

## THAILAND

### COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

Kenneth P. Landon	1930s 1954	Presbyterian Minister, Thailand State Department Operations Coordinating Board, Far East
Olcott H. Deming	1948-1951	First Secretary and Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Bertha Potts	1950-1952	Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Robert W. Zimmermann	1950-1952	Economic Officer, Bangkok
Robert Anderson	1950 1951-1953	Vice Consul, Chiang Mai Political Officer, Bangkok
William W. Thomas, Jr.	1952-1954	Consular Officer, Bangkok
Earl Wilson	1953-1955	Chief Information Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Samuel D. Eaton	1954-1955	Economic Officer, Bangkok
James J. Halsema	1954-1955	Assistant Information Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Norbert L. Anschutz	1954-1956	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
Kempton B. Jenkins	1954-1956	Economic Officer, Bangkok
Max Waldo Bishop	1955-1958	Ambassador, Thailand
Jack Lydman	1955-1958	Foreign Service Officer, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Bangkok
Victor L. Stier	1955-1960	Editor-Writer, USIS, Bangkok
Robert G. Cleveland	1956-1958	Economic Counselor, Bangkok
Dorothy A. Eardley	1956-1958	Clerk-Stenographer, Chiang Mai
Richard M. McCarthy	1956-1958	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok

John R. Burke	1956-1958	Deputy Chief to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization Section, Bangkok
George M. Barbis	1956-1961	Principal Officer, Chiang Mai
Gordon R. Beyer	1957-1959	Consular/Economic/Political Officer, Bangkok
Frank N. Burnet	1957-1959	Chinese Language Officer, Bangkok
Leonard Unger	1958-1962 1967-1973	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok Ambassador, Thailand
Sidney Weintraub	1959-1961	Economic Officer, Bangkok
Ben Franklin Dixon	1959-1962	U.S. Representative to the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, Bangkok
Kenneth MacCormac	1960-1965 1967-1971 1978-1979	Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok Director, Thai Fulbright Foundation, Thailand
George M. Barbis	1961-1963	Analyst, Thailand and Burma, INR, Washington, DC
Frederick Z. Brown	1962-1964	Intelligence Officer, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Bangkok
Alfred Puhan	1962-1964	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
Edward E. Masters	1962-1964 1971-1975	Desk Officer, Thailand Affairs, Washington, DC Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
Albert L. Seligmann	1962-1965	Political Officer, Bangkok
Robin Berrington	1963-1965	Peace Corps Volunteer, English Instructor, Kamphaeng Phet
John J. Harter	1963-1965	Financial Reporting Officer, Bangkok
John R. O'Brien	1963-1967	Information Officer, USIS, Bangkok

Moncrieff J. Spear	1963-1967	Special Assistant to the Ambassador, Bangkok
Paul Good	1963-1965 1966-1968	Junior Officer Trainee, USIS, Ubol Field Support Officer, Bangkok
Charles Robert Beecham	1963-1968	Press Officer, USIS/IPS Bangkok
Paul P. Blackburn	1963-1964 1964-1965 1965-1967  1967-1968 1984-1988	Junior Officer Training, USIS, Bangkok Cultural Affairs Officer and AFS Director Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Khon Kaen Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Udorn Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
James M. Wilson	1964-1966	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
Richard Ogden	1964 1965-1966	Vice Consul, Chiang Mai Economic Officer, Bangkok
James L. Woods	1964-1967 1969-1973	Research Analysis Division, DOD, Bangkok Advisor, ARPA Unit, Bangkok
John M. Reid	1965-1972 1976-1980  1992-1995	Assistant Executive Officer, USIS, Bangkok Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Irwin Pernick	1966-1969  1969-1971	Branch Public Affairs Officer, Nakon Sri Thammarat Economic, Political/Military Officer, Bangkok
Richard A. Virden	1967 1967-1968  1968-1969	Rotation Officer, Bangkok Assistant Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Chiang Mai Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Phitsanulok
John B. Ratliff III	1967-1969	Director, Vietnamese Language Program, Bangkok
G. Lewis Schmidt	1967-1970	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Philip H. Valdes	1967-1970	Political Officer, Bangkok

Milton Leavitt	1967-1970 1974-1978	Center Director, USIS, Bangkok Center Director, USIS, Bangkok
Victor L. Tomseth	1967 1967-1968 1968-1969 1969-1971	Consular Officer, Chiang Mai Political/Military Officer, Bangkok Political/Military Officer, Udorn Ambassador's Staff Assistant/Political Officer, Bangkok
Willis J. Sutter	1967-1971 1984-1986	Junior Officer Training, USIS, Bangkok Regional Project Officer, USIS, Bangkok
William N. Stokes	1967-1973	Counselor for Mission Coordination, Bangkok
Robin Berrington	1968-1969 1969	Staff Officer, USIS, Sakon Nakhon Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Yala
Harvey E. Gutman	1968-1970	Assistant Director, USAID, Thailand
John H. Kelly	1968-1969 1969-1971	Political/Military Officer, Bangkok Principal Officer, Songkhla
Philip R. Mayhew	1968-1971 1971-1972 1983-1988	Economic/Commercial Officer, Bangkok Principal Officer, Udorn Political Counselor, Bangkok
Fred A. Coffey, Jr.	1968-1971 1971-1972 1972-1973	Press Officer, USIS, Bangkok Information Officer, USIS, Bangkok Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Frank P. Coward	1968-1973	Student Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
George F. Muller	1968-1973	Political/Military Counselor, Bangkok
James Marvin Montgomery	1968-1971 1971-1974	Political/Military Officer, Bangkok Consul, Chiang Mai
Joseph P. O'Neill	1969-1970	Political/Consular/Administrative Officer, Chiang Mai
John T. McCarthy	1969-1971	Political Officer, Chiang Mai
Keith Earl Adamson	1970	Political Affairs Officer, Bangkok

Joseph P. O'Neill	1970-1971 1980-1982	Political/Public Affairs Officer, Phitsanolk Regional Refugee Officer, Songkhla
Ruth McLendon	1970-1972	Political Officer, Bangkok
Richard E. Thompson	1970-1972	Diplomatic Courier, Bangkok
James R. Bullington	1971-1973	Vice Consul, Chiang Mai
Irving Sablosky	1971-1973	Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
David E. Reuther	1971-1973 1973-1976 1975 1985-1987	Vice Consul, Udorn Political Officer, Bangkok Temporary Duty, Songkhla Chief, Anti-Privacy Unit, Bangkok
Roger Ernst	1973-1976	Mission Director, USAID, Bangkok
James A. Klemstine	1973-1976	Thailand/Burma Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Perry J. Stieglitz	1973-1977	Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
James J. Gormley	1973-1977 1987-1989	Financial Reporting Officer, Bangkok Narcotics Counselor, Bureau of International Organizations, Thailand
Francis J. Tatu	1974 1974-1976	Principal Officer, Chiang Mai Thai Desk Officer, Washington, DC
Margaret J. Barnhart	1974-1976	Consular Section Chief, Bangkok
Richard W. Boehm	1974-1976	Political/Military Counselor, Bangkok
Richard E. Thompson	1974-1977	Diplomatic Courier, Bangkok
Ward Barmon	1975-1977	Commercial Officer, Bangkok
Charles H. Twining	1975-1977	Political Officer, Bangkok
Thomas F. Conlon	1975-1979	Political Counselor, Bangkok
John R. Burke	1976-1977	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
John J. Helble	1976-1977	Country Directory, Washington, DC

Andrew F. Antippas	1976-1979	Consular Section Chief, Bangkok
Marie Therese Huhtala	1976-1979	Vice Consul, Chiang Mai
William Lenderking	1976-1980	Press Attaché and Information Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Daniel A. O'Donohue	1977-1978 1988-1991	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok Ambassador, Thailand
Harry Haven Kendall	1978-1979	Director, Language Center, USIS, Bangkok
Morton I. Abramowitz	1978-1981	Ambassador, Thailand
Timothy Michael Carney 1979-1983	1978-1979	Consul, Udon Political Officer, Bangkok
Edward L. Lee II	1979-1981	Regional Security Officer, Bangkok
Paul M. Cleveland	1979-1981	Office Director, Thailand Affairs, Washington, DC
Thomas B. Killeen	1979-1982	Refugee Officer, Bangkok
Lacy A. Wright, Jr.	1980-1981	Director, Kampuchea Working Group, Washington, DC
Charles Lahiguera	1980-1982	Principal Officer, Udon
Edmund McWilliams	1980-1982	Indochina Watch Officer, Bangkok
Richard A. Virden	1980-1983	Information and Press Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Richard M. Gibson	1975-1977 1980-1982 1982-1985 1989-1992	Thai-Burma Desk Officer, Washington, DC Consul/Branch Public Affairs Officer, Songhla Political Officer, Bangkok Principal Officer, Chiang Mai
Will Primosch	1981-1985	Economic Officer, Bangkok
Richard E. Thompson	1982-1985	Diplomatic Courier, Bangkok
Paul K. Stahnke	1982-1987	Economic Counselor, Bangkok

James W. Chamberlin	1984-1986	Computer Systems Manager, Bangkok
Chas W. Freeman, Jr.	1984-1986	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
Lacy A. Wright, Jr.	1985-1987	Coordinator/Counselor for Refugee Affairs, Bangkok
Joseph A. Winder	1986-1989	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
Victor L. Tomseth	1986-1989	Director, Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs, Washington, DC
	1989-1992	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok
Robert Duncan	1987-1990	Economic Counselor, Bangkok
Keith McCormick	1989-1991	Deputy Political Counselor, Bangkok
Richard E. Thompson	1991-1994	Chief, Regional Courier Office, Bangkok
David Lambertson	1991-1995	Ambassador, Thailand
Edward H. Wilkinson	1992-1995	Refugee Coordinator, Bangkok
John M. Reid	1992-1995	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Greta N. Morris	1993-1996	Press Attaché, USIS, Bangkok
Joan Plaisted	1994-1995	Office Director for Thailand and Burma, Washington, D.C.
William P. Kiehl	1995-1998	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Bangkok
Marie Therese Huhtala	1996-1998	Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam Affairs Desk Officer, Washington, DC
	1998-2001	Deputy Chief of Mission, Bangkok

**KENNETH P. LANDON**  
**Presbyterian Minister**  
**Thailand (1930's)**

**State Department Operations Coordinating Board**  
**Far East (1954)**

*Originally a Presbyterian Minister and Missionary by profession, Dr. Landon became known as a primary expert on East Asian, and particularly Thai affairs. Educated at Princeton and Chicago Universities, he went to Thailand (Siam) as a missionary, after which he taught Philosophy at Earlham College. During World War II, he worked with several Government Agencies, where his knowledge of East Asia was particularly useful. After the War, Dr. Landon worked with the Department of State and the Operations Coordinating Board dealing with East Asia matters. Dr. Landon was interviewed by Albert W. Atwood in 1982.*

*Q: As I understand it, you became a minister in the Presbyterian Church in 1927 and shortly thereafter you and your wife were sent to Siam as missionaries. I understand that you spent one year in Bangkok, learning the language, customs, and traditions of the country, and the next nine years as a missionary in various parts of Siam, as the country was then known. Do tell me a bit about those ten years you had over there.*

LANDON: I became a missionary because of a series of sermons I preached in Columbus, New Jersey, where I was pastor of a church while I was also a student in the theological seminary at Princeton. I was one of my own converts. At Princeton my studies had included Semitic philology, Hebrew, and Greek. So I expected to become a missionary in the Middle East. At one time it seemed that Margaret, my wife, and I might be sent to a place called Hilla, which was on the road to Baghdad. But the only opening at the time was in Siam. The day before we landed in Bangkok on a little 90 ton steamer going up from Singapore, Margaret asked me to tell her all I knew about Siam. I said that I understood that most of the Thai people were twins. She thought that was interesting and asked for more information. I said they had a great many white elephants in the country and I was sure it must rain a lot as I had seen a picture of the king sitting under an umbrella built like a fountain with nine tiers. Aside from these observations I didn't know a thing. I didn't even know where we were going when we landed. Fortunately we were met and taken to a residence.

The same day we landed, our Ford coupe, shipped in a box from New York, was unboxed and fueled and I had my first adventure in driving on the wrong side of the road as traffic moved in the English rather than the American pattern. The first year we spent in Bangkok studying the language. I've never been bashful about languages so that as soon as I learned a few words I'd rush out into the street and try them out on someone. My first two words were "how much" and "expensive." I went into numerous shops and asked "how much" while pointing at something. After getting a reply I would say "expensive" and start out of the shop. What followed in words was beyond me because I had not yet learned to count. Feeling sorry for frustrated shopkeepers who would follow me down the street while lowering their price step by step, I quickly learned how to count so as to know what the price actually was.

Both Margaret and I studied three hours a day with a teacher and then spent another three hours studying for the next lesson. We learned the language thoroughly as we expected to work with people and knew we had to be able to converse with ease and without dictionary in hand. After six months I preached my first sermon in a Bangkok church, not without some consternation in the audience. An elder in the church came to me afterward and congratulated me on my sermon

and with a kindly smile said that I had told him something new about Jesus that he had never heard before. I had said that Jesus was crucified on a pair of wooden pants. The words for cross and for pants were close in sound, and I had used the word for pants. I was as amused as the elder was. We discovered that the Thai language required an ear for tone, for music, as the meaning of a word or sound changed with the tone, whether it was high, low, even, rising or falling, or acute either high or low. It was common for a missionary to ask his servant for a tiger when what he wanted was his jacket. We discovered also that some 60% of the words were derived from Sanskrit or Pali, classic languages of India, and that the language was replete with terms derived from the Buddhist religion, which arrived centuries before via Ceylon and Burma. So I knew I would have to study India if I were to understand the people of Siam. I later studied both Sanskrit and Pali at the University of Chicago, where I took courses also on India.

After a year in Bangkok we were assigned to Nakhon Si Thammarat on the east coast of the peninsula facing the Gulf of Siam. A year later we moved across the peninsula to a town called Trang (a Malay word meaning "light"). In Nakhon Si Thammarat we lived in the compound of a girls' school with the principal, a Miss Helen McCague.

Our first incredible experience occurred one Sunday when I was coming home from church dressed in a white duck suit and carrying a Malacca cane. As I came up the road toward the house, which was on the edge of town, I looked across a high hedge and saw five servants of the compound standing and looking at something. I came through the gateway, and to my horror I saw our newborn baby girl lying naked on a mat with a sun helmet over her head to shade her eyes, but with a 12 foot king cobra encircling her and with its head erect and swaying above her while it examined her, presumably to determine what to do with her. The king cobra is different from the ordinary cobra, which is generally 3 to 4 feet long. This is a giant breed that is not afraid of people and will attack, sometimes without provocation. They may grow in size to between 9 and even up to 15 feet. Such a cobra may strike chest high on a person while the ordinary cobra seldom hits above the ankle.

Well, I being a father didn't think of all this. I just let out a war whoop and started racing across the lawn leaving my Malacca cane. The king cobra, apparently recognizing a reckless father coming to save the baby, reared up an extra foot or more to view the approaching conflict and suddenly took off like an express train, spinning the baby like a top as it unwound. I later observed portraits of Buddha in temples encircled protectively by such a cobra with its coils keeping him safe from the monsoon wind and its hood spread like an umbrella over his head. And as Buddha was a prince, son of a king, a mythology developed that if one were so embraced by a king cobra that person was a prince or princess. The myth was reinforced by the fact that a Sino-Thai infant was so embraced and grew up to drive the Burmese out of Siam and become King Chao Tak, a boyhood friend of the man who had him later assassinated to become king himself, the first monarch of the Chakri Dynasty. I was frequently informed by Thai that my daughter would grow up to become a princess and marry a prince or even a king. She did, American style, marrying a football hero.

Soon after this first dramatic experience with the wildlife of Siam I went on a tour with the evangelist of the station, an elderly gentleman who was about to retire and whom I was supposed to replace. He had been in Siam about 40 years and was proud of his preaching ability. We went

to the town of Singora. He then set out to show me how to go about preaching. He stood on a box in the market place and began to sing a hymn and soon got a crowd together. As he preached there would be a murmur of awe now and then. I was impressed and went to stand among the listeners in the hope that I might hear what they had to say. I discovered that the murmurs of awe occurred when he made some dramatic shouts when his mouth would open wide but his teeth would remain closed. This performance held the crowd spellbound. I realized there was more to mission work than met the eye. I had everything to learn, of course. In that part of South Siam there was a large Chinese population on the rubber plantations and tin mines. They did the heavy labor and were the commercial class. They also ran the restaurants in market places, and this led me to decide to abandon the practice of other missionaries who traveled with their own cook and equipment and to depend on the Chinese cook-shops. And this led me into closer contact with Chinese.

As I went from town to town I discovered that the Chinese in Siam had no schools to speak of. This was not surprising as they came from a coolie class in China. They admired scholarship but had few scholars among them. I saw also that they had money and could afford schools, and I talked to them about setting up schools. And then I learned also that I could get little out of them while speaking Thai. So I began to study Chinese while traveling about, my informant being a Swatow Chinese who was an evangelist to the Chinese. In about six months I was able to preach and converse in the Swatow or Tacho dialect. I was surprised to have Chinese inform me I was from a village in China named Pho Leng, because of my nasal intonations, of which I was unaware.

When I was fairly fluent in Chinese I started a campaign in a town on the railroad line largely inhabited by Chinese. The Chinese merchants would go to the local opium den about 10 o'clock and again at about 4 in the afternoon for a pipe or two of opium. I would follow along and sit on the side of the divan and chat with them about schools. I would first select a good piece of land on which a school might be built and find out who owned it. Then I would become acquainted with that man, find out if he was Chinese, and follow him to the opium den. I would talk to him about building a Chinese school on his property that would be owned and operated by the Chinese community. The conversation would move on to the bricks and lumber and roofing and labor involved, and then I would ask him to bring together some of the leading Chinese merchants to discuss ways and means. This first school took about a year to promote and build--a modest effort that offered only primary education through the fourth grade. I helped procure the teachers from Bangkok, Singapore, Penang. All funds, materials, and labor were provided locally.

A frequent question was what was in it for me--and did they have to become Christians. My only suggestion was that they provide for a reading room for the Chinese community and subscribe to Chinese newspapers and periodicals, and that I would provide some Chinese Christian periodicals published in China and Singapore. Over a period of about seven years was able to bring into being a number of such schools along the railroad line and had a waiting list of invitations from other towns on the west coast. Eventually all these schools established Christian chapels and hired dual-purpose teachers who could function also as pastors or preachers as needed. My parish extended from the Kra Isthmus to the Malay border, a couple of hundred miles, and I toured the area traveling by train, bullock cart, elephant, coastal boats, river craft,

bicycle, and on foot. In order to keep in touch with widely scattered Thai and Chinese communities I began to publish a letter, which evolved into a brief monthly journal in both Thai and Chinese. By the time we left Siam in late 1937 I had a lively correspondence with Thai and Chinese, with my Chinese evangelist handling the Chinese end of things. I could read hand-scribbled Thai and I used Thai typewriters, but hand-written Chinese was beyond me. I still, in 1982, occasionally receive letters in Thai and find to my own surprise that I still have no trouble reading the script.

As for Margaret, she was busy running a large household, having three children, and acting as principal of the Anugun School for Girls. She was a very effective educator and introduced a kind of primary education for Siamese children who were able to read in a very short time as compared to the length of time that it would take to learn to read in the public schools. They might be in a public school for two or three years before they could achieve the skills that Margaret achieved in about a year. This led the minister of education to come down from Bangkok to inspect Margaret's program and methods. By the time we left Siam in late 1937, I had a 10-year file of several Siamese-language newspapers and periodicals as well as a library collection of books, pamphlets, and maps on the area. There had been a coup d'état in 1932 against the absolute monarchy, which I felt was of historic significance and on which I obtained substantial documentation over a 5-year period.

After we returned to the United States in 1937, I resigned from the mission for various reasons. But here's one anecdote that might show the cultural interplay we had with one Thai village, a village on the railroad line near Tungson. I had inherited a small notebook from a former Thai evangelist who had noted on the cover the phrase: "Those that have been talked." It contained a list of names in the village and nothing more. The first time I visited the village I consulted the notebook and began asking where the people were on the list. The village was soon empty of people because they were alarmed by this stranger carrying a book with their names in it. I finally convinced them of my innocent intentions and eventually we became friends. I visited the village every few months and would stay in the house of the village chief, sleeping on a mat at the end of a row of sleeping children.

One day, two of the men of that village came some 40 miles to visit us. I'd stayed with them and eaten their food, and they stayed with us and ate our food. They spent their days looking over the town and fields. After a week or so they returned home. They returned about a month later with their village chief and I could see they had something very heavy on their minds. They stayed a week or more and again toured the countryside. Then they said they would like to have a serious consultation with me. The village chief said that they liked me and my family and that it was obvious that we liked them, too. He said, "You have a very large compound." It was about 6 acres because it had been acquired when the mission was hoping to build a boys' school. It was an old pepper garden with many wells.

The village chief said, "You have many coconut trees, enough to feed a village. And betelnut trees in plenty, which would take care of our chewing of betel." This was an aromatic kind of chewing tobacco that stained the teeth red at first and then turned them black. The chief said that they purposed to move their whole village over to our compound, and he said, "We think we could be a real help. For instance, you could fire all of your servants (who were Chinese) and

we'd do all your compound work and the housework and take care of your children. You have only one wife. You're a young man of great importance; so you could have the pick of our girls and you could have a number of wives, which would be appropriate to your position. And then instead of just the two children that you have, you could have a great many that would really establish you here. And when you went out, instead of going alone--we see you always have books with you- -one of us could carry your betelnut set, you really ought to chew betelnut. It's very good for you, for the digestion, very stimulating. Another one could carry a spittoon. You shouldn't just spit any place. Another one could carry your cheroots. You should really learn to smoke our cheroots; they are very fragrant and settle the stomach. And we notice that every day you go on a bicycle to meet some men and you rush around with a club and hit a ball. We'd be glad to do that work for you. You don't need to sweat like that. And wherever you went you would have an entourage that would show you were a person of importance. And then when we got into trouble, why you'd take care of us and represent us before the government, and you and we could have a very good and happy relationship.

Now we have discovered some fields that you could buy, and we would work those fields and you'd never have to buy any more rice. We'd raise your vegetables and chickens also. And we'd be your people."

I was quite impressed and I thanked them warmly. But I told them that in the first place I had a little problem. In about another year or so I would return to the United States and then they would become orphans. And whether I returned to Siam or not was problematical. I might and I might not. Furthermore I didn't own the compound. So that I'd have to ask permission from the company that owned it. They got the idea. They realized that although we would have been very happy together it might not work if I returned to the United States. So that was the end of that adventure.

One of my unusual experiences involved a missionary colleague named Dr. L. C. Bulkley who ran the Trang hospital; a wounded tiger; a young professional hunter; and Dr. Livingston's shoulder. When Margaret and I moved across the peninsula from Nakhon Si Thammarat to Trang, south Siam, we had as a resident physician Dr. L. C. Bulkley whose father was a prominent physician in New York City and who insisted that his son also become a physician. But L.C.'s interests were more veterinarian than his father anticipated and he became an inveterate hunter of tigers and other game. We soon learned to count on the doctor's vanishing on the nights before the full moon, during the full moon, and a day or so after the full moon when he went tiger hunting. And we were very much impressed by his achievements. His stairwell was literally fenced at the top on three sides with tiger skulls ranging from huge ones in the middle of the "U" down to cub-sized ones at the ends of the "U" - all of which glared at one ascending the stairs to the second floor. The doctor was only too glad to show pictures of himself with gun in hand and foot resting on the body or head of a dead tiger, which he had presumably just killed.

Looking at the pictures I asked him where each tiger was shot and how he did it, and how he encountered the tiger. And I began to wonder at his replies, which were somewhat vague, such as, "This one was killed over near Nam Dok." Or, "Oh, that one was shot while taking a drink from the Daang Creek." And then asked a direct question. "You did shoot them, didn't you?" And then he looked at me from sad brown eyes and confessed, "No." He went on to explain that

he had a standing offer of 10 cents to anyone who brought him an animal to look at with an option to buy, even if the tigers were dead. As a consequence he had a parade of enormous proportions passing by with every kind of wild animal from king cobras to black panthers and tigers and young elephants. Dr. Bulkley tried several times to get me to go tiger hunting with him, but I was not interested as I had never had much success even shooting rabbits sitting on the ground and looking at me. I had had some success shooting birds on the wing for some reason I never understood. So tigers-definitely no!

One night in 1934 or 1935 I had been to a church meeting and at about 10 p.m. or so I was riding my bicycle slowly from the church past the hospital on the road home. I saw a light in the operating room, which was separate from but connected to the hospital and wondered why the doctor was working so late at night. I turned my cycle in that direction and stopped at the foot of the steps leading up into the operating room and could see through the open screen door the figure of Dr. Bulkley at the operating table. I could not see any assistant working with him giving anesthesia. The doctor was alone and he was chuckling some more. I became alarmed and wondered if he was out of his mind and what he was up to.

I cautiously went up the steps and said, "Good evening, Doctor. You're working late. What's the emergency?"

The doctor didn't even look up at me as I entered the room. He welcomed me as a helper and told me to take over the anesthesia, chloroform, which he was having to administer with one hand as the patient needed it, while engaging in surgery. On the table lay a young man, little more than a boy, who, the doctor told me, was a professional hunter, a boy who loved to hunt rather than go to school and who had been required to attend classes but had managed to complete the mandatory attendance, learning little or nothing. He couldn't even read. But, this boy was going to become the luckiest boy in the world because, when the doctor completed his surgery on the boy's left shoulder, he would have provided him with a shoulder exactly like the shoulder of Dr. Livingston, who had been mauled by a lion, also on the left shoulder. In fact, he announced, "This boy might become famous because of his shoulder, the only one like the famous Dr. Livingston's."

On a stand next to the table stood a model of Dr. Livingston's shoulder, which Dr. Bulkley told me he had bought when he was first going through London en route to Siam to become a missionary doctor. He had been a great admirer of Dr. Livingston and in hero worship style had bought this model to inspire him in his own missionary work. As Dr. Bulkley cut and sutured and did what surgeons do to shoulders, he kept chuckling and talking about the boy and how it came about. And I kept adding chloroform now and then and hoping I wouldn't give him too much, which I knew was easy to do. I had seen my own little daughter, Peggy, operated on by Dr. Bulkley under chloroform and suddenly turn white and stop breathing only to be brought back to life when Dr. Bulkley dropped the chloroform pad and gave her a shaking and slapping and got her back alive again.

What had happened was that Dr. Bulkley and his hunter went after tiger on a route followed almost nightly by a tiger which the boy had studied. This was the way tigers were usually shot-- by cutting across the path of a tiger on his nightly rounds and generally getting a shot in at close

quarters. Most tigers were shot with 12-gauge double-barreled shotguns, often with one barrel loaded with screws and nails for the initial shot. Dr. Bulkley, however, thought this not sporting and he carried a rifle--and perhaps for that reason never got close enough to bag his own tiger. This night he had had a skilled hunter who brought him in close for his shot--and he hit the tiger but only wounded it. It was dusk and they followed the blood droppings for a while but didn't get another shot before it became too dark and too dangerous to trail the tiger. Up to then the young hunter had been in the lead and Dr. Bulkley behind. When they decided to go back they reversed the order and Dr. Bulkley took the lead. They went only a short distance when the wounded tiger leaped from the top of a termite mound beside the trail and knocked the boy to the ground and seized his shoulder intending to drag him off into the jungle. Dr. Bulkley was astounded and swung around in the direction of the attacking tiger, and as he did his gun went off accidentally and killed the tiger, fortunately missing the boy. It was the only tiger he ever shot and he had not planned that shot!

Making sure the tiger was dead and the boy alive but in great pain, Bulkley ran to the nearest village to get help. He got some men to rip out a bamboo-woven wall from a shack to use as a stretcher. They carried the boy on the stretcher out of the jungle to the road where Dr. Bulkley's car stood and loaded him into the back seat. Bulkley then drove to his hospital, which was about an hour's drive or more away. When the doctor examined the boy's shoulder and saw the kind of bone separation and crushing that had occurred it suddenly struck him that this was a close parallel to the experience of Dr. Livingston. He brought out his shoulder model, which indicated what the injury was and shows how it had been treated. He then decided that with only a little extra help he could give the boy the same kind of shoulder as his hero, Dr. Livingston. That was when I arrived on the scene. I was curious about the boy and visited him daily. He was in pain, and feverish, but like so many country Thai had remarkable healing qualities. To entertain him I took a copy of Aesop's Fables in Thai and read him some stories of the animals in the Fables. As a hunter he was fascinated with animals and took a great interest in the stories. One day he remarked that he wished he could read them himself, but was no good at it. He was not the first young Thai whom I had known who had managed to go through as much as four years of primary school and come out unscathed.

One of the things that I had learned as a foreigner studying the language was that the alphabet was phonetic and indeed was probably designed to help assimilate non-Thai. There were clear indications, critical markings and arrangements, that told one whether the tone was rising, dropping, high, low, or acute--and whether the vowels were long or short, etc. So I began to show the boy how the language was put together and how easy it would be for him to read, if he really wanted to. Margaret had had a similar experience teaching a maid, Maa Cham, to read. She caught on quickly and became so excited reading that for a time she didn't want to work but read. Once the word was pronounced phonetically the Thai who spoke the language immediately knew the meaning for most words. And this was the case with the young hunter. I left him with the copy of Aesop's Fables to read when he pleased.

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During the Eisenhower administration I was employed by the Operations Coordinating Board, an adjunct to the National Security Council, and had my office in the Executive Office Building. I

think it was in 1956 or 1957 that I had a phone call from the Thai Embassy asking for an appointment for the Thai Minister for Adult Education. I explained that I was no longer on a State Department political desk and that his call on me would be wasted but that if they could tell me his interest or problem I would be glad to help him see the appropriate officials. The Embassy officer said that it was a personal interest and would take only a few minutes. And so we set a time.

The Thai official, handsomely dressed, arrived on time, and stood before me expectantly for a few minutes without sitting down. Then he asked me if I remembered him. I have always found this an annoying question, unfair really, and thought to myself that this was going to be embarrassing to both of us because he obviously expected me to remember him. My mind was totally blank, and I made the usual dishonest response that I thought he looked familiar but couldn't quite remember where and when we had met. He laughed at my remark and then asked, "Do you remember a young boy mauled by a tiger near Trang who was operated on by Dr. Bulkley?"

I said, yes, I did remember such a boy and felt sorry for the young man in a way because like Dr. Livingston who had had a similar experience, the young hunter would never be able to hold his gun in shooting position again since he could not raise his left arm into shooting position, and his work as a hunter was thus ended.

The Thai official then showed me that he indeed could not raise his left arm to hold a gun in shooting position and said, "I was that boy!"

He then told me how he had gone on in his education and had now become Minister of Education for Adult Education. He said also that he still liked to read Aesop's Fables now and then but had long since worn out the paper copy I had given him.

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So I called on Elmer Stats, who administered the Operations Coordinating Board, an adjunct of the National Security Council, and was taken on with respect to the area from Kabul to Saigon to Djakarta.

Bill Atwood has asked me to talk about one of my many trips to southeast Asia as a State Department officer. After WWII, I went out in October for the British-Siamese negotiations to settle their alleged state of war. The Thai had declared war on both the British and the United States and the British had responded in kind but we didn't. We went on the advice of the Thai Minister, Seni Pramoj, that the declaration didn't really represent the Thai people, and he refused to extend the declaration of war officially.

At the end of the war the British had made 21 demands on the Thai, which if accepted would have made Thailand a Virtual British colony. The problem was, what could the U.S. do about these demands? I was sent out as a political adviser, of sorts, to the chargé d'affaires, Charles Yost, who was about to open our legation in Bangkok. Those were very unusual times, and I was able to write myself travel orders authorizing me to go anywhere I chose to in southeast Asia.

The U.S. negotiator beat down the British demands until the 21 faded to about 1, which related to requiring the Thai to provide free rice for areas presumably deficient in that grain. These negotiations came to an end in December to the satisfaction of the Thai and the United States. During this period and subsequently I had time to tour most of southeast Asia. On one trip I decided to go up-country in Thailand to see the state of the nation. I had a car for my use, a somewhat dilapidated Chevy, and I had two young OSS men plus a driver for my car, as my escorts. I think that trip was in November, and I found myself driving along a road behind some 90,000 Japanese troops walking along the highway under their own officers with no Allied military around, going to their camp to await repatriation.

At first we thought it was a big herd of buffalo because of the dust and then discovered these were troops from Burma and Thailand. The OSS men were driving a jeep and both our cars had American flags pasted on the windshields. We had a conference as to what to do and decided to go on. I said, "Let's just step on the horns in both cars and see what happens." So we drove up behind the troops and blew our horns. Japanese officers turned and saw the American flags and the uniforms of the OSS men and gave some commands and began to move the troops to the side of the road as they continued marching. We of course drove slowly, and it took us a long time to get past the troops. The officers all saluted our flag as we drove slowly by. We went on into Cambodia.

Among other places I visited Angkor Wat, and I spent several days there and was met by the French Curator who came up from Phnom Penh to meet me. He brought his family along also, and we had an expert tour of the various temples directed by the one man in residence who knew the most about them at that time. I took a quick trip to Saigon and then went down to Singapore, where Pat Mallon was the consul general, and on to Batavia, as Djakarta was then called, where Foote was the consul general. Back in Bangkok, I received orders from the Department to go back to Saigon and try to go up to Hanoi. At that time the British were supposed to be taking the surrender of the Japanese south of the 16th parallel and General Lo Han, representing Chiang Kai-shek, in the north. So I went over to Saigon again and met with DeGaulle's representative acting as High Commissioner, Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu. He had been a monk and had been brought out of his monastery to become High Commissioner. He brought with him a mistress, a Madame Galsworthy.

I had read the Forsyte Saga and I was somewhat up on the Glasworthy family; so I was quite intrigued by Madame Galsworthy, who was of the French side of the family and bilingual in French and English. The admiral included her in our first luncheon together as my interpreter because the word had gone ahead of me that my French was terrible, which it was. I read French, of course, but I had never tried to speak it much. The Admiral spoke the most beautiful French and I had no trouble understanding him, and so, to my regret, I didn't see any more of Madame Galsworthy. The Admiral was very helpful and arranged for me to ride to Hanoi on a plane with General Salan of later Algerian misfortune. Well, General Salan was supposed to go to Hanoi and take charge of the French community and any troops that might be left over. The Chinese General Lo Han was in occupation.

I was told to join General Salan at the airport at 6 a.m. But how to get a taxi to the airport? I managed it by paying a large sum to a driver--half of it the evening before and the rest on

delivery. I arrived at the airport without having had time for a shave or anything to eat or drink. And the airport was deserted. Along about 9 a.m. a few people drifted in, including a pilot of the C-47, which was sitting cold and unattended on the strip. About 10 o'clock the General showed up with his aides, well fed and well drunk on champagne. And I still hadn't had anything to eat or drink.

General Salan ignored me as we got on the plane and sat in bucket seats facing each other, with the baggage piled in the middle. As we took off, without warming up the engine, we all leaned forward on the baggage to keep it from bounding around. In the air, I tried the General in English and he responded in a mongrel French I couldn't understand. I tried him in Chinese with no avail. Then I tried him in Thai and he showed interest--he speaking a Lao dialect similar to Thai. So we conversed for a while. As he had learned his Lao from mistresses, and I had learned from a sainted Presbyterian old maid, there were marked differences in our selection of words.

We arrived in Hanoi at about 4 p.m. after a stop at Pakse. I still had had nothing to eat or drink all day. It was stinking hot and I was very depressed. General Salan was met by a French delegation and they all loaded up their cars and drove off leaving me absolutely alone, with no other cars in sight, on the wrong side of the river from Hanoi and about 30 miles out of town. I had no wheels and no Americans to meet me because there were no Americans, I thought, after the withdrawal of an OSS mission, which had been there for a time until it got involved in the political warfare going on among the French, British, Chinese, and Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh.

So I had a problem. I had a little tin trunk with me containing my belongings, which I dragged over to the nearest building. At that point I smelled something cooking and looked around the corner of the building and saw a Chinese GI squatting in front of a charcoal brazier, making a bowl of stew. Well, I hustled right over to him, squatted down beside him, and spoke to him in Swatow Chinese, a south China dialect. Lo Han's troops were from the south. I took the family approach and called him "Brother, Ah Hia," and he looked at me in some surprise. And I said, "Brother, I'm just starving to death. Brother, I haven't had anything to eat or drink all day and I am very hungry. Will you sell me part of your stew?"

He sat back on his heels and looked at me perplexed and then said, "No, it's all the stew I have and it's my dinner." I began to urge him further and he said he didn't want my money; he just wanted his stew. "Anyway," he said, "I have only the one bowl to eat from and we couldn't divide it." And I said, "Brother, who needs more than one bowl in a hungry family?" And then he put the clincher on me, he thought, when he said, "Ah, but I have only on pair of chopsticks!" And I said, "Who needs more than one pair of chopsticks between brothers?"

Well, this struck him funny and he gave up the contest and so we squatted with the bowl between us and we passed the bowl and the chopsticks back and forth until there wasn't a morsel left.

We squatted and looked at each other for a while and he asked me where I had come from and what was I going to do. And I asked him if he could help me get into town, and he said the only wheels would be a lorry loaded with Chinese troops going in for recreation and he wished he was going too. So, I persuaded him to hail down a lorryload of Chinese, about 40 of them standing in

the open back, packed in like sardines. He said he had this Chinese redhead who wanted to go, too, and how about it. They stared at me in disbelief until I began chattering at them in Chinese, and they gave me a hand up so I could stand among them going in to Hanoi. And I stood there with my head bobbing around among theirs for some 30 miles. They put me off in front of the Hotel Metropole, but the hotel didn't have any rooms they weren't full. So I said that was all right I would sleep in the corridor. I carried a small mosquito net.

The next day I cleaned up, dressed as well as I could, and went across the esplanade to the High Commissioner's palace, which had been taken over by Ho Chi Minh, the alleged president and head of the Viet Minh, hoping with his new constitution to head a new Vietnam free from French colonialism. I sent in my card and he received me. I told him who I was, from the State Department. I was fascinated to discover that he spoke flawless English, which I would call "TV English" as it didn't seem to be any regional kind of English, just beautiful English. Ho Chi Minh asked me how long I was staying, and I said I was just taking a look around--maybe we would open a consulate after things settled down. And he asked me if I could stay longer. I said I would stay longer if he wanted me to but that I had expected to fly back in a couple of days with the plane I had come up on. I added that I also had no place to stay. He asked me to stay a couple of weeks and said he would provide a place for me to stay. And what he did was to assign me to some quarters with an American graves mission hunting for the bodies of Americans who had been shot down during the war. The house where I went was large, and all the graves hunters were out in the countryside, but the house was well occupied by their mistresses; so I had a lot of company whenever I was there. Ho Chi Minh provided me also with a tiny automobile, French make, the size of a bathtub with just enough room for the driver in front and me behind. We couldn't communicate except by sign language and I drove by street map, pointing past the driver's face with my hand to indicate what direction I wanted to go and making a chopping sign to tell him to stop.

I had one meal a day with Ho Chi Minh most days, sometimes two, and we had extensive conversations, always the same theme of independence for Vietnam, free from the French and Chinese. He provided me with letters to the President and Secretary of State asking that the American Government would help him keep the French out, because as he said, "Your great president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, didn't want the French to return," And I said, "I know!"

One day I received a delegation from the Vietnam-American Association to bolster the line I had been receiving from Ho. They assured me that they were nationalists and socialists, as was Ho Chi Minh, and not real Communists as sometimes alleged. Their leader told me his name and I asked him to write it down for me in my little notebook I carried with me. I said I wanted to be sure and have the correct spelling. And he wrote "Le Duan." Later, I learned that he was the head of the Indo-Chinese Communist party. In subsequent conversations with Ho he re-emphasized that he was primarily a nationalist and not really a Communist. This was their party line, the same line they had been handing Colonel Patti, the chief of the OSS mission, which had been withdrawn. In 1982 Colonel Patti wrote his story entitled Why Vietnam, in which he set forth at length very much the same line that Ho and Le Duan had given me. I had the pleasure of reviewing his book for the American Political Science Review.

While in Hanoi I met again the French political adviser to Admiral d'Argenlieu whom I had first

met in Saigon. He was returning from Chung King where he had been on a diplomatic mission to the Chinese. I flew back to Saigon with him on his plane, and during the flight he gave me the details of the agreement with the Chinese that he had negotiated and that was to be signed by both governments on or about March 9. So as soon as I arrived in Saigon I put this information in a cable to Washington and thus by happenstance provided the State Department and other branches of the government the first details of this agreement. When I finally returned to the Department in March, I was suddenly notorious for a day and was beset with many questions, which I was unable to answer as I had already told all I knew about the subject.

One day at lunch, Ho Chi Minh told me of one occasion in the 1930s when he was in Hanoi secretly working underground against the French. He was in a very relaxed and bemused mood as he talked about those times. He said that the French had been trying to capture him, and on this occasion in the 1930s they thought they had him firmly trapped within an 8-block area surrounded by French police and military. Ho said, "They really thought they had me at last. But what I did was, I took off all my clothes down to my white underpants, but on a big coolie hat that came down over my face, put on coolie rubber sandals, got a wide 2-seater rickshaw, and had it loaded with a very fat Chinese market woman with a huge basket of chickens on one side of her and baskets of vegetables on the other. And then I, a little thin man, got between the shafts of the rickshaw and pulled her right through the French lines. The French were more preoccupied looking at the fat woman and chickens than they were at this thin little rickshaw puller. He sat at the lunch table and had the heartiest laugh during my visits with him." He felt he had made fools of the French.

**OLCOTT H. DEMING**  
**First Secretary and Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1948-1951)**

*Ambassador Olcott H. Deming grew up in Connecticut and graduated from Rollins College in Florida. In 1947, he entered the Foreign Service. His career included positions in Thailand, Japan, Uganda, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Horace G. Torbert in 1988.*

*Q: I noticed, by the way, that you've never served in a Spanish-speaking post. You started in the Far East, which is fairly typical!*

DEMING: That's quite classic, isn't it?

*Q: So, any comments on that you might have would be interesting.*

DEMING: Having said earlier that I was always interested in faraway places, when they read out the assignments: "Olcott Deming, Bangkok, Siam," you couldn't be much further away than that! I did ask why, with my Latin American background and all and learned the term familiar to all of us in the Foreign Service: "The exigencies of the Service come first, the officer's interest and background, second." So for the exigency of the Service I was sent to Siam. The post had only

been open for about a year and Edwin Stanton was the Ambassador. He was a China hand, a gentleman of the old school, knowledgeable in the Chinese language, and a diligent student of Siamese while he was there. I admired him very much. I was sent there as First Secretary and Public Affairs Officer at the time when the USIA, (U.S. Information Agency), was within the Department of State. One could have assignments there as you would to any other type of function in an embassy.

I was there for two years and it was a new window on the world for me seeing, or trying to see, things through Oriental, Asian, Buddhist eyes and minds. I wouldn't give anything for that experience, both for my later posts and also for a personal realization of different attitudes, different concepts, different values, which were useful to me. I thought they should be known among people in Asian affairs because there was an extraordinary kind of religious and intellectual tolerance which was different from what I had been used to in the Western world. Perhaps being a New Englander, those attitudes were borne in on me particularly. In my position as Public Affairs Officer I met with a number of American Journalists and others who came through to get a story on the country that I was accredited to. I remember particularly Stewart Alsop, Joe Alsop's brother who came out and stayed in our house in Bangkok. And after two or three days he expressed great frustration. He said, "there's nothing happening here." I said, "well, isn't that useful, isn't it interesting? Why not write about a peaceful country, its long history of peace?" He said, "that's not a story, just after the war, the difficult times." "Well," I said, "if you can't write about the unique qualities of Buddhism in this country, the peace and the young King who has just been welcomed back from his long studies in Europe, I don't know if I can help you."

A day or two later he came in and his eyes were shining. He said, "I got my story." He had seen the Thai foreign minister and had asked him, since Siam was geographically located really far down on the peninsula appended to the mainland of China and there was great turmoil in China at that time, what would happen and what would the Thai reaction be if the Chinese moved into Burma and Thailand, the rice basket of South Asia. The foreign minister said, "well, if that happened, we'd cave in." Alsop, asked, "Your policy would be to cave in?" The Minister replied, "Yes, we're a small country. You know, bend with the bamboo. We'd cave in at the time. Naturally we'd survive."

Alsop may not have realized that that's exactly what the Siamese did when the Japanese came down the Malay peninsula and into Siam. There was not a shot fired. The Siamese saw the "wind of the future," whatever you want to call it, and they quietly admitted the Japanese, moved out of enough houses to let them stay. When the war ended, thanks of course to the great effort by the United States, which he didn't mention, the Japanese went away and things went on much as they had in the past.

So Stewart Alsop got his story, the cave-in policy, and he got well printed in American newspapers. I remember at the same time that Time magazine while I was there came out with a fanciful picture of a stylized Siamese king. He had the wrong headdress, which was a courtesan's headdress, and pesin, silk trousers which were more or less authentic, and shoes turned up at the end which were more Turkish than Siamese. I had by then some very good friends who were Thais. They came to me and put their hands on this picture as though it was my fault, and said,

"how can they print something like that?" A picture which is ridiculing our king and putting him in a disgraceful uniform? I said, this just reflects the ignorance of some of our media about this part of the world which we are not familiar with, as are the British and the French and others who have had long connections with Asia. I hope that we become more aware, more sophisticated, as time goes on.

Those were two interesting notes about Public Affairs and serving your country in that capacity in an Asian land. Another was the film "Anna and the King of Siam," which was a dandy movie -- if you did not relate it to anything that actually existed in Siam at the present time or then. But I had been instructed to ask the Siamese government if they would put on a special event at the opening of the movie in Bangkok. I was referred to Prince Dhani Nivat, the grandson of King Chulalongkorn, who was the subject of the book, in "Anna and the King of Siam." Anna was the English teacher who taught him English, and Western manners and customs. The Prince, who was my friend, looked at me in shock. He said, "you want me to arrange for some celebration for a film that insults my great grandfather?" All of us have probably seen the picture with Yul Brynner as the King. Yul Brynner, with a completely bald pate! He was an excellent actor. But I have never in my life seen a Siamese who was bald, unless they cut their hair off on purpose. These were some of the things that happened that to me represented "a window on the world" of learning about new attitudes and cultures. It was also a learning process for me about my own country, my countrymen, and the basis of understanding and hopefully cultural enrichment of Americans by this old and different culture. I still call it Siam although it's name is Thailand, but that is a foreign name -- Thai meaning free and land being land. The British coined the phrase and the Siamese adopted it.

*Q: What particular programs that you planned in the public affairs field did you think were useful in this particular context? Do you remember any that were good? Which you considered effective and accomplished something?*

DEMING: We concentrated a good deal on putting out releases and periodic pamphlets. One was called "Behind the News." It was a Thai language analysis of news then breaking in different parts of the world which were very sketchily covered in the one English language paper in Bangkok and hardly at all in the Thai newspapers. We concentrated also on providing to the very influential Buddhist priests, and their organizations throughout the country, information about the United States, its culture, literature, and education. We avoided anything that might look like proselyting. We provided a large USIS library which was avidly used, partly because of interest in and friend ship for America, and partly because the library was the pleasantest place to study in Bangkok! We also sent a small floating library on weekly visits to the villages along the canals near Bangkok.

While I was there we negotiated the first Fulbright Exchange Commission with the Thai government, one of the fairly early Fulbright agreements. I had the happy experience of seeing the first Fulbright scholars go off to America. Ambassador Edwin Stanton knew how to use the Information Service, which not all ambassadors did. Sometimes they're suspicious of it as a competing arm with the Embassy. He had a very sophisticated view and used to furnish USIS materials to Buddhist groups and others. He had enough proficiency in the Siamese language to do that himself.

John Holdridge, who has recently retired as Ambassador in Indonesia, came as a young trainee Officer to USIA, Bangkok in 1949. He had just finished his Chinese language course in Taichung, Taiwan. When young John arrived full of Chinese and enthusiasm, he asked what we wanted him to do. After consulting with the Ambassador we agreed that John should prepare a Chinese version of our press & news release. There was a large overseas Chinese minority in Thailand that we wanted to reach. Because of the pressure being put on them regarding the dramatic events in mainland China, Chiang Kai-shek and the Communist insurgents. Holdridge gave us an entrée to those people for the first time.

**BERTHA POTTS**  
**Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1950-1952)**

*Bertha Potts was born in California in 1915. After receiving her degree from San Jose State College, she became a member of the WACS. Her career has included positions in Bangkok, Saigon, Lyon, Algiers, Vientiane, and Rabat. Ms. Potts was interviewed by Howell S. Teeple on February 19, 1999.*

*Q: The orders were to where?*

POTTS: For Saigon, which is where I wanted to go. But, when I called she said, “Sorry, the orders have been changed since we mailed them to you. Your orders will be for Bangkok.”

*Q: After you had studied French at Berlitz for a 100 hours.*

POTTS: That is right. I said that I wasn’t sure I wanted to go to Bangkok. She said, “Maybe you better go and talk it over with your colleagues in the office.” So, I talked it over with my colleagues in the office and they said, “Go, Bert, go. Take it, it might be a foot in the door.” So, I accepted my orders and went to Bangkok in 1950.

*Q: You were at the embassy there?*

POTTS: No, I was always in the United States Information Service (USIS). In 1950 USIS was still a part of the State Department. It did not become a separate agency until 1953.

*Q: What was your job in Bangkok?*

POTTS: I did primarily exchange of persons. I worked on the language and speak a little Thai. I was too stubborn to do it the modern way. I think the first sentence I learned to put together was not “Good evening, Mr. Ambassador. How are you?” but “The water buffalo is in the middle of the rice field.”

*Q: What was the title of your job in Bangkok?*

POTTS: Assistant cultural affairs officer.

*Q: Do you remember the name of the public affairs officer (PAO) or the ambassador?*

POTTS: The ambassador was Edwin F. Stanton. I'm not sure who was the first PAO, but the second PAO was George Helyer, who disliked me intensely, and told me so.

*Q: Too bad. How long did you spend in Bangkok?*

POTTS: Just two years. Then I got the orders to Saigon.

*Q: Did you still remember your 100 hours of Berlitz French?*

POTTS: I had to do a little review which I did in Redwood City on home leave with my mother. I found a student at Stanford University who helped me.

*Q: This was 1952 or 1953?*

POTTS: This was 1952. I spent 1952-54 in Saigon.

*Q: Again as a cultural officer?*

POTTS: Yes.

*Q: This was before any real buildup of our forces in Vietnam.*

POTTS: Oh, yes. We were not involved at all.

*Q: But it was at the time of the French debacle there.*

POTTS: Yes, and I was there at the time of Dien Bien Phu. I was there the day we were all assigned to go down to the docks where people were coming off ships, the great exodus from the north. We were given tins of milk to hand to the people and were asked to give them only to the elderly, pregnant women or little children.

*Q: These were Vietnamese refugees from the north?*

POTTS: Yes. They were so afraid of us that they wouldn't even take the milk. They thought we were going to poison them.

*Q: Did they think you were French?*

POTTS: No, they thought from their experience in the north that we were going to poison them.

**ROBERT W. ZIMMERMANN**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Bangkok (1950-1952)**

*Robert W. Zimmermann was born in Chicago, Illinois and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota and a master's degree from the Harvard Business School. Mr. Zimmermann entered the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included positions in Peru, Thailand, England, Spain, Portugal, and Washington, DC. Mr. Zimmermann was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.*

*Q: Then you say you made your application to get some economic training and they whipped you all the way over to Bangkok. You were there from 1950-52.*

ZIMMERMANN: That is right.

*Q: What was the situation as you saw it in Thailand at that time?*

ZIMMERMANN: Well, it was recovering from Japanese occupation. A bridge had just been reconstructed across the river. They were trying to pull themselves together. That was the main thing. We had people working with them on rice culture, trying to improve the dry land rice, developing hydroelectric power and establishing a reliable electricity supply. Also we were trying to reestablish American influence in Southeast Asia. This was the one country in the area that had never been a colony of anybody else. It was a great place to be working.

*Q: What were you doing as an economic officer there?*

ZIMMERMANN: I was doing some financial reporting and worried about radio communications...we had special permits from the Thai government that I was responsible for keeping up and getting renewed. Beyond that, it was mainly trade and commerce more than anything else, and running end-use checks to prevent diversion of goods to communist users.

*Q: Were we basically trying to find markets for Thai goods, or were we trying to find markets for American goods?*

ZIMMERMANN: We were trying to find markets for American goods. We weren't too much worried about Thai exports. Tourism was growing, but was not all that great at that point. Jim Thompson was developing his famous Thai silk. We knew Jim very well.

Road construction was another project of the ICA mission. Paved roads didn't lead very far out of Bangkok in those days. They hadn't started filling in the canals yet. They complain about traffic today, but I think it was just as bad then, there were fewer roads. You had more of the foot pedal three wheel vehicles (samlor).

*Q: How did you find dealing with the Thai officials?*

ZIMMERMANN: I found them very pleasant to deal with. I worked largely with the head of the commercial section in the Foreign Office, Thanat Koman, who later became prime minister. He was also ambassador here in Washington. A very able and shrewd man who was most pleasant. He was open and frank, and my principal contact, although there were others.

We had a big AID program there. In fact, another man at the Embassy and I went up on an expedition in the north while the AID people were trying to find a site for a dam. This was a famous trip down the Mai Ping River on the Burmese border, stopping now and then to take rock samples. We had armed guards along because there was a lot of banditry along there. It was a fabulous trip, a classic one that nobody does anymore. It is too difficult to arrange.

*Q: What about the impact of the Korean War which started in June 1950?*

ZIMMERMANN: Aside from the increased general insecurity in the area, I don't remember it having a great deal of an impact on the general public at that point. We felt much more the impact of events in Cambodia and Laos and Vietnam. There was a great deal of banditry and roving armed bands during that period. We didn't have Dien Bien Phu until later, but it was still very difficult. The Ambassador refused to allow anybody to go to Angkor Wat because the last time the plane had been shot up on landing and the previous time a bus going from the airport in Siem Reap was shot up. Things finally relaxed somewhat and Jerry Stricker and I drove over on our own with the Ambassador's permission. But we were about the first ones from the Embassy allowed for some time. However, we were not allowed to go outside of the central complex of Angkor without permission of the Cambodian government and a military escort.

It was an unstable and uncertain period. Saigon, however was more directly involved. My wife went over on one of the military planes that went over to Saigon for R&R. They had luncheon with the other friends who had gone and the day after a bomb was thrown into that same restaurant. Those things were going on. We were concerned in Bangkok and followed the events, but were not in the middle of them.

*Q: What about China? Was the Embassy spending a lot of time looking at developments in China?*

ZIMMERMANN: Yes. We had one officer, Jerry Stricker, who worried mostly about China and Ed Stanton, the Ambassador, was an old China hand. Between them they did most of the Chinese reporting. Of particular interest was the large Chinese population in Bangkok.

*Q: Did you get any feel from talking to Stricker or from ambassador staff meetings about what they felt the impact of China on Thailand might be?*

ZIMMERMANN: The Thais were always concerned about Chinese efforts to increase their influence and were very careful. This was nothing new; it is what they had been doing their entire history. However, I don't recall any instance of serious problems with the Chinese community in Thailand in that period. But they kept a very close eye on them.

*Q: You had Edwin Stanton as Ambassador. What was his style of operation?*

ZIMMERMANN: He was low key, Very knowledgeable, demanding, of course, but in a very pleasant way.

*Q: You felt you were under a competent ambassador?*

ZIMMERMANN: Oh, absolutely. No question.

*Q: You sort of tasted different areas, your next post was to London where you served from 1953-56.*

ZIMMERMANN: I might add on the Bangkok side that again there was a revolution. This was the one in which they sought to throw Pibul Songgram, the Prime Minister, out. It was on the occasion of AID delivering a dredge to the Thai government. The dredge was destined to keep the channel deep enough for larger vessels to come up the river. It was a big occasion with priests chanting, etc. The diplomatic corps was lined up on one side. The Prime Minister had gone aboard to inspect the dredge along with the head of AID and the Ambassador.

They were followed two minutes later by a detachment of marines who "arrested" the Prime Minister and requested the head of AID and our Ambassador to leave. We were all told to disperse. I was with Rolland Bushner. As we were going back to our car a marine came over and shoved a machine gun in our stomachs. We were told we could not go that way. We did not feel like arguing.

The city was full of shooting through the next day. Our house was hit about fifteen times by bullets...both strafing aircraft and marines coming up through the rice patties across the main highway. We were in the downstairs "john" with the kids so we would have more walls between us and the shooting. It was a pretty sticky time. We were told to stay home and not try to get to the Embassy.

We immediately met at the Embassy after the ceremony to discuss our observations of the takeover and then were instructed to go home and not move until called. The phone worked most the time, curiously, I recall. But by the following evening we were able to move around town to see what the damage was.

*Q: What was the general attitude towards this revolution?*

ZIMMERMANN: It is hard to say what the people really thought about it. This was a naval marine operation. They had Pibul as a prisoner on board a naval vessel in the middle of the river, but finally let him off as revolutionary support diminished. I didn't get any particular feeling from the people, from our servants or anyone else. It seemed to be viewed as one of those things the military did from time to time.

*Q: How about as far as the Embassy was concerned?*

ZIMMERMANN: Well, I think the Embassy didn't want a lot of changes. We were getting along

very well with the current officials in terms of our operations, desires and commercial and political relations.

*Q: Did you find that there was a change as far as your work was concerned?*

ZIMMERMANN: No, Pibul came back into power. It only lasted for a few days. There wasn't any basic change while we were there.

**ROBERT ANDERSON**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Chiang Mai (1950)**

**Political Officer**  
**Bangkok (1951-1953)**

*Ambassador Robert Anderson was born in Massachusetts in 1922. He entered the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included positions in Shanghai, Bangkok, New Delhi, Bordeaux, Paris, and ambassadorships to Benin, Morocco, and the Dominican Republic. Ambassador Anderson was interviewed by Horace Torbert in 1990.*

ANDERSON: So I came back to Washington and saw Livy Merchant. I bought back my retirement that I had collected on, so I wouldn't have a break in service. Then Walt Butterworth said to me: "Well, you and Elena are married now. I know just the place for you two. We're setting up a bunch of listening posts around China. And there's one up in northern Thailand, called Chiang Mai. That'll be just the place for you. And you can open the first American consulate."

And so I did. Elena and I went there and it was the happiest time I could have imagined. The ambassador there was Ed Stanton. Edwin and Josie Stanton were a wonderful couple. I learned about as much from them, on how this Foreign Service really should work, as from anybody -- the Butterworths and the Stantons and Johnny Jones and a few others.

But opening the first American consulate up there was quite a trick because, you know, it was up in the jungles and no official presence ever. And that was quite a thrill. And you were on your own.

*Q: How much of a city is Chiang Mai, or was it then?*

ANDERSON: It was the royal capital of the north. As far as the city's concerned, well, it was a very backward town. It had the Bombay-Burma Company, Borneo Company -- huge teak operations, so there were a few Brits up there, but it wasn't a city in any sense of the word. We leased the palace of the former ruler of Chiang Mai, which is very, very nice and with a beautiful garden. Incidentally, I had one American helper, a male clerk. Between us, we did everything;

we did the coding, I was my own USIS officer. My wife and I went out into the jungles with a projector. I had to learn how to do that and operate a generator. We showed movies to people out in the countryside. And it was just great. Today, they have three or four USIS people, AID people, and all sorts of others. I don't know what the hell they all are doing up there, frankly.

*Q: What did you do for language?*

ANDERSON: It was English.

*Q: English was generally spoken?*

ANDERSON: In Thailand, yes. It's amusing, but it shows the stupidity of the administrative world at the State Department, in my view -- I got my only official reprimand in my career when I was in Chiang Mai. I did not appreciate it, to put it mildly. The embassy, before I ever heard of Chiang Mai, had gone into the State Department, and they estimated that \$2,500 would be needed to furnish the residence of the new consulate. And so I arrived in Bangkok and the ambassador and the administrative officer said, "Here's \$2,500 for you to furnish the new consulate."

I then went home and I said to my dear wife, Elena: "Dear, here is \$2,500 for you to furnish the consulate," because she was going to buy and choose. She ultimately had the most beautiful teak furniture you've ever seen specially made. And I said: "Now, don't spend over \$2,500 or I'm in trouble. If you can save some money, do it."

Well, she saved \$800, so we only spent \$1,700 instead of \$2,500. I got an official reprimand for that because the \$2,500 had not been spent. I had seldom been angrier. Ambassador Stanton went back with the biggest rocket that you've ever seen. I just thought this ought to be noted for posterity's sake. [Laughter]

I was up there in Chiang Mai for about six or seven months. Ambassador Stanton and his wife, they loved it up there and kept coming up to visit us, not just to open the consulate, but to work with us in the area. He followed everything I was doing, finally said: "Look, you've had enough of a vacation." [Laughter] "I need you. I want you down there. Josie and I love Elena, and we want you to come down and come into the political section."

And I said: "Yes, Sir." I guess that's another thing. You do a fairly good job and then another thing happens. And I ended up in the political section with Norm Hannan and Rolland Bushner and Bill Turner was the deputy, whom I'll talk about a little bit later, and later knew in Bombay, India.

And I was down and spent a year and a half in Bangkok -- left in December, 1950. Our first daughter was born in early December, in Rome, and I returned just in time. I had a wonderful time in Bangkok, learning for the first time how to be a line officer in a political section.

Ambassador Stanton was so perfect in guiding us. There were three major political figures and three political officers. We each took one. I was the junior one and so I was assigned the

toughest, the one most unlikely to succeed. But he did! He became Prime Minister.

*Q: It's always fascinating.*

ANDERSON: We all worked together so well, thanks to the leadership of Stanton. There was a successful coup; they captured the prime minister, Phibun Songgram. We were at a ceremony for a barge we were giving to them. Bill Turner, the chargé d'affaires, was on the barge. I'll never forget it.

We were standing in the middle of a bridge and Mrs. Turner, who was deaf, was there near us. And all of a sudden, Siamese Marines started popping up from under the bridge, I don't know where they came from. Poor Mrs. Turner, they had fired a few shots in the air, but she couldn't hear anything.

So I picked up the chargé's wife and just tucked her under my arm. And I patted her head and I said: "Now don't worry, Mrs. Turner. Come on, off we go," and got her the hell out of there before we were going to have anything happen to us. [Laughter] And from then on, the Turners and the Andersons were very, very close friends.

One other item, regarding my stay in Bangkok, that I do want to put on the record here, was our very great concern over some of the CIA activities in Thailand. That organization was still pretty new, let's remember, and the people they had out there were very indiscreet. I felt so strongly that I made a very detailed report, backed up with nothing but facts, of all the breaches of security that they made; talking in bars, etc., about things they were doing.

Many of them talked too much, and I felt that this had to be brought under control. So I did this report, and it went to Ambassador Stanton. He was disturbed by it, but it was sent in. I must say, the Agency was very, very unhappy with me. But on balance, I think it was something that had to be done because they not only cleaned up their act there, but I think it probably made them more conscious eventually to be more careful elsewhere around the world. And when I get to the Paris days, later on, there's a story there I want to talk about, also.

I left Bangkok in late 1950 for Washington and work on the Southeast Asia desk. The reason for that, incidentally, was because dear Phil Bonsal, was the Office Director for Southeast Asian Affairs. He had come to Bangkok when I was there and we became very good friends.

Unfortunately, that was a very bad period. Because of financial considerations, the Department was having one of its periodic reduction in force, freeze hirings, and what have you. And for a while there it was touch and go if I was even going to get another assignment, which disappointed me somewhat after the job I'd done in China and Chiang Mai and Bangkok; I thought I'd started off a fairly respectable career.

**WILLIAM W. THOMAS, JR.**  
**Consular Officer**

## **Bangkok (1952-1954)**

*William W. Thomas was born in North Carolina in 1925. He majored in political science and international studies at the University of North Carolina. Mr. Thomas entered the Foreign Service in 1952. He served in Hong Kong, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Taipei, Beijing, Chengdu, and Washington, DC. The interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 31, 1994.*

*Q: Your first assignment was where?*

THOMAS: Bangkok.

*Q: Was there any premeditation on your part?*

THOMAS: Absolutely none. When they gave us a form to fill out what we would like, I put Western Europe, and I got Bangkok. At least I had heard of it. One of our guys was assigned to Penang, which he had never heard of. I guess after two tours they closed the post.

*Q: You served in Bangkok from when to when?*

THOMAS: From 1952 to 1954.

*Q: What was the situation in Thailand when you got there?*

THOMAS: We had an extraordinary ambassador named Edwin Stanton, who I presume was the grandson of the Secretary of War during the Civil War. He was a China hand. At that time that meant nothing to me, but I found out later that it meant a good deal to people who had dealt with him. He was a quite remarkable ambassador in a way that I didn't really appreciate at the time. He sort of had things in his pocket in Thailand. The liberals all came to us, the conservatives all came to us. He had stayed out of the fire in China by being captured by the Japanese. So he was safely out of trouble and didn't get involved in the Hurley criticism at the embassy in Chungking.

*Q: It was Patrick Hurley's attack on the China hand?*

THOMAS: Right. Well, he missed Stanton, who was doing other things at the time that he was being criticized for.

*Q: Did you have much contact with the ambassador? You were a junior officer. Was it a big embassy?*

THOMAS: No, it was not a big embassy. We thought it was a big embassy, but we didn't know what big meant. It has been bigger ever since.

*Q: Did you have much contact with Stanton?*

THOMAS: Not a lot, although it was adequate for our purposes. Like instructions to take the

French Ambassador's wife's American passport away. I thought I had better consult the ambassador on that. So he invited her over to tea and said, "Would you mind sending your passport back? You have three others anyway." The French Ambassador had come along and he said that it was perfectly all right with him.

*Q: You were doing consular work?*

THOMAS: Most of the tour. The first three quarters of a two year tour I was doing consular work and after that I did economic/commercial for six months.

*Q: What was the thrust of consular work while you were there?*

THOMAS: There wasn't a hell of a lot of it. We had 1200 Americans in Thailand at that time, most of them living in Bangkok. There were a few refugees from China; Portuguese from Macao trying to get in; a few Americans marrying Thai. There was no interest by Thai in going to the United States, which has changed since then. Students would go for a year and come back and say, "I can't stand it."

During the tour we got involved in the Korean War. The Thai were asked to send a battalion, but that wasn't my business.

*Q: What was the Thai political situation like, that you saw at the time?*

THOMAS: We thought of things being unstable, but actually they weren't. There were leftists in Thailand who were stirring up the peasants in the northeast and smugglers in the north. We worried about the Vietnamese because this was during the Dien Bien Phu situation.

*Q: This was 1954.*

THOMAS: Right. Actually there was no invasion as we anticipated there would be.

*Q: Was there the feeling that the North Vietnamese Communists, at least those who were fighting at Dien Bien Phu, might turn on Thailand?*

THOMAS: The Thai worried about it and our military worried more about it. We didn't have much of a military presence in Thailand at that time. We had a small military MAAG, as we called it...a Military Assistance Advisory Group. They weren't very big or active by Vietnam standards. In those days my first diplomatic toast was to Bao Dai, the emperor of Vietnam.

*Q: What was your impression of the Thai bureaucracy which you had to deal with?*

THOMAS: The foreign affairs bureaucracy were a privileged class, mostly came from the royal family and others. They were generally very good diplomats. They took good care of us and the foreigners living in Bangkok. The King made a house available for our ambassador, for example, in 1945. Part of this was due to, I thought, very subtle handling by the ambassador.

*Q: As a consular officer, did you have any dealings with the Thai government?*

THOMAS: Oh sure. Anytime we wanted anything like to pick up somebody's passport or something like that, they were always very helpful. Generally speaking they were helpful. I learned enough Thai to be able to talk with them in Thai and that was a big help at the lower levels.

*Q: As economic/commercial officer, what was going on in Thailand at that time?*

THOMAS: We had gotten interested in economic relations with Communist China and one of our big deals was how could we tell Thai mung beans from Chinese mung beans.

*Q: A mung bean being what?*

THOMAS: It's what you make bean sprouts out of. This was the first thing I did in the Foreign Service and that I thought was silly.

*Q: Were you able to tell the difference?*

THOMAS: I couldn't but there were those who could and eventually we were able to ship Thai mung beans to San Francisco.

*Q: If you couldn't tell the difference then there would have been problems?*

THOMAS: If you can't tell the difference, they were presumed to be Communist. We also were trying to buy tin and tungsten smuggled out of China across into Thailand and paying an exorbitant price for it.

*Q: We were trying to buy it?*

THOMAS: We were trying to stockpile.

*Q: So we were telling people not to trade with Communist China, but on the other hand, if we wanted something we were willing to do it.*

THOMAS: Right, and nobody asked any questions about it.

*Q: Were there any American commercial developments in Thailand at the time?*

THOMAS: There were old prewar firms like Standback and three oil companies. Shell was considered to be British then, but it was 40 percent British and 30 percent American. American President Lines had regular ships going there. There was one American trading company which operated out of San Francisco and Hong Kong. American Insurance and Bank of America were there. And that was it. Very little really.

*Q: There really wasn't much going from Thailand to the United States.*

THOMAS: Rubber we bought from Thailand and we were very interested in buying rice to ship to the countries we had just liberated like Japan, Okinawa, Korea, etc. Tin, rice and rubber was about it.

*Q: Was the silk industry much at that time?*

THOMAS: Jim Thompson was an old OSS guy. You have heard of him?

*Q: Yes, he was an American entrepreneur after the war who suddenly disappeared at one point.*

THOMAS: It was rumored that he had been eaten by a tiger, but nobody ever knew. He was running a silk company which wasn't very active when I first got there, but by the time we left, it had proved to be a success.

*Q: Were you married at the time?*

THOMAS: Yes, my wife went with me to begin with. She was pregnant and we had a child born in Bangkok.

*Q: How was life in Bangkok at that time?*

THOMAS: I thought it very pleasant, although a lot of others didn't. We had an old three-storied teak house which was a piece of royal family property that the embassy had acquired. There were no screens and bats in the bedroom, wild birds in the dining room. It was very open. Snakes in the yard. I thought that was very exotic.

*Q: Did the war, which was coming to a halt against the French after Dien Bien Phu in north Vietnam, intrude much upon how we operated in Bangkok?*

THOMAS: Not at all. Not to me, at least. The ambassador may have worried about things, but it really didn't get in the way of our business. I forgot to say that Stanton left three quarters of the way through my tour. He retired. And wild Bill Donovan took over as ambassador.

*Q: This was OSS Donovan?*

THOMAS: The fighting 69th Donovan and the OSS Donovan, the same man.

*Q: Now here was the activist supreme.*

THOMAS: He certainly was.

*Q: He would seem like a rather exotic bird in Thailand at that time.*

THOMAS: He was a very nice man. He took care of everything. He spent about half of his tour outside the country, visiting other areas in the Far East. He was interested in China, but we didn't

have any relations at that time. He certainly was quite different from his predecessor. I enjoyed and liked him, but I think he had bigger goals in mind than Thailand.

*Q: Do you have any feel for how he went over in Thailand as far as his dealing with the Thai officials?*

THOMAS: He tended to deal more with the generals than Stanton had. Stanton knew everybody, but I think deliberately Donovan chose the generals who ran most of the country.

*Q: At the time you were there Thailand was run by generals?*

THOMAS: Yes, generals and Chinese business people, many of whom were the same people.

*Q: How did we view the Chinese at that point?*

THOMAS: The Thai had a very clever policy of openly assimilating Chinese. So, if a Chinese was extraordinarily successful in any business, he was given a title and a Thai name and expected to conduct himself in Thai from then on. Bangkok was and still is a Chinese city. This was before I got into the China business so I don't really know much personally about the Chinese group at that time. Except that there were a lot of them and the generals tended to marry the rich daughters.

*Q: What was the feeling about the Thai army?*

THOMAS: We were after a battalion of the Thai army to help us in Vietnam...actually that was later. They sent a battalion up to Korea earlier on. I don't think they got involved in much fighting.

*Q: You left Thailand in 1954. Is that right?*

THOMAS: Yes.

**EARL WILSON**  
**Chief Information Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1953-1955)**

*Earl Wilson was born in 1917 and raised in Washington, DC. He attended the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and George Washington University. Mr. Wilson joined the IICA (USIS) in 1947 and spent his career in China, the Philippines, France, Thailand, Mexico, Hong Kong, Spain, Malaysia, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1988.*

WILSON: In Bangkok, Ambassador "Wild Bill" Donovan, the old head of the Office of Strategic Services, in the folding of OWI, was the ambassador. If there's ever a man who understood, in

my opinion, how USIS should be used, he was one. At that time, in '53, the Communists had China, and the U.S. was still shocked at this.

We were still at war in Korea. Thailand had the Chinese Communists on one border. Dien Bien Phu had just occurred, and so from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam itself, they had Communists over in that area. Up in the Shan Provinces of Burma, they had rebels there. Down on the southern border of Malaya, they had the "Emergency," Communist insurrectionists there. They had Thai dissidents setting up a shadow government in China. In every way, this was a threatening situation.

Ambassador Donovan recommended to President Eisenhower that they make a stand in Thailand, try to move from there back into some of these countries and to stop this onrush of Communism. It was agreed. Word went out. When I flew from Paris to Bangkok I found the Agency had brought in officers from all over the world including a lot of my old buddies. Jim Meeder was the Director. John Henderson had been brought down from Japan.

*Q: Meeder was the country director?*

WILSON: He was the Country Director. In Bangkok, they had built a new embassy building which had a nickname "the chicken house" from its appearance. USIS inherited the premises of the old embassy, which was a large wooden frame house. At my arrival, workmen were busily tearing out partitions for us to set this thing up. Meeder got us all in the center of a big room. There was no conference room, no secure room at all. We had to draw our chairs close together and talk in whispers. The meeting was labeled top secret. He briefed us. He said we were to help stem the spread of Communism in Thailand, that the campaign had top priority, would be conducted on all fronts, with substantial economic and military assistance. Our role was psychological.

They were worried about the thousands of Vietnamese refugees in the northeast of Thailand, still a problem. So the question was: What to do? Our task was to educate the government and the people -- you notice they say "the people" -- of the dangers of Communism. There were no special instructions. We'd have to develop a plan. Money was no object. The government of Thailand agreed to cooperate, and this was a crash program. I didn't realize it, but we were making history, because this was the first effort of this kind for the U.S. government which would be repeated later in Vietnam and elsewhere.

We had become virtually the Thai Government information program, as later happened in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. So we pioneered in many of the techniques that were used extensively later in that war. The plan that emerged, we called the Psychological Indoctrination Program, for lack of a better name. It was a pyramid concept. We'd start at the top rungs of the military and government, giving a series of lectures and seminars to educate those people. They would then become instructors and conduct similar meetings, both at lower rungs of the ministries and out in the provinces. In this way, we hoped to penetrate those levels. They wanted to make the northeast a special area because of the Vietnamese; they felt many of them were still Communists. And we decided we would use traveling teams to hold meetings with the provincial governors, village officials, teachers, and priests to reach the masses, but most particular, those

communicators within the masses.

So my job, as chief information officer, really, to support this massive effort was to develop media materials. One of my first acts was to send a cable to the Agency, asking them to assemble a photographic history of Communism. Now, this seemed like a simple request, but it turned out to be another Agency first. They took it seriously, and they made a major effort. It became known as Project 1016, which represented the number of photos they selected from worldwide sources.

In Bangkok, I was able to edit this material down. We spread the pictures out all over the place, and made a number of photo booklets and film strips, because we couldn't count on electricity, just have to use a battery for the film strips. The booklets, of course, were printed at RSC by the hundreds of thousands, and the film strips were produced by a film studio in Tokyo. We also used kerosene-burning film strip projectors. Then we assembled anti-Communist movies, including the one based on my old cartoon book, When the Communists Came, but with Thai language tracks. We planned to make ten original films in Thailand.

The director of films for the Agency was Turner Shelton, later an ambassador, quite a colorful character, who whizzed into town and left on a rented airplane to go to Saigon. So there he was. I'll never forget it. It was a Sunday, and he was closeted with Jim Meeder, going over details of this program. I was at a typewriter in the next room. They needed for this local film program three or four paragraphs of an outline for each film. They wanted to do ten films. So I'm sitting there writing the outlines for ten films. Later Shelton sent out a scriptwriter from Hollywood who wasn't of much help. I had to actually write the complete script for the first film which came out. It was a hectic time.

American experts prepared the main lecture outlines. I'll tell you briefly. The first ones were positive, discussing Thailand's national heritage, the King, the Buddhist religion, the natural beauty of the country, family system, history, culture, way of life, and asking the people to reflect on those points from their own life and how things were getting better.

Others followed about the nature, theory, strategy and tactics of Communism, the strategy of world domination by the Soviet Union, how they penetrated popular fronts. Then some discussion of the Communist military failures since the end of World War II in Greece, Korea, Burma, Indonesia, Malaya, the Philippines, political failures in France, Italy, Germany, and Japan, and that the Communists had failed so far in Thailand, but they remained a threat.

So it was that general kind of an approach. They were written initially in English by experts. Those given to the very top level in the government, in English, were university-trained people. They, in turn, took the material, wrote it, not only in Thai language, but also with a Thai emphasis. So as they penetrated down, they were Thai, but with this backbone of solid information.

I want to say one thing on the living side. I found a very large home up the street from the embassy on Wireless Road, corner of Plonchit Road. It was diagonally across the road from the British Embassy. Lorane and the children came with our car and furniture. Quite a different life

from Paris. Poisonous snakes were commonplace around there. The British ambassador, Sir Berkley Gage, took a shine to us. He had quarters on the upper level of his embassy he called Arms. He would invite some of his friends over after big functions, to go up there and have drinks. He would also invite us to play tennis. We became quite close with his press officer, Robin Hayden, and his wife. Our son, Robin, is named after him; he's his godfather. Robin went on up through the ranks, was spokesman for the foreign office at one point, and in his last job was ambassador to the Republic of Ireland. Now he's on the board of some major corporation in England. He's been made a sir, and his wife, Elizabeth, a lady. We saw them a year or two ago in London. It was just like we'd left them in Berkley Arms the day before.

USIS, in addition to doing this large indoctrination program, was doing a more or less normal program. We put out a weekly newspaper, a monthly magazine, a Thai Free World. We did radio shows, newsreels, and other media efforts, with our printing done over at RPC.

I flew to RPC for consultation on Pan American. Right in front of us, by an hour, was a Cathay Pacific flight. A Communist fighter plane came out of Hainan island and shot down the Cathay Pacific plane. When I landed at Hong Kong and went to the lobby of the Peninsula Hotel, people were more upset and excited than any previous time. Hong Kong was usually a pretty cool place. I ran into an old friend of mine from my Shanghai days, "Mo" Cutburth, who was very upset because his partner and buddy, with his wife and two children, were on that downed plane. Mo had landed many times in Hainan -- he used to fly for CNAC -- and volunteered to fly over to look for any survivors. He and I went around Hong Kong in a taxi. We saw different people that had been picked up. We went to the consulate, and came to the conclusion that the rest of the passengers had died.

When I left to go back to Bangkok, I flew Air France. There was only one other passenger, an Indian merchant. We were going to Haiphong. As we got closer, I noticed the stewardess was taking brandy up to the cockpit! I ordered some, too, and so that was my first trip to Haiphong, and then on down to Saigon.

Just a couple of quick anecdotes. We were establishing Thai branch posts. One of them was at Udorn in the northeast. We would have one American officer at these places. I went there and to the others. I met an education official at Udorn. He was driving down to the Mekong to cremate his brother. He invited me to go with him in his Land Rover. The roads were corderoy, with Poles laid over them. In Udorn, incidentally, there was only one other Westerner besides Jim Markey, our BPAO, and with myself made three. In later days, there were thousands of American troops there.

*Q: We had an airfield up there later.*

WILSON: Right. The red dust was terrible. Markey had an office over a store. Dust would come through the windows. I still have a Laotian parachutist's red beret Jim gave me to wear against the dust. That area was remote and primitive is what I'm trying to say.

Our mobile teams were getting under way, and it was really like a military operation. Logistics were very important. We used elephants and helicopters and planes, but mainly it was jeeps. We

sent one American who was instructed to be unobtrusive, the rest was a Thai operation. One of the products that we had that's interesting was a picture of the King and the other was a picture of the Emerald Buddha, their most holy religious object. There were stacks of these things pre-positioned. Then at a given time, the governor, for example, would give our pictures of the King, the local abbot would hand out pictures of the Buddha. Then because the house and shops had open fronts, in a few days we could go through these villages and see those pictures framed, hanging in every single one. It was successful from that point of view.

People would come from miles around to see our movies at night. Then we developed anti-Communist themes for songs of the native Mohlam singers. These singers would go on until 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock in the morning, I'm telling you, with thousands of people sitting around on the ground. So that was successful and later on adopted in Vietnam and elsewhere.

I went on one trip on a jeep through the jungle with the governor of the province to where Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand come together. After attending a service at the abbot's temple, where I did a sketch he passed around which I later gave him. He hung it up in my quarters. I was flown out by helicopter the next day. It had taken us a long time to get through the jungle, following elephant trails at times to get to this place. We got out quickly in one of those small helicopters, seating side by side; a pilot, a mechanic, and myself, three of us. I found the seatbelt didn't work. I almost fell out of the damn thing when it jumped up in the air.

This indoctrination program was a massive pioneering effort when I left in 1955.

A major anti-Communist move by the U.S. during my time in Bangkok was the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, SEATO. John Foster Dulles came out to sign it. To show the treaty had teeth, they sent a naval task force over, and in record time they launched more aircraft from a carrier than had been done since the Korean War.

I took a press group to a carrier. These Thai reporters found the escalator on the aircraft carrier was the most intriguing thing as there were none in Thailand. A commodore commanding the destroyers got drunk at a cocktail party where there were a lot of Thai officials. I managed to extract him from the party to my house, put him to bed. I had to go to work the next day. For three days he kept coming back. My wife didn't know what to do with him. But before he sailed away, he sent over a crate of frozen steaks and some fresh lettuce, which we all enjoyed very much. Later, in 1970, when I went to the faculty of the National War College in the research section, a Navy captain in charge looked at me and said, "I know you. You saved my career."

I said, "I did?" Turns out he was the captain in command of the ship on which the commodore was based. This commodore, an alcoholic, gave him a lot of trouble because of his drinking.

*Q: The other tape ran out, and we had a little trouble finding out just where we were, so Earl is going to start again with his story about the trade fair in Bangkok while he was there.*

WILSON: I was telling how the U.S. suddenly decided to participate in their first trade fair facing off the Russians. I suggested we have Cinemascope -- new at the time. We built an outdoor theater and it was a great success.

One other aspect of that trade fair. I thought we should have an anti-Communist exhibit. It was attributed to the police. It sounds kind of corny, but I had them make a paper-mache spider hanging from the ceiling with a big spider web, and a map of Asia on the walls around the web. I got Communist materials from many of these countries. The idea was to show that just as in Thailand, there were similar Communist themes and materials in each country. Then from Korea I got a whip made of barbed wire that came from one of the prisons made by Communist prisoners to whip some of the other prisoners. Also we had a Korean flag covered with hundreds of signatures in blood of Korean soldiers pledging to defend their country. As I said, it was corny, but at least the place was crowded with people all the time.

We left Bangkok in 1955 on a small British coastal freighter that had a deckload of water buffaloes. There were only two state rooms. Lorane had one with our four children. I had the other with our poodle, Caprice. At sea, we learned of the death of Ambassador Peurifoy. He had bought the Thunderbird sports car, brought out for exhibition at the fair. In driving it over a one-way bridge, he hit head-on into a truck. He and his son were both killed.

The drug scene was developing in the U.S. and, as I learned later, in Laos and Bangkok. American kids were getting involved, also in Malaysia. The Agency was not doing anything about this. I found one of my own kids with marijuana, and like the average American, I was shocked. I looked into it. So I wrote to another friend at home and got a whole stack of materials on what was happening in the U.S. I wrote a special report on that which we sent out. I wanted to have it sent out to all the target lists on the health, police, education, etc. My young press officer came over and said, "You can't put this out."

I said, "Like hell I can't. You put it out, and I'm responsible." Well, very soon thereafter, the PAO in Manila and the one in Bangkok somehow heard about it on the grapevine, and they wanted my materials. They put it out. Of course, today in the Agency, that's one of its big, big activities, doing the drug thing.

**SAMUEL D. EATON**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Bangkok (1954-1955)**

*Samuel D. Eaton was raised in New York and served in the military from 1943-1947. His Foreign Service career included positions in Bolivia, Brazil, Thailand, Columbia, Peru, Ecuador, Spain, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Well, just a little feel about the McCarthy period. As a young officer, did you feel under any particular jeopardy, or was this just a delay in the system as far as you were concerned?*

EATON: I didn't feel under any jeopardy, but I certainly was annoyed at the delay. And I also was very disturbed that a person who obviously was as off-base as he was could influence not

only our...well, I think more the service itself and affect young people and older people that were trying to do their jobs as much as they could.

There was an incident in Bangkok that bothered me about this, the exaggerated emphasis on security that came out of this, the idea that everybody was so suspect, and that might make a great difference in how the world turned. Wild Bill Donovan came out as ambassador to Thailand.

*Q: He had been the head of the OSS during the war.*

EATON: Right. He was an interesting person. I didn't have all that much contact with him and no particular reason to form an opinion one way or the other, except that one day he called all the officers into a session, and then he turned it over to a young man whose job obviously was security. And this young man went on a tirade (with Donovan sitting there and letting it happen) with regard to the most minor possible infractions of security and how they could affect the world.

Well, I had never had a security problem one way or another. I may have left a document somewhere sometime in my career, but security was never a problem for me, or never an issue. But I was very upset that the ambassador should lend himself to this sort of thing by a young person who I thought had no concept of what really was vital in foreign affairs.

*Q: Well, this was the sort of spirit. I know, today, in walking through the State Department, there are signs not to go out and do a good job, but to report waste, fraud and mismanagement. Not security, but waste, fraud, and mismanagement seem to be the operative words since the Reagan administration.*

EATON: Also in Bangkok we had a visiting group of congressmen, and, of course, we entertained them. We had a modest house and modest allowance, but we invited this one congressman to lunch, and considerable effort by my wife, before we went on to see some sights. He spent a long time talking about the threat by the pinkos in the State Department and what a wonderful job McCarthy was doing. I could scarcely contain myself. I wanted to boot him out of our house. I didn't, but I certainly wasn't pleased.

*Q: Well, it's an era that's hard to reconstruct today. Would you say that your views reflected the views of many in the Foreign Service?*

EATON: I would think so. ...not everybody felt as strongly.

*Q: Not to belabor this, but did you feel that the Foreign Service was sort of giving in, that you would have to be somewhat careful about what you would report?*

EATON: No, I didn't think that. But perhaps it was because my reporting was in the economic field and therefore was not affected. Perhaps other people in the political field did. But I was disturbed that the top leadership, the secretary of state and President Eisenhower, did not take more definite stands on this. I thought that they should feel obliged to do so, but they felt greater

political obligations to move slowly, I guess. But it bothered me.

*Q: I know I felt the same way about it.*

EATON: I can imagine you did.

*Q: What were your prime concerns in Bangkok as an economic officer?*

EATON: Well, I did the financial reporting, so my prime concerns were the general state of the Thai economy. And I must say I had great respect for the Siamese officials with whom I dealt. I also was liaison with something called the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, which gave me exposure to economic officials from all over the Far East (ECAFE), and three people's officials from outside the area -- the British, the French, and the Russians -- because there were four observers from the outside -- the U.S., the British, the French, and the Russians.

One of the interesting things about this in this period was that the business of the ECAFE was conducted in English, not in any Asian language. As a matter of fact, no Asian language was ever spoken, to my knowledge, at the Commission. The other languages were French and Russian...curious.

*Q: With the Thai officials, did you get a feeling, in a country that had maintained its independence when all the other places around it had fallen under colonial times, that they had the expertise and skills to move in what was really still a new world, the post-war decolonization period?*

EATON: No question about it, they had very able people and they knew how to move, reflected their history of independence, and, in the economic field, they had very well- trained people.

My primary contact, who was the deputy governor of their central bank and also under secretary of their foreign ministry, would have been an outstanding economist anywhere. As a matter of fact, he was a graduate of the London School of Economics. He had a very interesting history. While at the London School of Economics, the war broke out and the Japanese occupied Thailand, so he remained in London and broadcast to Thailand on the free radio. Then he was trained by British Intelligence, and, sort of in a Bridge over the River Kwai type of manner, he parachuted into Thailand with poison in his pocket to take if he were apprehended by the wrong people. But he wasn't. He was able to contact the underground, and he spent the rest of the occupation with the underground, broadcasting out to Thailand. So he was a Thai hero really, but he was also an outstanding economist. As the advisor to, I guess, the head of the central bank, he replaced a British civil servant, and he later became head of the central bank. He would have been outstanding in anybody's government.

So the Thai, I had great respect for their abilities and I enjoyed working with them.

**JAMES J. HALSEMA**

**Assistant Information Officer, USIS  
Bangkok (1954-1955)**

*James J. Halsema was born in Ohio in 1919. He spent most of his early life in the Philippines where he was placed in a Japanese Internment Camp during WW II. He received a bachelor's degree from Duke University in 1940 and a master's degree from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He entered the USIE (USIS) in 1949. His posts included Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Egypt, Chile, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1989.*

*Q: Another factor that I wanted to ask in passing, did your mobile units distribute a lot of these pamphlets?*

HALSEMA: Oh, yes.

*Q: The question is what was the degree of literacy of the people to whom you were distributing these?*

HALSEMA: Well, the Philippines has a high literacy rate, so this wasn't the problem in the country.

*Q: Were these in English, or Tagalog?*

HALSEMA: They were in both, it depended on what the material was.

*Q: Because in Thailand the problem we had -- and the conclusion to which I came -- was that we were wasting a good deal of our time and effort because the villagers to whom we were bringing this stuff in the boondocks, were so basically illiterate that I didn't think really a great deal of it was getting across.*

HALSEMA: Over the years this is something that I've given a great deal of thought to. In later years, for instance, I didn't see much value in having USIS branches all over a country; that there were only certain places that had an influence on events in the country as a whole, and that we ought to concentrate on those.

For instance, in the Philippines, instead of having 10 or 15 branches, that maybe two would be right. Maybe, I might add, today three. But there are places that influence the rest of the country, and that as those places go, so goes the country. A good example would be the so-called "EDSA Revolution" in the Philippines in 1986.

The revolution, so-called -- I think it's more of a restoration -- took place entirely in Manila. The rest of the country was not involved in it. It was affected by it, yes. But the course of events was determined by people who lived in one city.

*Q: I think the situation in Thailand, just as an aside, was different because what we were*

*shooting at, particularly in north Thailand, was to immunize to the extent possible the villagers against the Communist recruitment of, and subsequently response to the insurgent group. It was not a matter of a nationwide propaganda effort in many respects, but primarily to keep villagers, who were little in touch with what was going on in Bangkok, from succumbing to the Communist insurrection which was going on in the countryside.*

HALSEMA: Well, of course, I'll come to that because I was in Thailand after the Philippines. But it seems to me that in a situation like that, a mass effort really has to be something that's done by the some local organization, rather than by ourselves.

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I traveled around the Philippines as much as I could, and I certainly enjoyed the time that I was there. It was a period when the U.S. was still very much number one in terms of the position of influence in the Philippines. Then came along the events of 1953 which led to Dien Bien Phu and the collapse of the French position in Indochina with the whole pressure on countries like Thailand. I was tapped to go to Thailand to join Donovan's staff.

*Q: I was going to say you went on to Thailand after the Philippines.*

HALSEMA: Yes. I was drafted to go to Thailand, whether I wanted to or not. Alice was about to produce a child and we had only been in the Philippines for 18 months, but none of my protestations seemed to do much good. I left the Philippines just a few days after our daughter, Peggy, was born to go to Thailand. Alice brought Peggy and the rest of the family when Peggy was only six weeks old, so we really arrived in Bangkok under very unfavorable circumstances.

*Q: This is when, in '54?*

HALSEMA: January '54. But it was part of a build-up that brought people from all over the world to beef up the USIS Thailand staff, to essentially assist the Thais in the psy-war effort.

*Q: Who was the PAO, Meader?*

HALSEMA: No. Jim Meader, who had been the PAO in the Philippines, was...

*Q: Jack Pickering?*

HALSEMA: He came later. Meader was the PAO. Earl Wilson was the information officer. There was no regard for what people's previous jobs had been, so I was in the very uncomfortable position of having been information officer in Manila and then being assistant information officer in Thailand, which I didn't think was quite the right way to treat me. I knew nothing about Thailand, I didn't speak the language, had no briefing for the post, and was suddenly launched on this new psy-war effort. So I was uncomfortable physically and psychologically, but I did enjoy working as part of a first-rate team. I thought the people who were sent there knew what they were doing, and that working for Ambassador Donovan was very inspiring. He was a great leader.

We were in Bangkok at the transition period between it being a picturesque backwater port which had all the attractiveness of the old days, and it's becoming a modern city. It was halfway in between. We had all the inconveniences of both. We lived in a house in Bankapie. Alice used to have to clean the water meter, disconnect the water meter and clean the mud out of it every day. We didn't have enough electricity to run an air conditioner and the power went off a lot of the time. My office was in the process of being air conditioned so I didn't have the air circulation, but I did have the heat. I look on that period as being one of the most uncomfortable ones in my experience.

*Q: Were you over in that old compound?*

HALSEMA: Yes, on Sathorn Road. I was very fortunate that we had some excellent interpreters on the Thai staff, and I worked very closely with them. I've always felt that one of the most important things that a USIS officer can do, particularly if he's on the information side, is to cultivate the translators and make them realize that translation is a process that requires an infinite amount of care, and that you are perfectly willing to discuss with them any of the subtleties of each other's languages. This really pays, because when they understand that you're not looking for a hurry-up job or just any old kind of a translation, but really do want to get into the nuances of language, they become intrigued and will give you the kind of product which you need to have. But if you don't do that, you're likely to get a product which is doing you more harm than good.

So one of my big jobs there was helping in the psy-war effort that was going on. That was probably the principal activity that I had, and my biggest job was to produce a Thai version of a Handbook of Communism, which I don't know if you ever saw. It was turned out originally by the RPC Manila. I redid it for the Thai audience, then had it translated into Thai. It was widely circulated. It was my first book and I couldn't read it because it was all in Thai. [Laughter] I could read the English original, but I couldn't read the translation. We worked with the Thai Government regional administrators.

I was only in Bangkok from February until the beginning of October.

*Q: Just a few months.*

HALSEMA: Yes. But it was at that point that Sax Bradford became the area director for East Asia, then called the Far East. I told Sax my problem and he was really outraged by what they had done in terms of dragging us off with an infant to a place that we really weren't prepared to live in at that point, and particularly in the middle of a tour.

So at the end of our tour in October, we were transferred to Washington. Sax made me this special assistant, and that was my first regular Washington tour. This was the end of '54, beginning of '55.

*Q: Before we get into that, I'd like to ask you just a couple of questions about the Thailand program at that time. Were you conducting pretty much a village-type of visitation program in*

*getting your material out? Did you have a lot of mobile units running out into the village boondocks?*

HALSEMA: By the time I left, we hadn't really built up that kind of an effort. We were mostly doing it through the Thais themselves.

*Q: I see.*

HALSEMA: The whole thing was a hurry-up psychological campaign. Dien Bien Phu fell that summer.

*Q: How much of an insurgency was there in Thailand at that time?*

HALSEMA: It was potentially dangerous, but it hadn't really gotten to the extent that it did later. It was a well-founded fear on the part of the U.S. Government of what the consequences of the French defeat would be.

*Q: There had not been a series of assassinations of local officials?*

HALSEMA: There had been a few here and there. For instance, it wasn't unsafe to travel around Thailand at that point.

*Q: It was never unsafe for Americans we found later, because all the insurgents had orders not to shoot the Americans. It was less safe for the Thais who doing the work, but not for the Americans. We didn't know it at the time, but that was the case.*

HALSEMA: I didn't see a great deal of Thailand. I was mostly in Bangkok. I guess I went up to Ban Me Phuot, on the Burmese border, to distribute some material in Chinese to a group of Chinese Nationalist guerrillas who came across the border.

*Q: Leaders in the opium trade. [Laughter]*

HALSEMA: We got down to the beach a couple of times, but that was about it. I was mostly right there working long hours in embassy, or in the USIS office, actually. We seldom saw the embassy itself.

When I got back to Washington, I was in the midst of the program to build up USIS in Southeast Asia. That was my job -- to be the gofer in the IAF office, to try to get people in the media and personnel and everywhere else to get the show on the road for Southeast Asia. This was fascinating work for me because it brought me in contact with every part of the Agency in Washington, and I had Sax Bradford's full backing. Sax could be a pretty influential voice when he wanted to be, because he had Ted Streibert's full backing.

**NORBERT L. ANSCHUTZ**

**Deputy Chief of Mission  
Bangkok (1954-1956)**

*Norbert L. Anschutz was born in 1915 and spent most of his childhood in Kansas City, Missouri. He entered the Foreign Service in 1946. His career included positions in Greece, Thailand, France, and Egypt. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 13, 1992.*

*Q: Well, then, you left Athens in 1953 and moved rather quickly to Thailand. Is that right?*

ANSCHUTZ: Yes. We went back to Washington and for a period of time I was the officer in charge of political/ military affairs for NEA. At that time we, of course, had continuing military support for Greece and Turkey, but the question of Egypt had become very active.

*Q: We were moving up towards Dienbienphu, which was in 1954.*

ANSCHUTZ: Yes. And there were problems in Laos, problems with the Chinese.

*Q: Malaysia was having its...*

ANSCHUTZ: Yes, they had problems, but it was not as difficult...there were guerrilla forces in Malaysia.

So an effort was made to strengthen our diplomatic and national position in Southeast Asia. In that process, Jack Peurifoy was sent to Thailand and Charlie Yost was sent to Laos. Bob McClintock was sent to Cambodia. I have forgotten who was in Vietnam.

So when Jack was assigned there he requested I be sent as his deputy.

*Q: So you went to Bangkok.*

ANSCHUTZ: Yes, as Peurifoy's DCM. Always a bridesmaid and never a bride!

*Q: Yes. Here is Peurifoy who is...a very complex situation in Greece where you say he used his staff well; then he is quickly dumped in Guatemala which had a major situation where he played a key role in essentially a CIA-sponsored coup; and then all of a sudden he is off to Thailand. These are very different places. How did he operate there? Also for you, this was not your specialty at all. So in a sense you had two of you sitting at the top who had no particular feel for the area.*

ANSCHUTZ: That is correct. I think as far as Jack is concerned, the feeling was that his talents were rather ably used in Greece and in Guatemala and that they could be deployed effectively in Thailand. Again, Jack had a very warm, outgoing way and he became extremely popular with the Thai. Again this was a situation where you have a mega mission. The military advisory mission, the economic mission, the whole panoply of American foreign policy instruments. The Agency was training people, the Thai forces. We were trying to reinforce the Thai military establishment.

So actually it worked, in my view, very well. As you know, Peurifoy was killed in an automobile accident there, which was tragic. He lost a son and himself and then he had another son who was physically handicapped and spared but died a couple of years later.

But Jack was also favored by having an extremely attractive wife. Betty Jane Peurifoy was an extremely attractive, personable lady. She was very effective in her role, both in Greece and in Thailand.

*Q: What was the situation in Thailand? What were our concerns there?*

ANSCHUTZ: Our concerns were to try to determine to what extent the Chinese and the Southeast Asian Communists were moving down into Southeast Asia, and to create a bulwark in that part of the world. The whole Southeast Asia situation, as you have already pointed out, was somewhat tenuous, particularly because of Vietnam. The Communists were becoming more and more aggressive in China. And then the situation in Indonesia was not too stable either.

*Q: This was the height of Sukarno.*

ANSCHUTZ: Yes.

*Q: How did we view the situation in Thailand as opposed to China? Did we think of Red China being an aggressive force moving out into Southeast Asia?*

ANSCHUTZ: Well, I think we considered them a very aggressive force in their efforts to control and subvert the governments of the area. At least as far as Thailand was concerned at that particular moment, I don't think there was any particular fear of an eminent invasion or anything of the sort because of the terrain. But the terrain was so difficult that it also was almost impossible to make the borders imperious. The situation in Laos was very unstable. Thailand was in effect one of the core issues in Southeast Asia because of its geographical location.

*Q: Looking at it at that time, how well did you think you were served by the Southeast Asian and Thai specialists within the Embassy? Obviously you had to be pretty dependent on them for language or contacts.*

ANSCHUTZ: We didn't have much of what I would call Thai specialists. We had a couple of officers who had had Thai language training. But one of the factors that seems to have applied in places like Greece and in Thailand...the educated population usually speaks a second language, English or French. The language was a problem but not as much as one would think because most educated Thais know they are not going to get through life on Thai alone. But it is always desirable to have the language and I think everything we do in the language area is terribly, terribly important. But it wouldn't be, in my view, correct to say that we were victims or sitting ducks of the situation because we didn't speak Thai.

*Q: What were your contacts and what sort of government was there in Thai while you were there?*

ANSCHUTZ: Thailand was and is a monarchy. When we were there there was a ruling junta. Pibul was the Prime Minister. And as has been the case since almost the history of modern Thailand, the military is the backbone of the government. The senior military and the senior intelligence and police officer were two of the most powerful people in the Kingdom.

*Q: Did you find then, because it was a military junta with the head of the military and of the police senior participants, that in order to really make points one had to work with either the CIA or the military? Were these important factors in our connection with the government?*

ANSCHUTZ: Yes, they were. However, it is also true that because of their importance, they wanted and we wanted to have certain contacts with them too. So I would say that the relationships were more or less joint relationships. I am speaking now of the head of the military and General Phao who was the head of the intelligence and police forces. We weren't limited entirely to our American associates in the military and intelligence community. As in Greece, and I guess in most places, this tends to work out as a joint enterprise. One of the tricky things is to maintain the diplomatic relations without, as it were, embarrassing the intelligence connection, and yet at the same time trying to keep abreast of what the intelligence agencies were actually doing, promoting, etc. So it is a team work type of problem.

*Q: You were there at the aftermath of the Dienbienphu debacle when the French pretty much lost the war in Indochina. What was the impression of our Embassy of how this was affecting the attitude of the Thai?*

ANSCHUTZ: I think the Thai were apprehensive, but they weren't frantic.

*Q: Thailand was in SEATO which was still in its early years. How did we feel at the Embassy about SEATO, because it did become to some extent a paper alliance?*

ANSCHUTZ: I think we thought it was a useful coordinating effort. Actually, while we were there we had a SEATO meeting in Bangkok and Dulles came and Anthony Eden came as well as the French Foreign Minister. It also helped tie in countries like the Philippines, Australia and other right thinkers.

*Q: So you didn't have the feeling that this was one of these deals cooked up in London and Washington that really didn't have much significance?*

ANSCHUTZ: I think the Southeast Asian countries appreciated the sense of participation. I think it was useful to establish personal contacts and to do a little contingency planning.

*Q: Just to get a picture, because in the last couple of years we have moved into a new era. We were in the cold war era and now we are in what is being called the post-cold war era since the collapse of the Soviet Union. How did we view the Communist movement? Did we feel it was on the march...not just in Communist China but in other areas?*

ANSCHUTZ: There were those who felt very strongly that way and certainly the menace of China was real enough. After Peurifoy's death, the next man to be appointed ambassador was a

fellow by the name of Max Bishop, who was virtually a McCarthyite, anti-Communist. He saw Reds everywhere.

*Q: Did you find yourself uncomfortable with him?*

ANSCHUTZ: Yes, I did. He found himself uncomfortable with me.

*Q: What was the clash?*

ANSCHUTZ: Well, I think...

*Q: First, what was his background before he became ambassador?*

ANSCHUTZ: He was a Foreign Service Officer who had served in Japan. I think it is fair to say that the focus of his service had been more or less East Asia. He was a very complex fellow. I would say that he had very little personal charm. I think these judgments would probably be corroborated, I am not trying to express a strong personal view in this. I think that was widely known. He really never established any serious rapport with Thai leadership. I was very fortunate because I came out with Jack Peurifoy. Jack included me in everything so that I met almost everybody that he ever met. I frequently accompanied him on his calls. So when he was killed I was very well positioned in terms of relations with the Thai. I knew the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the chief of the army, the head of the police, General Phao, etc. Not only were our situation considerably different, but because of the fact that I had a personal relationship with these senior people in the Thai government, I think Max developed a sense of jealousy that he never could overcome.

*Q: This is always a problem -- the new ambassador whose DCM has worked with the previous ambassador and also been Chargé at various times too.*

ANSCHUTZ: Sure.

*Q: Did you leave fairly soon afterwards?*

ANSCHUTZ: I have forgotten exactly what the time interval was. I would say I left about three or six months later. I found the situation extremely unpleasant.

You know on the fitness reports, Max really hammered me. One of the Freudian comments that he made was "This officer is not well equipped to serve in this area because he has a colonial attitude towards the natives."

**KEMPTON B. JENKINS**  
**Economics Officer**  
**Bangkok (1954-1956)**

*Kempton B. Jenkins was born in Florida in 1926 and raised in Long Island, New York. In 1944, Mr. Jenkins went into the U.S. Navy Officers Training Program at Bowling Green in Ohio. He received a bachelor's degree in history and political science from Bowling Green State University in 1948 and a master's degree from George Washington University in 1950. Mr. Jenkins entered the Foreign Service in 1950, serving in Bangkok, Hannover, Berlin, Moscow, and Caracas. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 23, 1995.*

*Q: All right. Why don't I turn it over to you.*

JENKINS: I was a fish out of water in Bangkok. I'd spent five years in Germany. I had put in for transfer to either Budapest or Prague, and ended up getting orders to Bangkok to my amazement. In those days, as it should be even today, when you're sent to somewhere, that's where you go if you're a Foreign Service officer. So to me it was a cultural shock certainly arriving after the relatively comfortable years in Germany, with one young child, and our Airedale, in Bangkok, and being met by the heat of summer, living in a very inadequate little sort of rooming house until we were able to find a house. Then moving in and setting up housekeeping. It was the real Foreign Service as opposed to the occupation world that we lived in in Germany.

We quickly became enamored of the people in Thailand who had great charm and grace. Also quickly became involved in the politics and economics of the situation, and proceeded to spend two fascinating years in an area which was the center of things at that stage. Dien Bien Phu had just collapsed...

*Q: You're talking about Dien Bien Phu in...*

JENKINS: ...were defeated definitively by the Viet Minh. And the French were busily engaged in disengaging but trying to make sure that we didn't go in and pick up the pieces and "succeed" where they'd failed. Our relations with the French were not good at that time because we were beginning to move out into relations in their empire, and they did not like it. It made for a very interesting political setting. Dulles had argued in favor of intervention in Dien Bien Phu, but had been overruled by President Eisenhower. As a fall back position we organized an Asian counterpart to NATO, called SEATO, which included Thailand, Malaysia -- then Malaya -- and Pakistan, the Philippines, United States, Great Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand. Rather Jerry-built in terms of its political logic, but it was typical of many things we did, and I guess still do; to confuse activity for action. There were a lot of meetings and conferences.

One of the early responsibilities I had was to sit in on the SEATO formation conference, together with our allies in all these countries. We designed the basic documents for SEATO, drawing heavily on the NATO documents. I worked particularly on the economic and cultural papers. Then, we wrote the constitution for SEATO. None of us were terribly convinced that it was going to do what Dulles intended it to do.

Now, mind you, this was shortly after the arrival of the Eisenhower administration, the integration into the Foreign Service at the top level of several conservative, politically correct figures, in which Dulles, who was very suspicious of the Foreign Service, tried to lard the

Foreign Service with people who would be more sympathetic to his policies, and less "liberal." We had several senior officers assigned to the Bangkok embassy, former aides to conservative senators and congressmen, and ex-FBI agents, and so forth, all of whom had sort of made their reputation as hardliners, the presumption being that those of us who were in the Foreign Service before that election were not sufficiently loyal, which, of course, was totally incorrect, and unfair.

On arrival I was assigned as commercial attaché in the embassy. My early responsibilities included dealing with the Commerce Department's functions in Bangkok, and I had three or four high profile events which were very interesting and made the first year very interesting for me.

First, I was assigned to support Jim Thompson in his court case. Jim was the founder of Thaibok Silk. He had been an OSS agent up country in Thailand undercover when the Japanese occupied the country during World War II. While he was there he lived among the peasants, and he became familiar with the hand-woven Thai silk which the peasants in these small villages were weaving, and using for their fabric—they're beautiful silks; a coarse weave, but all the more attractive therefore. They had wonderful bright and quite unique hues. Jim watched all of this while he was living undercover, and at the end of the war organized a program with the government and the support of the Queen to try to standardize the dyes so that the silk could be produced, and you could order ahead of time a certain shade of blue, and you'd get that shade. Up until this time the dyes had been essentially a product of the individual preference and taste of the farmer whose wife was doing the weaving, and they just threw in various amounts of cobalt, etc., to make the colors. Once the dye had been standardized, Jim had a product which was quite unique, Thai silk is unique. It's beautiful, it's made to order for home decoration -- interior decorators -- and for clothes, ladies suits, scarves, and even tuxedo jackets, etc. And he organized this firm, incorporated it, and called it Thaibok, and it became immediately a success. First, in Bangkok, then he started advertising in the New Yorker, and opened a New York office, and it took off, and became a big success. Within a year of doing this, while he was on a New York business trip, his partner, who was from Laos, a Lao, absconded with the dye formulae, and set up a competing firm around the corner. So when Jim returned from New York, he faced this guy who'd walked off with all his dye formulae and he had to recreate all of those. And secondly, he was being out priced by this competitor. So he brought suit in the Thai courts.

My first job as commercial attaché, was to go to court with Jim and try to assist him in shutting down the competition which he felt was illegal under Thai law. He won that suit after a fashion. Winning the suit really didn't solve the problem, but he did win the suit. Through that process I became a good friend of Jim's, and became fascinated by his interesting background. He subsequently had us to his home for dinner several times. He had one of the great collections of Thai antiques, and going to his house for dinner was truly a cultural experience. The food was fabulous, the company was great. My wife became a tremendous fan of his and we bought Christmas presents for the next twenty years of Thai silk.

Later, I guess it was fifteen years later, we learned of Jim's untimely death. We were especially saddened. He had gone off on vacation to the mountains of Malaya, the Cameron Highlands, and disappeared during taking a walk after dinner one night. There were a lot of theories that this was a throw-back to his days in the OSS, and he was therefore presumably a continuing CIA agent;

that he may have been in the drug business; that he may have been a homosexual, and he may have been done in by a homosexual love affair; or that he may have fallen into a tiger trap of which there were many in that area, and that the Malays were embarrassed about this and therefore never chose to make it public. To this day his death has been unsolved.

The intrigue is heightened by the fact that approximately two years later his sister was murdered in Connecticut. And a third relative also died an odd death. What this all adds up to, nobody knows. But it is intriguing and it was fun to be involved with Jim Thompson who was a great American, and a great businessman, and had a magnificent eye for color and antiques.

During that time I went to my first business lunch at the Chamber of Commerce as an invited guest, the new commercial attaché in the U.S. embassy. I was invited to Ho Thien Lao, a restaurant, where we had a tremendous meal. The first course was a soup, and you were invited to use various sauces. I asked, because I've always liked hot food, which one of these sauces was the hottest. A little dish was pointed out and I promptly poured it into my soup and took a spoonful of it, and practically blew up on the spot. I knocked over two glasses of water reaching for a third to douse the flames that were in my throat. And that taught me to be very respectful about hot food in Thailand. In point of fact that sauce was made of hot red peppers which were ground with a pestle, and the oil from the skin of the pepper was what was used to make this sauce. Believe me it is hot. So that was a first introduction really. I found Ho Thien Lao a fascinating restaurant. It was in a building with eight floors. The first two floors were the restaurant, if you went up to the third floor, that's when the dessert started. I said, "What do you mean the dessert?" It was pointed out to me that the top four floors of the restaurant, which supported the restaurant financially, were the best whore house in Thailand. So that was another introduction to Thailand, and what real life was like there. But being commercial attaché was not all boring.

*Q: At that time how did we see the Chinese community, both the commercial activities, but also the Mainland Chinese connection?*

JENKINS: Well, that was a major element in what we were trying to do there. Our purpose for being there, according to Dulles, and it really was our policy, was to try to contain the expansion of communism. In Thailand where approximately 20% of the population is Chinese (more than 50% in Bangkok). The Chinese were a tremendously influential component of the population. It's true all over southeast Asia, as you know. It's true in the Philippines, it's true in Indonesia, it's true in all of the countries of East Asia. And their influence really is a reflection of their control of business. The Chinese families, which all have roots in a common Mainland China base, worked together throughout East Asia and they really do dominate business.

Now in Thailand there was a great sensitivity about the Chinese, and a great antipathy, in many ways. So the Chinese businessman would marry a Thai, set up their corporation, invite the Minister of Defense or the Minister of Police, the Minister of the Air Force, or whoever, to be chairman of the board. They would create this board with maybe six Thai on it, and only one Chinese, namely the man who ran the company. And the Thai were paid off with a handsome director's fee, but were not allowed to get into the business of the company. So this was a facade the Chinese have utilized to get around anti-Chinese sentiment.

Now, what was really interesting in this situation, was that the Chinese in Thailand were divided between those who were loyal to the Mainland, to the communist regime, and those who looked to Taiwan, where the KMT, the Kuomintang...the Chiang Kai-shek regime was based. And, of course, many of the families played both sides of the fence. But within Bangkok there was tremendous competition among these two factions. The communist Chinese pretty well controlled the Chinese chamber of commerce. They didn't have an embassy, but they had the chamber of commerce which was their instrument of activity, while the Taiwanese had a proper embassy. I would say on balance that the Mainland Chinese pretty well dominated the scene.

We historically had (and I think that remains true even today) a Chinese language officer on the embassy political staff. In my time it was John Farrior who was a wonderful fellow. He had been stationed in the Mainland before Mao's takeover and was a hostage for a time. As I remember his parents were missionaries there. He was succeeded by Art Rosen who was another Chinese language officer, who was Jewish, and used to laughingly say about Chinese business superiority, that he knew the really potent people in the world were "Chinese Jews." Art was a wonderful, brilliant, exciting fellow to have at the embassy. Both Art and John were tremendous career Foreign Service officers, as far as I was concerned. I learned a great deal from each of them. The role of the Chinese in Bangkok was very pervasive, very important, and I think we were quite sophisticated as an embassy in recognizing and dealing with it.

The other big event in my time as a commercial attaché, was the first Constitution Trade Fair. This was the first program under the Eisenhower International Trade Fair program, which was designed to help promote U.S. exports to the world, a real harbinger, way out ahead of the power curve in terms of timing, to the present export efforts of Commerce Secretary Brown today and Bill Verity, the Secretary of Commerce in the Reagan administration (who was superb). My job was to coordinate U.S. participation in this trade fair. The U.S. participation in it was about 90% of the show. It was a great success. Ambassador Jack Peurifoy, who was then our ambassador, had a terrific sense of stage management, and he weighed in back in Washington to make sure that we had good corporate participation. Opening night we had a panoramic screen which was called Cinerama, which, of course, has become quite well known in this country. It was the first time Cinerama had ever been used, and it was breath-taking, in that part of the world particularly. He invited Sihanouk, who was the King of Cambodia to come over for the opening. And Sihanouk and the King of Thailand, Phumiphon, officially opened the trade fair. With Peurifoy in a white silk suit and his attractive wife, there were the two Kings and their beautiful wives. It was a great, high profile operation. For my part, I had a lot of excitement recruiting American companies, assisting them in putting together their exhibits. We had a Thunderbird, one of the first Thunderbirds.

*Q: A Ford sports car, which is now a classic.*

JENKINS: And we had a Chevrolet Corvette. They were the hit of the exhibit. Ironically, at the end of the fair, Ambassador Peurifoy, with General Motors assistance, donated the Corvette to the Prime Minister, Phibul Songgram, as a gift which was extremely well received because Phibul was a car buff. And Peurifoy persuaded his wife to give him the Thunderbird for his birthday present. The ironic part of it is that it was in that Thunderbird that Peurifoy was

subsequently killed in an automobile accident in the southern part of Thailand. It was his own fault, he was going much too fast over a one-lane bridge which narrowed to one lane from two, and he didn't see an oncoming truck and he ran head-on into it. Even more tragic, in the process not only was he killed, but his one healthy son was killed. The only survivor was the son who had a bad case of MS. He subsequently died of the disease. Betty Peurifoy, his wife, of course, was totally devastated by this. It was a very sad event and it colored our assignment there profoundly.

I might flash back a little bit to the evolution of how Peurifoy came to be ambassador. It tells a lot about the Foreign Service, particularly in that time of the first years of the Eisenhower administration. As part of the effort to shore up "the bastion of democracy" in southeast Asia (which we thought was very high flown lingo for essentially something which didn't exist), Eisenhower sent "Wild Bill" Donovan out as ambassador to Thailand...

*Q: He had been head of the OSS during the war.*

JENKINS: He was rather like Bill Casey in his wheeling and dealing approach, and brought about a tremendous build-up in CIA activities in Thailand which were designed essentially to contain Chinese influence. I think those efforts were less successful, rather than more, but there were many heroic, dedicated CIA officers involved in them, and it's no reflection on them. It caused problems with our neighbors. Donovan, for example, typical of his high-handed approach to the area, launched a major effort to support the Burmese rebels who were essentially KMT troops who had been defeated by the communist in China, and had slipped across the Burmese border, and set up pockets of anti-communist forces in Burma, immune therefore from attack by the Red Chinese. The only problem with this was that the Burmese government took a very dim view of having these foreign forces there. And, they promptly began organizing opium traffic to finance their existence and their arms, etc. Donovan was in the middle of this, providing supplies while denying publicly that there was any U.S. involvement.

Our ambassador in Rangoon, Joseph Satterthwaite, was called in by the Burmese government to protest U.S. support for foreign intervention into Burma. He denied that we were involved in any way, and the Foreign Minister promptly showed him a display of American equipment, PX rations, and uniforms, and Collins radios, proving in fact there was U.S. equipment there. The ambassador was outraged when he found that in fact Donovan had been running an operation in his country out of Bangkok and he wasn't even informed. As I recall, he resigned in protest over that issue.

Donovan left not long after we got there. Howard Parsons, who had been the head of A.I.D., was made Chargé. Howard was a splendid man, subsequently became a Foreign Service officer and did a nice job until Peurifoy arrived. We learned that Jack Peurifoy was coming with some concern. Peurifoy had been very high profile in the press prior to that for having masterminded the overthrow of the government in Guatemala. President Arbenz had been a democratically elected leftist. U.S. policy at that time in Washington was nervous about communist expansion. This was again a period when McCarthy was riding high back home. It was all historically quite ironic because we were the only great power in the world then, as we are again today. The Soviets could not really match up to us, but they were a threat because they were determined.

They clearly didn't have the resources that we did. However, instead of dealing with this confidently, and firmly, we dealt with it in some panic.

So when Jack Peurifoy arrived in Bangkok, we were nervous. He was seen as a free-swinging interventionist telling local governments what to do, etc. Well, within six weeks we were all in love with Jack Peurifoy. Jack Peurifoy was a great leader of men. He worked that embassy like no ambassador I've ever seen. He was constantly walking around, sitting down on your desk saying, "What are you doing today? What can I do to help? I'm going in to see the Foreign Minister this afternoon, is there anything you'd like me to raise with him?" He'd visit and raise your issue with Prince Wan, the Foreign Minister, and then come back and report to us on what Prince Wan had said. I would then write a telegram reporting on what we'd done. But it was this constant openness, and availability, and respect. He knew he didn't know anything about the area, but he had people on his staff like John Farrior, for example, who knew the Chinese situation; and Al Moscotti (my colleague in the political section), who had a Ph.D. in Thai studies from Yale. A very bright man, bilingual in Thai. We had really great officers. And Jack Peurifoy knew how to use them. He also had a superb DCM named Norbert Anschutz (who remains a close friend of mine). He was a true Mr. Roberts, and a career officer's career officer. He was courageous, debonair, smart, outgoing, articulate, handsome. A terrific man with a wonderful wife, a true "house mother," a great Foreign Service wife. And the Peurifoyes and the Anschutzes turned that embassy around. Before then we had been suspicious of what CIA was up to. And, we were resentful of AID's big budget, being run by a man who was a former Postmaster General named Ed Sessions. A perfectly nice man, but he had absolutely no background in this area.

With Peurifoy's arrival things came together. When he was killed, Norbert became Chargé, and he was superb. He lasted about six months, and then under the new administration, out came a man named Max Bishop. Max had been a career officer, a Japanese language officer. He was the only career Foreign Service officer to testify against the Chinese language officers in the period of the witch hunt by McCarthy. He was extremely unpopular among career officers, very reactionary, and paranoid about China.

Personally, I found him trying hard to be a nice man, very dedicated. He was not in any way lazy, or corruptible. He just had a skewed vision of things, in my judgment. He immediately started trying to get his hands around the embassy which he said was perceived in Washington as left-leaning. Which is a ridiculous thing to accuse Jack Peurifoy and his deputy of, given Peurifoy's successful record of anti-communism.

I remember one infamous occasion when I attended the country team meeting for the political section, and we were talking about what to do for the up-coming SEATO exercises, which I'll talk about in a minute. The economic counselor said something about the Colombo Plan, which was an economic plan put together by India, Ceylon, Malaya, etc., as sort of an economic counterpart to SEATO, but not run by the United States. Bishop blew up and said, "The Colombo Plan is a bunch of damned Socialists, that's a terrible thing, and we should be focusing on SEATO. That's the anti-communist instrument that we should be focusing on, to the exclusion of the Colombo Plan." And then he got really carried away and said, "You know, I'm fed up with all this talk about the Colombo Plan and the British. Nobody has done anything about SEATO

until I got here. I'm the one who has put SEATO on the map in this country." And Norb Anschutz, who recognized this as perhaps unwitting emotional criticism of the late Jack Peurifoy, very quietly said, "That's a damn lie, Mr. Ambassador, and you know it." And everybody in that room said a silent vow that wherever he went, we would support Norbert Anschutz. It was a very heroic thing to do. It deflated the ambassador completely, and of course, the ambassador never forgave Norbert for it. Subsequently we received a new DCM named George Wilson who had been Senator Knowland's aide.

*Q: And Senator Knowland being a right-wing senator from San Francisco.*

JENKINS: A very hard-line, very pro-Taiwan, very anti-State Department. Putting Wilson in an embassy was like putting a fox in the chicken coop. It was just outrageous. And Wilson was totally unsuited for the job. He wasn't a mean man personally, but he just was out of his league. It was a stupid appointment.

Bishop subsequently was pulled out after an incident which was quite intriguing. Bertie McCormick, the publisher of the Chicago Tribune, had died and his wife was left owning the newspaper. And she took a trip. She was very interesting, intellectually engaged, throughout southeast Asia, and arrived in Bangkok. And because she had known the British ambassador when he was Consul General in Chicago (in fact he had courted Bertie McCormick's daughter), there was a close family tie there. She chose to stay at the British ambassador's residence, instead of the American ambassador's residence. Now, Max Bishop, being an ambitious, arch-conservative officer, was very upset that he was denied the opportunity to host the owner of the arch-conservative Chicago Tribune. The British ambassador, Sir Barkley Gage, had a dinner for her. My late wife was a friend of Sir Barkley's wife (who was a good deal younger than he was, and had been a Northwestern student when he met her). So there we are at the dinner party, when at the dinner a discussion started at the table about China -- Mrs. McCormick had decided she was going to go in to the Mainland. Americans were discouraged from traveling to the Mainland, and certainly a high profile American like the owner of the Chicago Tribune. Bishop felt she would be giving political recognition to the "gang of rogues who were running Red China." So at dinner, in front of everybody, he said, "I forbid you to go to China." And Mrs. McCormick looked at him like he was out of his mind, and said, "I find that amusing. Who the hell are you to tell me where to go? You work for me, I don't work for you, you're the ambassador and my taxes pay your salary, and don't you forget it young man." Bishop was undaunted by this and continued to argue the case. In the final analysis of course, she went, and when she arrived back in Chicago she wrote a front page article which was carried in the Tribune, which started out by saying, "The American ambassador in Bangkok might be a good plumber but he's a lousy diplomat," and then launched into this long discussion of how he was paranoid, etc., etc. Not long after that Bishop was out of there. A very interesting episode to observe as a young Foreign Service officer.

I had a marvelous experience with Eleanor Roosevelt in Bangkok. There is something called the World Federation of United Nations Association, which is still extant. They have an annual conference. And this particular year they held the conference in Bangkok, and because Eleanor Roosevelt was regarded as the "Mother of the United Nations" she was held in tremendous universal respect and affection for her role in promoting the United Nations, particularly right

after her husband died. She was invited to be the number one guest at this event. The U.S. delegation, which was always a "Presidential delegation" appointed by the White House, was as usual, full of political contributors, most of whom didn't have a whit of knowledge as to why they were going to the conference. They were just going out to buy silk from Jim Thompson, and see the area. The U.S. delegation was very weak. The Mainland Chinese sent a delegation even though the United Nations was officially still at war with China in Korea. They were allowed in because the third world countries were already trying to cut deals with the Chinese, and this was not an official government event, in theory. The instructions our embassy received were to observe, assist the American delegation in any way possible, but don't get involved.

Well, I met the delegation and briefed them on what was going on in Bangkok, and told them a little bit about the conference. I met Mrs. Roosevelt and expressed my admiration. And she said, "You know I'm not part of the American delegation, but I appreciate your support." The first thing I know on the first day of the conference, it was clear the Chinese had organized a lot of support among the Third Worlders, including the Indonesians and the Egyptians, and they were going to be voted in as full members of the World Federation, and the Taiwanese were going to be forced out. This would have been a major step toward recognition of the regime which was still officially at war with the United Nations. I recognized that this was, notwithstanding that the American delegation was so-called unofficial, an important setback for American policy.

So I went to see Norbert, and he said, "By all means get in the middle of it, ignore your instructions, get into it." So I met with the American delegation. I early on decided they were pretty hopeless, but I did run around working on the various ambassadors who were in Bangkok, the Belgian, the Israeli representative, and the German, and the Frenchman, and put together a little coalition of delegations which would speak against this, and try and head it off. Well, it came down to the third day to a vote on the subject, and it looked like they had the votes and we didn't.

Operating without any instructions, but with Norbert's blessing, I went to see Mrs. Roosevelt who was sitting in a panel of academics. I called her out of the meeting and we sat down on a bench out in front of the meeting place. And I explained to her what was happening, and she looked at me very coolly and said, "Well, what do you think we should do?" And I said, "Mrs. Roosevelt, I have no right to ask you to do this, I have no authorization from the State Department to do it, but if you agree with me that this would be a setback for the United States, and would damage the United Nations and its reputation in the United States, particularly at this tense time in the United States where the extremists are denouncing the UN as being a bunch of communists anyhow, I would like to suggest that if you would proceed down to the General Assembly meeting place, and ask for the floor. Out of deference to you personally, they would give you the microphone." She said, "I see that and I agree, and what do you think I should say?" So I said, "I'm just a junior Foreign Service officer here, but if I were you, you might want to consider the following because I think you might be able to move these delegations to support you. I have already lined up the Thai delegation." The deputy Foreign Minister was a good friend of mine, as well as the Belgians and the Israelis, and several others to lead an effort to bring about an amendment which would strike this proposal to make the Red Chinese members. "But it would take a catalyst like your personal intervention." And she looked at me and said, "Young man, take my arm."

At this point it was 1955, Eleanor Roosevelt had to be 75 years old, very heavy set, and she was feeling the heat. I took her arm and we carefully wended our way down the stairs, and Mrs. Roosevelt worked her way toward the front, and waved to the podium and said, "I wonder if I might have a word?" And the chairman immediately lit up and began...of course. At this point all the men who were engineering the effort to bring the Red Chinese in realized what might be happening, and they were scurrying around trying to persuade him not to let Eleanor Roosevelt speak. Well, there wasn't any way that they were going to say no to Eleanor Roosevelt. She kept right on walking toward the podium. She was such a dominating figure in the United Nation's culture that of course she got the microphone, and she gave a hell of a barn-burning speech. She denounced the Chinese for continuing to remain in a state of war with the United Nations, and rejected as ridiculous any suggestion that the World Federation of the United Nations associations should accept them into their membership. At which point the Thai representative stood up, followed by the Israeli and the Belgian and the German, to support Mrs. Roosevelt. And finally the American delegation leader (it was some producer from Hollywood), stood up and said, "Yeah, we agree, we agree."

Anyhow the Red Chinese initiative was killed. It was a great tribute to Eleanor Roosevelt. I cherish the photograph I have of her with me at that time. She was a great American, and a great political figure. That was a very exciting thing to experience, and I got a nice commendation from the Department for ignoring my instructions, and a big pat on the back from Norbert which I also cherish because I continue to feel that Norbert Anschutz was a truly great Foreign Service officer.

When we first moved into our house, fresh from Germany, it was a house built up on stilts, a lot of water around. With our Airedale patrolling the fence of the enclosure, he quickly stirred up what turned out to be two cobras. It was a very interesting experience, and he barked and fortunately he backed away so they weren't able to strike him, but they were trying to strike him. And because he made such a big racket, the snakes all left. He became the de-snaking instrument. Thereafter, we were known as the house of the big dog. They had never seen a wooly dog because all the dogs in that part of the world are short-haired, and here's this big wooly Airedale.

The other thing with that Airedale that was fun was that he had to be trimmed all the time to keep him from being terribly uncomfortable in the heat. The only place I found where we could have this done was the Thai army cavalry veterinarian. I would take him over there to the stables and with two sergeants we'd take these big clippers out which were used to trim horses, and give him a haircut, and that was kind of fun. I developed a special friendship with a very unusual group of people.

The political situation in Bangkok was very interesting. Phibul Songgram was the Prime Minister. He'd been a general, and seized power in a coup where he replaced an admiral who had also come to power as a result of a coup. He was a very small, delicate man, very pleasant. He was Prime Minister and remained Prime Minister only because the two real power centers, the police and the army, found him mutually acceptable. They were determined that the other one wouldn't get power, so Phibul was propped up by competing political forces. They weren't

political competitors in the sense one was liberal and one was conservative. Neither one of them was particularly soft on communism, or tough on communism. They were businessmen, and somewhat like today's Mafia. CIA was very heavily involved with the director of the police, General Phao, who among other things ran the opium business. And our army unit, the military assistance group, which was very large, and was providing equipment and training for the Thai military, again going back to the days of Wild Bill Donovan trying to create an effective army to contain Chinese aggression, was headed by General Sarit. Now Sarit's power came from his control of the whore houses, the pork business, and the liquor business. So they each had their economic bases, and each had a lot of bodyguards, and they each had -- thanks to CIA -- their own air force, navy, etc. They were two competing military forces. Both, in my judgment, were milking the United States for all the assistance that they could get, competing with one another, but supporting Phibul in the middle. On balance, this wasn't too bad for the United States because the Thai were extremely cooperative with us in the United Nations. They played along with our anti-Chinese policy, although in fact they maintained their own channels to Beijing. And they kept a very strong public association with Taiwan. They hosted SEATO. SEATO headquarters was established there. And they did basically what the Thai have been doing for centuries. They collaborated with whomever they had to collaborate with to remain independent. Thai means Land of the Free, and even though they were nominally occupied by the Japanese, they maintained their own government, and they played along with the Japanese while at the same time they played along with the OSS, and the Jim Thompsons from the U.S. They were very clever that way, but it was very interesting for a western oriented Foreign Service officer to see the subtlety, and the Byzantine nature of politics and power in Thailand.

I had, among other things, responsibility for the Thai-Malay border area in terms of the political section's coverage of it. So I traveled down to the Thai-Malay border and rode in helicopters along the border with the CIA-trained border police who were trying to prevent the communist terrorists in Malaya from coming across.

*Q: This is the time of the confrontation.*

JENKINS: That's right. I had good relations with the British officers who were assigned to the Malay border police units, and we developed cooperation between the Thai and the Malay along the border for which CIA deserves a lot of credit, and I made a small contribution. It was interesting because there was shooting going on down there -- I should have gotten combat pay. But I enjoyed it, I learned a lot, and saw a lot.

Another "hot area," of course, was Vietnam. With my wife -- not with the children -- we drove in our convertible Ford to Saigon and stayed with friends there. We stopped at Phnom Penh, went to Angkor Wat and saw the ruins. At that time Diem was running south Vietnam, and it was taking off economically. It was very successful. It was peaceful in the countryside. I think Diem's success, and the dramatic success of the private sector business economy that was organized there, drove the Viet Minh in the north to launch the attack because they clearly were losing the economic contest. They saw that the tide of history was running against them, and they had to intervene to reverse that. So not long after we left real shooting broke out, etc. There was intense, dramatic political back-and-forth going on in Saigon in the embassy and we had a large delegation there already.

"Lightning Joe" Collins, the World War II general, was made ambassador to Saigon by General Eisenhower. We had a number of people there, subsequently Henry Cabot Lodge, who made very serious misjudgments, and contributed to the eventual morass into which we slipped, and one of the great disasters in our history -- our participation in the Vietnam war.

Collins did understand the importance of maintaining a clear wall between permitting American forces to engage in combat as opposed to have them just there as training forces. He deserves great credit for that. Cabot Lodge on the other hand was there when, particularly in the Kennedy years subsequently when Bobby Kennedy, with McNamara's active support, engaged in policies which led us into combat, and eventually led to our defeat, and I think history is going to be very harsh with them for the arrogance which they displayed in dealing with Vietnam.

*Q: What were you getting from the officers at the embassy in Saigon?*

JENKINS: I had several friends in our embassy in Saigon. The embassy was split. The main thrust -- Donald Heath was the ambassador initially before Collins, and he had been a very pro-Paris Point of view. Anything we needed to do to keep the French in NATO, we should do, and if ignoring the Vietnamese and talking only through the French to Vietnamese is necessary, that's what we should do. The DCM was a terrific FSO named Ed Gullion, who subsequently went on to become an ambassador in his own right. Ed was for pushing very hard for our getting directly engaged with Vietnamese nationalists, including the Viet Minh who many specialists believed were up on the fence at that time. They wanted very much to have a relationship with the United States. I think history has proven that they were not in China's pocket, that they were independent-minded and that we did not have to have a situation where the Vietnamese independence movement would be taken over by the communists. Ho Chi Minh would not necessarily have been hostile to the best interests of the United States. Gullion had figured all that out. With him was the head of CIA and the A.I.D. director, Heath, and Bill Leonhart, who went on to be ambassador to Yugoslavia, were opposed to any independent action. He and Heath dominated the process obviously, and they had the rank. However, the minute Heath would go away on vacation, or left to go home, Gullion started firing off policy telegrams questioning the wisdom of where we were headed. He never did succeed in changing the policy. A very interesting novel was written about this called Forest of Tigers by Robert Shaplen. It's a novelization of this dispute within the embassy. It's well done, a real little gem, and for anybody interested in the history of our engagement in Vietnam, I would highly recommend it.

I found the whole time in Bangkok very educational. I did suffer personally in the sense that I had typhoid fever. And I had obviously gotten it from traveling up country. I did a good deal of upcountry traveling. We were engaged in an anti-communist program called the democratization drive. We would go out with our Thai local employees in Jeeps, and take pictures of the King and the U.S. constitution. It was a fairly simplistic -- and I think the Thai were all somewhat bemused by our actions, although they were very hospitable and they always enjoyed parties, etc. So I had a lot of dinners with governors which is always quite interesting, chicken was sort of the up-market thing to be eating, so they'd always have some chicken and rice, and so on, and we'd drink a lot of rice wine. They were very taken with refrigerators, and German beer. So the governor would typically have in his living room a Westinghouse refrigerator full of German

beer or Carlsberg, which they called Catchyburg. After dinner we'd all drink cognac. That was another big favorite of theirs, the French influence was very significant in that sense. Cognac was very popular. We'd be sitting around having cognac and in would come four or five Chinese dancing girls, and the tradition was that after a few dances and more cognac, that we were supposed to go off to a bedroom with our Chinese girl. That was part of the dinner, "the dessert." Of course, I was always able to wiggle out of that, but it wasn't easy, it took some diplomacy. I was either sick...I came up with all kinds of excuses. It became a great joke, and my wife, "C" used to tease me about whether I was enjoying "dessert."

Typhoid was no joke -- I damned near died and went down to 120 pounds before they finally diagnosed it properly. There were a couple of good Harvard-trained Thai doctors there and they stumbled onto it looking for Dengue fever. Once they did that, there was a new drug called Chloromycetin, and within 24 hours it broke the fever. Then I had four months of recovery. It was a tough time for me. I arrived home weighing about 125, and that also colored my experience.

Thailand was a charming country. In those days they had not paved over all the klongs or waterways. I gather it's pretty well destroyed its cultural identity today. The after-effects of the Vietnam war where Bangkok became the rest and recreation center for tens of thousands of American troops were severe. But the Royal Bangkok Sports Club remains a happy memory in my mind, very plush, very attractive, a race course, tennis courts, golf course, set up very much in the British tradition, linen-jacketed waiters, bare foot, and brass buttons. It was a neat place to be and a lot of fun. Playing golf was quite unique. We had a caddy carry the bag, and then we had a so-called klong caddy. Half the time you were going in the water because the golf course was laced with these canals, and the place was full of snakes. And their job was to kill the snakes, make sure you could address the ball without stepping on a cobra. You come out of Germany after five years, and it's a whole new experience. So that was kind of fun, and it was a happy assignment all-in-all.

*Q: Going back to the SEATO time. You were there at the creation, you were part of the apparatchiks who were putting this thing together. What was your initial, and particularly the young and maybe some of the older people, but the people who had to put this thing together the politicians, who said this is what its going to be, about Pakistan. Because there's been a lot of debate about, all of a sudden Pakistan got roped into it. It was supposed to be the bridge, but Pakistan...*

JENKINS: We wanted India to be a member but they refused to participate because they were a leader of the neutral Bandung group. They were instrumental in pushing the Chinese for membership, for example. The Paks came in because they were responsive to us and it was something that would set them apart from India. It was a way of getting close to the U.S. on a military to military basis. Pakistan was a military-run country. Burma didn't come in for example. Burma was with India on this. But Pakistan provided more muscle than anybody to SEATO; so far as SEATO had any substance, I would say it was the Pakistanis who provided it. Obviously the British, Australians, and Americans did, but for an Asian ingredient, even though they were south Asian, not southeast Asian, their officers were splendid, Sandhurst graduates, and splendid men. We really enjoyed them a lot, and they did a hell of a job.

We had one operation in Bangkok to sort of kickoff SEATO's existence, called Operation Firm Link. Firm Link included an airdrop and a naval landing combined exercise to demonstrate SEATO's ability to inject force onto the Asian mainland if needed. We had 5,000 paratroopers come from the Philippines. The Pakistanis had a couple of airborne battalions. We had jets that swooped low, and the navy came in, the New Zealand navy came, and the Australians had some troops with their wonderful bush hats, etc., and all these guys landed at the airport where there's a huge flat field which went on for miles, without accident, very effective operation. We had big parades through Bangkok and a lot of press coverage, etc. It was fun. But when we thought about how we were trying to impress the Chinese with their millions of men, it was kind of thin, not substance. We did the best we could. We had doubts as to whether it was going to have any impact. Certainly the Thai were heartened by it, it reinforced their commitment to stay with the West. The Pakistanis were trying desperately to stay with the West anyway they could. The Malays were very good. We had Cambodian and Vietnamese association with SEATO, although they weren't active participants, they sent a lot of observers. And I think Dulles was happy with that. Given the interpretation of the world at that time, it was a pretty reasonable and effective thing to do. Whether that interpretation was real is unclear.

*Q: Were you and the people at the embassy concerned about the possibility of a confrontation, a Chinese uprising in Thailand at that time?*

JENKINS: No. It's odd. I think that's true throughout southeast Asia, although the Chinese controlled business, and much of the finance of that part of the world, they never seemed to try to get control of politics. If the Mainland Chinese had invaded, obviously, these Chinese would have collaborated with them to a large extent. A Hong Kong-like takeover was always a possibility, and we were always concerned that the Thai not feel that time was on the Chinese side because they would start to adapt in advance. We used to say that political reed watching is the order of the day. If the wind is blowing in a certain direction, they'll be there. We tried to maintain a prevailing breeze in our direction, and to some degree we succeeded with things like Firm Link, the SEATO operation. There was a lot of anti-Chinese sentiment, like anti-Semitism in this country. Historically the Thai would complain socially and privately to you that the Chinese control all the money, but they didn't hesitate to collaborate, to accept directorships, go on the board, marry Chinese, to get their hands on the money. Not very noble, but very realistic in a sense. The Thai have always felt that they were a small country, that they were impotent, but very clever, and they were going to survive through being clever. They dealt with the Chinese the same way. Not long after I left, in Indonesia after the overthrow of Sukarno, Suharto came to power and under him they slaughtered about 800,000 Chinese. That figure may be inflated but I think those were the numbers used.

*Q: Nobody knows. This is in '65.*

JENKINS: That never happened in Thailand, and it never will. The Thai were political warriors. They dealt with Pol Pot, for example, in Cambodia. They do business with people, and they draw you into a relationship. That's their way of resistance. And who's to argue with it? It worked for them.

*Q: You left Thailand when?*

JENKINS: 1956.

*Q: When you left there, whither Thailand? What was your impression when you went. I mean we're really still at the height of the Cold War. China is a great menace, and all that.*

JENKINS: Oh yes, very much so.

*Q: What did you think?*

JENKINS: Well, I thought on leaving, that we had made progress, that we'd supported the Thai. The Thai were desperate to maintain their independence, recognized that we were available, and that we were probably reliable. What was clear by 1956 is that things were coming unraveled in Indochina, gradually but clearly. That was distressing. And in Saigon, for example, half the city was Chinese and they were all working with the Mainland. What we didn't appreciate, and I don't think any American analyst did, except true experts who were too junior to have any impact on policy, was that the Vietnamese hated the Chinese and vice versa. It didn't matter whether they were communists or anti-communists, we were dealing with a national attitude and mentality. And I think that was true in Thailand, true in Burma. It's true throughout Southeast Asia, and it's logical. It shouldn't have been too hard for Americans to figure out that nationalism was driving politics. For ideological reasons Dulles was really miscast in this whole picture. "Wild Bill" Donovan was very naughty, and I think we missed the opportunity, not only to undercut communist influence in southeast Asia by dealing with and exploiting the nationalist thrust, but ignoring the fact that within China itself nationalism was a key element. I think the China language officers who were literally driven from the Service, were heroes, they were right, and they had the courage to say it, and they paid a terrible price. And I'll never forgive Eisenhower as President for caving in to the Joe McCarthys of the world who were dominating our domestic policy. He certainly was a great leader in World War II, but not as a President. I found much about Eisenhower that I find about Clinton, reed watching, compromising, bending to the pressures, no clear agenda. Dulles, to his credit, had an agenda. It happened to be wrong, his picture of the enemy was wrong. He saw the Soviets as six feet tall, and us as 5'4", and it was exactly the opposite in the real world and history will show that, will confirm that. I felt that Thailand was on a pretty good track, and I left feeling that things were going to move ahead. In fact, as you look at it, Thailand has not really suffered a serious reversal. Even the loss of Vietnam didn't really damage the Thai. They are remarkable survivors. They made a lot of money out of the Vietnam war, they got a lot of commitments out of us. Their military got a lot of equipment, they got a lot of jobs, they paved a lot of roads, a lot of whore houses made a lot of money. And the net result of the whole thing was Vietnam was destroyed, decimated. We created a tremendous domestic crises in our own country, but nobody ever laid a glove on the Thai.

After these two eventful and, in retrospect, historic years in Bangkok, we returned home to Washington via Lake Bluff, Illinois, where we spent our home leave (2 months). "C's" parents lived there. Home leave is meant to be a time of regeneration and it was -- especially for me returning at 125 lbs. after typhoid fever. C's family were marvelous, supportive people and loved their grandchildren. There was a cold-shower impact on us, however, to feel the palpable

suspicion among C's school friends and their families towards the State Department and us -- a sour left-over from Senator McCarthy's empty but scurrilous attacks on the Department.

While there we learned that we had been selected for Russian area language study -- 9 months of intensive (8 hours a day, everyday) language training at the Foreign Service Institute and then, two semesters at Harvard's Russian Institute. The language training was very wearing -- a small room with no windows, four other "students" and a native Russian speaker.

While the language program was tough, it was really effective. The State Department language program is under-appreciated by the general public, but in my experience and diplomatic service around the world, our embassy officers are clearly better prepared to deal with native languages at the post where they serve than any other Embassies. The language program assumes no intelligence on the part of the student and uses a system which teaches language by sound, as a young child learns to speak.

After this intense interlude, we decamped for a fascinating two semesters at Harvard. I had long been awed by Harvard's reputation. As time went on, I found at Notre Dame and George Washington and in competition with Ivy League graduates, that Bowling Green had not really disadvantaged me. However, Harvard is truly something special. I was even more awestruck after coming to know Harvard than before I got there. I had the great opportunity to study with men like Marshall Shulman, who had been Dean Acheson's special assistant in the Department when I first started in 1950 and returned to be President Carter's principal advisor on Soviet affairs. Marshall was a fascinating and wonderful man and I learned a great deal from him. I also had two semesters with Zbig Brzezinski and Richard Pipes, both of whom became National Security Council Advisors; William Langer, one of the premiere historians in the United States, who taught a magnificent two-semester course on the history of the Ottoman empire, which of course was central to Russian history; and the very impressive Dean of professors on the Soviet economy, Abe Bergsten. On those occasions when we had a spare moment, we also were encouraged to host informal dinner parties at the alumni club where for example, we spent an evening with Henry Kissinger. All in all, our group of four Russian language students had a fascinating and very productive academic year at Harvard.

I must add that for my wife, it was slightly less than fascinating! With no help, a third-floor walk-up apartment on campus, my wife spent the long days coping with two in diapers and one in nursery school. A Siberia-like experience for which she felt compensated when we landed at our next post in Berlin.

**MAX WALDO BISHOP**  
**Ambassador**  
**Thailand (1955-1958)**

*Ambassador Max Waldo Bishop was born in Gravette, Arkansas in 1908 and raised in Kansas and Iowa. He received a Ph. B. from the University of Chicago in 1932. Ambassador Bishop entered the Foreign Service in 1935 and served in*

*Japan, Ceylon, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Thomas Conlon in 1993.*

*Q: How did it come about that you were assigned to Thailand? Had you had a special interest in that country?*

BISHOP: No. John Peurifoy, then Ambassador to Thailand, was killed in an automobile accident. There was a vacancy to be filled in an important post. Under Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover, Jr., arranged for me to be sent to Bangkok. He was my boss in the Department when I was Operations Coordinator.

*Q: How did you find Thailand at the time, in early 1956?*

BISHOP: We loved it. Well, you know the house and the beautiful grounds around the ambassador's residence. Our two older girls were just barely of school age.

*Q: SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization] had been established, as I recall, at the Manila Conference in September, 1954, following the end of the French War in Indochina. SEATO was getting organized, and it had been decided that Bangkok would be the headquarters of the secretariat. Did SEATO occupy much of your attention?*

BISHOP: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I had worked on the establishment of SEATO with Herbert Hoover when I was with the OCB.

*Q: When you went to Thailand, did we have consulates there -- in Chiang Mai, for example?*

BISHOP: Yes, and we had a consulate in Songkhla, in southern Thailand.

*Q: In terms of U. S. relations with Thailand, the country had a traditional policy of neutrality, of not getting very much involved with other countries. I always felt that its membership in SEATO marked a break with a long established pattern.*

BISHOP: Yes, there's no question of that. You see, Pibul Songgram was the prime minister and, I guess, benevolent dictator, of Thailand. He brought Thailand into SEATO, but he was disliked by the royal family and a few political figures, such as Pridi [Pridi Panomyong, a former Thai prime minister].

*Q: So you served in Thailand for about four years, from 1955 to 1958. You said earlier that you had decided to retire at about age 50.*

BISHOP: Yes. I reached 50 in late 1958. I was 53 when I actually retired in October, 1961. When I returned from Bangkok in 1958, I was assigned as Political Adviser to the President of the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, where I served until 1961. I stayed on longer than I anticipated, although I really didn't have much work to do. The Naval War College has one of the finest libraries. I lectured to the students on foreign policy and the objectives of national policy.

**JACK LYDMAN**  
**Foreign Service Officer, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization**  
**Bangkok (1955-1958)**

*Ambassador Jack Lydman was born in New York in 1914. He received a bachelor's degree from Bard College in 1936 and joined the U.S. Army Intelligence Corps in 1940. He joined the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included positions in Indonesia, Australia, and Malaysia. Ambassador Lydman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 27, 1988.*

*Q: Your first assignment was in 1958 as Consul to Surabaya, Principal Officer there?*

LYDMAN: No, that wasn't--my first assignment, in 1955 I was seconded as a Foreign Service Officer to the staff of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in Bangkok.

*Q: SEATO?*

LYDMAN: SEATO. A creation out of thin air by John Foster Dulles, in line with this grand goal to create alliance structures in which we would participate but which would call forth the independent efforts of countries that were weak economically, vulnerable politically to independent pressures as well as to instability in their own structures and systems. His whole effort was to engage these countries in international efforts that had a goal of regional as well as their own security and that encouraged friendly alliances and relationships with Western countries. Previously colonialist countries sustained an adversarial image and adversarial relationships with most of the Southeast Asian countries. Dulles had courage and vision in putting together the SEATO organization. What was this quite outrageous collection of countries supposed to do together for their mutual security? You had Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the United States. I was sent out to SEATO to be the Deputy in a division that was to be the research and intelligence arm of the SEATO organization. I was not to run the division, the head of it was a Pakistani and an old Indian civil servant type. He was from Assam and a poet in Persian among other things, a delightful Pakistani gentleman of about 60 years, and cosmopolitan. When we first met, he said, "Jack, I expect you to do all the work and run this thing." Then he said, "All I want you to do, if you will, is to bring in the minute every morning at, shall we say 10:00 AM? I'd like to see the minute daily and I will initial it."

*Q: The minute was what we would more likely call the agenda of the day?*

LYDMAN: The agenda, that's right. Any problems, etc., were in the minute. A sort of loose-leaf folder in columns. That's the way he was used to do ding business in the Indian Civil Service. He would sign the Minute very solemnly, say, "Thank you very much, Jack", and then go off and play golf. A delightful man. I liked him a great deal.

But anyway, I started with a three-week old copy of the New York Times. That was my resource when I arrived. But in about three weeks I accumulated a staff of about 35 people, completely mixed by countries of origin. I got a deputy who was an Australian and very bright. We had our pick of lovely Thai girls as secretaries and clerks and within I guess two months we were putting out a daily intelligence bulletin, which was really not too bad. It was based for the most part on public sources and some on lowly classified information. I got a stream of stuff not only from the United States but from Australia, the U.K. and France. We had a good little thing there, teaching young Thai and Filipinos officers how to analyze, what was important, why it was important, how to select subjects, and finally what to bring to the attention of people responsible for policy and operations.

I spent two and a half years there and enjoyed every minute of it. It was a unique introduction to the psychology of people who were eager in many ways to pattern themselves and their actions on Western models. Most of my staff were career army or police officers. They had been placed in their assignments to learn and to transmit what they were learning to their services. What became clear as time went on, was their realization that not all of the answers were the privilege of people in the West. They began to see where things were faulty in the analyses of the West and that they had just as good basis to judge problems as anybody else. I look back at that period as a kind of microcosm of the awakening of Southeast Asians to their own worth.

Another thing that was interesting at SEATO was to observe the cynicism of some of the Westerners. Their colonial lives had ended and they were going along for the ride, for European purposes, essentially, Atlantic Alliance purposes, or for probing commercial advantage in future. For them to focus on regional security was not very successful. But the facade was maintained for a good many years, as you know.

**VICTOR L. STIER**  
**Editor-Writer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1955-1960)**

*Victor L. Stier was born in Michigan in 1919 and raised in California. As a Foreign Service officer, Mr. Stier served in Thailand, Greece, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Finland, The Netherlands, and Washington, DC. The interview was conducted by Lewis Schmidt in 1990.*

*Q: What year was that?*

STIER: That was 1955, June when I arrived in Washington. I'd just finished ten years at the Tribune. In Washington they gave me an eight weeks orientation course which I thought was quite good. They used a lot of State and other foreign service-related personnel in and around Washington including academics. The course was quite comprehensive.

Our first assignment was Bangkok. By that time Audine and I had three kids who were, I guess, 11, 10 and 8, something like that, all boys. We flew out to Bangkok in September. I think we got

there in the middle of the month, maybe a little earlier. We found a house and settled in. My first PAO was Jack Pickering, who was a marvelous fellow to work with and for. He had been a Chicago newsman and later went over to Paris and worked on the Paris Herald. Jack was something, his sobriquet was The Growler. It's funny, I had already read about Jack Pickering and had forgotten it. He was in Eliot Paul's "The Last Time I Saw Paris" which was a splendid little book about the last days in Paris before World War II, right at the beginning of it. There's a great story in the book about the people who lived on the Rue Hyacinthe in Paris, including Jack, who decided to have a street party. It's a little cul de sac. Everybody was very peeved with Jack because he was terribly late as was often the case. Finally, however, Paul wrote -- there marched down the street in reasonable sobriety the Old Growler lugging over his shoulder the biggest fish any of them had ever seen. Jack was something, and a wonderful human being.

My first job in USIS Bangkok was entitled Editor-Writer, which included writing stories for Agency and other publications, pamphlets, scripts, all as a part of the PIP program started by Bill Donovan. Psychological Indoctrination Program, is what PIP stood for, and was modeled in part on U.S. Army programs. It was intended to convince the Thais that communism was a serious threat to them. I don't think it was effective, but it was interesting, professionally. I confess to a jaundiced view because of my difficulties with U.S. foreign policy in those days. John Foster Dulles forever!

*Q: At that time did you have a substantial insurgency in the field that you were combatting? Or was it primarily a city-oriented program?*

STIER: The program was in cities and the hinterland, but I doubt there was any real danger in Thailand. The government was stable. The country was run by a professional Army general named Pibul Songgram, and he ran the country very well. The real stability of the country was the king, of course, whom all the Thais loved, Bhumiphal Aduljadet. They still do. The problem was Thai military politics. Thailand was not any kind of a democracy. The policy chief of Thailand was a police general named General Phao, and he was one of Pibul Songgram's rivals. During our two tours there, we woke up one morning with tanks on the streets. It was an Army coup d'etat headed by General Sarit Thanerat. He ousted Pibul Songgram, who fled to -- I've forgotten where he went first. He ended up in Japan and ultimately in the United States. No, there were not many communists in Thailand; a few, but not many. Do Buddhists make good communists? There were more along the borders, of course, both in Burma and up north in the triangle, and in Indochina, which was just beginning to stir following Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam War was beginning. We used the PIP program in Thailand and in some other places. Remember, we had all the printing done in one place?

*Q: The Manila Service Center.*

STIER: RSC Manila, that's right. Run at the time by a guy named Bill Bennett, another ex-newsman. I would go off into Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam, as was, and pick up what I could find for these pamphlet series I was writing and talks I would give. I went to Laos a lot. At any rate, I was an editor. I was working for George Sayles, who was the Chief Information Officer.

*Q: The reason I asked this question was because later when I was there, almost 20 years later, there was a substantial communist insurgency in Thailand. And I was wondering whether this writing you were doing in this pamphlet series was aimed at people in the small towns and villages? Or was it aimed at the large city populations, mainly Bangkok?*

STIER: Actually, it was aimed at them all. Bangkok and little towns, regional cities, and centers. All this was picked up and used later in Indochina also, but the main use of the materials that we were turning out, we'd send them off and have them printed in Manila, was used in what was the psywar program. The pamphlets, posters, even music would go off with teams of USIS officers, State Department and I suspect CIA people and Thai military and lay people who were instructed along very carefully-drawn programs to try to convince the head men of villages who would be brought into these regional towns, government officials, business people, Buddhist monks and general public to a lesser extent. We were trying to target the important shakers and movers there.

*Q: But you weren't actually going down to the village level with these programs. You were bringing the chiefs into the towns and cities.*

STIER: No, we did go to villages of a respectable size.

Anyway, frankly I never thought much of the psywar program. It was hard to convince the ordinary Thai, and I don't mean just a peasant, I mean a fairly important educated Thai, of the dangers of communism in Thailand, in those days. I can't speak about how it was after, when I'd moved on. I think perhaps some of the military worried about communism, but the Thai, as you know Lew from serving there, is a great political pragmatist. He doesn't like to worry anyway, and his religion or his philosophy -- Buddhism -- seems to influence that kind of an attitude. I didn't think the PIP program was very successful. I thought we were whistling at the wind. I still think so.

*Q: Another thing that I wondered, the rate of literacy in Thailand is not all that high. I suppose, however, that the people with whom you were dealing in the towns were a pretty literate group. But I didn't know whether the pamphlet program would be very effective with, say, the village head men because I don't think many of them knew how to read.*

STIER: That's an interesting question. I don't recall that coming up. I think mostly we aimed at government employees like teachers who would read, police, military personnel, government administrators, both regional and Bangkok-based, who traveled out there, health personnel and the like. I don't think that was a problem. One thing we did do was we made a lot of films. There was a big film program -- we had film officers on the post, a couple of very talented people, and sometime we got others in on contract to produce films, with Thai soundtracks on them and we'd show these pictures widely. Always there was an American accompanying the Thai employees. So a lot of our pamphlets were very light on text and strong on pictures and captions. It was not what you'd call a sophisticated program.

As I said, I went up to Laos quite a bit. We used trips like that -- I wasn't the only one doing it -- rather extensively as program source material. For example, I would go up on what I later

learned were CIA financed DC-3s. I would accompany these and then write stories on what I'd see. They would fly over hamlets and villages with Thai rice in big bags, double bags, so that they could be dropped from the plane and not spill. We'd go into places where the Pathet Lao had surrounded a government hamlet or village, most of which were on little elevations, little hills, with the jungle all around them. We'd make a pass over these villages so the inhabitants could show us where they wanted the rice dropped and we'd kick the rice bags out. It was interesting that those villages, which were pretty harmless and insignificant, were being attacked. We could see and hear the attack, even see the smoke from the weapons.

*Q: But there really wasn't a substantial insurgency going on in Laos at that time.*

STIER: That's right, but it was burgeoning.

*Q: It hadn't yet become significant.*

STIER: That's right, nor had it gotten to Thailand.

*Q: Did we have a post in Laos at all at that time?*

STIER: Oh sure. The first time I went to Vientiane, Ted Tanen was the PAO and I slept in his house on a couch. I don't remember why I couldn't find a hotel room then. I'm dwelling too long on this, but that's how I started the Foreign Service. George Sayles finished his tour and I succeeded him. I had, I think, five Americans working with me and more than 100 Thais. We had a motion picture officer, a press officer, exhibits officer.

*Q: Did you have a radio officer?*

STIER: A radio officer, yes.

*Q: Had a radio program?*

STIER: Quite an extensive one.

*Q: Now, let me ask you, in connection with the motion picture program and the radio program, did you have production facilities right on the post for motion pictures, and did you have production facilities for radio programs?*

STIER: We had to the extent that we had in Radio, we had a sound room and equipment, yes. For films we had, I think we had about four or five cameramen. We had a still camera staff, Thais. But as information officer I spent most of my time from that point on either as press officer or press officer adjunct, writing speeches for the ambassador, working with the press, a more standard USIA press officer. That is, I was then not so closely associated with the psywar program.

*Q: Who was your ambassador at that time? Was it Max Waldo Bishop?*

STIER: Max Waldo Bishop, yeah, yeah. He was a career foreign service officer who came to us highly touted. He had been General MacArthur's drafting officer and was very favored by MacArthur. Bishop came and was exaggeratedly anti-communist, so much so that I felt he had trouble reading the situation in Southeast Asia, with great difficulty. He wasn't alone, of course. I say this even though there was a Vietnam War which certainly gave us lots of reasons for worrying about communism in that part of the world. Mrs. Bertie McCormick, the wife of the publisher of the Chicago Tribune was not exactly a left winger, and Ambassador Bishop got into a horrendous argument with her at a luncheon in Bangkok which made the press and the New York Times and Time Magazine, in which he accused her of being soft on communism. Another time he said some pretty strong things to the most important Thai editor, Khun Kukrit Pramoj, who was the Editor of Siam Rath and the leading media person and intellectual in the country. Khun Kukrit was terribly important because he was a nobleman, but he was also a man of great influence in Thai society and in the Buddhist world, and as you know, in Thailand that's important.

*Q: He later became Prime Minister as I recall.*

STIER: That's right.

*Q: And I think it was Kukrit Pramoj who played the role of the Prime Minister in the Ugly American film when it was filmed.*

STIER: That's right.

*Q: He was briefly again Prime Minister, I think, just after I left Thailand.*

STIER: Yes.

*Q: But he was back on Siam Rath most of the time I was there, and he was recognized as sort of a senior intellectual in Thailand.*

STIER: Yes, the Pramojs were an important family. His brother Khun Seni Pramoj, also had very responsible government positions. He was an attorney. Khun Kukrit was the former husband of a Thai employee, a lovely lady.

*Q: I'm trying to think of her name now. She was still there when I left.*

STIER: What was her name? Oh yes, Pakpring Janzen. Her nick- name was Puck. At any rate, we had two full tours there. I was there five years. Two of our children were born there, a boy and a girl. We all loved the country, loved the people, loved USIS Bangkok. We had a wonderful old Southeast Asian home with a great big patio which would flood in the rainy season. There were a lot of mosquitoes too. There was a big AID program to Thailand. I think we got along very well with the Thais who were very nice to us, but I really think we were spinning our wheels with the psywar program, and the dominoes thing, too. Well, the whole panoply and farce -- I don't know, how does one look on Vietnam? I have many mixed feelings. I think what's happened as a result of the communist attacks on the people of those three countries is

inexcusable. On the other hand, our foreign policy decisions then were also unbelievable.

One of the interesting things that happened to me in 1959 when the fighting in Laos was heavy and the Plaine des Jars brought the world's press corps there, I was sent up -- I think it was '59 -- on temporary duty to handle the foreign press corps, and that was fun. Laos kept taking a beating, as it has ever since -- along with the other two long-suffering countries.

We loved Thailand, loved the Thai people. It's a beautiful country. The war in Vietnam, in Indochina, started to blow fiercer in those years, in '55-60. We left in January or February of 1960. You could smell it coming, and already we (in USIA) were in strong arguments about our foreign policy and about our USIA policy. One thing which I -- perhaps this is more a concluding remark, but I could return to it: I always thought that the role of the Agency participating in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy was ignored, even repudiated by the Department of State, by CIA, by DIA, the White House and the Congress, that is the entire U.S. foreign affairs community. They never would give us the opportunity to contribute meaningfully and we simply never had the clout to get our views heard. The pity is that what we had to offer was significant, that it would make a difference. So many field messages and different kinds of messages we in USIA would send back, not just from Thailand, from all over, about how our audiences felt and how our policies could be sensibly and psychologically arranged to include meaningful arguments and policy statements. A very wasteful state of affairs. At any rate, we left Thailand in early 1960 and went to Athens where I was Information Officer for five years.

*Q: Before we leave Thailand, who was the PAO at the time of your departure?*

STIER: Oh, I should have mentioned, Dick McCarthy.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

STIER: Who was as good a PAO as I ever saw, a man of great humor, a fine writer, a charming guy that I enjoyed very much working for and he taught me a lot. We became very good friends.

*Q: You've mentioned when we were off tape that you thought Dick McCarthy was a great PAO and a very fine person. Since Dick has had some of his problems in the service, I'd like you to say a few words about what your estimation of him was and how you thought he conducted the program.*

STIER: Well, it was such fun working with Dick. He was open to any idea. He might nix it for a good and substantive reason, but he listened. He was friendly to ideas, creative ideas and ideas which were not congenial even to him, but he was interested in them. This made his entire staff eager to contribute to our work; it wasn't all done at the top. He never stood upon his position as PAO. He also stood up to the Embassy. Too many PAOs, as you know, are too submissive to the Embassy, shockingly so I thought, ignoring the brief that the agency had from the Congress. Our USIA director was appointed by the President and very few, not enough PAOs took that individual mandate, but Dick McCarthy did.

**ROBERT G. CLEVELAND**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1956-1958)**

*Robert G. Cleveland was born in Washington, DC and received a bachelor's degree in 1932. He entered the Foreign Service in 1946. His career included assignments in Bucharest, Paris, Sydney, Bangkok, and Belgrade. Mr. Cleveland was interviewed by Horace G. Torbert in 1990.*

*Q: I remember the stories. What happened?*

CLEVELAND: Soon after that, we left Sydney for home leave and eventual transfer to an undetermined post. When I got to Washington, I was asked to take the job of Economic Counselor in Bangkok. With many misgivings, I accepted the assignment. It looked like a challenge, and it was certainly closer to the action than Australia.

*Q: One thing about the Foreign Service is or was that you could count on having a change; but this assignment looked rather menacing.*

CLEVELAND: In those days, you were expected to accept an assignment without much question. Also, in my case, there was a record of my having contested an earlier assignment, so I felt I didn't have much choice. Nowadays, assignments seem much more negotiable.

*Q: I agree. So you went on to Bangkok?*

CLEVELAND: Yes. Despite my fears, Bangkok turned out to be a fascinating and demanding job. Thailand was a key post in those days because of its strategic location, and strong anti-communist orientation. The economic section had many functions beside routine reporting and trade promotion, ECAFE and economic aid matters, for example. So we had quite a sizeable staff. Aside from managing the section, my personal duties involved advising the ambassador on economic and politico-economic matters. Contrary to my prior concern, I had good relations with the ambassador, but found his judgment rather questionable. He had very close, certainly too close, relations with the then Prime Minister. When the latter requested something in the economic aid area from the United States, the Ambassador would wire Washington recommending it. These messages had little result, and I tried to persuade the Ambassador to let things go through proper channels, namely the aid mission. It was part of my job to interface with the aid mission.

Thailand has always been independent and sovereign. The citizens have none of the sense of inferiority of some of the former colonial peoples. They revere their King, which seems to give a sense of stability to the country. The military hold most of the power, and over the years, power has changed hands through a series of bloodless coups. While we're on the subject, we had one or two coups during my tour. The first one caused us a real problem. The Ambassador, as I said, had been close to the Prime Minister, and did not permit the Embassy staff to make contact with opposition groups. No civilian in the Embassy knew the new Prime Minister; fortunately,

however, our military attaché had maintained clandestine contact, so things worked out. It was a good lesson in diplomacy. I should add that coups in Thailand have always been bloodless. Being for the most part good Buddhists, they don't seem to believe in violence.

*Q: Was that called the ICA mission?*

CLEVELAND: Yes. The mission had a very big staff and a very ambitious program in many fields. Because of the importance of Thailand to the United States, large dollar amounts had been allocated to the program, especially for major projects.

*Q: Infrastructure type things, roads?*

CLEVELAND: Roads, dams, utilities, agriculture, education etc. The big programs went very slowly because at the time Thailand didn't have the skills needed to carry them out. Also too many Americans were used; this was expensive. We were learning that it would be much more effective to concentrate on training and education. This would upgrade the capacity of the Thais to absorb aid. So we moved from project aid to human resources development. This was more than thirty years ago, and thanks to the Thais themselves plus our assistance, Thailand is now no longer considered a less developed country.

The aid program for Thailand was plagued by a political problem. Each year, Washington would announce the dollar level of aid for each country. The Thai Government would compare the level allotted to Thailand with those allotted to other countries, and then tend to judge the state of Thai-US relations on this basis. Both the Embassy and Washington took this attitude seriously, with the result that much more aid was programmed than could be absorbed by the fairly primitive economy. The backlog of unspent funds became enormous, and remained so over many years.

The fifties was a learning period in the aid business, not only in Thailand, but in all other underdeveloped countries. The Marshall Plan in Europe had been successful because the European countries had the infrastructure and institutions capable of effectively utilizing aid. Our early assumptions for the Truman Plan seemed to have been modeled on the Marshall Plan. We thought that throwing money into massive projects would work. We were wrong, but we did learn that economic development is a complex business, and perhaps a science.

*Q: Regarding building human resources, how was that undertaken? Did we send experts to Thailand, or did they send people for technical training?*

CLEVELAND: Both. In fact, there was a huge program run by I. D. that persisted up until quite recently. Institution building was the name of the game. I believe it was quite successful, to judge by Thailand's present prosperous state.

*Q: I'm not sure that all countries have learned what we know about the subject of economic development.*

CLEVELAND: I agree. We are doing better now, although we're doing much less. Thirty years

ago, we really didn't what we were doing.

*Q: Going back to Thailand, wasn't there a change of Ambassadors while you were there?*

CLEVELAND: Yes. U. Alexis Johnson arrived in early 1958. He was a breath of fresh air. He was a great Ambassador. His superior judgment, leadership and organizing ability were impressive. It didn't take him long to get a grip on the job, and his tenure during my short period with him was one of the high points of my career.

*Q: What would you say was the secret of his success?*

CLEVELAND: Alex is and was a man of superior judgment; that is quality enough for a good diplomat. His other assets included leadership, self-confidence and a way with people. He never made one feel he was superior, and was always ready to listen. Thanks to his experience with Korea, he had the special respect of the military. This was a great help in Thailand, where the Thai military have a central role. He was very much respected by the U.S. generals in our military aid mission.

*Q: Was the MAAG primarily in the hardware business, or was there training also?*

CLEVELAND: Training was a major component, and involved a lot of U.S. military trainers in all branches. I should have said that the program had a heavy political content. Much of it was to maintain good relations with the Thai military. They got a lot of goodies from us for being good allies and providing the headquarters for SEATO. In the fifties, there appeared to be multiple threats of Chinese communist origin - particularly through surrogates, including Vietnamese in the Northeast and the insurgency in Malaya. Thus our military aid program was massive, and included hardware, training and advice. Thus we had a very big MAAG with a lot of brass. Alex kept them under control.

DOROTHY A EARDLEY  
Clerk-Stenographer  
Chiang Mai (1956-1958)

*Mrs. Eardley was born in Wisconsin and raised in Wisconsin and Illinois. She attended Rubican Business School before entering the State Department, where in 1951 she was assigned as Clerk-Stenographer at Djakarta, Indonesia. She subsequently was posted to Berlin, Chiang Mai, Paris, Libreville, Colombo, Ankara, Ottawa, Jeddah and Kigali. She also had temporary duty assignments in Djibouti, Reunion, and Johannesburg. She retired in 1980. Mrs. Eardley was interviewed by T. Frank Crigler in 2008.*

*Q: What on earth brought about your transfer to a remote place like Chiang Mai?*

EARDLEY: God only knows!

*Q: How did you learn about it?*

EARDLEY: They sent a telegram transferring me. Home leave and transfer. So, I got ready and went.

*Q: Saluted and went.*

EARDLEY: I always went wherever they told me, so if I didn't like a place I could gripe about it. The only place they had trouble placing me was the last assignment. Do you want to hear about that now?

*Q: No, I think it would be better to go step by step, don't you?*

EARDLEY: Okay, let's go to Chiang Mai.

I knew it was as one-man post, because I was told that. I didn't know how many other agencies were up there - CIA, AID, military, and . . . I don't know what that outfit was called. It was training Thai police. Then there was JUSMAT (U.S. Military Assistance to Thailand [?]), our military (I think they were Americans).

I lived in a house out on a country road. A big yard with fruit trees in it. Behind it, there was a kitchen, housing for a houseboy or cook girl, whatever, and there was a next-door neighbor, with sort of an alley that separated our two places. I didn't know who or what it was, but I often heard screaming over there, couldn't figure out what it was. One night, I drove in and my windshield was splattered. Something had hit it as I came in as I drove into my driveway. And I went right to the police, who were a couple of roads behind me. I learned a lot. They told me I lived on the opium trail from China! That house next door was a house of ill-repute, and the man who lived there was a police officer. He had all these girls locked up in the house. I mean, his girls.

*Q: Nice neighborhood.*

EARDLEY: Well, I knew enough Thai at that point. I learned Thai phonetically. I can neither read nor write Thai. I said something to the police when I was at the police station about opium. *Thin* [phon.] was the word for opium. And I said, "I think I live on the *thin* trail." "Well," they said, "you're right." They were shocked, though, about the screams from next door. That was one of their men who was living there with these women. It was funny.

*Q: Yeah, I guess so. Tell me about your principal officer, your single officer. Who was the Consul?*

EARDLEY: Karl Sommerlatte. He was PNG'd (expelled, *persona non grata*) out of Moscow. They should have sent him to Paris where he'd get lost in that big embassy. Instead they sent him to a one-man post where he stood out like a sore thumb. He was supposed to be up there in a "walking" position. That's walk here, walk all over the countryside. It was a listening post. (Maybe I'm not supposed to say that. Maybe that's classified.) But anyway, they should never

have sent him there. For the dispatches that they were supposed to send back to Washington, he simply copied the British consul general's walking tour reports to his government, but he had me change the spelling to American spelling. We put it on our forms, sent 'em in. I thought it was a crock! But I wouldn't report him, the dumb stoop.

*Q: He didn't do any of his own reporting?*

EARDLEY: Nope, he wasn't about to get his feet dirty.

He had a wife, Jane. They didn't get along very well. She was over on the consulate porch every morning when I arrived, crying her eyes out. She hated the post, and I guess she didn't care much for him anymore either. They had a little boy, I've forgotten his name. He was a sweetheart. I felt sorry for him.

*Q: Was he there for the whole time of your tour?*

EARDLEY: Oh, yes. Two and a half years I spent there. I liked it. I liked the people and learning their language — it was tough. It's a five-tonal language, and as you can tell, I'm a monotone. I needed singing lessons.

*Q: Did you teach this to yourself, or were there teachers?*

EARDLEY: No, the number one local (employee) in our consulate, it was his wife. They had ten children. She was a nice lady. She taught me phonetically. That's pretty tough with a five-tonal language, but I learned it. And strangely enough, I didn't think I learned that much, but my farewell speech when I left the post was in Thai. And when I went back about ten years later to visit, it came back. The speech came back! The first place I visited was the market, because I did my own marketing, got up at five in the morning when they butchered meat. Bought my meat. All meat was just fifteen *bhat* a kilo. And it was all cut into squares, so I didn't recognize the cuts. The only thing I could recognize was a very expensive cut. What do they make filet mignon out of?

*Q: Beef tenderloin?*

EARDLEY: Okay, I bought the whole one each time I went. And I was acquainted with all of the vegetable sellers also. When I left Chiang Mai (I left on a Sunday morning, there were only about two planes a week), I went to the market to tell them goodbye. I passed the first little stall. That news traveled all over the shop, all over that market, and they were all crying. "*Mem [phon.] is leaving! Mem is leaving!*" It was priceless. I was loved!

Carl Sommerlatte was not the nicest person on earth. Every year, you could just about pinpoint the date, the floods came. And when it flooded, the whole compound where the consulate was located was flooded. He didn't tell me about that damn flood. I drove down as far as I could toward the consulate. And there at the gate was our number one local employee. Pancho [?] was his name. I guess he was waiting for me. He knew I couldn't get in there. But he had his bicycle, and he had me hang onto the handlebar of his bike while he led me inside, through all that

washed-out garbage. They had open latrines. I threw my skirt over my shoulder (in those days we all still wore skirts) and Pancho led me in there through that mess.

*Q: On foot?*

EARDLEY: Yep. That dumb Carl Sommerlatte! And I'm thinking, "How could anyone be so stupid?" Well, he never became an ambassador, I'll tell you that.

*Q: Did his wife survive the two and a half years?*

EARDLEY: Barely. They were divorced after that. He married some older woman, I don't know who. I don't know how that turned out.

*Q: Tell me more about Chiang Mai. What about the other personnel in the consulate. Did you have much to do with anyone else?*

EARDLEY: Yeah, the head of JUSMAT (Joint U.S. Military Assistance Team). I think his name was Major Shawfelt. He came over to my house every night and had drinks with me. I liked him. I didn't care for the sergeants he had though (I think there were two of them), so I didn't have them over. Anyway, I liked that organization. They were training the police. The Shawfelts lived down the road apiece from me. They had a little girl, sweetest thing, Melissa was her name. We had a cultural affairs officer, too, and a little library that was also on the compound.

*Q: How did you think the police training team got along with the Thais? Was it a good relationship?*

EARDLEY: I don't know. When I entertained, they would all come to my house. One thing I should tell you: the Thai colonel who was governor of the province where Chiang Mai was located had studied Gregg shorthand in the United States. He was fascinated when he learned that Gregg was what I used. He gave me his books, and he asked me if I would teach the Thais shorthand. I could neither read nor write Thai, so I taught them in English. But the Thais have marvelous memories, and that's what it takes in shorthand. We have a lot of brief forms which you had to memorize, and in the colonel's day (I think he was in the United States in about 1927) they had had to learn a lot more word forms than I did twenty-five or fifty years later.

*Q: It's hard to imagine what he used his Gregg shorthand for.*

EARDLEY: I don't know. What did these 'children' he brought in for lessons use it for? He brought in seven. I think they were all men except one. They were all bank employees. But they didn't know English, and that's what I dictated to them.

*Q: So they could write English in shorthand.*

EARDLEY: But they had terrific memories. The brief forms, they memorized all of them. Do you know that in six months they took sixty words a minute? Not in their language?

*Q: That blows my mind.*

EARDLEY: It blows mine too. I don't know how they did it! Anyway, that's all I can think of about Chiang Mai. I loved it. That's why I went back to visit. You see, in the meantime Vietnam came along, and they made Chiang Mai an R&R (Rest and Recuperation) point for our GI's. You can imagine what they do to cities. I was worried. I didn't want them to do that to Chiang Mai. I went up to check on it. That's why I went to the market. Right off the plane I went to the market, and when I got there, those sellers recognized me and word went through the market "Mem is back!" I loved them. They were so sweet.

*Q: And that was ten years later?*

EARDLEY: Yes.

*Q: Did you have anything to do with the embassy while you were posted in Chiang Mai? Were you a courier or anything of that sort?*

EARDLEY: No, I think they ignored us.

*Q: So much for "listening posts."*

EARDLEY: Well, we did the listening.

*Q: But I mean the embassy needs to listen to the consulate. You had nothing to do with — was it Ambassador Bishop at that time?*

EARDLEY: Yes, he was there at that time.

*Q: Did he ever visit?*

EARDLEY: I'm trying to recall whether he did or not. I don't think I met him. However, there was one interesting thing: the King and his wife visited Chiang Mai, for only the second time in their lives. I had to learn the official curtsy for the occasion. Took me two weeks to learn and I kept losing my balance. *[Laughs]* I learned it. And you always back away from royalty. You don't turn your back on them.

*Q: Did you have the impression that the royal visit was a very popular thing? The people there were impressed?*

EARDLEY: Oh, the people there were happy to see him! It was a very peaceful country at that time. It still is, I think, but strange things have happened since.

**RICHARD M. MCCARTHY**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**

## **Bangkok (1956-1958)**

*Richard M. McCarthy grew up in Iowa and received a bachelor's degree from Iowa State University. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Navy during World War II. Mr. McCarthy joined the Foreign Service in 1946 and later became part of USIS. He served in China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Jack O'Brien in 1988.*

*Q: Good story. You had six years in Hong Kong. Then what happened?*

MCCARTHY: I was transferred as PAO to Bangkok by George Hellyer, who was then the area assistant director. I was sent to take the place of Jack Pickering, a man who most of us admired very much. Jack belonged to the wrong political party and had run afoul of the ambassador, so he found himself on the way home. I was sent out there to replace him.

*Q: That was what year, Dick?*

MCCARTHY: That was late 1956 or early 1957.

*Q: You were there how long?*

MCCARTHY: I was there until August of 1958.

*Q: What were some of the highlights of that period, would you say?*

MCCARTHY: My first task when I arrived in Bangkok, apart from the basic task of getting along with the ambassador, was to cut back very severely on something called PIP, the psychological indoctrination program, which, as somebody there at the time said, had managed to cover most of Thailand with two inches of paper. It was a massive psychological indoctrination program operated jointly by the Thai Government and American agencies. Its thrust was primarily anti-Communist, but it also built on the twin symbols of Thai national stability, the Buddhist religion, and, of course, the money.

*Q: What was the reason for cutting it back? Money?*

MCCARTHY: Partly money, partly the growing realization that it probably wasn't that necessary, particularly the anti-Communist objective. The Thais were about as anti-Communist as they were going to get, given the realities of the situation. Anyhow, we found ourselves trying to build a more or less conventional USIS program. This was the first time I'd served in a country which had a number of branch posts, and we tried to build up that particular field program. But we had posts, as I recall, in Songkhla, Chiang Mai, Udorn, Khorat, and I may have forgotten one or two others.

*Q: Was the American Binational Center functioning then?*

MCCARTHY: It was functioning, but it certainly wasn't as important in those days as I

understand it has been since. It's now a major part of the program, I understand.

*Q: Yes. But did you have that same location as it is today, or do you know? It was a land grant, as I understand it, from the royal family. Then there was a little sliver of land that was needed, and that was donated by the U.S. Did that happen during your time?*

MCCARTHY: I think I would remember something like that if it had happened. I think it may have happened either before my time or after I departed.

**JOHN R. BURKE**  
**Deputy Chief to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization Section**  
**Bangkok (1956-1958)**

*Ambassador John R. Burke received a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1947 and a master's degree from Wisconsin University in 1955. He immediately joined the Foreign Service. His career included positions in Thailand, France, Vietnam, Haiti, Guyana, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

*Q: That's too bad. I had come in a year before and went from an FSO 6 just to an FSO 8. It was rather traumatic. We're obviously going to concentrate on the later part of your career, but your first job sounds quite interesting. I'd like to talk a little about it. You went to Bangkok, didn't you? How did that develop, and what were you doing?*

BURKE: Well, my first post was Bangkok. I had expressed a preference for service in the Far East, because I felt I knew the region and already had a basic knowledge of it and wanted to build on it. When I got to Bangkok, I was originally slotted for a political officer job.

However, when I arrived, they had worked a couple of switches within the staffing, and the job available and open to me was one as deputy chief of the CENTO section. That, in effect, was the U.S. permanent delegation to SEATO that consisted of two men, myself and John Calvin Hill, Jr., who was my boss. And the two of us really handled the day-to-day work and representation of the U.S. on the permanent working group of SEATO, which was the body that sat regularly in Bangkok and handled the activities of the organization on the political side. There was representation from the other six member governments as well drawn from resident embassies in Bangkok and the other member governments. So it was an excellent experience, and I got my feet totally wet right up to the hips, I think.

*Q: Well, how did you and those around you at the embassy view SEATO at that time? Because today it's looked upon as being sort of an ineffective nonstart of a treaty. How did you feel about it at that time? It was brand new or almost brand new.*

BURKE: It was fairly new, of course, as you say. It's kind of curious in a way in that my first job in the service was in Bangkok on the SEATO delegation, and then later I came back to Bangkok

as DCM, and I was present at the termination of SEATO and sat in on the last meeting of the council representatives when SEATO was dissolved finally.

I do feel that SEATO was "bad-mouthed" by several people who didn't really understand that we got over time, I think, a great deal of bang for the buck out of SEATO. We never spent much money on it. Our contribution on an annual basis when I was there in the mid-'50s, I think, ran something like \$300,000 a year. Plus we had a few people detailed to the international staff, and we had some military people on the military committee as well. But the total outlay from the U.S. side was really minimal in modern terms or even then terms of what we were spending on NATO and, I guess, CENTO it was. But as an organization, I think it performed some useful services particularly in terms of providing the regional members -- by that I mean, of course, the Philippines and Thailand and Pakistan -- with a great opportunity to work together on a variety of projects. And I think the Thai, by their experience, gained a great deal of savior-faire, if you will, in the international realm which they built on later.

*Q: This is really their first international organization, wasn't it?*

BURKE: Yes.

*Q: I mean, other than the U.N.*

BURKE: Yes.

*Q: How did your ambassador and the rest of the staff view SEATO? Did you feel sort of a stepchild, or were you --*

BURKE: Well, Max Bishop, who was the ambassador when I first arrived, I think took a reasonable interest in it and did participate fully. He left the day-to-day running, of course, to John Hill, who just, by the by, is probably one of the most extraordinary Foreign Service officers I ever served with in terms of his intellectual capacity and his negotiating skills. John Hill, I think -- and I say this, I'm also including comments that I received from British, Australian, New Zealand diplomats who were there present at the time -- they all felt that John Hill was the guiding genius behind SEATO in the early days and in the early years, and any effectiveness they had was due to a large extent to Hill's competence and abilities.

But getting back to the question, Max Bishop was quite content to leave the running to Hill, and it was done extremely well. The successor to Max Bishop was Alex Johnson, and Alex, I think, had an interest in SEATO. I don't really have a feel for how he regarded the organization in terms of its long-term value or what we might be getting out of it in terms of national interest. But he certainly participated very actively in all the meetings of the council representatives.

*Q: How did you view Vietnam from there, I mean, your personal view? Was it a problem at that time?*

BURKE: No. In those days, of course, Ngo Dinh Diem had just begun to consolidate his position in Saigon. And I had friends in the embassy in Saigon and used to travel back and forth on

holiday to Saigon and traveled around the country, to a certain extent, with them a lot. It was still quite easy to make that trip by road. I talked to the people in the embassy about their view of SEATO, and certainly SEATO looked at Vietnam very carefully, looked at the insurgency and looked at the threat posed by the insurgents in Vietnam and elsewhere and what had been French Indochina.

At the same time, of course, they were protocol states -- Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam -- under the SEATO treaty, and there was no obligation. But it was not as clearly defined as one might have hoped.

**GEORGE M. BARBIS**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Chiang Mai (1956-1961)**

*Mr. Barbis was born in California and raised there and in Greece. He graduated from the University of California and served in the US Army in WWII. In 1954 he entered the Foreign Service and was posted to Teheran, Iran as Economic Officer. His other overseas assignments included postings in Thailand, Korea, France, Belgium and Greece, primarily in the Political and Economic fields. Mr. Barbis served on the US Delegation to the United Nations (1973-1975). His Washington assignments involved him in Southeast Asia matters and the US military. Mr. Barbis is a graduate of the National War College. Mr. Barbis was interviewed by Mr. Raymond C. Ewing in 1996.*

BARBIS: Right. And, when I was told I was going to Chiang Mai, I had heard about it from some colleagues and knew it was isolated somewhere up there in the Thailand, Laos, Burma, China area, but I didn't know much more about it. My wife knew even less and burst out in tears when I told her. But, it turned out to be a wonderful experience for both of us.

*Q: Before we go on to that, did you learn Korean along the way?*

BARBIS: The Korean I learned was very elementary. By no means could I use Korean other than to break the ice by saying, "hello," "thank you," and "How are you?" I don't even remember if I took formal lessons, but certainly there was no big language program before I went there.

*Q: When you were given this assignment to Chiang Mai, did you get language training there?*

BARBIS: We got language training of a sort, early morning at the FSI [Foreign Service Institute]. It was just the two of us. This was very useful, especially for Pat. I had two excellent, Foreign Service National assistants who were always with me and spoke good English, so I had no difficulty communicating with people, whereas Pat was thrown into the Thai environment a lot more.

*Q: So, in May of 1959, you were initially the only American officer in Chiang Mai?*

BARBIS: When I first got there I had an American secretary, or administrative assistant, and there was a vice consul and a BPAO from USIA. So, there were four Americans at the consulate.

*Q: And you were the consul?*

BARBIS: I was the principal officer.

*Q: Had this post been open for a while?*

BARBIS: The post had been opened back in 1950, not as a consulate performing consular duties, but as a special purpose consulate. In fact, we did no visa work whatsoever. Anybody who came to us for an immigrant or tourist visa application we referred down to Bangkok. That whole area of north western Thailand is one with nomadic crossing of borders by hill tribes. The Meo, who figured so prominently in Laos, who we now call Hmong, were one of the tribes. [Various tribes] were up in the mountains cultivating opium. So, our interest was two fold. One, just to monitor what was going on in that area in terms of cross border movements with political implications, and secondly, the drug trafficking that was occurring, although, it wasn't until I left that drugs became a primary target of focus and we even established a DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] presence in Chiang Mai. But, when I was there, it was myself, my vice consul, the branch public affairs officer, and the administrative assistant.

*Q: Obviously this is a key city in a region that impacts several countries, but was our main interest in what was going on the stability of Thailand or were we looking at Vietnam? You went there in 1959, which was pretty early days for Vietnam interest.*

BARBIS: Our focus was more international than it was national. Thailand, throughout my association with that country, was a pretty stable country and throughout their history they have had stability. They are not the kind of people who rebel. It is kind of surprising in a way, but they bend like the bamboo that they are famous for. So, there was an interest in that, but most of the domestic political center was Bangkok and still is, I guess. It was what was happening across the borders that could lead to instability. For example, the Shan in Burma were very much in arms against the central government and Chiang Mai was a headquarters of the Shan in exile. One of my closest friends in Chiang Mai was Sou Souk, who was a prince of the Shan nation and who had married a Thai woman and lived in Chiang Mai, but who had contacts up in the Keng Tung area of Burma and was an excellent source of useful information for us. But, it was that, the Shan, and the remnant of the Kuomintang troops that had withdrawn from China and settled in the Burma/Laos border area [that were sources of instability]. We had helped evacuate Kuomintang troops to Taiwan back in 1959, but some of them had stayed behind, gone into the opium business to support themselves and were still a military force and no doubt received some support from Taiwan. One of the main things I did in my two years in Chiang Mai, was to observe the evacuation of remnants of the remnant. We still left some remnant there, they didn't all come out. We were involved in the sense that we brought pressure on them to do it and also facilitated it, I presume, although the Chinese air force established a presence in Chiang Mai with those big bladder fuel things because at that time there were no refueling capabilities there.

They would come in with these DC-3s and DC-4s and these guys would come out of the hills and be flown off to Taiwan. I would be at the airport every day to see what was going on trying to take a count, talking to the Chinese air force colonel who was a resident liaison guy. A wonderful guy with excellent English. His name was Johnnie Tong. I will never forget him. We will get to that later because we celebrated the completion of his mission at a Chinese restaurant in Bangkok with much [fanfare].

Anyhow, every day I would go to the airport and then back to the consulate and get on the single side band radio and talk to Stapleton Roy and give him a report of what was going on. Stape was the political officer in Bangkok and to this day whenever we meet we recall our communicating two or three times a day by a single side band radio. But that jumps ahead because that was a very special episode of my two years in Chiang Mai.

My main activities were to learn as much as I could about what was going on in terms of not Thai political activities because there weren't any to speak of, but in terms of the tribal groups, the Shan and the KMT [troops].

*Q: Were you interested in what was going on in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam?*

BARBIS: Less so. Not at all with Vietnam, [we were on the opposite side of Thailand], it being the northwest corner. [We were] much more [interested in] what was going on along the Burmese border. I would occasionally go up to the Mekong River, northeast of Chiang Rai, which is [another] major town directly north of Chiang Mai and closer to the border. Obviously there was a lot of smuggling and that kind of activity going on across the Mekong in that area, but at that point I was not involved with Pathet Lao activity, there wasn't any to speak of in that general area at the time. It was later when I came back and got involved with Laos that I spent more time on that issue.

*Q: Was the Thai military quite active in the Chiang Mai area?*

BARBIS: There was a regimental headquarters there. The officials I dealt with primarily were the governor of the province, a heavy drinker, a little man, a wonderful guy with a wonderful wife who became a good friend of Pat's; the mayor of the city and a Harvard graduate banker of Chinese origin; [the other], who knew everything, was an art collector, a banker, and sort of the renaissance man of Chiang Mai. So, it was sort of a broad group. There was a guy with tattoos on his beer belly, who would come down from up country to Chiang Mai to see us and tell us what was going on with the Shans.

*Q: He was a Thai?*

BARBIS: He was a Thai no doubt involved in cultivating or trafficking opium. I don't know.

*Q: Was there much of an American community or missionaries?*

BARBIS: Mostly missionaries. But there was also an American presence beyond the consulate. We had two MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] officers, a full colonel and a

lieutenant colonel, or major, who were advisors to the regiment. And then there was one AID representative, Dr. Butler, who was more in the agricultural area. And then there was a missionary group that ran a hospital with a wonderful Scots doctor, who took care of us. In fact, on our way to Thailand we stopped in Chicago, before stopping in California to say goodbye to my folks, to visit my brother and coming down the steps of his apartment Pat had fallen and apparently injured her back. This started giving her real trouble and she was hospitalized at McCormick Hospital, which was very primitive.

*Q: Where was McCormick Hospital?*

BARBIS: In Chiang Mai. For traction they tied sandbags on her ankles. But, things were not getting any better and I talked with the doctor in Bangkok and he arranged for the Attaché's plane to pick Pat up with the embassy nurse and fly her to Bangkok where the hospital flight, which flew from New Delhi to Clark Air Force Base, took her on to Clark Air Force Base where she was hospitalized for about a month. She came back on crutches because while she was there, after she was released from the hospital, she broke her ankle. They had to put her in a cast. She stopped off in Hong Kong before returning to Chiang Mai and was hobbling when she arrived.

*Q: Did you have children at that point?*

BARBIS: At that point we had only been married less than a year. We had no children while we were there. So, Pat was involved very much with...there were some interesting other Americans, private Americans, the Young family, Harold Young and his sons Bill and Gordon. Their family had been in that area even before the war or during the war. They started out as missionaries and then became hunters. Harold helped organize the zoo in Chiang Mai. They really knew all the languages and the area very well and were well known throughout both to Thai and to others. Pat used to go and visit them. One of their pets was a baby cub, a tiger cub. One day it bit her on the behind.

This was kind of primitive you know. For meat we would get buffalo meat. You didn't have beef. We had to boil our water. There was a man who had been assisted by AID and had developed a vegetable garden so we could get some nice vegetables and all kinds of marvelous fruit. We had banana trees on the property. Chiang Mai had been a principality and the Thai government rented to us, and still does, for one dollar a year, I don't know whether the rent has gone up since I left, a compound which had a lovely two story house, with teak floors and ceilings. My predecessor didn't like teak and he had painted it black, so the first thing Pat did was to blow torch all the paint off and restore the original teak. Bathroom facilities weren't great, so she supervised the construction of a modern bathroom with a Chinese contractor. I will never forget, he had a fingernail on his little finger out to there.

*Q: About ten inches?*

BARBIS: Yes. They communicated through an interpreter, of course. So, it was quite a challenge for her. Her first post had been Korea, her second post was this sub-country town in Thailand where elephants would frequently walk by our compound. The compound had three buildings on it. In one corner was a beautiful pavilion, all open, which was our USIS library. Then there was

our magnificent teak house. And behind it, what the ruling prince had used for his concubines, or dancing girls, a bungalow with four rooms and a nice veranda where the receptionist sat. So, Pat was in charge of training the cook to boil the water properly, to learn to tenderize buffalo meat and things like that. As a result we ate a lot of Thai dishes. We got very fond of a Thai dish that [the cook, Thong, prepared]. And the kitchen was a separate building and Pat helped modernize that, too. Electricity was erratic so we had our own generator whenever city power went off. We had a wonderful mechanic who took care of the cars and did a lot of the maintenance work and as soon as the lights went out, Seeboot would run and kick in the generator, so we always had electricity.

Pat got involved in raising orchids and even won prizes, which put her in contact with the local community. How I got on to the Youngs, Ruth Young, the wife and mother, ran a program at the local school for English teaching and Pat became a volunteer English teacher there. So, running the house, teaching English, raising orchids and raising Siamese cats... there are not all that many in Thailand but there was a retired British consul there, Mr. Wood, a man in his eighties or nineties, married to a Thai lady, who when he retired from the Colonial Service stayed on in Chiang Mai. They raised pure Siamese cats, and that is how we got involved in it. Every few months, when we would have a litter, I would load a basket with kittens and take them to Bangkok and hand them out to people at the embassy who wanted a Siamese cat.

So we had those activities, plus any official ceremony, that the consuls, and there were only three of us, the American and British consuls and the Burmese consul general, would attend. School would open and the monks would be there to chant and the consuls would be there to sit with the mayor and governor and chief judge, etc. So, we were part of the official community of Chiang Mai.

*Q: How large roughly was it at that time?*

BARBIS: Oh, 15,000-20,000 at most. It was one of the principal towns of Thailand outside of Bangkok, certainly [the largest] in the north. [But, close to town], there was farm land with people living out in the fields.

*Q: Was there much industry?*

BARBIS: Well, cottage industry. Waxed, paper umbrellas, which are still a tourist attraction because they paint these very colorful designs on them. Silver, the silver village was a very popular place. When I went back in 1980-81 there was a whole center, sort of American style, with beautiful gardens, exhibit rooms, etc. and you could still go and see the silversmith tapping away and making a beautiful vase out of a piece of silver. The other cottage industry was celadon. This banker I mentioned, his wife sponsored or promoted two things cotton weaving, sort of like Jim Thompson in Bangkok and the silk industry that he promoted and created, and celadon, trying to bring back the old Thai pottery craft. Also lacquer painting on blocks of teak wood, and we have some of those pieces.

*Q: When you went back in 1980-81, the Thai economic miracle was probably well underway. Twenty years earlier you probably saw very little sign that that had begun.*

BARBIS: Exactly. Of course, it was two decades later or more. Chiang Mai was essentially a village even though the population was larger than a village. A river went through the center of town. On the other side of the river was the Railway Hotel, sort of colonial type, up on stilts, open verandas, little cottages. There were no bathing facilities, a Shanghai jar in every room. I can remember going there for meals. There was quite an Indian community there and I remember the Indian community leader had a dinner once and we had to cover our bread with plates because of all the flies. It was an interesting situation. The only other restaurant, you would go in and the dog was always there and the floor was all dirt.

When I went back in 1981, the hotel where we stayed, the Orchid Hotel, was one of the most luxurious hotels I have been in. Teak everywhere. A restaurant of French cuisine. In fact, I ran across a picture just last week and showed it to Pat and told her this is where I had dinner at Chiang Mai, could you believe it. Very fancy like in any modern city. There were several hotels with modern air conditioning. Completely transformed. They had joined the 20th century. I didn't see any elephants parading around when I was back that time. There were a lot of cars, a lot of activity. A market place open 24 hours where you could buy a shirt, shoes, hats, furniture, you name it.

*Q: When you were there a consul, how often would you go to Bangkok?*

BARBIS: Once a week somebody would act as courier from the embassy staff and bring the pouch up. And I guess, once a month or every six weeks I would take the pouch down, both in order to consult with the embassy and deliver whatever I was sending and collect whatever they were holding, but also to do shopping. The only commissary where we did our food shopping and other household things was in Bangkok, and that was always a problem because they had to pack it and ship it by train or get it on the plane if you could. And they only flew these DC-3s that didn't have much room. But in the back there was a little compartment where you would find chickens and goats and some of our commissary supplies.

*Q: You would usually fly when you went to Bangkok?*

BARBIS: Yes. The first trip I made to Bangkok was right after we arrived there when the director of Point Four and the political counselor were making a tour and I joined them and we drove from Bangkok down to west central Thailand where we were building a dam and where Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson was involved in some kind of a dedication ceremony. I think Bechtel was the contractor. Now it is a dam that provides a lot of electricity and a lot of other good things to the country.

*Q: Did Ambassador Johnson come up to Chiang Mai some times?*

BARBIS: I think Alex came up towards the end of his tour for a farewell call and brought Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman with him, and Mrs. Johnson. That was a busy time for us, of course. I think that was his only visit. Other officers came up. Len Unger, for example, the DCM, came several times. And other officers would come up.

To continue with the trip with the political counselor and Point Four officer, we flew back with Ambassador Johnson who had the plane. I never drove all the way from Chiang Mai to Bangkok. When we first arrived we flew directly to Chiang Mai, because my predecessor had already left and they didn't want a gap. The only way we could get up there was with the British Air Attaché's plane. He flew us up and dropped us. And, then, as I said, the following week, Tom Naughten and John Guthrie arrived and I left and here was Pat with her limited Thai and no English speaking servants in the house. But, she adjusted very quickly and got things organized for us.

*Q: You started to mention something that happened after you had been there about five months.*

BARBIS: Oh, my kid brother in Chicago died of a brain tumor and I flew home for his funeral leaving Pat there alone. At that point, the vice consul who was there when we arrived had left and his replacement had not come. Anyhow the embassy sent an officer up who stayed at the Railway Hotel, to sort of act in my absence. This was interesting because it brought out, and I hope this has changed, that the wives in the Foreign Service were not always treated well in terms of being recognized as part of the team, although they have always been, especially in a post like Chiang Mai. While I was gone for those two weeks, Pat was not treated as though she was the consul's wife, or that she had any official standing. She was completely ignored. And this happened in other posts where the wife was not given the same treatment as the husband, who was the officer. Of course, now we have a lot more female officers and I would hope we are much more appreciative of the role the wife of a Foreign Service officer plays.

*Q: I would certainly hope so, but I think there are probably times even now when things don't happen the way they ought to.*

BARBIS: Yes.

*Q: Certainly in that period it was common.*

BARBIS: Like the day we were married or the day after getting this telegram that "if rumor true, resign immediately."

*Q: Is there anything else, George, that you would want to particularly reflect on in terms of Chiang Mai, or have we pretty well cover your two years there?*

BARBIS: I would only make some comments that maybe have more general applicability. A special post like that, we have a number around the world, is a special challenge because you are on your own and isolated. We had one-time [encryption] pads, if you have ever had that experience. I would get telegrams about some cultural group visiting Rangoon, "limited official use" so naturally it was encoded. There was no need for that to be encoded. I think now we have simpler decoding machines at isolated posts like that. But, that was always a pain, to get a call in middle of the night because an urgent telegram had come in and then to find it had nothing to do with Chiang Mai.

*Q: We certainly have cut back on consulates and special purpose posts that we have for budget*

*reasons, etc. Did you feel that it was pretty valuable, important to have the American flag flying in Chiang Mai in those days?*

BARBIS: I think very much so and we will come to that when we talk about Bordeaux as well, because that has been closed. Chiang Mai has been elevated to a consulate general, as you know. And the name when I was there was one word, Chiang Mai, and now they have split it into Chiang Mai.

And, this was my third post and here I was principal officer. I hope I did well. I think I got a promotion out of my Chiang Mai experience. But, you do need an officer with some experience because he is America to many, many people and his presence is important which was why we consciously accepted any invitation that we got to anything, be it Buddhist monks, etc., simply because it was noticed. If the British consul was there and I wasn't, people would talk about it. And, it was also important, I think, that we developed a close relationship with the Burmese consul general who was a military officer and was there for obvious reasons similar to mine. It helped to show the Thais that the Burmese are not your enemies, we can have our differences and work together and live together. And, he had good relations with the Thai officials. They put on a good front and behaved properly in that respect.

*Q: You mentioned much earlier that the Shan were quite active in Thailand. Were they seen as a kind of rebel force?*

BARBIS: Well, not in Thailand, in Burma they were very much a rebel force and at times they controlled large parts of the Shan state. I think they are still a problem for the central government. And, in addition to the Shan, the Karen, on the western front have been in rebellion, in a dissident state for many years.

*Q: There were also Chinese elements you mentioned.*

BARBIS: The Chinese had been pushed out and came into an area that was pretty close to the Laos/Burma/China border. There were not KMT troops in Thailand, itself, but very active up near the border. I guess because of the weather or terrain the PRC [People's Republic of China] never tried to eliminate them completely.

*Q: So the ones that were evacuated to Taiwan were brought to Chiang Mai because that was the closest airfield?*

BARBIS: Yes.

*Q: So, the Shan would be active on the western border of Thailand and the Karen along the western part of the frontier.*

BARBIS: Yes. The only Shan I met was retired essentially.

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*Q: Today is October 23, 1996. George we have been talking about your experience as principal officer in Chiang Mai from 1959-61. I think we pretty well completed that assignment, but would you like to talk a little bit about the role of the Foreign Service National employees in a post like Chiang Mai?*

BARBIS: In a post like that, especially in a post like that that is isolated, a special purpose post, you are dependent, especially if you haven't had prior experience of being a principal officer on your local assistant. In Chiang Mai, we have had over the years, and I regret to say I don't know whether he is still living, an outstanding Foreign Service National whose wife taught me and my predecessors, and I am sure my successors, Thai. He was an unusual man, very well informed, contacts all over the place, and loved to go on field trips. It was always a joy being with him and having him assist in opening doors.

This may be off the record. I remember one of my first trips we went to this little village and called on the local officials and had dinner and then returned to our rooms and as soon after turning the light off to go to sleep there was a knock on the door. I opened the door and there was this young lady there and I couldn't understand her, my Thai not being very good. But apparently this was the custom in Thailand and maybe in other Southeast Asian countries where you sort of took hospitality to the extreme. I managed to convey to her that she should go to room number such-and such, [where someone] was able to dismiss her. He told me the next day that the chief or whoever the host was for that visit had been perplexed that this young consul wanted to be alone.

*Q: I would like to ask you about one other American position at your post, was there a USIA officer, was there an America House or public programs in addition to what you did in contacts?*

BARBIS: There was and it was a very important function. Initially, when I arrived there there was also a vice consul--the consul (principal officer), vice consul and the administrative assistant on the State Department side. We also had co-located with us a branch public affairs officer from USIS, with a cultural center, which was the pavilion, open air, in front of the residence, which the previous occupier, the last reigning prince of Chiang Mai, used for entertaining. That is where his dancing group, which was housed in the buildings in the rear of the compound where our offices were, used to stay. We had books there and various events, movies, occasionally a leader grantee or entertainment group. It was a popular place for Thai, especially young Thai, to come. We didn't have the resources ourselves to promote English language classes, but there was a separate group of ladies, including my wife, which in cooperation with one of the local schools offered English language classes.

*Q: You left Thailand in 1961, I suppose the summer?*

BARBIS: That's right. And this gives me the opportunity to mention something that I think has broader application too in terms of life in the Foreign Service. I had two family emergencies during my two years in Chiang Mai. We arrived in May and this must have been in September, I got word that my kid brother, who lived in Chicago, had died of a brain tumor, so I returned home on emergency leave to be with my parents and attend the funeral, and then return to Chiang Mai. The following year I had bad news again that my father had been diagnosed as

having leukemia and hoped that I could come home and spend some time with him. So, I returned for a month or so. Both trips were made at my own expense and I am glad that I did it. I returned to Chiang Mai and completed my tour. As it happened my father died a month before I was eligible for home leave and we decided that we would not return for the funeral.

But, I think that points out even in this day of rapid communications and transportation, one of the unfortunate parts of being in the Foreign Service. I had good support from my colleagues, from my ambassador, U. Alexis Johnson, Len Unger, the DCM and a colleague, very kindly took me in for the night because I had to fly down from Chiang Mai to catch a flight to Hong Kong and from there to fly home. This was the pre-jet period so it was a long trip. Friends took care of me in Bangkok that first night, which was very comforting. But, I just mention that as something that many of us have experienced. I think we do better now in terms of facilitating people. I don't know whether we pay for trips back, but in any event we have addressed that problem as best we can.

*Q: The world is smaller but it is still a long way from home and family, particularly for emergency, crisis situations.*

BARBIS: I think I mentioned this earlier and made a mistake, it was during that second emergency trip, when an acting consul was sent to Chiang Mai and my wife suddenly became a non-person. I think this needs to be acknowledged. I think we have come a long way in recognizing the role of the spouse in the Foreign Service and we have made great progress in that respect and in accepting them as part of the team. Well, they were always part of the team but they were two for one and sort of anonymous, whereas they get some recognition now and they deserve it because I don't see how a Foreign Service officer can be effective, especially in a situation such as Chiang Mai was, without a spouse to help you enter the community, become part of that community so that you have some standing and some role and some influence.

*Q: Yes, and I think also it very much enhances your position not only as a family person but a person with a normal life.*

BARBIS: Exactly, and I can still remember how one of the things my wife got involved in, in addition to the English classes, was growing orchids. She participated in some contests and won prizes and was cited in the local weekly newspaper with her picture for having won a prize for whatever type of orchid she had raised.

*Q: And that was a talent, skill that perhaps she developed there that she could continue elsewhere.*

BARBIS: Exactly. She had has that to enjoy for many, many years since then.

**GORDON R. BEYER**  
**Consular/Economic/Political Officer**  
**Bangkok (1957-1959)**

*Ambassador Gordon R. Beyer received a bachelor's degree from Harvard University and a master's degree from Northwestern University before entering the U.S. Marine Corps during the Korean War. Following his military service, Ambassador Beyer joined the Foreign Service. His career included positions in Thailand, Japan, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Horace G. Torbert in 1989.*

*Q: That is the proper way of doing it, but not the easy way as some of the rest of us got into the Service. Do you want to start then and outline generally where you went to begin with, and what your major duties were, and what kind of a life you had for the first year or so? I think you started out by going to Bangkok, didn't you?*

BEYER: That's right. After the A-100 course, which all the young officers took at that time, I was assigned to Bangkok, Thailand as our first post. My wife and young daughter, Theresa, and I took off for Bangkok. It was a pleasant trip in those days. We went by railroad from Washington to Florida, to Chicago, to Minneapolis, to Seattle by train, then Northwest Airlines from Seattle to Tokyo, to Hong Kong, to Bangkok. In those days it was a prop plane and we traveled with beds on this plane.

We arrived in Bangkok and there were three junior officers assigned to Bangkok, Thailand. I was assigned, perhaps in those days considered the least desirable post, as consular officer. In fact, it turned out to be a marvelous job where I was in charge of our little consular section, had an American assistant, an older woman, and two or three Thais. No one, really, was terribly interested in what we were up to as long as things went along all right.

Two things that I remember are, when I arrived, Mr. Donovan was inspecting the post, and the consular section had had some troubles because a traveling rodeo had gone broke in Bangkok, Thailand. I had been working part-time on the desk, when I was in the A-100 course, with one Mr. Rolland Bushner, who was the desk officer. So I was somewhat familiar with the problems, as seen from Washington, with this rodeo going broke. One of the problems was, that the consular officer did not immediately find out what the Americans were and what their passport numbers were.

So, as this rodeo went broke, the horses were sold and the Americans dispersed, but there was never a very clear accounting of who was who, and so on. Washington was quite distressed.

Mr. Donovan, an old consular hand, was very upset. When I arrived, he decided to take me under his wing and tell me how this should have been done so that, if it ever happened again, I would be able to handle it properly. He was a fine teacher. I learned a great deal about consular work from him, and kept in touch with him for many years afterwards.

So I did that for nine months. I was then assigned to the economics section, and had a pleasant time there, doing a variety of things. Robert Cleveland was the head of the economics section, and I learned a great deal from him about Foreign Service life and the style that we, as young officers, should maintain.

Then finally, I finished up for the last year or so on our delegation to SEATO. So, in that first tour, I had a good exposure to life in the Foreign Service -- the consular business, the economic side of our affairs, and then the diplomatic side and working on our delegation to the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization.

*Q: Was SEATO, in those days, a viable and growing concern that was really, that you felt, was doing something useful in building our defense posture in that area?*

BEYER: I thought it was quite viable, but it was not a NATO. It didn't have forces assigned to it. It had a disparate membership and, therefore, was never a defense organization as such, as NATO was.

On the other hand, these were the early days of SEATO. For example, Ambassador Jack Lydman was in charge of the secretariat at SEATO in those days. Mr. Hill was in charge of our delegation -- another fine and vigorous officer. What SEATO did do, I think, is it was more of a cultural organization in many respects. It permitted a great deal of conversation between the European members -- the U.K. and France -- the U.S., and the members from other parts of the world -- Pakistan and Thailand. So, though never a NATO, I think it served a very good function in those days, and it certainly was very interesting for all of us.

One aspect of life in Thailand in those days was curious. I was, of course, a third secretary. There were a goodly number of other third secretaries who were there, including the today's ambassador from Australia to the United States, Mike Cook, Bruce Harland of New Zealand, and Ali Alatos of Indonesia. Ali today is the foreign minister in Indonesia, and Bruce Harland is up at the U.N. in a significant post.

But, in any event, we third secretaries decided that, since no one else wanted to talk to us, we'd talk to one another, and we got together for lunch every couple of weeks. It became very interesting because we felt we could invite anyone that we wanted to, and we began to invite people that, I think, our ambassadors began to wonder about.

In any event, all of our ambassadors heard about this, after about six months. We were called in and asked what we were doing and what we were up to. [Laughter] We explained that this was just a social club and that we were having a good time.

The ambassadors that I had there, first was Ambassador Max Bishop who I didn't get to know very well. As I said, I was down in the consular section at that point. The next ambassador in the second year was Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, and his DCM was Leonard Unger. Both became friends that I kept in touch with throughout my career in the Foreign Service, and both were outstanding officers.

Mrs. Johnson became very fond of my wife, Molly. Molly wanted to teach English to Thais and asked Mrs. Johnson if that would be all right because, in those days, it wasn't too common for wives to work. Mrs. Johnson said this was fine as long as she attended the American wives' meeting at the residence once a month. That was the only requirement she put on Molly.

We, of course, in those days, did work very closely, both of us, with the staff of the embassy and the ambassador, and so on. We tried to be as helpful as possible.

**FRANK N. BURNET**  
**Chinese Language Officer**  
**Bangkok (1957-1959)**

*Frank N. Burnet was born in New York in 1921. He joined the Foreign Service in 1951 and served in the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Washington, DC. Mr. Burnet was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Your first post was then to Bangkok from '57 to '59. What were you doing there?*

BURNET: I was in the political section, and we had an assignment there which was called the Chinese Language Officer slot. There had been several incarnations before me.

So my job was to get in touch with the local Chinese communities. Something that I very quickly got into, because my predecessor was being given a number of farewell entertainments by members of the Chinese community, and those were usually large affairs.

I remember when I got to Bangkok, it was six, seven, eight nights in row, feting my predecessor's departure and my arrival. And, as you know, at these Chinese affairs there's an awful lot of drinking and eating.

One thing you'll have to say about the Chinese is that they don't believe in drinking without eating, so that nobody really gets into trouble. But you have to have a cast iron stomach for all of the ganbei-ing, the chug-a-lugging of warmed rice wine -- or even Scotch -- that you'd do.

It was kind of hard on me physically, but I quickly got to know who the leaders were in the Chinese community.

*Q: What was the importance of the Chinese community in Thailand to us?*

BURNET: You see, this was in the period of the Cold War. And Southeast Asia and Thailand, being among the dominoes, we were interested in at least keeping the status quo.

We were worried about the Chinese community. We thought that this was a group of people who could easily be used by the mother country for subversion, in all kinds of ways, to bring about a change of allegiance in this part of the world. And we were there to try to see that Southeast Asia would hold together.

So we were interested in the way China, the mainland, Beijing, was working on the Chinese community to make some headway with them. Taiwan, on its part, was trying to do a little bit. And our job was largely to try to work with those Chinese who were more or less favorably

disposed to us and keep them in our camp. So we had to know them, know what was going on, see who was making the inroads and to what effect, and report this back to Washington.

*Q: Well, how did you view the Chinese community there? Was it a strictly business-type community, really had very little connection with the Thai community, and did it play much of a role in Thailand?*

BURNET: It played a very large role. All of the Chinese, even the formal community leadership, were deeply involved in business, and deeply involved with Thai Government officials.

They sort of wore two hats you could say: they had their Thai hat and their Chinese hat. I think the bigger and the fancier hat was the Thai hat, because this was where all their money was made.

All the Chinese knew each other and they monopolized trade. They were also connected by networks all the way back to China. There was a symbiotic relationship between the Thai and the Chinese as they needed each other.

The Chinese, being the superior businessmen, knew how to do business with one another, but they all had partners or associates who were Thai. So they could do business with one another in a way which really had nothing to do with the formal Chinese organization but be protected from arbitrary acts of the Thai Government.

But yet it was in the Chinese associations, the communities, that you got to know these people. My language and area training gave me easy entrée into that, but you had to know both sides of these Chinese leaders' lives.

*Q: Well, did you feel at the time that the Peoples Republic of China, the Communist Chinese were making serious inroads into this group one way or another?*

BURNET: They really weren't. There were not too many positive signs that they had any great effect on the general Chinese population. But yet you never knew for sure which way they were going. There was always the fear that they could get an inroad, maybe take over a newspaper or a Chinese school, so that we weren't too comfortable-feeling. Washington put a lot of time and effort into devising programs to keep the overseas Chinese lined up with the free world. But the attitude of the Thai Government was by far the most important factor in determining their loyalty.

*Q: Well how did the political section view the stability of the Thai government? We're talking now from '57 to '59.*

BURNET: Well of course when I arrived it was very unstable, because you had a very strong and powerful leader, who was long since past his peak, Pibul Songgram. And you had younger people coming up in the military, more ambitious and very powerful in the number of troops they commanded.

About two months after I got there, there was a coup (called a "coup de repos" because it was peaceful) which overthrew Pibul, and Marshal Sarit and his group came in. So there wasn't a feeling of stability when I arrived. There was a very definite feeling that a coup was coming, that there were going to be big changes in the works. So we were very anxious to report this to Washington.

There was a problem in that the then-Ambassador, having been there almost two years by that time, had become very close to Pibul.

*Q: Who was that?*

BURNET: This was Max Bishop. I remember one of the first things that I heard when I arrived in the political section was: Look, we've got a problem. We can't really report what's going on, because the Ambassador won't approve any reporting which is critical of Pibul or suggests he's on the way out.

The way we were to get out the story of what was going on in Bangkok and elsewhere in Thailand was to write memcons, because no one interfered with getting your memcons back to Washington. So the chief of our political section said, "I want you to get out lots of memcons and get the word across as to what's going on."

*Q: The idea of a memcon, you're making no judgment. This is, you're talking to somebody, this person said we've got a problem here, and so you're just reporting the facts, ma'am, type of thing.*

BURNET: It's legitimate reporting; however you hoped that there were things said in these conversations that would obviously lead to a conclusion of some sort.

*Q: And you would be picking the people, too, to some extent.*

BURNET: Oh, yes. You picked them, and then of course you knew what you wanted to ask them. So you pointed them in the direction, perhaps, where you were seeking information.

*Q: Well now, often when you have an Ambassador who you feel has gone so committed to almost one side as you see another situation, there is not only the memcon route, there are other ways. When the desk officer comes to visit, or... Did you find there was much of this going on, too? Were people going on home leave and would...?*

BURNET: You know, I don't remember that there was much contact back and forth in those days. I don't know just why there wasn't. I remember the chief of the political section had just returned from home leave, and... But still things were very unsettled in Bangkok. We were all concerned about what was going to happen, although in the event it went fine.

A continuing embarrassment for the political section was that up to the moment Pibul fled Bangkok in his sports car (to Cambodia) we could not send any reporting cables to Washington. By that time we should have sent many "Flash" cables! Finally, the Ambassador sent one which

said simply, "Trust Department has seen reporting in other channels." A further irony was that a prominent U.S.-financed facility in Bangkok -- widely believed by the Thai press to be a CIA activity -- was attacked and wrecked by elements of Sarit's coup group. This was because it was a symbol of American support to the national policy which was led by Sarit's arch-rival for power, Colonel Phao.

*Q: How about when Sarit came in. Did that make much of a difference?*

BURNET: Well, it certainly did. The Ambassador at that time realized (I think he realized) that he had made a mistake in not giving us a little more head in our reporting. So there was really no problem after that. Of course it was a totally new situation. There was lots of work for everybody to do to get to know the new crew. So we had a free hand. It was not long before Bishop was replaced by U. Alexis Johnson.

*Q: How did you view Sarit and company when they came in?*

BURNET: I think we had no particular animus against him. And we were certainly disposed to burrow in and to get to know him and the people behind him. Of course the Chinese were doing a lot of shifting of ground in the same way. I was interested to see how the Chinese were viewing Sarit, and how they were making their accommodations and so on. So it all fit. Every Thai leader certainly had his Chinese who associated with him, a whole group of people who had sort of made his money for him. The new military leadership were also involved heavily in business and had their Chinese associates.

**LEONARD UNGER**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1958-1962)**

**Ambassador**  
**Thailand (1967-1973)**

*Ambassador Leonard Unger was born in California in 1917. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1939. He joined the Department of State in 1941 and later the Foreign Service. In 1945, he was worked with the post-war boundary issues in Europe. Ambassador Unger worked in the late 1940's and early 1950's on the issue of the Free Territory of Trieste. This work led to his appointment as the Assistant Secretary for Southeast European Affairs. He served in Italy, Thailand (where he later was ambassador), Laos, and Taiwan. Ambassador Unger was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

*Q: Skipping over your time in the War College, we'll move to your assignment to Thailand as Deputy Chief of Mission, DCM, 1958. How did this assignment come about?*

UNGER: I imagine the principal factor was that there was a new appointment as Ambassador to

Thailand, namely Alexis Johnson, succeeding Max Bishop. Johnson was appointed early in '58. He was looking for a DCM. He didn't propose to keep on the man who had been Bishop's DCM. He had been asking around and, I think, it was probably Marshall Green who had mentioned my name to him. Marshall and I had been working on this worldwide survey of overseas deployments and bases, for which Marshall had been the East Asian man. When we traveled to East Asia, I was on all of the trips. Marshall and I got acquainted and hit it off very well. I think he mentioned my name to Alexis Johnson.

So I was in the middle of my War College year that Johnson was getting ready to go. He suggested we get together and I invited him down to Fort McNair for lunch. We talked and he told me what he had in mind. I was very pleased because, of course, at the end of my War College year, I would be looking for a new assignment. I had expressed an interest previously in serving in some different part of the world. All of my experience, up to that time, had been European. I said I would like to go out to this area Thailand, he was looking for a DCM and so that was it!

*Q: He was willing to take somebody who had not served in the Far East? I mean was this a detractor? Did he feel that this was necessary?*

UNGER: He knew that I had accumulated a certain amount of background on that region by virtue of my participation in this worldwide bases survey, when I had worked with Marshall. Of course, at the War College, we had obviously picked up a number of the outstanding East Asian problems at the time, and had studied them. But I had not served out there. He apparently decided, nevertheless, that somewhere along the way, I would learn enough to be able to be a useful assistant to him. He, obviously, was the experienced person in that part of the world and he was going to be calling the shots.

*Q: Well, how did he use you? Some ambassadors use DCM's in different ways.*

UNGER: I would say that he identified a certain number of sectors in which he expected me to take responsibility. If I had to make some kind of a distinction, I would say that the political aspects of the job, and particularly the more sensitive political ones, he very definitely kept to himself. But some of the less complicated political things, and a lot of the economic things, he was ready to have me take over, always under his supervision. I was the first to recognize that this was, for me, a new part of the world and I had an awful lot to learn. Until I had an opportunity to get some of that behind me, I obviously would have to move a little slowly and cautiously.

But there was a great deal going on at that time in Thailand, the Thai-U.S. relations. They were becoming more and more significant as time went on. We, the Thai, the Philippines and Pakistan, which at that time, of course, still had its Eastern Branch, we were all in SEATO. At that time SEATO had a certain role and reputation. It didn't last very much longer but at that time it was active.

*Q: Did you feel SEATO, at that point, was something other than a paper treaty?*

UNGER: We doubted that it was ever going to be a close treaty in the same sense, for example, as NATO, identifying committed forces, setting up joint commands, assigning forces to an identified SEATO commander, etc. SEATO never went that far, and I think it probably was not intended that it would.

I had worked a lot on NATO and it was much more a matter of a difference than a similarity. I think SEATO was seen as primarily political, a means of providing some reassurance to the Filipinos, and particularly to the Thai, who at that time were living in an atmosphere where there was a fair amount of hostility and uncertainty in the region. The French Indochina period was not very far in the past. China, of course, was a distinctly hostile power.

In Malaysia for example, at that time (it was British Malaysia still) there was essentially a Communist insurgency. Indonesia was, certainly in the Sukarno days, in a good deal of trouble. The Philippines had the Huks problem. And, of course, in Vietnam, there was the North/South conflict, which was hotter or cooler, depending on the time, but always potentially a very active military situation.

So SEATO was seen as not so much an active instrument, but as a means of reassurance, particularly to the Thai and the Filipinos, to reassure them that their links with the United States and with some other Western countries was not going to be a serious endangerment to them. That if they were in trouble, their friends from outside were prepared to come and lend a hand, give them support.

*Q: What were American interests in Thailand at that time?*

UNGER: That's a tough one. I would say that, approaching it negatively, the United States felt that it would be dangerous if, one by one, the countries of that area were either taken over by Communist powers or fell so much under Communist influence that they were responsive only to orders out of Moscow and perhaps, to some extent, out of Beijing. Little by little, many significant interests of the United States in the region would be threatened.

One of the most serious questions, of course, was the Straits. The Straits of Malacca, where Singapore sits and across the way, Sumatra; and the Sunda, a Strait in Indonesia. The absolutely critical nature of those two straits was clear for all sea communications between East Asia and the Indian Ocean and, beyond, i.e., the Mediterranean and Europe. The feeling was that if things began to fall apart in Southeast Asia, in due course, Communist power would be established in Malaysia and then in Singapore and perhaps Indonesia. In fact, each one of those countries already had its own internal subversion problems.

When the British were still there, in what was still called Malaya, there was a serious Communist problem and there was a very active Communist movement in Singapore itself. There was not such in Thailand, but there certainly was in Vietnam, in Laos and Cambodia, too. Those situations were somewhat chancy.

So there was a feeling, that we now look back on and don't particularly approve of, or agree with, that saw all these issues as black and white: "they're either for us or they're against us!" And a

fear that both the Philippines and Thailand might be engulfed and lost. These indispensable sea routes, indispensable to countries like Japan and Korea, between Europe and East Asia, would be cut off and all the resources of the area would be cut off and all the population. This would make India dubious about any kind of connections with the United States; even Australia might feel an obligation to change its policies. In effect, that part of the world would be completely under direct or indirect Communist rule. The balance would be a dangerous one for the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

*Q: How did the Thai see the situation at that time?*

UNGER: Well, the Thai governments were by and large Western and U.S.-oriented. They certainly were anti-Communist. There was a new young King and series of dictators who were the real bosses. Sarit, for example, had taken charge in Thailand about six months before I came there. He had taken charge about the time that Alexis Johnson got out there, or shortly before. We developed a very close relationship with him. He was looking for American support and assistance, including economic assistance and military assistance. He argued for this on the basis that he was a friend of the United States and of the West and that he was an enemy of Communism. He would be doing what he could do to see that the Communists didn't have any further successes in his region.

This was kind of a black and white era-"you're for us or you're agin' us!" There were rulers in the Philippines, at that time, who were taking a similar line. In the Philippines, of course, the United States had a much more direct stake because of what are now two bases, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay, but then were proliferated far beyond that. There were, I don't know how many, American installations of one kind or another, which were considered vital to our position in the western Pacific. And there was a feeling that Japan, and its friendly orientation, was dependent on keeping those sea lanes open and preserving a reasonably secure situation in East Asia.

There was also a feeling that it was important to hold on to this last little friendly Chinese foothold, namely Taiwan. And there was a very definite apprehension that mainland China might try to move against Taiwan. It was at that point that it was announced that the American Seventh Fleet would be regularly circulating through those waters in order to inhibit any intention of the Chinese to make a move of that sort. This is, of course, also the period of the Korean War and subsequent years.

*Q: In the first place, when you were in Thailand when the Kennedy Administration came in 1961, did you feel, just from your position as a Foreign Service officer there, a change in mood toward the area or not?*

UNGER: Yes, I think so. There was less of a disposition to accept some of the attitudes that had been established and running by then for a fairly long period. The sort of black and white attitude of John Foster Dulles about how you can't have anything to do with the Communists; their intentions are invariably evil and aggressive. The only thing to do is to build up secure defenses and military arrangements, and work with the countries that are friendly to gear them to share the same anti-Communist attitude. (Some people referred to this as "pactitis.") In that particular area, the SEATO pact and ANZUS, and perhaps several others, were already in force.

This situation I think, in a way, was what led to the Laos settlement of 1962, which was intended to substitute a neutral solution for the dangerous East-West hostility which otherwise prevailed. Presumably, some of the initial discussions on this were between Khrushchev and Kennedy. When the new arrangement was worked out to provide for a neutral Laos, the idea was to wipe the slate clean, send in a new ambassador who was going to be there to work with not only his British and French, but also his Russian colleagues. (We Americans couldn't work with the Chinese because they wouldn't talk with us!) But we meant to try to make a success of this neutral solution, with the idea that Laos might lie as a buffer between western-oriented Thailand and Communist-oriented North Vietnam. It was also intended that a neutral Laos would not be used by North Vietnam to infiltrate troops into South Vietnam.

In Cambodia, you had kind of a neutral position of Sihanouk. If you could have a similar neutral position in Laos, perhaps you could isolate and insulate the Communists who were in charge in North Vietnam, and also the Chinese, particularly from Thailand. And Thailand could continue its existing western orientation. I was sent from Bangkok, where I was DCM, directly to Laos, having been sworn in in Bangkok, as Ambassador to Laos. (Almost always a new Ambassador is sworn in in Washington where he gets his instructions before taking up a new assignment).

*Q: Did the nomination come as a surprise to you? Had anybody talked to you before about it or prepared you for it?*

UNGER: I knew it might be in prospect because I knew about the Geneva Conference; I knew it was going to be necessary to appoint somebody to Laos. And several of the people who had come through Bangkok, had been working in Geneva with Harriman, who was our principle negotiator there.

*Q: He was then Assistant Secretary for the Far East.*

UNGER: Yes, which was an interesting job for him to accept because with his standing he could have aspired to be Secretary of State.

*Q: Or President. I'd like to move on now to your assignment to Thailand as ambassador. How did this come about?*

UNGER: I suppose one of the reasons they asked me to go out to Bangkok in the fall of 1967 was because of my earlier experience there and in Laos. Let's see, did I follow Ken Young?

*Q: It was Graham Martin.*

UNGER: Excuse me, Graham Martin. Yes, that's right.

*Q: You presented your credentials in October of 1967.*

UNGER: I think I arrived at the very end of August and presented my credentials in October. Again, I think my name probably got thrown in the hopper by a number of people, including

again, Bill Bundy. I think Bill was still Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific. Could that be correct?

*Q: Yes. He was there until 1969.*

UNGER: Right. This was a period when the United States had a rapidly mounting number of Americans in Thailand. The predominant group was the U.S. Military. There were five or six air bases in country, which were being used to support the allied forces in Indochina. There was a major logistics base at Sattahip, in southeastern Thailand. That was the base that had been developed to facilitate the movement of supplies in country, from abroad, for two or three purposes: one was moving supplies up country to support the then five, or maybe six, Thai air bases where the United States had substantial forces.

Also, to supply what we were taking into Laos and, to a minor extent, Cambodia, as well as what was still being provided for Vietnam. Obviously, most of that last was moving via other routes, but the port at Sattahip, which was initially a Thai Naval Base, became a very important supply base also for the United States forces through that whole area, in Thailand and Indochina.

Under those circumstances, a large share of my responsibilities related to the situation in Indochina. There were several situations: the most time consuming, the most troublesome, the most difficult, of course, was Vietnam. The Thai were very much committed to joint action with the United States, Korea, Australia, et al. The Thai sent ground forces to South Vietnam to support the government in Saigon and they were engaged in the land war especially in the northern coast area. I don't remember precisely which places, maybe around Da Nang and north of there.

Moreover, the military effort in Vietnam was very substantially supported on the supply side through the Port at Sattahip. As for the U.S. air activity which was principally over North Vietnam (the bombing of Hanoi and all of that) and also along the Ho Chi Minh trail, most of that was based in Thailand, utilizing bases like the ones I mentioned in the northeast, mostly, but also Thakli.

This meant that the United States had, in five or six locations in Thailand, substantial numbers of Americans in residence. Most of them were Military. There were all the local community relations situations that come out of such a situation. By and large, our presence in Thailand was free of critical tensions but every once in a while there would develop an unhappy jurisdiction situation, or the U.S. Air Force would feel it had to acquire some real estate. This might impinge on a lot of agricultural or other important land uses. By and large, the relationship was smooth; nevertheless a great deal of my time, in that early period, was taken up with trying to resolve a multitude of problems of that sort.

If I remember my chronology correctly, it was only about five or six months, or even less, after I got there, namely late October or November, that . . .

*Q: You presented your credentials in October of '67. So this would be the spring of '68 or so?*

UNGER: What I'm trying to recapture is the year; I seem to remember that it was October or November. It was when Thanom Praphat were eased out and the government was taken over, first by a caretaker, and then Seni Pramoj, and then Kukrit Pramoj and others.

*Q: There was a coup by Premier Kittikachorn in November of '71. Or maybe it was '70?*

UNGER: A coup by Thanom?

*Q: I mean his forces. I have a note here. He was the Premier, but apparently his group took over. I'm not sure exactly about this.*

UNGER: He was the Prime Minister who took over from Sarit when Sarit died. It was a coup against Thanom that I was thinking about, but that was in October or November, 1973.

*Q: We are now restarting. We've just gone and done a little research. Mr. Ambassador, let me ask you first, how did you deal, when you first arrived, at the end of 1967 -- and you were there for almost five years -- how did you deal with the Thai government. Whom would you see and who were the major players that you dealt with? And, could you spell the names.*

UNGER: When I returned to Thailand as Ambassador, in the fall of '67 (having been out there earlier as Alex Johnson's and then Ken Young's deputy), Sarit had died and Thanom had succeeded him as Prime Minister. I had known Thanom from that earlier time when he was Deputy to Sarit. We had what seemed to me and, I believe, seemed to him likewise, a good relationship. It was easy for us to communicate. He was available to receive me if there wasn't something critical going on; I could go in and see him and talk to him quite informally. He accepted that I was able to bring him reliable word of U.S. Government opinions and policies.

I think it is fair to say, that I had perhaps a better understanding of his country than some other American ambassadors, if for no other reason than that I had already served there for a number of years, and that I had learned their language, which wasn't true of very many American ambassadors out there. Also, I had served elsewhere in the region, namely Laos, specifically. Also I had been working in Washington on the region before I came out there. I had been with Bill Bundy in the East Asian Bureau as his Southeast Asian deputy. Earlier I had been very much involved in the activities of SEATO, even though SEATO was by this time on its way out. But nevertheless, I was familiar with the history of that and other important earlier situations.

Also I spoke Thai. For example, with Thanom's wife, both Mrs. Unger and I could communicate with her only in Thai; she didn't speak any English. Thanom's English was limited. I wouldn't have pretended to do business in Thai, except when I had to, particularly if I were traveling around the country in more remote areas. But nevertheless, Thanom knew that I knew it.

So I think we had developed a pretty good relationship. At that time, in Thailand, there were really two powerful people. Thanom was out front: he, himself, plus his wife, plus various people closely associated with him, were one sort of power center.

But a much more adept and much more skillful operator was his Deputy and Minister of Interior,

General Praphat. Praphat was more than Thanom in the old line of Thai General-politicians, people who came up through the Military ranks but who, in the process, had accumulated to themselves a very considerable body of supporters, and they had brought those supporters along with them into relatively high places. Whether in the Military or in the Ministry of Interior or in other important places, there were key people who were "Praphat men," and they were ready to support him. I think they expected that Thanom, as sort of a genial and kindly father figure, would in due course be prepared to move aside and that Praphat, who was younger, would move into the top position. This whole hierarchy of Praphat supporters would then benefit from his being in the number one position.

This was pretty much the expectation. I don't think it was Thanom's expectation, but it certainly was that of many people in political positions, including many of the Military, many of whom were Praphat's men. He was not only an important figure in the Thai Army but he was also the Minister of Interior; therefore, the police were very much a part of his group as well.

This was the power scene as it had developed following the death of Sarit some years before. Thanom and Praphat had moved in as a kind of team. I think one of Thanom's sons or daughters was married to one of Praphat's daughters or sons, or something like that. [Laughter] It was an alliance, and an effective one. But it ran into growing opposition. Sometimes for special reasons, but sometimes just because I think it's in the nature of such things: as people in power "overstay their welcome" and other people who want power are anxious to move in.

Anyway, little by little, their situation became more tenuous. There began to develop, in Thailand, a much wider political participation and involvement of various groups, particularly the students. There was resentment over the machine that was primarily under Praphat's direction, but from which Thanom benefitted too, in which very substantial amounts of funds were diverted to personal bank accounts; that very familiar pattern that has happened many places in the world!

It had been true in Thailand, certainly of Sarit. But Sarit had been a very determined and effective leader and, perhaps also, had chosen to die at an appropriate moment, before some of these things caught up with him!

Furthermore, Thanom was less effective than Sarit and Praphat was perhaps a little more outrageous than some, in terms of the kinds of deals that he was engineering and the amounts of money he was diverting!

Also, this was a time of some stress with the war in Vietnam, not far away, and something like 50,000 foreign, albeit allied, forces in country. There was growing uncertainty as to what was going to be the outcome in Indochina. (That situation in Indochina, particularly as it might directly affect Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam, was always a very central concern for the Thai).

At a certain moment, the unhappiness with Thanom and Praphat boiled over. There was a student demonstration; in the past these had usually been quite effectively controlled and never had represented any kind of a serious political problem. But in this atmosphere that I've been

describing, the demonstration did get out of hand and in October of '73, both Praphat and Thanom were ousted and I guess they both flew to the United States, fairly directly. The King appointed, not on a permanent basis, but essentially as a caretaker leader of government, a very much respected Chief Judge of the equivalent of our Supreme Court, Judge Sanya Thammasakdi.

Judge Sanya was someone I knew well. Given what had happened, he asked me (even though at that time I was just about to leave) to stay on for some additional time, over the transition, as he was beginning to get things in place for a new government. Washington agreed to let me do that. So I stayed, as I recall, about another month beyond what I had planned to do.

*Q: Did we play any role in the change of government there?*

UNGER: We, the United States, in any official sense?

*Q: Yes.*

UNGER: No, I don't believe so. I think that from top to bottom, both on the U.S. side and on the Thai side, contacts were extremely numerous and very frank. Many of them of long duration. People talked to each other and compared notes and passed on opinions and had numerous discussions of situations. I'm sure that it was clear, particularly, that the kind of graft and corruption that Praphat represented was something the United States felt was a real disadvantage to the Thai. And it was something that was inevitably going to cause them problems. While they had had a pretty stable internal situation and relatively little in the way of political dissent, that kind of leadership was going to breed the kind of opposition they hadn't had before.

The stability of the country and the stability even of the monarchy could come into question, if that were to take place. I think there were many Thai, including people in responsible positions, who, as time went on, became more and more disturbed particularly with Praphat. They realized that Thanom was not a strong figure and that even if they removed Thanom and Praphat remained in place, they wouldn't have accomplished very much. The important thing was to get them both out and to bring in a more democratically organized and a more responsible kind of government that would be better able to start handling some of the problems in Thailand that needed to be solved.

All of that might suggest to some people that the United States played some kind of a role in the change, which was not the case. In fact, there were many official Americans, and I would say particularly Americans in the military, who were very apprehensive about the kinds of changes that took place. They feared that this might bring an end to the kind of position and privileges that the United States military had in country.

And, of course, account had also be taken of American people in the Thai business world, although the American business presence in Thailand was not all that great at that time. But they were afraid of a revolutionary spirit and instability that they believed might follow.

When Judge Sanya took over, he was a respected but certainly a conservative figure. The general disposition of His Majesty the King was also well known; it certainly didn't suggest any desire to

move in any radical direction. It was anticipated that there would be a transition to a more responsive government and that, hopefully, there would be less corruption. Clearly it was not going to be a government that was going to bring any kind of radical overturning, either on the political or the economic scene. And this is, in fact, the way it turned out.

While I can't speak out of direct experience with the subsequent situation, since I left Bangkok at just about the end of '73, I certainly tried to keep track of it. I was back in Washington and was, of course, closely in touch with what was taking place at that time. As anticipated, there were some rough times in Thailand as time went on with the Pramoj brothers and their governments, followed by Thanin. Nevertheless, fundamentally it was a stable situation as it has continued to be and remains so today.

*Q: You were saying you had the 50,000 Americans. When we have large bases, we tend to insist and have what amount to extraterritorial rights. Were you concerned about this being a destabilizing factor? Not only because of the Service men, but also the money that you bring in. This could not help a country by doing this.*

UNGER: We were very much concerned about it. When it became clear that there was going to be this much larger deployment to Thailand, a lot of measures were undertaken to find a way to handle problems as they arose and even anticipate problems, and to try to avoid the development of any kind of critical stress or strain.

Of course, I was not yet there when this big deployment took place. That was, I think, primarily during Graham Martin's time. But when I got there, I had a good basis for judgment given my past familiarity with the situation. I had talked to all of my Thai friends, including people in the government, including some discussion with His Majesty to learn how he saw the situation. I reviewed the situation with people in the Thai Government and a lot of people that I knew, who had perhaps been in government, or people who were not directly concerned with this issue, but whom I knew to be perceptive, sensitive people. While I knew most of them to be friendly to the United States, They also would be very ready -- if they felt our actions had been high-handed or improper or incomplete or whatever -- to give me a frank opinion. So when I went out there, in the early fall of '67, it was very important to reestablish contacts and try to get a feel for how the Thais perceived the situation. By and large, in the Thailand of that day, the U.S. presence was not resented. Most of the Thai in leadership positions -- I'm not saying this was necessarily true of the Thai body politic as a whole -- were themselves concerned about the situation in Vietnam. The fact that the United States was concerned, and involved, and intended to defend South Vietnam, fitted with their policy as well. This is what they wished to see. They were afraid that a North Vietnam, moving into a dominant position in Indochina, taking over the South and exerting control over Laos and Cambodia, meant trouble for them. They felt there was hostility there that would mean pressures on Thailand and make life difficult for them.

Of course, in the light of what's happened in the last year or so, we know that the Thai have adjusted well to the situation at the same time that Vietnam itself has been adjusting. But that's modern history and things looked somewhat different then.

*Q: You were there during the critical period when our relations with the People's Republic of*

*China went through a very dramatic turn from being absolutely opposed to establishing a form of relationship there. How did the Thai view this?*

UNGER: Remember, of course -- as would be true in the United States too -- there are Thai and there are Thai! [Laughter] And, certainly, there were university people; and there were some business people, who for rather special reasons, regarded this PRC-U.S. rapprochement favorably and anticipated Thailand's following suit somewhere along the way.

There were those who were ideologues (and this included quite a number of people in top government positions), who were dubious about this. They felt the United States was mistaken in its perception of China and that a country that they saw, by all odds, as the principal menace to Thailand's independence, was perhaps going to be given a free hand to operate as it wished in Southeast Asia: this would be very dangerous from a Thai point of view. Now, of course, we know that none of that happened the way they anticipated, but that was the kind of thing that they were worried about.

Remember one thing, and this is very important anytime you talk about China and Thailand: Thailand has one of the largest Chinese minorities in all of Southeast Asia or anywhere else. There are some countries in Southeast Asia like Singapore where the Chinese are not a minority; they are a majority -- three quarters of the whole population. But in Thailand, they are a very significant minority and a minority that has an extremely important position, particularly on the business and economic side.

But unlike Malaysia, where the Chinese element is often in almost a hostile relationship with the Malay Muslim population, in Thailand the Chinese have adjusted and assimilated in remarkable fashion. The Chinese minority is nothing like the problem that it is in the Philippines, in Malaysia, in Indonesia and many other areas.

The usual pattern is that the first generation dresses as Chinese and lives in the Chinese part of Bangkok or maybe in one of the other big cities. Maybe even in the next generation somebody will go out and become a rice miller in a relatively small town or be in business in Bangkok with children with Thai names. Possibly they will change their own name and take a Thai name; and the next generation, to all intents and purposes, is Thai.

One of the most interesting cases that I always have cited is a family that I knew pretty well -- I think there were something like a dozen children. The oldest was a very respected gentleman who still had his Chinese name and perhaps dressed Chinese. He came from China when he was a young man and he was the head of one of the most important Chinese societies in Thailand. He was a very wealthy businessman and was respected as such by the Thai. But there was no question that he was a representative of the Chinese community, an immigrant community. It was a big family and his youngest brother -- who was quite young when he was brought to Thailand -- had a Thai name. In due course he was also given a Thai title -- Phya -- when he became a very close advisor to the King. He was thought of by everybody as a Thai; he married a Thai woman; he had the name Phya Srivisarn which was a good Thai name. And so in the course of just one generation, however many years that entailed, they went from the old pattern of identity as Chinese immigrants to a new pattern of essentially total assimilation as Thais!

*Q: One last question before we move on to your next assignment. How much did narcotics play a role in your work as Ambassador at that time?*

UNGER: The second time I was in Thailand, it was an extremely important aspect of the work. For one thing, we had begun to have a problem in the United States. I can't remember exactly the status in America at that time, but certainly drugs had been recognized as a growing problem in the States. And Southeast Asia was perhaps the principle source of opium and its derivatives, morphine and heroin; this came primarily from the "Golden Triangle." Territorially speaking, this meant primarily Burma and Laos, but with some production in northernmost Thailand. Thailand, however, provided the principal route of exit for these substances.

That wasn't always true. For example, even in the days that I was still in Laos, it was frequently reported there were French or other free-lance pilots who knew the wild areas of Laos and knew where they could land and take off unapprehended. They were operating mostly in the northwestern corner of Laos where they loaded up heavily with opium (or perhaps heroin which had been refined in one of the Burmese refineries) and flew over Thai territory, high enough so that they weren't intercepted and then dropped their cargo to a ship at sea in the Gulf of Thailand. This was one of the ways to get the heroin out without being interfered with and thus engage in a very lucrative trade!

But at the same time, it was known that there also were overland channels through Thailand (as well as through Indochina and Burma) that probably came down the western side of Thailand, in relatively remote, mountainous areas. They delivered their product to rendezvous along the Thai coast; again, that was primarily heroin.

Going back to our discussion about Thanom and Praphat, there were recurrent rumors that Praphat who, as Minister of Interior, was responsible for the police, but also had a military position, and was the person we had to talk to and work with, principally, to try to get the narcotics problem under control. At the same time we were talking to him, we were from time to time receiving reports that he was carrying on his own narcotics operation! So it was a somewhat discouraging picture. I never had any reason to think Thanom was personally involved, but we definitely thought that Praphat was.

**SIDNEY WEINTRAUB**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Bangkok (1959-1961)**

*Sidney Weintraub was born in New York in 1922, and graduated from the City College of New York with a BBA in 1943. From the University of Missouri and Yale University he received an MA and in 1966 got his PhD from American University. He served overseas in the US Army from 1943 to 1946. His assignments abroad included Madagascar, Mexico City, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Santiago. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Mr. Weintraub in 1996.*

*Q: I've heard this many times. You went to Thailand. You were there from when to when?*

WEINTRAUB: '59 to '61.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

WEINTRAUB: Economic Section?

*Q: Who was the Ambassador at the time?*

WEINTRAUB: Alex Johnson. He later became Under Secretary, Ambassador to Vietnam. There, the experience was very different. I had great regard for Alex Johnson. He was a decent fellow. He did his job well. He knew everybody. He encouraged people. It was a very good assignment.

*Q: What was your particular parish?*

WEINTRAUB: Essentially the analysis of the economy, of what was going on, and then making recommendations on U.S. policy. I guess I was Number Two by then in the economic section, just reporting generally on the nature of the economy, the usual economic officer duties.

*Q: What was the political and economic situation in Thailand in this '59 to '61 period?*

WEINTRAUB: There was a military dictator. His name was Sarit. I met him on a number of occasions, but I had really no great dealings with him. I had much contact with a very professional man at the head of the central bank, and with others in the central bank. They were really very professional. And with the people in the various economic parts of the government. Thailand wasn't booming then the way it later happened, but it was in reasonably good shape. The Foreign Minister, whose name was Thanat Khoman, was really quite a sophisticated man. I met him a few time and I had some dealings with him. But my dealings were much more with the economic side of the government. The central bank and the other economic officials realized that, as the Vietnam War heated up in the years following, Thailand would be deeply affected. They began to think about how they could limit the adverse impact on Thailand. In other words, people were thinking ahead. The government was pretty corrupt. That's not the point I'm making. Thailand was not a democracy. But the economic policy makers were people of considerable sophistication and ability.

*Q: Did you have problems getting to know people within the Thai government and Thai business?*

WEINTRAUB: No, not at all. Thailand was very different from Japan. I had a quite active social life with Thai government officials, Thai businesspeople, others there. Thailand was a pleasant place to live at that time. I found it a rewarding experience.

*Q: What were American economic interests in Thailand then?*

WEINTRAUB: Essentially trade. Modest investment, though not all that much. Thailand had always been an independent state. So, it was kind of a political/economic relationship. The two went together. They wanted to maintain that independence. The problems between us were not deep problems.

*Q: Were we competing for rice or anything like that?*

WEINTRAUB: Yes, it was an issue, but I'm not sure it was all that deep an issue. It's the way PL 480 has always been an issue.

*Q: What about Thai silk and all that? Was this a major export?*

WEINTRAUB: It was an important export. It wasn't Thailand's main export, but it was an important export. The Thai silk industry got a big boost by a man named Jim Thompson. Jim Thompson helped them get the right dyes and the right designs and set up quite a flourishing business which then got emulated by a lot of other Thais. They were building up a jewelry business. Their big exports though at that time were agricultural products of one kind or another. They hadn't reached the boom period yet.

*Q: Were they at all concerned about an indigenous Communist movement there? They had all of Indochina.*

WEINTRAUB: Yes, I'm sure they were. I'm sure there was some concern. As far as I can recall, there was no serious expectation that the Thais would succumb to some of the things happening elsewhere in Indochina. There was a good deal of, not animosity, maybe that's too strong a word, but there was no love between the Indochinese states and the Thais. The Thais tried to keep themselves somewhat distant from that. There were insurgencies in Burma, but that didn't affect the Thais too much, except along the northern part of Thailand. There were insurgencies in Malaya the time, not too far from the Thai border, but, again, they did not deeply affect the Thais..

*Q: You left Thailand when?*

WEINTRAUB: I left in '61. I came back to Washington.

### **BEN FRANKLIN DIXON**

#### **U.S. Representative to the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East Bangkok (1959-1962)**

*Ben Franklin Dixon was born in North Carolina in 1918. As a civil servant, Mr. Dixon was the officer for Greek Affairs in Washington, DC. As a Foreign Service officer, he was posted to Morocco, Thailand, Pakistan, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Well, then, we'll move you. You left Rabat in 1958, and then you went to Bangkok, where you served from 1959 to '62. What were you doing there?*

DIXON: Well, my personal job was being liaison officer, or U.S. representative to the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East. I was given that job primarily because Bill Porter, who was back, head of...

*Q: This was Ambassador William J. Porter.*

DIXON: Who had been the DCM there. I had just come into the Foreign Service. Well, I had just come into the field for the first time. I had been in the Civil Service and qualified under that...what is that program?

*Q: Wriston program, I think, wasn't it?*

DIXON: No.

*Q: Mustang program, or...*

DIXON: ...five, ten, eleven, or something like that. After so much time in the Civil Service, I took an oral exam and was qualified for this. I wasn't brought in until the time of the Wriston thing, but I did that thing about a year before that. And they apparently held up, I don't know why. Oh, yes, I do, because, well... In any case, Bill Porter thought that I had never had the economic experience, and he kept telling the Personnel people that I should be given economic jobs. This also involved this problem with John Root. They wanted to make John Root the head of the political section; the people back in the department had wanted this right along. So I was shunted off to Bangkok.

The Asians at that time were at the beginning of this great opening that they have reached today. But they were just beginning then, and they were very hopeful that the United States would help them develop their economies and get started. A lot of that representation was done through ECAFE, which was the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East. And then they had meetings on all sorts of specialized things, like petroleum and Customs and...I don't know, they must have had fifteen or twenty different seminars every year on special aspects of economy and of governmental functions, you know, sort of a training thing. And they'd put out these detailed things about how you, for example, conducted a Customs Service and this sort of thing.

I was completely immersed in this. The embassy had no interest in this whatsoever. Alex Johnson was the ambassador, and the economic counselor had no idea of what I was doing. They began to ask me to do other things, but I said, "You know, I think there's a job that needs to be done. I was sent here to do this job and I think I should be supported in doing this." There wasn't much response to it. And I found trouble in getting my things sent out. You know, they'd let them stand for a week before they'd be signed and that sort of thing. And I found it very difficult to try to get along.

*Q: Was this just one of the things that has often been leveled against particularly the older Foreign Service, that things of economic or commercial interest just didn't grab their attention as much as...*

DIXON: They paid absolutely no attention to it whatsoever. I spent a lot of time out there talking to people to see what they wanted to do on all these different sections, and what they planned, and informing the department of this. There was a section of the department very much interested in it. And if I could get my dispatches out, or my telegrams out, which... There were great delays by the economic counselor.

*Q: Who was the economic counselor?*

DIXON: Claude Whittington -- didn't know what I was writing about, didn't even send them up to Leonard Unger, who was the DCM, who would simply let it sit there for a long time before he would sign it or do anything. Sometimes he'd want to talk about some minor point, but he'd hold it there for a couple of weeks before he did it. And Ambassador Johnson just had no interest in it whatsoever. I felt pretty annoyed about this.

When the inspector came, I told him I thought that either they ought to let me do these things alone or give it immediate attention.

This annoyed Whittington considerably, and he began to denounce me as not being very responsive to leadership and so forth. I'd never had anything from him at all, except he'd want me to do some things, and I had, say, a delegation there, we were doing something, and I'd say I couldn't do it.

The result was that the inspector wrote a nasty report about me, which I resented very greatly. It, in fact, was primarily untrue. They had some professional inspector, named King, there, who didn't write his report until several months after he got back. It was shot through with all sorts of error of fact, error of judgment. But it certainly didn't help my career very much.

*Q: No, no.*

DIXON: Anyway, I enjoyed... Once I got into it, it was an entirely different kind of thing than I had ever done before. And I think they had great confidence in me.

*Q: You're speaking about the...*

DIXON: The ECAFE.

They also assigned me labor reporting in Thailand, which I resisted. But Alex Johnson finally insisted that I do it, so I did it. But it cut into the time on the other thing.

I had some interesting times. They were trying to start the Asian Bank at that time. I felt that it would be a great help in dealing with the Asians, if we could afford it. Therefore, I wrote dispatches recommending that the Department consider this thing very seriously, and consider

doing some basic financing for it. They eventually did do it, but they never showed much of a willingness as long as I was there. Shortly after I left, they began to take on to it some. But I felt that it was a very important thing for the Asians.

commerce and under secretaries of a lot of departments -- that came out to these things. I was able to talk them and try to explain what ECAFE wanted to do, what these countries needed and that sort of thing, in hopes to get widespread interest, throughout the agencies of the U.S. government that dealt with these sort of things, for the problems in East Asia. Sometimes they'd stay two weeks, sometimes delegates would stay a month, but those were good times to do briefings and talk with them.

One thing that was rather funny. The ECAFE had an annual meeting. One time it was in New Delhi. This was just when Kennedy had come in. I felt that it was important to get somebody of standing to come and talk to the economic ministers who came to these meetings. I saw that Harriman was probably going to be the EA assistant secretary, so I sent a telegram back saying: Would it be possible for Harriman to come to this and talk to the economic ministers individually and sort of get familiar with our problems? I thought it would be helpful in his job to know what their problems were, as well as a good chance for us to make some time with somebody who was important in the administration to talk these people. They never answered this thing until the last minute. When I got to New Delhi, they said he was coming.

Funny thing, we had a guy who said he'd worked for Harriman. And he said, "Mr. Harriman will want to make a speech, so I'll write a speech for him." So he wrote a speech for him. Harriman came. At the first delegation meeting, this guy said, "Governor, I've written a speech for you." And Harriman picked it up and looked at it, opened the second page, read a couple of lines, third or fourth page, tore the thing up and threw it in the trash basket and never said anything, which I thought was one of the rudest things I'd ever seen in my life. Well, he was pretty bad.

He said for me to gather all the economic ministers together and he would address them. I said, "Governor, the point of your being here is to talk to each one of these guys individually and to listen to what they have to say." Well, he wasn't going to do that. And I said, "Well, this is what you're here for. And I hope you will do it, I'd hate to have to report back that you are not going to do what you came here for." He looked plenty goddamned mad, but he said all right, he would do it.

So we sat -- each minister, and Harriman, and myself. The first meeting we had was with the Afghan minister. Harriman said, "I'll just write out my speech that I'm going to make, while I pretend to listen to what they're saying."

I said, "You know, it doesn't make any difference to me, but please hear enough of it to be responsive."

Harriman was sitting there. He was talking and writing a couple of words and things. And all of a sudden he took the hearing aid out of his ear. It was sort of loose. He pulled the cord in front of his ear. I reached up, picked it up, and stuck it back in his ear. He was a terror. He was terrible.

But we did get through all the economic ministers. I think he was pretty annoyed with me, but nonetheless...

We had two other things that happened there that were quite important. The Lao foreign minister, Kampan Panya, came to me and said... I had been in Laos.

*Q: What was his name again?*

DIXON: Kampan Panya. He came to me and said, "Souvanna Phouma is here at the Ashoka Hotel." And he said...

*Q: Who was then the...*

DIXON: Well, he had been prime minister and was thrown out. And he had stayed quite a while with Sihanouk in Cambodia. Kampan Panya said, "Listen, he's on the other side of the fence from me, but nonetheless I think the Americans ought to go in and show him some attention. At least call him and have something to say to him. You never know when something else may happen and you'll want to be in his good graces, too." Which I thought was pretty good, coming from the foreign minister. So I went and got Carol Laise at the embassy and wrote a telegram, and she sent it to...

*Q: Carol Laise would have been, at that time, the political officer at the embassy in New Delhi.*

DIXON: She sent a telegram off. I said, in effect, please authorize somebody -- out of the embassy, or Harriman if he comes, or myself -- to talk to Souvanna Phouma. We got no answer. Two or three days went by. Harriman still hadn't come. So I went to my British opposite number and we went over to his embassy, and I told them that Souvanna Phouma was there and that my government had not responded to it, and I thought maybe it would be a good idea if they went over and had a chat with him, which they did.

I knew him, slightly. So I hung outside his door until he came out, and went over and spoke to him and sat down and had a chat with him.

Finally, Harriman arrived. Souvanna Phouma was on the way to the airport, so we dispatched Harriman out to the airport to catch Souvanna Phouma just as he was waiting for the plane to go off, and he did get to talk to him. But, you know, it was sort of a last-minute thing. Harriman later put great store in the fact that Souvanna Phouma was friendly towards us, but of course a lot of groundwork had been laid before that.

*Q: Well, this is about the time when Laos all of a sudden became the area of concentration of the early Kennedy administration, and particularly Averell Harriman. We're talking about 1961-ish, '62-ish.*

DIXON: Yes, that's right. But Harriman was awful goddamned slow in getting out there. We tried to say, you know, he's on his way, get out to the airport. And Harriman finally went, but he dawdled a lot before he went. I don't know, maybe he was tired or something. But I think he's a

pretty sorry character. I had a lot of contacts with him which were the same sort of thing.

Another thing happened which I thought was interesting there. There was an Indian who was said to be a stringer for the KGB.

*Q: The KGB being the Soviet secret police.*

DIXON: Yes. My opposite number was in fact the head of the KGB in Bangkok. He was the top KGB agent. I'll tell you about him in a minute.

This guy was very friendly with him, obviously very friendly with him, but he was also doing some sort of...I don't know what. He was doing some task for the KGB, our CIA people said.

*Q: This is the Indian you're talking about.*

DIXON: Yes. When we were in Delhi, I was approached by this Indian, who was fairly high in the Indian Civil Service, who said, "The Soviets are going to make an attempt to have the Lao delegation thrown out of the conference, saying that they don't represent the true government." And so forth. There had been a change in government. I've forgotten exactly what it was at that point, whether they had forced their way in or what it was.

In any case, I went and told Kampan Panya, "They are going to try to unseat your delegation and I think you ought to get prepared for it." I said, "I've gotten this through an Indian source, but it sounds fairly reliable to me."

The thing that was difficult, as far as I was concerned, was the fact that if he was the KGB setup, it seemed unlikely he would tell me the truth. But it just didn't fit at all, so I figured he must have had a spat with them or something and was going to get even with them. So I told Kampan Panya, and I sent a telegram back home, and we were all prepared when this thing came.

And, in fact, it came very suddenly. But we were all prepared; we had already talked to other delegations and so forth. And we very quickly turned it around. We had made enough contacts and so forth, so that they said okay, we... this and they seated the Lao delegation of Kampan Panya.

The other job that they gave me at the embassy was because there were a number of Soviets in ECAFE, in the staff as well as this guy Victor Leziovsky, who was the head of the KGB there. I was in constant contact with them. You know, this was still during the Cold War. They had one officer from the embassy who went to their parties and talked to them and reported on them and that sort of thing. So I was given the job, which was fairly easy because I'd see these people out at the ECAFE headquarters as well as other places. So I reported on the Soviets there.

I got in great, detailed discussions with them. They were very excited at that time by the fact that Khrushchev had come to power. They said he was the new Boris Gudonov; he was going to turn the government around and get rid of all this Communist crap and so forth and so on. Which they told me individually -- a number of them, even the deputy chief of mission, who I'd gotten very

friendly with in one of these discussions. It was perfectly clear they welcomed him and they wanted a reform in Russia and so forth and so on, and they had thought the Stalin days were over.

I did a fair amount of reporting on this and got a fairly good insight into how these Soviets, in this mission at least, which I think in different ways were representative of different runs of people in the Soviet Union, how they do things, how they think about things, and what they were hoping for and so forth.

Well, that about winds up what I did in Bangkok.

*Q: One thing, you were talking about your dealings with the Soviets. How did you work with the CIA on this? I mean, because I assume they would be very interested in what you had to say.*

DIXON: My deputy was a CIA type, and I worked very closely with him. Well, I reported. They didn't have much to say. They were pretty closed about it, but they got a little less closed. They didn't keep it into their chests. But they were, at first, not very informative. As I told them things, they began to sort of tell me about what was going on. My deputy, as a matter of fact, tried to get one of the Soviets to be subverted. And, well, a big to-do. The Soviets sent a note to the Secretary of State, objecting to his activity and so forth. And I think, for a while, they thought I was a CIA type. They all seemed to know each other well.

*Q: Well, you know, there are tee-shirts today in Washington which say: "KGB and CIA, together at last. We cover the world." But did you find that the CIA operation at that time, I mean, obviously the KGB and the CIA are in there, were they promoting what you were trying to promote? I mean, I'm talking about our CIA. Or were their activities sort of a hindrance to our trying to further the economic development in there?*

DIXON: They were trying to get things... For example, they wanted to build a model of the Mekong. Apparently, in deciding how a river's going to react, you can build a model and run water down it and one thing and another. The other thing is to do it by computer. You can do it by computer. The Soviets were prepared, through ECOSOC I think it was, to give the institute in Phnom Penh where they doing this work under ECAFE on the Mekong Authority, a computer model. I felt that if they did this, they'd be pouring more Soviets in there to run the thing and to do all this, and I figured what we ought to do was to try to beat them out on this. So I wrote the department about it. They reluctantly finally came along, and we did put something down there. But it was very difficult to get them to act on this.

However, with the Soviets, we were in contest with them. They also had an ECOSOC meeting there in which there was a great political to-do over seating delegations and objecting to people and God knows what, in which the Soviets showed their orientation pretty closely. We fought with them there.

In other things, we were cooperative. At this time, though, the Chinese and the Russians were being split asunder. I used to refer to the Chinese as their Chinese cousins, which used to irritate the hell out of the Russians. They didn't like that.

But I got along fairly well with them. And they were fairly open, after a while, about things, projects that they were interested in, projects that we were interested in. And we were pretty careful. You know, if it was a project that they could not really object to, we would discuss it with them. If it was something we'd think we'd get into competition, we didn't discuss it with them. But in general we were trying to find out as much as we could about what they were going to do, as well as to find out what they were particularly interested in, and try to warn our government about the things they wanted to do.

*Q: Did the early stages of our involvement in Vietnam play much of a role in what you were doing at that time?*

DIXON: Yes. I was up and down in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam quite a bit, as well as Australia, Indonesia, and Singapore, about various and sundry things. I figured, you know, what could we do to try to bring Vietnam on our side? We had this Mekong development. And, you know, we at that time were trying to have peace with the North Vietnamese. The war had not gotten to the stage that it later got onto, and it was still possible to do something about this.

I therefore wrote a dispatch recommending certain projects, which the North Vietnamese obviously couldn't participate in the Mekong thing, and suggested that we use these things as bait to try to interest them and join the Mekong, stopping the war in effect.

President Johnson used this basic idea in a speech at a college to propose this. But the Vietnamese would have nothing to do with it.

The other thing was that I knew the president of Vietnam. Also, was the guy, Wolf Vladijinsky, who was...

*Q: He was the very famous advisor both in Vietnam and in Japan, too.*

DIXON: Yes. I was up in Laos on special duty when the incursion came in from the north. Wolf was there then, I got to know him. And he got to telling me about how bad things were with Diem and his family and all of those secret organizations and so forth. Later, while I was in Vietnam, he introduced me to Diem. And I got into the conversation, saying, in effect, you know you ought to get rid of Madame Nhu.

*Q: Diem was the president, and Madame Nhu was his sister-in-law.*

DIXON: Yes. And I had occasion a couple of times after that to talk to him about it. He clearly was aware that it was a liability to him, but, on the other hand, he apparently seemed to think that all this organization and so forth that they had was really important to his support. There wasn't much I contributed to that.

There was some resentment against Diem. There was a rumor at an ECAFE conference that Diem had been deposed. The Vietnamese ambassador rushed over to me and said, "What is this? Have you heard?"

I said, "I don't know, I can go over to the embassy and find out if there's anything."

And I went down and found it wasn't true.

But they didn't know what the hell to do. They heard that somebody else was taking power. You know, they wanted to be on the right side. And a great, great to-do.

And finally, when we got this thing straightened out, he acted as though nothing had happened, but I think he was getting ready to try to throw his weight on the other side.

I went down on an inspection of the Mekong, and we went down to look at something in Cantho. There was of course fighting in there, but it wasn't very great.

*Q: This is in the Mekong Delta, Cantho.*

DIXON: Yes, and we took a look at this thing. We were riding in Jeeps, and there was an Army truck with some soldiers in it that sort of went with us. It was an area where there wasn't any fighting to speak of. But on the way back, somebody started firing, and they stopped that big truck. The driver said, you know, it made him nervous to sit there. And I said, "Well, I agree with you. I was in the Marine Corps, you don't ever let yourself get caught while you're just sitting like a duck somewhere. Either let's go back or let's go in to Cantho." So we just drove around that big truck -- with some difficulty, they didn't want us to, but we went on into town. They didn't get out of there for hours after that. But they sat there, of all stupid things. That was my only encounter with that down there.

While I was there, this incursion into Laos came. The Pathet Lao had come into the north there. They needed people up there and I went up. John Holt, who had inspected me in Rabat and thought very highly of my work, asked that I be assigned up there. And I stayed up there nine months. I drove back and forth to ECAFE things, and then went back when things were quiet.

But I did two things there. One was that we borrowed the United Nations mission to take a look and see what was going on. I had worked with UNSCOB on Greece, when I was the assistant Greek desk officer.

*Q: What was this?*

DIXON: United Nations Commission on the Balkans. And I knew generally how it was organized, so I explained to them, and we did the basic preparations to set up for a mission there. A guy named Jilliard, I think, who was from the U.N., finally came out there. But he didn't know much about this either.

We also had to see about getting aircraft that could get people up to that high level up there where this thing was going on. And I got the Naval attaché and we talked to the people in the Navy channel to sort of figure out what sort of plane we could use to go up there. We finally found the only kind of plane we could use. Helicopters wouldn't do very well. But the landing

place there was in the shape of a "U" cut out of a mountain. And you had to come in, turn around, and land on a very short strip. So that you could not get more than about two or three planes in at a time. The only plane we could use was a Canadian plane named something like a duck or something like that.

*Q: An Otter, I think. There's a Canadian plane called an Otter.*

DIXON: Otter, yes. And you could only take a few people up there. When we were organizing for this, the minister of defense asked that I come out and talk to him. I went in there and sat down and expected him to ask me a question. And he said, finally, "Well, what do we do?" And I explained to him how UNSCOB had been organized and what we ought to do, and that we ought to send people up there to take a look around, we ought to interview people and explain how the mission should work. And generally I worked on...

When the mission came, we had a great guy, a Japanese who was on the mission, who had been Mariel's handler in Istanbul during World War II. But he was an active guy and got out and did things. The son of the president of Tunisia was there, but we couldn't get him to do anything.

*Q: Bourguiba.*

DIXON: Bourguiba, Jr., yes. They were the two outstanding ones -- Bourguiba for not doing anything, and this Japanese, whose name I don't remember right now, who was very good and very active.

Anyway, they went up. We got the aircraft in and everything worked fine. And they did the interviewing and finally got up a pretty good report on it.

The other thing that I got involved with there was, there were two Gudden brothers who had an airplane, who rented their plane and flew commercial missions for people. They had been down to...I've forgotten where they'd gone to, but they had stopped, because they were low on gas, at a field they saw in Indonesia. Well, they landed there, and it was the CIA field that they were trying to build up, or outfit, to get rid of Sukarno. They had a terrible time with the Indonesians and, I guess, the CIA getting out of there. But they finally got out, and they got up as far as Laos and they ran out of money. They got a contract with a local guy, hauling something from Cambodia somewhere. They were just bags of things. They finally realized they were hauling opium. They refused to do it anymore. Don Corli, who was a Corsican living in Laos and running dope out of there, took over the planes. I went down to the Lao government and told them to give the planes back to the owners. And, after long representation, they finally did.

This Don Corli, however, was still doing a lot of things, and they were trying to find out who the hell was supporting this thing.

The Lao ambassador to India came there, went down to the Banc D'Indochine (the French Indochinese Bank), and did some transactions. I talked one night to somebody, and I was asking about him. Something made me think that he was somehow involved in this. So I went down to the Banc D'Indochine and talked to some people there. And I found out that the Indian

ambassador was sponsoring Don Corli and that he, of course, was very closely tied in with the prime minister.

This absolutely sent Horace Smith, who was the ambassador, wild, because he was the principal supporter of the Indian ambassador and apparently must be getting some rake-off from this thing that Don Corli was doing. And that explained why we had so much trouble in trying to get this thing straightened out. It was very interesting. But the CIA had been unable to find anything about it. And I guess it was just by accident, in talking to one of these Lao who said something that gave me the idea that he might be tied-in to the problem. And I must say that, for bankers, I was surprised they would tell me as much as they would tell about him.

**KENNETH MACCORMAC**  
**Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIA**  
**Bangkok (1960-1965)**

*Kenneth MacCormac was born in Cordova, Alaska in 1911. He graduated from the University of San Francisco in 1933 and served overseas in the US Army during World War II. After entering the State Department, MacCormac served in Seoul, Japan, and Thailand. In 1978 during his retirement Mr. MacCormac directed the Thai Fulbright Foundation. He was interviewed in 1989 by G. Lewis Schmidt.*

MACCORMAC: In 1960 I was assigned to Bangkok, Thailand. I had six months of Thai language training at Foreign Service Institute, and then I continued in Thai language training all the time I was in Thailand. As you know, it's a difficult language. Languages are difficult for me, anyway.

*Q: They are for me, too.*

MACCORMAC: I had to spend a lot of time at it. But it was worthwhile. I was assigned as deputy PAO at that time to Bangkok. The public affairs officer was Howard Garnish, with whom I'm still in contact and look forward to seeing whenever I go to Washington. He and his wife were very, very kind to me.

One of the interesting things, as far as I'm concerned, in Thailand was my association with the Siam Society. Through the Siam Society, which is a cultural organization which has been going in Bangkok since 1904, I came in contact and met practically all of the cultural leaders in Thailand, including the king and queen. This was helpful in many, many ways. My great and good friend in the Siam Society was Prince Dhani, who was the king's uncle, a delightful man who was then in his sixties. His grandmother was one of the consorts of King Monkut. When Prince Dhani was a boy, he was raised in the grand palace and carried around until he was 13. When he was 13, he was sent to Rugby in England for an education, and stayed in England for many years. He's was a graduate of Cambridge, and he spoke flawless English in a rather Victorian manner. He wrote beautifully, a highly educated man. He had been under the absolute

monarchy, at one time the minister of education. As I say, through Prince Dhani I got to know some of the cultural leaders and, as a matter of fact, some of the cultural leaders became political leaders, among them Kukrit Parnoj.

A good deal could be done through personal acquaintance with the nobility and aristocracy. Of course, the king in Thailand is greatly revered, as is his wife. Among my other acquaintances at that time was Prince Wan, also a delightful man, English educated, of the old school. When I knew him, he was rector of Tamasat University, and at one time he became prime minister. Then I remember another time somebody wanted an interview with him, and for some reason or other, I was the only one in the embassy who knew him.

This was during the time U. Alexis Johnson was the ambassador, and he was followed by Ken Young, ambassador to Thailand. It was shortly following Ken Young's appointment there that we had the visit of the Vice President, Lyndon Johnson.

Vice President Lyndon Johnson Visits Bangkok!

*Q: Which I understand was something of a disaster.*

MACCORMAC: Something of a disaster. Right. (Laughs)

*Q: Would you care to make a few remarks about that? I think it would be very interesting to get your impressions and your report of what happened.*

MACCORMAC: I found it was very difficult to deal with the Vice President's party. We had been planning at that time -- "we," that is USIA. I was Acting PAO at that time because Howard Garnish was on home leave. We had been planning a reception at the Erawan Hotel for the Thai Press Association, which was celebrating its 50th anniversary. We had invitations out, and it was going to be a big gala affair of which we, USIS, were the host. We did not know at the time that Lyndon Johnson had refused the Thais' offer of one of the palaces in which to live while he was in Bangkok, and he moved into the Erawan Hotel, where we were having our reception. I thought as long as he was going to be in the hotel, he might like to meet the Thai Press Association. So I phoned to members of his party in Taipei and in Hong Kong, and asked if the Vice President would be willing or interested in meeting with the Thai Press Association in his hotel, and was assured that he would be happy to. So all was laid on.

Our party was going on and on and on downstairs, and I was waiting for the Vice President to come down. The party was half over and he wasn't there, so I asked somebody to go up and get him or see if they could coax him down. It was Carl Rowan. Remember Carl Rowan?

*Q: He was the director.*

MACCORMAC: He was the director of the Agency at that time. Carl went upstairs. After a funny story that I can't record, he came down and told the story about the Vice President. Anyway the Vice President eventually came down and he stayed about half an hour and talked to the Thai Press. It was a big success as far as that went. But I was getting gray hair, wondering if

he was coming to the party at all.

*Q: At this point I'd like to ask you why did he refuse to stay in one of the palaces?*

MACCORMAC: I think he refused to stay in the Phitsanolk House because of security reasons. That's the story they gave, anyway. But it took Bangkok a long time to get over the visit of Lyndon Johnson.

*Q: There was one story going around when I got there, which may be apocryphal, said that he moved into the mansion, didn't like the drapes, and asked the imperial household to change the drapes.*

MACCORMAC: It's a story that could have happened, knowing what he subjected the post to. But I never heard that story. I don't know whether it's true or not. He was a difficult man to please, anyway. That was 1963.

*Q: Your tour was up in 1965.*

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MACCORMAC: I was getting old, and I knew that I would have to retire in 1971, so I asked to be returned to Thailand. An opening came up as the cultural affairs officer, and I was assigned back to Bangkok as cultural affairs officer.

*Q: You replaced Frank Tenny.*

MACCORMAC: I replaced Frank Tenny. I met Frank Tenny last week at Greg Henderson's memorial service in Cambridge.

It was a job I liked, back among old friends. I got my old house back again. One of the perks in Bangkok was a beautiful old Chinese house which I had leased when I first got there in 1960, on the same street as the USIA office, and it was a great place for entertaining. It was wide open, lots of room, lots of space. I had a number one, which is known as the person in charge of your household, from 1960. Her name was Foo. Foo ran his house with an iron hand.

*Q: Was she Chinese?*

MACCORMAC: Foo was a Vietnamese, totally uneducated, although she could speak five languages, Vietnamese, Lao, French, Thai, and English. The reason she wanted to work for me, because there was a school nearby she wanted her three children to go to. This little lady who had never been to school in her life arranged that her children got into this very good school near where I lived, and all three of them went on to the university. I'm still in touch with her.

*Q: Did they go to the university in Thailand?*

MACCORMAC: The university in Thailand. Right.

*Q: Tomasat or Chulalongkorn*

MACCORMAC: Chulalongkorn.

*Q: Was Phil Damon in Thailand when you were there? Did he return in 1970 or '71?*

MACCORMAC: Yes. Philip Damon, whom I'd known in my German days in Germany, and who had married a delightful French girl who came with the ballet from Nice to Munich, he was in Bangkok when I got there. Phil and Genevieve Damon were very close to the king and queen. They were both fluent in French, and Phil was a big, outgoing guy, a great golfer, but sadly enough, he contracted multiple sclerosis, and he was back in Washington when this developed. He always thought if he could get back to Thailand, he'd get better, but, of course, he didn't. Through agency help, he was brought back to Thailand as an employee without compensation, I think it was called. There he had the use of the APO and the commissary. The king and queen kept him in Chulalongkorn hospital with day and night nurses for the first year he was there, Phil is still living. I go to see him whenever I go to Bangkok. He's totally bedridden. I think he's nearly blind. His only source of happiness is the books on records which he gets from the Library of Congress.

*Q: Is his association with the king terminated now?*

MACCORMAC: No. The associations with the king and queen are still strong. As a matter of fact, his wife Genevieve, is a great friend of the Queen, and Genevieve is the only non-Thai that I know of who has been given a title by the king. She's now known as Khun Ying Damon. She runs a small ballet school, and she's been a marvelous, marvelous wife to Philip Damon, who has had this terrible affliction. His three daughters are now married and living in Thailand.

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MACCORMAC: One of the first things I did when I first got to Thailand in 1960, was to deliver a check of \$280,000 to the American University Alumni Association, AUA, to build an AUA language center. All the preparatory work had been done by the people who preceded me, but the check just happened to come when I was there. To make a long story short, we got crown land on which to build the AUA building, and I still have pictures of it. It was on three old fish ponds on a very long, long lot, but in a good location. We moved the AUA center, finally, when it was built, from Sarankom Palace, way down the river on the other side of town, to the new location. It's been a big and going concern ever since. When I was last in Thailand, the AUA center was operating from 7:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night, teaching English to Thai. This is something they want, and AUA knows how to do it. Small classes, teaching spoken English. By the time the pupils are through one year of this course, they can really speak English. As a matter of fact, we moved the USIS library and cultural center from Patpong Road, which had become infamous, to the AUA center, and it's now a USIS center, as well as the American University Alumni Association.

*Q: When I was there, we closed the American library and we moved all the books, donated them to the center. Is that the move to which you are referring?*

MACCORMAC: That's right, yes. After the building of the AUA classrooms, another grant was made to build the large library in front of the AUA classroom building, and it's one of the best libraries in Thailand.

*Q: When you said you acquired the crown property, what did we do, pay the crown for it? Or did they donate it?*

MACCORMAC: It was on a long-term lease, which is a nominal amount. I forget the amount which we pay the crown property division every year.

*Q: So all the major grant went to the construction.*

MACCORMAC: The major grant went to the construction of the building. Right. There are 35 classrooms, and it's amazing to see them all in use, all the time. The success, of course, was the use of American teachers. We used only American teachers, even though those who had never taught before, we taught them how to teach.

*Q: You were teaching English with an American accent and American vocabulary.*

MACCORMAC: Precisely. As a matter of fact, some of our colleagues in Australia, New Zealand, and England were sort of miffed that we wouldn't use them, but we always insisted on using Americans.

Ambassador Johnson was one of the firm backers of the AUA and all of its activities. I'll always remember him saying, in a country team meeting, "I never put pressure on people to participate in social events, but if there are any events at the AUA center, I want you there." It was very well attended by Americans. Usually there was an annual show put on by the AUA membership, to which the king and queen came. There were lectures, films, big auditoriums. It's a very impressive and worthwhile institution.

*Q: I've heard people say they think that the AUA, which is, in fact, our cultural center in Bangkok, probably did more for American-Thai relationships than all the rest of the USIS programs.*

MACCORMAC: I think there's no question about it. It's something we know how to do, something the Thai wanted, both in teaching of English, use of the library, and use of the film center, lecture halls, all that sort of thing.

*Q: Who was directing the center during the time you were there as CAO?*

MACCORMAC: Gordon Schneider was director of the language center when I first got to Bangkok, and he was the one instrumental in the move to the new location. He was followed by Milton Leavitt, who had two tours as director of AUA. I remember when we were moving the

USIA cultural center to AUA, there was some hesitancy on the part of the board of directors, which was headed by a Thai, Phra Bisal Sukhumvit who is still living. He didn't want to have an American propaganda institution. So Leavitt went over all the programs we had at our own cultural center the preceding year, and convinced Phra Bisal that it was not going to be, and never would be, an American "propaganda" center. The programs we put on there over the years are very, very well received by the Thai.

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MACCORMAC: I retired in July of 1971. Then in 1977, I received a telephone call from the Thailand Fulbright Foundation, asking me if I'd come back for two years to direct the Fulbright Foundation in Thailand. I was only too happy to go back, and so I spent '78 and '79 back in Thailand as the director of the Fulbright Foundation, working with a lot of people whom I'd known in the past. For instance, one of our early grantees, Dr. Qasim, was then rector of Chulalongkorn University. A lot of the young Thai we'd sent in the early sixties for advanced degrees to the United States had come back and were in very prominent education and cultural positions in Thailand. So it was easy to deal with them.

We had good support from the department, not because we were such a good foundation, but because no money could be spent in Burma, Laos, or Cambodia. So we had extra money for the Fulbright Foundation in Thailand, and we usually sent 30 or 40 graduate students to the United States every year. Most of them came back with doctorates.

*Q: When you were there on your first tour, I imagine there probably was not much student agitation, but I know that at the time that I was approaching the end of my tour, the students had become quite activist, and a number of them were getting into left-wing organizations. Did you have much trouble with that during your last tour there?*

MACCORMAC: I never did at all, no. I was very much surprised to read and learn about these student riots and uprising after I'd been away from Thailand. To me, it was so un-Thai to have this open rebellion against authority. But nothing like that ever happened while I was there.

*Q: You mentioned a little earlier that a number of the people who had been patrons and even, perhaps, students at the AUA, subsequently went out and became prominent people not only in the Thai educational scene, but also in the political field. Can you name a couple of them in the political arena? Were these the Pramoj brothers?*

MACCORMAC: The two Pramoj brothers were particularly influential in the political field. Kukrit became Prime Minister of Thailand. He is his own man and quite a mercurial man, sometimes a great friend, sometimes a great enemy of the United States, was manager, owner, and publisher of the most prominent newspaper in Thailand. The Siam Rath, a paper that everyone reads. He was also the man who played the part of the prime minister in the film, "The Ugly American." We journeyed to the United States on the same plane one time, and I remember, I think it was during the time when he was doing this film, I addressed him as Mr. Prime Minister, in jest, never thinking he would really be prime minister again one day. His brother, an older brother, Seni, had been the Thai minister to the United States in Washington at

the time of the Japanese invasion of Thailand, at the time when Thailand declared war on the United States. But we were never at war with Thailand because Seni refused to deliver the Thai declaration to the Government of the United States.

**GEORGE M. BARBIS**  
**Analyst, Thailand and Burma, INR**  
**Washington, DC (1961-1963)**

*Mr. Barbis was born in California and raised there and in Greece. He graduated from the University of California and served in the US Army in WWII. In 1954 he entered the Foreign Service and was posted to Teheran, Iran as Economic Officer. His other overseas assignments included postings in Thailand, Korea, France, Belgium and Greece, primarily in the Political and Economic fields. Mr. Barbis served on the US Delegation to the United Nations (1973-1975). His Washington assignments involved him in Southeast Asia matters and the US military. Mr. Barbis is a graduate of the National War College. Mr. Barbis was interviewed by Mr. Raymond C. Ewing in 1996.*

BARBIS: But, that job didn't last long because I was affected by another reduction in force program in the government and the position I occupied was abolished. So, suddenly I had to find a job. A friend ran into a friend and mentioned that I was looking for a job and I ended up in INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] in the Far East region [RFE], assigned as the analyst for Thailand and Burma. The Ne Win coup in Burma occurred my first weekend there and Dr. Spinks, who headed RFE, called me in and we went to the safe, which I didn't know how to open yet, opened it and looked in the biographic files. This was soon after the responsibility for biographic files and reporting had been transferred from the Department to CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. But, that was no excuse, the file on Ne Win was empty. I knew even less, although I lived near the Burma border and one of my main interests in Chiang Mai had been to follow [cross border] developments and activities, I did not follow the Burmese political situation in detail. So, I had very little background that qualified me to write the brief for the Secretary on this coup. But, somehow with Dr. Spinks' assistance we managed to produce a paper that was acceptable.

*Q: Had you ever been to Rangoon?*

BARBIS: I had never been to Rangoon. The closest I got was the border in northwestern Thailand.

I was there for several months when the analyst for Laos was coming up for transfer, Bob Barrett, and he suggested that I was the logical person in the office at the time to succeed him. Of course, Bob was anxious to find a successor so he could move on. In any event, I became the Laos analyst. I think I dropped Burma but kept Thailand, but I was primarily on Laos which was heating up at that time and becoming an important issue in American policy. In that job I worked very closely with my counterparts in the army intelligence service (AIS) and, of course, at the

CIA.

It was some months later, maybe more than a year, after I had become pretty knowledgeable and pretty deeply involved in Lao affairs and I can remember having to go in on weekends frequently. There was one particular time when Dr. Spinks took me up to brief Secretary Rusk on a Sunday afternoon and he was kind of relaxed, having a high ball with his coat off, etc. He had a big map on his desk and I was showing him how some of the intelligence reports had been exaggerated and tried to give him a true picture of the situation, which was threatening but not at the critical stage that some reports were suggesting. For this I was indebted to a major in army intelligence who kept me very well informed on the details of the order of battle and all that kind of thing. In any event, I remember to my horror as I was moving around and pointing things out on the map I hit and almost upset Secretary Rusk's high ball. Fortunately I retrieved it before it spilled all over the map.

**FREDERICK Z. BROWN**  
**Intelligence Officer, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization**  
**Bangkok (1962-1964)**

*Frederick Z. Brown was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania in 1928. He joined the Foreign Service in 1958. His career included posts in France, Thailand, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Cyprus. Mr. Brown was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: Your next assignment was somewhat out of this world. You went to Thailand.*

BROWN: Something happened on the way to Thailand. At one of my farewell parties, and I can remember exactly just what one it was, in Cap d'Ailles or Menton, it was a lobster. It was a lovely farewell dinner, as only the people in the Cote D'Azur can offer. Champagne and so on. It was either a lobster or a soupe de pistou, a bouillabaisse, which must have been hepatic. Because 21 days after that party, I came down with hepatitis. I spent from July of 1962 until November of 1962 with a very severe case of hepatitis, which delayed my arrival in Bangkok. I was slated to be staff aide to the ambassador in Bangkok, who at that time was Kenneth Todd Young, since deceased. Father of Steve Young who ended up being one of my close colleagues of Vietnam a number of years later. In any event, by the time I got to Bangkok, that position was filled, and I was shunted over to the civilian staff of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, where I was in the intelligence business. What I did was write basically black propaganda, anti-communist propaganda for use in various SEATO publications as part of the paper war conducted by SEATO against Beijing and Moscow. My job was to work with Pakistanis, New Zealanders, Australians, French, Filipinos and do the biweekly background papers and reports of an unclassified nature that were placed in universities and opinion influential locations in an effort to point out how bad the communists were. In retrospect that was a fatuous, rather nonsensical activity. In fact SEATO had very little reason for existence as an operating entity even then.

*Q: How did you see it at the time?*

BROWN: At the time I saw it as fatuous. I did. I saw no point in what I was doing.

*Q: How about your fellow officers?*

BROWN: There were only two or three American assigned to the international staff. Deliberately. The head of the international staff at that time was Nai Pot Sarasin, who was a distinguished Thai political figure. He was succeeded by a Filipino general, Vargas, who was nowhere near as effective. But the international staff was generally made up of other countries who were seeking a cushy assignment. Basically, my American colleague who was Françoise Queneau, who had been assigned to Laos, later assigned to Vietnam; Françoise and I did most of the writing of this biweekly what ever it was, intelligence report. The rest of the people did very little. My recollection is that these were political assignments from Manila, from Canberra, wherever. The international civilian staff at SEATO Headquarters was basically there on holiday.

*Q: Did the embassy pay much attention to you?*

BROWN: They paid as much attention to me as I wanted. Every week I went over to the political section and read the classified material. They kept a safe for me. I would go over there and I would read it. And in some cases I would take that information and rework it into the SEATO documents that I did. I certainly was well treated at the lower level of the embassy. But to be perfectly honest with you, I was terribly highly motivated in a professional sense to get in with the embassy and to do one thing or another. I am being very frank about this. What I was interested in was Thai culture and getting to know Thailand and having a good time. Because Thailand in the early sixties, for a bachelor, was really like pig heaven. I must say I took advantage of that. I was permitted to teach English at Thammasat University by the director general of SEATO so I did that virtually every morning. Spent some time there. I was a member of the Royal Bangkok Sports Club, so I spent time there in the afternoon, polishing my tennis. I had access to both the SEATO commissary and the American commissary. It was good living. I must say that, to my regret, I did not look upon that time as a way to sort of build my career. Because it was an offbeat assignment. It was not a good assignment for a young foreign service officer who was supposed to be up and coming. The fact that I was picked to be staff aide to the ambassador was indicative of sort of fast track assignment. I don't know. I lived it up. I had a very good time, traveling around the countryside in the company of an officer with whom I came into the foreign service, Albert A. Francis who ended up being one of the two brilliant Thai language officers in the foreign service. Did you ever know Al?

*Q: No I didn't.*

BROWN: But that is what I did. I was offered a chance to go to Thai language training out of SEATO. I declined that because I had applied for Russian language training.

My assignment ended early. I left after eighteen months in Thailand. I left in June of 1964 to go to Russian language training. Because in the back of my mind I always had this desire to be a Soviet specialist.

**ALFRED PUHAN**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1962-1964)**

*Ambassador Alfred Puhan was born in Marianburg, Germany, (now Poland) of an American father raised primarily in Illinois. He was educated at Oberlin College, the University of Cincinnati and Columbia University. During World War II he was employed in radio broadcasting, first by the British Broadcasting Company and later by the Voice of America. In 1953 he joined the Foreign Service, serving in Vienna and in Washington, where he served as Executive Director of the European Bureau and Head of the Office of German Affairs. In 1969 he became US Ambassador to Hungary and served there until 1973. Ambassador Puhan was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1990.*

PUHAN: So this was to be a substantive job. But to my astonishment when I got back I was asked to go to Bangkok as DCM. The reason I think was that we had a political ambassador there and they wanted someone to ride herd on him which is very difficult for a DCM to do.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

PUHAN: It was Kenneth Young.

*Q: He was a pretty good ambassador.*

PUHAN: Kenneth Young was a friend of Chester Bowles. He had some credentials for being out there. His problem was—he's dead now as you know—his problem, I think, was mainly that he sort of, well, I've never seen any ambassador call as many press conferences as Kenneth Young. And during his press conferences he had his small children climbing all over him with Thai journalists around. He never could keep an appointment on time. I immediately voiced some objection to going there when it was proposed to me by saying, well, I don't know anything about the country and it's not my field. And I was told, well, that's all right. We want you to take over there and Averell Harriman wants this done.

Well, Kenneth Young was in Washington and I got an appointment with him. And the first question he asked me was why do you want to go to Bangkok? And I said, I don't. I said, I want to go to Belgrade where I know something about the area. I don't know anything about Bangkok.

*Q: Oh, you mean you never got to Belgrade?*

PUHAN: Never got to Belgrade, no.

*Q: Oh, so this came up in lieu thereof.*

PUHAN: They just changed it after I had been told, yes, get ready. My wife had even measured for curtains in Belgrade and the house. Anyway, I went to Kenneth Young, who liked my frankness and I think was relieved that I was not an expert on Southeast Asian affairs. We got along very well. And as you may remember, he and his wife and my wife all had hepatitis at the same time and I was Chargé. He never returned. His case was complicated by some gastrointestinal ailment and I was Chargé for six, seven months in Bangkok. So you see after that, of course, then came Director of the Office of German Affairs and then finally Ambassador to Budapest. So by the time I finished my job as the Executive Director I was in a substantive job, but known as a man who could also administer. I was sent out by Katzenbach, for example, to implement both the BALPA (balance of payments reduction program) and OPRED (overseas personnel reductions) programs. You remember those cutbacks?

*Q: Yes, I remember those cutbacks.*

PUHAN: I was sent out to do those because, I guess, of my administrative experience.

*Q: What years was it that you were in Bangkok?*

PUHAN: '62 to '64.

*Q: '62 to '64.*

PUHAN: Yes.

*Q: I guess there was not a coup at that particular time was there?*

PUHAN: No, there was not.

*Q: And there'd been one not too long before that. And the next one came in the early '70s.*

PUHAN: Yes, Sarit was in power when I was there and died in bed while I was there. He was succeeded by Kittikachorn.

*Q: Thanom.*

PUHAN: Thanom Kittikachorn, yes.

*Q: He was the Premier when I was there.*

PUHAN: Yes, very genial man. And Thanat Khoman was the shrewd foreign minister. I got along with him very well.

*Q: I got along with him very well too.*

PUHAN: Yeah.

*Q: What would you think or what would you consider to have been the principal political developments in Thailand during your period there as far as the Thai government itself was concerned?*

PUHAN: Well, as far as the Thai government was concerned I think the principal development was already in progress when I got there. That, as you know, you were there, Thailand had until World War II a policy of neutrality. All the roads out of Thailand ended at the border and they had nothing to do with the outside world. And they kept pitting France and Britain against each other. Then when the Japanese came in there and were ousted they finally opted to go with the Americans. When I was there the buildup for the subsequent war in Vietnam was beginning. I knew General Harkens, Paul Harkens, who was the predecessor of Westmoreland. And I knew Westmoreland. They used to come to Bangkok and sit in my office. I used to have long conversations with them. That was the principal development.

I think one of the problems in Thailand was that the capital was full of talented people, Thais, as you know, but none of these talented people wanted to go out and work in the boondocks. So the communists agents could go in there and tell the people that when we take over you won't see the tax collector, you see, and this was a real danger that was developing in Thailand. But I think Thailand having opted to ally itself with the United States caused some regrets later on in Thailand.

*Q: Did Graham Martin come in as ambassador before you left? Or had you left by the time?*

PUHAN: No, he came in. He came in after this long hiatus when I was Chargé. He came in in the Fall of 1963 or maybe October, November. In any event, I spent six or seven months with him.

**EDWARD E. MASTERS**  
**Desk Officer, Thailand Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1962-1964)**

**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1971-1975)**

*Edward E. Masters was born in Ohio in 1924. He graduated from George Washington University in 1948 and from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1949. He served in the U.S. Army for three years and then joined the Foreign Service in 1950. His overseas postings included Germany, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh. Mr. Masters was interviewed on March 14, 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Then pushing ahead, you had economic training from 1961 to 1962, and then you moved to a desk, on Thai affairs, from '62 to '64.*

MASTERS: Yes, I had the great, good fortune -- I guess because I had been in the Far East part of INR, and had gotten to know some of the people in FE (the Far East Bureau) -- to switch over first as the number two on the Thailand desk, under an FSO named Clinton Swayze, who fortunately was not very active; so it enabled me to play an important role. And when he left -- I guess he retired right after that -- I forget where he moved on to. And then I took over as Officer in Charge of Thailand Affairs.

*Q: What were our principal concerns, at that time, with Thailand?*

MASTERS: Economic development, I suppose was the major one, and related to this was the counter-insurgency program. I spent an awful lot of my time working on AID programs -- PL 480; helping the Thai to develop programs to train people, and so forth. And of course, I spent a lot of time fighting the U.S. bureaucracy, because that was a time when a lot of attention was focusing on Southeast Asia, and again, authority was -- power was tending, I thought, to drift away from the State Department.

So one of the first things I did, after I became OIC, was to set up what I called a Working Group on Thailand, with me as chairman; and including the people working on Thailand, handling Thai affairs, from all the key departments of the government. We had two from the Pentagon -- one from ISA, and one from the Joint Chiefs. We had a CIA fellow, AID, USIA. I don't remember whether I left anybody out or not, but anyhow, we got them all in. We met -- initially -- about once a week. Then it later became unnecessary to meet so often. But it was a way, I felt, of putting State more in the driver's seat; and ensuring that we had an overall, consistent policy toward Thailand.

*Q: This obviously makes sense, but you say you had to institute this. In other words, one -- it came as an initiative, rather than an overall order that you should have these working groups, I take it?*

MASTERS: There may have been others in the Department -- I wasn't aware of them. But it seemed to me that this was a way to do it, instead of dealing bilaterally with all of these people, and them dealing bilaterally with each other -- was to get us all in the same room. Sort of like the country team in the field.

*Q: Well, did you have any problems putting this together? You know, sometimes there's the inherent reluctance of a bureaucracy to deal with other elements.*

MASTERS: No, I felt that it was welcomed. My view has always been that when State asserts leadership, by and large, the other agencies will respond. I think the real problem is when State doesn't assert itself. I think the others are looking for leadership; they're looking for coordination. Now that doesn't mean we all agreed. We had some god-awful fights in this working group, but at least we got together and talked about it.

*Q: And you could get the cross feelings, rather than have to fight each battle individually, and then go off and fight it all over. All the cards were on the table.*

MASTERS: That's right. Exactly. Somewhat related to that -- you were asking about the big issues. Of course, counterinsurgency -- very early on in the Kennedy administration -- became a big issue. And Thailand, of course, was very prominent in the that role, particularly through the Border Patrol Police. We spent a great deal of time on the BPP (Border Patrol Police).

*Q: These are the Thai Border Patrol Police?*

MASTERS: The Thai Border Police, that's right. The idea was to strengthen the BPP to at least reduce, if not eliminate, the infiltration of Communists into Thailand.

*Q: They were coming from where?*

MASTERS: Largely through Thailand's border with Laos, but also to a certain extent, through the Cambodian border.

*Q: But basically Vietnamese?*

MASTERS: Basically from Vietnam; yes, basically they were Vietnamese. Or they were Thai who had been taken out; trained in Hanoi, maybe in China, and then reinjected.

And of course, there were high-level government groups working on that problem. I know occasionally I would have to go up and meet with -- I don't remember the name of it anymore -- it was a group chaired by Maxwell Taylor that included Robert Kennedy -- very top-level. I would appear before them periodically, and we'd talk about the BPP; we'd talk about other counterinsurgency programs for Thailand. And they got right down into the nitty-gritty of it.

*Q: There was the feeling that if we had the proper training, and the proper people on the ground, that this could be contained.*

MASTERS: That's right, exactly. But we recognized at the time that it wasn't only beefing up the security forces; that steps had to be taken to improve the living conditions of the Thai people, to reduce the vulnerabilities, also. So we had good programs. At least I think they were good programs, on community development, and helping to expand the base of the Thai economy.

It had happened before my time there, but one example -- and I think we benefited from it -- was the building of the Friendship Highway, up to the northeast of Thailand; from Bangkok, up into the northeast.

The northeast, we considered -- and I think certainly the Thai agreed -- to be the most vulnerable area. It's a dry area -- poor soil, much more poverty there than in the rest of Thailand. And this highway helped to open up the northeast.

And accompanying that, different crops were introduced: corn, for example -- I was told that an AID officer, traveling up this new highway, looked out over the terrain, and said, "Gosh, it looks to me like corn would grow here." Anyhow, corn was introduced. It was tremendously successful, and the result was that the Thai pretty well knocked us out of the Japanese market for

corn. (Laughs) But it was a real boon to Thailand. It gave them another foreign exchange earner, and it brought some more money back into the northeast.

*Q: Then you went to Bangkok, from 1971 to '75, as Deputy Chief of Mission. You had two ambassadors there.*

MASTERS: I had three.

*Q: Three? Leonard Unger, until '73. And then William Kintner.*

MASTERS: Bill Kintner came.

*Q: And then who?*

MASTERS: Charles Whitehouse -- Charlie Whitehouse; the last year was Charlie Whitehouse.

*Q: How did they use you as DCM?*

MASTERS: Gosh, that's a tough question. (Laughs) All three of them used me very heavily. It's a little bit of a problem, maybe, to have three ambassadors in a five-year period. But all three were good, and all three gave me a lot of scope, because there was a hell of a lot going on in Thailand at that point.

One thing I did was to coordinate the drug program. That was a huge program. Two aspects of it: one was working on drug abuse among the large American community.

*Q: This was a major problem, I know, in the school there, and all this.*

MASTERS: That's true. There were -- I think it was five students -- Americans -- who died of drug overdose in Thailand. We had problems of drug abuse -- addiction, heroine -- in kids as young as 10 to 12 years old. You could buy pure heroin for your lunch money in Bangkok. It was available everywhere. And these kids didn't know what they were getting into. So we had that side of the problem.

Then we had the interdiction -- the effort to stop the flow of heroin out of the Golden Triangle, through Thailand, and out to foreign markets -- largely U.S. I coordinated both of those program; that took a fair amount of time.

*Q: How did you find working with the other agencies -- the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the CIA, and all? These are usually rather hard-headed, hard-charging organizations, and often don't work well in the complexities of an international situation. Did you find problems there or not?*

MASTERS: Oh, we had problems, but I think -- I always felt they were worked out satisfactorily. Again, we had a group that met frequently, and it included the agencies you mentioned; also, customs, which was involved in it. AID was involved equally in -- well,

initially in supporting the police, until we were prevented from doing that; then in helping develop alternative sources of income for the villagers who had been growing opium. But I think it worked reasonably well. But was it a success? Not really.

In our most optimistic moments, I would guess we may have interdicted ten percent of the opium and heroin coming down through Thailand. It's like here; there's so much money to be made, that if you block off one route, it comes out some other way. And I was convinced at that time, and in fact still am, that the problem really has got to be tackled in this country. I'm not saying we shouldn't do anything overseas; we should continue to do what we can, partly to help those countries themselves reduce the availability of drugs. But that's not the answer here.

We did a lot of work with the U.S. military, and of course, at that time we had five air bases, and some Army units in Thailand. A lot of the bombing of Vietnam came out of the Thai bases. So I did a lot of the liaison with General Kriangsak, who was the head of a little unit that had been created within the Thai military to handle the relations with the Americans. It was a little bit of a throwback to what I'd been doing in Germany, god what, 20-25 years earlier, although with much higher stakes. Kriangsak, incidentally, went on to become prime minister, although this was a surprise since he was a staff officer.

I spent a lot of time working with him on issues all the way from a brawl in a bar where G.I.s beat up on some Thai, to moving a major air unit; or expanding a base, or what have you. And it was an interesting . . . He was good, he was helpful, he always extracted a price for Thailand, which is understandable. Whatever we were going to do, it had to have a little something in it for Thailand; not corruption, but if we were building a runway, we'd also have to pave a road, or something. It worked out satisfactorily. So that was another major effort.

Of course, since I was there for the whole five years, and ambassadors came and went, I kind of became the point of continuity for the Thai, which was good and bad; in a sense, it was good that -- remember, the Thai had known me, and I think fortunately, had a favorable impression when I was running the Thai desk in the '60s. And then I came out there as DCM, and it was like old home week again. So they tended to gravitate to me, particularly after Len Unger left; Len had long experience in Thailand, and he was very highly regarded.

It was good that the Thai felt they had a place to come; but it was a little bit difficult, I found, in my relations with my ambassadors.

*Q: I'm sure. This is one of the reasons why often a DCM is kept only for a relatively short time, and then moved on. The idea is to leave the ambassador (inaudible). How did you evaluate Charles Whitehouse, who's again, one of those rather pro-counsels of our Vietnam era?*

MASTERS: I had known Charlie quite well. As you probably know, he was ambassador -- before Thailand -- was ambassador in Laos. And of course, we had a lot of interaction back and forth between the two missions. I thought Charlie was a good choice. Yes, he had been a province advisor -- or whatever it was -- in Vietnam. But I felt that he had a good understanding of Thailand, and how you had to operate in that country. I was with him for one year. He arrived in difficult circumstances. I was chargé during the fall of Saigon; we were between ambassadors

then. It was a god-awful mess.

*Q: How did that play out in Thailand? What did the Thais see as this was going?*

MASTERS: Well, the Thai went into a total panic over it. In effect, we had lost the war, and they were aligned with us. We were running a lot of the war out of Thailand, and through Thailand, and with Thailand. And they saw us being defeated, and they were in a state of panic.

They don't like the Vietnamese anyhow; historically, their relationship is very bad. They were worried about an aggressive Vietnam, an expanding Vietnam, a communist Vietnam. And there were some elements in the Thai government at that time that wanted to move very quickly to a neutral position. There were even some who thought, "We better strike a deal with these guys in Hanoi, no matter what the price." But fortunately, they didn't.

It put us in a difficult spot; we had some very difficult negotiations with them. Some elements in Washington wanted to keep at least something on the bases that we had there. The Thai refused; I think the Thai were right. It was better for us to get out of there, and get out of those bases; let the Thai work it out with Hanoi in their own way. And this was what I was recommending at the time -- which they did, and as indeed we thought they would. The result was that I think the U.S. relationship with Thailand came out much stronger after this interim period.

But the point I was going to make was -- of course we had been through this traumatic experience. Saigon had fallen. The refugees started pouring into Thailand; this was at the very beginning of the refugee problem. Neither we nor the Thai were equipped to handle them. Our embassy in Phnom Penh had fallen. John Gunther Dean came into Thailand with his entourage, and they thought that they were going to continue to operate as an embassy in exile in Thailand. I told them no way; John and I had some working out to do, because he let me know very quickly that he was an ambassador, and I was a chargé. But I had to let him know that it was my country and not his. (Laughs)

*Q: You were saying that John Gunther Dean wanted to more or less take things over.*

MASTERS: Yes, well he thought, at the very least, that he would continue to run -- in Thailand - - a mission, which would be running our relations with Cambodia, and maybe ultimately with Thailand, too, for that matter. But we felt, in Bangkok, that the Cambodian thing was finished, we were out, and there weren't going to be any diplomatic relations with Cambodia.

For example, John wanted to set up his own independent reporting channel, and I told him no way. And we had -- we've ended up friends, and I have high regard for John. I could understand. He'd gone through a terrible experience as ambassador in Phnom Penh; had seen the country fall around him; had been evacuated by helicopter. And after a few weeks things calmed down. Washington supported me, as I felt they had to.

*Q: Yes, in a way, when push comes to shove, there's nothing they can do about that.*

MASTERS: I knew that the Thai didn't want any U.S. element in Thailand that had something to

do with Cambodia -- absolutely not. They didn't.

*Q: Let me ask a question. You say there was some thought of maintaining our bases in Thailand?*

MASTERS: Yes.

*Q: What was the rationale for this?*

MASTERS: Well, it was largely to keep them -- you know the military -- they are great contingency planners. And they wanted to keep these bases. After all, they are super bases. We had put a lot of money into them, they had all the latest equipment, and they wanted, at least, to keep some on a standby basis, and keep small units there; at the very least, to maintain the equipment, and keep them in a state of readiness. And the Thai were not prepared even for that.

I wanted to make one other point. I got -- as I tend to do -- I got distracted there a little bit, on Charlie Whitehouse's arrival. This was an important element. In addition to the collapse of Saigon, the refugees, Ambassador Dean from Cambodia, I also had a Foreign Service Inspection Team at the embassy at the time. (Laughs)

*Q: In fact, I was talking to somebody who was on the inspection team, who was finishing up the inspection of Vietnam a week before Saigon fell.*

MASTERS: Oh yes? (Laughs)

*Q: Oh yes. He was William Bradford, I think.*

MASTERS: Oh yes. Ray -- the guy who was in charge of that -- Ray Garth is it? Anyhow, that's beside the point.

But the point I wanted to make was that adding to our complications was the Mayaguez issue. Are you familiar with the Mayaguez?

*Q: Yes, I am. But would you spell the name of the ship?*

MASTERS: Well, we were in this state of total confusion. The Thai were panicky. Refugees were pouring in. U.S. military units were leaving. And all of a sudden, we had this U.S. merchant ship carrying PX supplies, for this god-awful department store that the U.S. military had in Bangkok, that was seized by the Cambodians.

*Q: This is the Mayaguez?*

MASTERS: The Mayaguez, exactly. And I was chargé. Kukrit Pramoj was the Prime Minister of Thailand; he was the head of a 16-party coalition government -- very shaky, this thing that had been put together after they had overthrown the military.

Well, Kukrit was a very smart guy. He's a very prominent Thai intellectual and journalist -- ran

the best paper in Thailand; also an actor; he played the part of the Prime Minister in The Ugly American, among other things.

*Q: This is the movie, The Ugly American.*

MASTERS: The movie, yes. The ship is seized. Kukrit calls me in. He's not dumb. He says, "Look at it." Fortunately, he and I knew each other; we're on good terms. He said, "Look at it. I know how you Americans feel about freedom of the seas. And we respect all that. But whatever you do to get this ship released, leave us out of it. We've got our own problems. And I ask you to not involve Thailand in this process."

I said to him, "Well, we are trying, I know, through certain parties, to get the ship released. I'm not aware of any plans for other action. But if such a plan should be developed, I'm sure that in accordance with our usual procedures, we would consult with you." We had firm agreement -- including written agreement -- that we would not introduce any military unit into Thailand without the Thai government's prior approval.

So, I went back to the embassy. I had no sooner walked into the office, that the press officer came running up with a ticker item -- AP or something or other. And it reported that Marines had left Okinawa, I think it was, en route to Thailand, to stage the release of the ship -- the military release.

I called Kukrit. I said, "Remember that conversation we just had?" I said, "I've just seen a press item that indicates that maybe -- " I said, "I don't have confirmation. I have nothing from the government. But if this item is correct, it may be that other ways of freeing that ship are being considered."

Well, he moaned and groaned, and asked me to stop it. I said that if the ticker item was correct it was too late for that. He said, "Well, for god's sake, do the best you can. I don't want this kind of a problem." He said, "All hell's going to break loose if you stage a military action out of Thailand."

Well, to shorten a long story, indeed the report was right. I think it was 1,200 -- I'm not sure of the exact number -- 1,200 Marines came into the large air base just south of Bangkok. And Kukrit, being the head of this rather shaky coalition government, felt that he had to react to this. We had violated the agreement. We had not consulted in advance. We had sent the Marines into Thailand.

So, a big demonstration was mounted against the American Embassy. Ten thousand, probably, at one time. I don't know whether you have ever been there, but they totally blocked off Wireless Road, in front of the embassy. But being Thai, they were very practical about it. Our embassy went through an entire block, and it also had a back entrance on another street. They didn't bother that. So we continued to have access, but they were making their point. They barricaded the front entrance. They tore down our seal. I understand that seal is still available in one of the Thai universities somewhere.

They did some dumb things, from the Thai standpoint. They urinated on an American flag in front of our gates. They burned a flag. The use of the shoe and foot is very insulting in Thailand, and they stamped on the American flag. And these things, fortunately, had a counter-reaction. There were a lot of Thais who said, "Hey, wait. We're mad at the Americans, but we don't go this far. This is not polite. This is not behaving in the proper Thai manner."

So, the thing started to, sort of, turn around -- if there was any bright side to this -- turn around a little bit in our favor. But meanwhile, Kukrit would call me down to the Prime Minister's office, at least once a day while this was going on. And the TV cameras would be out there, cranking away. "Here's Masters again, flying the flag, going in to see the Prime Minister." He'd hand me a protest note, and say, "Read it in the car going back." We would both agree that things were tough, and we were both in a difficult position. And I'd go out, and he would then appear before the microphones and say, "Well, I told the American chargé that we're not going to tolerate this kind of heavy-handed treatment," etc., and so forth.

So we both played our roles for a few days, until eventually -- as you know -- there was military action. The ship was released. More people were killed in releasing the ship, than were freed. I thought it was a tragedy, myself. And I'll never forget, there was a photograph on the front page - - much as I respect President Ford -- there was a photograph on the front page of, probably, the New York Times, of Ford and somebody -- I'm not sure, one of his top people -- laughing gleefully over the freeing of this ship. And I thought it was just terrible.

But meanwhile, Kukrit was making his political point. Work was going on okay. And eventually, the demonstrators went away. And then a counter-demonstration, favorable to the United States, was mounted. And I had to go out in front of the embassy and accept some flowers. Everything was okay again.

The point I want to get at though -- and this is an interesting one to me -- is what happened with the dispatch of the Marines to Thailand. Phil Habib, who was then the Assistant Secretary EA, was on a speaking trip somewhere; I think it was in Missouri, or somewhere. (He was out of Washington.) And what I have never been totally clear on is, did Washington forget to tell me, as chargé -- in charge of the embassy -- that the Marines were coming in? Or did somebody say, "Let's not tell Masters. What he doesn't know -- he can honestly say he didn't know." And did somebody make a deliberate decision not to tell me? I don't know.

When this happened, I went -- next time I saw Kukrit, I said, "I honestly did not know."

He looked me in the eye, and he said, "Ed, I know you, and I believe you." Had we not had that kind of personal relationship it might have been much different. But I have never known, to this day, whether they'd forgotten me, or whether they deliberately decided to leave me out.

Then we got into a great hassle over -- the Thai obviously had to have something to save face. So I sent back to Washington a proposal that we should issue a statement.

What Kukrit said was, "You've got to apologize."

I said, "Well, maybe they're not going to apologize, but I'll see what I can get out of Washington." So Washington and I exchanged messages back and forth on what we could say. Finally, Kissinger -- as I had understood -- was taking a very hard line against doing anything.

But we finally got a statement which the State Department agreed to issue, which said in effect, "We regret that in the heat of the moment actions were taken which did not follow normal procedures," -- something like that.

I thought this was pretty good, and ran down to Kukrit. He looked at it, and read it, and said, "It's no good. It doesn't say 'apologize'."

So we got into a big hassle. I said, "Look, Kukrit. You know English as well as I do. We said 'regret.' What's the difference between 'regret' and 'apologize'?" I said, "Let's not have a semantic problem over this."

So we talked back and forth, and he finally said, "Okay, I accept it." He went out. He addressed the press. He said, "The Americans have apologized; everything is fine." The demonstrators went away -- no problem. (Laughs) A fascinating incident, in retrospect.

*Q: It really is. What was the feeling, let's say, of Henry Kissinger or someone? I mean, after all, here we were sending troops to a country -- to operate against a third country. There must have been some appreciation of the fact that you had to make amends for this, or you never could do it again.*

MASTERS: Well, one would think so. As I say, I never got what I regarded as a decent explanation as to what had happened. Of course, Washington -- let's face it -- was in a state of great turmoil then, also. Vietnam had fallen, and they had all that on their hands.

*Q: You had a rather shaky Presidency, with Ford.*

MASTERS: Yes, exactly.

*Q: I'd like to move on. In the first place, just how did you get along with Whitehouse?*

MASTERS: We got along fine, yes. Charlie is a good, solid professional, and he was astute enough to know that he needed me for a while. He was also astute enough to know that since I was so prominent in Thailand that he had to get rid of me before too long. And it worked out very well. I was there for just about a year, and then was appointed to Bangladesh.

**ALBERT L. SELIGMANN**  
**Political Officer**  
**Bangkok (1962-1965)**

*Albert L. Seligmann was born in New York in 1925. He received a B.A. and an*

*M.I.A. from Columbia University and served overseas as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army. After entering the Foreign Service in 1955, his postings abroad included Osaka, Tokyo, Bangkok and Berlin.*

*Q: 1962 you are back; you went where?*

SELIGMANN: In 1962 Joe Yager, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, in the course of a visit to Tokyo, told me that he wanted me to come back as the deputy Japan desk officer. I replied that it was a good job and I appreciated the offer, but that I had been working on Japan for seven years in Japan plus two years in Washington before that and it was time for me to go somewhere else first. Actually, it was time to return to Washington, but I hoped for another overseas assignment. We parted without commitment, and then I received a nice letter from Joe saying as I recall, "Your piteous plea touched my cold heart," and that I was being assigned to Bangkok as deputy head of the political section.

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

SELIGMANN: 1962-1965.

*Q: What was the sort of political situation when you got there in 1962?*

SELIGMANN: Field Marshall Sarit had engineered one of the famous Thai coups not too long before that. (I found out later that the ousted prime minister, Phibul, was living quietly in exile not too far from our house in Tokyo.) Sarit was pretty much a dictator, surrounded by military colleagues who ran much of the government but by no means all of it, and many of the more profitable business enterprises. The Thai were pragmatic about their economic affairs. They permitted technocrats to do a reasonably good job of economic planning and management of the country's finances, and similarly left the management of the Foreign Ministry to professionals; Thanat Khoman, an impressive skilled diplomat, was foreign minister at the time. In contrast to my work in Tokyo, I was concerned principally with external affairs; other officers in the section covered domestic politics and the Chinese community, there were separate counterinsurgency and political-military sections, the latter being heavily involved in military assistance and matters related to hostilities in Vietnam.

*Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?*

SELIGMANN: When I first arrived, it was Ken Young, who had come out of Standard Oil - a fine man with good knowledge of the area. He was followed by Graham Martin.

*Q: I would think that when one thinks of Thailand, I mean obviously it has got the rest of the neighbors. It has got Burma, Cambodia, Laos. I am not sure about Malaysia?*

SELIGMANN: Malaysia, which was on Thailand's southern border, loomed as a potential hot spot. Malaysia was created during this period as you recall, incorporating post-independence Malaya and Singapore. That quickly became a major issue for the whole area.

*Q: Okay, let's take the political concerns. The Vietnam War was beginning to develop for us. What were you looking at?*

SELIGMANN: I was not involved directly in the buildup of infrastructure related to the Vietnam War; other parts of the embassy were doing that. I certainly was aware of some of what was going on: building airfields; running all kinds of economic programs in critical parts of northeast Thailand; and consulting closely with our ambassadors in the other countries in the area, including Vietnam, where I once accompanied Martin for a brief meeting, my only visit to Saigon. We were interested in one way or another with Thailand's relations with all its immediate neighbors. Historically Thailand had very poor relations with Cambodia. No love was lost between the Thai and Cambodians, and not too long after my arrival, Thailand and Cambodia broke diplomatic relations. We were not on much better terms. After President Kennedy's death in November 1963, Sihanouk made one of his less inspired pronouncements: he hoped that Sarit and Kennedy would meet in hell. When a year later I attended a conference in Cambodia for East and West diplomats, sponsored by the Quakers - the first in Asia similar to a series held in Europe in an attempt to encourage a modicum of dialogue despite the Cold War - Roger Sullivan from Singapore and I decided that if Sihanouk in his scheduled remarks made some such odious remark, we would have to walk out. In the deed, his speech was anodyne, but after it was too late to walk out inflammatory "full text" of the wily fox's remarks was distributed. As for Burma, you didn't know if you were going to have another white-elephant war, and the Burmese accused the Thai of supporting various insurgencies. KMT refugees in north Thailand were running an opium operation with a small private army. And in north Malaysia, you had an ethnic Chinese Communist insurgency.

*Q: Was that spilling over?*

SELIGMANN: It did to some extent and concerned Thai officials. It was an inaccessible jungle area and the Thai worried about the loyalty of the Malaysian population in south Thailand. Then Malaysia was created, which included not only Singapore but what was called East Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah, which Indonesia claimed should be part of Indonesia. Sukarno moved to his confrontasi policy with Malaysia over the territorial issues. So it was an interesting period. We were in the middle of it.

Bobby Kennedy came through Jakarta and talked the Indonesians into a mediation effort, and then came on to Thailand, where he persuaded Thanat to act as mediator. We were not a party to the dispute and did not sit at the table, but worked closely with Thanat behind the scenes while he tried to bring the disputants together. Singapore became independent around that time adding another complication to the talks - I can't remember the timing of Singapore's independence...

*Q: I am not sure exactly when but it was in that period.*

SELIGMANN: Then the Philippines joined in for kicks, claiming that parts of Sabah belonged to them. So, they got themselves to the negotiating table as well. The principal persons involved included the Indonesian foreign minister, Subandrio, one of the most charming scoundrels in the world; Philippine Foreign Minister Lopez, who was a pure opportunist; and Razak, the Malaysian foreign minister, who was a rather nice gentleman. I was the leg man for Graham

Martin, in all this, running around between embassies, the Thai foreign ministry, and delegations, when negotiations were under way.

*Q: Well in all this, I have heard Graham Martin being described as sort of Louis XI as the spider king, manipulating, and if you were his leg man your dealing with Graham Martin...*

SELIGMANN: You never knew what was going to happen. I am not sure I ever knew the substance, but one Sunday he received instructions immediately to see Thanat Khoman and deliver a message to him. In the first instance, my job was to find out where Thanat was. Having established via his private secretary that he was at his beach house at Hua Hin, several hours away with no telephone, Martin rounded up a small Air America plane to get himself and Thanat's secretary, Somphong, later ambassador to Washington and Tokyo, down there. There were other senior diplomats, but in those days the secretary to the foreign minister for practical purposes was the number-two man in the foreign ministry. I was sitting in Martin's outer office planning to go home once they were on the way, when he walked by, looked at me, and said, "Aren't you coming?" So with no time to call home, I got on the plane, which landed on a grass strip, only to find there was no transportation. Somphong commandeered a rickety old fire engine, however, so with the ambassador sitting up front with the driver, Somphong and I hung on the back, and off we went. I wish I had a picture of the startled foreign minister coming out on the verandah in his black lounging pajamas to see this strange entourage pull up at his doorstep.

*Q: With a fire engine, yes.*

SELIGMANN: More significantly, you know, Martin did not go bonkers until he got to Saigon. I won't comment on that - lots of other people know better than I what happened there. I found he met your description of being conniving and devious, but when it came, for example, to the negotiations to end confrontasi, he was resourceful in somehow always finding an angle to keep talks going. His strong belief, to which I subscribed, was that one war was enough at the time. We didn't need a war in Indonesia to compound our involvement in Vietnam. The Australians may have thought otherwise. I felt flattered when the Australians sent an emissary from Canberra to Bangkok with the express mission of telling the Americans to stuff it. They wanted to "give Sukarno a bloody nose." I was a specific target of that effort - I didn't know anyone had ever heard of me but the reporting cables apparently get around.

At one point the foreign ministers were meeting in Bangkok and just couldn't agree on a key issue - I vaguely remember that it had to do with holding a referendum to determine the destiny of East Borneo - and they were all set to go home. Ambassador Martin got the inspiration to get Lopez, who really had very little to do with any of this...

*Q: From the Philippines.*

SELIGMANN: Yes, from the Philippines. ...to be the proposer of some new idea having to do with election observers or some such that would keep the talks going. I tagged along as he jumped into his car without calling ahead to visit Lopez at his hotel or guest quarters - I can't remember. When we arrived, we were told that he wasn't there and that they did not know how to reach him. Wondering what to do next, I told the ambassador I had overheard a secretary

making a reservation for Lopez at the Carleton, a night club - not a lavish one, really a restaurant many of us frequented that had a band and dancing in the evening. So off we go to the Carleton and there is Lopez out on the dance floor with some Thai girl. Martin cuts in on him, takes him over to a booth, and informs Lopez that he, Lopez, is the genius who has come up with this wonderful idea. Lopez agrees to be the genius and agrees to commission Martin to convey this to Subandrio; the Malaysian Foreign Minister Razak; and Thanat. That done, we went to see Subandrio, who reluctantly agreed to stay on. We couldn't get to see the Malaysians, however - they had all gone to bed, so we left it for the morning.

It was my custom to meet almost every morning with Anand Panyarachun, Somphong's predecessor as Thanat's private secretary - Anand became ambassador to the UN, ambassador to Washington, and served as prime minister of Thailand for a brief period. It was such an awful trip to the foreign ministry in the clogged traffic of Bangkok in the heat, that we had developed a pattern whereby I would come into the Embassy, read the cables, go to his house, which was close by, at seven or seven-thirty and get a fair amount of business done over coffee. Anand left right after for the Foreign Minister's house, accompanying Thanat to the foreign ministry. The next morning I filled Anand in on the night's events, informing him that we had been unable to get in touch with Razak, and asked whether he could help. So off goes Anand, and as he went around a rotary (traffic circle) on the way to Thanat's house, he spotted the Malaysian entourage in the circle exiting on the road to the airport. Thinking quickly, Anand, as he reported later, did a circle and a half and followed the motorcade to the airport. When Anand informed Razak that Subandrio had agreed to the "Lopez proposal," he first said he regretted that the baggage was already on the plane and it was too late, but Anand convinced them to turn around and come back. The extra day of negotiations did not produce anything worthwhile beyond agreement to think about the proposal, but that was the sort of maneuver that Martin was capable of pulling off. By the way, when I wrote all of this up in a reporting telegram, Martin did not change a word except to add at the beginning, "It has been a very weird day," and at the end, "To be continued."

*Q: That was great. Were we concerned about the Thais doing anything that might, movement towards the Chinese or anything like that at that time?*

SELIGMANN: Not particularly at that time. It was in the Thai tradition to hedge their bets and keep lines out, but Thanat and the other Thai leaders were proud nationalists, even if many, including Thanat, were of Chinese descent. He saw Thai interests and U.S. interests converging on many critical areas, including relations with Thailand's neighbors, which were colored by historical enmity and rivalries. In that sense we could work closely together, whether it be Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, or Malaysia. The Malays, for example, constituted a significant minority within Thailand, and Thailand supported Kuala Lumpur's efforts to suppress the Chinese-led Communist insurgency in north Malaysia. Similarly, Thailand feared Indonesian imperialist ambitions, which it saw manifested in the confrontasi policy. In general, the Thai were leery of communist machinations, whether it be the Soviet Union or China. So we really did see eye to eye on most foreign policy issues.

*Q: Well were we concerned, were the Thais concerned in this period? You left when in 1965? Usually June?*

SELIGMANN: That summer.

*Q: Yes. Were we concerned up to the time you left about events that were happening in Indonesia? I mean Sukarno seemed to be turning more to the left. This was before what was it September, October I guess when the coup came and Suharto took over, but prior to that Sukarno seemed to be on a roll and moving his country. Were the Thais concerned?*

SELIGMANN: Very much so. Sukarno had made his famous “Live Dangerously (vivere periculoso)” speech. He was more and more manipulated by the communists. Yes, both we and the Thai were certainly concerned. At the same time, there was much opposition to the whole mediation effort between Indonesia and Malaysia because critics would say you just don't understand where Sukarno is headed. I think we understood well, but figured it was important to buy time; one war, Vietnam, was about all we could handle at one time.

*Q: We had this peculiar situation in Indonesia through most of this period where you had Ambassador Howard Jones, who was considered by many in his own embassy to be well meaning but an apologist for Sukarno. Were you getting...*

SELIGMANN: My nickname for him was “Pollyanna Jones.” “Just give me one more hour with Sukarno, and I will bring him around.”

*Q: Yes, I mean, this was very much I mean when we got reports from Djakarta, did we tend to look to see who, did we tend to discount what Jones was saying?*

SELIGMANN: Absolutely. I once wrote a telegram as a joke - that was when you still had green telegrams and you could bang them out on your own typewriter. I entitled it “Meeting between Thanat Khoman [a bridge enthusiast] and Ambassador Martin as it would have been written by Ambassador Jones.” It started off something like this, “When I entered Thanat's office, he was in a dark mood. The Thai contract bridge team had just lost in the semi-finals, and he was not ready to listen to anything I had to say.” It went on in that vein until the last paragraph, which read, in effect, “As I was leaving, Thanat stopped me at the door and said, ‘Mr. Ambassador, you have been too persuasive.’” Well, that was okay as far as it went as a parody, but Martin happened to come into my office - he had a habit of walking up and down the corridors, not waiting for the telegrams come to him, but going to the telegrams. He would take something you hadn't finished and say fine, or tear it in two or whatever. He picked up my bogus telegram, and said, “Great. Let's send it.” I pleaded (successfully) with the ambassador that it was well and good for him to say that but I had a career to consider.

I visited Djakarta during this period, taking advantage of funds available to Bobby Kennedy's young leader program - I was the Embassy “Youth Coordinator” - but also to talk about common political interests. I stayed with Frank Galbraith, then DCM, later ambassador, but to be able to talk, he suggested we go for a walk, which we did after dinner, around Merdeka Square. It was too risky to talk in the house where he said he could not trust the servants and which was probably bugged. Yes, it was a tense period.

*Q: Yes, well, I mean, there was this concern that permeated that whole area of Howard Jones and not being the right man to deal with Sukarno and where Sukarno was going and all. It was a difficult time.*

SELIGMANN: I am not the person to comment really. There are others who were much more closely involved.

*Q: I have interviewed for example Bob Martens and Marshall Green.*

SELIGMANN: Paul Gardner.

*Q: Yes.*

SELIGMANN: My feeling was that the silver lining to all this was that we did buy time. And we did avoid a conflict. Maybe we lucked out in the events that followed...

*Q: Sometimes you kind of wait and have an over reach. Was there concern during this 1962-1965 period that there might be the equivalent of what happened in Indonesia, a clash between those identified as Chinese and those who were identified as Thai or had things had they pretty well amalgamated by this time?*

SELIGMANN: Like Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines as well had a history of anti-Chinese riots going back before World War II, reflecting resentment of the dominant entrepreneurial position of the overseas Chinese. Concern about the politics of the Chinese community as well as Thai-Chinese relations accounted for the presence of a Chinese language officer in the political section. Whereas anti-Chinese demonstrations have continued to occur in Indonesia, however, there were none while I was in Thailand and there have been none since. Perhaps much of the contrast is accounted for by the absence of sharp religious differences, albeit the Thai subscribe to Hinayana, as opposed to Mahayana Buddhism, but, also, related to that, there has been far more extensive intermarriage and integration of Chinese into Thai society - to the point that many Thai leaders, if you trace their not-distant ancestry, turn out to be full-blooded Chinese.

*Q: How about India? Did India play any particular role?*

SELIGMANN: It was a pro-Soviet neutral, but was not much of a player in Thailand. Under instruction, we had no contacts at that time with the Soviet embassy. If I wanted to communicate with the Soviet embassy, I discovered I could do it very nicely. My Indian colleague always wanted to get together, so I would see him and occasionally deliberately say things that I wanted the Soviets to hear. One time I literally caught him in the act. We had finished lunch, and as I got into my car parked on the opposite side of the street and made a U-turn, there he was talking to a Soviet embassy officer.

*Q, How about, having come from Japan. Was there any Japan-Thai connection at that time?*

SELIGMANN: They had an active embassy and I knew many of the staff personally. There

principal interests in the area were commercial, with investment beginning to supplement growing trade. As what might be seen as a related matter, the Japanese also supplied a well-known beauty as mistress for Sukarno, which doubtless motivated him to visit Japan from time to time and may have emboldened the Japanese to make one or two false-start mediation efforts of their own between Indonesia and Malaysia.

*Q. Yes, one of the major commercial functions of anybody who dealt with Sukarno was to make sure that you had usually allied hostesses.*

SELIGMANN: Rumor had it that for the United that entailed cooperation with Pan Am and a certain stewardess.

*Q. Were the Japanese, had they started putting the motor scooters into Thailand?*

SELIGMANN: Probably - they seemed to have a corner also on the market for the ubiquitous "long-tailed" motors on the small boats that plied Thailand's rivers and more shallow waterways. There were a great many Japanese salesmen around of all sorts, but mostly dealing in relatively small things - they were just getting into the big stuff - but even then they were close to becoming the number-one, if not, the number-two trading partner for almost every country in Southeast Asia, including Thailand. We were still number one, I think.

*Q: Well I was interviewing somebody who maybe it was Bill Brown who was ambassador to Thailand at one time, somebody who was saying one of the big problems with the Thais was that they turned out wonderful sort of liberal arts majors who you know, were good in government and all but were never very good in turning out people who ran businesses, you know, masters of business administration and all that. Did you notice that at the time?*

SELIGMANN: It wasn't something I was really paying a lot of attention to. It was probably true. But then, you know, the Thai are laid back to a large extent. They are not entrepreneurial and tended to let the Chinese tend to run commerce - of course, in Thailand you get to the point where you can't distinguish between Thai and Chinese.

**ROBIN BERRINGTON**  
**Peace Corps Volunteer, English Instructor**  
**Kamphaeng Phet (1963-1965)**

*Mr. Berrington was born and raised in Ohio and educated at Wesleyan University Harvard Universities. After service with the Peace Corps in Thailand, he joined the Foreign Service (USIA) in 1969. During his Foreign Service career Mr. Berrington served at posts abroad in Thailand, Japan, Ireland and England, variously as Public and Cultural Affairs Officer. He also served several tours at USIA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Mr. Berrington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

*Q: While you were doing this were you thinking of what you might do with it?*

BERRINGTON: No, not at all. In fact what I knew I was going back next year to become a teaching assistant, which I told you fell through once we got there. So as far as I was concerned I was just looking to going back next year and maybe I should push on because this is all wrapped up together. I went back and then another important event occurred. Again I talk about fate and all, but I guess all our lives, yours as much as mine have these crazy events that kind of define. We may not be aware of it but it does lead to other things we may not be sure about. My father became very sick. I had already applied to law school, because if you are a bright young, kind of achieving type from a school like Wesleyan, you go to law school. You go to medical school; you go to law school; you do something that is going to point you into an academic or really prestigious white collar career. I applied to law school, and was accepted at Yale. Yale was a very expensive place, and when my father got sick, being self employed he didn't have quite the insurance that we needed, so that literally ate up all the family money. I didn't have a scholarship from Yale so Yale told me if you don't have the money, we will put off your acceptance for another year so that you can work and build up some money. In the meantime, I thought what am I going to do for a year, and along came something called the Peace Corps. I applied to the Peace Corps, and they said, "Is there anyplace I wanted to go?" I said, "No place in particular, but I would like to go to East Asia and if possible as close to Japan as you could find something." Literally within a few months I was accepted into the Thai program. When I went off to Thai Peace Corps training, my father was just getting out of the hospital. Yale was receding quickly as an option. So I went into Thailand and into the Peace Corps training at the University of Indiana which was a summer long intensive, very intensive Thai language and area studies program. From that I wound up in Thailand for two years from 1963-'65.

*Q: How did you find the Peace Corps training?*

BERRINGTON: A mixed bag. The language was fabulous. The language training was outstanding. They had a bunch of Thai exchange students. It was put together by a well known American linguist of Thai experience. Her name was Mary Hoss. It was just an outstanding program. The rest of the program was kind of a mixed bag because that was the early days of Peace Corps. In fact when we were just group six of the Peace Corps. I think they were still feeling their way around and not quite sure how to do it. There were 60 of us, and we were all in an English language teaching program, what they called TEFL, teaching English as a foreign language. Am I giving you too much detail?

*Q: No you are not. I want to capture this seminal experience. The Peace Corps, begun under the Kennedy administration, was considered one of its crown jewels, a way tapping the youth of America. How did you find your fellow Peace Corps and the spirit and all that?*

BERRINGTON: In those days, there were clearly two groups of Peace Corps kids. There were the generalists like myself or there were the technical types. The technical types might have been kids with farming backgrounds or engineering backgrounds or something that gave them a specific skill to do overseas, dig sewage systems, or develop new ways to treat malaria, or provide farming techniques a country could adopt. But those of us, and of course this was in the days of idealism was still a major part of the Peace Corps. In those days the generalists, they

didn't know quite what to do with him or her so we were put into these cattle programs teaching English as a foreign language and sent overseas in effect to teach English in high schools. This was fine with me because it got me overseas and got me back, if not close, to Japan, at least it got me to Asia. But there were 60 of us, and all of us were generalists. All of us were basically young bachelor of arts or liberal arts kids from New England prestigious schools like Wesleyan or Harvard or whatever to you know some of them from very typical small church schools in the mid-west or larger state schools on the west coast or whatever. I mean there was quite a mixed bag but we were all generalists, and we were all young and fired up.

*Q: How much of a presence was Sargent Shriver when you were getting training?*

BERRINGTON: Nothing. He was in Washington. We were in Indiana. You know, Sargent Shriver, Who is he? We didn't join because of him. The first time I met Shriver was at a meeting in Bangkok a year into the program when he was passing through and the Peace Corps office said any of you want to come to Bangkok to meet the director come on in. But no he was a minimal presence.

*Q: Well when you got to Thailand where did they send you?*

BERRINGTON: They sent me to a small town called Kamphaeng Phet. It was about halfway between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, sort of where the central plain meets the north. I was the first Peace Corps volunteer to ever go there, and I was the only Peace Corps volunteer in that town. A lot of the kids said they wanted to be with somebody else. A lot of the kids said they didn't want to be pioneers. I wanted to have as stark an experience as possible, so I asked to be the first one in the area.

It was a pretty undeveloped little town. It was a provincial capital. It had electricity only at night. My water was drawn from a well in the backyard. The school had assigned two students to live with me to make sure I didn't kill myself or something. I mean the embarrassment of having the first volunteer in your town to you know, get in trouble would have been, you know, not to have him shoot himself. So it was you know as probably as typical a Peace Corps experience at least in terms of what the public thought the Peace Corps experience was like. I taught school every day with a bunch of Thai students. It was a boy's school, a secondary boy's school. I taught like ninth, tenth, eleventh grade, actually just ninth and tenth because my school was not as advanced enough to have eleventh and twelfth grade yet. I spent two years doing that. The interesting thing about that period is that about once every four months, three four, five months on a kind of a regular basis, some guy, a foreigner would show up in my town, set up a big screen, show movies, pass out booklets, and provide entertainment. The second or third time that this happened, I asked who this guy was. It turned out he was the USIS (U.S. Information Service) person from Chiang Mai who traveled through various prefectures now and then to show his movies and sort of wave the USIS flag. That was my first exposure to USIS and their operation.

*Q: Well had the Foreign Service raised any blip on your radar? May be when you were in Japan?*

BERRINGTON: No not at all. If anything, you have got to remember, it was the 60's. I was

young. Even though my upbringing in Ohio and Tennessee was extremely conservative, by the time Wesleyan finished with me I was fairly liberal. The last thing I wanted to be doing was sashaying overseas with a bunch of cookie pushers in pin striped pants, you know the fascists in the embassy, are you kidding? No I didn't want to be doing that. As Peace Corps volunteers we went out of our way to avoid them, and when we went to embassy events if we were invited or something was involved, we always stood in the background and made a point of making ourselves as obnoxious as possible. I am sure I was a pain in the ass.

*Q: Interesting. I was with the board of examiners in 1975-76, and I had had a certain prejudice against the Peace Corps. I never had much experience with the Peace Corps, and I thought these are a bunch of sort of radical kids who are going out there and living it up or having a good time anyway, and make lousy foreign service types. Yet I had my prejudices ripped away because they did very well on the foreign service exam.*

BERRINGTON: OK, we overlapped. I was at BEX in '76. By the time I was at BEX I was probably on the other side of the fence. I would get more and more of those guys in there. So Peace Corps was my first introduction to USIS, my first introduction to sort of living in a third world type of situation, and my first time where I was really on my own working. In Japan I was a student, I was living with a family, it was somewhat different.

*Q: Well were you getting a different feel for Thai society than Japan, because you were right in the guts of the business?*

BERRINGTON: Sure. I became rather notorious in my Peace Corps group because my headmaster and I didn't get along at all. He was very much involved in petty corruption and mismanagement of school funds. I really, being young and everything was black and white, I was very disapproving. I complained about this so much, you know, when you are a Peace Corps volunteer you are backed by the governor and other people. I am not sure volunteers do today, but in those days we did. I think I have a large part to do with getting him transferred out and a new headmaster in. The new headmaster was terrific. But yes, I became aware of how corruption makes things work. The other important part of the Peace Corps work was you were actually living and working with people who were not of your own value system or own traditions. You had to make compromises; you had to make adjustments of your own. Those of us who were in the Peace Corps and moved on to the foreign service, I think many of us admitted, and this has almost become a rite of passage or something, we still carried the Peace Corps mentality with us to our foreign service work which created problems as well as opportunities to the more traditional style of foreign service operation.

*Q: What as a teacher, how were these Thai boys approaching their study? Did you find them motivated, driving, lackadaisical?*

BERRINGTON: Certainly more closer to lackadaisical than motivated. I mean if you are a young Thai boy whose mother and father may not even be able to read and write, and the highest grade you can go to is the tenth grade, what are your job opportunities after that? You go back and farm or you go back and take over your father's small job. What is the value of learning English? For them it was a joke. My main responsibility was keeping them entertained rather

than teaching the rudiments of a foreign language they would have for about a half a year.

*Q: Did you find you were striking sparks with any of the students?*

BERRINGTON: Yes, I was, of course. In fact they often say if you have an impact on one person in your life you have really done well. Well, there was one kid that I clearly must have had some kind of impact on because he was one of the two that lived with me at that time. After he graduated he had come back to school, he went on to a teacher training school which was more prestigious among Thais and more likely to lead him to a better lifestyle. Then by the time I left Thailand, he went from the teacher training school to university. He was the first student from that province, not family or town but from the whole province. He was the first student from that prefecture to ever go to university in Bangkok. He then following graduation from Thammasat University, which was one of the two prestigious schools, he got a job with Bank of Commerce. So I cannot help but think all that might not have gotten together if he had just not had the experience of living there because I was pushing and urging these kids to do things. I can remember one time I took the class; I had one class that I was kind of like the homeroom teacher. I took the class to Bangkok which was the first time many of these kids had ever been to Bangkok. It was just a quick overnight. I remember going out to the airport, and they had never even seen an airplane before. So I opened the doors, or shall we say, expanded their horizon, in terms of what these kids had experienced. It is not just me; it could have been any other Peace Corps volunteer.

*Q: What were the parent's reactions? Were you getting...*

BERRINGTON: I seldom ever saw them. In a provincial high school like that, many of the parents live in other villages way out. Onetime this particular student, the one that I helped, he took me out to his village which was about two hours out of our town and I met his parents. We talked and had a nice couple of hours had lunch together. That was the only time I saw them. We didn't talk academic issues.

*Q: Well you were doing this 1963-'65. Did you get to the embassy at all or have any...*

BERRINGTON: At the risk of sounding repetitive "Are you kidding?" The only time we got to the embassy I think was for that Shriver meeting. And as I say we had absolutely nothing we wanted to do in Bangkok.

**JOHN J. HARTER**  
**Financial Reporting Officer**  
**Bangkok (1963-1965)**

*John J. Harter was born in Texas in 1926. Harter served in the US Air Force during WWII before graduating from the University of Southern California and joining the Foreign Service. Overseas, Harter served in South Africa, Chile, Thailand and Switzerland. He also worked in the Bureau of Inter-American*

*Affairs, for USIA and after retirement on Oral Histories. Harter was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.*

*Q: What did you do after your year at Harvard?*

HARTER: Starting in January, 1963, the FSOs in Cambridge wondered what our next assignments would be. My previous overseas posts had been in South Africa and Chile, and I didn't want to be boxed in as an expert in African or Latin American affairs. I thought a tour in East Asia might be rewarding, and luckily, Chris Pappas, the personnel officer responsible for mid-level economic assignments to that area, had been a neighbor in Arlington when I was assigned to IO. We rode the same bus to work. I called Chris from Harvard, and he said an economic slot in Bangkok classed one step above my level would open in the summer. If I was interested, he would check it out. I was, and it worked.

*Q: You served in Bangkok from when to when?*

HARTER: From July, 1963 to July, 1965 - just two years.

*Q: What was your position?*

HARTER: I was the Embassy's financial reporting officer, meaning I kept track of the Thai planning agency, the Central Bank, and the Ministry of Finance. This provided an excellent vantage point for observing the practical implications of the economic development theory I studied at Harvard.

*Q: How would you describe the political situation in Thailand while you were there?*

HARTER: The Prime Minister when I arrived was Sarit Thanarat, a striking individual. As you know, Thailand was virtually the only country in Southeast Asia that escaped colonial status in the late nineteenth century, when the British grabbed Burma to the west, and the French seized Vietnam to the east. The clever diplomacy of two remarkable Thai kings - Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, the exotic personalities featured in *Anna and the King of Siam* - staved off both the British and the French, and Thailand thus avoided the imperial overhang that handicapped many Third World countries in the twentieth century.

The monarchy provided an element of stability in the Thai political system. Bhumibol Adulyadej, a descendant of those nineteenth-century kings, was much respected, and he reputedly exercised a constructive behind-the-scenes influence. The photogenic Queen Sirikit was often described as Asia's most beautiful woman.

Several coups d'etat occurred, beginning in the 1930s, but they mainly involved opposing factions of the military elite rather than fundamentally different groups with opposing political philosophies. Thai governments, before and after I was there, were largely controlled by Thai generals who were not immune to corrupt influences. The two Deputy Prime Ministers under Sarit were Praphat, who ran the Ministries of Defense and Interior - which oversaw local governments and the constabulary - and Prince Wan, who played a largely ceremonial role.

General Thanom Kittikachorn succeeded Sarit when he died in the fall of 1963, and under his cautiously benign patronage, Thailand underwent some preliminary movement toward parliamentary democracy before I left. Nevertheless, the generals relinquished their traditional authority grudgingly and slowly.

*Q: How about the economic side?*

HARTER: The principal economic advisor to Sarit and Thanom was Dr. Phuey Ungphakorn, Governor of the Central Bank. Dr. Phuey earned his Ph.D. at the London School of Economics, and his wife was English. His proteges dominated the economic ministries and agencies. They were intelligent, honest, and genuinely dedicated to the Thai national interest. They laid the foundation in the 1960s for the economic stability and impressive growth that generally characterized the Thai economy in the 1970s and 1980s.

*Q: Were you personally acquainted with Dr. Phuey?*

HARTER: Yes, I was fortunate to know him and several of his lieutenants fairly well. Dr. Phuey was the personification of integrity - and a very pragmatic politician. The odd fact was that Sarit, as Prime Minister, depended on Dr. Phuey to track the economy at the same time he countenanced corrupt elements in the military and police structures. For Dr. Phuey, the critical issue was to maintain stable purchasing power for the Thai baht, which was just about as solid as the Swiss franc.

*Q: That was in marked contrast to the situation you found in Chile.*

HARTER: Yes, and I saw ample evidence that when inflation is minimal, economic decisions can be more rational. Unfortunately, Thailand later strayed from Dr. Phuey's conservative and anti-corruption precepts, and by the 1990s a continuing economic boom led to overexpansion in some sectors and speculation in real estate and the stock market. Nevertheless, the country's long-term outlook continues to be bright.

*Q: Were you involved in commercial work?*

HARTER: Not directly. The U.S. Commerce Department operated a Trade Center in Bangkok, managed by a commercial attache and two assistant commercial attaches. When I arrived the commercial attache was John O'Neill, who was succeeded by Harold Voorhees. Both were well acquainted with American and Thai businessmen, and through my association with them and participation in the monthly meetings of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Thailand, I indirectly absorbed some sense of what was going on in the commercial world. The business community was overwhelmingly optimistic about the Thai economy.

*Q: What did you think of AID operations in Thailand?*

HARTER: My view was mixed. Overall, the Thai Civil Service benefitted greatly from an AID project aimed at building up a School of Economics at Thamassat University. That began as Dr. Phuey's pet project some ten years before I arrived. The Public Administration Service, a private

group under contract with AID, played a very positive role there. AID also stimulated constructive investment in education, health, agriculture, and highway construction that yielded abundant long-term benefits to the Thai people.

*Q: What was your impression of the Thai Civil Service?*

HARTER: I was favorably impressed with the Thai civil servants I knew. They were relatively senior officials at the central bank, the Ministry of Finance, and the planning agency. Many of them had received graduate degrees from Columbia, Harvard, or the London School of Economics.

*Q: But you considered some AID operations less successful?*

HARTER: Yes, I felt the so-called public safety program was too eager to boost the position of ostensibly anti-communist elements in the police agencies, the military, and local governments, especially in the Northeast. I think the use of AID cover for CIA operations distorted economic development priorities, while sometimes bolstering unsavory elements in the government.

*Q: Did you know what the CIA was doing in Thailand?*

HARTER: Just what the CIA does is always murky because of their zeal to protect their "sources and methods," comprehensively defined, which ensures that CIA activities and research are insufficiently accountable. The CIA was certainly influential in Thailand. I assume we shouldn't go into detail here, but I think it would be appropriate for me to mention prevalent impressions among my friends at the Embassy. The Chief of Station was well known among the Thai elite. He had been in Bangkok for several years when I arrived. He was a strong personality and a beer-drinking buddy of several Thai generals. I first met him about a year after I arrived in Bangkok. He apparently spoke Thai, and he seemed to be close to Praphat. He knew more about Thai history, the Thai government, and gossip about top Thai officials than anyone else at the Embassy.

*Q: Do you mean Thailand was a country of particular interest to the CIA?*

HARTER: It certainly was! The OSS [Office of Strategic Services, the World War II predecessor of the CIA] developed an extensive operation in Thailand toward the end of World War II, and "Wild Bill" Donovan, the super-sleuth who created the OSS, took a personal interest in it. Remember, Donovan was our Ambassador to Thailand in 1953-54, just after the Korean War was over, and he apparently played a major role in developing the CIA network throughout Southeast Asia that was centrally involved in the buildup to the War in Vietnam.

*Q: Did you work directly with any of the CIA officers?*

HARTER: One could hardly avoid them! Jim Lilly, for example, had an office next to mine in the Economic Section. He was quite different from the very public Jim Lilly we occasionally see on the Jim Lehrer news program these days: He seemed reserved and taciturn, but very sharp. We were told he was an expert on China, but we never knew exactly what he was doing.

*Q: Who was our Ambassador to Thailand?*

HARTER: Al Puhan was Chargé when I arrived. I knew him in IO. Ambassador Graham Martin arrived some three months later.

*Q: What was Martin's mode of operation in Thailand?*

HARTER: In a word, it was Byzantine! The best description I can give you would be to recapitulate an in-house briefing I attended at USIA in 1975, shortly after the collapse of the South Vietnamese government. Alan Carter of USIA tried to explain what, in his view, went wrong in the final days. The meeting was packed, and Carter's presentation was taped. Carter emphasized, as a principal factor underlying the chaos that prevailed in Saigon in April, 1975, Martin's refusal to authorize in advance the kind of emergency evacuation plan that is normally required at U.S. Embassies. Carter said his entire experience in Saigon, from the time Martin arrived until the end, was surreal - and that was Carter's word. He said our Embassy in Saigon was the only one he ever heard of where the Ambassador never attended his own staff meetings and the DCM always presided. That was precisely how Martin ran the Embassy in Bangkok a decade earlier. Carter said Martin was almost inaccessible, except for a few senior officers who spent many hours with him. Martin was at the Embassy from early morning until late at night, but he rarely interacted with most of the Embassy officers.

*Q: Did you ever deal directly with him?*

HARTER: Yes, on a few occasions. Soon after he arrived I was the Duty Officer, and he asked me to bring the Embassy cables to his residence. I vividly recall that Sunday morning when he engaged me in a lengthy duel of words over the Foreign Service personnel system. I had promised my wife I wouldn't be gone long, but I was wrong.

*Q: What was his attitude toward the Foreign Service?*

HARTER: The fireworks started when I said I admired Loy Henderson. Martin thought Henderson's whole approach to the Foreign Service was dead wrong. I had heard, when I was on the AFSA Board, that Martin would be an effective Under Secretary for Administration, but if he had held that position he would have irreparably destroyed the Foreign Service. He favored large-scale annual recruitment of junior officers and vigorous selection-out at each level to eliminate *most* FSOs after their first two or three assignments.

Martin had no sense of a junior officer's life. He entered the Foreign Service in Paris at a very senior level, when Douglas Dillon, as Ambassador to France, recruited him as his chief administrative officer. When Dillon became Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, he named Martin as his Chief of Staff. Even after Dillon left State in 1961 to become Treasury Secretary, he promoted Martin's career. Unfortunately, Martin's views were adopted by the so-called "Young Turks" who seized control of AFSA in the late 1960s [Note: See also *Toward a Modern Diplomacy*, a report to the American Foreign Service Association by Graham Martin, 1968.].

*Q: How did the Embassy's Political Section feel about Martin?*

HARTER: Well, the Political Section was a remarkably strong team headed by Ted Tremblay and his deputy, Al Seligman. The others when I arrived were Wever Gim, Tom Barnes, and Al Francis, and together they produced a steady stream of balanced and perceptive analytical reports. I think they regarded Martin as an enigma. They had a sense that he was brilliant but I think they regarded him as Machiavellian. He always seemed to be spinning complex webs.

*Q: Can you recall an example?*

HARTER: Yes, here's one: Al Francis once prepared a comprehensive report of some 30 to 40 pages on corruption in Thailand. Ted considered it excellent and sent it to Ambassador Martin for final approval. Martin blocked it, saying he didn't want anything like that to leave the Embassy.

Martin's rationale was that a State Department report on corruption in Thailand was bound to leak and undermine his efforts to secure more U.S. resources for Thailand. Actually, he was probably right about that! Anyway, Al's report did not leave the Embassy until after Sarit Thannarat died in the fall of 1963, when the world press exploded with accounts of corruption in Thailand. At that point, the Embassy dusted off Al's report and sent it to Washington, where it was well received.

*Q: Martin's reaction was not unusual. Many governments in developing countries are corrupt, and some are awfully corrupt.*

HARTER: Probably less so today than then.

*Q: But when you highlight it, some Senator will become aware of it and use it in a way that may not be helpful to programs advocated by the Embassy.*

HARTER: Well, this reminds me of a point Loy Henderson emphasized in my interviews with him: I asked him what he considered the most important attribute of a good Foreign Service Officer, and without hesitation, he said he prized *integrity* above all other qualities. He said absolute honesty is essential for the Foreign Service, and a Foreign Service Officer who shades the truth is not doing his proper job. I think that's right. We should convey to Washington the reality we observe, without bending or distorting the facts. The State Department must be scrupulously honest in dealing with Congress. Throughout the Cold War too many people blindly accepted and parroted stereotypes put forward by influential individuals in the Congress and the media.

*Q: I agree! But how do you convey the truth? FSOs who served in the Middle East found that reports critical of Israel often leaked to Congress. FSOs who reported the facts in China in the mid-1940s were crucified.*

HARTER: Nevertheless, withholding the truth contributes to inaccurate Washington perspectives and misjudgments. Sadly, there is often a disconnect between our Embassies and the

Department. Senior officials in Washington are bombarded with secret reports from the intelligence community, Congressional opinions, and newspaper editorials that tend to be less prescient than insights of well-placed professional diplomats.

Anyway, from the time he arrived in the fall of 1963, Martin was determined to ensure continuing if not increased congressional appropriations for military, CIA, and AID programs in Thailand. He was convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a major war was going to be waged in Vietnam, and he saw Thailand's northeastern provinces as a launching pad for the bombing missions he anticipated. He repeatedly echoed Douglas MacArthur's prophecy that sooner or later Armageddon must come in the form of an epic showdown between "communism" and "freedom" in Southeast Asia.

*Q: Was the idea prevalent that the Chinese communists were about to take over Thailand?*

HARTER: No, that was *not* a common view in the Embassy or among Thais I knew. It *was* a commanding myth among influential people in Washington. Graham Martin thought the threat was real, and a few expensive studies and reports by the Rand Corporation sustained that presumption. They were heavily influenced by the CIA, which gave too much weight to views of local police officials in the Northeast and the South. They were true believers in the anti-communist cause, and our public safety advisors closely associated with them shared their views. I found the same phenomenon in South Africa and in Chile, where the local police, especially in rural areas, also identified their political opposition as "communists" or "communist inspired."

I recall a discussion between Ted Tremblay and Thayer White of the Economic Section, as my family rode to Bangkok from the airport after they met us on our arrival. Ted and Thayer spoke of a meeting that morning, at which they both questioned and discounted the position of JUSMAG [Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group] officers who were alarmed at ostensibly new evidence that Thailand was threatened by invasion from communist forces from the north. Ted and Thayer considered the external threat less serious than the potential for *domestic* unrest. They thought internal political stability was critical for Thailand, and the thrust of U.S. policy should therefore be to sustain a sound and growing economy. That was basically the view of individuals I knew who worked at AID, the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance, and the planning agency, who weren't excessively concerned about the so-called "communist threat." To them, it was much more important to reduce the disparity in incomes between rich and poor Thais.

Al Puhan, who was charge when I arrived, shared that outlook. Incidentally, Puhan and Martin seemed incapable of communicating with each other. Puhan left soon after Martin arrived. I sat next to Puhan at a lunch in Florida in 1993 for Foreign Service retirees, by the way, and he was still overflowing with bitter memories of Martin.

*Q: Were attempts made at that time to foster something like what later became known as ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations]?*

HARTER: ASEAN dated from the late 1960s, after I left Bangkok, but the Thai authorities were

exploring possibilities for fostering closer economic cooperation with neighboring countries, especially the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, while I was there. In the mid-1960s there was much more emphasis on SEATO [The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, modeled more or less after NATO], which was staunchly championed by the Dulles brothers and Graham Martin. The Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thanat Khoman, was also a strong advocate of SEATO. Of course, ASEAN is still going strong, but SEATO died a natural death after North Vietnam took over the South.

*Q: Did you deal with other matters?*

HARTER: I was especially interested in southern Thailand. I took a fact-finding trip down to Songkhla and Haadyai, just north of the Malaysian border. My wife and our kids were with me there for several days. I prepared an in-depth report on the economy of southern Thailand, an area that had been largely neglected by the Thai Government and the U.S. The economic potential of southern Thailand was seriously underestimated in those days. Northern Malaysia, just south of the Thai border, had good roads, productive rubber plantations, and prosperous tin mines; but southern Thailand, north of that border, was undeveloped, with ragged and overgrown vegetation even though the area had very similar climate, soil, and other resources.

My report suggested that a major highway connecting Bangkok with the Malaysian highway south of the border would spur economic advance in southern Thailand. I think such a highway was eventually built, but in the mid-1960s AID gave priority to road construction in northeastern Thailand, impelled by strategic considerations. Those roads, in the long run, helped to open up relatively underdeveloped areas and integrate them into the national economy, but I argued Thailand as a whole would have gained larger returns from a comparable investment in southern Thailand.

*Q: When did you finish your assignment to Bangkok?*

HARTER: In July, 1965. My last night there was a nightmare! Tonia, our younger daughter, was in ill health, and our older two kids were recovering from strep throat. Tonia was born in Bangkok, and she was a one-year-old baby. We considered postponing our departure, but the Medical Unit pronounced our kids well enough to travel. I went to the Embassy after dinner that last night to clean out my desk, and that was when Konrad Bekker, the deputy chief of the Economic Section, confronted me with my efficiency report. And there were serious problems with it.

*Q: What kind of problems?*

HARTER: Konrad's report was basically positive, but it used a superseded format.

In 1965 State Personnel split the annual efficiency report into two parts, one that was supposed to grade "performance" and the other that ostensibly described "potential." The former was shown to and discussed with the rated officer, but the latter was not - it was supposed to be secret, and that inevitably led to widespread abuse. The personnel authorities were besieged with outcries regarding that format, and it was never used again. Konrad didn't like it, and he insisted

on using the traditional form that preceded it. I told Konrad I shared his concern regarding the new format and I appreciated his favorable comments, but I told him I would be disadvantaged if my EER did not contain the categories of information called for in the new form. He asked me to set forth my objections in writing so that he could forward my concerns in my own words with his draft EER to Bob Fluker, who was out of town. I hastily drafted the memorandum he requested and left it with him about midnight. I later learned that Fluker incorporated my objections as the main component of his reviewing officer's statement. I left the Embassy after midnight, and the next day we left Bangkok on home leave with three sick children. We were exhausted, tense, and dispirited when we arrived at my parents' home near Berkeley, California, and our visit there was marred by the most painful disagreement I ever had with my dad.

*Q: What was the conflict?*

HARTER: Well, somehow the burgeoning mess in Vietnam quickly became an inescapable topic of conversation. My dad was a World War I veteran whose patriotism had been honed by active participation in the American Legion in the 1920s and 1930s. He was appalled at the much publicized, trenchant, and sometimes obscene protests against "Lyndon Johnson's War" at the University of California in Berkeley. He was shocked when I suggested that although their remonstrances were intemperate and simplistic, their basic complaints had merit. It got worse when my dad told me the President of the United States based his decisions on knowledge I had no access to, and I replied that I had a better understanding of what was happening in Southeast Asia than the President did because I had just returned from two years in the area, and I knew some of the information that was fed to the President was distorted. I had never before suffered such a complete inability to exchange views with my dad, and for the next ten years we both avoided any such exchanges. After 1975 he relented and granted me some slack. He died in 1978.

**JOHN R. O'BRIEN**  
**Information Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1963-1967)**

*John R. O'Brien was born in 1918 in Seattle, Washington. Prior to World War II, he worked as a journalist. Following the war, Mr. O'Brien became involved with the USIS in the Japan Occupation and later served in Indonesia, Burma, and Thailand. He also worked as Deputy Director of the Voice of America and as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs with the State Department. This interview was conducted by Hans Tuch in 1988.*

O'BRIEN: Ken Bunce, then the area director, saw that it was almost a dead program, and Thailand was exploding in every direction, so he transferred me to Bangkok.

*Q: When was that?*

O'BRIEN: That was in 1963.

*Q: In 1963 is when our real involvement in Vietnam and the war started escalating also.*

O'BRIEN: Yes.

*Q: And you were there for how many years?*

O'BRIEN: Four years.

*Q: Four years, from '63 to '67, a very significant period not just for you, Jack, but also for American history.*

O'BRIEN: Well, it was a very exciting time. We had, I think, an important role in that war. I had an excellent arrangement with Lionel Mosley, then the director of personnel. He would send out people, and I would then assign them wherever they were needed in-country. At one time we had either 12 or 13 branch posts, an American at the post, not each one with a library, of course. All spoke Thai and were the eyes and ears of not just the United States Information Service, but I made available to the CIA and one or two others, very informal reports of these people who would write to me on their activities working with the Thai Government on security and developments. Security and development -- those were the key themes.

Graham Martin was the ambassador, a tough, cool character. We were separated by half a mile from the chancery. I would four times a year bring in my branch people to review what they were doing.

Martin asked if he could come over and sit in on our meetings. I said, "Of course. We'll come see you." No, he wanted to come over. He'd come over and take notes on what our people would observe as they were going through a joint Thai-American information project. They'd observe the status of agriculture, they observed the status of a dam-building project, whatever it was, all very informative.

Our people were also active in the war, in a special sense. One day in Ubol, one of the country's northeast towns, Rob Nevitt branch PAO, a first-rate guy, was astonished to find some of the hottest airplanes the United States Air Force had zooming in and landing. He didn't have any advance word of it, nor did the governor. The governor came to him. "Who are these people?" [Laughter] I had not been told about it either, but Nevitt, from that point on, worked with the governor to explain who they were, what they were there for, getting the Thai officials to come out and talk with the commanding general, and getting the Americans to be considerate of Thai pride and culture.

So the war was being fought in large measure from Thai bases, which the Thai would not admit.

Now, in some parts of Asia -- it may also be true in other parts of the world -- there's reality and the confirmation of reality, two quite different things. So an old correspondent friend of mine, Keyes Beech, of the Chicago Daily News, would come through Bangkok, and he knew every bit of what was going on, the bombing of North Vietnam from Thai bases. I couldn't confirm it. I'd

have Keyes out for a drink, and say, "You know, they're just big mosquitos out there, Keyes." We joked about it. We had to, because the Thai Government would not confirm reality until -- and this became a very delicate operation; it was about as elaborate as a Japanese tea ceremony - the Thai Government, for reasons I'm not still quite certain of, decided at a certain time that they would confirm that American planes were using their territory to bomb North Vietnam.

So we had to work out a scheme with the foreign office, State, CINCPAC, and the Pentagon. It was to be at 11:35 p.m., after a dinner at a Chinese restaurant in Bangkok that a Thai reporter I knew would say, "Jack, I understand that tomorrow we're going to have a tour of some of the activity at Thai air bases."

I said, "Yes, Thah, that's correct. The Thai Government has arranged that." He and I had rehearsed it in the afternoon.

"What will we see, Jack?"

I said, "You'll see American planes taking off." I left it open.

"And they'll be taking off for where?"

I said, "North Vietnam." I said this at 11:35. This was the first official confirmation of what we were doing.

Well, it satisfied the Thai, doing it that way. Of course, we played their game. We needed their real estate. It was done with a delicacy that the Thai appreciated. I don't take credit for it; I was a part of it. So that was an interesting part of the war there.

*Q: Was there an insurgency in Thailand at that time?*

O'BRIEN: Oh, indeed. The northeast part of the country is the poorest, and the Communists had a foothold there. That's where AID was putting its big projects.

We concentrated in the northeast in publicizing everything that AID was doing, and we were doing a lot. It meant that our people would spend an awful lot of their time out in the boondocks with the Thai officials, making friends, passing out material, showing our films, getting reports on problems, and so on. So it was very active.

O'BRIEN: You mentioned, Tom, that we were getting into psychological warfare. We were, indeed. Leonard Marks, then the director of the agency, came through, and he called Barry Zorthian over from Saigon.

*Q: Barry, at that time, was . . .*

O'BRIEN: Barry was my opposite number in Vietnam. The three of us sat in my house and reviewed what we were doing. Leonard was very good about it.

He said, "Look, you guys. I know that Barry's gotten much more deeply involved because he's had to."

He turned to me and said, "Now, Jack, I only tell you don't get me into trouble. Don't get me into trouble."

I said, "Leonard, I'm following the instructions we've had so far, and I don't see any possibility I can get you into trouble."

*Q: Trouble in what way?*

O'BRIEN: Trouble in getting us too deeply involved with the Thai Government in ways that would reflect, possibly, on the United States or on Lyndon Johnson.

So it meant we were cooperative, but not to appear that we were leading the Thai into war. Now, I think that same problem plagued Lew Schmidt, my successor, and his successors. When I was transferred back to the front office of USIA, Frank Shakespeare called me in and said that he had heard from Kissinger.

*Q: Frank Shakespeare was then . . .*

O'BRIEN: Then the director of USIA.

*Q: He became that in '68, succeeding Leonard Marks, and remained director until 1972.*

O'BRIEN: Yes. I'm jumping ahead just to keep in line talk of psychological warfare, because Frank had heard from Henry Kissinger that USIS in Thailand was doing too many things that the Thai should be doing for themselves.

I've jumped ahead, as I just said, Tom, but I want to follow up on this matter of psychological warfare. When Shakespeare became concerned because of Kissinger's call, he then brought out a lot of the publications and posters that we had been turning out in Thailand, and he kept asking me, "Jack, you've been there. Is it necessary for us to do it? Why can't the Thai do it?"

I said, "They're simply not prepared to do it, and we work closely with them, we share a lot of the costs with them and ideas, but it's a joint enterprise and we look upon them as partners in this."

Frank was scared, frankly, and he didn't want to cross Kissinger on it. Kissinger apparently read it as our going down the path of getting involved, as we were in Vietnam. I believe our joint programs were then curtailed. Lew Schmidt, my successor, should know.

But the Thai program was a vigorous one in almost every sense. We had a spectacularly successful binational center. It was created long before I was there, so I take no credit for it. It was called AUA, an abbreviation for American University Alumni Association.

It was built on land that was donated by the royal family. The United States Government contributed a little piece of property to round it out. It had night and day English-language teaching. There were all sorts of artistic performances. We had a number of people on contract as teachers. It was the symbol of American-Thai cooperation, and it would be the last thing, as I told many visitors, the last thing I'd want to give up in our program, because it was bedrock solid, still goes on to this day, as far as I know, one of the most successful in the world.

*Q: A huge English-teaching program.*

O'BRIEN: Oh, tremendous, yes. People paid for it, too. We had a very active Fulbright program, first-rate. It's interesting to look back on the Thai experience overseas. The Thai, first, oh, since the First World War would send their brightest people to France or to England. Since that time it's overwhelmingly been to the United States, so there's a very, very large number of Thai who have gone to school in our country. Indeed, there's sort of a special club there of American women who have married Thai, and they have regular meetings, when we were there, at least, at the AUA. Our friendship is deep. We all know about what the Thai did in World War II, in providing hospitality to OSS and helping us in a number of ways. So we were dealing in a very, very favorable atmosphere, and you could go almost as far as you wanted, except -- and I'll never forget this -- the first Thai graduate of M.I.T., a dignified man named Phra Bisal, and I used to have lunch regularly. He was head of the AUA.

One day I got word from the agency that they had a very elaborate Berlin Wall exhibit they'd like to send out. So I brought it up in the course of lunch with this distinguished Thai, and saw a sort of cloud over his forehead. He said, "Jack, don't put it at the AUA. It's a little too political. Put it in your own library. I want to see it, but put it in your own library." He was right. We did as he suggested.

We had very good relations with such organizations as the border patrol police, a good outfit. Of course, they had a big job. They had borders with Burma and Laos and Cambodia and Malaya. The head of the border patrol police invited me one time to come with him in his helicopter to the borders and to see what was going on. I said, "Fine."

We were returning in late afternoon, the last part of the journey back to Bangkok, when the skies literally turned black. It was a big storm. So the general directed that the helicopter go down. Well, it was right in the middle of a rice field, and out of nowhere came dozens of little Thai kids. How many times do you get a helicopter land in your rice field? The storm was heavy, so the general turned to his aide and said, "Break out the whiskey." So we all sat and drank and watched the kids playing. The storm showed no sign of letting up, and the general, however, kept looking at his watch. I said, "General, there's no hurry as far as I'm concerned. I have plenty of time. Don't worry about going back to Bangkok in a hurry."

"Oh," he said, "I think we'd better take off."

Well, it was still black, but the plane shot up, just like an arrow. Thank God, about a thousand feet up, it was beautiful, crystal clear, sunny. I'm sure my face showed the relief I felt.

*Q: The program in Thailand at that time, would you say that it was motivated or guided by our tremendous involvement, because of our efforts in Vietnam, or was it because we realized that Thailand was an important country in terms of U.S. policy?*

O'BRIEN: Oh, I think all those factors worked, Tom. Our program was based upon a long friendship, really, and so we had a solid foundation as represented by the AUA. It was on that, then, that we could go into other programs relating to the war in Vietnam, and it was that that enabled us to do things on radio and in joint publications. I never forgot that there was a foundation that had its origins long before we got into war in Vietnam. As far as I'm aware, that friendship still exists. Thailand was and is important to us because of geography, and we've been fortunate in having them as good friends and allies over the years.

**MONCRIEFF J. SPEAR**  
**Special Assistant to the Ambassador**  
**Bangkok (1963-1967)**

*Moncrieff J. Spear was born in New York in 1921. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He received a bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 1946 and a master's degree from George Washington University in 1949. Mr. Spear joined the Foreign Service in 1950 and served in Germany, the Philippines, Yugoslavia, Thailand, the Bahamas, Vietnam, and Washington, DC. Mr. Spear was interviewed by Thomas J. Dunnigan in 1993.*

*Q: This presumably had to be cleared through the Operations Center. Well, that was certainly an exciting experience. Presumably, one of the highlights of your career. But you didn't stop there, because from then on you moved out to the field again, this time to Bangkok. Tell me something about what you did there.*

SPEAR: I went out to Bangkok in 1963 as a special assistant to Ambassador Graham Martin. My job there was coordination of the various counterinsurgency programs which the U. S. Government was supporting in Thailand. There had been a growing communist insurgency, particularly in the northeastern provinces of Thailand. The Thai Government had sought assistance from the United States. As a result, there was a growing proliferation of these programs and a need to pull them together and coordinate them more closely under the chief of our diplomatic mission. This was a matter on which Ambassador Martin had some very strong views, and I was the one who carried out the staff function of this effort. It involved not only our military assistance to the Thai military forces, but also large amounts of economic assistance, particularly in rural development, road building, community development, and that sort of thing. Our USIA [United States Information Agency] people were also training the Thai in developing all sorts of pro-government propaganda activities to be carried out among the villagers in the northeast of Thailand to convince them of the government's concern for them, and to let them know what the government was doing. In other words, to have a multiplier effect on the assistance programs which the Thai Government was carrying out.

The Thai Government had originally started on its own a program known as "Mobile Development Units." These were largely Army engineer units which were sent out to the provinces to drill wells, develop farm to market roads, and so forth. We funneled quite a bit of military assistance into providing them both with training and the equipment to do this sort of thing.

The USIA people had mobile teams which went around to the various villages. Displaying a great deal of imagination, they had worked up a technique which was known as "Mohlam." These involved local storytellers who used to travel around to villages. With musical accompaniment these people would improvise as they went along, telling various stories. Well, they worked into the stories what the Thai Government was doing in terms of development, public health programs, and so forth. These were supported by our USIA field officers out, who trained and traveled around with the Thai teams. I must say it was all highly successful.

We were making a great effort at that point to keep the Thai in the forefront of this whole program and prevent their throwing their hands up and feeling that the United States would do all of this for them. I'm afraid that this later was one of the syndromes we ran into in Vietnam. The local effort there had slacked off because the U. S. had come in and, they felt had overridden them. Major efforts were made to try to upgrade and increase the police presence of the Thai security forces up in the northeast. Some of the [communist guerrilla] activity got beyond the ability of the local police forces to handle, so there were para-military police and Thai Army units where they were needed, also.

Following that assignment in Bangkok -- we were there for four years [1963 to 1967] -- I came back [to the Department] and worked as Country Director for Thailand-Burma affairs [1968-1970]. There, I think, our principal concern was trying to get sufficient resources for the various programs in Thailand, so that, in effect, we didn't wind up with two Vietnam's in Southeast Asia, instead of just one. We were in fierce competition for resources with Vietnam. There was a great deal of bureaucratic interplay going on there, if you will, in our effort to get the resources we felt were necessary there.

This was also the period when there was a large military buildup, when the U. S. Air Force was moving into Thailand to carry out bombing operations in North Vietnam.

*Q: Well, the programs you describe, Monty, must have involved many thousands of Americans in Thailand at that time, presumably largely engaged in matters connected with our presence in Vietnam.*

SPEAR: Yes, that's true. In fact, the U. S. presence in Vietnam had become so large that there was a great deal of pressure to locate a lot of these activities in Thailand. For instance, the [Department of Defense] Advanced Research Projects Agency -- ARPA -- was carrying out a number of experiments with radio equipment and things like that to support U. S. forces in Vietnam. But because of the heavy presence in Vietnam, ARPA activity was largely located over in Thailand, and that was just one example. A large number of dependents of our Foreign Service staff in Vietnam were also living in Bangkok.

While I was Thai Country Director, we had a visit by Thai Prime Minister [Thanom]. I was in charge of setting up all of the arrangements for the visit. Because he was a general, it had been agreed that after the state banquet at the White House the Marine Drill Team from the Marine Barracks would put on a demonstration of precision drill. This would be followed by a fireworks display. Lois and I were invited down to the reception after the dinner and stood out on the balcony. The drill team, performing under floodlights, was spectacular, with a full moon shining down on the Washington Monument in the background. This was followed by a marvelous fireworks demonstration. The only problem was that the fireworks demonstration took place a week after the riots and burning in Washington following the assassination of Martin Luther King [in 1968]. We discovered the next day that the White House switchboard had lit up in a fashion that almost put the fireworks to shame, with people wanting to know whether the rioting had started all over again.

**PAUL GOOD**  
**Junior Officer Trainee, USIS**  
**Ubol (1963-1965)**

**Field Support Officer**  
**Bangkok (1966-1968)**

*Paul Good was born in Kentucky in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree at Cascade College he received his master's degree from Ball State. His career in USIA included positions in Thailand, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Australia, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Morocco, and Senegal. Mr. Good was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 2000.*

*Q: Well, then you were in Thailand from '63?*

GOOD: To '68.

*Q: '68? My goodness.*

GOOD: That was back when USIA was trying to do what they thought State was going to do before State did it, and then State didn't do it. That was to build a three-year posting. So I was out there three years before I got home leave. State was only out for two. It was too long the first time around; it was. It was a traumatic time because I'd done that JOT and I was sent out of country to-

*Q: Let's talk about your JOT.*

GOOD: They only gave us five months overseas in language training, and we did our exam on tape, sent back for evaluation at FSI, and I got two-two plus I guess, which is what they were expecting from the 10-month course back here. My classmates, the missionaries, and I were

going to missionary school in Blue House there on North Saturn and were expected to do two years of language, so when they came out, they were preaching in the language. We should have had more. But I don't know whether it was Washington's decision or the post's decision, probably a combination of pressure from the post to get this body and Washington looking at the figures and the cost of having to pay differential and to pay for your R&R somewhere overseas. I was then put into JO training, JOT training as we called it in Bangkok. We were a large post; we ended up with 45 officers, largest USIS post I've ever been in, and with 240 local employees, just in USIS. It was easy to bicycle us around, for there was so much in the information section, and so much in the field office, and so much in the culture section.

*Q: Who was the head of public affairs officer in...?*

GOOD: We had Jack O'Brien, followed by Lewis Schmidt. We had actually one week of PAO, who just died a year ago I think it was Howard Garnish. I remember the roast that USIS gave Garnish at the Oriental Hotel, on the river. I'd never been to a roast before. I hadn't been in Bangkok five days, I think, they had it Friday night. One of the officers, whose wife was teaching the queen's daughter ballet, really tore this PAO apart. Now I got the impression that it was more than a roast for him. He was venting some steam as well. The roaster, poor fellow, never left Thailand. He sort of retired in place, living at the palace on the Queen's money. He came down with a paralyzing disease, and the Queen was most puzzled that the American government didn't have any medical plans for him. So she had to pay for his whole medical problem. I think he died at post. But the roast was amazing. I thought the PAO was an inoffensive, pleasant, short, jolly, geographer, had a Ph.D., But I only saw him for a week, so what did I know.

Arriving in the country on Pan Am, we arrived in the evening of course, and met by the USIS field operations officer was designated to go out and pick me up. Two kids, one on my back, one walking by me; it was humid. We were dumped in the Erawan Hotel, no air conditioning, chin-chucks (lizards) on the walls; it was foreign.

*Q: (Laughing)*

GOOD: I hadn't ever had a papaya before. Breakfast the next morning. What they served was papaya. It's an acquired taste. It's okay, but the first time around I didn't think I liked it.

The post was quite nice. The post was located in what had been the embassy at the end of WWII. Our main building was one that had been used as the combination embassy and ambassador residence. They had some other buildings, all of which changed over the years. We bought a new little warehouse out of petty cash, while I was in the exec (executive) office there later on.

I was able to study in the afternoons up on the unairconditioned porch in one of the buildings, the audiovisual building. I had a chance to practice my language around town. This is what I'd spend my weekends doing, so I got a lot of use. We had a fair number of language-trained officers. Only had one fellow who was a four-four. I thought that I'd had a three-three by the time I finished, but when I came back here I found out how wonderful FSI was. They really had a memory. They didn't want this experimental program to be able to show real potential. They

knew very well that we had been under orders in Thailand by the ambassador not to speak about race relations, so we didn't have vocabulary built up on that. So what did they have a test on? Race relations. So I came up with the same score I'd had four years before. Never forgave Warren Yates for that.

*Q: (Chuckle) Who was ambassador when you were there?*

GOOD: Sullivan, not Sullivan. Who was the fellow that was ruler in Vietnam at the end?

*Q: Graham Martin?*

GOOD: Graham Martin, yes. He was there much of my time. At my arrival our Ambassador who was still sick from hepatitis. Martin was the one that was ambassador when I was up country. His wife was the sister of the Marine Commandant back here in Washington. She had a lot of her brother's characteristics. Green was her name, his name. Of course, she ran the embassy women like women were run in those days, charitable activities, wrapped those bandages, visited those orphanages, do what you're told.

*Q: What was your impression of relations between the United States and Thailand when you got there in '63.*

GOOD: Fine. We weren't into Vietnam yet. I mean, we were there; it wasn't yet a major conflict. The Tonkin Gulf took place in November of '63?

*Q: It was a little later than that. November of '63 was the assassination.*

GOOD: '64. No, not '63. '64.

*Q: Yes.*

GOOD: Because, yes, I got over there in June if 1963, yes '64.

*Q: Had Kennedy been assassinated?*

GOOD: Kennedy was assassinated when I was a language student, I heard the news while I was getting a haircut. I had gone out to look at one of the historical sites southwest of Bangkok that day. I'd stopped to get a haircut on the way back, and they had the radio on. I was not far advanced as a language student, couldn't believe what I thought I was hearing. I thought, "Can they really be saying what I think I'm hearing, the president of the United States, dead?" I had a long wave radio in the car, had to have both in Bangkok at that time. I had both on my radio, so that when I got closer to Bangkok I got the English version and found out it'd happened.

So that would have been, let's see and get it straight. I finished language training in November of '63, went out to post. Something happened in November of '63.

*Q: '63 was also when Diem was killed, and there was a coup in Saigon, and things started to go*

*downhill.*

GOOD: Yes, that's what it was, and then the Gulf was in fall of '64.

*Q: Yes, because Johnson was president at that time.*

GOOD: Because I was just arriving in Ubol when that took place, my first assignment (November '64). So I was in JOT training from the end of the year, December 1963 I suppose, until the next November.

*Q: Yes, well, then your first actual post was what?*

GOOD: Assistant Branch Post Officer Ubol.

*Q: What did that mean?*

GOOD: That's spelled U-B-O-L. L is pronounced N. Ubol Ratchathani, and that was up in the Northeast. If you think of Thailand as an elephant, that was in the ear. It's over next to Laos and just above Cambodia. There was a small JUSMAG (Joint U.S. Military Affairs Group) contingent there, about 15 people. We had a branch officer, Rob Nevitt. We had a few Australian military there as well. A little later an army detachment communications group came in across the river. There was also a listening post there. You know those bright young guys that cause all kinds of trouble with the girls, undisciplined, but they were very bright, and had languages, and they would listen. So that was what we had. But the Australians were fun. The American contingent went from these 15 to about 5,000 troops by the time I left 18 months later.

*Q: Good God!*

GOOD: They built up because we had an F-104 repair shop there for F-104 that were assisting were doing rescue missions over North Vietnam, which is rescue missions for sighting people and they'd direct helicopters in on the downed pilots. I was living two blocks away from the field, and at night, if you're having a cocktail party, you had to stop when they roared up the jets to check their repair work. Those are loud planes.

*Q: What sort of work were you doing?*

GOOD: We had a program which had been instituted with the purpose of solidifying the ties behind their king. This, by the time Lewis Schmidt left, had been pretty well been scotched by Washington because they didn't feel that this was the kind of thing we should be doing. We were in effect a PR (public relations) unit for the Thai government. We would pass out pictures of the king. We would put up posters which had public health themes. We had comic books, which had anticommunist themes. All of which were being printed in Manila by our publishing house there.

We were doing "molam" movies. Molam is a musical form, folk singing type thing. We would hire teams to do molam films with an anticommunist, pro Thai government theme, and then we would take these films with us when we went on our trips. I would spend 80 percent of my time

in the field. We had a fleet of cars, CJ6s, that's a stretch Jeep. My car was a Jeep station wagon. These CJ6s had a platform on top. They had a large water container, and they had extra gas tanks. They had a generator that was tied down, screwed down in the back, because we had lost a local employee, the year before I got there, when he hit a tree. The generator was loose and landed on him, and he was done. So we had to carefully secure the generator by nuts and bolts. We had a container for our poles on which we would put up a screen, which was visible of course from both sides. We had audiences on both sides of the sheet. One of my favorites was "New York, New York," a propaganda film from New York. It didn't have any words; it had some music. It was a great crowd gatherer, because it was nothing they'd ever seen before.

*Q: Yes.*

GOOD: Then we'd go into molam, which pushed the message. I was programmed to fall asleep when molam came on because we were working long hot days.

We were up at 6:30, then 6:00, trying to find something to eat. We had hard tack with us if we were desperate. But we tried to go on the open economy, and there wasn't much in the villages. We were up in the Northeast, and in the dry season it's dry and not much growing. The villagers are poor, and so what you'd have, I can remember one meal in March, we had one chicken for the whole day for the whole crew. So you had chicken, essence of chicken if you will; you had leaves that were in this sauce, and that gave it a little flavoring; then you'd have sticky rice in the baskets, which you would give to the villagers. They had a top on the basket, so that when you finished what you wanted, you put the top back on. It was on the string, so that you couldn't separate it from the bottom. That was better because if you were full you could put the top on. But if you were being served regular rice, your timing had to be just right because it was offensive if you left anything, and if you cleaned it up at the wrong moment, they'd put more on! Now that was bad, not only because you didn't want anymore probably, but because they didn't really have enough rice to go around anyway. So the sticky rice was a better deal, but you had to wash your hands quickly because that became like glue. It would hours to get off if it dried on your fingers. But it was very good.

So we would be out for about 10 days on a trip, probably two vehicles, my station wagon, in which I would carry district officials, from the amphur or district led by the "nac amphoe." There might be a doctor from the provincial headquarters. There could be some inspector; they had a cultural inspector. They would do their thing during the day, and we'd show our movies at night. We'd put up our posters during the day. Occasionally we would have some sports equipment to hand out, not often, but occasionally. We'd visit, pay our respects to the monk or the monks at the local temple. We usually were camped out on what would be a bandstand, if you will; it was a wooden platform. It was adjacent to the temple, if you're lucky. We, of course, slept in our sleeping bags. We didn't have tents. We would usually have a folding canvas cot. You'd put your sleeping bag on that. So you didn't sleep past dawn because the village began to have life. You learned how to take a shower with dipped water with a "pahama" (rectangular cloth) around your waist and with the villagers all around you watching, and how to take off that wet one and put on a dry one with the crowd there watching, too. Pahamas are great. They're a six by three foot cloth that you can use for any number of things. Swimming, it's swimming trunks in the Mekong River; you can wrap things in it; you carry things with it; it's a belt; I still wear them

often, because they're so comfortable.

*Q: Was there a guerilla or communist movement going on while you were doing this?*

GOOD: Well, certainly there was in Laos. Word had it that there were infiltrators in northeast Thailand and north Thailand as well. I can't say that I ever identified any. But I did get a meritorious honor award for serving in an area which was under threat. We watched to be sure that there might not be mines on the road. If we saw something on the road, we'd make sure we went around it. We had Vietnamese refugees in a camp near Vientiane, which were an annoyance and a worry to the Thai government. These were foreigners and they didn't particularly like foreigners. They were coming from an area that had communists, so they didn't know what the connections might still be. So they pretty well kept them under lock and key at that camp.

*Q: These would be from the North Vietnam?*

GOOD: Probably. At that time possibly I wouldn't swear to it. Probably they were, but they were coming across Laos. They could have been coming from any number of places.

We still were able to go over into Laos for R& R (rest and relaxation) if you could call it that, because you had highlands over there. You'd go across to Pakse and then drive up into the hill country. Tom Dooley had some health units up there, Philippine doctors, nurses. You couldn't drive from Pakse to Xiangkhoang on the Laos side. That had been possible in '62 still. But about '63 that was closed down, because it was insecure in the area to the northeast. Up, of course across the Mekong, in the narrowest section of Laos, they just couldn't keep it secure, so we couldn't do the driving. But we could go across at Savannakhet where we had a branch post and at Pakse.

I remember visiting over in Laos one night and one of the USIS local employees was telling me how he was handing out ammunition. I don't know why. But somehow or other we'd get involved in things that we weren't supposed to be involved with.

We had Air America over there. We had AID (Agency for International Development) of course. Air America was U.S. cargo operation. One of their employees created a pornographic novel about Air American activities. I had a copy one time; some one stole it.

We traveled a lot. We had in Ubol a reading room, small library. There were two of us officers. When Rob left, I moved into his job as branch officer and I got a new assistant.

My wife had a child in Ubol, our fourth. That was the sad part. He was born in February of 1965. The night before we left, we had a farewell party at the house. We invited Australian friends over for the party. They'd just had a dengue fever outbreak in the camp. For adults of course, it was painful for some, but they survived. But they still were infected. A mosquito bit one of them, and then our son. We went on the morning train back to Bangkok. It's a 12-hour ride. That Saturday night he was crying already, and he cried all Sunday. We finally took him to the hospital and he never recovered, because he was a kid. He had none of the immunity that doctors at the SEATO

(South East Asia Treaty Organization) medical unit considered kids that were born here in the States had. But the Caucasian kids born in Thailand apparently didn't. They did an autopsy on him to make sure that they knew what he had.

*Q: Oh, how tragic!*

GOOD: Yes, terrible! Just absolutely devastated! There wasn't anything that you could do! I mean, it was better that he died, because there was no treatment. All they could do was give him intravenous feeding, liquids.

*Q: Yes.*

GOOD: He lasted until Thursday. My wife was down there most of the time. They told her on Thursday. "You can go home and get some rest." Ten that evening they called us, said, "Come back quickly." By the time we got there, he was dead.

The embassy came through though, marvelously at that point, just laid it out. They took care of all the problems. They made sure that costs were covered. They took care of the cremation. The problem is what to do with the urn. I still have it. I have no idea what to do with it. That was a sad ending to our up country stay. Actually I had been down to Bangkok for a month before that because they needed help at the field operations office. We were expanding our posts to 13. They needed someone with experience to set them up. I returned to Ubol to get my family. Shortly thereafter we went on home leave for a couple of months, then came back to Bangkok.

*Q: Okay, well, this is fairly a good place to stop. And I'll put at the end here where we were, so we'll know where to pick it up. So we got you coming back to Bangkok from home leave, is that right?*

GOOD: Yes.

*Q: What year, when did you come back?*

GOOD: '66, the year that Johnson visited Thailand. I was fortunate enough to miss that visit while I was on home leave. I did get to see the paved streets in Manila that they had done up for his visit there. We even got some benefits that I'll go into later on from his visit that we were allowed to piggyback on...

*Q: Well, we'll pick this up in '66, and we'll cover what you were doing from '66 to '68 in Thailand, and then we'll move on, okay?*

*Remember a talk about Ubol?*

GOOD: Living in Ubol in 1965, 1966, '64 to '66, my boss had only two children, and one was a baby. His house was smaller. I don't know whether there had been anything more available when he went up there or not. He found me a larger house, a more imposing house, no better built. It had been a Chinese merchant's house, which meant that it was wooden with bars on the windows

and screen. Obviously not perfect screen, because of the problem that I told you earlier. It was located with some yard; there was a lawn. They ultimately put up a bowling alley next door before we left.

The interesting thing about the location, I was half a block from the governor's house. The governor was paid about the same as I was paid. He had a few more perks of course that I didn't have, like a Mercedes to use, and entertainment expenses, and I'm sure there was a little bit of corruption in there somewhere too, but he was a nice guy. But one night I decided to survey the area two blocks radius from my house, my house being the center. There were 19 warehouses within that two-block radius. Now that area was off limits to the troops. These weren't great warehouses, they were shacks, and there would be a small waiting room, and then like, you know, areas in back. But this kind of a location so close to the governor's house astounded me. We were a block from the hospital, which had been set up by the Seventh Day Adventists, and then they were kicked out because the community felt that now that they had the hospital, they didn't need these pushy missionaries who were buying their converts. They'd give them a dollar attendance on a week's meeting. Ubol had been a center for the Koreans working for the Japanese back in World War II. Prostitution had been a big thing there. They had a section of town they called the A-frame, because that's where the prostitution houses that had been frequented by the Korean soldiers had been set. The Koreans carry their loads on A-frames.

*Q: A-frames, yes.*

GOOD: That's how it got that name. Of course these warehouses were of all styles, they did have warehouses that specialized in preteen, if you will, child prostitution. They had some that specialized in pregnant women. The costs that I remember, they tell me, probably 50 cents.

*Q: Yes, well, it's a different society.*

GOOD: A very different society, yes. One of the interesting things on these trips that we were traveling on, when we'd get to a village there wasn't a hotel. If there was a hotel, it would close down by nine o'clock. Well, you weren't ready for bed at that time usually, in town, and there were people that you wanted to meet. There would be experts who were out building dams here, places that you didn't have time to go visit. They came to town in the evening and the only place you could meet was the warehouse. Now we didn't go there for the whores. In fact, I can remember, few were using the facility for that.

*Q: It was the place you had a beer.*

GOOD: It was the place where you talked and had a beer, met your contacts, and it was an information gathering location. The police chief might get a freebie, but we weren't into that. I remember my boss's wife had told me when I got to post. She said, "Now look. This is gonna (going to) be a part of your travel experience." She said, "My husband does this all the time, and I don't have any problem with it. It's not something he's using."

But the whole problem of the GIs (general infantry) as they were coming up, airmen I guess it was, not GIs, was that many of them were coming to find this as a first experience. They would

come into the office and, because we didn't have a consulate in Ubol, wanting to know how they could get their girlfriends, who they were wanting to marry, official and back home. Well, they thought that they had compromised these girls, and it was their duty to marry them. Of course, the girls ran a business. When these guys left, even if they ultimately did get to the States, they were carrying on their business, even though the guys were sending money back for them while they were gone. Very tough girls, there was nothing wrong with the trade. It was a way they could earn their dowry, get themselves set up for marriage by themselves, a perfectly acceptable part of society. The health facility on Fridays would have them all come in; they'd be checked over. But it was certainly startling for me, certainly (laughing), and certainly for the airmen who didn't have as much contact with the local society. They didn't understand that this was to be treated a certain way. You went to the girls at night; you didn't squire them around the town. Some of them did that and it was offensive to the community.

Basically it didn't matter what level of society you were in, you did not go out with your wife, and you didn't go together to the restaurant. The district attorney did. He was an oddball. He and his wife would go out to the restaurant in public and eat. If you went to a party, the men went to one place; the women went to another house. Wives didn't go to the same parties. It was just the way it was done.

I remember once up in the Nakhon Panom on the river, the GIs, the airmen were just coming in. They were setting up a base. I saw these fellows in winter uniforms walking down the main street one night and I walked up to visit them. I talked to one of them and I said, "Where are you coming from?"

He said, "Michigan. They loaded us on a plane, and they passed us through Travis Air Force Base in California, and here we are." He didn't know where he was. He had just been engaged and he was all worried. He says, "I'm gonna be faithful."

I don't know, I never saw him again, but the odds were against him.

*Q: Well, this is very difficult. Well, then we'll pick this up again, 1966 to '68 after home leave.*

GOOD: In 1966, yes.

*Q: It was the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2000. So where are we now? You're leaving Thailand?*

GOOD: No, not leaving Thailand.

*Q: No, you're...*

GOOD: No, I was leaving Ubol Ratchathani, up in the ear of the elephant as you're looking at Thailand as the shape of an elephant's head, close to the border with Laos, and just north of the border of Cambodia. I left there in May of 1966 and went to Bangkok for TDY (temporary duty), went back up to bring my family down. We had an incident, tragic one at that point.

*Q: You told me about your son.*

GOOD: Yes. My son picked up a mosquito bite and died of encephalitis the next week. We stayed there in Bangkok for a couple of more months before we went on our first home leave. This was a illustration of the USIA versus State, and one-upmanship, and the agency said, "Well by golly, State's gonna (going) to start doing the three year tours now. So we're going to jump first, we're in the three year tours." Well State never jumped, at least in that decade. But I think for first two or three years out was too long. But anyway...

*Q: I think so, too, yes.*

GOOD: I came back on home leave, the only home leave I ever got that was a full home leave because I was going back to the same post. I managed to miss Johnson's presidential visit to Thailand.

*Q: Aw, shucks.*

GOOD: Shucks. I did get to enjoy the benefits of that visit however, because the post sneaked in some better cars and some typewriters, although they had to send the typewriters back later because they hadn't gotten permission from Washington to buy them. I came through the Philippines on the way back in and enjoyed the paved streets that had been prepared for the Johnson visit in Manila. I came back to the job I had been brought down from Ubol to take, which was field support officer. We had or were in the process of expanding to 13 branch posts in Thailand, and they'd wanted someone who had both executive office experience and field experience. I had both, having been in the executive office for a bit before I went out up country, to service, make sure the personnel was running well, to make sure the supply lines were in shape, make sure that the housing was fine, the offices were rented, cars were provided and the regulations were adhered to. So it meant a lot of traveling, but by the time I'd finished, I had been to all the provinces of Thailand, whether or not they were part of the official itinerary or not.

*Q: You were doing this when, was it '66?*

GOOD: '66 to '68. It was a two-year tour. We did not completely staff all 13 posts in the end. We had the facilities rented. We had everything ready to go, but they ultimately after I left, finally didn't get people into two of them as I remember. Now of course it's way down to perhaps one; I'm not sure what the latest statistic is. The basic ones when I got there were Udorn in the north, which had a consulate at that time, Chiang Mai, of course, in the north with a consulate, Songkhla in the south which had had a consulate, but I think by the time I got there it was closed, and Korat which was the starting off point for the northeast area and the location for storage of a battalion's worth of military equipment, in case of its need.

It was also the base for the major road construction project through northeast to the Laos border, which it had been completed shortly before I arrived in '63. It was a contract operation. They brought Chinese in, to work on it. It was a paved, all weather, two lane road, which was a marvelous addition to the northeast. It was the only length of paved road that they had in the northeast. Now I understand that all the provincial capitals are connected, and the laterite roads

have disappeared on the main stretches.

*Q: With these posts, what was the rationale for having so many in this country? What were you up to?*

GOOD: Washington began to back away from this about this time, although of course inertia kept things going for a while. Vietnam had started effectively in about '64, '65. We were looking for dependable allies in the region. We were going to do everything we could to make sure that Thailand was one of those. We were constantly out while I was up in Ubol and of course after I left Ubol, supporting the branch posts, taking teams, and sponsoring teams of Thai government officials from the district level with specialist doctors, agricultural officers, and so forth. The purpose was to show the people that the King was thinking of them and taking care of them and interested in listening to what they had to say, on the theory that if the people were supportive of the King, that he would be the binding force, the focal point for all attention, and there wouldn't be any susceptibility to the communist influence which was coming in on the Laotian and Cambodian sides from Vietnam. That was the theory. We pinned up a lot of pictures of the King, which were printed in our Manila printing plant, we distributed lots of propaganda in the form of comic books, some of this was on health, and some of it was on security, we had molam, which were groups of singers who sort of chanted. It wasn't just a song, but chanted stories which had propaganda themes of the good guy wins, the good guy is a good guy because for example he brought health facilities to them, and just generally tried to bring the country together. Washington thought we were spending too much money on something that wasn't direct enough for their feelings. However, our PAO was very senior and he held the area director at bay while he was still there. The shouting matches on the telephone could be heard through the entire building however..

Well this is the usual thing. Washington, wanting something much more direct or policy oriented, "You fight communists," that sort of thing. We were trying to say, "Well, that's not the way to do it. You say, 'You support the king.'"

Well, obviously, there had been agreement initially in Washington about how to do this, but then a new area director arrived who ultimately bombed out of the agency because he became in India somewhat like a MacArthur. He didn't listen. It was his first area director job and he was looking to make a mark. Of course you make marks in two ways, you cut back or you expand. He took the cutback route in the case of Thailand.

*Q: As you were looking over this whole thing, as you're looking at the map, were there areas in Thailand where you felt that we needed to concentrate more or that were more dubious as far as supporting their cause?*

GOOD: You mean who might be approaching the borders?

*Q: Yes.*

GOOD: There were three areas, one of which, well, four I suppose, although for different reasons, of which two were not communistic in their threats. The border with Malaysia, the

Malaysian uprising or revolution or submersion, was...

*Q: Insurgency.*

GOOD: Insurgency they called it, yes. It was really finished by '63, but that didn't mean that there wasn't concern that it might start up again on the Thai side and then work its way south. There was some concern down there, and as a result, we opened up another post in Yala, which was closer to the border of Malaysia on the east side.

The border with Burma was not of the concern it is today, although across from Victoria there was a little bit of concern, because you had water communication, communication between the Thai port and the Burmese port.

The two areas of real concern were up in the Chiang Rai area bordering with Laos and fairly close to China and, of course, in the northeast, bordering with Laos along the Mekong, where we were fairly close to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, almost shooting distance at points. So close, that by the time I got up to Ubol in '64, you no longer could take the river side road that ran from Pakse up to Vientiane. It wasn't secure. Any communications were being done by plane at that point. Air America was acting up then.

It was still safe enough in the south of Laos because the trail moved closer to Vietnam at that point and Laos became wider. So we were still able to go up into the hills across the Mekong, where the climate was a little bit milder. The Philippines had a missionary, a Tom Dooley mission up there, medical mission.

I was just reading the other day, a story of an American who's currently teaching English somewhere in Thailand and he talks about a stay he made in Ubol. There was a town, Phibun; it was about 15, 20 miles to the east, on the way to the border of Laos. He talks about it as being a major center these days. It was on an interesting rapids, white water area, on the river. When I was there, it was not unknown as a tourist attraction, but it wasn't connected by a paved road. It wasn't really geared up for tourists. The way he talks about this, it's the biggest thing since sliced bread in northeast Thailand. (Laughing) It was interesting to see how it had changed. It was a vacation spot for prostitutes for example, who would take a two-week shift in a house in Phibun in order to be able to enjoy some neighborhood entertainments during the day, and then go back to wherever they were based. But aside from prostitutes, and an occasional family I guess going down to enjoy, a local family, not coming from any distance, it was not a major tourist attraction.

But during these two years that I was in the field support job, I, as I said, had a great deal of travel to do. It was easier travel than when I'd been at post because I was going between provincial capitals, mostly traveling by train, but on occasion delivering vehicles. We took a caravan out of there once, dropped cars off as we went south on the Kra Peninsula. Occasionally driving north, I remember taking a truck trip with a buddy who was based in Bangkok also. We climbed on a bus truck if you will. It was really not an official bus. It took merchandise between points which had no roads, because all roads led south toward Bangkok. They didn't go east and west. Of course it was useful to have some to step cross east to west, because there were things

in between. It's just they weren't important. So they had some trucks. They didn't have real roads. They were paths and fording rivers, but then you did that most everywhere you went.

But it was interesting, like the time I climbed on the logging train coming from the River Kwai. The River Kwai (Kway) as they said in the movie, where there had been a camp, or near where there had been a POW camp during World War II for building the railroad for the Japanese across to Burma. Of course, that was long gone, but there was a train running up to the town at that point. So John and I climbed on this train and rode it back toward Bangkok, picked up our car at the other end. We were young.

*Q: Yes. While you were doing this whole program, did you find yourself up against any cultural restrictions or caveats?*

GOOD: Yes, these cultural nuances, I learned about them a little bit late, I think. I was already up country; nobody had given me an orientation. After we had been in a village one day, I was told by my chief local employee that I should not precede the district office when we went to a headman's house in a village to have a chat in the evenings because I was the visitor, and he was the official. It hit me hard. I can remember as if it were right here in this room. He was right of course. I was definitely wrong. I understand what proconsul means having been in Thailand. We were under red passports, not black in those days, but it didn't make any difference. If you were American, anything you wanted was yours. Nobody would tell you no. It was up to you to be sensitive. Unfortunately, there were so many Americans that a lot of people weren't sensitive.

*Q: Yes.*

GOOD: But there was no real effort on the part of the Thais to do anything about this. They were going to roll with the punch. They rolled with the Japanese punch in World War II and survived. They had managed to keep their independence during the British and French carving of territory early in the matter and they knew that they would be able to last through the American invasion as well. And, of course, they were making money hand over fist. We were dumping money in that country, not just official grant funds or donations, equipment and so on, but just per diem. We had 10,000 GIs a week in there for R & R, in Bangkok. That's a lot of money!

*Q: It's an awful lot of money!*

GOOD: And if you couldn't get your investment back in two years from a hotel that you'd built, something was wrong with your business deal.

*Q: Yes. Did you run across the problem of grasping entrepreneurs that you were using for one purpose of building things or something, of trying to make sure that things were done correctly?*

GOOD: USIS didn't, because we weren't handling contracts as such. The military did. They occasionally would run into the need to pay somebody off, usually a military officer or general, in order to get a project moving. There would be all kinds of bureaucratic barriers being set up, which could easily be brushed aside by a high enough official, but he needed to be convinced with a little bit of money. Yes, that happened.

*Q: Yes. How about films and things like that? Did you have a pretty good repertoire to draw on, and how did they sort of fit within the Thai?*

GOOD: We'd made our own films in some cases. Certainly the molam groups were on film. The villages liked the molam groups better than, of course, anything that we could import from outside, even if it'd been dubbed into Thai because they knew the molam. They were comfortable with the dialect. It was their speech, and they were comfortable with the means. If we'd pull out this as we usually did just to draw a crowd at the start of an evening, New York film, it had color, didn't have anything but musical background, showed you the majestic towers in New York, that was fine for a teaser, but it wouldn't have kept them, because it was too far away from their comprehension. They hadn't seen it, weren't about to be able to see it, so why bother with it. It was a five minutes, ten minutes max, and then you'd have to get on to something that would hold their attention.

The cities of course were showing the Western films, the 007. It's not 007 at that point; it was...

*Q: Yes, he was going in.*

GOOD: Was he started at that point?

*Q: It was earlier than that.*

GOOD: The Italian Westerns, spaghetti Westerns.

*Q: Yes, spaghetti Westerns with Clint Eastwood.*

GOOD: With Clint Eastwood were started then. Of course the Thai theaters always made these gigantic signs, which might be 20 feet long and 15 feet high that were freestanding in the front of their buildings, in the front of their theaters so that people could see it from a distance. They weren't subtle. To a certain extent, they were caricatures, but they showed you the people and showed you their reactions, and there were girls and that pulled people in. Of course, you stood up when you got in there because the national anthem was playing. You know, after that was done, you could sit down. The movie would start and away you'd go. But we didn't have any censorship, of course. We did later in Australia. It surprised me. Australia still has censorship of anything that's coming in from outside, particularly TV series, TV shows. But Thailand didn't have any of that, self-censorship I suppose. Of course, we didn't put the violence and the sex in anything we did.

*Q: Yes, yes. Were you getting a feel about how the war in Vietnam was being played, because this is during that, as we started our big buildup, and you there when the Tet Offensive caught us by surprise?*

GOOD: We were building in Thailand of course. We were bringing in thousands of troops. At our level in the field, it was concern as the how day-to-day operations were affecting our guys who were based in Thailand, the rescue troops, helicopters, and F-4s who were going out to

protect. We didn't get involved with the policy. We were down at the grass level and we were interested in the behavior in the troops and community relations. One of our jobs was community relations liaison between the U.S. base commander and the city officials. But policy wasn't a particular interest. You could pick up these things on the radios, but we didn't have the press in the field. The press was limited to places like Bangkok; Chiang Mai might have had a few rags around. They didn't want anything more than local news in the agoras. We were not preaching a direct message, so we weren't particularly concerned. Our libraries, of course, had books about the United States. We were pushing the United States as a friendly ally, but we weren't trying to get in there and sell them on Vietnam, or our policy, not at the field level.

*Q: Acting as liaison officer, I would imagine your people would have gotten quite involved with getting our military base commanders to deal with the problems. You had a lot of young men, and all these pretty girls out there! There must have been a lot of problems?*

GOOD: There were problems, although they really didn't get out of hand. If they had a problem, well, for example, as I said, my house was half block from the governor's. There were 19 houses within a block of us, in a circle. Our area was off limits to the troops. There were other areas that they could go to. The people we had a little bit of trouble with were the listeners, not the air troops. The big guys who were the fitness types, the CIA side because they were brighter, in general. They were off base, they had their own house, and it was a little more difficult to keep them under control. Their commander would come up occasionally and try to thin the girls out of the houses, they weren't supposed to have them in there.

As far as riots or misbehavior of that sort, I don't remember any of it, anywhere in my area, and you had a lot of troops, particularly in the Nakhon Phenom, where you were only about 17 clicks (kilometers) from the base. It was a major base, because it was the main rescue place for North Vietnam activities. Initially before they had the facilities really built up out there, they had a lot of these troops in town. As I said, this guy walking up and down one night was the precursor, but hundreds and thousands more came. Once they got their facilities, they had the go-cart racing out there, they had the bowling, and whatever, and then they kept the men restricted to the base, unless they had some business in town.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there, we're talking about the '66 to '68?*

GOOD: Martin, Graham Martin.

*Q: Did he ever caution radar?*

GOOD: Well, we had a branch officers' meeting in Bangkok. We did get addressed by him. The only advice I can remember him giving us directly was, "If you're gonna have an affair, make sure it's outside of Thailand. I don't restrict you on affairs, but don't do it on home territory." That's all.

*Q: I would have thought would have been all very nice, but it's some of the most beautiful women in the world (laughing), and they're all over the place.*

GOOD: And they were all over the place, of course and there was no local societal restriction to it at all, provided of course you did it appropriately. You didn't squire them around town. The problems of disease were a minor problem at that time, syphilis I suppose, gonorrhea certainly. They did have a public health operation going, at least in the provinces. I'm not sure about Bangkok. The girls were to be checking in to the health office every week, Friday morning, but it wasn't a major problem. Peace Corps had some problems with this, I remember. They had a very high infection rate, at least as reported at Seventh Day Adventist Hospital. But the problems that you have today with AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), well that's a different world.

*Q: Yes, a different world. How did you find, I mean looking at it, you were in Bangkok. How did you find the USIA operation meshed with the consulate's men?*

GOOD: Well in the field, we got along very well with the consulates. We were in areas that were in their territory, but which they didn't have manned. So we were a resource that they could tap. There wasn't extensive use of us because there wasn't that much business. But we were there, and they knew that we could be tapped if needed.

In Bangkok, we really had nothing to do with the consulates, except in so far as we were dealing from the cultural office with the exchanges, the training programs. We had occasionally difficulty with the ADM (administrative) section. (Laughing)

In fact, one of the reasons that I left for law school was my irritation with the presumption on the part of some of these lowly ADM types over there that no one else could read the negotiations. The senior ADM officer was great. I wish I could remember his name, but he and his wife were the most dapper couple that I've ever seen in the Foreign Service. They could come through a day of driving in the heat of the countryside and appear without a wrinkle or a hair out of place. They were magnificent that way. But some of their underlings tended to presume they knew more about the regs (regulations) than we did. I found that to be ridiculous. And of course, after I'd finished law school I concluded that I now knew it was ridiculous. I didn't know any more about regs when I finished law school than I did before, but now they paid attention to me, because they figured that I probably did. So there was some visceral satisfaction in spending three years at law just to come back and being able to tell a state ADM officer to stuff it!

*Q: When you left Thailand in '68, had the Tet Offensive of January, February, left much of a mark? We're talking about Tet Offensive in Saigon, well, all of Vietnam. Had that had an impact in Thailand?*

GOOD: No, I don't remember it having any impact. There were military Thais over in Vietnam, of course, a small group. One of our employees who was our tech manager, a Cal Tech engineer. He knew his stuff. His background was Chinese Spanish, but he was Thai. He got himself declared officially dead in Thon Buri, across the river from Bangkok, so that he wouldn't be called up to go to Vietnam with the Thai usurp. (Laughing)

*Q: Well, from my listening to this, a year later, from the time you left, I was at Saigon. Thai troops, the main problem was they might drop a box in the PX (post exchange) on their toe.*

GOOD: (laughing) They didn't send their best. They did it because we wanted someone.

*Q: It was more flags, I think, this was.*

GOOD: Yes, they wanted to have some representations so they could say this was the United Nations effort. But back home it didn't have any. I don't remember any deaths; we didn't have any reported. It was a sideshow.

The big story, of course, was the money being made out of these GIs coming over from Vietnam every week. Now the GI's didn't have to go to Bangkok. Some of them with any brains went down to Panang. You'd see a few down there.

*Q: Also, I ran the consular section for 18 months in Saigon. They would go to Australia and to Hong Kong. We would give out passports, and you know, so they went to Hawaii.*

GOOD: A minority.

*Q: Yes, most, yes. Well in '68, it must have been difficult, particularly for you and your wife after losing a child. Had you given thought to not coming back to Thailand or not?*

GOOD: No, we were young officers. We didn't have any choice, and as a result of it, it didn't cross our minds. We rolled with the punch. We went home, had our home leave. Maybe that's why they let us take the whole home leave, I don't know; 42 days we were out. We came back with a new car and put the oldest at that point in school, at the American school, and away we went.

*Q: How did you find life as a couple in Bangkok at that time?*

GOOD: I was traveling so much that I wasn't all that much involved with the local scene. My wife had friends and they did their things, and we had the occasional party of course. But I wasn't really that much a part of the Bangkok scene myself.

**CHARLES ROBERT BEECHAM**  
**Press Officer, USIS/IPS**  
**Bangkok (1963-1968)**

*Charles Robert Beecham began his career with the State Department in 1952 at the IPS Japan Desk in Washington, DC. He later served in Japan and Thailand and returned to Washington, DC to work for the Voice of America in 1968. Mr. Beecham then became Chief of the Far East Branch and later Deputy Head of IPS. This interview was conducted by Jack O'Brien in 1990.*

*Q: So where did you go next?*

BEECHAM: I was sent to Bangkok as Publications Officer. Within a week or so after my arrival, the Press Officer was called home for some reason and there apparently was nobody else around at the time who could replace him. I had no strong feeling about it, one way or the other, but I remember my surprise in my first meeting with Ambassador Kenneth Tod Young to hear Howard Garnish, the PAO, assure him and Al Puhan, the DCM, that Beecham was highly qualified, based on his experience in Tokyo working for Ambassador MacArthur. Actually, the only time I had any direct contact with MacArthur on a press matter, the Ambassador threw me out of his office for neglecting to take notes while he was dictating a news release for USIS to send out about something he had said or done earlier that day.

*Q: Nonetheless, that was the job you got in Bangkok?*

BEECHAM: Yes. I have forgotten when you showed up there.

*Q: I came in July, 1963, replacing Garnish.*

BEECHAM: And, of course, I stayed in the Press Attaché job until I left Bangkok in December, 1968.

*Q: Both of us can recall that those were busy years. You certainly had your hands full with the press -- not only American, but Thai and others. This was, of course, the period during which we were deeply engaged in Vietnam. How would you describe your problems during that period?*

BEECHAM: Well, I think my worst problem early on in our Air Force buildup there was being left out of the picture for a longer period than was good for me or good for the Mission. I simply did not know initially that we were preparing to bomb and then bombing North Vietnam out of Thai bases. In my ignorance, there were instances when I misled press guys about what was planned or actually underway. The one I regret most was Frank McCullough.

*Q: From Time?*

BEECHAM: Yes. He never forgave me, I'm sure, for not in his view being straight with him about it. But at that point I was as dumb about what was going on as he may have been.

*Q: I think it is important to point out here that Graham Martin was then ambassador. He was superb in backing up USIA when it came to a battle I might have with Washington. But Graham Martin did not believe in a Country Team. He kept secrets to himself; even the DCM was not aware of them at times. So it was Martin's style that kept you and me and most of the other key people in the Mission from knowing what he was up to.*

BEECHAM: I remember one conversation with him about the problem after it had become fairly clear to many people that something serious was going on. Martin suggested, "Well, why can't you tell them that the planes stop in Vietnam, that they go over there to arm themselves?"

There was quite a long period of time there when the correspondents were convinced that Thai bases were being used for bombing runs in North Vietnam, but could not get confirmation. Our

friends in the military, as you remember, were always anxious to get their story out about it, but they were kept under wraps by Martin because of Thai demands that while the U.S. could use Thai bases for strikes against North Vietnam, we were not allowed to discuss the actual facts. I don't think many correspondents ever understood that aspect of the arrangements Martin had agreed to.

*Q: The question that Bob describes is one that both of us shared because of Martin's style of operating. It was absolutely ridiculous for us to have to put on a straight face for experienced correspondents, who had chapter and verse about our bombing of North Vietnam, and for us to either deceive or put it in a way that made us look foolish. A Thai told me one time that they were just big mosquitoes up there, going north.*

*Gradually Martin was out. There were more sources of information coming from outside Thailand than there was from inside of Thailand. It led, later, to a deal in which the United States and Thailand agreed to have an official acknowledgment of what we were doing. That certainly was unusual in the many interviews I have done, but I must say at this point that Bob Beecham had a difficult time, but he handled himself beautifully.*

**PAUL P. BLACKBURN**  
**Junior Officer Training, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1963-1964)**

**Cultural Affairs Officer and AFS Director**  
**Bangkok (1964-1965)**

**Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Khon Kaen (1965-1967)**

**Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Udorn (1967-1968)**

**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1984-1988)**

*Paul P. Blackburn was born in Hawaii in 1937. He received his BA from Haverford College in 1960 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1962. His postings abroad include Bangkok, Khon Kaen, Udorn, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur. Mr. Blackburn was interviewed by Charles R. Beecham on November 18, 2002.*

BLACKBURN: The training was episodically exciting and even fun, but I think we all were itchy to get to work. It really was a long grind, being trained for a year in Washington and then another one as a JOT overseas before you could get a responsible job all your own. After the general JOT Washington training, I was given six months of Thai language training at FSI. That

was a most challenging experience. I was very, very intimidated at the beginning. I had major doubts that I would ever be able to master the Thai tones. I worked for hours and hours on those damn tapes, and found it extremely hard going. Eventually, however, I began to feel that I could actually distinguish between the sounds, and that people listening to me were beginning to be able to make out what I was trying to convey. Probably nothing in my entire career gave me more satisfaction than reaching S-4 in Thai by the end of that first overseas tour. I also got to the 3+ level in reading, having made out-of-class use of a book called “Teach Yourself to Read Thai.”

*Q: Did what you learned in training actually apply when you hit the ground in Thailand? Not only the language study, but other aspects of the training as well.*

BLACKBURN: Yes, it did pretty well. The Thai training, though devoted in part to some very high class, even courtly, language, helped me communicate appropriately with ranking officials I dealt with when once in Thailand. But mostly it was essential for giving me control over the tones and the basic grammar. As for the other parts of the training, some was quite pertinent, particularly that part which dealt with counter-insurgency and working on the ground in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, I never had to face an audience of hostile Indian students, and not a word was said about how to handle two major responsibilities I faced in my first years in Thailand: running a teenage exchange program and promoting troop-community relations at an overseas U.S. base. And much of the American studies emphasis was unnecessary; as it consisted of basic information we had been tested on in the Foreign Service exam.

*Q: Would you talk now about the JOT phase in Thailand?*

BLACKBURN: Thailand was a mind boggling and growing-up experience for me. When I first got there, I was young – just 25 – and pretty callow, which is another way of saying immature. But I was extremely lucky to spend my first tour in the company of some really great officers. The Executive Officer, Russ Cox, told me, quite accurately, that never again in my career would I serve with so many outstanding officers. USIS Thailand at the time was led by an extraordinary PAO named Jack O'Brien, who had an amazing ability to command those of us who served under him. Though I thought he was an old-timer, actually he was then only in his early to mid-forties.

I think I learned the bulk of whatever public affairs “tracecraft” I ever learned in the Foreign Service during that tour. Many senior and mid-level officers were generous with their time, and directly or indirectly taught me valuable lessons. For example, from Jack O'Brien I learned the importance of thinking through what you're trying to do so carefully that you can articulate it in ways that everybody on your staff will understand. Jack stressed that every part of the PAO's operation deserves attention and respect – and that meant it should be periodically critiqued in systematic fashion. His policy of keeping an “open door” to all staffers was also an excellent example.

From you, Bob Beecham, the USIS Thailand Press Officer in those days, I learned the importance of being persnickety about how things look in writing, especially when they deal with U.S. policy and are to be shared with the public. You taught me not to accept, from oneself

or from anyone else, a written product that does not meet the highest standards.

From Jack Zeller, who was an Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, I learned that “there is always plenty of money.” Don't worry about financial constraints, he taught me, or you will think too small. If something needs to be done, and you have a good idea, then go look for the funding, either from the post's assets or some other source. You are likely to get it. He stressed that responsible creativity is an essential quality for a first-class USIS officer.

From Howard Biggerstaff, who was later my boss in the field program, I learned that careful planning is extremely important – and can be great fun, too. He showed me that thinking through the component parts of a complex and ambitious plan, explaining it to others and getting their inputs, and finally seeing your concept reach fruition brings a special sense of satisfaction – especially for USIA officers who have such a rich plate of resources to work with. “Bigg” worked indefatigably to plan the USIS Thailand field program that we all carried out during those years. Later on in my career, when enthusiastically involved in one complex scheme or another, I would fondly remember the zest of Jack Zeller and Bigg as they worked on similar projects.

From Bob Lasher, then the formal head of USIS Thailand field operations, I learned of the pleasures of visiting Thai villages. Even before leaving Washington I had read many of Bob's widely-distributed reports on USIS-supported Mobile Information Team (MIT) trips to sensitive villages in the northeast. Besides assisting the senior Thai officials on the team, Bob would have a grand time of it in the evenings – drinking, eating exotic foods, and even taking part in traditional folk dancing. In other words, winning hearts and minds just like the “Ugly American.”

In Rob Nevitt, who was the Branch PAO up in Ubol, I saw an exemplary communicator in action. Rob was an officer who made maximum use of his limited Thai and his extraordinary gift for empathy to add an extra depth to his relations with both Thais and Americans. I tried, then and later – albeit with limited success – to emulate Rob's thoughtful and respectful approach to interpersonal relations.

As a JOT assignment, I was tasked with preparing a brochure on the post. I went to every section and talked to them about what they did, looked for pictures, and drafted the text. The resulting briefing brochure was very useful in telling Washington, the rest of the Mission, and others what USIS Thailand was all about at that time. That was a great training exercise. I think the idea might have come originally from the Deputy PAO, Ken McCormac, another of my kind and helpful mentors. At that time Ken and Cultural Affairs Officer Nelson Spinks, along with Jack Zeller, were the Thai hands at the post.

In those first years in Thailand, I was trying to fit in and find my role as a USIS officer. There was a lot of internal social activity, much of it very male oriented. Once a week we had a poker game, and another night was set aside for bowling. We often ended up going to bars and drinking heavily. I often went with Jerry Tryon, an Assistant Radio-TV Officer and good friend. The carousing is not something I feel proud of in retrospect, but it was fun at the time and definitely part of the USIS Thailand culture of that era.

One of my most enjoyable JOT experiences came when I visited USIS Chiang Mai, to see how that branch post operated under BPAO Jerry Kyle. It was the time of the Songkran water festival, and I had a grand time joining the other revelers in the mass water fight. I think it was the most fun I had ever had in my life up to that time.

*Q: In 1964, why did you do in the Cultural Affairs office in Bangkok between your JOT and upcountry stints?*

BLACKBURN: I believe it was Jack Zeller who came up with the brilliant idea of starting a large-scale American Field Service high school exchange program with Thailand. He got it up and running before I took it over. I was a complete neophyte actually, but took to it with gusto, applying energies pent-up from the two long years of JOT relatively passive traineeship. AFS, a two way exchange effort, offered the U.S. a way to reach out to the young people of Thailand and make friends for America, particularly those who showed the most promise in the provinces. USIA was giving strong financial support to the national AFS organization headquartered in New York anyway, and Jack just decided USIS should initiate a start-up program that could eventually evolve into a proper non-USG AFS-Thailand office.

When I became AFS director in 1964, we had just sent off 89 students to the States, and the 14 “pioneers” from the first group had just come back. We were preparing to send another 160, two thirds of them from the northeast or other regions outside of Bangkok. This was a mammoth undertaking, and the kids were carefully screened through a series of written and oral tests. The responsible FSN, Khun Amphorn Komes, and I worked closely with high schools, education offices, and Thai and American English teachers throughout the country. We were supported by Jack Zeller, then in another job in Bangkok but serving as the “AFS godfather,” and scores of volunteers who helped with interviews, our two-week final orientation program, and the constant search for Thai families to host American AFSers. Responsible Americans involved in the program had to visit each selected Thai student to assess what kind of a home life he or she came from, in order to help AFS New York find a compatible American receiving family.

*Q: Who would do these interviews?*

BLACKBURN: Americans and Thais would. This was one of the pluses of the job for me. I really liked doing the home interviews, even on miserably hot weekend afternoons. We would go into the homes and ask personal questions that gave us unique insights into Thai families, asking about living arrangements, space and privacy, family activities, the role of Buddhism in their lives, and how much – if anything – they could afford to pay toward the cost to send their student to the U.S. for a year – the maximum being \$450, if I remember correctly. For the Thai families volunteering to host American AFSers we were even more careful in our home descriptions. We had to imagine how well an American kid would be able to deal with the specific conditions of that particular family.

*Q: Did most of those American kids end up in Bangkok, or did they get out into the countryside?*

BLACKBURN: Those who initially came in the full-year program were expected to reach a level

of basic classroom competence, with help from English-speaking Thai teachers, so we placed them only in Bangkok during those first years. However, later they were sent all over the country. Amazingly, even without speaking more than rudimentary Thai, most of them did fine after a few months, even in pretty rural areas. The summer program, which brought 14 kids while I was there, was nationwide from the beginning. The American AFSers who came to Thailand in those days, all of them about 17-years-old, were gutsy and impressive kids. I was quite sure I never could have handled such an experience at that age.

*Q: Has anyone ever gone back years later to see what's happened to those kids, the Americans, I mean?*

BLACKBURN: I don't know of any systematic study of the Americans – or the Thais either. A lot of the Thai participants later became prominent in one area or another of Thai society, and are great friends of the United States. The best known probably is Surin Pitsuwan, who was Thailand's Foreign Minister until recently. When I went back later as PAO, many Thais I ran into would say, "I was one of those early kids you helped." That made me feel terribly proud, even when I couldn't exactly place them. It was a great program, one that worked mainly because of the kids who took part, but also because it had tremendous support from many quarters – in the U.S. as well as in Thailand.

Through AFS I met many Peace Corps Volunteers, quite a few of whom later became great USIA officers. Among them were Harlan Rosacker, Robin Berrington, Frank Albert, Ed Ifshin, Larry Daks and Gary Smith.

*Q: Would you like to talk some now about your assignment to Khon Kaen in 1965?*

BLACKBURN: The USIS Thailand field program was truly extraordinary. Our goal was to serve as a kind of surrogate ministry of information to help the Thai government achieve its security and development objectives in rural areas, particularly in northeast Thailand. When in 1965 I went up to open our post in Khon Kaen, a once-sleepy town that Thai Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat was pouring money into with the aim of making it "the capital of the northeast," we had all the financial and equipment support I could have possibly asked for. Besides plenty of regular staff – perhaps six FSNs – I had other funds for hiring "temporary" workers. We called them SPS (special personnel support) staffers. Altogether I had maybe 15 people working for me, as many as you could stuff into the little office area we rented along a downtown Khon Kaen street.

We had probably six vehicles, a sedan for the BPAO and five CJ6s, which were specially configured jeeps – carefully designed by Biggerstaff – used for transporting people, posters, pamphlets, and books, as well as equipment for showing films out in the villages. In our base office we had a large collection of films and perhaps 25 projectors we lent out to Thai institutions that wanted to show our movies. All of us BPAOs had the latest AV equipment to use. For example, we had new cameras to take pictures of anything we found in villages that might be useable in a publication or poster. We had radios to do interviews that might be used on one or more of the radio stations that we were supporting, or on VOA. And we had 8-millimeter cameras for making "tactical films" that might be used locally to show the Thai government working for the good of the people in the villages. Of course, we had had no training in any of

these areas, so the results of our efforts were at best spotty. Still, it was a time of abundance, innovation, and intense activity in support of a goal we all believed in.

One premise of the field program planning by Biggerstaff – and also later by Jack Zeller and Ben Fordney – was that throughout the country the 13 branch posts should all have the same types of vehicles, projectors, cameras, etc. Bigg loved to plan so much that he even designed a model house for Thailand Branch PAOs – and got two of them built. My family lived in one of them in Khon Kaen, and my colleague Mark Brawley and his wife down in Yala had the other one. The two houses had the exact same floor plan. Unfortunately, they both suffered from the same planning oversights. Bigg and his engineering partner – Jose Rico, I think his name was – neglected to allow for water to be piped into the inside kitchen area. The assumption was that all the cooking and washing would be done by servants working outside the main living area. And because Bigg liked spacious commodes, we had an unusually large downstairs bathroom that featured a toilet placed in the middle of a long wall – just sort of sitting out there in splendid isolation. In addition, the stairs between the first and second floors were designed to come down into the middle of the dining and living room areas, but had no railings. Bigg didn't have small kids, but we did. Banisters were quickly added, as was piping to the inside kitchen. And I now realize that Bigg's overall concept of a made-to-order USIS BPAO house, audacious as it was, wasn't at all bad. In those days we were all amateurs, trying to do the best we could under urgent conditions. And it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to give full rein to our most creative imaginings. I didn't know any more about making movies than Bigg knew about designing houses, but we all tried to give such tasks our best shot.

The centerpiece activity of the field program was the MIT trip, generally lasting a week or two, that had us going out into villages in groups led by Thai officials like a governor, deputy governor or district officer – and also including officials who could provide much needed services, like a doctor, veterinarian, community development worker, or agricultural specialist. During my time in Khon Kaen and Udorn, I estimate I stayed overnight in more than a hundred villages, and spent at least that much time in district and provincial capitals. A couple hundred nights in less than three years was a large cumulative chunk of time away from home. It was hard on my wife and kids, and often strenuous and otherwise difficult for me, too. I, however, was energized by all the experiences I was having – and by the thought that I was being a brave and valued soldier in the counter-insurgency battle.

Conditions in some of the villages were plain awful. Most were very poor, and some were wracked with diseases – including leprosy – and suffered from ineffective leadership as well. Despite their exposure to anti-government Communist propaganda, the villagers were almost invariably grateful for our visits, particularly when they realized that we intended to be self sufficient in our meals, including paying for anything we needed to supplement the supplies we carried with us.

For me personally the time in a village was a real challenge. I tried to come across as a sympathetic foreign visitor, interested in admiring village folk crafts like woven items and mousetraps, and not in any sense a leader of the team. It gave me a great sense of satisfaction just to survive some of those trips. Fortunately, I had great help from Thai FSN colleagues, especially Khun Withee Suvarat in the Khon Kaen period and Khun Sanguan and Khun Tiew Tawat

Pantupong when I was in Udon. The Thai USIS staffers provided the essential mobile unit for the evening film showings and helped the Thai officials in various ways. They were great guys – dedicated and brave. Three of our USIS Chiang Mai colleagues were killed in a Communist ambush shortly after I left Thailand, but we had no such incidents on the MITs in my time.

I spoke Thai well enough to communicate with the officials and at a basic level with villagers who spoke only Lao. I could overcome fears that our group might come under attack by the Communists. I could sleep on bedbug-infested cushions and under mosquito nets even when there were mosquitoes inside my net – as I found when I squashed their blood-besotted bodies early in the morning. I could find my way to places to relieve myself when there were no toilets anywhere to be found. I could eat food that was sometimes not properly cooked – helped along by Mekong whiskey or locally made rice whiskey that reduced my inhibitions about eating such dishes as uncooked pork, raw lake shrimp, and ant eggs – even, once, live red ants. And I could maneuver the Thai cloth called a pakoma skillfully enough to take a standing bath using water from a large water jar, maintaining my modesty when washing and drying even though fully surrounded by Thai kids eagerly anticipating a misstep on my part. That I could do all of this gave me a sense of confidence and accomplishment. And actually, it was often fun. I traveled with and met some wonderful people, the villagers were exceedingly generous, and not infrequently the food was tasty. Sometimes we had gourmet fare, like frogs legs, roast pig, or cannabis-laced soups or chicken curry.

Our reports on these trips were sent back to Bangkok. The Ambassador (first Graham Martin and then Leonard Unger) would say, “You guys are my eyes and ears out there.” How many of our reports got such ambassadorial attention I don’t know, but we believed our reports got read by people who could make good use of them, so we were careful to describe the specific characteristics of a particular village, the amount of cohesion it seemed to have, its problems, and the major issue the villagers brought to the team leader (potable water being the most frequently cited felt need). The intelligence people, civilian and military, loved our reports. We often heard from Embassy colleagues that we were doing important, even enviable, work on the front lines of U.S. policy in Thailand.

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When I went to Udon I had, in addition to all the MIT activity, the additional responsibility of working on troop-community relations. My predecessors as BPAO Udon were Ed Schulick and, before him, Gordon Murchie, both of whom had done really amazing work in gaining the friendship and confidence of local officials in Udon and nearby jurisdictions. I had the good fortune of being able to pick up on their excellent contacts among the Thais. However, dealing with the senior U.S. military was not so easy for me – a 29-year-old snot-nosed civilian whose only authority came from being a junior member of the Udon Consulate. In 1967-68 Udon was a major Thai base from which we prosecuted the air war over Vietnam. In addition, it was the headquarters both for Air America and other elements of the CIA’s so-called “secret war in Laos” and also for the Thai government’s counter-insurgency effort in the northeast provinces bordering the Mekong River.

I worked closely with our exceptionally able Consul, Al Francis, on various efforts to promote

reasonably comfortable relations between the U.S. Air Force and community leaders in Udorn. Though the senior officers listened politely to my suggestions for minimizing frictions with the local populace, their reaction often was, "Yeah, we know cultural sensitivity is important, but don't bother us too much about it. Our mission is to fight a war, after all." One of my ideas was to take some of the "civic action" officers on an MIT to visit villages on the periphery of the base itself. They were pretty shocked to see how easy it was for villagers to walk directly onto the base. With no proper perimeter fence, the base was extremely vulnerable, but no one took action to protect it. Shortly after our MIT, Communists sappers went in and fire-bombed some of our planes, and then made a clean getaway. In a few instances, problems we uncovered on that MIT could be and were addressed. For example, equipment was brought out to build a needed well, and in another case steps were taken to reduce the noise level of on-base testing of jet engines that greatly disturbed services at a Thai temple.

On Saturdays I regularly took part in briefings of incoming Airmen. I gave them general advice on showing respect for the Thai King and Queen, avoiding offending sensibilities by publicly fondling their Thai girl friends, and behaving appropriately at Thai ceremonies. As I was about to leave the country, I wrote down a summary of my main points, and passed the draft to a senior Air Force officer. Years later I learned, much to my surprise, that my text was used almost word-for-word in a pamphlet called "Thai Customs and Courtesies" that was given to all U.S. Air Force personnel assigned to Thailand from 1969 until we pulled out in 1975.

I sometimes used my residence as a venue for large dinner parties that brought the Air Force officers together with local officials and their spouses. As an "ice breaker" I would serve a concoction made from mixing village rice whiskey with small amounts of the blood of a kind of monkey found in the remote parts of Laos and northeast Thailand. The blood supposedly had various medicinal qualities, and was also considered an aphrodisiac. It would be slightly congealed in the bottom of the bottle, so vigorous shaking was part of the ritual. The Thai officials, especially the macho police and military officials, recognized the concoction as a rare and special libation, while my American military guests, though generally queasy if not horrified, gamely took a shot or two as the price of building close relations with their Thai counterparts. It was a kinky idea, and perhaps had desirable cross-cultural bonding results, but the practice was not universally lauded. Later on, I heard that in some quarters I was known as a monkey killer who sent his staff into the mountains to procure blood to feed my filthy habit. When I returned to Thailand in the 1980s I was told that those monkeys had become virtually extinct, and didn't feel at all proud that I had contributed to their demise.

When I left Udorn in 1968 the USIS Thailand field program was at its largest. We had 50 officers overall, most of them working in the branches, 13 branch posts, and perhaps 500 Thai staffers. I had an Assistant BPAO, first John Fredenburg and then Frank Albert. Both were great guys to work with, and later went on to head their own posts. John, who started the branch post in Nongkhai, on the Mekong River just across from Vientiane, and reported to me from there, was the first and last BPAO in Nongkhai. With such responsibilities on my young shoulders, I was blessed by working for excellent officers. Ben Fordney had a terrific avuncular touch as leader of the entire field program at that stage of its history, and Ed Schulick was my immediate boss, having taken that position just after turning USIS Udorn over to me. Ed was probably the best boss I had during my entire career. A born leader, he was enormously dedicated, thoughtful,

and empathetic. He always seemed able to draw out your deepest concerns as well as your best thinking, and could then help you find needed focus for tackling the task ahead. Ed later used his talents in fashioning the Agency's speaker program, but tragically died of cancer not long after his Thailand tour.

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*Q: In 1984 from Kuala Lumpur you went directly to Bangkok, right?*

BLACKBURN: That's right. "Directly" is definitely the appropriate word. That day was certainly an emotional roller coaster. Just one hour after our emotional, even tearful, farewell to friends, colleagues, and Pek's family in Malaysia, we found ourselves given a joyous, open-arms welcome to Thailand.

*Q: What were your first reactions to being back?*

BLACKBURN: The first night Pek and I went out to a dinner given by the Fulbright Commission to say farewell to my popular predecessor as PAO, Hal Morton. We had a wonderful evening, and I remember thinking, "What a pity we'll *only* be here for four years."

Those years were in many respects the pinnacle of my career.

*Q: How so?*

BLACKBURN: Perhaps because I was probably at the top of my form then. The assignment permitted me to make a unique contribution – because of my previous experience in the country and my fluency in the language. No previous PAO had had an earlier posting in Thailand, which is pretty amazing when you think of the huge number of officers who had served there.

By 1984 Thailand had changed tremendously from what it had been when I left in the late 1960s, but the post was to a large extent still stuck in the past. In fact, the Country Plan of that era led off with comments about how big a psychological factor the emasculation of the Thailand field program was to achieving our psychological objectives. Indeed, much was changed. We had closed almost all our branches. Only USIS Chiang Mai remained as a full fledged branch post. We had one FSN in Songhkla, and we eventually lost him, too. But nine years after the end of the Vietnam War, and in the aftermath of convulsive changes in internal Thai politics, it was certainly appropriate that we would no longer have the big field presence – just as we would no longer be making movies, printing posters and "tactical pamphlets," or otherwise producing materials directly supporting the Thai government.

I told the Thai staff that as much as I well remembered the post's past "glory days," it was time to recognize that we were in a different period in the bilateral relationship. To drive home the point I decreed, taking a leaf from the USIS Japan play book and an idea I had successfully tried in Malaysia, that we would redesign all of our printed materials. To start that process, I initiated a logo contest for USIS staffers. I asked them to think carefully about ways symbolically to represent what we were all about in 1984. We got, I think, 57 entries. Some of them harkened

back to the old days, using a representation of Thailand's royal barge or Thai and American hands clasped in USAID fashion. Others used spokes of a wheel to depict various functions. Many of the ideas were interesting and even inspired, but most were easily eliminated when we went to the final cut. We displayed all the entries on a large board and encouraged the staff to come and discuss the pros and cons of each. In the end we selected a nice wavy design that included suggestions of both the Thai and American flags, and put it on all our materials. But the most important aspect of the exercise, I thought, was that we raised consciousness about the fact that we were in a new period of U.S.-Thai relations.

*Q: Were you operating under much more stringent budget conditions?*

BLACKBURN: No, not really. Happily, I was able to emphasize to the staff that although the times had changed, we still had a great cadre of Thai FSNs – and money for new initiatives was plentiful. It was a time for creativity applied in any direction, including improving the dilapidated physical plant of USIS Bangkok, which in those days was still located on a large and beautiful compound on South Sathorn Road. Not only did USIS have its own property, which included a charming building that served as the Chancery after World War II, but the Embassy had decided to make it the locus for staff recreation activities. So right outside our windows were the Embassy pool, two tennis courts, and a snack bar. Very cushy indeed!

Not long after my arrival USIS Thailand had the chance to pull together on a once-in-a-career challenge. It came about when the New York Philharmonic Orchestra canceled a visit to Malaysia three weeks before a scheduled concert. The issue had been that the Malaysians insisted on a cello piece called “Schlomo: a Zionist Rhapsody” be removed from the program. When it became a big issue, the New Yorkers could not back down without producing a stir among their supporters, so the performance in Kuala Lumpur was scrubbed. That was when NPYO manager Nick Webster called me and asked if we could somehow arrange a concert in Bangkok. I told him I would do my best to get approval from the Ambassador, at the time John Gunther Dean. Most such performances are set up at least a year in advance, but I thought that having such a major American orchestra make an unprecedented visit to Bangkok would be just the kind of event that would bring out Thai leaders and make a strong statement about our bilateral relationship. The Ambassador was enthusiastic and gave the effort his full support – including paying for a large and lavish representational function at the Oriental Hotel. Though it was only a single performance, the event was extraordinary in several respects. First of all, Bangkok at the time had no concert hall, so we had to use a large auditorium at Thammasat University, where elaborate baffles had to be constructed literally overnight – following a rock concert the previous evening – in order to produce reasonably good acoustics. To carry out the many tasks that had to be done within about 15 days, we recruited legions of volunteers to help us, we brought in an organization that donated logistical support, we printed a fancy program, we arranged the ticket sales, we lined up Thailand's Crown Prince to attend as a royal sponsor, and we raised money from American and Thai companies and private benefactors. Frank Scotton, legendary in USIA as a Vietnam counter-insurgency aficionado, was Cultural Affairs Officer at the time and found himself, much to his amusement, leading the out-front effort to solicit support from big multinational corporations in town. Many of the other American and Thai staffers went all out and distinguished themselves to make it work. In the end we had a great concert, the publicity was tremendous, and we raised \$50,000 for the Thai Red Cross. It was really quite

something. I felt great about it, particularly knowing that had I not had so much previous involvement in Thailand, I never would have had the confidence or sure-footedness to pull it off. My bosses back in Washington were very impressed, too, and said that they wanted to recommend me, and my key Thai and American lieutenants, for a Superior Honor Award. I replied that I thought the entire staff deserved the award and would not single out a limited group. That was too much for the Agency awards committee, so we had to settle for a Certificate of Appreciation to all of USIS Bangkok.

*Q: Wasn't that about the time that WORLDNETs got started? Were you in on that?*

BLACKBURN: Oh yes. A year or two after I got to Bangkok, we got one of the Agency's TVRO – that is, “television receive only” – dishes on the USIS compound. That made it possible for us to participate in the WORLDNET dialogues that Charlie Wick and Al Snyder had just introduced into the USIA global structure. Their main use was for long distance press conferences, for which Bangkok was one of the Asian posts that allowed local correspondents to ask questions to American officials talking about major security and economic issues. Under that format the video was transmitted from Washington, with the overseas posts participating via an audio channel. They were very exciting. The Thais were fascinated, and typically one or more TV stations would give coverage to the mechanics of the program, thus supplementing the substantive news value of the press conference itself.

*Q: What was the most memorable of your WORLDNETs?*

BLACKBURN: Hands down it was the “WORLDNET to end all WORLDNETs” – if I may be so immodest as to say so – we staged toward the end of my tour. The concept was so far out of the box most people in Washington thought, and probably still think, it was simply crazy. It came about because a young Thai woman living in Los Angeles, whose nickname was “Pui,” won the Miss Universe contest representing Thailand. She had spent very little time in Thailand, and most Thais had never met her, much less ever seen her. Everyone was thrilled she had won – and extremely curious to learn something about her. Some Thai television producers asked if we would let them use the WORLDNET facilities to interview her. I thought it was a golden opportunity to make some important points about our society, particularly that a charming and beautiful, yet traditional, Thai woman resident in the U.S. can thrive in our open, multiracial, friendly-to-Thailand society. The Washington WORLDNET office contacted her, and she – being aware that it would give her a full hour of exposure to the Thai media – was very willing to do it.

Then the question became how to organize the interview on our end. Every newspaper and every TV station wanted a piece of the action. The country's five nationwide television networks each vied to carry the entire program on an exclusive basis, even if they had to work out of our modest facilities on the USIS compound. And they wanted to give little if any role to the print media. But I insisted on maintaining control – so that it would get maximum media play. I insisted that this WORLDNET program would be for all of Thailand's TV stations and all of the Thai print journalists, with Khun Ratana of our Radio/TV Section serving as the moderator. Those wanting to ask questions would have to stand in line and ask their questions in turn, alternating between print and TV journalists. Finally, recognizing that our studio was much too small, one of the

major TV networks agreed to do the program, under our ground rules.

The upshot was that our hour-long WORLDNET with beautiful Pui was carried live, on prime time, for a complete hour on every TV station in Thailand. From 8 to 9 P.M. that night the only choice before the Thai television viewer, anywhere in the country, was to watch Pui answer questions. There was nothing else on! None of the five networks had wanted to be left out of the action. Pui deftly answered all the softball questions – for example, about missing Thailand and being eager to greet her fans there, but at the same time expressing a deep love for America, which had been so good to her. Pretty fluffy content, but still a positive portrait of our country that was quite different from the usual media emphasis on American crime, narcotics addiction, sexual promiscuity, and violence. Besides the saturation TV coverage, the WORLDNET was on the front pages of all Thai newspapers the following morning.

By any measure, the program was extremely successful. And it had cost us practically nothing. If there has ever been another WORLDNET carried live and in full during prime time on every station in a single country, I never heard of it. But of course there were people back in Washington who were horrified at this whole thing. They thought it was a big waste of whatever time and money had been put into it.

*Q: For a beauty contest winner!*

BLACKBURN: You, too? Yes, I was criticized – both by feminists and by what I call “WORLDNET purists” – for making a mockery of the WORLDNET medium by using it for a dialogue with a Miss Universe winner. Though too plebeian a usage for their taste, I still think it was a very successful program that achieved genuine public affairs goals. As well as being great fun!

*Q: What were some of your major activities dealing with more substantive issues?*

BLACKBURN: One public affairs issue which hit us right out of the blue had to do with an early AIDS case that was all too close to home. In 1986 Thailand was still turning a blind eye to the problem, denying that it was a present or potential problem for the country. Meanwhile, many AIDS cases were reported around our bases in the Philippines, suggesting there might be a flicker of truth in the Communist charge that the virus for this “American disease” had been developed at Fort Detrick, Maryland. Knowing that an AIDS crisis would doubtless soon hit the Thai sex trade, we were anxious to demonstrate that the U.S. was doing what it reasonably could to keep AIDS out of the country - for example by instituting a rigorous HIV-testing regimen for sailors given shore leave in Pattaya and Bangkok. The problem was that precisely at this early juncture we had an HIV-positive FSO officer working in the Embassy! Although he was looking sicker and sicker, he denied having AIDS and no one would challenge his assertion. Finally, after being refused treatment by the leading Thai hospital, he was medically evacuated to Clark Field in the Philippines. Sadly, the officer died not long afterwards, but fortunately the story never hit the Thai press. We were lucky on that one, but, fearing it might come out, I decided to discuss the general issue of Thailand’s handling of the AIDS question with the Spokesman for the Thai Foreign Ministry. Without mentioning our Embassy case, I told him that it was widely known in the international community that there were already a number of HIV-positive foreigners in the

country, including prisoners of various nationalities who had used infected needles while incarcerated. Although the Thai Government might not yet want to admit to a domestic AIDS problem, when they did do so, I said, I hoped they would not look to blame any particular country, but instead speak of it as a tragic situation affecting both Thais and resident foreigners of many nationalities. Many months later, that was how the story came out, to our relief. Whether my intervention had any effect or not, I still think it was good insurance during that early period – a time when there was so much AIDS panic in Bangkok that many Embassy employees refused to swim in our swimming pool for weeks after the infected officer had used it. And after he left, the officer's bedding and furniture were incinerated by the Admin Section.

Another hot issue of the day was “yellow rain.” The U.S. had asserted that Vietnamese aircraft were using biochemical agents against hill tribes in Laos, and villagers gave personal accounts that seemed to corroborate the charges. The public affairs problem was that there was no persuasive hard evidence to support the allegations – and much evidence for an alternate hypothesis that the cause of the “yellow rain” was in fact droppings from swarms of bees. Neither Press Attaché Larry Thomas nor I felt comfortable peddling a story that seemed so flimsy, so I consulted DCM Stapleton Roy about what we should do. Fortunately, Stape was way ahead of us. A three man team was just being assigned to the Bangkok Embassy to investigate all yellow rain charges. With Stape's guidance, Larry and I were able to answer skeptical questioners by saying that the Embassy took very seriously charges of Vietnamese use of biochemical agents, that we had no means to verify what happened in earlier reported incidents, that we would carefully investigate each new case, and that full disclosure would be given to the team's findings. In the end no such proof turned up, but Stape's neat formulation allowed us – and the rest of the Embassy there on the ground – to maintain our credibility and self-respect.

Besides those flaps, we gave a lot of attention to economic issues – mainly relating to trade, investment, and intellectual property rights. One great vehicle for addressing them was a high-powered U.S.-Thailand economic seminar that USIS sponsored each year over several days at a beach resort. An officer several years earlier, perhaps John Reid, had started it, with the assistance of our extraordinary senior FSN, M.L. Poonsaeng Sutabutr, who really made it work.

Khun Poonsaeng made many things happen, and was in my view the most effective, imaginative, and well connected FSN staffer I ever worked with.

*Q: In any country?*

BLACKBURN: Yes, definitely. Anyway, the leading western-educated economists of the country thought the annual economic seminar was a great event, were delighted to be invited to participate, and gave it their full support. Besides the stimulating interchange, they and their families appreciated the chance to get out of Bangkok for a long weekend. Supachai Panichpakdi, now heading the World Trade Organization, was one of two co-chairs of the Thai planning group for the conference during my days there, and the sessions attracted many others who were – or became – senior officials in the Thai government, including two prime ministers.

It was certainly one of the greatest USIS traditions I encountered anywhere in the world. Besides the leading Thai economists, many of whom made presentations, we supplied speakers from the

U.S. or the American business community. Senior officers in our embassy were there, too. Ambassador Dean loved it, as did his successor Ambassador William Brown, because of the opportunity it afforded to hobnob informally and for several days with all those top English-speaking economists. And they could actively participate in a substantive seminar that addressed fundamental and topical economic issues of concern to both countries. It was useful all around. I believe the seminars are still held, though without Khun Poonsaeng, who retired a few years ago, or some of the former luminaries on the Thai side.

*Q: I understand you also were involved in programming on narcotics. What was that all about?*

BLACKBURN: Yes, we were very concerned about the flow of narcotics from the Golden Triangle to the United States. At that time many Thais – as well as others – said the root of the problem was “demand pull” from an out-of-control U.S. Questions were raised as to why we were heavily leaning on Thailand when our country had so many addicts and so many drug dealers running loose on the streets. To counter these charges, I led a public affairs effort focused on serious U.S. efforts to reduce demand for drugs in our schools and communities. Working with Thailand’s Office of Narcotics Control Board, we put together two large anti-narcotics conferences that highlighted education programs, public service messages, voluntary organizations, and the like in the United States, as well as in Thailand and other countries in the region. The conferences, held in Cha-am near Hua Hin, were both useful and well attended. Besides the USIS speakers we brought from the U.S. – such as grass roots activists and drug program officials – we had senior attendees from the State Department, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and various United Nations bodies. We got across our points very well, I thought, and thus helped provide the climate for promoting more vigorous Thai actions to stem the flow of narcotics passing through the country from the Golden Triangle and Laos.

*Q: Did you still have publications at USIS Thailand at that point?*

BLACKBURN: Not anywhere as many as before. But while I was there we reinstated Seripharb (or Free World), the magazine that we had had earlier, but which had gone out of favor and had been dropped a few years before I got there. I thought it was worth resurrecting, to see how well we could market it, especially since we still had a very professional staff on hand to put it out. With an updated image and format, the publication looked good and was a fine medium for putting across our messages. It lasted several years after my departure, but then died along with nearly all the other Agency publications that went by the boards.

Besides Seripharb we also had a number of publications for special purposes. For example, we produced an excellent pamphlet on the USAID program in Thailand, we put out study guides for university professors using American films to teach about the United States, and we worked with RSC Manila on a bilingual set of advisory materials for Thais and Americans participating in high school exchange programs. The latter product, developed under my direction by Elizabeth Mortlock and a Thai professor, was aimed at both the students and the families involved in such activities.

*Q: How about books?*

BLACKBURN: We still had a modest book translation program, run by a marvelous FSN named Khun Sukhon Polpatpicharn. To give her a boost, and to encourage more attention to the translation of serious books from the U.S., we put on a two-day conference on “The Joys and Sorrows of Translation” at the American University Alumni Association – or AUA – where USIS had two officers, Larry Daks and Bill Royer, supporting the English teaching, library, and other programs centered there. That conference was a big hit with the Thai translators, but I am not sure it really led to any increased production of translated American works.

Another ambitious venture of mine that didn’t work out so well was the exhibition of works by Thai artists who had studied in the U.S. Unfortunately, the prominent Thai art critic I recruited to write the catalogue for the show chose to charge the featured artists with lack of originality. Though the wording was fairly mild, they took great offence when they read it – after the show’s up-beat opening, fortunately. The show went on, but it was far from the grand success I had hoped for.

More successful was my launching of the American Studies Association of Thailand, an institution similar to the one I started while in Malaysia. One of the big American studies events we held was a three day celebration and symposium devoted to the 1987 bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.

*Q: It sounds like you were very involved in planning events.*

BLACKBURN: Yes, I think I was. There were so many opportunities to move in new directions, and I had such great support from the USIS officers and FSNs that I didn’t need to look over their shoulders so much. CAO Frank Scotton and then Ginny Ferris did a great job with speakers, exchanges, and the Fulbright program. Larry Thomas was a superb Information Officer/Press Attaché, followed by the capable Ross Petzing. And Larry Daks was simply superb as Director of AUA.

I saw it as my job to have wide contacts in the American, expatriate, and Thai communities – to spot problems and opportunities and to be able to bring people into the USIS and Embassy public affairs orbit as appropriate.

Among my “outside” activities was to serve on the Council of the prestigious Siam Society, where I was recruited to help out with a Ford Foundation-sponsored symposium on “Culture and Environment in Thailand.” That proved to be an enormous undertaking. I spent many a Saturday morning over two years to plan the week-long conference in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. It proved a fascinating examination of how cultural forces and the environment had interacted in Thailand from the dawn of recorded history – talking about the arts, the economy, the ecology, and so on. Though I started on it simply because of my own interests, in the end I found that it was very useful to Embassy objectives relating to the environment, and gave me terrific contacts among leading Thai intellectuals.

*Q: Did you have much interaction with the Thai royal family?*

BLACKBURN: Yes, I certainly did, particularly in the context of the 1988 celebrations of the

60<sup>th</sup> birthday of His Majesty the King of Thailand. The Thais asked us – as their best friends and treaty allies – to do two things in the public affairs line. The first was to bring a cultural troupe to participate in a festival marking the opening of their new state-of-the-art cultural center. And the other was to contribute a permanent structure or garden at the newly created Rama IX Park – Rama the Ninth being part of the King’s formal title. Similar requests were made to other countries. It was clear that the U.S. was somehow going to have to come up with a respectable showing.

We did a lot of brain-storming on what type of cultural presentation would be both appropriate and affordable, and lamented that we did not have the New York Philharmonic hankering to come our way during that period. We knew the British were bringing the Sadler Wells Ballet, the Soviet Union had laid on one of the Bolshoi troupes, and the Japanese planned to perform a full-scale opera. In short, expectations were very high. Finally, I came up with the idea of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band from New Orleans.

*Q: Oh, like the jazz performers who came and played with the King in past years?*

BLACKBURN: That’s right. We thought about Lionel Hampton, who had come in the ‘50s or ‘60s, as had Benny Goodman and others, but figured that might be too risky. Instead, I thought Preservation Hall would be perfect, with its rather old African-American performers, who liked the same type of jazz the King enjoyed. So we, with help from the Arts America folks in USIA Washington, lined up the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, got one of the airlines to pay for their travel, found a hotel to put them up for free, and secured ESSO funding for other local expenses. In the end it didn’t really cost us anything except for staff time. They came and performed three times to enthusiastic crowds at the cultural center. His Majesty didn’t show up at any of their public performances, but asked them to go to his palace for a private meeting and jam session. Khun Poonsaeng, whose father had been the King’s private secretary, arranged everything – including for the Ambassador, Ginny Farris, and me, and our spouses, to attend the event. It was marvelous fun and a great treat to be there at Chitlada Palace for the “session.” The evening was amazing in many ways. For example, when His Majesty drove over to the venue for the event, he jumped out of his Rolls Royce, pulled out his trumpet, and played “the King’s Anthem” right there. And then he went in and joyfully jammed with the band for a couple of hours, mostly playing his sax. We understood that he especially appreciated being able to play with high-quality performers in their 70s or 80s, as his doctors were saying that it might be too hard on his heart to continue playing after passing his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Royal Household videotaped the entire wonderful event, but did not feel it appropriate to share the tape with us. I hope someday to see it, but until then I have a kind of mental videotape of the occasion etched in my memory.

*Q: But wasn’t that sort of an affront, for the King not to go to any of the performances held in his honor?*

BLACKBURN: Well, no, I don’t think so.

*Q: Weren’t the people who sponsored all those major productions disappointed? Didn’t they at least expect that he would attend the performance?*

BLACKBURN: Yes, they might have thought so. But what we heard was that the King, for health reasons and perhaps for other reasons, felt that he couldn't go to all the performances, so it would be better not to go to any of them.

*Q: Good logic.*

BLACKBURN: That was the reason. I don't think any performers from other countries got to go to the Palace, so we and the band were highly honored. Years later I dropped by Preservation Hall in New Orleans, and noticed that still prominently display the poster we designed on their walls. The older performers who came to Bangkok are no longer active, or have passed on, however.

*Q: What happened with the park request?*

BLACKBURN: The way they put it was this: "You in the Embassy represent America, our ally and good friend, and we would like you to give us an American garden to go along with the British garden, the Italian garden, the Japanese garden, and even the Chinese garden that we have been promised by those governments." Our first question, to ourselves, was: "What the hell is an American garden anyway." The second was: "Assuming we can come up with a workable concept, where are we going to get the money to pay for such a garden?" In the early stages we thought it might be nice to supply a grove of dogwoods that would somehow provide the annual good cross-Pacific feelings afforded by the cherry trees from Japan that grace Washington's Tidal Basin. Preliminary research found that the best we could possibly do would be to bring in small trees that had a slim chance of surviving and certainly wouldn't, even under the best of circumstances, be impressive until after many years.

We were really stuck and befuddled until a prominent professor Khun Poonsaeng knew came up with the brilliant suggestion that we consider supplying a Buckminster Fuller style geodesic dome that would provide protective cover for a U.S. Southwest cactus garden. We liked the idea, but realized it would be extremely expensive and complicated to pull it off. Besides, we had no money for such a project. So, under Ambassador Brown's authority and with his full backing, we went to the American business community. We told them that America's reputation was at stake, but that if they would work with us we could together pull off a grand project that would be much appreciated by the Thais, including the King and other members of the royal family. I was confident we could do it, because I knew we could rely on two friends of mine, Malaysian architect Lim Chong Keat and Thai architect Sumet Jumsai, who had been close to Buckminster Fuller and knew quite a bit about the construction of geodesic domes. All we really needed was the money to buy the material, to ship the pieces from the U.S., and to pay for the design of the dome's interior. The Thai professor assured us he would obtain the needed cactus plants.

I proposed that we set up a special committee for the project, with the Ambassador as honorary chairman, me as the executive secretary, and various American Chamber, or AmCham, members filling the other positions, including chairman. Given U.S. regulations, all direct fund-raising would have to be done by AmCham or some other unofficial group. At my recommendation, the planners decided not to accept any donations under \$25,000. This was not to be a hat-in-your-hand operation. And it would have been just too complicated to keep track of and give proper

credit to a wide range of funding sources. People thought it was nutty to be turning our noses up at smaller donations, but then the companies started to buy into that concept. Different companies signed up one after the other – ESSO, IBM, and so on – and David Rockefeller said he would join if we would set up at tax exempt foundation, which we did. Malcolm Forbes came in, too. And then AmCham got Sealand to ship all the materials from the West Coast for free. So we pulled in somewhere around \$350,000 for the dome, and had it constructed.

*Q: How big was it?*

BLACKBURN: About three stories high.

*Q: So it was a big one.*

BLACKBURN: Oh, yes. And with a Buckminster Fuller dymaxian map on the ground, and with nice cactus the Thais got from the U.S. and elsewhere, it looked pretty great – and still does. Princess Sirinthorn, the so-called “Crown Princess” presided over the opening, the King was briefed on it, and everybody thought it was just the greatest thing. It ended up a win-win situation that made everybody happy.

So those were the two things we did to honor the King’s birthday. They had a very positive impact on the Thai leadership and general public, but neither one cost USIS or the Embassy anything beyond the considerable staff time we put into them.

At the time of the Challenger disaster we did something similar to show unity of spirit and purpose between Americans and Thais. Right after it blew up, Khun Poonsaeng said to me, “You know, the Thai are very upset about this tragedy. We identify with Americans on the space program, and many astronauts, including the first ones back in the late ‘60s, have had high-profile visits to Bangkok over the years. I think we should have some sort of a ceremony on the Embassy property. I can get some people from the Royal Household and other prominent contacts to come and participate.” She talked me into going forward with this idea, and I persuaded Ambassador Brown to support it, though he was very skeptical at first. So within a day or so we had set up a big stage, with large pictures of the dead astronauts, and so on. And we held a very moving ceremony right there on the Chancery grounds.

Such public events, though perhaps inappropriate or even wasteful in other contexts, were important at a time when our relationship with the Thais was in a state of transition. Though our alliance continued with regular joint military exercises such as Cobra Gold, we looked to the Thai to play host to VOA transmitters, and many aspects of our former intimacy remained in place, we were also pulling away from the Thais in other respects. With trade issues assuming increasing importance, our once almost familiar relationship was being replaced by one more cold-blooded and legalistic, so I thought it important to emphasize the human dimension of our relations.

My time as PAO in Bangkok was a period of high productivity, Pek and I enjoyed it a lot, and our daughter Sarah was born there. I was glad to be turning the post over to a consummate pro like Donna Oglesby, but I hated to leave nonetheless.

*Q: But the four years were over.*

**JAMES M. WILSON, JR.  
Deputy Chief of Mission  
Bangkok (1964-1966)**

*James M. Wilson, Jr. was born in China to American parents in 1918. He received a BA from Swarthmore College in 1939, graduated from the Geneva School of International Studies in 1939, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1940, and Harvard Law School in 1948. He also served as a lieutenant colonel overseas in the US Army from 1941-44. Mr. Wilson has served abroad in Paris, Madrid, Bangkok and Manila. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.*

*Today is the 13th of April, 1999. You are off to Bangkok. Who was your ambassador then?*

WILSON: Graham Martin.

*Q: Why don't we start off by asking about Graham Martin. I've had quite a number of people talk about him either in Rome or Saigon but not anybody in Bangkok.*

WILSON: Graham was there for I guess four plus years.

*Q: How did he operate? Did he choose you?*

WILSON: Yes. I had known him for quite some time dating back to our Paris days. He was administrative counselor in the embassy in the early '50s and I got to know him at that time. He then came back as special assistant to Douglas Dillon when Dillon came in as under secretary first for Economic Affairs.

*Q: How did he use you at the embassy?*

WILSON: I'm not sure I know how to answer that one. A week after I arrived in Bangkok, we had the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and things became very, very busy. This continued during my two years in Thailand. Graham was there for most of my stay until taking extended leave at the end. We got along quite well. I was charg e for about six months out of my total of two years.

*Q: I've heard Martin was renowned for playing his cards close to his chest.*

WILSON: Very much so.

*Q: As the DCM normally you are supposed to be the alter ego and all of that. Did you find that he kept you informed of what was going on with the Thai government?*

WILSON: Oh, yes, completely.

*Q: What were the issues during this '64 to '66 period?*

WILSON: The main issue was the war in Indochina. When I first started out, the primary objective, I would say, was to keep Thailand in our camp and get bases established in Thailand which would support the operations in Vietnam. Gradually, of course, we had Thai involvement, not only with some token forces that were sent to Vietnam but also with the so-called undeclared war in Laos; and later on to a certain extent in Cambodia, though Cambodia did not really enter the picture, as you know, until later.

*Q: Were you there during the sort of negotiations or continuing negotiations or agreements to get the bases in?*

WILSON: Yes, very much so.

*Q: What was the Thai attitude? How did this work out?*

WILSON: The Thai were in general quite cooperative on this. The prime minister at that time was a fellow by the name of Thanom who had a military background. His defense deputy was an air force marshall by the name of Dawee. The foreign minister was Thanat Khoman, a veteran in the diplomatic business, very much up to date, very much interested in what the Thai government might get out of the situation and, I would say, entirely protective of Thai interests in the whole thing. I wouldn't say there were no disagreements at all. There were quite a few, but all very friendly.

*Q: What about the Thais on this war in Indochina, where did they see... (end tape)*

*This is tape two, side one with James Wilson. What was in it for the Thais as far as for them letting us use their air bases? They weren't in Indochina. How did they see their interests?*

WILSON: They were into Indochina in the sense that they were very much exercised by what was happening on their borders. The proximity to Vietnam, of course, was really enhanced by the North Vietnamese incursions in both Laos and Cambodia, which the Thai were well aware of and very much concerned about. They did not want to be the next domino, to coin the old phrase; and as it turned out, they weren't. They were also worried about the infiltration that was going on across their borders. There was an insurgent movement in the south of Thailand tied in with the remnants of the Malaysian problem. There was another one on the border with Laos, and they were very much concerned about what might happen in terms of the infiltration of ideas and irregular armed forces.

*Q: Was there the feeling in Thailand at that time that there was very definitely a communist threat to Thailand itself if they didn't do something?*

WILSON: Very much so. Their northern border is not too far from China.

*Q: What were the indications of that?*

WILSON: A good deal of guerrilla-type activity within the borders of Thailand itself. You may remember that in the southern provinces down by Songkhla, there was considerable movement of insurgents back and forth across the border with Malaysia. This was the internal communist led fracas between...

*Q: It was called the emergency or whatever in Malaysia.*

WILSON: And there were a number of irregular forces, the insurgents there, who would go back and forth across the Malaysian-Thai border joined by a number of Thais. The same thing became so in the Laos situation, where there were a number of insurgent bands, irregulars, in the mountains south of Udorn particularly and others over on the other side on the border with Burma. Of course, you are also not too far from the Chinese border in that area.

*Q: When you are working on these base agreements one of the stickiest things is always the element of status of forces agreements as far as American troops not ending up in Thai jails and all of that.*

WILSON: Exactly.

*Q: How did this work out?*

WILSON: It worked out without too much difficulty, happily, I think, for all hands. There were no major incidents; not of the same variety that we had in Japan for example or in the Philippines. There wasn't too much that was written down a lot of times. The Thai were very much concerned about their image. They did not want to create the impression that they were in any sense being pushed around by big Uncle Sam. They were very sensitive about that. We talked, for example, not of U.S. bases but Thai bases being used by U.S. forces. Nevertheless, there were practical arrangements which had to be made in terms of status of forces and such, which we did obtain.

*Q: I take it then there were a certain number of arrangements that were arranged just by understanding rather than getting everything pinned down?*

WILSON: Yes.

*Q: Usually the Pentagon players like to have reams of paper...*

WILSON: That's right.

*Q: ...which really makes it very difficult to negotiate.*

WILSON: The circumstances at that time in Vietnam were such that I don't think the Pentagon was in any position to insist on a lot of stuff. The main thing they wanted was the use of those bases

as fast as possible.

*Q: I would have thought that there would have been difficulty because Bangkok was I suppose then and certainly it became later sort of the sex capital of the world, and not just for the military. You had hordes of foreigners from Europe and Japan and moderately the United States coming in for a dirty week in Bangkok or something of that nature.*

WILSON: That happened a little bit later, and I don't think that the presence of the U.S. forces contributed a great deal to that situation. There were, as I recall, five bases. Whether or not that included the navy at Sattahip I can't remember at this point. Everybody on the base side was busy fighting a war. It is not like the situation in other places where you are simply on stand-by duty. There was not much opportunity for people to get into trouble.

*Q: What about communications with the port? I know later it became quite difficult where goods would disappear between the port in Bangkok or elsewhere. Was this a problem for you all?*

WILSON: Sure it was a problem, but most of that was handled by JUSMAAG [Joint U.S. Military Army Advisory Group], military-to-military. Not that we were not concerned or involved. We were, but the nitty-gritty of this stuff was handled generally at the military level.

*Q: How did Graham Martin deal with JUSMAAG and with the military component of our embassy?*

WILSON: Graham was very much a stickler about who was in charge. Washington came out with a new presidential decree at that time emphasizing that the ambassador was not just the representative of the Department of State, he was the representative of the President. Graham was very particular about seeing that all members of the country team knew that and toed the line. The same thing was true of course with AID and the other U.S. agencies involved.

*Q: Here you have an ambassador who from what I gather was a rather solitary person who played his cards close to his chest and you have a huge embassy there at that time, or a large embassy.*

WILSON: It was growing all the time.

*Q: Did you find yourself as the DCM sort of having to act as the intermediary and having to sort of run the basic elements of the embassy while Martin tended to higher policy?*

WILSON: No, I don't think that was necessarily the case. Graham was very much interested in what was going on throughout the embassy and he was not one to sit in the ivory tower and let somebody come to him. He was very much involved and intervened whenever he felt like it.

*Q: I understand now that somebody was saying that Graham Martin was a great one for dropping by and looking at what was in you in-box.*

WILSON: He did that, oh, yes, but only now and then.

*Q: So he went back to his old administrative habits. What about reporting on the Thai political situation because this is not a stable situation. There is a lot of movement in Thai politics even though it often ends up with military, civilian, military, civilian type rule alternating depending on who is a little more powerful than the other.*

WILSON: In those days, we did not have that alternating arrangement; it was almost all military on the political side, except for the Foreign Office. As you may recall right after World War II the prime minister of Thailand was a fellow by the name of Sarit who had been a field marshal and became something of a benevolent dictator, if you want to put it that way. Sarit died about a year (I've forgotten exactly how long it was.) before I arrived on the scene and Thanom was his successor but by no means the strong man that Sarit had been. There was a leveling out at that point and the backing and filling which you are referring to, I think, really occurred considerably later.

*Q: It was a solid government that you weren't sort of having to...*

WILSON: The chief worry in our day was the possibility of some sort of revolt or coup attempt, within the prevailing military cast. That was always a problem.

*Q: I recall, I'm not sure what it was, but there was the coup that happened when they were having a dredger come in or something like this.*

WILSON: I don't recall that one at all.

*Q: I had somebody talking about this and my Thai details are very vague. They had brought a brand new dredger in from America and everybody was lined up at the diplomatic reception and all of a sudden there was a coup right in front of everybody.*

WILSON: I don't remember that one. Must have been later.

*Q: What about with Laos, what was our involvement with what was happening in Laos at that time?*

WILSON: It was a growing involvement. The ambassador when I first arrived on the scene was Len Unger. Len was there not very long before he was succeeded by Bill Sullivan. Sullivan held forth for most of the time when I was on duty. It was during that time of course that we had the terrific buildup of North Vietnamese forces in Laos. The Ho Chi Minh trail was big news, and border incursions were the name of the game. We had problems too internally I remember with the Pathet Lao as they were called then. There were problems with the Hmong, the internal disturbances that led to the Plain of Jars. All of these were very disturbing developments and everybody was much concerned with what was going on in Laos.

*Q: Were we encouraging the Thai to put troops into Laos?*

WILSON: We weren't entirely against it, I would say, and they were not against it either. I remember Thanat Khoman at one point saying, "Well, we don't have much difficulty justifying this or defending it because the North Vietnamese say they are not in Laos and therefore any people that we might have there can't be fighting them." It was played like a chess game by the Thai.

*Q: At some posts the CIA develops almost an independent status. Did you feel that the CIA and Graham Martin were working together well?*

WILSON: I have no doubt whatsoever about that. Graham was very meticulous about keeping the CIA onboard as part of the country team, and there was no doubt as to who was calling the shots. The same thing with Sullivan in Vientiane.

*Q: Did the ruling family play much of a role or were they off to one side during this time?*

WILSON: Oh, yes, they were and are very prominent in just about everything going on. The Thai monarchy, of course, is a very benevolent one. The king is very much loved, and still is from what I can gather; but he wields no power except the power of persuasion, and he is very much revered. He usually stands in the background, but when something gets really out of line, the king is generally there to express his views very quietly, which usually prevail.

*Q: How about dealing with the royal family, we went to the prime minister basically?*

WILSON: Yes. Dealings with the king were usually ceremonial. There was an awful lot of pomp and ceremony in Thailand in those days and I guess there still is. You can take it from the palace on down to the royal barge processions, to summer sessions at Hua Hin and up in Chiang Mai.

*Q: What about the problem in our various dealings with aid, military and all, with corruption, was this a problem?*

WILSON: It was always something of a prickly point. I remember in particular one occasion when I was chargé with Graham away someplace. I received a peremptory order to report to the foreign minister, who was usually the soul of politeness, suavity, etc. When I arrived on the scene, he practically grabbed me by the lapels and pushed me into a chair, waving in front of my nose a copy of *Time Magazine* which had in it an article on corruption in the Far East with particular emphasis on Thailand. Thanat launched into a tirade on the subject and said that we Westerners would never really understand what morality was. He said we set up a series of puritanical standards which we hold up for everybody else to see but don't pay much attention to ourselves. He went on to say that, whether we knew it or not, the Thai in particular and the orientals in general had moral precepts of their own which were relative and hard to understand. But they understood them. One could go so far along that way and it is accepted. But if he goes beyond that point, and everybody knows when you go beyond that point, then you are corrupt, and it is dealt with, said he. And he added, "I don't know what you Americans want us to do, give honorary citizenship to Bobby Baker?"

*Q: Bobby Baker being...*

WILSON: LBJ's cohort who was under indictment in Washington for corruption at the time.

*Q: It had something to do with some kind of chemical supplies. I can't remember but we all knew it at one time. What do you do when you get something like that, just sort of look grave?*

WILSON: You look grave.

*Q: How did you find the officers? Was it easy to do political reporting, economic reporting from there?*

WILSON: Yes. We had I guess three counselors at that point, not counting administration and USIA. We had a political counselor, economic counselor and a political-military counselor. The political-military counselor was seized with problems of the bases and with the problems of insurgency and counter-insurgency, and worked very closely with JUSMAAG. The economic counselor was involved also with the AID mission.

*Q: What were we doing with the aid? What was our main thrust?*

WILSON: We had a big agricultural program and quite a big technical assistance program. We had some infrastructure programs not the least of which was the road which received a certain degree of notoriety I guess later on, up in the northeast area. It became known as the "freedom road," which was supposed to be joint military-civic action and economic.

*Q: What was your impression of how AID operated in those days? Were we able to sort of fine tune it or was it pretty much going into a lot of projects?*

WILSON: The Thai had, and still have quite a number of very competent technocrats in the economic and finance ministries. They had three or four really outstanding young fellows, mostly all Western educated, and they were very cooperative at that point. I can't speak for what has happened since, particularly in light of the current economic situation in Thailand. In those days, it was, I would say, a very profitable relationship.

*Q: What about the Thai brigade in Vietnam, how did we view that?*

WILSON: About the same way we viewed the Philippine contingent, I think. They didn't engage in any active fighting; they were not foot soldiers in that sense. They were military but they were more civic action than anything else.

*Q: Did you get any high level visits from Washington?*

WILSON: Absolutely, we had them all over the place. Vice President Humphrey was there and Nixon (then out of office). There were several visits from the Secretary, Dean Rusk. A considerable amount of military brass came through and all sorts of congressmen, all interested in what was going on.

*Q: This was a period where some of the hostility in the United States in certain aspects of the public had not yet manifested itself.*

WILSON: That's absolutely right. This was when we were gung ho and thought we could clear everything up and go home. It didn't exactly work out that way.

*Q: Did you find back with the Far East Bureau and the desk and all, was there any problem with them or was there a pretty good relationship?*

WILSON: I think we did very well indeed. This was in the days of Bill Bundy as assistant secretary. I think we saw very much eye-to-eye with Bill on most matters. Graham had some difficulty with some of the things that were going on in Vietnam even then and had no hesitancy about expressing his views, some of which did not go down too well.

*Q: This would be Lodge maybe?*

WILSON: Maxwell Taylor and later Lodge, I guess, were the two ambassadors at that point. Alex Johnson was deputy ambassador, succeeded by Sam Berger, former ambassador in Seoul.

*Q: Sam Berger.*

WILSON: Sam Berger, yes. I guess Westmoreland was there the entire time that I was in Thailand.

*Q: Did Martin go down to Saigon from time to time?*

WILSON: Oh, yes, he got down there quite frequently or the Saigon folks came to Bangkok (Many of their families were in Bangkok.). We also set up an informal arrangement which was called SEACORD, Southeast Asia Coordinating Group, which consisted of the U.S. ambassadors from all of the Indochinese countries and Thailand, Westmoreland, and CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific], who was, I guess, Administrator Oley Sharp to begin with and then Administrator Jack McCain. That group met almost monthly to coordinate what was going on in several operations that were being conducted simultaneously in Southeast Asia. We alternated between Saigon and Bangkok and reported the meetings to Washington.

*Q: During this particular period, this was when the great buildup started in South Vietnam. How was this looked at, a good thing or a bad thing? What was your impression that you had from the vantage of Bangkok?*

WILSON: I can't put any particular dates on this but I think our feeling was that we needed to go very, very slowly with the American presence. We weren't being asked for our opinion on a lot of this, however. The Gulf of Tonkin incident kicked off the base establishment. One of the conditions of our being there laid down by the Thai government was that the bases could not be used for combat operations without the permission of the Thai government. I remember vividly being waked up at two o'clock in the morning and summoned down to the embassy (Graham was away at something.) to get on the secure telephone. It was Saigon saying that there had just

been a large attack on our Marines at a place called Khe Sanh and they wanted permission to fly some missions from the Thai bases to help relieve the pressure on the Marines. Westmoreland himself got on the phone and said it was very important and wanted me to see what could be done, as it had to be done as soon as possible. I got Air Marshall Dawee on the telephone at that hour in the morning and told him what the problem was (I had never heard of Khe San, by the way. I had to look it up on the map.). He evidently consulted with the prime minister and got back very shortly and said, "Okay." All this was done orally.

*Q: Later Sullivan in Laos became renowned as being the bombing commander with targets and all of this, the targeter. Did Graham Martin get into it that way in Thailand or did he leave the military sort of alone?*

WILSON: No, he didn't get into that part of it. This was Sullivan's baby. This was stuff that was going on in his country, and he worked it out with the military. We tried to help

*Q: Is there anything else? Are there any other major developments that we should talk about do you think in Bangkok?*

WILSON: SEATO was quite active in those days.

*Q: I wanted to ask about SEATO. You had a SEATO hat?*

WILSON: Yes.

*Q: SEATO sort of seemed to almost fall off the radar. How was SEATO involved in this?*

WILSON: Well SEATO was not involved. You'll remember that Dean Rusk used to be very emphatic in saying that Vietnam was not a SEATO operation. SEATO was very much interested, however, and SEATO wanted to be very much kept informed of what was going on. That is what we did primarily. It was an interesting time in many ways.

*Q: Did Pakistan get involved? Pakistan was in SEATO wasn't it?*

WILSON: Yes indeed.

*Q: That was sort of the contact with the old CENTO [Central Treaty Organization]. Did they do more than sort of keep a watching brief?*

WILSON: That's all they did.

*Q: How about the Indians? The Indians played a rather interesting role in that period.*

WILSON: They were not involved. The Indian ambassador was very affable and we used to talk to him quite frequently; but nothing on a confidential basis at all.

*Q: The Indians wanted to keep out of everything I guess.*

WILSON: That's right.

*Q: What was the feeling about the Chinese at this point?*

WILSON: We didn't have a Chinese ambassador to Thailand; only the government in Taiwan. There was a Russian ambassador, and he was very affable. We used to have lots of fun fencing with him.

*Q: Was there the feeling that the Chinese were behind...*

WILSON: Of course there wasn't. There was no Chinese communist ambassador. The ambassador from Taiwan was a great fellow. The Thai, along with the Filipinos, were probably one of the few who continued to recognize Taipei.

*Q: Was there sort of the underlying feeling that there was a Chinese menace in Thailand at that point?*

WILSON: Thanat Khoman himself was of Chinese ancestry. A large part of the population, particularly in Bangkok, was Chinese. There was never any difficulty on that score during the time I was there, but there was always that basic unease with the situation, given the proximity of Singapore and Malaysia.

*Q: What about China itself - not local ethnic differences? Was there the feeling that China was behind what was going on in this as part of Chinese expansion?*

WILSON: Yes, very much so. We were very suspicious of what was going on in China proper.

*Q: Were there China watchers in your embassy?*

WILSON: No, not anyone particular that I can recall. Hong Kong of course kept everybody informed.

**RICHARD OGDEN**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Chiang Mai (1964)**

**Economic Officer**  
**Bangkok (1965-1966)**

*Richard Ogden was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, in 1939 and grew up in New Canaan. He attended Stanford where he majored in economics and went on to receive his masters from the Fletcher School in the spring of 1963. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964 and in 1966 he began service in Bogota, Colombia as*

*part of the Economic Section. In addition to Colombia, he was posted to Thailand, Argentina, Peru, England, and Spain.*

OGDEN: I did end up in Thailand, though, which satisfied my Asia interest and was close to Vietnam.

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

OGDEN: I was in Thailand from 1964 to 1966, just two years. That was for junior officer training. I spent one year at our Consulate in Chiang Mai and then a second year in the Economic Section of the Embassy in Bangkok. Lyndon Johnson was President at that time. Thailand was important because of our growing involvement in Vietnam.

*Q: What was Chiang Mai like? What was it doing, and how did it operate? This would be in 1964 and 1965.*

OGDEN: In those days, there were only three Consulates in Chiang Mai- the British, Burmese and American. We helped to look after a pretty good sized American community in northern Thailand. Then we also did some political reporting on events in the area. We were interested in following the activities of several KMT (Kuomintang) units which still operated in northern Thailand. We were extremely interested in the opium trade in northern Thailand, including growing areas and shipments across the border from Burma and Laos. We tried to follow the hill tribe activities, and tensions between them and the Chinese and the Thais. Of course, we also were interested in information coming from southern China.

*Q: Was the CIA an important element there?*

OGDEN: The CIA was there. Indeed, one of my first memories after arriving at the Consulate was getting into a jeep and taking a long drive around the area. It turns out that the jeep belonged to the CIA, and the owners were highly irritated at having it disappear for most of a day with no explanation. As I recall, the CIA worked closely with the hill tribes seeking to gain their support for our efforts in Vietnam. The CIA also was active in efforts to obtain information from China through interviewing refugees and defectors and all that.

*Q: Was Burma of any particular interest? As I recall, Chiang Mai is close to Burma.*

OGDEN: It is close to Burma. As I recall, relations between Burma and Thailand were pretty tense at the time. We did what we could to promote stability along the border. The Burmese Consul, incidentally, was a great charmer. He really captivated my mother when my parents visited on one occasion.

*Q: What was your impression of the Thais?*

OGDEN: The Thais are absolutely delightful, charming, fun, gracious, lively, pleasant people and very friendly to the U.S. I had a great time in Chiang Mai. There was always a social event in the evening, northern Thai cuisine is excellent, and the northern Thai women were very

attractive.

*Q: Sometimes when you are a young officer and you haven't been around the block as much, it is easier to get upset about inefficiency or corruption or something like that. What was your impression of Thai rule from the Chiang Mai perspective?*

OGDEN: I am sure there was a lot of corruption in the government and in business circles. We were always concerned about that at the Consulate and Embassy. Still, I don't recall any specific scandals or cases of corruption.

*Q: What were you doing?*

OGDEN: I was in charge of services for Americans and economic and commercial reporting. I also helped out with political reporting whenever possible.

*Q: What kind of Americans were up there?*

OGDEN: We had a good sized Peace Corps contingent. We had a medical group that was assisting the local university with different programs. And there was an Air Force contingent stationed just outside of Chiang Mai. The air force group was monitoring southern China for any nuclear explosions. Then there were reps of USIS, CIA and other U.S. government agencies. And there were a number of religious groups. Finally, we had a few anthropologists doing research.

*Q: Who was consul there?*

OGDEN: Stephen Dobrenchuk was the consul when I first arrived, Steve and Ann Dobrenchuk. I don't know what's happened to them. I've lost track.

*Q: He's in California somewhere. How did your first taste of Foreign Service life suit you?*

OGDEN: Initially, I was a little disappointed to tell the truth. At graduate school, the intellectual level was pretty challenging. In Chiang Mai, the work was often people oriented and social. It was hard to write a brilliant economic report on the future of northern Thai rice production. Washington just wasn't interested. On the other hand, a lot of Foreign Service work is people oriented so I guess it was good to have the experience early. Also, in retrospect I think it was useful to start out in a very small Consulate where a young officer like myself could have more freedom.

*Q: When you came down to Bangkok it would have been 1965 or 1966?*

OGDEN: I got to Bangkok in the summer of 1965 and began working in the Economic Section. That was an interesting period in Thailand. Graham Martin was the ambassador. Our involvement in the Vietnam war had grown significantly. A key embassy focus was to obtain maximum Thai cooperation for our programs in Vietnam. This meant a lot of focus on political-military work. We were constructing major bases in Thailand and this put a strain on limited

Thai resources like lumber and cement. In the economic section, we wanted to ensure that actions taken for security purposes didn't destabilize the Thai economy. For example, we had to watch that base construction didn't drive up prices in other sectors of the Thai economy.

*Q: How does one when building bases, you've got to use all this equipment, you are hiring a lot of people, and how do you go in and do a massive program like this and your fellow officers up and down the line trying not to destabilize?*

OGDEN: As one example, at the time we were selling a good deal of rubber and tin from the U.S. stockpile. I recall several embassy cables arguing against excessive stockpile releases which could adversely affect Thai foreign exchange receipts and thus destabilize the economy. Rice would be another example. While supporting U.S. rice exports, we didn't want to drive down the world price to a point where Thai exports and foreign exchange receipts would be hurt.

*Q: Did you find yourself discovering about the rice lobby in Louisiana?*

OGDEN: Yes.

*Q: Senator Ellender from Louisiana was one and there were others.*

OGDEN: I remember a lot of visitors from rice producing states in the United States coming to Bangkok to meet with embassy officials about rice problems.

*Q: How did it feel coming from Chiang Mai to the big city, to Bangkok?*

OGDEN: It was a good change. I enjoyed being able to use more of the academic work that I had done. In the economic section, I did a good bit of macroeconomic reporting. I handled civil aviation issues. I also served as the economic section's liaison with the AID mission. I sat in on their meetings and followed AID programs and policies. That was interesting to me. I had a good first tour in Bangkok in the economic section.

*Q: Who was the head of the economic section?*

OGDEN: Bob Fluker was the Counselor and Konrad Becker was the deputy.

*Q: I would have thought that the economic side would have been very important because that has to work and you don't want to upset the apple cart. You were obviously pretty far down the line in a big embassy but did you get any feel for the hand of Graham Martin. He was a legend in the Foreign Service.*

OGDEN: I was always impressed with Graham Martin. I remember thinking that he was a very cool customer and a very tough customer. I did get to sit in on several meetings that he had. I remember that he used to have one-cigarette meetings or two-cigarette meetings, depending on the importance of the issue. He must have smoked a lot. I recall that a U.S. contractor won a bid for road construction and Martin asked me to analyze the project. He liked my work so he must have been a good economist.

*Q: What was the feeling you were getting about our increasing involvement in Vietnam. By this time we had just begun to put troops in.*

OGDEN: As I recall, most people at the embassy were still pretty positive about developments. Things were going pretty well then and the Thais were supportive. I recall how closely we all followed events. At parties, fresh news often would be discussed every hour.

*Q: Was there a concern about the Communists in Thailand while you were there?*

OGDEN: I think there was concern about possible North Vietnamese efforts to utilize communist elements to destabilize things. Of course, the CIA was very much interested in this. In our work in the economic section, we obviously were focusing on other things.

*Q: How was traffic then?*

OGDEN: Traffic in Bangkok at the time was extremely bad, and by now I understand it is about fifteen times worse. You could hardly get around even then in 1964-1966. I don't know how people manage now.

*Q: How was the social life?*

OGDEN: The social life was very active. The embassy did a lot of entertaining, and I remember several occasions when the ambassador invited me to a function. The DCM was Jim Wilson and he also was helpful. He had a farewell dinner for me as a junior officer, which impressed me because Bangkok was a pretty big mission. Communicating with the Thais wasn't easy because I hadn't had Thai language training before I went to Thailand. I studied some Thai in Chiang Mai and ended up with a 2-0 on the language exam.

*Q: Were we at all concerned about Laos from the economic point of view? Was there any spill over there?*

OGDEN: I think the major effort was on road construction between Bangkok and Vientiane. We helped to build a beautiful highway through the northeast of Thailand to Laos which could have been used by the military if necessary. I remember attending the dedication ceremony and later traveling to Vientiane on the highway.

*Q: Did you have any dealings with the American military?*

OGDEN: Not directly, but everyone at the embassy was involved in one way or another. We had some contact with JUSMAG and I visited a few of the bases.

*Q: In 1966, you left.*

OGDEN: Yes, I left in summer of 1966. I flew home stopping off in Tehran and Europe. Then I took Spanish language training and went to Colombia that fall.

*Q: Was this a career choice or an assignment? How did this work out?*

OGDEN: It was a career choice in the sense that I had expressed interest in getting a second language and maybe having a tour in South America. I hadn't specifically asked for Colombia.

*Q: When you talked to your colleagues in Thailand, I would imagine that Latin America would be sort of the other side of the moon as far as people were concerned with it. The ARA at that time was almost like there were two different services or something.*

OGDEN: It was totally different. You are right. The focus and issues were completely different in Colombia.

**JAMES L. WOODS**  
**Research Analysis Division, Department of Defense**  
**Bangkok (1964-1967)**

**Advisor, ARPA Unit**  
**Bangkok (1969-1973)**

*James L. Woods was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. He graduated from Ohio State University and Cornell University and served in the U.S. Army in Germany. He has served in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, which supplements an outstanding career in the Department of Defense. Mr. Woods was interviewed in 2001 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

WOODS: At any rate, in the fall of '64 I was in Thailand, probably working on a Long-range Assistance Strategy, and found an old management intern friend out there, Lee Huff, running a little office for the Advanced Research Projects Agency, and we got together. He said, "I've just been called. They told me I'm going to be posted back to Washington rather abruptly. We're looking for a replacement. Would you be interested?" I said, "What are you doing?" He explained that this was a special project – Project AGILE - under the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. They had a special name for it - I forget. It wasn't Foreign Internal Defense; that thing hadn't come up... Well, basically it was helping selected foreign countries develop programs to cope with their own internal defense and, of course, the U.S. involvement with them. ARPA had opened stations in Lebanon, Saigon - where it was CDTC, Combat Development and Test Center, down on the waterfront - and in Thailand, later the Canal Zone, eventually a liaison office in Korea, and then the whole program was scrapped in the early and mid-'70s. So in '64 it had been set up just a couple of years earlier. In Thailand it was still operating out of a hotel downtown and at the SEATO Graduate School of Engineering on the Chulalongkorn University campus, with a very small staff under Marine Colonel Tom Brundage. I mentioned Lee Huff, who later became Deputy Assistant Secretary over in Transportation. Lee was running the social-behavioral science research program and asked if I would be interested. I came back and talked to my wife, and we decided why not. So on basically no notice we packed

up and went to Thailand in the fall of '64.

*Q: You were there until when?*

WOODS: Well, our first tour was three years in Bangkok. I was still toying with the idea of finishing the dissertation, but I decided that I wasn't going to do overseas basing. I'd given up on that somewhere along the way. I would change to a Thai topic and work on the Thai policy toward its hill tribes, including the involvement of the Thai Border Patrol Police, which the U.S. was funding, and I started working and collecting documents on that. I applied for and got a DOD fellowship, and they sent me back to Cornell grad school in the fall of '67 for a year of Southeast Asia studies under Dr. George Kahin - who just died - who ran a very prestigious Southeast Asia studies program. Actually I toyed with the idea of the Southeast Asia program when I first went to Cornell, but I found that you had to specialize right away, pick your country, start studying Thai or Burmese or something from day one and sort of narrow your options. So I decided not to do that. I took Kahin's courses but I majored in international relations. When I went back in '67, then I worked for George and went through the graduate seminar, which was interesting because I was the DOD swine in a sea of very angry Cornell "stop the war" students and George was organizing the protests on the East Coast himself.

*Q: I'd like to stop and go back... In this '64 to '67 period, what were you doing? In the first place, when you hear a name like that, to my ears it says, 'Ah, this is a CIA operation.'*

WOODS: Oh, we worked closely with them in the field, because they were operating out of AID/USOM, running the Border Patrol Police program, and also they were very interested in general in the issues of internal security and they had their advisors in many of the same agencies that we had ours. But we were funded and controlled strictly in the Defense channel and our counterpart... Well, the idea was to create a Thai counterpart organization and then we'd be the U.S. component of it, and that was done, the Military Research and Development Center, MRDC, which was a component of Supreme Command Headquarters. We also did some work for something called CSOC, which was a Thai organization, the Communist Suppression Operations Command, run by General Saiyud Kerdphon, and there were a number of CIA advisors over there operating for the most part out of the embassy. We were all part of the country team and the ARPA field unit in Thailand was a U.S. component of that. We also got Australian and British officers in due course - in fact, rather early on - and they stayed with the operation for many years. But we had Thai and Americans mainly. The Thai counterpart to our director was a two-star general, and he reported to a component of Supreme Command - Education and Research, I believe. Most of the MRDC commanders went on to become three-stars or, in some cases, four-stars. The first commander was an air vice marshal actually, Manob Suriya, who was the first Thai graduate of West Point back, I guess, in the '40s. The U.S. approach was that this was a counterinsurgency-oriented program. Thailand was the laboratory for the soft side and Vietnam was the laboratory for the hard side or things that go boom. So in Vietnam - I would go over there from time to time, and they would come over to Thailand from time to time to escape Vietnam mainly - they were doing a lot of systems work - village information system, hamlet evaluation system, territorial forces evaluation system. They were doing stuff trying to evaluate how was the war going, for MACV. They were also doing ordnance testing; the ArmaLite rifle which developed into the AR-15, which developed into the

M16 - they were involved in that and God knows what else. On our side we were doing studies and analyses and systems research and a good bit of electronic research including remote sensing, trail sensors, testing different kinds of mobility equipment and communications equipment. Initially I worked for a Navy commander, John Denham, as his deputy. John had just come off an assignment running a spook ship off of Korea. Our office - the Research and Analysis Division - was in charge of social and behavioral and systems research, and we worked for the most part through contractors. We brought in rather sizable teams from RAND, RAC - Research Analysis Corporation, which no longer exists; it was then the Army's prime operations research organization - Stanford Research Institute, Cornell Aerolab, BMI, AIR - you name it, we had it - and a lot of individual scholars on contract.

*Q: It strikes me that this sort of thing is a boon to the social scientists and all in the United States at a university or something, but what does it actually produce down in the field?*

WOODS: From the beginning there was a disconnect which was never healed. The Thai side thought that this would produce nifty gadgets and improved weapons which hopefully we would give them, otherwise they could buy. They were very much interested in that side of things, the hardware side. ARPA headquarters was very much interested in "the problem" and how to fix the problem. The Thais thought they knew what the problem was and they wanted to go kill it. Eventually we got into counterpart development or counterpart institutional development, and eventually the U.S. gave them a nice new building and a bunch of equipment and a handshake and left. I was the last one out in December '72. On the U.S. side, we were doing a good bit of work on the hill tribes. My assumption was this would be a long-range program. That was another fallacy because ARPA really isn't into and DOD isn't into long-range programs. It's remarkable it lasted as long as it did. This, I decided, is another reason that, by and large, we're so ineffectual in foreign affairs. We don't have any long-range perspectives. We don't learn much from history. We build contacts and lose them. We develop clientele and discard them. I just think a lot of the problems we face right now are because of the way we misconduct ourselves in our overseas activities. We're entirely too much focused on us and our short-term approach and meeting our requirements. So it was always a testy relationship with the Thai because they were feeling they weren't getting a hell of a lot out of it that was useful to them. We were getting shelves full of studies, some of which were of interest to U.S. Army laboratories, or course, or U.S. Navy and Air Force laboratories. The electronics work was of considerable interest. We had - I remember - a thing about three inches thick: *the electromagnetic properties of a tree in Thailand*. I guess it's important to know this stuff if you're trying to build small devices that will penetrate triple-canopy jungle. So we did a lot of that stuff. We built some systems and libraries, which were turned over to the Thai, which hopefully they have found useful -for example, the Thailand Information Center with a gazillion documents. Everything useful that had ever been written about Thailand that we could find in the scholarly community was in there. We turned that over to a Thai university actually. Our hill tribes data base, we turned that over to another Thai institution, the Tribal Research Center, in Chiang Mai. The Village Information System, we turned over to a Thai ministry, although it was still very much in an embryonic state...

*Q: One of the big problems in Vietnam was that the Vietnamese and the Montagnards really didn't get along. The Vietnamese treated the Montagnards as third-class citizens..*

WOODS: Did you know Gerry Hickey?

*Q: No, I didn't.*

WOODS: Gerry, of course, was sent to Vietnam by RAND under ARPA contract to work on the Montagnard problem. He's an outstanding - I don't know if he's still alive - an outstanding anthropologist and ethnographer.

*Q: You get to this. You do study after study, but if your officer corps is going to treat the hill tribes as subhuman or something...*

WOODS: Then what you end up doing is putting in U.S. special forces who just work with them themselves, and they were pretty effective. Of course, a lot of the Montagnards ended up here and others were abandoned willy-nilly. But the problem in Thailand was somewhat different. The Thai are by design rather accommodating. They have a much softer approach. They solve a lot of problems by avoiding them or sliding off. They're not as confrontational as the Vietnamese. Rather than have platoons of policemen up in the hills, they have Border Patrol Police, which was very much a U.S.-funded program, a lot of it. The CIA provided a lot of the equipment and guidance and so on, but the Thais have kept it up. They put into the remote areas a single policeman with his hut, hopefully his family, and he was the village school teacher and, of course, obviously also the source of intelligence about what's going on up there in the mountains. With respect to the armies and militias that were already up there, Lahu, Karen, KMT Second Generation, all these people, "if you don't cause any problems, you don't bother us, we don't bother you. You can just live up here and trade with the lowlands and do your thing. Don't cause too many problems in Burma, or we might have to do something about it." It was sort of live and let live.

*Q: But that's so against sort of the American principle. Were you able to soften this?*

WOODS: Well, it worked. We had enough problems without looking for more. That worked okay. What didn't work okay was when the Thai would get excited about something, problems along the Lao border in particular, and decide, probably true, that a lot of these villages, some of them upland Thai and some of them non-Thai - mainly the Chinese tribes - were harboring or providing support to insurgents and drug traffickers along the border. I remember two campaigns. One was aerial. The Thai Air Force started bombing villages up in the north. Our director, Dr. Holbrook, reported on the country team meeting. They were using our bombs, and some of us thought that was really stupid, but Dr. Holbrook came back and reported that the Chief of JUSMAG briefed on how many more tons of this stuff were on the way in, and how many sorties were flying and how many villages had been flattened. So then Holbrook said, "Does any of this make sense? Aren't we just creating more insurgents?" and Ambassador Unger said, "Well, you know, it's a sovereign country. They're free to make their own mistakes, and we're here to help them." I'm sure that wasn't the exact phrase, but "keep the bombs flowing" was the bottom line. "We're not going to question the Thais' right to drop bombs on their own villages." They eventually had a conflagration on their hands and stopped the bombing, because it was doubling and tripling the goddamn insurgent population every time they had a sortie. Then

they went back to their previous policy of leaving them alone or buying them off. The other time they decided to send an army into the Phu Pan Mountains to chase the insurgents and their ethnic affiliates out of the mountains, and the U.S. was duly cast to support this. It was not our responsibility, and you could look at it and say this was going to be a disaster, and it was a horrible disaster and the army got totally trounced trying to get up the slopes and retreated with heavy casualties, licking its wounds and basically gave up the war, or gave up attempting to rout the enemy out of their own terrain. So, in general, I'm not sure that giving the Thais what they wanted would have helped - what the military wanted was more toys to go out and drop bombs and shoot people. What we were working on eventually became a huge doctrinal book that was prepared, *Civil-Police-Military Manual*, and we got in difficulties with our Thai military counterparts because it was basically directed to General Saiyud and the Communist Suppression Operations Command - which got renamed the Internal Security Operations Command - and was predominantly a soft, non-military approach. There was a military component, but there was a heavy police component and a heavy civil administration component. Most of our work, to the extent that it was relevant, fed into CSOC/ISOC rather than to the Supreme Command Headquarters, which didn't know what to do with the studies. As in our own forces, they had Thai special forces and they had, under General Kriangsak Chomanand, decided to send to the border "mobile development units" to work the border villages with movies and loudspeakers. At one point we got into giving the villages radios - AID did a village radio program - and other non-military measures to try to reach out in these contested areas where there was heavy, lethal insurgent activity. But the military, by and large, wasn't enthused about this special stuff any more than our own military is and would much rather go out in force and lay waste to something. The problem is you could very seldom find a target, because the insurgent was out there in the deep jungle. I think I digressed. Where were we?

*Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop, and I'll put at the end here where we'll pick it up the next time. Why don't we finish at least the first part of your time in Thailand, what you were doing, and let's pick up the time, too- - I think it would be interesting - in Cornell, just to catch the spirit of the times and all that, where obviously you were persona non grata.*

WOODS: Well, with the Americans but, interestingly enough, not with the Southeast Asians.

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*Q: In '68 where did you go?*

WOODS: As soon as the course was over, I went back to Thailand.

*Q: The same job?*

WOODS: Basically the same job. I went back to the ARPA field unit, or research center, but I was posted immediately to Chiang Mai University in the north for a year as advisor to the dean, which sounds odd but we knew the dean from his previous position in Bangkok and he was trying to establish an expanded research program on northern Thailand, especially the tribal minorities problem. There was a Tribal Research Center, which the Thai government was attempting to operate, co-located at the university, and so my job was trying to build a tribal

research program in the north working out of the university. So I spent basically the next year doing that, although I was dragged off to Vietnam several times to work on projects there. We launched several projects, one with the university geography department to try to build a description of the transportation network of northern Thailand because the maps basically showed only the main roads and there were networks of what I would call tertiary roads and trails all over the place which were not charted. We also launched a program to create a tribal database of all the villages in the north - location, ethnic makeup, approximate size and so on.

*Q: The Thai government didn't have a database of this?*

WOODS: They had information but it wasn't in any organized form that we would call a database. Much of their information came from the Thai Border Patrol Police who were posted to the outermost fringes of the kingdom and were basically a CIA project or at least were getting support and training through the CIA part of USOM. They were posted out there basically by themselves. They had a medical kit and they also functioned as the village school teachers, so they were quite effective in figuring out what was going wrong. But we were trying to integrate - not their data actually, because the police weren't sharing that, at least with us - but take the most basic information and get sort of an overview of the ethnic populations of the north and their location, their commerce patterns and all the rest of it. The Communists were at work on the northeastern border trying to infiltrate using the tribes and whatever animosities they had toward the Thai government. There's really a highlander/lowlander split, however, if you had to describe the politics, but then you had the KMT army or remnants thereof over on the western border and the drug smugglers on both borders and the lumber smugglers. So it was a "Terry and the pirates" kind of environment, and we were basically just trying to collect information. We were also sponsoring basic ethnographies by a number of anthropologists, European and American, at the time, again trying to collect in-depth ethnographic understanding of several selected lesser-known tribal groups. So that's how I spent a rather odd year as the advisor to the dean of the faculty of social sciences at Chiang Mai University.

*Q: With a map of trails and essentially a jungle environment, how did you find out where the trails were?*

WOODS: The dean of the geography department sent his students out all over northern Thailand to drive and walk around and map the things and report back, which is a pretty cheap way of doing it.

*Q: Well, I'm sure he also got them out to see the folks.*

WOODS: This, of course, eventually came to the attention of the American Anthropological Association and some others and got them greatly excited. It's cited in a book which was published some years later called *Anthropology Goes to War* featuring me as one of the devils they identify as corrupting the practice of anthropology.

*Q: Anything we touched in those days the academic world would jump on you for it.*

WOODS: Well, the anthropologists were the hottest under the collar because it was not in the

tradition of Margaret Mead, you might say. Before the war went bad and became greatly unpopular, we had the leading American anthropologists on Southeast Asia on the consultant payroll and they were hard at work, and some of them stayed at work. Dr. Gerry Hickey – an expert on the Montagnards of Vietnam - worked with us throughout the war. Later he wanted to go back to U. of Chicago to write a book - he'd been out of there for a decade - and the faculty had a panicky emergency meeting and voted not to let him on the campus.

*Q: It shows the attitude.*

WOODS: So he said, "Fine. To hell with you," and he went elsewhere and wrote his book. But that was the attitude. We had Dr. Ladd Thomas, Northern Illinois University. Now, Ladd, I recall, was a political scientist, and he reported that students invaded his office and threw his furniture and books out the window. He said he couldn't walk across the campus without somebody shoving him and spitting on him, or getting phone calls in the middle of the night threatening to blow up his house. So it was a lot of fun. The same thing was going on all over. We had a couple of very senior professors out in California, David Wilson, political scientist, and Herb Phillips, anthropologist, and they had been cutting-edge scholars on Thailand. Herb capitulated. David basically got up on his feet and told all his student and faculty critics to go to hell; they could think what they wanted but they weren't going to interfere with his right to speak out. But Herb went over; Herb gave up. At any rate, yes, it was an interesting time. It didn't particularly affect me, but it was an interesting year. There were riots at Cornell. The black students took over the student union for their own purposes at the point of guns. President Johnson announced, of course, while I was there, that he was not going to run again, causing great, lusty cheering. It was a most peculiar time to be a DOD person sitting in the very seat of anti-war sentiment. My office on West Avenue was, of course, where they were also cranking out all these leaflets for the protests and other propaganda materials for the East Coast. But I really liked and respected Professor Kahin, who died last year. We had kept in touch. He had his own very distinct point of view, which I didn't entirely share, but I think he was a very honorable man and an excellent scholar but, you know, a scholar with a very open bias, very liberal bias, but a very decent guy. He ran a first-rate seminar, and he would let everybody express themselves freely, but I found there wasn't any point in expressing myself freely very often because it just annoyed the rest of them anyway. They already knew everything and there was nothing to learn. So that was my last return to academe except for an occasional teaching lecture here and there.

*Q: In Chiang Mai you said you went down to Vietnam. What were you doing there?*

WOODS: I was called over several times to work on what was called a long-range plan for MACV, Military Assistance Command Vietnam. The Army had a special study group reporting to General Abrams on how was the war going and what recommendations do we have - at a high strategy level, not how to fight the war. It was a large study group. I had worked earlier on something called the Comprehensive Army Study for Thailand, and the Army colonel in charge, who was, by the way, a Ph.D. anthropologist who had worked in the South Pacific, asked me to be a part of the Vietnam study. I was to look at some of the management aspects of the bowl of spaghetti they called MACV headquarters, and that was quite interesting, to be going over in those days. It was an interesting environment of a different kind. Rockets were flying.

*Q: I was there from '69 to '70 as consul general at the embassy, and I was running what amounted to civilian court martials for people involved in the black market, civilians. We would bounce them out of their military privileges if they were caught at that. A lot of things were going on.*

WOODS: I was there in the fall of '68, late fall, and a couple of times in early '69. The group eventually submitted its report to General Abrams, who was not too pleased because basically it said, you know, we've lost the war, declare Vietnamization and get the hell out of here. Also, he had asked that different units be evaluated. I liked General Abrams. He was a straight shooter. He was also a tanker, which I was. The conclusion was that the conventional forces were not particularly useful and the forces that had really done well were the Special Forces, and he didn't like that, and that the Marines were second best, and he didn't like that. Anyway, we had our hearing.

*Q: You were at Chiang Mai through '69. Then where did you go?*

WOODS: In the late summer of '69 they moved me back to Bangkok and I stayed on there for four more years. The ARPA program was in the process of phase-out. The headquarters had basically decided that this was not a popular thing to be engaged in. They were catching all kinds of flak especially on their social science projects. They had gotten a great deal of flak over a project they started in Latin America, Project Camelot, and this had the whole academic community after their scalp, so they decided basically to start closing down or at least changing the nature of their overseas activities, getting out of the social-behavioral sciences, the soft research, the counterinsurgency, and go back to high tech and things that go boom, so they had made a decision to close the Center. It took us several years to wind it down because we were in a counterpart development phase and turning things over to the Thai government. I stayed to the end. I was the Acting Director in the final months. We turned the Thailand Information Center over to one of the universities, turned the library over to another. The building and equipment and so on, the Thai Supreme Command Headquarters absorbed it, which was the intent from the beginning, and the Americans gradually went out the back door and disappeared. In December '72 we closed down. I then moved over to the embassy and worked at the embassy for six or seven months in what was called the Development and Security Section, run by William Napoleon Stokes, a counselor. George Tanham had that job for a while earlier. My job was as an advisor to what had been the Communist Suppression Operations Command but was now called the Internal Security Operations Command under General Saiyud, and I wrapped up my final months in Thailand working there.

*Q: Did you have any feel, as you were turning over your facilities of the work you had been doing there, that the Thais seemed to absorb this and use it, or was this just one of these things that we did and after you left it languished?*

WOODS: Well, the Thai priorities were very different from the American priorities, and the approach was very different. Our Thai counterparts were essentially all military and very hierarchical. They didn't understand, had no experience or exposure to, the concept of real civil control of the military and a lot of civil guidance and input on things. So most or a great deal of

what we were interested in, the kinds of projects the Americans were running, simply vanished once we left. I think some of it rubbed off, and they certainly got some very good files, technical and social-behavioral research of all kinds, a lot of stuff they never knew about their own country, and some of the officers seemed to be very interested. Probably our best program: we sent 18 young Thai officers, carefully selected, to the U.S. Navy Postgraduate School in Monterey, six at a time for three years, and those officers, I am told, when they came back, did rise rapidly in their own ranks. That was career enhancing and, I'm sure, individually helped their institutions as well. One of them ended up as the maverick mayor of Bangkok, a Navy officer.

Also, to the annoyance of our military counterparts, a lot of our work was done through sort of a side door through the embassy to the Communist Suppression Operations Command/Internal Security Operations Command, CSOC/ISOC, General Saiyud Kerdphol, and he was running a program outside the military. We had a good bit of input through our contractors to his program, and he absorbed a great deal of that including finally some comprehensive manuals and training materials which were basically drafted by teams led by our contractors, especially a good friend of mine, a British retired officer named Jerry Waller. Jerry had worked all over Asia for 20 years, and had been in charge of training police field forces in Malaysia during the emergency. Stanford Research Institute picked him up at our request and put him in charge of some of our counterinsurgency research projects. The Thai military were not very interested in any of this, and they regarded counterinsurgency as sort of a weird concept although they were obliged through Supreme Command Headquarters to participate, but they would have preferred a straight military solution or no solution at all. So I would say to the extent there was an impact, it was over on the counterinsurgency side where the CIA was very much involved as well and USOM with the USAID development programs, and that's where the ARPA main interest was actually, so there was always a disconnect. In the beginning the Thais wanted military projects with a lot of hardware, and ARPA was really, at least in Thailand, not into that. The Thai would have been happier had we treated them as we had the Vietnam project, as a laboratory for weapons testing and so on. But we did give them a nice facility and a nice electronics laboratory. Presumably some of it was helpful. But, I think, if I had to answer your question with a yes or no, I would say no, it didn't really rub off enough to, for the most part, continue after the Americans left, although the building is still there and they still do what they consider to be legitimate military research and development.

*Q: Then in '73 you left?*

WOODS: In '73 I reluctantly came back to Washington, back to the Pentagon.

*Q: I take it you really enjoyed Thailand and the Thais.*

WOODS: Yes, and the work was interesting and you weren't stuck in your office. You could get out in the field and muck about.

*Q: How was the traffic in Bangkok in those days?*

WOODS: Well, it was bad but not very bad. We didn't have to go downtown much. It was a

great time, the early years. As the place got more developed, it became more congested, more smog, less fun. But it was a very interesting time to be there.

**JOHN M. REID**  
**Assistant Executive Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1965-1970)**

**Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1976-1980)**

**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1992-1995)**

*Mr. Reid, a Virginian, was educated at Virginia Tech, Columbia and Harvard Universities. A specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs, he served in Saigon, Vientiane, Bangkok and Seoul, primarily as Public Affairs Officer. In his Washington assignments, Mr. Reid also dealt with affairs of that region. He was also assigned as Public Affairs Officer at Beirut during the Lebanon Civil War, and was a casualty in the bombing of the US Embassy in Beirut. Mr. Reid was interviewed by Charles R. Beecham in 2002.*

*Q: I want to ask you here whether or not you arrived at your first tour in Bangkok with a good understanding of the program you were getting into.*

REID: To some extent not, although this soon changed. The training program in Washington had focused on main-stream USIS (United States Information Service) activity. On the other hand, I knew that Thailand was a big post and that its size was related to what was happening in Vietnam. I think that, although I wasn't fully prepared for what I encountered in Thailand and may have been a little confused a first, I soon understood the character and importance of the Thailand program.

*Q: Why don't we talk about your initial break-in period as a JOT in Bangkok?*

REID: I was involved in some very traditional USIS activities and in some things that I did not really expect. I arrived in Thailand for the first time on March 3, 1965, and Mark Brawley took me in and introduced me to the PAO, Jack O'Brien. That was a Friday, and, on Monday, I began seven weeks with Ivan Campbell in the radio section, then located above the U.S. Information Center on Patpong Road. I liked this assignment. The radio program was large, and we produced a lot of material, mostly in Central Thai, for local placement. Then, as I recall, I came over to USIS headquarters on Sathorn Road and worked with you in the press section. I spent a lot of time editing Wireless File copy and, from time to time, I drafted something original. I was always pleased to see a media release I had written, however anonymously, appear in one of the local papers. During my first months in Thailand, my "big brother" was Paul Blackburn, who had arrived in Thailand a year earlier as a junior officer. Paul did a wonderful job of explaining

things to me and keeping me pointed in the right direction.

After my time in the press section, I moved upstairs for a couple of weeks in the field operations office, which was run by Howard Biggerstaff (“Bigg”). I think it was at this point that I discovered that my training was preparing me for an assignment at one of the branch posts. Following my initial contact with Bigg, I made my first branch post visit—a couple of weeks in Udorn, where the branch was run by Ed Schulick, an outstanding officer who later became one of my closest personal friends. Ed did an excellent job of showing me the ropes and getting me involved in branch operations.

*Q: Were there many Americans stationed on the air base there at this point?*

REID: Officially, the base was Thai with a Thai commander, and we were allowed to use it. Actually, by that time, we had a very large U.S. Air Force presence in Udorn, as well as on Thai bases at Ubol, Ta Khli, Khorat, Nakhon Phanom and U-Thapao. From the end of 1964 until sometime in 1968, our presence on these bases rose from about 6,300 servicemen to about 45,000. I don’t recall how many Americans were stationed at Udorn, but there were a lot, and, in addition, there was a significant Air America operation flying covert missions.

Eventually, USIS had branch posts in towns close to the bases at Udorn, Ubol, Khorat and Nakhon Phanom, and a considerable part of what those posts did involved base relations. In Udorn, Ed Schulick was very effective in facilitating relations between the base and the local community. Ed had military experience in Vietnam, and this gave him credibility with the important people on the base. He was also well connected locally, partially thanks to wife, Duangduen, who came from a prominent Thai family and who well understood the role of the local governor, his deputy, the local educational community and important people at the provincial, district and municipal levels.

*Q: But what did you do? You went to Udorn for a training assignment. Did you simply follow Ed around?*

REID: Actually, it was unintended, but I got a pretty intensive dose of base-community relations. When I got to Udorn, I found that Ed had been involved in a rather serious vehicle accident, which kept him out of action for a couple of weeks. Ed had been working with the American consulate in Udorn and with the base to host a big July Fourth function to be held on the campus of the local teachers’ college. Invitations had already gone out to prominent Thai in the local community, but there was still a need for considerable coordination among the various Thai and Americans, on the base and in Udorn. Ed asked me to take it on and arranged for me to extend my stay in Udorn so I could finish the project. Subsequently in my career, I must have been involved in dozens of July Fourth functions, but this was my first, it was a challenge for me, and it went well. I recall it as a highly instructive experience, and its success helped my junior-officer morale considerably.

*Q: So then you came back to Bangkok?*

REID: After I got back to Bangkok, there was another abrupt change of course doing work under

Nelson Spinks, the experienced and distinguished head of the Cultural Affairs Office. Then I had some more up-country experience, particularly in Ubol, where Rob Nevitt was branch director and Paul Good was his deputy. I did my first actual trips out into northeastern villages with Paul, including a couple along the Thai side of the Mekong River. By this time, Paul had been in Ubol for a while. His Thai was fluent, and he understood what was happening in the villages and with the Thai officials we accompanied. He was careful in explaining things to me, particularly in helping me understand the requirements and limitations of my role as an advisor.

*Q: Did you get any training in the executive office?*

REID: Yes, I did. It was under Jack Zeller, and it was very thorough and useful. Unfortunately, however, it lasted only a few weeks. Nevertheless, Jack managed to give me some understanding of what was involved in supporting a large, expanding field program. After I worked in the northeast program, I returned to Bangkok, in 1966, and worked directly under Jack's supervision as assistant executive officer and distribution officer, and I think I then, more than ever before, understood the problems he had to manage.

*Q: Maybe this would be a good point to sketch out the special character of the USIS field program in Thailand.*

REID: USIS Thailand was a very large operation with, at one point, more than 50 Americans and 200 Thai employees staffing the Bangkok headquarters and as many as 13 branches, eight in the northeast and five elsewhere in the country. The traditional USIS programs—international visitors, the information center, radio placement, publications, press—were large and, to some extent, supported what was happening in the field. The U.S. military presence in Thailand attracted a large U.S. media contingent, as you know better than anyone, so the press operation was very important. Thailand had a lot of VIP visitors, including President Johnson twice and President Nixon once. On the other side of it, however, was the essential, articulated purpose of the Thailand program; that is, supporting and enhancing the ability of the Thai government to communicate with and inform the Thai public, particularly the part of it in geographic areas most vulnerable to the communist insurgency. This was consistent with what the U.S. mission in Thailand was doing on a broad front—trying to develop within the Thai system a capability to deal with a serious domestic insurgency.

*Q: And actually to urge the officials to get out and maintain contact with people in the villages, right?*

REID: Yes. In Bangkok, the focus of the mission, particularly USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development), was on institution-building—developing regular budget processes within the Thai government and establishing a training institution for junior local administration officials, for example. What USIS was doing in the field, however, was encouraging Thai officials to get out into the villages and to interact with people at the local level. Our part of it was information. We went out into the villages with the Thai officials, we showed films, we distributed publications and we talked to people. Our media focused on a few essential messages—the efforts of the Thai government to improve the lives of people in rural areas, for example, and the institution of the Thai monarchy as a unifying symbol for all Thai. It was a big

program, and it required a lot of very intense personal effort.

*Q: Was there much Thai-produced material available?*

REID: Virtually none.

*Q: Were there problems in terms of supply and distribution? Were you able to get what you needed up there?*

REID: Certainly in terms of quantity.

*Q: What about relevance and quality?*

REID: It was a continuing struggle. Howard Biggerstaff very much favored the field determining content. He was enough of a bureaucrat, however, to want to be on very firm ground when confronting the people producing the media. I think there was always a conflict, probably very natural, between the professionals in Bangkok who wanted to call the shots and the end-users out in the field.

*Q: This was not unusual in USIA operations as a whole, of course.*

REID: No, it was something I encountered many times in my career, at all levels of USIA.

Let me go back to something you asked earlier, whether or not I was prepared for the USIS program I encountered in Thailand. Before I went back to Bangkok to work for Jack Zeller in 1966, I was very involved with the program in the northeast—first going on village trips as a trainee, then working with Ed Schulick in Udorn for about four months before going over to Sakolnakorn to open my own branch post. I spent a lot of time in villages in the company of Ed and Khun Tiewtawat, his senior information assistant, and later in that of Khun Prayong, a Thai information assistant who worked for me. Conditions in the northeast were dreadful then. The drive from Udorn to Sakolnakorn which today takes about 40 minutes on a well-maintained road, in those days took at least three hours on a dusty laterite road and could take as long as five hours in the rainy season, when all that dust turned into a sea of slippery red mud. When the mud dried out again, the surface of the road buckled and looked like a washboard. At certain speeds, the ripples in the road would make vehicles very difficult to control. This was especially true for our boxy old jeep station wagons which had a very high center of gravity. There were frequent accidents. I was involved in two, one of which got me evacuated to Clark Field in the Philippines.

The only way into villages, accessible today by paved roads, was on rutted ox-cart tracks, barely navigable with four-wheel drive vehicles. I remember going into a village in Nakhon Phanom once, and there were virtually no young males between the ages of 15 and 30. They were all up in the hills with the insurgents. Children were dying of dysentery everywhere in that village.

*Q: Maybe you should provide here some general background about the political and social environment in which you and other branch directors were operating.*

REID: Of course, I am now speaking from the viewpoint of 2002 and not on the basis of what I thought in 1965. People left the villages to join the insurgents. Conditions were terrible, and I believe there was generally a tremendous feeling of alienation in the Thai countryside, particularly in the northeast, toward the Thai government and its bureaucracy. Many of the northeasterners were the descendants of Lao forcibly relocated away from the Mekhong River by the Thai after their victory over Laos in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They had no sense of their own history, but their culture and language persisted. They spoke Lao, although most central Thai still insist that it is a dialect of central Thai. At best, they were treated indifferently and arbitrarily by the Thai centralized bureaucracy and, even worse, were sometimes exploited by corrupt officials. The communists could say to them: Okay, you are alienated, you are rejected, and you have no stake in this system. We can provide you with an alternative. I think this was tremendously attractive for a lot of these people. As a consequence, I think some more thoughtful and aware people in Bangkok were looking at what was happening in Vietnam and just beginning to run a little bit scared. What we had to say to those we found prepared to listen was, you have to build roads, you have to provide clean water, you have to bring public health services to the villages, you have to build and staff schools, and you have to communicate with the villagers, however insignificant you think they are, and tell them what you are doing, because, if you don't, you may very well lose it. I think this was a very useful and credible message. And, in a very perverse, paradoxical way, I think the communists probably did Thailand a great service, because they scared the hell out of some people in the central government, and these people began to react and do some of the things that needed to be done.

*Q: How about the leadership and organizers of the insurgency? Were they Thai, or were they Vietnamese?*

REID: I am probably not qualified to deal with this question. If anyone in Bangkok had the answer, it did not get to us in the field, and, so far as I know, it is not part of the record. I can only speculate. In the early 1960s, there was an organized Communist Party of Thailand, controlled, I think, largely by Sino-Thai, some of whom had been in China and some of whom had close connections with the mainland. I don't know what kind of relationship this party organization had with the insurgency in the countryside, but I suspect not very much.

On the other hand, there was a large group of Vietnamese who had grown up in northeast Thailand and who had been repatriated to North Vietnam in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Under an agreement with Hanoi, the Thai had allowed North Vietnamese Red Cross offices to be established in northeastern Thai towns to handle this repatriation. When the Thai began supporting South Vietnam, Hanoi terminated the repatriation before it was complete, but some of the North Vietnamese Red Cross offices still existed in places like Udon and Sakon Nakhon when I first went there. Most of the people who were repatriated spoke excellent Thai and had connections to the Vietnamese settlements in northeast Thailand. And, of course, there were Lao from across the Mekong who spoke the same language as people in northeast Thailand. Certainly, the ideology of the insurgency was foreign-inspired and, most likely, foreign-controlled, and there were channels available for its introduction.

I recall that, on Christmas day, 1965, Khun Tiewtawat, Khun Prayong and I had been out on a

village trip in Nakhon Phanom, and we were in the district officer's house. Someone came in with a pamphlet, which had been given to him by communist insurgents who came into his village the night before. When they distributed the pamphlet, they said they would come back in 24 hours, collect it and discuss the content. This guy had taken a tremendous chance bringing the thing in, and we had only a little time to look at it before he had to take it back. The pamphlet text was question-and-answer format. It was in northeastern Thai, but was written with the standard central Thai alphabet. We read it into a tape recorder and then later transcribed it. The questions spared the monarchy, which the communists refrained from attacking, but there were very real attacks on the military government headed by Field Marshal Thanom and General Phrapas and the Americans who supported them. The answers were articulated in highly ideological terms, and they read like quotations from Mao's little red book.

Eventually, the ideology helped defeat the insurgency in Thailand. Later, in 1976, when the Thai military cracked down on the students, and the students ran off into the jungle to join the communists, what they found was that the whole insurgency was very ideological and was not at all responsive to conditions in Thailand. The communists weren't a bunch of reformers, they weren't really interested in improving conditions out in the countryside; what they really wanted to do was change the political and social system in Thailand.

*Q: Are we still talking about your early assignment in Thailand?*

REID: We jumped ahead. I am just saying that the mid-1970s marked the final end of the insurgency and that the increasing irrelevance of the communist ideology to Thai conditions was a significant factor in that. Of course, a principal contribution to the increasing irrelevance of the ideology was the fact that the Thai establishment had been responsive to conditions in the countryside.

*Q: Did military confrontation with the insurgents contribute to decline of the communist movement?*

REID: I think the U.S. mission saw appropriate action by the Thai military as very much part of the overall response. We had a very large military advisory group in Thailand, and they were very active outside Bangkok. As for USIS, we had some contact with the Thai military, and our message was that information and civic action were essential parts of any military suppression activity.

One of the trips I did after moving over to Sakolnakorn early in 1966 was for 30 days with the Thai military. I was there at the insistence of the provincial governor, and there were no other Americans, not even the local U.S. military advisor. The operation I accompanied was a real suppression operation, and there were engagements in which the Thai took some casualties. We were joined at various points by people from the provincial and district offices, who participated in some of the civic action.

*Q: What did you have to offer?*

REID: It was very much a standard village operation for us—with the film showings, the

publications and the personal contact. The Thai military commander generally wanted my Thai team out doing its thing, but he discouraged me from going with them. I think he was concerned about the possibility of a security incident involving an American, but I also think that, for very good reasons, he wanted the operation to be a Thai thing. My role was to make sure my people did their job, which they would have done anyhow, and to be aware of what was happening.

*Q: I don't think I have ever heard this discussed very much. I don't know whether you want to get into the existence of controversy among some of the USIS officers assigned to up-country posts. My recollection is that some of them resigned or were moved to other positions because they disagreed with this and other aspects of the field program in Thailand.*

REID: Definitely. Also, hindsight is always 20-20, but I was young and inexperienced, and I really didn't know that much about what USIS was supposed to be doing. I liked being out there in the boondocks, however, eating sticky rice and sleeping on temple floors, talking to the village teachers about local problems, having a few drinks in the evening with the Thai officials and working on my Thai. It was exciting, fun and, I thought then and still think, useful. At the same time, I recall a question in my own mind. It was an intellectual question—a little paradox. If the object of this thing is to show that the Thai government is responding to a situation, what is the impact of my ruddy, foreign face appearing in the middle of things?

*Q: But wasn't it the judgment of the Americans who were running all of this in the embassy and back in Washington that this would not have happened without Americans present in the field as a catalyst?*

REID: That was their judgment and I think it was correct. In most cases, particularly early on, I don't think the district and provincial officials would have been out in the villages if we weren't there as well.

*Q: In any event, it went on for ten years. You say it ended in 1976, during your second tour there?*

REID: I think the insurgency ran its course sometime after 1976. Our own disengagement from the counterinsurgency program was much earlier. It was well underway by the end of my first Thailand tour, in 1970. Let me try to get the chronology correct.

Nixon was elected for his first term in 1968. Up until that time, Washington had supported the maintenance and expansion of the field program. Immediately following Nixon's stop in Thailand in the spring of 1969, however, we were visited by a team from the NSC (National Security Council) which did a very comprehensive review of the program. I recall that Lynn Noah came out to serve as our liaison with the team. Clearly, that was the turning point. It may have been Lynn, but someone told me that Kissinger had decided that we were going to get out of the business of doing the Thai government's job for them. Being just a little guy on the ground, I did not understand the implications of this at the time.

*Q: Was that related to the idea of getting out of Vietnam too?*

REID: Yes, I am sure it was, but, again, that wasn't so clear in 1969. We now know that the whole direction of our Vietnam policy under Kissinger and Nixon was Vietnamization—trying to get the Vietnamese to do the job.

Before we move on, let me say just one final word about the effort to support counterinsurgency in Thailand. Ultimately, I think the failure of the insurgency was due to the fact that the insurgents found themselves increasingly marginalized, largely by an irrelevant ideology but also significantly by the fact that the Thai establishment had addressed pressing issues in the countryside. Our contribution to this was very important. I think it paradoxical, however, that the most important consequence of our work, particularly that of USIS, may have been one we did not anticipate. I have been amazed over the years by the number of Thai who have told me that the first time they ever saw a motion picture was when USIS teams came into their villages. We were part of the opening of traditional society to the world. One may argue whether or not this was a good thing, but I think it was inevitable, and I think our role in it was constructive.

*Q: Now, this brings us to another question, that of so much friction between Agency officers in Washington and USIS officers in the field, in Bangkok and upcountry. Wasn't there a period when there were great arguments between Washington and Bangkok about whether we were going to preserve parts of the program? Was this on your first or second tour?*

REID: The confrontation between the field and Washington raged during all three of my tours in Thailand. USIA never did a good job of explaining to people in the field what was happening back at headquarters, how things were going. If it had, we might have been able to accommodate change and manage things more rationally.

I recall that, by the end of 1969, our PAO, Lew Schmidt, and the area director in Washington had gotten involved in a very heated and, I think, emotional exchange over the field program. The people in the field had worked hard and thought they had done their job. Yet, it seemed, very arbitrarily, we were being told to liquidate operations in which we had made major investments and to dismiss talented, loyal staff who had served us well. If someone had said to us, this is the way it is in Washington, this is the way it is in Vietnam, we have to get from point A to point B within two years, now let's come up with a rational plan—we might have managed with much less friction and anguish.

I was more fortunate than many of my colleagues in Thailand. By the end of 1969, I was in Bangkok, serving as distribution officer. We had devised a very successful means of getting our publications to every village headman, every primary and secondary school and every government office in Thailand. I think we probably distributed over a million pieces of paper a month, and we could document that almost all of it was going where we intended. At the same time, we ran a very successful program for our monthly Thai-language magazine, Seripharb, getting it to about 43,000 paid subscribers. Our distribution contractor used the subscriptions proceeds to finance a book translation program, which produced a new title each month, with sales of each copy amounting to about 7,000, principally a result of promotions through the magazine. In response to the pressure from Washington, we began working with the Thai, early on, to take over the free distribution to Thai institutions. This involved an investment in equipment we gave them, transferring some of our people to their payroll and providing

extensive training and advice. They assured us that they would be able to produce the material for the system once we went out of the business. I don't know to what extent they were ever able to manage that. In the meantime, however, we continued, on our own, paid magazine and book distribution. Thus, I was able to maintain a significant, successful part of the distribution program, and, in this, I think I had a happier experience than some of my field operations colleagues, people like Ben Fordney, Rob Nevitt, Ed Schulick and the people at the branches...

*Q: Don't you think that what you encountered then in Thailand was partly the inclination of bureaucrats to assert their authority, especially if they are in Washington dealing with subordinates in the field.*

REID: Absolutely. Thailand was always a target for Washington bureaucrats looking for easy cuts, and the cuts seemed always to occur in a highly arbitrary and contentious fashion. I encountered the problem on all three of my tours there, particularly my last, when I returned as PAO in 1992 and stayed until my retirement in 1995.

Let me give you an example. From the time of my first arrival in Bangkok in 1965 until my final return in 1992, our binational center in Bangkok, the American University Alumni Language Center, AUA, had been the paradigm for such operations throughout the world. It enjoyed the support of a distinguished group of Thai. It ran a highly successful language program, teaching English to thousands of Thai students and professional people while generating significant profits, some of which were used to finance activities of direct interest to USIS. On its own, it ran a highly successful cultural program. Our state-of-the-art library was located on the binational center premises, while the center, from its own resources, helped staff the library. Initially, we had made a major investment in the binational center infrastructure, but, in later years, our contributions were limited. We provided some support for specific programs, and we supported the library with acquisitions, technology and some staff. The center director was a USIS officer, and a USIA specialist ran the language program.

For 30 years, the reputations of my predecessors in the Bangkok PAO job had been burnished and enhanced by universal esteem for the American University Language Center. After my arrival as PAO, however, I was visited by an area director from Washington who confronted me with a new view of things: "Look at this place! Why are we involved in this? Why are you doing this? It's a total anachronism!" Worse, this area director was no less confrontational when meeting some of the prominent Thai who supported the center.

I was shocked. What had changed? Now I know that USIA, under all kinds of pressure, had made the decision, I think very unwise and unfortunate, to get out of the library and binational center business. This was never clearly articulated to the field, however, or, in any case, to me. If it had been—if someone had said, USIA no longer has the resources to support this, but we will support you while you work with these people to recruit their own director and language specialist, and to become self-sufficient—it would have been much less contentious and much easier to manage. Eventually, I was able to work with the Thai through the problems of recruiting a director and a language specialist. In fact, today, the center runs a highly successful and profitable language program, and it still maintains a cultural program. The library is a sad business, however, since Washington told us to withdraw our own staff and major equipment to

form the basis of a separate information resource center within the USIS operation. Nevertheless, I find it interesting that the binational center outlived USIS as an institution.

Let me tell you another little story. On one particular Monday, I had an early-morning engagement, so I did not go directly to the office. When I got to the office around ten o'clock, there, in the center of my desk, was an unclassified cable from the area director in Washington. It told me bluntly to implement, within a relatively short period of time, a major cut involving, as I recall, three American positions, several FSN positions and a big piece of our annual budget. By the time I got to the office, photocopies of the cable were all over the building. A little heads-up on the cut and a classified cable for PAO eyes only would be helpful. It was enormously difficult to deal with a cut like this, but having people lined up outside my door wondering whether or not they would lose their jobs didn't make it any easier. Anyhow, that's the way things were done.

*Q: What else do you consider important about your final assignment in Thailand?*

REID: My two previous PAO jobs had involved some very hard work under very difficult conditions, but I was pleased at the extent to which my efforts and those of my colleagues had been recognized. In Bangkok, I thought we did some significant work as well—like the annual economic seminars, which involved the ambassador and senior embassy people in week-end sessions with the most important economic policy people within the Thai government. No matter how well we did in Bangkok with the economic seminars or with anything else, however, I never felt that anyone back in Washington paid the slightest attention. Overall, the experience seemed a disaster. Nothing constructive was acknowledged, and the core of the matter was that, for three years, I seemed to spend most of my time fighting with Washington.

*Q: In other words, you felt that the experience and skills developed over the years weren't being used. You were given a situation where what you had to offer didn't apply. What was the role of the embassy in all of this? How did the ambassador feel about it?*

REID: That is a very interesting question. I was in Thailand, as you know, three different times. During my first tour there, Graham Martin was ambassador, long before he went to Vietnam. Martin was extremely supportive of what we were doing in the field. When he left, Leonard Unger came, and I think he was basically indifferent to the USIS program at a time when the PAO, Lew Schmidt, was under tremendous pressure from Washington.

When I returned to Thailand for my second tour, as deputy PAO, Charlie Whitehouse was ambassador. I had known him in Laos when he was ambassador there and I was binational center director. I liked Whitehouse, and I think he understood USIS and supported what it did. He was succeeded, however, by Morton Abramowitz, whose only interest in USIS, in my view, was whatever exposure it could provide to the international media.

This was at a time when the PAO, Bob Chatten, was having his own share of the unending ration of difficulties with Washington, and I don't think the embassy was at all supportive. The area director at that time did not like the Thai program, and our branch post in Khon Kaen, among other things, was on his hit list. He came out to Thailand, assembled the USIS Americans, and spent three days telling us how we would fare under the "new agency" being promulgated by

John Reinhardt and company. Among other things, there was to be a centralized, worldwide magazine to replace the local one-country magazines, including Seripharb, which we were still producing in Thailand. In fact, the whole thrust of the presentation, as I recall, was more centralization and less autonomy for the field posts. In this case, the message did not go down well, partly because of the way it was communicated. It gets back to your earlier point about Washington bureaucrats asserting their authority over field subordinates. Eventually, we did lose the branch in Khon Kaen, and we got no help at all from the embassy on this, but I think many of us would have felt better about it if the whole business had been handled with a bit more collegiality.

To finish this one off, I should say that, when it was my turn to be PAO in Bangkok and deal with Washington, I received excellent support from the embassy. David Lambertson, the ambassador, had been DCM when I was PAO in Korea. We were friends, and he understood USIS and appreciated what we could do. I got along well with the DCM, Matt Daley, and I had good, mutually useful relationships with my other embassy colleagues. David was a regular participant in our programs, and he was particularly distressed by Washington's treatment of the binational center.

*Q: Before we leave this, I wonder whether you should talk a bit about the impact of all of this upon the Thai, the people who had supported USIS over the years and with whom it had good relations.*

REID: USIS had established a tremendous presence and reputation in Thailand over the years, particularly among an older generation of Thai. On my last tour, I met the Thai prime minister, a former IV (International Visitor) grantee, at some function. When I was introduced as the USIS director, there was a definite quickening of interest—a comment something like, “USIS, it has done a lot of good in Thailand.” On another occasion, I heard Surin Pitsuwan, who later became foreign minister, talk about USIS. Surin was a Muslim from a poor village in south Thailand. He came to Bangkok for high school and, in the late 1960s, started hanging around the binational center, where he befriended several of the American staff. He also befriended Wright Baker, one of our USIS colleagues whom you will remember. Wright helped Surin fix a severe tooth problem and later helped him get into the American Field Service exchange program for high school students. After his AFS year, Surin came back to Thailand from the U.S., got his law degree from Thammasat University and went on to Harvard for his Ph.D. Afterward, he went to Cairo for a couple of years to learn Arabic and do Islamic studies. Surin is one of the most promising, most admired politicians in Thailand, and, recently, he has been very helpful in moderating anti-American sentiment within the Muslim minority in Thailand. I think Surin might actually become Thailand's first Muslim prime minister. He very specifically says that, had it not been for USIS, he would probably still be living in that poor south Thailand village.

I think people like this regret the decline and demise of USIS. When I had to tell the board of the binational center that we could no longer support them as we had done before, there was tremendous dismay. Unfortunately, the people who remember us and who feel they profited from our efforts will pass from the scene.

*Q: I have one more speculative question to ask you about this thing in general. Is it conceivable,*

*given whatever direction we are going in relation to the Middle East, that we could eventually find ourselves deciding we need in one or more countries of the region a presence and capability patterned after those of USIS in Thailand in the 1960s? There is a lot of talk now about a need for a larger, better American public diplomacy effort as a consequence of general anti-Americanism abroad, particularly in the Arab countries. The talk is all rather abstract and shallow-minded, it seems to me, as if public diplomacy can succeed simply through television, radio and other electronic media messages. Rarely is anything said about an on-the-ground American presence or the cultivation of mutually beneficial personal relationships on a much broader scale.*

REID: To the extent that I did a good job in Lebanon, I did so because I really worked at relationships. I had good, intense relationships with all kinds of people—Maronites, Sunnis, Shiites, government, media, education, religion, arts and, at one point, even a senior Palestinian. When I was in Korea, the effectiveness of what I did, to the extent that it was effective, depended on me being there and maintaining relationships. To do the kind of thing we did in Thailand requires a lot of local compliance and acceptance, and we probably don't have anything like that now in the Middle East. Nevertheless, in a country like Egypt or Jordan, if we sent someone to the Ministry of Education who said, "I have a little budget, and we'd like to open a little center where we could teach some of your people English, where we could have a library and where we could invite some people in from time to time for discussion or whatever," I think that might work, and would be as cost-effective and useful as anything we could do.

*Q: Before we move on, I have always been curious about the time you drove in an auto race from Vientiane to Singapore. Can you tell me about that?*

REID: It was actually an auto rally, and I did it in April 1969. I had done the drive solo from Bangkok to Singapore the year before, in my Volkswagen, but the rally was much more of an event. I think there were about 170 vehicles participating. We started in central Vientiane, drove to the Mekong ferry, crossed to Nong Khai, spent the night and then drove directly down to Bangkok. After a few hours there, we headed, non-stop, for the Malaysian border. From there, it was a straight shot to Singapore. The whole thing took about 48 hours. Aside from myself, my team members were John Fredenburg, an American colleague, and Vara Suyanond, the Thai mechanic who managed the USIS vehicle repair facility—and someone very useful on an expedition like this. We did it in my Volkswagen, and the idea was to pass checkpoints at specified times without exceeding legal speed limits. Points were awarded on this basis. We didn't win or even place, but we had a great time. There was, in fact, paved highway all the way, but things were much less developed then than now.

None of this involved work, although I did write a piece on the experience which was used by Free World, the USIS regional magazine published in Manila, and by Seripharb, the USIS Thailand magazine.

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*Q: From Harvard, you went back to Bangkok in 1976 for your second tour, as DPAO (Deputy Public Affairs Officer). Have we covered it, or do you want to revisit?*

REID: After Ambassador Abramowitz arrived, the U.S. mission in Thailand was very much focused on the refugees—thousands of them coming across the border into Thailand from Laos and Cambodia, and Vietnamese boat people pitching up on the beaches of South Thailand. The refugees were a Thai problem and a U.N. problem, but the refugees were there as a consequence of a war in which we had been involved, so there was a feeling of responsibility. The mission was screening refugees who wanted to go to the U.S., and it was trying to facilitate the work of NGOs who were working with the refugees. To coordinate all of this, there was a very large refugee office within the embassy, which really drew resources from everything else. When we assigned people—junior officers, for example—to the refugee operation, it was sometimes very difficult to get them back.

There was a lot of international media interest in the problem, and, Bill Lenderking, the press attaché dealt very capably with this, which appeared to please Abramowitz. Beyond this, it was very hard for us to fit into the mission priority. The refugees weren't a USIS audience, and, since the Thai were already managing the problem, there was nothing we could say to them about it. On the other hand, there were important things we could be doing—and did—but they weren't related directly to the refugees who were Abramowitz' principal interest.

One of the things we did was to get some free advertising calling attention to the refugee problem in some major international media. Bob Klaverkamp, a senior editor from Reader's Digest, was a friend. Bob was in Bangkok with some colleagues from Time and Newsweek for a meeting. After seeing a story about the terrible situation of the refugees on the front page of the Bangkok Post, these people, together, made an offer of free advertising space to call attention to the refugee problem, if someone could come up with copy and sponsorship. Lintas, a local advertising agency, immediately offered to produce the copy, but when I approached the foreign ministry with the offer, I was told that the Thai could manage the refugee problem quite well without help from anyone. A good Thai friend of USIS, however, from field operations days, Winyu Angkanarak, who had been a provincial governor and had worked with Ed Schulick, Rob Nevitt and, to a much lesser extent, myself—was now the senior career official, the permanent undersecretary, in the Interior Ministry, which had overall responsibility for the refugees. When I approached him, he immediately seized upon the offer and assigned someone from his staff to work with me on it. Subsequently, there was a lot of to-and-fro among the Thai, our embassy, the advertising agency and the NGOs, to whom we were attributing the advertisement. Eventually, however, we got everyone headed the same way, and the ad—a very effective piece—ran in the three magazines for several weeks.

**IRWIN PERNICK**  
**Branch Public Affairs Officer**  
**Nakorn Sri Thammarat (1966-1969)**

**Economic, Political/Military Officer**  
**Bangkok (1969-1971)**

*Mr. Pernick was born and raised in New York City and educated at City College of New York (CCNY). After service in the National Guard he joined the Foreign Service in 1963 and was posted to Rome. His other foreign posts were in Thailand, where he was Public Affairs Officer and, in Yugoslavia, Political Officer. At the State Department Mr. Pernick held a variety of positions dealing with a variety of issues including Political/Military Affairs, Military Sales, and Press and Public Affairs. Mr. Pernick was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1997.*

*Q: After Rome you went to Thailand. That was a different direction. How much training did you have for that and what did you do there? It looks like you were detailed to USIA.*

PERNICK: That was about the time of the buildup of US and diplomatic forces and interests in South East Asia and I recall a telegram sent around the world asking for volunteers to be assigned in South East Asia and perhaps some other agency. I did not know what my prospects were in my current assignment. I discussed it with my wife. I did not know what was going on. It could be Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma, anything. She said sure, why not. I was assigned to Thailand. I found out later that it was likely I would be assigned to the US Information Agency. I only knew a little bit about it from my contacts in Rome. I studied Thai for ten months. It came out much better than my Italian. I had another month of intense area studies including Vietnam. Then I went to Bangkok. I did not know where I was going in Bangkok or what I would be doing. I was just to show up and report to the US Information Service Office for my assignment. Once I arrived they said that I would be a Branch Public Affairs Officer. They had about five USIS posts and were planning to open several more in the next few months. The likelihood was that I was going to get one of those. I had no idea if it would be in the northeast or in the south. I was pleased that it turned out to be a very obscure place in mid-south Thailand where we spent over two years.

*Q: This area was subject to insurgency?*

PERNICK: Well, the Thai government was a little concerned about the political situation. There is a Thai communist party, which was a covert party. They were making noises in the northeast because of the activities in Laos. Also, in the north and to a lesser extent in the south. The south is divided into two regions. The southern border has a high Malay speaking and Islamic population in the mid-south. I was assigned to the mid-southern where there was some concern about communists from Burma coming in. The program was basically a counter-insurgency PSYOPS program. It was not a traditional USIS program. We had a little library. It wasn't a flashy program of any sort. We did some facilitating for American Field Service for scholarships but it was all put together using Thai language materials. It included films and publications, handouts and posters. We worked with Thai government officials to get them into the villages. We had three or four jeeps. There was only one American man. I had four or five Thai local employees and they were very good. I had two provinces, each with a governor. I would call the governors frequently along with the local village chiefs and encourage them to go into the villages to show the people what the Thai government was doing for them in the areas of security and development. It was very simple.

*Q: You had aids to do that. Films and posters.*

PERNICK: We would go to some very obscure villages. I would go as often as possible. I found it very eye opening. I had never slept in a Thai village before or in a Buddhist temple or somebody's back yard. It helped me with my language and with the appreciation and knowledge of the culture.

*Q: You were the only American in this provincial place?*

PERNICK: No. There were two CIA people but they were in different programs. One was working with the police and the other with intelligence. Neither of them spoke Thai so I often worked for them doing a little translating. The first couple that was there had no Thai at all. They had been there about six months. When we showed up the first thing that they asked us was if we played bridge. I don't play bridge; I play gin rummy and poker. About the third dinner they invited us to they said we are teaching you and they sat us down and forced us to play bridge. So we played a lot of bridge for the next many years. There was also a Thai military base outside of town. There were two or three military advisors on the base.

*Q: US?*

PERNICK: US, exactly. None had families. An incoming person found out that there was an incoming family with children so he brought his wife and children down instead of leaving them in Bangkok and that was nice. My kids were perfectly comfortable with everything that was going on locally. They didn't have to have Americans involved.

*Q: Irwin, how would you assess 30 years later or so this period from 1966 to 1969? For you personally it was a very unique and special experience. How would you rate it in terms of US government? This is the sort of thing we don't do anymore, to have people off in the provinces. It was kind of a special situation in South East Asia at that time.*

PERNICK: Very much so. It was clear that we were there, helping and encouraging the Thai government to do its job. A lot of people recognized this. That part of the program at the time I was sorry to see. That aspect was killed almost as soon as I left. It had nothing to do with me. By the time that I left Nakorn Sri Thanarat, there were 13 branch posts around the country. Most of them were closed in the next two or three years. My successor who was a traditional USIA person was very happy to learn that the whole aspect of the position was going to be done away with. I think we probably did a little more than we should have. Our work with the Thai government probably could have been subtler. Too often I got a lot of credit that I often didn't deserve. I would go into villages where I had not been for six months or a year and people recognized me. I enjoyed that and it certainly helped me with my language. Professionally, for myself it was an excellent assignment. Very unique. There were only four State FSO's who were given those posts. Do you know Jim Wilkinson?

*Q: Sure.*

PERNICK: Jim studied Thai language three months after I did. There were quite a few of us who

became close. He was in the same region as I was but further south. It was a place, I think, called Songkhla. It had a little more to it like a golf course. Well, I had one too but it wasn't the same.

*Q: Songkhla was, I think, a consulate.*

PERNICK: Exactly, a Consular was opened shortly after. John Kelly was Consular down there. It's a very important city in the south. The place I was in was really out of the way. There are parts of that region that have become big tourist sites. I see it in the New York Times travel section all the time. I was there when they didn't have enough rice and you had to paddle overnight to get there.

*Q: The world has changed.*

PERNICK: The world has changed indeed.

*Q: Did you do much reporting? Was the embassy interested in what was going on in your area?*

PERNICK: I had the feeling that the embassy was only partially interested. We reported to the field operations office in USIA. I actually had to report on just about every trip that I took, in detail. This village, how many houses are in it. We gave a lot of detail they probably didn't need. This is how many pigs are in the village. Where the nearest store was.

*Q: I assume they were very interested in whether people were coming in from Burma. Infiltrating?*

PERNICK: Yes, but I didn't have access to that type of information because the two agency types had pretty good contacts and they had more money and were able to use it better. I did not have much except my jeeps. The embassy did comment on an election. A national election, which was really surprising because they don't have too many elections I wrote a very comprehensive report on the electoral process in these two provinces and someone from the embassy political section about a year later told me it was very interesting. It was an air-gram or an operations memorandum. I couldn't write classified stuff since I didn't have classified capability. In order to talk to Bangkok I would have to make an appointment with the local radio/telegraph office for the next day. I couldn't pick up the phone and call anybody in Bangkok. I had very little access and no access to anything secure. I couldn't depend on gift bags, which came through. They weren't secure as Thais carried them.

*Q: I have thought about what is the most remote place Foreign Service people have served and I thought maybe Australia in terms of distance from Washington. In terms of the facility and ability to communicate I would think that mid-south Thailand was very remote.*

PERNICK: Absolutely. Knowing it would be remote the first thing I did, before my family came, was to make sure to meet all five doctors in the area. We were friends with the doctors. Then I visited the governor.

*Q: Okay, why don't you say very slowly the name of this place that we have been talking about?*

PERNICK: Thai is a tonal language. It has to be pronounced very carefully. It is Nakhon Si Thammarat.

*Q: Nakhon Si Thammarat.*

PERNICK: It means roughly the city of good morals and ethics. There is a very famous Buddhist temple in the city but people don't visit it anymore. There is a museum attached to it with very little light and you could hardly see any of the artifacts. I liked to go anyway because the curator was a nice old guy.

*Q: How big was the city at that time?*

PERNICK: The city had forty thousand inhabitants. It was long and thin. I suspect it is not much bigger now. The regions around it have grown but not this particular city.

*Q: It is not on the coast?*

PERNICK: It is not far from the coast. Perhaps a thirty-minute drive from the coast.

*Q: Okay, after Nakhon Si Thammarat...*

PERNICK: Very good.

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*Q: After that you stayed in the country and went to Bangkok, after home leave, I suppose?*

PERNICK: Right.

*Q: What did you do there? You were in the Political Military section?*

PERNICK: I was in a very large Political Military section. I think Bangkok was the second largest embassy we had in the world, after Vietnam.

*Q: This was 1969 to 1971?*

PERNICK: Yes, 1969 to 1971. The Pol/Mil section had nine people in it. This was all officers, not including the secretaries. We had three military officers on detail. One of the major roles of the section was to act as a liaison with the Thai military. The purpose was to let the Thai government know what we were doing with Thai bases as far as Vietnam was concerned. Ambassador Unger took that responsibility very seriously. He wanted to make sure that in no way would our relations with the Thai government be compromised and in no way would they have an excuse to force us to diminish our use of the bases, which were very crucial in terms of Vietnam. I know there were at least three maybe four air bases plus the naval capabilities in addition to other things going on that I never learned about. I do recall one interesting thing. I

suppose it is declassified now. Once a day we would get a very classified cable from Saigon. This would give us the coordinates of the places that were going to be bombed that day by the B-52's based in Thailand. It was the responsibility of the Pol/Mil duty officer, he couldn't go to lunch but had to wait around for that cable, to check it against the maps and send back the ok. This was interesting because on two occasions that I recall the coordinates seemed to be inside of other countries. Specifically, Cambodia, which we weren't authorized to bomb, at least not to our knowledge. Within hours there were generals at the embassy in Thailand pointing out our mistakes or telling us that we had bad maps and then supplying us with new ones. The whole notion of what the US government was doing from Thai bases was very important.

*Q: Did you coordinate or discuss some of these things with the Thai government?*

PERNICK: I had a different job. I was the eighth man in a nine-man section. I was the SEATO affairs officer, which was a very important job. John Kelly was my predecessor. I didn't know much about the job. I knew a little from my university studies and from having been in the region for almost three years. Why did anyone give a damn about SEATO? It turns out that we took it very seriously. It was our legal justification for being in Vietnam and the need to keep other nations informed about the Vietnam Conflict. So we took SEATO seriously without taking the details seriously. However, somebody created this organization, not just a treaty but an organization, which required some tending.

*Q: Were the headquarters of the South East Asia Treaty Organization, SEATO, in Bangkok?*

PERNICK: Exactly. There were various groups that met regularly. We even had some Foreign Service types detailed to SEATO. Ambassadors would meet once a month. They were called the council representatives. Under the ambassadors was the permanent working group. I was the deputy working group person. I did all the work. We would meet once a week with the representatives from the other embassies. There was a budget sub-committee looking at the spending habits of this outrageous organization. I was on the committee. There was a ministerial meeting of the councils, which took place once a year. The foreign minister, Mr. Rogers, attended the two I attended when I was in Saigon. There was one in Manila and London.

*Q: Were you able to go to those as part of the US delegation?*

PERNICK: Well, yes. Only because the desk officers in the department knew that I was the only one that knew everything that was going on. Even though I would be the twenty-first person in twenty-man delegation, which was outrageously large, they still needed me. At one of the meetings, Ambassador Unger was sitting next to Secretary Rogers and the Chief Military Advisor, Admiral McCain and I was sitting all the way in the back because I wasn't a big shot at all. I was just an FSO six or so. Ambassador Unger would look at me and pull his finger toward him and I would excuse myself and walk up to the front. He pointed to a seat that was occupied by someone important. I think maybe the legal advisor. That person stood up and I sat down and he asked me what was going on and I told him and he then told Rogers and Rogers was able to reply to somebody's question.

*Q: It is good to have a little expertise.*

PERNICK: Absolutely. This experience taught me about the size of the delegations that we tended to send. I attended one in Manila, one in London, and one in New York the following year. There were just thousands of people.

*Q: Were you involved in some interesting issues in SEATO or was it just nuts and bolts and details?*

PERNICK: Well, there were interesting issues in the sense that the eight members of SEATO were not a coherent whole, which is not surprising. The French showed up but were not at all interested and thought we were overstepping our bounds. The Pakistani's had long since given up interest in SEATO but still showed up. The Thai and Filipino were pretty close to us because we were providing a fair amount of assistance but we had to be sensitive to their concerns. The Australians and New Zealanders were very good at that time. This was way before the nuclear issue in New Zealand. The Brits were members and the Brits were a pain in the ass. Did they have a Labor government at that time? I can't recall. They may have. They raised all kinds of issues about Vietnam.

*Q: OK, you were talking about Secretary Rogers and his relationship with the British foreign secretary.*

PERNICK: I was never privy to the closed meetings, the bilaterals, which they had during the SEATO council meetings, but they seemed to get along famously. However, the Brits were often a pain in the ass. I made a lot of friends in the British Embassy. I learned to play squash as a consequence. Still, the issues were that we used the SEATO treaty, not the organization, as justification for being in Vietnam. We also often tried to incorporate the view of the Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese and have Vietnamese present at various meetings. Mostly at the ministerial level but also in Bangkok. The Brits usually were not very happy with that.

*Q: Because Vietnam was not a member of SEATO?*

PERNICK: Right. Although it was covered by the treaty.

*Q: Your role with SEATO was to represent the United States and support others who were doing the same? Not to liaise or deal with the Thais?*

PERNICK: Right. My main responsibility was on the Pol/Mil side. I worked with SEATO as well as trying to keep a lot of American soldiers out of jail. That had nothing to do with SEATO. I did liaise with the Thais but really on SEATO issues. The Thais took it very seriously because they were the hosts. The top diplomats were always assigned to be the SEATO liaison. Their ambassador here did SEATO work for awhile.

*Q: OK, is there anything else we ought to say about Thailand?*

PERNICK: It was lovely place.

*Q: Did you work on East Asia?*

PERNICK: Yes.

*Q: Because of your experience in the area?*

PERNICK: We had a few people doing regional work. East Asia was the biggest thing and obviously Vietnam. I was pleased that I was able to work on that. It involved a lot of interesting work. We tried to anticipate needs, argued for certain programs, writing testimony for the Assistant Secretary or for the Director and even for the Secretary. The last year we starting doing more congressional stuff when it became clear that we had to provide a lot of the bulk of the testimony that the Secretary would give before the committees on the Hill.

*Q: I was involved in some of the Security Assistance programs a little later and certainly the congressional aspect was very important both in terms of testimony but also in providing information and sometimes even negotiating*

PERNICK: Yes. We didn't do too much of that but had to, of course, prepare the T document, the congressional presentation document which was the annual budget document.

*Q: Anything else you want to say about that assignment?*

PERNICK: No, I can't think of anything.

**RICHARD A. VIRDEN**  
**Rotation Officer**  
**Bangkok (1967)**

**Assistant Branch Public Affairs Officer**  
**Chiang Mai (1967-1968)**

**Branch Public Affairs Officer**  
**Phitsanulok (1968-1969)**

*Mr. Virden was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at St. John's College in Collegeville, Minnesota. He joined the Foreign Service of the United States Information Service (USIA) IN 1963 and served variously as Information, Press and Public Affairs Officer, attaining the rank of Deputy Chief of Mission in Brasilia. His foreign posts include Bangkok, Phitsanulik and Chiang Mai in Thailand; Saigon, Vietnam; Belo Horizonte, Sao Paulo and Brasilia in Brazil; and Warsaw, Poland, where he served twice. Mr. Virden also had several senior assignments at USIA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Mr. Virden was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.*

*Q: When you arrived in '67, what was the situation in Thailand?*

VIRDEN: You remember I was working for the United States Information Service; at that time we had a very large program in Thailand, one of the largest in the world. This was connected to the Vietnam War, so the focus was on counterinsurgency.

We had as many as 13 branch posts in Thailand at one time. We even had people in some rather small towns, particularly up in the northeastern part of Thailand, because of the concern about an insurgency growing there related to the war in Vietnam. We also had a lot of air bases up in that region that we were using for the Vietnam War effort. The main focus of the U.S. mission overall to Thailand and of USIS was keeping Thailand with us and helping the Thais hold the loyalty of their own people.

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*Q: Where were you assigned?*

VIRDEN: Well, the first eight or nine months I was based in Bangkok and had a series of assignments with different sections of the United States Information Service there. In those days USIA officers had rotational training, you moved around different parts of the operation – press, radio and television, library, cultural center, executive office, field operations -- to learn the business. The final three months of that training in my case was in our consulate up in Chiang Mai, in the far north.

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VIRDEN: Well, my first non-training assignment then was as a branch public affairs officer in a town called Phitsanulok, which is in the north central part of the country, maybe about three hundred miles due north of the capital, Bangkok, and 20 miles east of Sukhothai, which had been the capital of a Thai kingdom in the early Middle Ages.

I was the only USIS officer there, with a staff of about half a dozen Thai employees. What we were doing then, as I mentioned, was counterinsurgency. We had a five-province region, bordering on both Laos and Burma, and we operated what we called “mobile information teams,” or MITs.

The idea was to get Thai government representatives out of their offices and into the villages, to show villagers that their government actually did things for them and that there was a government on their side and worthy of their support.

We would take people along on our MITS who could offer concrete help: veterinarians, doctors or nurses, agricultural specialists, educators, the chief district officer or his deputy, sometimes the governor and other provincial officials.

And we would bring things to give away as well: medicine, for example, and pamphlets about the King. We would also show movies, using 16 millimeter projectors, a sheet held up by bamboo stakes, and our own generators (there was no electricity in most of these villages). We

reached many of these places by Jeeps on ox-cart trails, since there were few decent roads.

And the whole idea, again – this being an authoritarian system, going back centuries, with a government very distant from the people – was to work with the Thais to bridge that divide, to bring the government and the people together. The whole effort was born out of concern of a spillover from the Vietnam War; we were concerned that a disaffected population could turn against the government here, too, as in Vietnam.

*Q: Here you are, a young kid, all of a sudden you're by yourself with this staff of six. How did you find the experience?*

VIRDEN: It was fascinating, stimulating, sometimes intimidating, often exhausting. I did have almost a year of rotational training and travel and moving around the country with some of the other people who were already in the field doing this, so I didn't start from zero when I got my first assignment on my own. I'd been in the country almost a year by that time, when I started taking on that responsibility.

You just did it. I understood what we were trying to do, it made sense. And of course I did have a staff of good, experienced Thai employees who knew what they were about.

It was pretty isolated, when you got into some of these areas. I was often the first farang -- or, white foreigner, in Thai -- that ever showed up in many of these villages, so I was a curiosity. Watching this large, pale creature take a shower was a source of great mirth for village kids; you had to maneuver a couple of pakimas – a sort of large towel – while pouring water from buckets. It was a risky business.

We'd bring along sleeping bags and sleep on the floor of a pavilion or Buddhist temple. Village food, which it would have been rude to decline when offered, could be gut-wrenching.

At night we'd show movies. There was no electricity, so we would string up bamboo stakes and tie a sheet to them and that we would be your screen and we'd show cartoon type films, Walt Disney type things, public service advertisement.

*Q: These were basically informational films?*

VIRDEN: Yes, and we had had some entertainment features, too, and films about King Bhumibol and his activities, because that was the strongest asset -- in terms of the loyalty of the villagers -- identification with the king and the royal family.

I remember being on one of those trips, in the small town of Mae Sot in Tak province on the border with Burma, when an Air America pilot who'd just flown in on a small aircraft told me Robert Kennedy had been assassinated that day, that's how I learned about it.

On another village trip, in Uttaradit province near the border with Laos, we needed an elephant to pull a teak log off our path. It's probably the favorite petty cash voucher I ever submitted: 10 baht (50 cents), hire of elephant to remove log from trail.

*Q: When you were in the villages, were they interested in us, or*

VIRDEN: No, we were a curiosity but little more than that. These were people who were really cut off. Remember, many of these villages had no roads. They were very poor in those days.

I believe there was something like 50,000 villages in Thailand, and many of them -- we're talking now in the late 60s -- did not yet have electricity. Part of what the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was doing in those days was helping build roads through much of the country. Some major dams were also in the works, financed by the World Bank among other organizations.

That development work had not yet progressed very far. There were still many areas that had not been reached. And so these were rice farmers, living out there amid their rice paddies as they had for time immemorial. Our presence was something new to them, not only that they had foreigners around, but also their own government.

*Q: How'd you find the Thai government officials, you were getting them out. Were they sort of reluctant, a bunch of Americans pushing them out into the boondocks and all?*

VIRDEN: Well, it was often a struggle. It was much more comfortable to stay in their offices back in the district or province capital. We would sometimes get the governor and his staff out on some of these things, too. That took even more work.

Some officials -- particularly those trained at the USAID-created district academy -- were willing to go but lacked the means. We had Jeeps of our own. We provided the transportation and paid for the gas to get out there. So we had to kind of provide the wherewithal and impetus, because this was not something they were used to doing.

Traditionally, state officials stayed in their offices, and if there was contact at all, the people came to them; they did not go out to the people. So in a way this was a revolutionary concept.

*Q: Were there security threats to you?*

VIRDEN: Yes, there were, and in fact the year after I left there three of my Thai colleagues from Chiang Mai were killed, ambushed by terrorists.

The area we were in was fairly close to the Laotian border, up in the north central part of Thailand, so there was spillover, particularly in the mountain tribe regions, on both sides of the border. The border was pretty porous and there was frequent violence. Most of the trouble was attributed, rightly or wrongly, to communist terrorists, CTs, as they were called in those days. There indeed was a communist party of Thailand, and some actual armed terrorists active in the field. So the threat was real enough, if perhaps exaggerated.

*Q: I'm not too familiar with that area, but you say the mountain people. Were they Hmong, or were they separate from the normal plains Thai, or not?*

VIRDEN: Yes, they were. The northern part of Thailand is very mountainous and the north central part, where I was, was on the fringe of that. In that region, there was particular concern about the mountain tribes.

There were a wide variety of tribal people in those mountains and the Hmong were among the larger groups. Yes, the Hmong – or Meo -- were some of those that we were concerned about in those days. Not to say that all the Hmong were on one side or the other, but they were part of the perceived threat.

There were also the Yao and Karen, over near the Burmese border, and a wide variety of other groups. I think in some languages, like in Vietnam, they're all called Montagnards, or "mountain people." There's quite a variety of tribes covered by that generic term.

*Q: Did we have programs to work with the mountain people, or not?*

VIRDEN: Yes, we did and the Thai government did, too. The king and the royal family in particular had a number of initiatives. Another concern in those days was that the tribal people were involved either in opium production or in opium transit; one of the major programs of the royal family was crop substitution.

That's not something I was directly involved in, but we as a mission were trying to encourage the growth of crops other than opium. It's a tough sell and a long-term struggle. Actually, I think the effort continues to this day.

*Q: When you moved to Chiang Mai, that was, what, your last year and a half for so?*

VIRDEN: That was near the end of 1967. That was the final three months of my orientation training. I was attached to the U.S. consulate up there, and then transferred to the post in Phitsanulok. So I moved away from Chiang Mai but got back there occasionally on visits.

Chiang Mai, of course, was a wonderfully exotic place. There's a book about Chiang Mai, called Consul in Paradise; it was written by W.A. R. Wood, a British diplomat who went there as a young man and just never left, a fascinating book about a really quite beautiful and interesting part of the country; it's cooler up there, too, because of the mountains. The Thai woman chosen as Miss Universe one year was from Chiang Mai; it was a kind of Shangri Ra in that era.

*Q: Who was the consul general there when you got there?*

VIRDEN: A man named Wever Gim. It wasn't a consulate general, it was a consulate then. He was the consul.

*Q: You were there from '68 to*

VIRDEN: In Phitsanulok from early 1968 until late '69.

*Q: I would imagine that our military would sort of overwhelm everything there.*

VIRDEN: Yes, though not so much in my area. They were more in the northeastern part of the country. In Phitsanulok, there was a small radar site, so we had a detachment from the U.S. Air Force there and we had a very small U.S. military advisory group working with the Thais. I was the only civilian U.S. government official on the scene.

*Q: How'd you find the writ of the Thai government out there?*

VIRDEN: It didn't extend very well into the villages, even in the lowland plains; that was exactly what we were trying to change. We felt it was important for the Thais to get government services out and extend them beyond the provincial capital or the district capital, make those villagers out there believe that the government provided them something valuable, was on their side and could do useful things for them.

That had not been the case for most of history. The fact that many villages didn't yet have electricity and didn't yet have usable roads was a pretty good indicator of that. They didn't have schools, either, in many of these areas.

That, by the way, is I think considerably changed now, but we're talking about the late 60s.

*Q: I take it the king was sort of the thing that held things together in Thailand?*

VIRDEN: Yes, the king and the Buddhist religion were the unifying forces that brought Thais together; it was nation, king and religion.

*Q: the Buddhist religion, since you were working on the information and cultural side, did that intrude, help or was there a problem with it, from your perspective?*

VIRDEN: Not a problem, no. It was one of the major unifying forces that made the Thais a nation. Now, one region of the country was a bit different and I didn't work in that region. That was the south, the Malayan peninsula, where the ethnic makeup is mainly Malay and the religion is primarily Islam.

Now we're talking about the Deep South, the southern peninsula of Thailand, going down towards Malaysia. That's a somewhat different situation down there. I visited but never worked in that part of the country.

*Q: Was there much spillover from Laos, refugees or that sort of thing, in the area you were dealing with?*

VIRDEN: Yes, there was a border with Laos that was not patrolled in those days. The tribal groups moved back and forth at will. I mentioned earlier that the year after I left there was an ambush in one of the northern regions – Nan province – in which three of my Thai colleagues were killed. The attack was attributed to a hill tribe group in that border region.

There was a fair amount of moving back and forth and the government writ did not really extend up into those border areas.

*Q: Did you have sort of an immediate boss in Chiang Mai?*

VIRDEN: I did, the Consul, when I was in Chiang Mai. But when I was in Phitsanulok my boss was in Bangkok. The USIS field operations officer in Bangkok was the person I reported to.

*Q: How was the support, instructions, etc, from, well, from Washington through the embassy and through your agency and all when you were that far out in the field?*

VIRDEN: All that was very far away and the communication was weak. Even phone service was problematic; getting calls to and from Bangkok was shaky. You had a pretty long leash in a field program like that in those days to do what you thought was best and report about it later.

*Q: That must have been fun!*

VIRDEN: It was exhilarating in many ways.

Of course, you could also feel a bit cut off at times, too. A senior colleague from that time used to talk about something he called the “foxhole mentality,” by which he meant the tendency of soldiers in exposed positions to feel that, “nobody behind the lines knows anything or cares about us out here.” It’s an understandable but not especially healthy attitude to adopt. I tried to keep the phenomenon in mind then and in later year when I was on the other end, supervising other officers from a distance.

Once when I was living in Phitsanulok a tower was hit by lightning and power knocked out for the entire town for the next three weeks. This was at a time when temperatures in the lowlands were often a hundred degrees every day. That didn’t seem to matter too much to the Thais, who put on jackets when the temperature dips below 90, but it was hard on a Minnesotan. We didn’t have phone service either, but if I had to choose between the phone and air conditioning, it wouldn’t have been a tough call, so to speak.

But for me, working out there, yes, it helped me learn to use my own wits and do what needed to be done as best I could judge it in those days.

*Q: How was social life? I would think that, one thinks of the plays of Noel Coward and others, having drinks at sundown and extremely pretty girls and all that. It’s like the British Consul in Paradise. It could sort of interfere with your work, or spur you on, or what?*

VIRDEN: Well, sure, there were times like that, especially in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, less so in Phitsanulok. But the news that really matters is that it was on this tour that I met my future wife! Linda Larson was in Bangkok that first year I was there on a junior year abroad from her college, St. Olaf, in Northfield, Minnesota.

*Q: Where else?*

VIRDEN: Right, there you go! Linda and I were from towns 14 miles apart but we met 10,000 miles away in Thailand! Through family connections, she learned that I was there and got in touch. I invited her to dinner, and the rest is history, as they say. We were married in late 1971, after she finished college and I completed a tour in Vietnam. This year we are celebrating our fortieth wedding anniversary.

*Q: Congratulations!*

VIRDEN: Yes, thank you very much.

*Q: Now, how about the influence of the American military? With these big bases around, did that intrude much on your work?*

VIRDEN: Yes, but a little less so for me than for some of my colleagues working in the northeastern part of Thailand, where we had major air bases, at least half a dozen of them.

We only had a small radar installation at Phitsanulok airport, plus a small detachment of military advisors in town, not a major presence in the region.

The radar group had a little club, where I could go to watch movies, have a drink, play poker, that kind of thing. This group did not have much contact with Thai authorities; their work was connected to the Vietnam War, tracking airplanes that were doing something in Laos or in Vietnam, not in Thailand.

*Q: Were there officers, particularly political officers, coming out from the embassy and trying to find out what was happening and how did you interact with them, if they did?*

VIRDEN: There was some of that. But actually, the area where I was based was part of the Chiang Mai consular district. Wever Gim, as I mentioned, was the consul in Chiang Mai. He and a political officer working with him up there would come down to the region once in a while to gather information on political developments.

As an adjunct to my own job, I also did a certain amount of political reporting, since we would see and hear things while we were out and around. In addition to reporting on our own programs, we reported basic data – number of houses in the village, availability of water and electricity – and whatever tidbits we picked up that might be useful.

One example that comes to mind was when the Thai government, with U.S. backing, broadcast to hill tribesmen in an area near Laos directing them to come down to the valley to get away from an ongoing military operation. However, we'd been in the makeshift camps in that area and knew they were simply not equipped to cope with a new influx of refugees. So I reported what I believed was a potentially dangerous disconnect between the message and the reality that would greet anyone who heeded it.

On another occasion, I raised the alarm about the lack of plans to provide for the hundreds of

village families that would be displaced by the huge Sirrikit (named for the Thai Queen) Dam, then being built in Uttaradit province.

*Q: What about the corruption situation there?*

VIRDEN: Well, yes, there certainly was a fair amount of corruption, one would have to assume. It didn't brush against us in any direct way. It may have been one reason for the skepticism we would often sense when we were out in the countryside. Like, who are these strangers, why are they here, what do they want to take from us? It wasn't hard to detect a certain amount of distrust, and a record of corruption or exploitation probably had something to do with that.

I don't remember personally noticing any direct examples of corruption, but I didn't doubt it was part of the picture.

*Q: Had the influence of either drugs or drug money penetrated that area when you were there?*

VIRDEN: There was opium traffic, but it was primarily up in the very remote areas where the opium running took place. It was fairly confined, where that was going on.

There was some of it grown in Thailand's own mountain regions and some of it coming from other areas in Burma and Laos, the so-called Golden Triangle. Much of the trafficking was controlled in those days by remnants of Chiang Kai-shek's forces, the KMT, who had been up in those hills since the days of China's civil war. They didn't grow the opium but got protection money out of it.

Two years later, when I was a correspondent based in Saigon, I was sent to all three of the Golden Triangle countries to do a series about efforts to curb the drug trade.

*Q: Well, then, you left there in, what, late '69?*

VIRDEN: Yes, I left in late '69 for home leave with orders to return to a new assignment in Bangkok, as assistant radio and television officer. That's what I thought I was going to be doing next. While I was in Minnesota on leave I got a call from Personnel and was told, "Hold on. Your assignment's going to change. You're going to go to Vietnam instead. You're needed there."

**JOHN B. RATLIFF III**  
**Director, Vietnamese Language Program**  
**Bangkok (1967-1969)**

*John B. Ratliff III was born in Louisiana in 1935. He graduated from Southeastern Louisiana College and Georgetown University. He served in the U.S. Army from 1954 to 1957 in Japan and Korean Language Training. After postings at language programs in Bangkok and Tokyo, Ratliff became Dean of the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia. Dean Ratliff was interviewed by*

*Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.*

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

RATLIFF: From January of '67 to June of '69.

*Q: What were your challenges?*

RATLIFF: Well, the first challenge was learning a bit of Thai. I found myself in Thailand which was a delightful place at that time. While I had a regional traveling job in which I covered all of the countries of Southeast Asia, I was resident in Bangkok, Thailand. My wife and I enrolled in the AUA, American University Association, at the Binational center for an intensive course in Thai. I say enrolled, since I was the regional language training supervisor, I beat the bushes and turned up seven government students, that is, six government employees plus my wife from various government agencies who needed intensive training. A woman from USIA and three people from AID, a sergeant from JUSMAAG [Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group], the military assistance group, so we had kind of an interagency intensive Thai class. We went for six weeks; some people stayed on for nine. I felt that I needed to get that out of the way in order to make living in Bangkok enjoyable and tolerable. That worked well. After that I'd say the greatest challenge aside from, Vietnam, which was its own challenge, was living out of a suitcase three weeks out of four and not being home very much. The first round of trips, it was all very exciting. I'd go to Rangoon. I'd never been to Rangoon and that was great. I actually went up to Mandalay. Each country I visited for the first time was very exciting. By the third visit, I was beginning to get a little tired of the constant travel. I will say on the professional side, after a time it began to get frustrating to see the same old problems all the time in the language program. One of my primary responsibilities was proficiency testing of government personnel. This enabled employees to get proficiency on their records without having to wait until they next were assigned to Washington. Aside from that, I was supervising post language programs, and that, I can assure you, seemed like a thankless task and that any improvements that are made don't stay improvements very long.

*Q: What's the problem with post language training programs?*

RATLIFF: It is a part-time language training program, and people have their regular work to do as well. Consequently the progress that is made tends to be rather minimal compared to intensive training. There has been over the years a pattern built up, which has been to me a great frustration which you may have a slightly different take on, in many posts it was assumed that the Foreign Service officers that graduated from the FSI program, they had an investment to protect and that those FSOs should get tutorial instruction, and then the secretaries and spouses could get group instruction which would give them the basics of the language in order to get around the city. What happened often was that an inordinate amount of the money was spent on tutorial instruction for FSOs, which had a tendency to be if not unstructured certainly unsupervised.

*Q: I agree.*

RATLIFF: So I was a hard charger in trying to represent the FSI party line and therefore I was not always popular when I went in to see the post language officer and subsequently the DCM or the Administrative Counselor and said I think you've got too many FSOs having tutorial instruction. At the very least you should pair them up. Of course I wasn't popular with the FSOs either.

*Q: What about working on the Vietnam training. This is a period of intense buildup. It also covered the Tet period, the Communist offensive. What were your experiences there and what were the problems?*

RATLIFF: Again in spades, people were busy; people were trying to do their jobs. Often in the case of people with AID particularly where there had been no time to give them any Vietnamese language training there were many of them working without much language training, and the conditions outside of Saigon made it very difficult to run any language training. Yet we tried. I worked at the region or the corps headquarters level. I didn't get into the individual provinces where there were even more challenges. We were trying to set up and maintain Vietnamese language training in places like Da Nang and Can Tho and Bien Hoa, and Nha Trang. Quite frankly, a good portion of my job involved proficiency testing. I tested lots of people. There was incentive pay for language proficiency at the time, and there was a great interest in being tested for proficiency pay, so I did hundreds of tests. There was also the occasional junior officer who had Vietnamese training in Washington but not to the three level and who had continued working. People like Desaix Anderson, who later went on to be Deputy Chief of Mission in Japan, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Affairs, and others who were in Vietnam at the time. I tested with the help of a trained native speaker who had been on the FSI staff before, I tested a whole range of people over that two and a half year period.

*Q: Was there a problem because of the relatively short tours that people served in Vietnam, or did you find that the people speaking Vietnamese tended to stay much longer?*

RATLIFF: I honestly don't know. I didn't get much of an impression, particularly since I was only there two and a half years, I couldn't form that much of an impression. You had a feeling that everybody was transient to some degree, passing through, people thrown in, a lot of reluctant volunteers.

*Q: This was a time when if you wanted to stay in the Foreign Service, you bloody well went to Vietnam if you were asked to.*

RATLIFF: That's right. I remember hearing about a couple of A-100 students, brand new FSOs, who were in their basic training at FSI. This was in 1965 I recall vividly. These two FSOs were walking out of the classroom during basic officer training and one of them said to the other, "I went into the Foreign Service to avoid going to Vietnam. Now I'm going to go whether I like it or not."

*Q: You left Bangkok in '69.*

**G. LEWIS SCHMIDT**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1967-1970)**

*G. Lewis Schmidt entered the State Department in 1949. He served thereafter with USIS in Tokyo, Thailand, and finally on USIS Resource Analysis Staff. Mr. Schmidt also worked for the State Department as Deputy Assistant Director and Director of Latin American operations. He was interviewed by Allen Hansen in 1988.*

*Q: Excuse me. What year was that?*

SCHMIDT: This was the end of May, 1967. In my final briefings for Thailand I was told that USIA was expanding the Thai program very rapidly. We felt it necessary to expand because there was a substantial insurgency in northern Thailand, and a smaller one, completely separate from the other, in southern Thailand. We had just opened the last of 13 field posts scattered throughout Thailand in various smaller cities both up country and down on the Malaya peninsula near the border between Thailand and Malaysia. In the north, we had opened the most recent post, the 13th, Nong Khai, just across the Mekong River from Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

An additional post or two had been tentatively authorized, and I was given every reason to believe that we were going to expand further. However, just as I was leaving, Dan Oleksiw, who was then the Assistant Director of USIA for East Asia and the Pacific, told me that when I got out there, I should perhaps think about cutting back one or two positions, because Director Leonard Marks was getting a bit concerned about the size of the Thai program. He thought perhaps we were overstaffed there. I was never given to understand that Leonard was at all concerned about the number of field posts we had. Nor was I told that he had any reservations about the kind of field program the post was operating.

Each field post had a small library, but its principal effort was in the villages. Every field post was equipped with several mobile units. Teams from the post, sometimes with the Branch PAO along, other times with only Thai employees, would make large numbers of village visits each month. The BPAO was expected to spend 40 to 50% of his time out in the villages. The communist propaganda effort was touting a principal theme that Thai Government officials didn't care anything about the people living in the back country. They were only interested in feathering their own nests, increasing their salaries, etc. So, each team attempted to get one Thai official, local, provincial or national to go with the team to the target village. There, he would be expected to provide some service (medical, agricultural, etc.) to the village, and give a talk on what plans the government was making to aid the village. Later in the evening, the team would erect mopix screens and show movies. Some of these were merely documentaries; others showed the activities of the King and Queen (very popular figures in Thailand), and later, USIS had its own motion picture studios in our offices in Bangkok, and produced a number of blatantly anti-communist films, using a story line to show how insurgent teams tried to take over villages and impress the young men into the insurgent para-military forces. There were others that demonstrated the tactics used by insurgents to infiltrate a village, and ultimately take it over.

It was pretty hard hitting anti-communist stuff, featuring Thai actors and locales in the North or South, easily recognizable to the villagers. The insurgents were right up in the areas being visited. From deserting insurgent soldiers who defected to the Government, we later learned that in most cases the insurgent bands had orders not to shoot Americans on these village visit teams, but at the time, knowing the insurgents were all around, we exercised great caution. Just after I left Thailand in 1970, one of our local teams out of Chiang Mai was ambushed, and all three Thai employees from the branch post were killed. We made every effort to teach young officers coming into USIA and being assigned to Thailand to learn Thai. Most of them learned it well, and during village visits, made it a point to converse extensively with the villagers, find out about their wishes and expectations, and generally give a good impression of Americans. I believe we scored many points with the back country people, and now, that Thailand is developing rapidly, and the isolation of the villages is disappearing, the fruits of that program are beginning to be demonstrated.

Back in Bangkok, we ran the more conventional USIS type of program. Press and publications, a huge binational cultural center with a large well used library collection, and an enormous English teaching effort. In fact, many Thais who later rose to responsible positions in Government and business learned English through the Center. The Center was established as the AUA -- The American University Alumni Association, for those Thais who had gone to University in the States. It has high prestige in the country, and continues to add to its prestigious and expanding membership. Most of our exhibits were staged through the center. There was a heavy exchange program, including a very active Fulbright operation.

In addition, Bangkok was the supply line for the field. The motion pictures were either made or distributed out of our large mopix studio offices. Our print shop produced a continuing series of posters and booklets to be put up or otherwise distributed by the mobile unit teams. Enormous quantities of these products were reproduced in the Regional Service Center at Manila. I had some doubts about the effectiveness of poster and pamphlet/booklet effort. Thai literacy was not very great, and the posters usually needed a little reading ability to make the pictorial themes fully understandable. I don't think they were worth the expenditures we put into them. The actual presence in the villages of our mobile teams, the motion pictures, the visits of the Thai officials, I feel were highly useful.

In addition to the mobile unit field program which USIS was running directly, we had obtained the use of a mobile transmitter from the Army. This transmitter we set up in north central Thailand, with a USIS officer in charge, and some mobile units. The purpose was to train Thai Army personnel to carry out a roving reporter type of program in the field. Each Army team was sent out regularly with mobile tape recorders to interview rural Thai people. They would record accounts of the villagers' problems. When the Thai government did something to help a village, they recorded those events. If communist insurgents raided a village, or made efforts to recruit young men into service, these traveling reporters recorded the villagers' accounts of the event. The tapes were edited, and played on the field transmitter beamed back to the villages. It was an effective program. Villagers often heard tapes recorded in their own or nearby villages, and often by voices they recognized as friends or acquaintances. The authenticity made the program. Sometimes, however, it was difficult to persuade the laid back Thais to spend enough time on the

road. The effort was designed to train enough personnel so the American could be withdrawn, leaving the Army to carry on with its own resources. I regret to say that after we withdrew the American supervisor/trainer, the Program wound down, and lost much of its vigor.

The radio section in Bangkok, however, was productive. We had a fine radio officer in Ivan Campbell, put out innumerable shows, and were able to place most of them on regular Thai stations.

At urgings from Dan Oleksiw, I did reduce two or three positions in Bangkok, but still there was no indication that we should cut back field posts. Later, I began to get hints that Washington wanted further cutbacks, but it was not until toward the end of my second year that the pressures began to be direct. I guess because of the lack of actual orders, I was late in realizing what was wanted, and was late in coming to the realization that a complete turnabout in the program was in the making.

The U.S. election was approaching in the fall of 1968. USIS set up its usual "election center" with VOA broadcasts coming in and a huge electoral tote board. The Thais were all cheering for a Nixon victory, because they felt that U.S. support against their own insurgency and secondarily, that in Vietnam, would be better assured under a Republican than under a Democratic administration. Earlier returns indicated that Humphrey might pull out a victory. But as the day wore on, and Nixon's victory seemed assured, cheers arose.

As things turned out, Nixon began to wind down the war, and the American support for counter insurgency began to dwindle. Frank Shakespeare came in as USIA Director, and began to exert recognizable pressure to phase out our Thai counter-insurgency effort. The Thai Army had a small, lackluster type of village field program, in which they tried to do something of what USIS did in its village effort. However, the army had little stomach for operating in the boondocks. Their fleet of vehicles was small; and they simply had neither the resources, the knowhow, the willingness to work with the civilian Thai government people, nor the will to carry on vigorously. They seemed, however, to be the best, if not the only bet to take over the field operation.

There was a rather ineffective Thai Department of Public Affairs, but its contributions to any sort of counter insurgency were virtually nil.

So, when it became evident that we would have eventually to either greatly reduce or perhaps fully abandon our field program, we began a serious effort to prepare the Thai army field unit to assume our functions. The going was slow. The Thai army had no desire at all to assume USIS field functions. Periodically I would have calls from the army colonel in charge of the unit pleading with me not to stop our program. Even the prospect of getting all our C-J 6 mobile units didn't titillate them. Nevertheless, they were finally convinced it was going to happen, and so resigned themselves to taking over. Gordon Murchie, who had been closest of all USIS officers to the army group practically lived with them. John Reid devoted 90% of his time in the attempt to push the Thais into learning how to operate in USIS fashion.

About that time, Frank Shakespeare made the only trip he made during my incumbency to Asia.

He was accompanied by the ubiquitous and sour Teddy Weinthal, who was bitterly opposed to any American involvement in counterinsurgency either in Vietnam or in Thailand. Most of the visit was a probe and a push to speed up the turnover to the Thais. I was suffering from a terrible cold, really a flu, and it soon became apparent that Frank and I were not very compatible. The turning point came, I guess, the night the Ambassador gave a dinner for Frank in the Residential compound. Finally Frank turned to me and said: Lew, how long do you think it will take the Thai Army counter insurgency unit to take over the field program. I made a serious mistake. I knew the Thais would never really perform. And even if they did make a semblance of doing so, it was going to be a long pull. I was annoyed at Frank, and I felt lousy. So, facetiously, I said, Oh, about seven or eight years. Frank, I realized immediately, was not amused by facetious humor. It was probably then that he decided I ought to be removed from the Thai program. He didn't know it, but that didn't bother me. I had made it plain that I would go to Thailand for only one three year tour, which would be up in May of 1970. In any event, he clearly decided at that point that I was a total loss to USIA. This was proven on a few subsequent occasions when attempts of other officers in the Agency who had known my abilities over a long past tried to promote me for good assignments. Frank turned them all down, never having the courage to tell me directly that he was blocking them. It was that antipathy of Frank for me -- and vice versa -- that crystallized my own decision to retire early, which I did in 1972. But I'm getting ahead of my account.

The program was wound down. The operation replete with all the mobile units, was turned over with pomp and ceremony to the Thai army by my successor a few months after I left Thailand. As we had anticipated, the Thais were happy to get the equipment, but not the program, and it gradually lapsed into innocuous desuetude. The USIS was out of the village operation by late 1970, and all but about three or four of the field posts were closed.

But I'm getting ahead of my account again.

By late '69, Dan had become a strong advocate of cutting out the field program. Some time after Frank's visit, Dan made one of his frequent visits to the post. His arrival coincided with a planned visit of mine to our southernmost post at Songkhla, not too far from the Malaysian border. From there we were due to make a village visit. And when that was over, I scheduled a few days leave to go over into Malaysia and pay a visit to Malaysia's Penang Island, a pleasant old British colonial type duty free port.

I told him about my plans, and he decided to go south with me, then on to Penang. I persuaded him to make the village visit with me as well. It happened that our visit coincided with an event of considerable moment for the village. AID ran a training program for midwives near Bangkok. A young woman from the village that was our target for the evening had just completed her training, and was returning to set up shop in her hometown. AID had also built her a small clinic in the village which was being dedicated that evening. In accordance with our plan always to have a Thai official present if possible during a USIS visitation, we had been able with the assistance of AID, to get the Deputy Minister of Health of the Royal Thai Government to be our visiting official. The mood was festive. The clinic was dedicated. The young midwife was introduced to cheers and the Deputy Minister gave a speech, none of which I understood, but evidently the villagers were grateful for the gifts and the visit.

The next day, I took off with Dan for Penang. We were there two or three days, during which time Dan made no comments about the village visit, or anything else about the Thai program. We had long conversations about many other things, but nothing official. We parted at the end of the visit. He went on to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and I back to Bangkok.

About three months later I received an "eyes only" cable from Dan. Its opening sentence said: "I direct USIS Thailand to cease immediately all midwifery programming," and went on to direct other reductions in the USIS operation. I was thunderstruck. I couldn't believe Dan really thought we were involved in a midwife program. I felt it was a grandstand play to catch attention back in Washington, and make it appear that we had been caught in actions completely unrelated to what we were supposed to be doing. I was so angry that I waited two days to send a reply. I should have waited longer. I was still too upset. Instead of calmly replying that his whole statement was foolish and misleading -- that this one village visit happened to coincide with the culmination of an AID project (that we would in any event have publicized in support of AID), and had nothing to do with our ongoing work in the country, I blew a cork. I started out by saying we could not stop what we weren't doing, and raged on from there. Clearly, it was a mistake on my part, and probably hurt me more in Washington than even my previous facetious remarks to Frank Shakespeare had done. I will say that the cable got high level attention in Washington. Seemingly, almost everyone heard about it.

I am revising this part of my interview while editing it, long after the interview was first transcribed. I probably would not have mentioned the Midwife episode had I not read the transcript of Dan's own interview recently. In it he remarks that one of his tasks in his position as Assistant Director East Asia and Pacific, was keeping the Thai program on track, and eliminating their activities in such areas as midwifery. I still can't believe that he ever truly thought we were into such activity in Thailand, but this statement nearly 20 years after the event makes me wonder.

I will close the discussion of my USIS tour in Thailand with accounts of two occurrences not directly related to the program.

As usual in most countries, the Peace Corps representatives in Thailand were a fine bunch of young people, and for their own program, they were doing a splendid service.

Their Director was Tim Adams, son of the noted columnist and commentator of the 30's and 40's, Franklin P. Adams. Tim was a loudly vocal opponent of American involvement in Vietnam. His opinion was his own and he was entitled to it. But his vocal opposition in Thailand, where the Embassy was deeply involved with the Thai Government in supporting their own counterinsurgency effort, and the U.S. Air Force was flying bombing missions into Vietnam was embarrassing. Whenever challenged, Tim would loudly assert that he owed no allegiance to the Embassy, and was free to express publicly any opinion he held. He also preached the same philosophy to the Peace Corps members, one or another of whom would occasionally sound off adversely, not only on the American role in Vietnam, but also on the U.S. support of Thai counterinsurgency efforts.

The most irritating incident came when a Peace Corps girl gave an interview to one of the

Bangkok English language newspapers, in which she remarked that she had been recently in Ubon (where many of the bombing missions originated). She said that she watched a U.S. bomber take off into a gorgeous red sunset, noted the colorful tail of flame from the jet's engines mix with the grandeur of the setting sun, and wished that the pilot would be shot down in similarly red flames over Vietnam.

I had been in Bangkok only a few weeks by the Fourth of July. Several of us had been attending the Embassy Fourth of July observance, and had gathered at the home of one of our USIS staffers. Someone came running in to announce that there had been a serious incident on a boat that a group of AID people had hired for the evening to make an excursion on the river. Reportedly a USIA man was involved. A group of us rushed to the dock where the boat had come in from the water.

It seems that a man who was a VOA monitor whose job it was to monitor foreign broadcasts, particularly those from hostile nations such as the USSR, China, North Vietnam, etc. and also monitor the strength of Voice signals, had been involved. He was independent of the USIS and even of the VOA correspondent in Bangkok. I had never met him. Evidently he had become somewhat intoxicated, had provoked an altercation with an AID officer, and when the latter defended himself, grabbed the man's \$250 camera, threw it overboard, pulled out a hunting knife and stabbed the man. Fortunately, the blade struck the AID officer's belt, glanced off, and only penetrated his abdomen superficially, but otherwise, he might have been fatally wounded.

Inquiry revealed that the assailant had a history of bullying attacks on people, especially, though not only, when drunk. He was reported to beat his (Finnish) wife occasionally, and was an all around belligerent personality. We reported the incident to Washington, and asked for his recall. He came to see me, threatening, defensive. He also visited the Embassy Assistant Administrative Officer who was reporting the matter to DepState. The latter was a black. The assailant tried to intimidate him by saying that where came from down in North Carolina, they knew how to handle niggers. It took about ten days to get him out of Bangkok and back to Washington, where he filed a grievance claim against the Agency that took six months to resolve.

But the worst effrontery came about a month later. An Embassy officer was listening one morning to the VOA Breakfast show. Suddenly who should be heard but the erstwhile assailant. Evidently looking for some possibly interesting personality to fill in the morning program, the host on the show had flagged him down in the hall, knowing that he had recently come from Bangkok, but unaware of his trouble there, had interviewed him. The guy claimed to be the post Radio Officer, and gave a long exaggerated and scarcely truthful account of his role in Bangkok. The Embassy was outraged. I wrote to Dick Cushing, who was at the time Deputy (perhaps Acting) Director of the Voice, who sent me an explanation of the mistake and an apology. It wasn't one of the Voice's better moments.

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POSTSCRIPT ON THAILAND: When I left Thailand, I was afraid the Thais were losing the battle against the insurgents. A major reason for their success was that China was extensively funding them, as well as helping to impress rural youth out of Thailand, send to a training camp

in North Vietnam, then reinfiltate them into fighting units in Thailand. Somewhat later, China and Vietnam, never historically friendly, had a falling out. Then Nixon opened China to U.S. relations. The Chinese stopped aiding the Thai insurgency, and it gradually faded away. I am convinced to this day, however, that had China sustained its support for the insurgency, the insurgency would have won out. Thailand might be a very different country today.

**PHILIP H. VALDES**  
**Political Officer**  
**Bangkok (1967-1970)**

*Philip H. Valdes entered the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included assignments in China, Korea, the Soviet Union, Germany, France, and Thailand. Mr. Valdes was interviewed by William Knight in 1994.*

*Q: Well, your next role was what and when was it?*

VALDES: I went back to [the Embassy in] Moscow [in 1964], but we've already covered that period. Then I went to the Embassy in Bangkok [in 1967]. I really don't have very much to say about Bangkok because it was something totally different for me. I didn't know how to speak Thai and didn't pick it up very well, though I worked at it.

It was an interesting period. I was doing internal political reporting and had two Thai language officers to help me, which was a blessing, because I couldn't have done it otherwise.

*Q: What years did [your assignment to Bangkok] cover?*

VALDES: 1967 to 1970. This was a period when they developed a new constitution to try and get back to parliamentary government. They did this, and it lasted for a while after I left, but not for too long.

Everything was sort of subordinate to the Vietnam War in that period.

*Q: That book by Bill Stokes and Marshall Green which I referred to earlier also has a chapter on Thailand, because Bill Stokes was there in a liaison capacity.*

VALDES: He was there at the same time I was.

*Q: He seemed to be very satisfied and proud of the policies followed with the Thai. They had to provide their own security. We wouldn't take over the operations. Stokes felt that this policy worked very well and prevented us from being "sucked in," as we were in Vietnam. And I guess that Leonard Unger was there.*

VALDES: He was the Ambassador.

*Q: Anything else about that operation that you'd like to mention?*

VALDES: No.

**MILTON LEAVITT**  
**Center Director, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1967-1970)**

**Center Director, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1974-1978)**

*Milton Leavitt was born in 1919 and raised in Worcester, Massachusetts. He joined the U.S. Air Force in 1940 where he was captured by the Japanese in the Philippines and led on the Bataan Death March. Following the war, Mr. Leavitt received a bachelor's degree from Clark University in 1949 and a master's degree from Boston College and joined the IIE (USIA) in 1951. He served in the Philippines, Germany, India, Colombia, Peru, Thailand, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1989.*

LEAVITT: Kermit Brown was the area director at the time. I expressed my desire for a transfer to Kermit, who was an outstanding man. They don't come like that anymore. He was already sick at the time, unfortunately. But, after a long interview, he transferred me to Bangkok.

I went into the Binational Center in Bangkok, and this again was the first time that a career officer had come into a center in that whole area. Jack O'Brien was the Public Affairs Officer at the time . . .

*Q: Had they built that new center of theirs out there at that time?*

LEAVITT: They had built the new center but only partially. The classroom part was finished where they taught English. But the library was not done. The whole new building in front which we have now on the street was not completed yet.

I went into the program with more or less orders from Washington to try and pump in good USIS informational activity into the program. At that time, we had an informational center which was in another location, but that was only a library and film program. The lecture programs that we undertook at that time were done mostly in universities and schools throughout the country.

At the time there were seven branch posts, well, branches of the English teaching center in Bangkok, throughout the country. The program was large in its English teaching aspect. There were some 4,000-5,000 students at the time studying English at the Center, but little else was going on, little information activity.

When I went out there I sat down with the Board Chairman, Phra Bisal Sukhumwit, a great guy,

and told him what my assignment was and asked for his cooperation. He gave me all this cooperation. And I wondered after, what was the problem? What was the problem in the first place, because he was so cooperative? But I didn't go into that.

The first year I was there, I worked very extensively with information activities in the Center. There was a small auditorium in the Center at the time, and the USIS film program was very well attended also during the time when I first went out there. But the Information Center, for some reason, was closed down for rent. Was there a rental problem there? You were PAO at the time.

*Q: No, it was just a decision at Washington, and I think it was a proper decision. Why should we have two essentially, partially at least, duplicating programs if the AUA [acronym for the American Universities Alumni Association], which was your Binational Center, was doing so well? It would make better sense to simply close our library and our other small information library operations out, and, if Phra Bisal was willing to take it on -- in fact he turned out to be quite enthusiastic -- if he would take it on, allow the library to be used the same way as it was when we had it as strictly a USIS operation, why not? We would save money. We would not be duplicating, partially somewhat, one another's efforts. It just seemed the logical thing to do.*

LEAVITT: Yes, when we discussed this with Phra Bisal, Chairman of the Board, he agreed to it, and we received a grant of funds of money from Washington to build a new library which we did. It opened in, I think, October of 1968. The new library opened and the whole USIS staff from the Patpong Road library moved over with the library. It was immediately successful. The Board Chairman and the Board of Directors saw that they had done the right thing, that they made the right move.

*Q: What year did you arrive out there as the Center Director, your first tour there?*

LEAVITT: 1967.

*Q: You arrived just about a month or two before I came out.*

LEAVITT: That's right. Jack O'Brien was there for about three months and then you came out.

That was, I believe, the highlight of my first assignment to Bangkok, namely, the acceptance of the Board and the Chairman and the Board of Directors of USIS's program in the Center. This had never been done before since the information center opened in 1952.

The Center was called AUAA, American University Alumni Association. A little background here: the Board was composed of Thais who had graduated from American universities. Phra Bisal, himself, was a 1922 graduate of MIT. You couldn't have met a better bunch of Thais than the people on the Board. They were just outstanding patriots and outstanding people and all for USIS's information program.

I had heard stories of what transpired before I got there, but thinking back on my own experience, I don't think there was one program that we wanted to put into the Center that was refused by the Board or the Board Chairman.

*Q: I wanted to ask now, the time that we were contemplating the move of the library into the Center, I think you carried out most of the negotiations on it, did Phra Bisal express any worry about bringing a good portion of the standard American information program into the library? Did he have any reservations?*

LEAVITT: If he had any reservations, he never really expressed them to any great extent. He did say once, maybe while we were negotiating, "Well, of course, you're not going to do anything to hurt the reputation of the program, of the library, of the English teaching activity."

I said, "Rest assured, I would never do that." This was true for the whole program. At that time, we had 6,000 students coming in every day. I think when I left it was about 8,000 studying English. And these were all adults and had to have some knowledge of English prior to enrollment. It was a very successful program both the auditorium, with the lectures and the films, and the library program. As I said, Washington was very generous with funds for building the new library. We built it in about six or seven months. We completed the whole thing, driving the pilings and everything else. It is a beautiful building to this day. I don't know, I haven't been out there for ten years now. That was the highlight of my first tour there, to get this program underway.

In 1974, at my own request, I went back to Bangkok. I took over the Center again. It was hugely successful a second time. There were really no highlights. There was already an information program. We had lost several satellite programs because of budgetary reasons. But some of the big ones, Chaing Mai and Songkhla, were still operating, were still going when I first went out there.

*Q: Well, of course, I think your AUA branch posts were different from our USIA . . .*

LEAVITT: Usually we were located in the USIA.

*Q: Well, we had thirteen branch posts under USIS in Thailand at the height of the operation there.*

LEAVITT: We had fifteen teaching posts, too.

*Q: Yes, when the Nixon Doctrine was put into effect in 1970 we began closing those posts which had been opened successfully during the period from about 1965 to '67. The thirteenth post had just been activated when I came out there as PAO in May of 1967. They were all open during the time I was there, but immediately after my departure, as a result of a new policy in Washington, the post had to begin closing them. So the USIS centers as we had known them for about three or four years were gradually shut down. I think there are only three or four left now.*

LEAVITT: Well, we were able to maintain some of them after they were closed. We were able to maintain an English teaching activity for some time in several of them, not all of them. But their programs were small nonetheless. The last I heard AUA had about 9,000 students going in every day. I mean, this is fantastic. It's the largest teaching activity in the world at the present

time.

We published our own books with the help of the Manila/USIS printing office. We were able to produce our own materials which was a big help. We taught not only English but we also taught Thai to Americans and other foreigners and printed our own materials in Thai also, teaching Thai to foreigners. So it was quite a variety of activities going on, and from early morning to late at night it was busy.

*Q: When you were producing your own materials for the English language teaching program, did you try to get any kind of a lower intensity American-type of instruction into it? I don't mean in the methodology, I mean, any of the message material?*

LEAVITT: Oh, yes. Just by virtue of teaching itself you had a message. But there were always situations in the lessons. For example, say you were in an American restaurant, or at an American ball game or whatever, but always Americana throughout all the teaching materials. We just did this. And there were no objections. Nobody complained about that at all.

*Q: At one time, I've forgotten exactly what it was because it was after I left, but it seems to me it was in the first two or three years after I had left Thailand, there was an uprising which overthrew the government and the students were quite active in that affair. For the first time the students really got politicized and were out demonstrating, two or three of them ultimately, I think, executed as a result of that. Were you there at that time?*

LEAVITT: No. I was at home. I was on leave the first time at that time. I was not there. I think Jack Jergins was Center Director at the time. He told me about that. That was very unfortunate that a few students were killed. But, no, I wasn't there. I had left and was with the English Teaching Division in Washington then.

*Q: When you went back did you find any antipathy among the student population toward the United States. I understand at that particular time there were the first glimmerings of some anti-American sentiment among the students who were actively and strongly revolting at the time the students were killed. I wondered if you sensed any kind of antipathy toward the U.S. in the student groups.*

LEAVITT: A few little things where one or two students were argumentative about various things, but I didn't find too much of this in the Center. You might have come across this if you visited universities but not in the Center. The Center was a place to which they came with a goal in mind because they were paying money for this and they didn't want to waste any time. So you didn't find too much of that in the Center, any antipathy, any anti-Americanism. If there was, it was held down. They would do nothing to disrupt their own programs because, as I say, they were paying money for it, not a lot of money, but to them it was a lot of money.

*Q: On the International Visitor Program once you got the Center really established and enlarged, did any Bangkok appearances of the international visitors take place outside the Center or were they exclusively within the Center program?*

LEAVITT: No, we held a lot of activities outside the Center, in universities mostly.

*Q: Ken MacCormac came back . . .*

LEAVITT: Ken MacCormac came back during my time. He headed the Fulbright Commission there.

*Q: I guess he went in '70 or '72, I can't remember which.*

LEAVITT: Yes, I think '70.

*Q: He probably left a little after I did.*

LEAVITT: He was there when I first got there and then Frank Tenney. Who was the CAO my second time there? Nelson Stevens.

*Q: I didn't know him personally.*

LEAVITT: Yes, he was there a short time. But anyway, I completed my tour there my second time in 1978 at which time I returned to Washington and worked for not quite a year, about ten months, as Chief of the Book Acquisition Program and then I retired.

**VICTOR L. TOMSETH**  
**Consular Officer**  
**Chiang Mai (1967)**

**Political/Military Officer**  
**Bangkok (1967-1968)**

**Political/Military Officer**  
**Udorn (1968-1969)**

**Ambassador's Staff Assistant/Political Officer**  
**Bangkok (1969-1971)**

*Victor L. Tomseth was born in Oregon in 1941. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in 1963 and his master's degree from the University of Michigan in 1966. After joining the Peace Corp and going to Nepal he joined the Foreign Service. During his career he had positions in Thailand, Iran, Sri Lanka, and was ambassador to Laos. Ambassador Tomseth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.*

TOMSETH: I don't recall anybody who was openly trying to get out of going to Vietnam by coming into the Foreign Service. There were several people who were actually interested in

going to Vietnam and a number who were prepared to go to Vietnam, including myself. In the assignment process, when I was interviewed and asked where I would like to go, I said, "The only place outside of Northwestern United States, maybe a little bit of Washington, DC, and Ann Arbor, Michigan that I know anything about is South Asia. I just finished a graduate degree in South Asian history. Of course I would like to go to South Asia." The State Department assignment policy at that point was not to send former Peace Corps volunteers back to the areas from whence they had just recently come, a policy long since trashcanned, for the better, I think. So, I was asked, "Where else would you like to go?" I said, "Well, while I was in Nepal, I did make a trip to Southeast Asia. A friend and I went to Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Singapore. I guess I wouldn't mind going back to Southeast Asia. That includes Vietnam," thinking I had just bought myself a ticket. But as it turned out, no one from my class was initially assigned to Vietnam.

*Q: That's odd.*

TOMSETH: It is odd. In the very next class, I think they had about six who went. Within a year, everybody was going to Vietnam. The only way to get in was to commit to go to Vietnam. Then several people from my class ultimately wound up in Vietnam on subsequent assignments.

*Q: Where were you assigned then?*

TOMSETH: Thailand.

*Q: This was still 1966?*

TOMSETH: The assignment was made in 1966. There was a two-week consular course. Then I had 24 weeks of Thai training.

*Q: You took Thai training through to 1967. You were in Thailand from when to when?*

TOMSETH: I got there May 1, 1967 and was there until the end of June of 1971.

*Q: How did you find Thai training?*

TOMSETH: Well, having been through learning Nepali, which was very different than learning college French, with the emphasis on speaking, I had learned a couple of things. One was the value of actually being able to speak the language. I had also learned how to study in this kind of a language program. So, I worked at it very hard and got a very good result.

*Q: Had you gotten married or anything like this?*

TOMSETH: No, I was single at that point.

*Q: When you arrived in Thailand in 1967, how did it strike you as a country?*

TOMSETH: Well, I had been there. I had spent about a week there on this trip. The way the

mission dealt with junior officers at that particular point was over a period of probably 10 years or more, they got one junior officer a year. They had a rotation program. They put the officer in Chiang Mai, where we had a consulate, for the first year and then moved the person down to Bangkok for the second year. So, I went to Chiang Mai. I had not been in northern Thailand. In many respects, it was sort of an ideal first assignment in a great place with great people and an interesting political environment. Even though it was a consulate, the only consular work they did was renew an occasional American passport. They didn't issue any visas. That was all done in Bangkok.

Because I had worked with this language, when I got to Chiang Mai, unlike getting to Dhahran, I could actually function. I wasn't prepared to give speeches yet, but I could talk to anybody about most common kinds of things. They understood me and I understood them. We had four State Department Americans in the consulate: the principal officer, another second tour junior officer, myself, and a staff officer who was the administrative person.

*Q: Who was the principal officer?*

TOMSETH: Well, there was a guy named Carl Nelson who was in the position when I got there, but he was not there. He had gone on home leave and while he was there, one of their children had a serious medical problem that meant he could not go back. So, he and Weaver Gimm, who was then on the desk in the Department, switched places and Weaver came out in about July. He promptly sold my position to the embassy in Bangkok for a couple of additional FSN positions. So, I didn't do a year in Chiang Mai. I only did five months and then was moved down to Bangkok.

*Q: What was the situation in Chiang Mai that we were particularly interested in?*

TOMSETH: The big issue then was what is going on in northern Burma with the KMT remnants and various ethnic minority-

*Q: Red flag.*

TOMSETH: Yes, exactly. A little bit of interest in the narcotics issue. This was pre-DEA, but there was a federal agency that had an acronym of four letters (I've forgotten what it was.). But they didn't have anybody there. They had a car and left it there. Somebody would come up from Bangkok every six weeks or so just to check on what was happening on the opium front. But there was not the kind of interest in narcotics that subsequently developed not only in the Golden Triangle, but worldwide.

*Q: Was there any communist insurgency going on in that part of Thailand?*

TOMSETH: Not in northern Thailand at that time. Within the previous couple of years, an open insurgency had emerged in northeastern Thailand, but not in the north at the time I was there. Subsequently, it did.

*Q: How did we check on Burma?*

TOMSETH: The Agency had a big operation there and there was and still is a listening operation there. They ran [agents] in and out and had various rather nefarious people on their payroll.

*Q: What about the social life there in Chiang Mai?*

TOMSETH: There was a small American community that, frankly, I wasn't all that interested in. There were a few old missionary types who had a lot of lore. I liked picking their brains, but the American community cocktail and dinner circuit I didn't find terribly interesting. I bought myself a motorcycle and rode all over the place and spent as much time as I could getting to know Thai. A university had been built there. They literally built it from scratch on a brand-new campus. They hadn't graduated a class yet when I got there in 1967. I made a point of trying to get to know as many of the university faculty people as I could, a lot of whom were really quite young. They were my contemporaries. So, I got to know a lot of them.

There was a big Thai medical community there. The American missionaries had started a hospital and there was a hospital associated with the university, so I got to know quite a few of the doctors.

*Q: What was your impression of the Thais as opposed to the Nepalese?*

TOMSETH: I guess the most obvious difference was, it even then was a much better educated society. Literacy in Thailand in the mid-1960s was well over 70%. In Chiang Mai, there was really a kind of community you couldn't find in Nepal at all: people who had university educations and who had traveled abroad. It was a developing country, to be sure, but not in the 13th century. This was a very different kind of place.

The Nepalis, particularly in the hills of Nepal, are very open and you can go up to a door of somebody's house and knock on it and ask them if you can stay there. If they are not high caste, they will actually let you stay inside rather than sleep on the porch. So, they are friendly enough. In that sense, they were a lot like the Thais. Well, I'm prejudiced. I eventually wound up marrying a Thai. They are just very friendly people. If you make an effort to speak their language, they will clutch you to their breast.

*Q: Then you went to Bangkok when?*

TOMSETH: At the end of September 1967. The embassy at that point had a separate Political-Military Section. We had nearly 50,000 troops in Thailand, most of them Air Force. In the summer of 1967, it occurred to somebody that it would be a good idea with that many U.S. forces in Thailand to have a Status of Forces Agreement. So, we were in the midst of trying to negotiate one. I was assigned in the Political-Military Section with a couple of people. One was an Air Force officer, a lawyer, and another FSO to this SOFA negotiation effort. We did that until about the end of the year, at which point the negotiations became hopelessly deadlocked and by mutual agreement we said, "Well, we brought all these people in and we've been operating for a couple of years now without a SOFA. Why do we need one? Let's just do it ad hoc," which is very much the Thai way of doing things. Americans really aren't adverse either.

We like to do things ad hoc. So, thereafter, we had no more negotiations. The Air Force judge advocate type and I spent the next five months sort of ambulance chasing or police car chasing. Wherever there was an incident, he and I would go. He was the legal expert and I was the language interface.

*Q: I am told that as you got started on these potential negotiations, dealing with the country is a piece of cake. The real problem is dealing with the Pentagon lawyers. Did you find this?*

TOMSETH: This Air Force officer was a great guy and the soul of reason. But at that point, and it may be less strong today, there was some well-entrenched legal doctrine when it came to SOFAs, one of which had to do with who exercises criminal jurisdiction. The model was NATO and the bilateral agreements with Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. There, the U.S. had the right of first refusal. The U.S. would exercise jurisdiction in all criminal cases unless, for its own good reasons, Uncle Sam chose to waive that privilege. That was something the Thais simply could not accept. It hadn't been that many decades since they had gotten rid of all the extraterritoriality treaties with Woodrow Wilson's son in law being the principal advisor. So, here were the Americans back saying, "You've got to give it back to us."

*Q: What sort of problems were showing up? You saw ambulance chasing.*

TOMSETH: Mostly police traffic accidents. We had built a port in Sedaheep on the [coast of] Thailand and from there, a road up to Korat in northwestern Thailand. We were shipping in all the ordinance that the Air Force was dropping in Laos and Vietnam through that port and trucking it up to Korat. These guys would have accidents.

*Q: How were they settled?*

TOMSETH: However we could. The basic way was, if you could get it at the police level, that was best. We worked a deal with the police whereby the military would pay some kind of compensation to whoever was injured or killed in the accident in exchange for dropping any kind of criminal or civil charges that might otherwise be brought.

Sometimes you didn't get to them until they went to court. The Thai judicial system has no trial by jury. It's done by professional judges. Judges as trained lawyers tend to take the law more seriously than cops do.

*Q: Who was your ambassador while you were there?*

TOMSETH: Graham Martin was when I first arrived, but he left in the summer of 1967 and Len Unger came to replace him and was there the whole time that I was there.

*Q: Were there Graham Martin stories going around?*

TOMSETH: Oh, you bet. The one I remember because it subsequently was proven to be totally all wet in terms of Thai society was, Graham Martin divided the staff into two types: those who worked and those who played golf. At that time, golf was not a big game among Thais. There

were only a few courses in the country. When I went back the second time in the late 1980s, there were golf courses all over the places. Golf was a very useful thing to do in terms of contacts, particularly with the military.

*Q: You were in the Political-Military Section. Is this where you stayed the time you were there?*

TOMSETH: No. In June of 1968, I was sold into bondage once again. We had opened up a consulate in Udorn in 1965, I think, maybe 1966. Al Francis had arrived in Udorn as principal officer. He had been a junior officer in Thailand and had done the year in Chiang Mai and the year in Bangkok. Al is one of these people who also thinks language is very important. He was a very good Thai speaker and Vietnamese speaker. So, he wanted people on the staff in Udorn who could speak Thai. By that point, I for better or worse had a reputation. He went to Unger and said, "I want him" and got me. So, in June of 1968, I moved up to Udorn and spent the next 10 months or so being a political-military officer in northeastern Thailand.

*Q: What were you doing up there?*

TOMSETH: Two things. One was, because I had worked in the Political-Military Section in Bangkok, I was given responsibility for the bases, of which there were four large ones and several small ones in northeastern Thailand, to stay in touch with them, pay attention to what their relations with local communities were, work with their civil action officers and programs that they did out in the villages. They vaccinated a lot of water buffalo and people. I hope they didn't give them the same serum. Things like that.

Secondly, in early 1969, there were parliamentary elections for the first time since 1958. So, we spent a lot of time covering the run up to the elections.

*Q: What was your impression of the electoral system in Thailand at that time?*

TOMSETH: Well, one important factor in northeastern Thailand and in rural Thailand generally was the poor communications infrastructure. There weren't a lot of roads. Constituencies were entire provinces. Some of these provinces were pretty big. So, the challenge for a candidate, particularly after a more than 10 year hiatus, was how do you get the word out that you are running for office? How do you generate votes? The methods were fairly primitive because of the lack of this communication infrastructure, but in a sense, it was more democratic than this much more sophisticated system that has developed over the years has become in that money didn't count for nearly as much as it does now. You got a lot of former teachers who were elected to that parliament. I think some people who have stayed in politics over the years have been very good politicians in the sense that they pay attention to their constituencies and they are very interested in local development issues. But in terms of the sophistication of the process, it was very primitive compared to what you have in Thailand now where a road goes everywhere, every village is electrified, they all have television sets, there is a lot of media advertising, but money counts for a lot more in this system than it did at that very early stage. It is literally possible to buy a seat, if you're prepared to spend enough money to get it in Thailand. In 1969, I don't think you could have bought a seat.

*Q: You say there had been a 10 year hiatus. Had there been a military government?*

TOMSETH: Yes.

*Q: When had that ceased?*

TOMSETH: There was a coup in 1957. Thailand has had lots of coups. The military strongman who won out was a guy named Serittonarat, but he did not in 1957 become prime minister, which was the traditional thing to do. He appointed one of his lieutenants, a general named Tunong Kintagajong, who was the commander of the First Army as prime minister. But a year later, Surit took that over himself. He was prime minister from 1958 until he died in 1964. Then Tunong became prime minister once again. But all this time, there was a constituent assembly appointed by the military, supposedly drafting a new constitution. For years, they really didn't do very much, but in late 1967 and early 1968, there was a flurry of activity. They produced this constitution in the fall of 1968. It called for parliamentary elections, but they didn't really give parliament very much power. It still remained with the military to appoint a prime minister and a cabinet. So, this was a parliament that had basically little more than debating powers. They could debate the budget, but they really didn't have any power to affect it in any meaningful way. But even that was too much for the military. They threw parliament out again in 1971. It didn't last very long at all.

*Q: Was the CIA actively working in Udorn?*

TOMSETH: The CIA was everywhere and still has a huge presence in Thailand, not that they need it anymore, but they are very comfortable there.

*Q: One of the things we try to examine is the role of the CIA as far as how it interfaces with the Department of State. The CIA in some places is almost so powerful that it doesn't interface very much. It goes back to Washington and does its thing and the State Department does its thing. It isn't enmity, but There really isn't a lot of real interchange.*

TOMSETH: Well, the presence there in the 1960s was huge. There is a history to this. It goes back to World War II when the OSS worked very closely with an organization called the Free Thai Movement, which was an underground group during the war years when the Japanese were in Thailand. One of the people in the OSS was a military fellow named Bill Donovan, who subsequently was involved in setting up the CIA after the war and then was our ambassador in Bangkok during the mid-1950s. So, from the very beginning, the Agency had a special place in Thailand. From the late 1940s, it had a very close relationship with the Thai military. So, particularly in the 1960s when we were using Thailand as the world's largest aircraft carrier, that relationship between the Agency and the military when there was a military government in Thailand was a very important one. Good ambassadors, and I think we had some good ambassadors in Thailand over the years, recognized what the situation was and did their very best to have as good a relationship as they could with the Agency and the station chief. That was certainly true in Martin's and Unger's day.

*Q: What about the war in Vietnam and also in Laos? You were there during a high period - the*

*Tet Offensive, post-Tet. Nixon was coming in and all that. How did this impact as you saw it on what was happening in Thailand?*

TOMSETH: It was the overwhelming, if not absolutely singular, bilateral issue that we had. The main function of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Thailand in the late 1960s and early 1970s was prosecution of the war in Indochina. That led into other things. That was the reason why we became very much involved in the counterinsurgency program in Thailand itself. That insurgency potentially threatened the ability to use these military facilities in Thailand for prosecution of the war.

*Q: It was one of the dominoes, too, wasn't it?*

TOMSETH: That was the assumption, although I must say, as a young, inexperienced, naive junior Foreign Service officer arriving in Thailand in 1967 and hearing soon and frequently from experienced hands, many of them Agency people, "If Vietnam and Laos go down, you can bet money that Thailand won't be far behind them," I thought, "I'm not so sure that's true. It just strikes me that Thailand may be a different country than Laos or Vietnam."

*Q: There is a tendency in the part of people to extrapolate from one to another, but it certainly was part of our thinking.*

TOMSETH: Yes. It was taken largely as an article of faith at that point.

*Q: This is one of the reasons why the CIA had such a presence there. It was to do what it could, to observe, and to help prevent, wasn't it? This was an occupational prerogative.*

TOMSETH: Yes. There was a program, ostensibly an aid program, Public Safety, and a lot of the staff actually came out of the Agency. The Public Safety Program subsequently got a very bad name for what went on in Vietnam, Brazil, and a number of other places and was done away with in the 1970s. But in Thailand, they were actually doing something that was useful. They were creating a modern police force that actually would be responsive to local security and criminal issues. They weren't 100% successful or effective, but they played a very important role in the Thai development process. You cannot have a developed society without a modern police force. These guys played an important, overall positive, role in bringing that about.

*Q: In Udorn, you were there until 1971?*

TOMSETH: No.

*Q: They bounced you around.*

TOMSETH: Well, I was a junior officer. I was supposed to be on a rotational tour, so I was supposed to leave at the end of two years. But again because of the language aspect, when my two years was up, Len Unger said, "I want him for my staff assistant." So, I took home leave and came back and staff aided for Ambassador Unger for 15 months. Then I spent my last year in the Political Section.

*Q: What about Len Unger as an ambassador? How did he operate?*

TOMSETH: Al Francis had done this job for Kenneth Todd Young. As I was leaving Udorn, he said, "You will find that this is a good job to have done." I think Len's style was probably not the same as Young's, but Al was right. It was a great learning experience. I was frustrated sometimes because Len actually could and did do a lot of things for himself. I sometimes wished that he would let me do more things for him, but nonetheless, being able to sit there and see everything that he was doing and look at every piece of paper that went across his desk was an invaluable experience.

*Q: How did he interact with the Thai officials?*

TOMSETH: He was very good. He had been DCM in Bangkok when U. Alexis Johnson was there in the late 1950s. Len is also very good at languages. While he didn't have a great deal of formal training other than getting an hour here and there with a teacher as he could, he could speak enough Thai to carry on a basic conversation with people. When he went off to see a minister of this or that, he did his business in English, but he could sit there and make the small talk in Thai. As I said, the Thais just love anybody who will even try. They may butcher the language, but if you make the effort, they really respond to that. He could do enough that it allowed him to really have some kind of rapport with people who really were not all that fluent in English themselves and often spoke no English. Prime Minister Tunom in those days knew almost no English.

*Q: I imagine there was always the war issue, but...*

TOMSETH: That dominated everything. In the time I was there, we had periodic civil air negotiations. By the time I left, Thailand was just beginning to develop a textile industry. I am not sure whether we made our first call on them before or just shortly after I left, but there were some textile negotiations. In the 1960s, most of Thailand's territorial sea was surveyed and blocks were auctioned off for oil exploration. Some of these were awarded at the tail end of my time there. UNOCAL wound up with a very big stake in that. So, there was some of that kind of business with the government as well. But it was really the war that just dominated everything else, the war and the insurgency. By the end of my time, narcotics was becoming a bit more of an issue. McCoy had published his book.

*Q: What about your time in the Political Section? What slice of the pie were you given?*

TOMSETH: I was made the biographic officer as a principal duty. There were other things I did. Particularly because I spoke Thai well, I was often called upon to go off to meetings with people and be the interpreter. But biographic work is good political training. Al Francis had done this. He had cycled through this. He also wound up in the Political Section as part of his time in Bangkok. He had done a very extensive family tree on the royal family and showed how people are related to one another through this royal family connection. So, in the course of that year, I learned a lot about who is related to whom, how do these families fit together? It really helped in understanding why people did certain things in a political context because of family connections,

whether by blood or marriage.

*Q: What about the royal family? At that point, what was the role as we saw it?*

TOMSETH: During Surit's premiership from 1958 to early 1964, up to that point... In 1932, when there was a coup against the absolute monarchy, the king on the throne was somebody who really never had expected to become king. The coup group, which was both military and civilian at that point, did everything they could to put the monarchy over in a corner. After a couple of years of that, Botetikboke said, "Hell with this. I don't need it" and abdicated. There was a regency council for a little while. Then they chose as king the minor child of a prince who was way over on the side. The family was then in Switzerland and stayed in Switzerland with only a couple of visits back until after the end of World War II. In 1946, this young kid, who was only 19, was killed or shot himself (Nobody really knows what happened.) in the palace. His younger brother, who was then still a minor, was made king. He went back to Switzerland and stayed there most of the time until 1950 when he married and came back to Thailand. But through most of the 1950s, the monarchy was still hardly in the consciousness of most people.

But Surit saw this very attractive in a physical sense young king and his beautiful young wife as a potential political asset, so he started encouraging the king and the queen to travel around the country just in a ceremonial capacity. They did that. So, when I got there in 1967, even though Surit had died, this practice of spending a lot of time during the course of the year moving about the country and visiting villages was well entrenched. The monarchy had reemerged as an important symbolic institution. The military did everything they could to foster that. They made it one of the pillars of the Thai political system. It had no direct political power. It was all symbolic. But it had reemerged as an important factor.

That did not come into play in any kind of proactive political sense until 1973, at which point I was back in Washington and on the Thai desk.

*Q: We'll cover that when we get there.*

TOMSETH: During the four years that I was there, there was a lot of this traveling around the country.

*Q: Was there much concern at that time on our part about corruption within the military ruling class, with the royal family, or with businesspeople?*

TOMSETH: Not the royal family. There really wasn't any need for corruption in the royal family. After 1932, the government had set up something called the Crown Property Bureau. This was run by bureaucrats. The monies generated from that supported the royal family. It was quite adequate. Even in those days, it was plenty of money to support a royal family. Over the years, it's become fabulously wealthy. There is a lot of money in the Crown Property Bureau. Corruption is even less of an issue than potentially it could have been 35 years ago.

In the military, yes, this was something that was widespread, endemic, and well-known and well-documented. There were a number of American scholars in the 1950s and 1960s who had really

gone into this and written books about it. So, it was a well-known phenomenon. But the attitude was, you can't really do anything. It's there. You can't do anything about it. We need these guys.

*Q: Did you get involved in keeping Thai troops in Vietnam?*

TOMSETH: That was part of the issue. They initially sent a brigade, and it eventually wound up an entire division, and we paid for it.

*Q: I used to watch them march into the PX in Cholon under the orders of non-commissioned officers buy usually female items (perfume, powder, stockings, etc.) which they would march out and put on a truck while our provost marshal was getting redder and redder in the face watching this.*

TOMSETH: There was great competition to get assigned to the Tiger Division. I don't know about the Thai. They are better lovers than they are fighters. But I know in the White Horse Division, the Korean case, a lot of people rather cynically said, "The way to clear the road in Vietnam is to tell the Koreans there is a PX at the end of it."

*Q: Absolutely. I think they were each given a cubic ton or whatever of space on a ship on the way back. But they were good fighters.*

*Had you met your wife by this point?*

TOMSETH: Yes. I met her in the spring of 1968 when I was working in the Political-Military Section and Walt Reed and I were chasing ambulances. There was a very gruesome murder in the town of Takli, which was near one of the air bases. This was in central Thailand. The Air Force OSI was trying to work with the local cops. She was a prostitute. There was a suspicion or at least the possibility that one of her American customers was involved. The OSI was having a terrible time doing this. There wasn't a common language. The interpreter they had had been an AFS student and it just wasn't working very well. They really needed somebody who could interpret, but also understood the political dynamic. So, I was sent up there to work with the OSI and the local police on this for several weeks. Because of the nature of the crime, it was something that the sensationalist press in Bangkok had a field day with. I was going back and forth between Takli and Bangkok on the public affairs aspect of it all. My wife was the secretary to the press attaché, so I met her in the course of that.

*Q: Later, Bangkok became practically the sex capital of the world. I would think this would impact very heavily on the embassy, problems and all that. At least you had the R&R business.*

TOMSETH: Yes. Sex was readily available and very open in Bangkok. Bangkok was a popular R&R center because of that. There was a whole strip that really catered to American GIs. Some of the criminal jurisdiction cases we had rose out of bar fights and somebody beating up his sweetheart for the night or whatever. But I think what turned Bangkok into what it subsequently became known for really was a phenomenon of the 1970s and Europeans and Japanese more than Americans.

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*Q: In 1972-1973, we were pretty well out of Vietnam. I think the draft had stopped by that point, hadn't it?*

TOMSETH: Yes, I think that was sometime in early 1972. But by that point, they had already gone to the lottery system, so people in graduate school knew where they stood vis a vis the selective service system, so that was not a big issue. By the summer of 1973, after I had left Cornell and come back to the Department, you had the congressionally-imposed bombing halt and the agreement... That happened during the winter, in January. After the Christmas bombing, they reached an agreement with the North Vietnamese that envisioned the removal of all U.S. combat forces from Vietnam. So, that was winding down.

The Philippines was building up. Marshall law was declared while I was at Cornell. That began to get the attention of people, both faculty and students at Cornell.

*Q: You were concentrating again on Thailand?*

TOMSETH: On mainland Southeast Asia, although I took advantage of the expertise that they had at Cornell on Indonesia and the Philippines to get better acquainted with that part of Southeast Asia, but my real specialty was mainland Southeast Asia, Indochina, Thailand, and Burma.

*Q: What was the feeling towards Burma? Was there much study about Burma?*

TOMSETH: Not at all. It was the Hermit Kingdom at that point. May Win had been in for 10 years since the second time he had taken over. People just didn't know very much about Burma. It was difficult to get into, although the president of the... There was an Association for Southeast Asian Studies and the president of the Association was a fellow named John Wyatt, who subsequently came to work for the State Department when he couldn't get an academic job. His specialty was Burma. He had been in the Special Forces and had been trained in Burmese by the Army, so he did his dissertation on something having to do with Burma, but he was one of the few.

*Q: From that academic side, did you see a different Thailand from the State Department?*

TOMSETH: I guess a lot of the expertise there was focused on different aspects of Thai society than the U.S. government was preoccupied with at the time, although it wasn't totally divorced from it. There had been a lot of anthropological work done by people at Cornell in the 1950s into the 1960s even. That was a good academic, intellectual basis for programs that AID was involved with in the Counterinsurgency Program, for example. Some of those people had gone back and forth between academia and AID, so there was a connection in that regard.

But somebody like David Wyatt, who was a historian and whose real specialty was the reign of Juwalankon from the 1870s to 1910, the work that he was doing other than he had to know that to really understand what was going on today, didn't seem to have that much of a direct

connection for contemporary events in Thailand.

*Q: Were you working towards another degree?*

TOMSETH: No, I was only going to be there for an academic year and I already had a master's degree, so rather than put myself into a straightjacket requirement for a degree, I used it to take any course that I thought would be relevant to what I was interested in. As a result, I took some classes that I wouldn't have otherwise taken, such as a course in art history and an economics course on agricultural reform in the Philippines, which I never would have taken if I was working for a degree.

*Q: The degree business does narrow one. In fact, I noticed this when I was with the Board of Examiners. Sometimes we would get somebody there who was working on a Ph.D. on Mongolian history and thought this would be a natural for the Foreign Service and yet they did very poorly. There is this narrowing of outlook.*

TOMSETH: Yes. I think particularly as one gets involved in the doctoral aspect of an advanced degree... It's not so much with the master's, which is a little more gentle. But I saw the same thing, whether at the Board of Examiners or elsewhere. People who had done a Ph.D. often were very narrowly specialized and that didn't really do them a whole lot of good in terms of the more generalist approach of the Foreign Service... The pendulum goes back and forth, to be sure. But over the years, I think the greater value is put on a good generalist than a highly specialized person.

*Q: In 1973, whither?*

TOMSETH: In 1973, I came back to Washington to EAP as one of the Thai desk officers for Political and Political-Military.

*Q: You did that from 1973 to when?*

TOMSETH: Until 1975. By that point, Henry Kissinger had become Secretary of State and had decreed the Global Outlook Policy (GLOP). I figured I had been in the Foreign Service for almost 10 years and I had not only done nothing but Southeast Asia, with that one year at BEX being the exception, I had done almost nothing but Thailand. So I figured I was a prime candidate for GLOP and started looking around for an out of area assignment that I thought would be interesting. I had been to Iran a couple of times, so I thought Iran would be interesting. I put my name in for Farsi language training.

*Q: Let's stick to EAP for now. During this 1973-1975 period on the Thai desk, what were our concerns with Thailand at that time?*

TOMSETH: Two mainly. One was disengaging in a security sense. The other one was what kind of a relationship are we going to have, not only in the aftermath of Vietnam, but in the aftermath of something that happened domestically in a political context in Thailand. That was a student movement that resulted in the ouster of the military clique that had been in charge for 16 years

from 1957 to the fall of 1973. During that period that I was on the desk, you had for the first time in a long time real participatory politics going on in Thailand, an elected parliament that actually exercised real political power in Thailand. Given the student context that had brought this government into office (Actually, there were two or three of them in the space of the three years until the military intervened again in 1976.), they were confronted with this American retreat from not only Thailand, but Southeast Asia generally, and in 1975, communist victories in all three Indochinese states, and "How do we make our peace with those countries and China in a context where it looks like the United States is putting its tail between its legs and getting out of the region altogether?"

*Q: Who was the assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs?*

TOMSETH: We had two while I was there. Bob Ingersoll came in just about the time I came back from Cornell. Then Phil Habib 15-18 months later took his place.

*Q: Was the fact that things were beginning to fall apart in Vietnam or was it apparent when you arrived... Did that have an influence on how EAP operated?*

TOMSETH: The settlement had been negotiated just before I got back and was being implemented when I reported for duty in June. Then the congressionally-mandated bombing halt was imposed in August. But I think even at that point, the hope was that Vietnamization would work, that the South Vietnamese military had been developed to a point that, with U.S. financial support, they would be able to hold their own. For a good bit of the time I was on the desk, nothing happened that suggested that that hope wouldn't be realized. It was really only at the beginning of 1975 when the North Vietnamese began a concerted push that things fell apart - and they fell apart quite rapidly. There were some people who felt (Graham Martin was certainly one of them.) that if Congress had come through with more funding for ammunition, the South Vietnamese would have been able to hold off this offensive. I don't think so. I think the organization was so corrupt from top to bottom that you could have had unlimited resources and they would have collapsed in the face of this offensive.

Cambodia was a little different situation. There, from a very early stage, the regime found itself in a few enclaves with the vast majority of the countryside controlled by the Khmer Rouge. I think throughout the period that I was on the desk, the outlook for Cambodia was much less optimistic than it was for Vietnam, at least for a year and a half during that period.

In Laos, in 1973, as a sideshow to what was going on in Vietnam, there had been an agreement to create for the third time a coalition government that would have all three factions involved. Even into early 1975, it looked like that was working fairly well. It was only with the collapse of Vietnam and Cambodia that the Pathet Lao were emboldened to begin pushing their partners in this coalition out and the coalition partners, seeing what had happened in Vietnam and Cambodia, were eminently pushable at that point. There, the denouement was that during the summer and fall, more and more of the neutralists and rightists left the country to the point where in December, it was a fairly easy proposition for the Pathet Lao to declare the monarchy abolished and to proclaim a People's Democratic Republic.

*Q: How were the developments in Cambodia reflected in Thailand from your perspective?*

TOMSETH: I think for the Thai, they were absolutely panic-stricken. There is a corridor that runs through central Cambodia into eastern Thailand right onto Bangkok. During the dry season, it's ideal tank country. The Thai could see Vietnamese divisions sweeping through that corridor on to Bangkok. There was sort of the wry view going around. Thailand at that point was, "Well, our ultimate defense is going to be Bangkok's traffic. That will slow these tanks down, but nothing else will." There was already an effort underway to try to patch things up with China. Up to 1975, the Thai government recognized the Republic of China on Taiwan. In the course of just a few months after the fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh, the Thai established diplomatic relations, had broken them with Taiwan and established them with China, and did the same thing with Hanoi. They tried to do the same thing with Phnom Penh. They actually did recognize one another, but from the very beginning had trouble with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge were doing the same thing across the Thai border that they began doing across the Vietnamese border. It was causing a real problem for Thai security forces along that border. But their greatest fear, that Vietnam would move into Cambodia in force and then on to Thailand, never materialized until the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese fell out irrevocably in 1978 and the Vietnamese occupied Cambodia in late 1978/early 1979, at which point the Thai, in effect, joined forces with the Khmer Rouge to try and create some kind of cordon sanitaire around the border.

*Q: How were we viewing the student movements that resulted in major change in government? In the beginning, was there concern... Students are usually pretty far to the left. Otherwise, they wouldn't be students. What was the history of what we were getting from our embassy about the student movements and how were we viewing them at that time?*

TOMSETH: Traditionally, students in Thailand tend to be very passive. There have not been many occasions when students were deeply involved in the political process.

*Q: Not like Korea, where every-*

TOMSETH: Not even like Indonesia, for example. In a way, it was sort of interesting. We changed ambassadors just as this was happening. Len Unger left after over six years in Thailand in the fall of 1973. A non-career person went out. His inclination was to try to get behind this movement, that certainly as we were disengaging in a military sense from Southeast Asia, it made sense to a lot of people in the embassy and in Washington to try and engage more proactively in a political relationship, particularly in circumstances where the government was much more democratic than it had been in a long, long time, in more than two decades in Thailand. That sentiment though was not embraced enthusiastically in Thailand itself among the student groups. They tended to see themselves as much more leftist than people in Washington and the embassy thought they were and were inclined to look at relations with the United States through the prism of the previous two decades when U.S.-Thai relations were overwhelmingly a relationship with the Thai military. So, during that three year period, you had Washington and the embassy, in effect, trying to court these people and democratic forces generally within Thailand, but in the case of the students, sort of an arm's length approach. Many of them were not too keen on getting very close to the U.S. mission in Thailand. Interestingly enough, in the

fall of 1976, the military intervened again in a context in which there was increasing polarization among students themselves with university students much more leftist and students at vocational schools becoming the pawns of rightists forces and the military. Clashes between these groups provided the excuse for the military to intervene once again.

These university students, for the most part, took one of two courses. They either went to the jungle to join the insurgents or they wound up coming to the United States. Some of the most radical of the students who were the least inclined to reciprocate to these overtures that the U.S. had been making during the previous three years wound up at Cornell.

*Q: Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State. Was there much interest from above?*

TOMSETH: Sitting where I was, my impression of Henry Kissinger's management style in the State Department was to gather around him a small coterie of people, most of them Foreign Service officers, and to use them to isolate what was important in foreign policy from the rest of the State Department. Those of us in our various regional vineyards did what we could to tend bilateral relationships, but if it wasn't on Henry Kissinger's agenda, it got no attention from the seventh floor. That was largely the case with Thailand in particular. From Kissinger's point of view, the important thing was the peace agreement that he had been instrumental in negotiating and implementing that and very little else as it pertained to Southeast Asia. So, what the bureau and the desk found itself doing was trying to manage this disengagement in a security sense from Southeast Asia in a context in Thailand, where we had a domestic political upheaval, in a way that was going to maintain some kind of productive bilateral relationship with Thailand, one that we fully expected was going to be quite different than it had been for the previous 20 years, but not to abandon Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia to its fate, as was implied by the approach that Kissinger was taking.

*Q: With Thailand, were we shutting down our bases there?*

TOMSETH: That process had been underway as part of Vietnamization from the early days of the Nixon administration. While I was still in Thailand, before mid-1971, we actually closed one of the large Air Force bases at Takli, only to reopen it a year or so later when we wrapped up for the bombing campaign as part of Kissinger's strategy to get the North Vietnamese to agree to some kind of a settlement that would allow us to get everybody out of Vietnam. But with the bombing halt in August of 1973, the utility of those bases became nil almost overnight. So, from 1973 to the collapse in Vietnam and Cambodia in the spring of 1975, we were drawing down those forces very rapidly and closing things right and left. We did want to maintain the military... We had a very extensive signal intelligence operation-

*Q: This is intercepting communications from other countries.*

TOMSETH: But this was very extensive and done in cooperation with the Thai military. They and we were both benefiting from this. The Thai military also wanted to continue this, but because it was targeted to a very large extent on Indochina and China, the civilian government in its effort to come to some kind of modus vivendi with these governments that it hadn't even recognized a few months previously, was not prepared to allow us to continue those operations

with the numbers of people that we have. There were well over 2,000 Americans who were on the ground in Thailand as part of this signal intelligence operation. The civilian government simply wasn't prepared to have that kind of continuing U.S. military presence targeted against countries that it now felt it had to come to some kind of accommodation with. Ultimately, the operation in terms of American personnel was scaled back tremendously. We didn't close it down entirely.

But the interesting thing is that technology in this area moves so quickly that within two or three years, you didn't need all those people on the ground anyway. So, to this day, there is a continuing cooperation with Thailand on this sort of thing, but it doesn't involve large numbers of Americans on the ground.

*Q: Were we finding our military talking to Thai military? Was there one of these things where we were trying to hold the civilian hand and the military hand at the same time?*

TOMSETH: As I said the other day, the relationship that we had with the Thai military was a longstanding and pervasive one. Yes, during this period, 1973-1976, when you had civilian governments in power, and even though there was a disengagement from Indochina, we kept our lines open to the Thai military. Those channels of communication became quite important in the late 1970s and 1980s, first in the context of the military reinserting itself in the political process in 1976. Then in 1978 and 1979 with the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, Thailand saw once again the importance of some kind of a security relationship with the United States. Having those lines of communications open during that period made it much easier to reestablish a much more robust kind of security relationship than we had had during that period in the mid-1970s.

*Q: When did the Thais pull their Tiger Division out of Vietnam? Also, there were troops in Lao uniforms, weren't there? During this period, was there a withdrawal to homeland Thailand?*

TOMSETH: The Tiger Division in Vietnam came out as part of the early 1973 peace agreement. In Laos, it was a little more complex. Again, sort of on the side, the Vietnamese agreement... The three factions in Laos formed a coalition government. They agreed among themselves that there would be a cessation of military operations. Basically what you had in Laos in terms of U.S. involvement, there was a royal army that was absolutely ineffectual. Then there was a paramilitary force that was nominally subordinate to the Royal Lao Army, but in effect was run by the CIA. They had recruited very extensively among Lao highlanders, particularly the Hmong ethnic group. A lot of these units were officered by Thai mercenaries, in effect, people who had been hired by the Agency in Thailand or were active duty Thai. army officers, in effect, seconded to this operation. Some of those people came home after 1973, but right up to 1975, there were still those kinds of people in these paramilitary units. As the Pathet Lao began its push in the late spring, summer, and fall of 1975, particularly after the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon, those people started coming out. They were withdrawn. That in turn sparked a massive refugee outflow. A lot of these, both lowland, but particularly highland Lao, who had provided the troops and their families and their families' families, began pouring into Thailand. At one point, you had upwards of 100,000 Lao refugees in camps in Thailand, many of them highlanders.

*Q: When did you leave to go to training?*

TOMSETH: I guess I checked out of EAP in the latter part of July and reported to FSI a couple of weeks later to begin language training.

*Q: Did you get involved in the early problems of boat people and refugees?*

TOMSETH: Boat people didn't start showing up until a little bit later. While I was still in EAP, the big refugee issue was the ones that we brought out as South Vietnam went down. It really wasn't until a few months later that you began to have Vietnamese arriving in Thailand who had crossed through Cambodia or Laos in some cases. That was a phenomenon that really didn't get underway until that latter part of 1975. By that point, I had left the bureau. Then a little bit later you started having this flow of boat people out of Vietnam as well.

*Q: What about the refugees coming to Thailand while you were there? Were we trying to do something about it?*

TOMSETH: The big flow of refugees while I was still there were from Laos. Yes, there was a lot of scrambling around - what do you do with these people? A bunch of them were put at one of the air bases that we had used only very little in northeastern Thailand, in Nonpom in Konkeng Province. Then there were some camps set up along the Lao border that were viewed initially as temporary, but several of them were there for nearly 20 years.

*Q: You had first Ingersoll and then Habib. Did you have much contact with these men?*

TOMSETH: I was a lowly middle-grade officer, a desk officer. But both of them were pretty good about coming out of the front office and visiting the country desk on a regular basis. Ingersoll had been ambassador in Japan, but he was a political appointee out of a business background. He was very interested in the Foreign Service and the State Department and how it worked. I found him a good assistant secretary. I think his tenure, while it was brief, was a very positive one. Phil Habib, of course, was one of the great men of the Foreign Service.

*Q: I would think that he would be so busy at other things... He always seemed to be in orbit, whether he was retired or not. I would think that there wouldn't be much contact concerning Thailand.*

TOMSETH: Well, not a lot, but he was interested. We had a particular Thailand issue that he had to deal with. This political appointee replacement for Leonard Unger, whose name was Bill Kintner... He had been an Army officer, retired, and then went to a think tank attached to the University of Pennsylvania and was headed by Robert Strausz-Hupé. Kintner was his deputy at the center. The story is (and I don't know whether it's true or not) that his connection to Henry Kissinger was that while he was at the center at the University of Pennsylvania, Kissinger was well-known, but nonetheless just an academic at Harvard, and Kintner actually introduced him to Nelson Rockefeller and Nelson Rockefeller then used Kissinger as a policy consultant. That was really his entree into Republican Party politics. Kintner was Kissinger's personal choice to go out to Thailand to replace Len Unger. Kintner wasn't a bad person. In the context of this student revolution that we had in Thailand, his instincts were correct. He saw this as an opportunity and

wanted to reach out to students and democratic forces generally. But he had a severe drinking problem. This became more and more of a problem in terms of dealing with the Thais, not that the Thais are prudish about drinking. They have plenty of people in high positions over the years who have had their own drinking problem, Surit being one of the more famous ones. But from the point of view of the bureau, it was becoming a problem. The event that precipitated doing something about it was the Marine Corps Ball in 1974. Kintner fell off the stage into the band. At that point, George Roberts was then country director for Thailand and Burma. George first went to Art Hummel, who was the deputy assistant secretary for Southeast Asia. Then he went with Art to Phil and said, "We have to get Kintner out of there. This is really becoming too much of a problem." Then the question was, who was going to go to Henry Kissinger. Phil took that on. He went to Kissinger and convinced him that a way had to be found to bring Kintner out of Bangkok as gracefully as possible and convinced Kissinger to do that.

*Q: You left this Thai concentration. For how many years had this been?*

TOMSETH: Depending on how you count it... I went into Thai language training in October of 1966 and out to Thailand in April, was there until June of 1971, came back to the desk in June of 1973, and was there until the end of July of 1975. So, it had been about seven of my first nine years in the Foreign Service.

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*Q: Were you getting information... How did Thailand play from our point of view? I know we have post interests up around the Burmese border, mainly for drug purposes. Were you getting good information?*

TOMSETH: I think you have to make a distinction between what we have done for decades from Thailand in terms of looking into Burma. That activity tends to be centered in Chiang Mai. Originally, it was very much key to the communist victory in China and the KMT (Kuomintang) remnant in northeastern Burma. Then over time, this shifted to a narcotics focus. Chiang Mai was a convenient place to do that. Certainly during the 1960s and 1970s, it was virtually impossible to get any kind of information on what was going on in northern Burma via Rangoon. The writ of the central government was occasional and we didn't have any kind of cooperative relationship with the central government in those days. So, what was done out of Chiang Mai was very critical to having a picture of what was going on in northeastern Burma.

The democracy movement in Burma that began in 1988 was very much a Rangoon-centered phenomenon. So, it was the embassy reporting in Rangoon that the Department, that Washington, relied upon to get a picture of what was happening in terms of the democracy movement, not what people based in Chiang Mai were reporting, which was very heavily focused on ethnic insurgencies and counternarcotics out of Chiang Mai.

**WILLIS J. SUTTER**  
**Junior Officer Training, USIS**

**Bangkok (1967-1971)**

**Regional Project Officer, USIS  
Bangkok (1984-1986)**

*Willis J. Sutter was born in New Jersey in 1936. He joined the Foreign Service in 1966 and served in Thailand, the Soviet Union, Laos, Zaire and Mauritania. Mr. Sutter was interviewed by Jack O'Brien in 1988.*

*Q: This is February 24, 1988. My name is Jack O'Brien and I am about to interview an old colleague and friend, Will Sutter, who has volunteered to participate in this oral history of USIA and its predecessors.*

*Will, let us begin with the obvious -- your full name, rank, serial number -- anything that identifies who you are, to the people who may not know you.*

SUTTER: My full name is Willis J. Sutter. I joined the Agency in June of 1966 and retired in May of 1986. So, I spent just about 21 years with the Agency.

My last overseas assignment was in Bangkok, Thailand, which was also my first overseas assignment. Jack O'Brien was my first PAO.

I think I would like to talk about some of the high points in my career. Bangkok was certainly one of those high points. At the time I got to Bangkok as a JOT, in April of 1967, I think Bangkok had about thirty -- no, it was more than that. We had about 13 branch posts, as I recall, Jack --

*Q: Yes.*

SUTTER: -- around the country. How many American officers did we have? Thirty some, as I recall --

*Q: I have lost count.*

SUTTER: -- or more than that. It was one of the biggest USIS operations in the world at the time. It was so large because of the massive American counterinsurgency program in Thailand, supporting the Thai's in their counterinsurgency program. Most of these USIS branch posts had to do with the Thai counterinsurgency program.

Basically, we were helping the Thai's in their information efforts out in the villages. Most of us BPAO's, who were young officers, spent -- I think it was -- fifteen days a month -- I think that was Bigg's requirement -- fifteen days a month --

*Q: Explain who Bigg is.*

SUTTER: Howard Biggerstaff was the Field Operations Officer at the time. He was the man who

had direct responsibility and supervision of these thirteen branch posts. I was up in the Nakhon Phanom on the Mekong River, right across the river from Laos. That was my first branch post. At that time, it was isolated and undeveloped province. The people were Lao speaking, not Thai speaking.

It was one of the centers of the insurgency. The insurgents infiltrated back and forth across the Mekong River into Nakhon Phanom and used Nakhon Phanom, both as a base of operations against the Thai and as a conduit into adjacent provinces in the northeast. The northeast was where the insurgency was really centered -- or, at least where the insurgency was hottest.

My job was to join up with local Thai officials and to basically back them up with technical equipment, movie projectors and so forth, and with publications and films that USIS had made in Thai, to be used in the local Thai officials information programs in the villages.

We used to call these trips MIT's (Mobile Information Teams). Teams consisted of the USIS BPAO and one or two of his Thai assistants, FSN's, and the Nai Amphur -- literally it means the boss of the Amphur, the basic organizational unit of the Thai province.

We do not have an equivalent in American government, although maybe county executive might be something close to it. Anyway, he was the chief executive at this lowest unit of Thai government. He had under him a whole array of officers who dealt with things like public health, rice production, security, tax collection, land -- recording land deeds, things like this.

The basic premise behind the MIT was that these officials had to get out into the villages and perform their service functions for the villages. This was so that the government could manifest itself out in those isolated villages where the communists roved about making propaganda against the government and winning a number of adherents to their cause.

*Q: It might be useful at this point, Will, to ask, why the Thai government was not able to conduct these programs by themselves? Why was American participation and support necessary?*

SUTTER: As I understood it, it was largely a lack of resources. They did not have enough money to buy jeeps, for example, or pay for the gas it would take to do a tour of four or five isolated villages within a week's period of time. They did not have the resources to print the publications and make the films that were thought to be so useful in this kind of work -- particularly the films. The publications were not that useful, simply because many of the villagers were illiterate and only picture postcards and posters and things like that could carry a message.

Films are very, very popular in Thailand. They had already been introduced by the medicine men -- that is -- people that used to go from village to village selling medicines. They used commercial films as a way of gathering a crowd. They showed them films to entertain them and then got up after the film was over to sell them different kinds of medicines.

The MIT was essentially a kind of take off from that. What we would do was go into the villages with Thai officials, show the film -- usually in front of Sala Wat in the temple yard, in the

village. Every village of any size has a temple surrounded by a large clear yard. We set our screen up there, showed films, then after the film, the Thai officials would get up and discuss different local issues with the people.

In many ways, it was like a political campaign. This is what I used to liken it to in my own mind, that basically the Thai officials were out there in those villages, conducting a political campaign against the communists insurgents.

*Q: Who made the films you discussed?*

SUTTER: The films were made, for the most part, by USIS, actually all of them were made by USIS. When I first started, we had just documentaries, all of which, of course, were translated into Thai. Most of them dealt with Thai issues. There were some documentaries about the United States, but most of them dealt with, for example - the royal family, or the SEATO Alliance, or different aspects of the Thai and American relationship.

Shortly after I became a BPAO, we got our first full length feature film made by USIS Bangkok, tapping Thai resources -- we used Thai movie stars, for example, some of whom were well known. The stories were basically stories of villagers and how they had suffered at the hands of the insurgents and, of course, how the Thai government, in the end, would come in and intervene and make the villagers' life better. That was the essential story line of these feature length films that we used. By the time I left, I think we had about four of them. All of which, again, were made and produced by USIS Bangkok.

*Q: Turn to the American participation in this, Will. Was it in your opinion, an advantage for the Thai villagers to see that there was an American presence working in cooperation with their own government? Did "Farang", the Thai word for foreigner, stand out in a way that seemed to cement US/Thai relations? How would you evaluate that?*

SUTTER: Well, I would say that our presence was positive rather than negative. Not necessarily because we were such experts in counterinsurgency or such marvelous diplomats, but we went out very consciously under the direction and the authority of the Nai Amphur, or whoever -- whatever Thai official was leading that particular trip. We always played down our own particular participation. We always went along as part of the team. The team was always led by a Thai. That was very clear.

Our presence there was simply to show that we were united with the Thais in this effort to improve the relationship between the government and its peoples out in these isolated villages. I never got the impression that the Thai villagers that we met ever thought that my particular presence indicated American supremacy or American direction of Thai efforts. I never got that sense.

I am quite sure, too, that if the people had thought that, the Thai officials would not have cooperated with us. They were very sensitive about that themselves. They would not have allowed us to go if they thought our presence was going to undercut their particular stance or their stature with their own people.

*Q: Tell me about the reports that you wrote after such a visit in the field.*

SUTTER: After each trip, we wrote a report of the trip. If I went along on a trip, then I wrote the report. If my information assistant (a Thai field post employee) was the person that made the trip, he would be required to write the report -- in English, which was then sent off to Bangkok.

Basically, the report stated the number of villages we had gone to, what problems we had seen there, what Thai officials had gone with us, what they had said, what kinds of things they had done, and any positive results of the trip. For example: one of the big problems among Thai villagers was that their land was never registered, so ownership of rice land was very unclear. This could be a problem at times. The reason it was not registered was because many of these villages were at least a day's walk away from the district office, where one had to go to register land. Most Thai farmers just did not bother to make the trip. Also, Thai officials are rather overbearing and most villagers preferred to steer clear of them. As a result, a lot of what we would take for granted as government services never got performed.

One of the things these trips would do, would be to bring the land officer around. He would help the people register their titles to their rice land, which I am sure gave them a great deal of peace of mind. It certainly clarified what could be a very troublesome issue at times in these villages.

Health officers would go out, of course, and provide inoculations to the people. The veterinarian always went out. He would go out and look at the water buffalo and other livestock of the farmers. If he detected incipient disease or whatever, he would give them advice. He used to go along with vaccinations and so forth. One of the standard procedures of the trip was to vaccinate the livestock against whatever particular diseases were prevalent at the time.

*Q: What were the overall purposes then, to summarize? Would it be to let the villagers know that their government was concerned about their welfare, their interests, whether it was health, agriculture and so on?*

SUTTER: Yes, basically, that was it -- to let the villagers know the government was there and interested in their welfare, and that it was going to "bring to them," which is a revolutionary attitude in Thai society, the services that they needed. [A principal communist insurgent propaganda theme was that the Thai Government cared nothing about the people -- were only interested in "feathering their own nests."] In the past, the people had always gone to the government when they needed services. But, in this particular instance, the government was taking the services out to the people. I suppose our instrumental role there was to provide a lot of technical support that the Thai's lacked, as a kind of encouragement for them to do something they were beginning to see they needed to do in any case.

Earlier I likened these trips to political campaigns. I always liked that metaphor, because it always seemed to me the most successful trips were always the trips that were conducted by a particularly charismatic Thai official, whether it happened to be the Nai Amphur himself or his deputy or some other official in charge of the trip. What really made it work was, when he would get up there on the steps of the Sala Wat on the temple compound. It was a little guest pavilion

that every temple has for visitors.

He would get up there and give his little speech, either before or after the film. It was at that point, I always thought, that the real nexus between the central government in Bangkok, represented by this particular officer, and those villages came to life. I have always believed that politics is more a question of spirit rather than material. The villagers certainly appreciated the medical support they were getting and the registration of deeds and all the other services that were being performed.

They appreciated those. But, what they really wanted to feel was that they were part of something bigger than themselves. I call them charismatic, that may not be the right word. But, it was always these officials who were able to impart that particular spiritual dimension, that I always thought made for a successful trip.

*Q: Now, when you were out there you, of course, were cut off from communication from Bangkok and elsewhere. Did you listen to the Voice of America when you were in the field?*

SUTTER: We listened to the Voice of America, but we also listened to a radio station that had received a great deal of material support from USIS Bangkok. It was a radio station called 909, located in a provincial town called Sakol Nakhon. This was a medium wave station as I recall, Jack. The idea was to give the northeasterners, who were again Lao speaking, not central Thai speaking people, their own radio station. All the announcers on this station were Lao speakers, Issan, is the name of the dialect spoken in that part of Thailand. Issan is a dialect of Lao. Considerably different from central Thai.

*Q: Was that station at Sakol Nakhon or Khon Kaen.*

SUTTER: No, that was a Sakol Nakhon. It was at Sakol Nakhon.

*Q: There was one at Khon Kaen at one time also.*

SUTTER: That was a government station. That was the public relations department of the Thai government. They built the station, first it was a radio station. Now, of course, there is a television station there as well. The station I am talking about 909 or Khu Sung Khno, as the Thai's used to call it, was based in Sakol Nakhon. We had about two or three American advisors from USIS attached to the station to help them get on their feet.

That station was quite popular with the people in the villages. We listened to it as much as we did VOA. That was the station that was really aimed at these villagers. The VOA, of course, was aimed at a broader Thai audience. This station was aimed right at the villagers in the northeast, where we were working, and we used to listen to that a lot. It was quite popular. They had one announcer there who was an army major -- as I recall. I cannot remember his name, but he was very, very popular. Occasionally he would go on these MIT's as a kind of accompanying personality. Whenever he did go, the reaction to him was the same as our "teenyboppers'" reaction to Elvis Presley's presence at a concert.

I would like to emphasize that a lot of these villages we went to were "really" isolated. I mean, these villages were back in the 13th century. Very few of them had -- there were no televisions at all. There was no electricity. They were living in a way that any Thai in the 13th century would have recognized, easily recognized, and been comfortable with. I think it was this disparity between the two worlds represented, you know, this earlier age of Thai civilization coming into contact with the more modern civilization of Bangkok represented by the Thai officials that were coming with us and, of course, ourselves and the films and vehicles and all that drew large audiences.

I remember one night, we were showing films in the temple compound there. There was one little guy who, before the film show, sat with us and had supper with us and was drinking the local brew, called Mekong. Apparently this old guy traveled around quite a bit. He had been out of the village several times. He may even have been in the army at one time. I am not quite sure about that. But anyway, he was real sophisticated as far as the rest of the villagers were concerned. He was telling all these tall tales of travel and so forth, and letting everybody know how sophisticated he was.

When we showed the films, this old guy sat on the steps and stared at the projector all night long, through the entire film show. At the end of the film show, he announced in a voice that everybody could hear, "I figured out where you get those pictures from, but what I cannot figure out is where you hid that little guy with the voice."

*Q: (laughter) Out of a month, you would have how many days on MIT on the average?*

SUTTER: We were required to spend fifteen days, fifteen working days traveling. That was a requirement that Howard Bigger- staff, no doubt with the support of Jack O'Brien and concurrence of Jack O'Brien levied on us. Actually, it was not any hardship on us, because it was such an interesting experience to travel back into those villages. The Thai officials with whom we worked were, in many cases, very interesting people. The work we were doing we thought was very worthwhile, so there was not really a lot of hardship involved.

*Q: The Thai officials would set the time and schedule the location? Correct?*

SUTTER: Yes. They would set what villages they wanted to go to, how long they wanted to spend there and so forth. It depended on the Thai official. Some of these officials had done MIT's already, or had good ideas of their own -- they would simply come to us and say, "Look, I want to go to so-and-so, so-and-so, and so-and-so, and these are the things I want to do out there, can you come along and can you help us with films and vehicle support?"

Other times, we would go to them, particularly if there was a new Nai Amphur who had not been in that part of the country before. We might go to them, introduce ourselves, tell him what kinds of things we had done in his district, what kinds of support we were willing and ready to give him and gently suggest that he might want to visit a couple of villages. We knew villages ourselves that might be trouble spots and we thought might be appropriate places for him to begin his experience.

So it depended on the Thai official. In no case could we tell them they had to go. There was no suggestion that we were directing things. We basically were working as a catalyst. Whether we were a very active catalyst or a passive catalyst depended a lot on the kind of Thai official with whom we were dealing. Basically, it was their expertise and their interest that made the thing go. We just simply gave them more means to do the things they themselves were convinced they had to do.

*Q: Did you ever receive any threats or warnings?*

SUTTER: I never got any direct threats. I remember, I guess, after I had been in Nakhon Phanom about nine months or so, I met a defector. That is, a man who had been the chief of the military arm of an insurgent band in Amphur Muktuhan, which is one of the better known Amphur's in the Province of Nakhon Phanom. It is the site of a chedhiwat that apparently goes back to Khmer times.

This man had been the military chief of the band located in the Don Yen forest, which was south of the district seat along the Mekong River. It was a particularly hot spot for the insurgents. I think it was one of the main highways they used in sending people out of Thailand to North Vietnam for training and then infiltrating them back into the country.

This particular guy had conducted an assassination attempt against the district office at the time. It almost killed the district officer. He was severely wounded and his jeep was all shot up, but he survived. Many, many months later this man, I forget his name now, defected to the Thai government. He came in -- I forget how he came in -- I think he came in on his own actually.

Jack had asked me if there were ever any threats against my life. No, there were no threats that I knew about, but, in talking to this defector, I asked him if he had seen any Americans out in the bush. First, he told me they used to lay an ambush along this one trail that went into the Don Yen forest. The trail we would have had to use going into that area. He said they watched it all the time. I asked him if he had ever seen any Americans down there?

He said, "Yes," and I asked him, "Who?" He pointed to me. He said they had seen me go by several times, past their little ambush there. I said, "How come you did not shoot?" He said, "Well, first of all, our policy was not to shoot Americans, but, secondly, we never shot at anybody unless we had explicit orders and the orders had to contain the name of the person that we were after, where they could be found and when they could be found at that spot." If those three conditions were not present, they would not open fire.

Just as an interesting aside, I asked him, "Did the Amphur know you were the guy who shot him up?" He said, "Yes, I told him." I said, "What did the Nai Amphur say?" He said, "He did not say anything. He took his 45 out -- at this time all Nai Amphur were armed with 45's or 38's or whatever -- laid it on the table between us and he said, 'That does not matter. I am going to ask you a lot of questions and you tell me the truth and it will be okay. If you do not tell me the truth, I am going to blow your fuckin' brains out.'" (laughter) I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I told the truth." (laughter)

*Q: Any other anecdotes that come to mind?*

SUTTER: Just one other story that I think illustrates the isolation of many of the villages into which we went.

Early on in my tour there in Nakhon Phanom, we were visiting a very isolated village. I was with my Thai information assistant. As the custom was when you first got to a village, you got together with the village head man and some of his principal associates and they conducted a tour around the village and showed you all the high spots. Sometimes, if it was a large group, such as the one that I was with this time, we would split up and one group would go off with the Nai Amphur, the head man, and another group would go off with one of his assistants.

After we had done our tours, we got back together and my assistant came to me and said that a bunch of old ladies in a part of the village where he had come up to him and said they heard there was a farang in the village. He said, "Yes, that was right." They said, "Did you know him?" He said, "Yes, I know him." They said, "What is he like?" So he described me. At the end of his description he said, "And, he speaks Thai." Which he thought was a matter of some distinction, I suppose. This old lady just looked at him and said, "Well, what else would he speak?" (laughter) I think it illustrates the point that these were very isolated villages.

*Q: Looking back on that period, Will, would you say that you were satisfied by the efforts made by both the Americans and the Thai's in trying to combat terrorism, communism in the area?*

SUTTER: I think so, yes. We had a lot of questions at the time that we did this, the BPAO's among ourselves. We were all young and feisty. I think we criticized as much as we applauded, if not more. One of the questions we always asked ourselves was, "What expertise did we have to be doing this particular work?" I think the answer was that we did not need a lot of expertise. What we needed to do was to make our technical resources available to Thai officials who had the expertise. As I said earlier, when the trips worked, they worked very well.

I suppose the bottom line and the real answer to your question is that the insurgency in northeastern Thailand eventually died. [The insurgency did die. One of the reasons was that the Chinese Government had rather extensively supported it in the period covered by this interview. As the Vietnam war wound down, and the US reopened relationships with China, that support stopped. The value of the USIS supported village program was that it helped contain the spread and success of the insurgency until larger political considerations regarding China, the Soviet Union and Vietnam led to cessation of external support.] The Thai government did manage to contain it and finally tamp it down. I revisited that area, I guess about fifteen years after the events I am recounting here. It has considerably changed from what it was back then. The attitudes of the people are much different from what they were.

In those days, the people really were isolated and alienated from the central government. Now, there is a much closer relationship between the people of northeastern Thailand and their government in Bangkok. A great deal of development has occurred. In those villages that I used to go into it would be rare then to find two or three short wave radios. Now, everybody has radios and many, many homes have television sets. So there are a lot of changes.

Yes, I think those trips did a lot of good. Again, not because we were so smart, but, we did the wise thing. We had the goods, the Thai's needed the goods and we made the goods available to them.

*Q: We have covered, Will, your -- we will call it -- Thailand One, we have covered Moscow, two posts in Africa and Vientiane (Laos). Do you want to turn back to Thailand Two?*

SUTTER: Well, I suppose basically, the only real interest is in the comparisons I was able to make between my first and my second tours.

*Q: Let's get some dates on that.*

SUTTER: My first tour in Thailand was from 1967 to 1971. I returned there in December of 1984 and left in December of 1986.

*Q: What was your assignment in the second tour?*

SUTTER: The second tour, I was there as a regional project officer. The regional project office supported the cultural and information operations of our Embassy in Vientiane, Laos. When I got there, I found out there were not very many cultural and information operations in Laos and that my job was really rather very empty. Since I had in-country experience, I then helped the post on a number of in-country projects mostly up in the northeast where most of my Thai experience -- previous Thai experience -- had been.

From the point of view of an Agency assignment, it was not very interesting. The only interests, of course, was the comparisons that I was able to make, both between USIS Bangkok then and USIS Bangkok that I had known in my first tour and the Thailand that I had know in the 1960's and Thailand that I had seen again in the 1980's

USIS Thailand was considerably different. When I got to Bangkok in 1967, there was a big counterinsurgency operation, 13 branch posts, well over 30 American officers, really a humming compound down there on South Sathorn Road in Bangkok. It was really, really an exciting place to be. I suppose some of my fondest agency memories come from those days. Some of my deepest impressions about the Agency and what it is, what it is about, and the quality of the people that were in it, also are rooted back in that first tour in Thailand.

When I got back to Thailand in the mid 1980's, I found what I again will call an orthodox USIS program. High quality program, under a very high quality PAO, but the assignment was not the same. You really cannot go home, I guess, as Thomas Wolfe says. You really cannot do it. I was not really trying to go home. I mean, my orientation was toward Laos, not so much Thailand.

But, anyway, I spent a lot of time in the northeast, revisiting places in which I spent my early career in. There were great differences -- economic improvement, cultural differences. The region was firmly integrated into the national politics, which it had not been when I was there in the 1960's. There was no question now about its loyalty. I would like to think that some of those

changes were, at least, helped along by some of the stuff that I and my colleagues had done back in the late 1960's.

I do not want to say too much for what we did back in the late 1960's, but it was, it was a great operation, filled with enthusiasm, good will -- more enthusiasm than skill at times, I am afraid. But, nonetheless, you know, I think our enthusiasm caught on to the Thai's. I think we convinced them that we really were interested in helping them to better govern their country and that we really did not have ulterior reasons. Obviously, of course, we wanted Thailand as a base in the war against Vietnam, but beyond that, the Thai's were persuaded, I think, that we were really true friends. That was, and is, a big achievement.

I think that is what the Agency is all about, to convince America's friends around the world that we really are true friends, which is not to say that we do not have other interests as well. We do, of course. It is stupid to think otherwise. But, nonetheless, we do have a sincere friendship for them. We mean well for ourselves and for them. This came through, I think, in our relationship with the Thai's back then.

**WILLIAM N. STOKES**  
**Counselor for Mission Coordination**  
**Bangkok (1967-1973)**

*William N. Stokes attended the University of Chicago and Columbia University specializing in mathematics and physics during World War II. After joining the Foreign Service in 1946, Mr. Stokes served in China, Japan, Morocco, Tunisia, Thailand, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by William Knight in 1992.*

*Q: So that took you to '51 more or less?*

STOKES: '52, yes and I'm trying to center this around China and not talk about career movements. But I then went to Thailand as head of the counterinsurgency effort and was dealing with a manifestation of Maoism because the insurgency was Chinese sponsored, had Mao badges and Mao books and all of that so that was another seven years of study.

One of the most interesting and ultimately significant assignments for me was to plan the response from the Air Force's point of view of the Thai government's request that a United States helicopter fleet of 100 Hueys and pilots be sent to Northeast Thailand to help the Thai government deal with the Chinese sponsored insurgency in Northeast Thailand, which coincidentally was just in the, not so coincidentally, but was in the same vicinity as the place where our air base network in Thailand was being located - near the Lao frontier which is an easy reach of the Ho Chi Minh trail. At this time the State Department manifested the beginning of what was to be the core of what I'd like to talk about. An unwillingness to see reproduced in Thailand the same kind of direct involvement and direct assumption of military responsibility that the United States was conducting then in Vietnam.

*Q: US military?*

STOKES: US military. And the Thai request was in fact for a beginning of a direct US military involvement in Thailand against a domestic threat. So at the same time the US military wanted to be certain that its bases were secure and it was perfectly ready to use its own military force for this purpose, and if the Thai would invite us, so much the better. In fact, there were many low level indications that I came across that the Thai and the US military saw eye to eye on this issue. Whether the inspiration for the idea was purely Thai or a mixed Thai/US military agreement, that was the thing that the Thai should ask the US political leadership, I think is an open question.

*Q: What was the basis of the junior officer's opinion that in Thailand the military should not ideally take over as in Vietnam?*

STOKES: Well I think I've tried to ask who in the US State Department was one of the principal sources for this kind of what I consider trenchant and significant and wise points of view. Leonard Unger who was Ambassador in Thailand through most of this time, and DCM before, told me it was Marshall Green and I planned to ask Marshall about this part of the piece that I'm trying to do on the Thai insurgency. I should say at this point that the Thai insurgency unquestionably was a Maoist insurgency inspired by Mao Zedong and his followers. The insurgents were trained in China, they were Chinese or Sino-Thai. The little red book was everywhere in their camps, and pictures of Mao were worn on caps by the insurgents when they wore uniforms or insignia of any kind, and the insurgency was supported from China by a clandestine radio broadcast that put the whole thing clearly in a Maoist context. So this is really not an arguable point. The insurgency was an eternal manifestation of Mao's continental policies and the way he saw it, the Vietnamese were up again to their historical tricks of creating areas of uncertainty on China's southeast frontier and China needed participation in that area to stem the increase of Vietnamese influence. The Mekong River and Northeast Thailand was clearly the frontier of Vietnamese expansion. Ho Chi Minh, by the way, lived for many years on the Thai bank of the Mekong, in Mekong Phnom which was the key air base for fighting for interdicting the Ho Chi Minh trail.

*Q: When we come down to the present I want to have you cover that same point about the present situation in Cambodia, the Chinese position towards the Pathet Lao and the rest of it. But continue.*

STOKES: So my perspective on this and I'm trying here to concentrate not so much on what I think as what I immediately saw and the Air Force asked me to be the action officer for this whole request of the Thai for the helicopter fleet. I had served in the Air Force during World War II as you recall from the earlier tape in the Air Weather Service and many of the colonels who led the Air Weather Service and who were my immediate superiors had become lieutenants and four star generals in the Air Force and were the Air Force leadership. So although I was a simple exchange officer I was on close terms with people who were in the high stratosphere and otherwise untouchable by people I normally dealt with on the planning staff. The Air Force did not participate with the Army and Navy and the Marines in thinking always in terms of direct US involvement. The Air Force was the exposed service in Thailand and would much prefer to have been protected by means that did not involve combat operations on the perimeter of their bases.

The department succeeded in obtaining an agreement within the US government on a compromised reply to the Thai request for the helicopters - that we would provide the helicopter capacity but it would be to exclude actual combat operations. It would simply ferry Thai officials and groups into certain areas

*Q: US pilots and crews?*

STOKES: US pilots and crews, and it would only be for a period of 120 days and on the condition that the Thai nominated a sufficient number of pilots and ground crew personnel for training at Fort Rucker in the United States, fly and maintain the aircraft, following which the US pilots would be withdrawn, and all US personnel would be withdrawn from the insurgency and the aircraft would be turned over to the Thai.

*Q: That's very interesting, we were reluctant then. We were not reaching out to grasp this?*

STOKES: I think the US Army that did the training would have been very happy to be directly involved, but Marshall Green, who at that time I believe was already Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, and Mr. Unger apparently had different views. In any case, the State Department's voice was heard in the US government in the decision to arrive at a compromise that we would provide the airlift but for a brief period only. And it became the fundamental idea that what's happening in Thailand is a Thai government responsibility, we would help them but not take on their responsibilities.

*Q: Are we still in 64?*

STOKES: 1964/65, the training I think was in early '65. I beg your pardon, in late '65 I was assigned to the Air Force planning staff so that this must have been in '66. On this assignment I went out to Thailand to be present at the ceremony in which the Thai pilots came back from the United States and there was a turnover of the helicopters and the responsibility to the Thai. I went out there early and flew on several of the missions of transportation to make certain that the condition that there was no combat hazard involved. This whole ceremony occurred at the Mekong Phnom air base which is right on the Mekong, you can see Laos from there and the Ho Chi Minh trail was barely over the horizon.

*Q: So the Thai base already existed, it did not involve building a new base?*

STOKES: There was a rudimentary base there. The US bases in Thailand represented a massive construction effort. Astounding. From little airfields were made monstrous bases.

*Q: But that was later.*

STOKES: No, this was at the time, remember my first duty was to develop the base rights and we began building B-52 basin U Tapao where there had been nothing, and greatly expanding the flights. See the US Air Force was flying into bombardment missions in Vietnam from these bases by late 1964. So when I went out to Thailand it was to an established US base from which there were combat operations in Vietnam plus helicopter missions in Thailand in support of the

Thai, but transport missions, not combat missions. These were unarmed helicopters, by the way, no mini guns or anything

*Q: So it was involvement in internal conflict that was the question?*

STOKES: That was the issue. The involvement in Vietnam was already heavy, so in any case the main point I'm trying to report here is the way in which China was trying to manifest it's Maoist continental thrust through the insurgency in Thailand and the way our reaction to it was firm but guarded so that from the Chinese point of view we were not involved in a resumption of the direct hostilities with China. We were both acting through surrogates, so to speak, behind surrogates.

*Q: Was that part of the deliberate plan, or intention or wish that we not sidle into an open conflict there with China?*

STOKES: My impression is that the overriding objective was that we would not expand to Thailand Vietnam-type hostilities. That it was not necessary or appropriate or useful for our purposes. Much lower down on the scale and related to it was that we did not want to be directly involved in hostilities, not only with the Viet Cong or North Vietnam, but with China either if this did not involve damage to a profound interest or a major US interest. Moreover there was the wise and far-seeing historically supported or proven later belief that the best way to deal with the insurgency in Thailand was to help the Thai government focus on its own inadequacies and the inappropriateness of its policies in the effected rural areas and by the making of Thailand, transforming it from a city state based around Bangkok, to a nation state that incorporated effective presence in its outlying areas, especially its frontiers with Laos and China and Burma, that there would emerge a linchpin against the domino theory. In fact that is in the hindsight now of 15 or more years, it's 25 years rather, it is perfectly evident that Thailand has fulfilled all those hopes and objectives. The Thai economy has prospered. The thrust of our policy was to help them develop an academy to train their district officers, help them develop a system to build roads into these areas, to help them with modernizing the police, creating adequate compensations and rewards so that the systemic exploitation of the local economy would not be really necessary, that there were alternatives to it. During this ceremony of the turnover to the Thai there was also present Ambassador Graham Martin who, while seen as pro-military, was really much closer to the US Air Force than to any of the other branches. He had been faculty advisor at the Air War College at Maxwell Field, and developed a lot of those relationships. So that between the chief of staff of the Air Force and the air planning staff and Ambassador Martin and Marshall Green and the State Department there was a kind of community of a weight that could deal with the hard-liners and CIA and the US Army and the Marine Corps after I returned from Thailand.

*Q: Bill, in that reference, what were the particular battles that were being fought with these alignments of people.*

STOKES: I'd like to come to that, may I, because I'm coming to how I went to Thailand and then I can tell you about things I know first hand about. I came back and was sitting at my desk in the Pentagon and I picked up the phone there was a very soft voice, I could hardly make out, best as

I could hear in all that noise, he says (muffled) "Stokes, this is Graham Martin."

*Q: The spider.*

STOKES: And I didn't know what to say, I thought someone must be pulling my leg and I didn't want to say "Who?", but I managed somehow to keep my equanimity and he said I would like you to come out to Thailand and head our counterinsurgency program. He said Peer DeSilva from the agency is heading it now but he is not well and we need to be thinking about ultimately a successor. And I told him I'd be delighted to do that. In fact I was blown off my feet because I didn't expect anything like that. The job is one that had to be approved by the Joint Chiefs and the CIA and the national security apparatus and a foreign service officer was not really seen as a candidate. In any case Graham Martin in the mean time was transferred, Leonard Unger was named and he decided that he would keep the assignment and that I would work for him in the same capacity that Graham Martin did.

*Q: So Graham Martin was in Bangkok at that stage?*

STOKES: Yes, in Bangkok.

*Q: It was later that he went to....*

STOKES: Yes, as a result of his transfer, he was succeeded by Leonard Unger. When I came out to Bangkok to work in this capacity, it was sometime before it was finally realized that. That's unimportant here. The State Department and the office of counterinsurgency in the embassy was determined to pursue the policy earlier identified in connection with the helicopters, that there would be no direct US involvement, that we would help strengthen the Thai and everywhere manifest the Thai responsibility. Before I get deeply into that I want to tie up this whole question of what perspective did all this offer on what was happening in China and the Chinese leadership. The Maoist insurgency in Thailand was as I say a pluperfect Maoist operation from beginning to end. It did not represent a desire for an opening to the outside which is the tendency that we had first encountered and we were looking for a revival of. So the fact that the insurgency was frustrated at every turn successfully by the American policy as the Thai successfully carried it out, was in fact a severe frustration of the Maoist tendency in China, and represented a on a much smaller scale of course. But it was another one of the series of failures of Maoist continental thought to further Chinese aims. So that by 1976 when Mao had died and Deng Xiaoping had come into power, in the whole array of things, this failure of Maoism was one of the many, many reasons that led Deng to feel that the internationalist point of view, in fact the *motus vivendi* with the United States, was one that would better serve China's interest than what Mao had been pursuing.

*Q: I would assume that this cockpit was one of the major fields of Chinese interest and activity in the foreign field at that time?*

STOKES: Yes, I think so, because remember the continentalist concept - Mao was most interested in things to which he had a direct land connection. And its important to remember that Thailand has an intimate historical connection with China. The Thai are originally from the

Yellow River Basin and there are more than a million Thai residents in China right now. They are one of the most significant minorities in Thailand.

*Q: But they don't have any citizenship in China, they're not Thai citizens in China?*

STOKES: No, they're regarded strictly as Chinese, absolutely. And of course the main Thai exodus was back to the 13th and 14th century. But in China that's not ancient history. Its relatively modern history.

*Q: Do they still speak Thai?*

STOKES: In China, oh yes, absolutely. And on top of that, almost the entire commercial life of Thailand which is thriving is ethnic Chinese who have come to Thailand by way of the sea from Fujian and Swatow and the South China ports, and have settled in Thailand and intermarried. And the Thai, unlike the other southeast Asian nations, have accepted the Chinese providing that they follow three main themes, that is they will revere the king and speak Thai, use Thai language publicly and will support or acknowledge or at least make some arrangement with the Buddhist religion. The Chinese have done this. As a result you don't have any of the pogroms at all in fact the Thai king is himself a Sino-Thai in that General Taksin that overthrew the Burmese invaders and whose son was the first monarch in the Chakri Dynasty, General Taksin was half Chinese. So that's simply a symbol of all this. So that Thailand represents for China not merely another southeast Asian state, it is a place where it can be seen by the Chinese as one of its most important overseas Chinese areas of interest, so that the insurgency there represented rather big and interesting stakes.

*Q: The Chinese are not excluded from some areas of activity in Thailand as they are in the Philippines?*

STOKES: No they're members of the cabinet...

*Q: I know in the Philippines, because of this, overseas, Chinese have almost a monopoly of retailing. They are by law excluded from retailing in the Philippines. Noting like that in Thailand?*

STOKES: On Chinese New Year, which has nothing to do whatever with any Thai holiday, every store is shut. The city shuts down commercially and no issue is made of that. That's the way the Thai succeed, they don't make issues where issues are not necessary. I'd like now to come to your very interesting question of whether and how this military desire for direct involvement manifested itself. One day, a report was received that there would be a Viet Cong attack on the US air bases and in fact the attack did manifest itself in a preliminary way by confirmed intelligence that it was coming, missproduced a tremendous flap. We had 41,000 Americans in these bases at this time and crucial operational interests. The Joint Chiefs wanted to sent a regimental combat team of marines to guard in the Mekong Phnom especially which was to be the target for this attack. Remember, it's just across the river from Laos, practically on the river. This would have signaled the end of the department's policy because one thing leads to another. You know how those things go. Use of force provokes force then there's no way to stop

it, you're down the ski slope. So the Ambassador, with the support of the department...

*Q: Unger, now?*

STOKES: Yes, put his foot down and said, absolutely not, and he said that he was constituting a committee that would consist of myself as chairman and the Air Force Commander and the Army Commander as members. We called on the Thai Chief of Staff of the armed forces, General Surakut, and the Ambassador went to the Prime Minister Thanom and made it clear that this would be a Thai responsibility and that it was a grave and imminent danger and that we wanted to know what they needed to do this properly.

*Q: Before the Ambassador made that approach I would assume that in Washington this had probably gone to the President for final approval that there would not be the regimental combat team?*

STOKES: I would imagine that it went to the Secretary of Defense at least. And that if I have no knowledge that the Joint Chiefs exercised their corporate right to go directly to the President over the Secretary of Defense's head. But remember, in all of this the Air Force chief of staff would be unwilling to override the Ambassador.

*Q: The Ambassador couldn't have taken that position without Washington approval?*

STOKES: That's right, and remember the CIA was very much opposed, and USIA and USAID, to involvement of the US military there. So you had a shifting coalition behind positions but it was successfully orchestrated by the State Department. On the other hand there was great danger in this because if a Viet Cong raid had succeeded in a crippling attack on one of the bases like their successful crippling attacks on the US bases in Vietnam they would have been murdered over this and hell to pay. So we really worked tooth and nail day and night and everything else to get the Thai the radio and signal equipment that they felt was necessary to do this and to make sure that the Thai were doing an effective job because the key idea was intelligence. That's what we wanted to know, if we knew when the attack was coming and we were ready for it inside the wire. To give you an idea of the degree of control, I had a red telephone by my bedside and no US armed personnel could do anything outside the wire of the base without approval over this phone. So there were very trenchant and stringent rules to follow and the phone would ring often during the night with reports of this threat or that threat or something else, it was like a combat control center.

*Q: Did you have a coterie of officers with you?*

STOKES: Yes, military, CIA, USAID, USIA, and other foreign service officers, many who have gone on to be key people including Kelly. So to come back to this crucial point, though, the Thai police notified Thai villagers that they were apprehensive about Vietnamese coming across the river and urged them to inform the police if they had any idea about this or saw anything. And in the old days, the old ways the Thai police behaved they would never would have been told anything by the peasants, but as the result of the years of effort to try to clean up the Thai police operation and to create a rapport with the people there was some hope that this would be done.

And one day a Thai village head man called the Thai police on one of the radios that we had provided to village head men and said my villagers have seen a group of 60 people heavily armed and speaking Vietnamese and going on the road in such and such direction toward one of the bases. The Thai informed us immediately, the base was put on red alert, and that night at 2:00 am one of the sensors in the outer perimeter was tripped and with night vision an American MP saw someone cutting the wire and fired a rocket propelled grenade because they were authorized, once there was immediate intrusion, and we had authorized the red alert, which gave them the right to shoot as luck would have it the first rocket propelled grenade fired by the MP hit in the chest the Vietnamese leader who was carrying what must have been about 100 pounds of plastic explosives and there was the most horrendous explosion which wiped out the Viet Cong invaders.

*Q: Really, en masse, the whole group?*

STOKES: Well, maybe not in that one shot, but then once that went up, then everything opened up from within the base. This was the first of eight Viet Cong efforts to attack various US air bases.

*Q: So the Thai really did not succeed in blocking that particular infiltration.*

STOKES: No, but you see the distances are so short you could hardly expect it. And that really wasn't what we were seeking so much. We didn't want massive Thai shield. And this leads to all kinds of other issues about what was happening in Laos and where was the Thai Army and what was a Thai Army and what was a Lao, or things like this, also, but the point was here is that there were 8 major Viet Cong attacks in force on US airbases including the B52 base at U Te Pao . And in the entire war not a single American was injured not a single combat aircraft was put out of operation and this is an astounding record and a wonderful vindication of the policy. There were many other vindications of the policy and just last January before this I was in Thailand and I had dinner at the home of the man who had been supreme commander of the Thai Armed forces and who was the general that I was advising in this insurgency suppression headquarters at the years we're talking about and we reviewed what had happened and it was just a litany of successes of this indirect policy culminating in where Thailand is today, by the way. So that you contrast this with the domino theory which was erected to explain why we should fight in Vietnam because everything else would just fall automatically if Vietnam fell. This was the rebuttal of it and the rebuttal of it was due, I think, to this kind of far-seeing policy and its rigorous implementation by Leonard Unger and Marshall Green and the support of the Air Force. And it was the Air Force that stood to lose most by this of course because it was Air Force assets that were at risk.

*Q: Bill, could you briefly cover the personal aspects of performing this role? How did you, in day to day form, interact with the Thai officials in pursuit of these policies?*

STOKES: My official role was as advisor to the Thai ministry of the interior. The Minister of the Interior of that time, General Praphas Charusathien , was in fact the strong man of the regime and Vice Premier. The Premier was General Thanom Kittikachorn but Praphas was the man who controlled the armed forces, the police and the governors.

*Q: Armed forces, too?*

STOKES: Yes. He was also minister of defense, you know the real power there was Praphas. And I had a very good relationship with Praphas and I was advisor to him in his role as Minister of the Interior which included control of the police and governors. The Thai invited me to attend meetings of the governors in the outlying areas addressed to dealing with the insurgency. I frequented police headquarters. If we had advice to give them about police organization or police armament or tactics training I could freely go to the Thai at any level and discuss it. The Thai were not at all closed to that.

*Q: Your office was in the embassy?*

STOKES: It was in the embassy.

*Q: You would you go down and see this power, this person, or would you typically, day to day, be going to see members of his staff on particular problems. Praphas Charusathien his name is?*

STOKES: Praphas Charusathien, the strong man of the regime.

*Q: I'm just asking a question of the simple procedures of performing your role in this scene.*

STOKES: The most regular and obvious role in relating to the Thai was with what was called the Communist Suppression Operations Command under Lieutenant General Sayud Kurdpong which was a Thai coordinating agency of the civil police and military elements engaged in the counterinsurgency efforts or in supporting it. He had an interagency staff like I had and he would have his meetings and we would have our internal meetings. The way we were organized within the embassy was that I had an interagency staff of people delegated from the US Army and Air Force and CIA and USAID and USIA and foreign service officers.

*Q: Full time with you?*

STOKES: Yes, and then we could draw upon the consulates for people in the field as necessary.

*Q: You said that staff was about 40?*

STOKES: Yes, and we had a big conference room with audio visual systems and everything and the whole wing of the embassy all dedicated to this purpose.

*Q: So they were physically together, you had a section of the embassy?*

STOKES: Yes. And we developed the guidelines for the conduct with respect to the insurgency by all American personnel. The central theme of it was don't just do something, stand there. In other words, it absolutely forbade Americans, if they saw or encountered some kind of emergency, from taking steps to deal with it. They were to observe and see how the Thai dealt with it. If it was going wrong then they would just later report and that would be a bad object

lesson and we would modify our advice to the Thai accordingly.

*Q: Were the Thai trying to involve Americans?*

STOKES: I come to a key point on that in just a moment but I should finish your earlier question. In addition to dealing with General Sayud which was like a foreign ministry, a point of formal contact that might shield you or prevent you from dealing with the rest of the Thai government. It didn't work that way, at least in my experience, because I was invited by the Thai governors to attend meetings that they held in the affected areas to consider their policy. I had the ready access to the Thai police headquarters, and very often advice or suggestions I was making that were not entirely easy to take but it was very open. They recognized that we were well intentioned, that they were in charge, that it was their responsibility. And so I give them a lot of credit, quite open to what we had to say. I remember we often had outings together and just friendly get togethers with key people in the Thai Ministry of the Interior which is normally a very closed organization to outsiders in any country including Thailand.

*Q: This was all in English?*

STOKES: For me, yes. We had many young people who spoke Thai but English is the Thai's second language. I never encountered any problem of communication. I tried to study Thai just for the cultural insights and so on, and even people who spoke beautiful Thai like Al Francis never really used Thai in these general meetings. They might personally, I'm sure it was valuable, I don't want to say that it isn't. It was not a barrier.

*Q: A local police chief would speak English?*

STOKES: Yes. A district officer or anything else. The Thai university has English courses. Not everywhere. There was great antipathy for the Thai formal military, that is the Thai Army which was the core of the strength of that government and is still a dominant figure in Thai politics today. Thai Army is an institution that has brought political significance to Thailand. It represents the guarantor of the Thai people, vis a vis Chinese and other influence. It's the core of the ethnic Thai strength in the country. But I would frequently call directly on the Chief of Staff of the Army and have a regular review with him of what was going on in the insurgency. And one day the Chief of Staff of the Army hit me between the eyes, he said "Mr. Stokes, you know very well that one of the key strongholds of the insurgency is among the mountain tribes and it's on the key ridges of these high mountains that they have their bases and your B-52s are flying back from Vietnam anyway, why couldn't they, when they have extra bombs, just dump them on these mountain tops?" It took my breath away because it is so contrary to all elements of our policy I wondered why Surakut, who's a smart man, would have developed this. The military people on the Joint Staff were really very loyal to the idea of what we were trying to do and one of them told me that he had reliable evidence that the US commander of MAC-Thai the Army general had put this idea in General Surakut mind and Surakut had relayed it as a request to us. Although I didn't usually, the...

*Q: You learned that later?*

STOKES: No, after coming back. And after we had reported it I went immediately to the Ambassador Leonard Unger with this information because it represented a case of one of the lions coming off his stool and biting the hand of the trainer, and it was to my mind one of the great moments in the foreign service to see Leonard Unger, normally a mild man, respond not with shouting and pounding the table but he picked up the telephone on his desk and got Sinc Pac on the phone and insisted on speaking to Sinc Pac himself. He told him what had happened and said "I think this is a direct insubordination to my role as Ambassador and I know that you have instructed US commanders to the contrary and I feel I should inform you of this and ask you to take immediate and urgent corrective action." And Sinc Pac said "Ambassador, it's three hours flying time, in about three hours and fifteen minutes let's meet again in your office on this subject and we'll get to the bottom of it." And within a day or two, in the time prescribed, in the Ambassador's outer office were some ten white uniformed Navy admirals averaging three, four stars, and General McGowan was called over and I have never seen such a.... Meanwhile Sinc Pac must have satisfied himself that this was a true report. If it had not been, Bill Stokes would have been peering out from behind bars I imagine by now. But Sinc Pac put his nose about one quarter of an inch away from General McGowan's nose and gave him the most excruciating going over you'd ever want to see and McGowan disappeared from the scene.

*Q: Was he transferred?*

STOKES: Yes. To an undisclosed reassignment. And his deputy was made Acting Commander and I remember not long thereafter MAC-Thai gave me an award of a MAC-Thai flag on one side and "great job" on the other. It had a brass plate with my name on it so it was kind of peacemaking and I think the great majority of people in the MAC-Thai headquarters believed in the concept by that time because it was working. But it was a constant effort to keep the discipline. It was not merely the Army. The day after I left Thailand finally on reassignment I read in the New York times the most unbelievable story. The head of the CIA station in Mekong Phnom had faked a letter purportedly from the Chinese communist party to the head of the insurgency. I forget exactly the gist of it but it was a provocative letter designed to promote a direct Thai involvement against the insurgency on the military side. Heavy use of the military, or greater Thai direct involvement in this, and the person I had been advising had discovered that it was a fraud and had publicly...

*Q: You mean the Thai?*

STOKES: Yes, the Thai and had publicly denounced it. This was on the CIA side, a complete violation of the rules as well. But by and large except for these egregious examples, the rules were consistently followed, and of course they were never really broken because both of these were nipped in the bud - one by the Thai and one by us. But there was a case of collusion by a US military officer to sow ideas among the Thai that were contrary to the ideas we were trying to sow. But by the way in which it was handled, the role of the Ambassador as the true leader in the foreign service as the accepted field leader of a policy that was essentially peace preserving and classical diplomacy, so to speak, in the best sense, although in an operational context was executed with the loyal participation of the whole American establishment. I was in Thailand for six years in this work. It became awkward to think of a substitution because then the whole question of who would be the Counterinsurgency Coordinator, the military always felt that it

should be a general, the CIA had felt that they would naturally do it because they did it in Vietnam, had had the credit. Peer DeSilva had been a CIA, top CIA, may had been fifth or sixth in the whole CIA setup. But by the time I left six years later...

*Q: Which was when?*

STOKES: In 1973, in October, the insurgency was down to a whimper, it was clearly not a significant threat.

*Q: Do you have any impression of where it stands at the moment, does it continue in some way?*

STOKES: Yes, I mentioned that in January of 1991 I returned to Thailand and had a dinner with General Sayud who later had become supreme commander and so on. And on that day, the very last Thai insurgent had surrendered and was returned to China. The Thai commander along the Malay border lasted five or six years longer as an insurgency than in the parts of the country that I had been mainly concerned about. That is the north and northeastern parts. I don't want to say by what time it had entirely disappeared but under Deng Xiaoping by 1979 China had withdrawn all support of this insurgency and had sought good relations with the Thai government and the Thai reciprocated. So the Maoist-inspired insurgency in the north and northeast had evaporated by that time. It took another 10 years in the south because it was involved there with Malay irredentism and a lot of local matters that had nothing to do with what we're talking about.

*Q: Or had an indigenous substance of it's own in the south, you're saying?*

STOKES: Yes , that's right.

*Q: So I gather in the north it did not, it was mostly pump priming from China?*

STOKES: Yes and this whole Thai effort to deal with the insurgency in a positive way was focused in the north and northeast. The Thai attitude in the south to these essentially Malay provinces...by the way, in the north and northeast the Thai emphasized that this is your country, you are Thai and we are Thai and the insurgents are Chinese. In the Malay provinces, the Thai had no ethnic appeal to the populace at all. They were just really Malay provinces, in their manner of speaking and everything else. The Thai didn't have the attitude of wanting to win over those people either. They were just outside our perspective and I think are another question altogether. This I think is one of the great success stories of what I might call the making of unhistory. The anticipation of a threatened disaster, the painstaking development of policies to forestall that disaster, and their success in such a way that nothing happens. That is recorded in history which usually pays attention to disastrous wars and the killings of vast numbers of people, great ebbs and flows of power. But if you build up the strength and forestall and nip in the bud efforts by a great power to foster surrogate insurrection in a smaller neighboring state and finally cause that great power to withdraw from the effort, then unhistory fills the interim. So the history will talk a great deal I'm sure about the Vietnam War and the covert war in Laos that was related to it, Cambodia, but very little about the Thai wing of what could have been more dangerous because it involved a great power, namely China instead of just a local strong second rate power like Vietnam with no real capability of going very far with anything that it succeeded

in exploiting.

**ROBIN BERRINGTON**  
**Staff Officer, USIS**  
**Sakon Nakhon (1968-1969)**

**Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Yala (1969)**

*Mr. Berrington was born and raised in Ohio and educated at Wesleyan University Harvard Universities. After service with the Peace Corps in Thailand, he joined the Foreign Service (USIA) in 1969. During his Foreign Service career Mr. Berrington served at posts abroad in Thailand, Japan, Ireland and England, variously as Public and Cultural Affairs Officer. He also served several tours at USIA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Mr. Berrington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

*Q: Well you were in Thailand from when to when?*

BERRINGTON: The very beginning of '68 through the summer of '69.

*Q: Now that you are in the field were there an equivalent to mentors or somebody that was going to show you the ropes or were you sort of thrown in there?*

BERRINGTON: Well in those days, and I guess we are really starting the foreign service experience. I should preface that by saying I was not a foreign service officer. I was not what they called an FSO in those days. I wasn't even what they called an FSIO, a foreign service information officer. I was an FSL. Do you remember that designation?

*Q: They keep changing.*

BERRINGTON: Foreign Service limited which meant I had in effect a two year appointment just for Thailand. Okay, I was young still and two years was a long way off. So I arrived in Bangkok and went up country to take up my post in Sakon Nakhon. As far as having a mentor or any kind of supervisor, he was in Sakon Nakhon. What we were assigned as, there was a radio station in northeast Thailand. It was set up to broadcast counterinsurgency news and information to help the Thai government tell its story to the Thai people, particularly in those areas where the counterinsurgency was strongest, and the northeast was that area.

*Q: Who were the insurgents?*

BERRINGTON: The communists.

*Q: But native Thai?*

BERRINGTON: Native Thai plus a large number of Vietnam. The Vietnamese had cadre in northeast Thailand at that time because northeast Thailand contains a large Vietnamese minority. The Vietnamese people are, of course, one of the major people in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese community was very strong in northeast Thailand. Not in Bangkok or in other parts of the country, so they provided a kind of a natural conduit for any infiltration or whatever the communist Vietnamese from Vietnam might have wanted to push in northeastern Thailand. Then of course, Northeastern Thailand is as you know right on the border with Laos. The northeastern Thai is probably ethnically closer with, linguistically, customs everything, to the Lao than they are to the central plains Thai. That was another reason why the border was very porous and people came back and forth. There was the Mekong River. I used to go back and forth on the Mekong to Laos all the time without a passport, so it was easy for anybody else to do as well. So the program we were helping, that USIS Bangkok was helping, was the Thai government's efforts to try and get better control over this insurgency movement.

There was a Thai communist party as well, and there were Thai CP member operatives up there. That was one of the interesting things, who was running the show? The Vietnamese coming through Vietnam or the Thais who were supposed to be nominally in charge? The town where I was stationed was sort of a headquarters for the Royal Thai Government's efforts in that area. There was a large Thai army presence. There was a large American presence. There was my supervisor who actually was the top guy at this radio station. There was a colleague of mine who also had been in the Peace Corps Thailand and was recruited just like me. There was a CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) official there. There was an AID (Agency for International Development) official there. They all had families, wives, children, and of course there was a large Thai government presence. So it was a kind of a mix of a community there for this tiny town in the northeast.

*Q: What was your USIS structure there?*

BERRINGTON: Well, oh and I forgot, there was a BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer) as well. The BPAO (branch public affairs officer) did your routine USIS work, running around showing movies, meeting with officials, sending in reports to Bangkok, you know, what BPAO's do almost any place. We who were assigned to this radio station were supposed to be working with Thai counterparts to go around into the countryside to collect news, to get these reports which we would then turn into radio commentary and kind of on the scene, you know, interviews which were then edited and then turned into radio broadcasting, which was then broadcast all over the northeast. I guess you would say we were supposed to be the advisors to the Thai guys in trying to encourage them to do more timely, relevant, up to date programming on what the Thai government was doing on behalf of the people.

*Q: How did that work? How did you feel our sort of working with the Thais worked?*

BERRINGTON: Well the Thais are a very relaxed, fun loving people. I know that sounds like a generalization, but I think it is fairly accurate, and we tended to be much more disciplined, more work oriented than they were. A lot of it depended on the personal relationship between the various Thai army. It was the Thai army people that were the staff of this station because the

military was running the counterinsurgency program up there. A lot if it depended on just the personal chemistry between you and the person you were working with. I was very lucky in that I got along very well with the number two at the station, one of the reporters. And whenever one of the reporters and I went out into the field to interview people or gather information, I think things worked pretty well. My supervisor tended to be much more kind of efficient and kind of I guess you would say goal oriented and wanted to play by the rules. I think he found it much more difficult. He was older too, I mean he was, that was 1968 so I was 28 years old at that point; he was probably around 48. I think he had it tougher. He also didn't have the language. We all were speaking provincial Thai from our Peace Corps days just a year or two before, so it was easier for us to get along with local villagers.

*Q: Well did you have a problem adjusting to being part of the establishment from having been aloof from the establishment when you were in the Peace Corps?*

BERRINGTON: You see I didn't consider myself part of the establishment. We weren't at the embassy. I was kidding myself. I started going through this little game of I am not really part of those guys in Bangkok. In fact my supervisor was who as I say was maybe 48, he was the same way. He kind of looked down and disparaged what was going on at the embassy in Bangkok too, as is typical of any branch or regional operation as opposed to headquarters. So it was very much a kind of game that I was playing. But of course, as time goes by and you accustom yourself to bureaucratic procedures and all that, you start to buy into it as well, no question about it.

*Q: What was the threat in northeastern Thailand? Was the feeling of our people, of which you were part now, that there was a significant threat?*

BERRINGTON: Oh yes, very much so. In fact I think that is probably that is one of the less touted achievements of the U.S. government or of the SEATO allies I guess you might say because the Brits and others were doing other things in Thailand. It wasn't just one country. But we were able to keep this from getting worse than it became. And of course a lot of credit had to be given to the Thai government, the Thai government itself. Sure there were good guys and bad guys in government, but many of them were very patriotic and very motivated and you know, felt very strongly about the issues.

There were some bad things going on. I mean we used to travel, the reporter and I. Not every day but there were many times when we would go out on our information gathering excursions when we were under armed guard. I mean there were people out there ready to do violence. I can remember one village head man that I liked and admired very much who three or four months later was assassinated. It was sort of like what had been going on in Vietnam before Vietnam became really as bad as it was. Of course, we never put in any troops; we never did anything like that, but there was clearly a threat. And the Thai government had been very indifferent and even downright hostile in some cases to its regional areas particularly a place like the northeast which as I said earlier was economically backward and largely full of Vietnamese and Lao minority groups. So that was very much a neglected area for years.

*Q: Well, did you feel that we were trying to do things in the northeast provinces maybe the Thai government might have just let go or something?*

BERRINGTON: Well, that's a hard one to second guess at this time. I mean there were many times in my time there when I thought Oh my God nothing any good is ever going to come out of this. There were times when I thought the Thais are going to screw it up again. Then there were times when I was really quite moved by the motivation and dedication of some of my colleagues. Given the kind of violence and trouble that was always there in the background, the Americans were lucky. If it ever really became a crisis we knew a helicopter was going to come in and pull us out in time like what happened in Saigon. You know it was easy for us to stand off and kind of look at this with some remote objectivity. With the Thais it was their homeland, their country. I always had a hard time at the time I was being very subjective in my judgments of this and that, but now given the years and a bit more maturity I think I would be less eager to judge say whether they were doing everything right or wrong. But in the long run I guess some of us and others must have been doing something right because the insurgency was turned back.

*Q: Was there a problem of trying to get the Thais to even handedly treat the Vietnamese minority?*

BERRINGTON: Oh, of course, yes. That was one of the most difficult things because in any of these Asian societies, Japan included, diversity is not a strong point. I mean it is not quite as tribal as places in Africa or Catholics versus Protestants in Ireland but it is there. It is something difficult for many people. I can remember when we arrived in the Peace Corps and the headmaster, the bad one that I finally got kicked out. He expressed great relief that I was a real American and not a black American. So, they were even sensitive to the idea that they would be getting a non white American something second or third class in there.

*Q: Later Bangkok developed quite a reputation as an R&R (Rest and Recreation) stop for the GI's (WWII slang for soldier), I was wondering whether some USIA officers had problems with this?*

BERRINGTON: Well some of them did. I have to say I was one of the ones that did. But that I think was probably part of my overall makeup which again is part of my Peace Corps mentality I kept referring to. I tended to eschew, to distance myself from the American community, and the idea of going to Bangkok and yukking it up with the Americans and going out to where the GI's and the bars were didn't appeal to me. It wasn't just Bangkok. I mean any of the places where there were airbases, as you know in that time there were a lot of airbases in Thailand. There was one in Udorn which was just 60-70 miles up the road. There was one in Ubon which was about 150 miles to the south in the other part of the northeast. Both of them were little Sodom and Gomorrah sites as well. Yes, I found that a very deplorable and kind of embarrassing part of the American presence. I still do; that is something I still feel strongly about.

*Q: Were you by this time able to have good relations not just official but friendly relations with many of your Thai counterparts?*

BERRINGTON: Thai counterparts, oh, sure, yes. We got along pretty well. Again it was based on personal chemistry. I got along with some persons better than the others. Oh no, it was sort of like we were all out there on the front lines together, and we all had to help each other. I can

remember one night we were staying in a small village which we traveled to over tracks that were bare imitations of roads and then sometimes muddy ruts in the rainy season. All the cars we drove were 4-wheel drives and had winches on the front bumper so we could wrap a line around a tree and pull ourselves out of the mud. Anyway, we were in a very small village, and we were staying in a temple. That was the only place you could be put up. About halfway through the night about three or four A.M. we were awakened and the village headman said, "You have to leave now." We said, "Why?" He said, "because the CT's are coming." CTs are communist terrorists. So, we quickly packed our bags such as they were and were out of there in about five minutes. We couldn't even turn on the headlights. We had to drive in the dark by moonlight through these horrible jungle roads and trails. When you do that sort of thing together with other people, the bonding becomes pretty strong. Yes, with some there it was a pretty close relationship.

*Q: Well now, did the Tet offensive in Vietnam [January 31, 1968], which took place at about the time you arrived in Thailand, raise concerns on the part of the Thais about America's will?*

BERRINGTON: No. Not that I remember. We were still such a strong presence there. Now who knows. Consider we were at the working level. These were questions that might be better posed to people in Bangkok dealing with...

*Q: I was wondering if this translated down there at all.*

BERRINGTON: No. We were there; there was a lot of American money there, and I don't recall there ever being any questions from them. And we talked about a lot of things, because these were basically young Thai army sergeants, lieutenants. The guy, the deputy of the station who I was friendliest with was a major, so these weren't senior Thais.

*Q: Did you get a feel for the Thai military?*

BERRINGTON: Yes.

*Q: What was your impression?*

BERRINGTON: Disorganized, corrupt, with a leadership element that varied from outstanding to appalling. Probably like many other military groups in small countries. But there were a lot of good guys. I think the ones we had at our station tended to be more motivated people because they tended to send to our station people from the northeast who could speak the local dialect. That was very important. If you were interviewing a farmer in Lao or Vietnamese, you have got to be able to speak it. These were people who saw pretty much what was going on there was going on in their backyards, so they were more motivated and more willing to get out there and really work for what they saw.

*Q: Was there much social intercourse between the Thais that you knew and the Vietnamese and Lao residents of the area?*

BERRINGTON: Not much, although there was a Vietnamese restaurant in town that was

considered to be one of the best restaurants. I am talking about a tiny town with about four restaurants. But the Vietnamese restaurant was considered to be the best restaurant. And yet even though we knew it was Vietnamese and the woman was Vietnamese, all the cooks were Vietnamese, we always used to sort of half joke that even though we could talk shop and business in the restaurant, we wonder what they are picking up and passing on even though I think, the idea that these people were passing on information to the enemy was probably fantasy. It was probably a woman and her staff that couldn't care less about it. They were just eking out their daily living.

*Q: Did you have much contact with the powers that be at the embassy in USIS?*

BERRINGTON: Yes. I mean there would always be the PAO (Public Affairs Officer) coming up and visiting. I don't think, let's see, I am trying to remember who was ambassador. I think it was Graham Martin part of the time, who was of course, one of the most vainglorious ambassadors in the history of the foreign service. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Martin served in Bangkok from November 1963 to September 1967.]

*Q: You have got his number.*

BERRINGTON: Then Leonard Unger arrived [Editor's Note: Ambassador Unger presented his credentials on October 4, 1967 and departed post on November 19, 1973]. He would later be ambassador to Taiwan as well. One of the best guys. He and his wife traveled around. A fabulous terrific guy. I admired both of them very much. I admired both of them proportionally as much as I did not admire Martin. Yes, we got the traveling salesmen that came through, the visiting firemen. They didn't come through a lot because you have got to remember this was one of the more provincial, dangerous, and difficult parts of the country. Most of these guys, frankly, would just as soon not go there.

*Q: What were you thinking about this experience as a career?*

BERRINGTON: Oh I thought it was terrific. You know I was doing what that guy when I was in the Peace Corps the one that came through every couple of months to show movies, I was doing what he was doing. It was fun. I was going out and drinking booze with the village headman. I was running around with armed guards, all very dramatic or I would say melodramatic and enjoyable. I thought it was terrific even though I knew it was a two year contract, I thought it was wonderful.

*Q: Well did you have a feeling that, two year contract or not, basically this was the entree to a good career move?*

BERRINGTON: Yes. I probably was hoping something would come of this, but I still wasn't quite sure. I had home leave after...it must have been after a year, and decided I have enjoyed this job a lot, so I took the written foreign service exam. I decided you know, in case I wanted to continue with the foreign service, I will have taken the test. I passed the test, the written test. So I had that in my file, even though this was a limited career appointment.

After a year or a year plus at this radio station, Bangkok offered me a job as a BPAO in a place called Yala which is in southern Thailand. It was in effect the same game that I was doing in the northeast, except that there wasn't a radio station there. I became a full fledged BPAO rather than this kind of radio officer type that I had in the northeast. I was still running around helping the Thai government with its counterinsurgency program. In the south the big difference was the insurgents were Muslim, not Vietnamese or Lao. That was the minority group down there, because the four southern provinces were seized from the Malay at the height of Thai power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But as far as the methodology, the issues, it was all the same thing, sort of a different cast of characters. In some ways it was more interesting because the Islamic or Muslim insurgents were not only a different religion, many of them were ethnic Chinese. Frankly most of us in the U.S. government, as well as the Thai government, regarded them as probably more efficient and more formidable opponents because it is safe to say the Chinese can be better at this sort of thing.

*Q: Well, was this a reflection of the earlier insurgency in Malaysia in the 1950s; that was a formidable group?*

BERRINGTON: Oh, yes. They were the original MCPs. That is not male chauvinist pig but Malaysian Communist Party. The guys that ran that thanks to the British efforts back in the '50s, many of them had been driven away from the main parts of Malaysia into the very mountainous jungle area along the spine of the peninsula. I mean we are talking about serious mountain jungle area along the Malay-Thai border. The prefecture that I was in, Yala, was right up against that area, so the CT's, the communist terrorists, from that part were direct descendants from the old MCP crowd from Malaya. The Emergency they called it.

*Q: The Emergency was a serious insurgency that took considerable time and British forces to bring it under control. But I would think in Thailand, since you didn't have the British army, you had a different approach.*

BERRINGTON: Quite definitely. You still had the same old strengths and weaknesses of the Thai effort that I alluded to earlier, the corruption and the inefficiencies and whatever. The big difference though was there weren't as many Thai from that part of the country that they could send there to be key parts of the operation as they could in the northeast. First of all it is more distant and secondly they were a totally different religion. I mean the Vietnamese and the Lao tended to share at least Buddhism and more ethnic commonalties. The Malays, the Chinese Islamic Malays were almost a totally different ethnic religious group. In many respects they were a harder bunch to deal with, and in fact if memory serves correct, there are still remnants of them in the jungle down there even today.

*Q: Were you doing really the same thing or was this a different game?*

BERRINGTON: Yes we were. The big difference I used to say was in the northeast we used to run around in jeeps going through muddy and horrible roads. In the south we tended to do it in boats going on rivers which made it probably even more melodramatic. They were interesting trips. Yes, we would go out on these, it would be this huge excursion where the governor and deputy governor of the province plus many of his people from public health and agronomy and

education, they were called mobile information teams, MIT's. These mobile information teams would go out, and there would always be a USIS person with them. We would handle the public affairs part of this. The Thais would handle the other more technical aspects of trying to set up a public health station or trying to provide better agricultural methods to the farmers or the fishermen in the south or whatever the local economy was doing. Sometimes there would be a local AID from the U.S. along as well or maybe a CIA or something too, but by and large the American presence was USIS.

*Q: Were these armed expeditions?*

BERRINGTON: Oh, always. Particularly if the governor or deputy governor was along, then there would be armed guards always. Now I was in Yala for only a short time, not even a half year I don't think. One day the USIA, the area director, Dan Oleksiw who was one of the grand characters in USIS in those days. Dan came along and said, "You know we are thinking of cutting down on our Thai program." I'm sure this was budget because the Vietnam was still going strong. For whatever reason, they were deciding to cut back on the Thai program. "We are thinking of cutting back on the Thai program and we are thinking of beefing up our Japan program. I see you have Japanese in your background." I said, "Yes." He said, "How would you like to go to Japan?" I thought that sounds pretty good! I figured I would kind of push my luck with all the things going on in Thailand, why not go someplace a little bit safer and more solid, and Japan was after all my real love. As much as I loved Southeast Asia, Japan was my first. I said, "Okay." I went back to Washington in the summer of '69. I told them by the way I have already passed the written foreign service test. Is there any way I can get this limited career converted to something else? They said, "Why don't you take the oral interview?" I took the oral interview and I passed it, so that was when I became a full fledged Foreign Service Officer.

*Q: Do you recall any questions they asked you on the oral interview?*

BERRINGTON: They asked me something about music. I remember they asked me something about Aaron Copeland. They asked me a lot about Japan and Japanese politics and all the language. I was able to handle these. I was still following that. They asked a lot about Thailand. It was not the typical kind of oral which you and I might have remembered. I suppose because I was already on the payroll. Frankly I was much more surprised when I got through the written test than the oral interview. So at that point I said good-bye to Thailand in the summer of 1969.

I am just trying to think if there was anything else about Thailand that really was important. Were there any other questions about Thailand?

*Q: Well I was just wondering did you find there were a core of people in USIA, or other organizations, that sort of fell in love with Thailand? I mean you have China hands and you have Arab hands etc. I have never heard much about Thailand.*

BERRINGTON: Well that is interesting, because that was at a time when we had I think 13 branch posts, USIS, 13 in Thailand. I also think...I was very young and new, and this is more information I believe in later on than there at the time, but with that many posts and given what was going on in Vietnam and the importance they kept telling us they were attaching to the

whole counterinsurgency business, that was often called by many people the golden era of embassy activities in Thailand. Many of the people who were there I have to say, I can't speak about State as much as USIS, but many people who were in USIS Thailand at that time went on to have very good careers. I think many of us still look back on Thailand as a wonderful; time.

I talked about the bonding between us and our Thai counterparts. There was a lot of that I think between the Americans as well, particularly among those of us who were up country. When you have 13 branch posts and let me think about State. You have consulates in Udorn, Ubon, Korat, Chiang Mai, well there is five right there. That was a lot of consulates for only a country of 30 million people. I think all of us felt that we were really part of a big important unified team. I mean there were some guys who were clearly kind of on the outs or didn't fit in quite as well, but particularly within USIS, I think we felt there was good morale. I think that is a good way of putting it.

*Q: Back in the States this was the beginning of the great protests against Vietnam that hit so much of the intellectual community, the very source of Foreign Service recruits, was that having any effect on you all or was that far away at the time you were in Thailand?*

BERRINGTON: Yes to a degree. I have to say while I was in Thailand, I was being pushed and pulled. On the one hand, I was still pretty much a true believer in the Vietnam War. I had not yet gone that far. I would later on, but I was still pretty much a true believer in the Vietnam War, because I saw what was happening in Thailand and I just kind of projected that into Vietnam, and if it was as bad as it was in Thailand, my God what must it be like in Vietnam. But on the other hand, I saw the bad things the Americans were doing in Thailand. I mean the whole business as you described it of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the sort of American domination of things. There were some of the people in USIS Thailand who I did not admire so much who thought only about the bureaucratic this and that and really seemed to think more about advancing their careers than anything to do with Thailand. Remember I was still in my Peace Corps mentality.

Again project that to a much larger bureaucracy in Vietnam with a much heavier American military involvement, and of course, I was very skeptical of the military, the American military. On the one hand I thought the war was what we should be doing, and on the other hand, I was becoming more and more disillusioned. You know, it wasn't any kind of dramatic overnight epiphany (hand clap); it was something that was slowly eating away at my commitment, and commitment to the war. My colleagues and I talked about it. There was a lot of exchange of ideas, and I can't speak for all of my colleagues, but I suspect there were one or two who felt like me that on the one hand it was good but weren't we getting a bit over our heads. I must say by the time I left Thailand, I was thinking more and more why were we the Americans doing what we were doing when isn't this what the Thais should be doing? Isn't there a little bit too much big brother telling little brother how to run the show? This was really starting to nag at me. I suspect when Dan Oleksiw showed up on his visit one day and said how about going to Japan, in the back of my mind there was a feeling I better get out while the getting out is good. Somebody's is going to wake up one day and say wait a minute, we shouldn't be doing as much as we were, and we should be transferring a lot of this to the Thais. If you recall, that was also a period in Vietnam where they were trying to do more Vietnamization. I'm sure that must have been passed

on as well. So, yes, you saw the beginnings of a greater critical mass there as far as the war was concerned, and I think many of us given the opportunity to go elsewhere probably took advantage of it. Although the two years were terrific.

**HARVEY E. GUTMAN**  
**Assistant Director, USAID**  
**Thailand (1968-1970)**

*Harvey E. Gutman was born in Switzerland in 1921. From 1942-1946 he served in the American Army overseas. Upon returning in 1949 he received his bachelor's degree from University of Portland and later received his master's degree from American University in 1958. During his career with AID he held positions in Laos, Paris, Thailand, Morocco, Liberia, and Nigeria. Mr. Gutman was interviewed by Stuart Van Dyke in August 1997.*

GUTMAN: I moved on to Thailand, at that time a major component of the "domino theory" that was then cited as a principal justification of our involvement in Vietnam. We had a large Mission in Thailand and numerous contract groups. The basic thrust of our program was counterinsurgency (CI), although it also had a classic technical assistance component.

I had the resounding title of "Special Assistant to the Director for Village Security" with the rank of assistant director. In the name of the Director (Howard Parsons; later Rey Hill), I was to act as coordinator between the USAID divisions concerning their CI projects and, in addition, was to head the Village Security Forces division (VSF) which was still on the drawing board. This was the director's pet project. It was intended to assist the Thai to train and equip villagers, enabling them to defend their communities against Thai communist terrorists (CT's in the jargon of the time) and North Vietnamese and Chinese border crossers.

The Thai were not easy to deal with. They were very conscious of never having been under colonial rule and felt that they had a better understanding of Thailand, its needs and problems than non-Thai speaking, non-Buddhist Americans.

There were many American cooks in the CI kitchen besides USAID. In the Embassy there was a Minister-Counselor for CI who job was to coordinate all American elements on behalf of the ambassador. That included the various U.S. military advisory and research groups, the CIA station, USIS and, of course, USAID.

My VSF associates (mostly selected for their experience in Vietnam) and I made extensive field trips to the border provinces in the North and Northeast. We became convinced that villagers must be given tangible reasons why they should go to the effort of organizing themselves and spend part of their working hours on guard and patrols. After many discussions, the Director and Ambassador (Leonard Unger) agreed that the project should be transformed into a village development and security project with the new acronym "VDSF."

We argued that responses to development needs defined by the villagers not by Americans or the Thai bureaucracy in Bangkok would motivate these communities to fight off communist marauders and propagandists. The heavily armed terrorists would appear at night, corral the villagers and lecture them, pointing to GOT neglect and disinterest.

The Thai had their own agenda. They were far less apt than we were to consider their country a domino. Arming of villagers was a contentious issue and, in fact, often opposed by local authorities and especially the police who saw their authority in the villages and over the villagers threatened. "Authority" was frequently a euphemism for levying local taxes and shake-downs.

A compromise was finally reached that limited fire arms to shotguns for the villagers, a fairly ineffective answer to the CT's automatic rifles. However, it was felt that the American side could not afford to antagonize powerful police generals since the modernization and reorganization of the police force was a priority U.S. objective. In the byzantine, internal GOT power struggles, even this objective was complicated as the army did not want the police strengthened beyond a certain point. The police itself was split into semi-autonomous units, e.g. the airport police, immigration, highway police, RR police, Bangkok municipal police, etc. The one faction that supported our efforts at the village level was the Border Police, the singly best trained unit with its own parachute company. It was considered the King's anti-coup force.

Our immediate counterpart agency was the powerful Department of Local Affairs Division (DOLA) of the Ministry of Interior. DOLA controlled the provincial governors and their staffs, i.e. the government outside of Bangkok. However, both the police and the army felt ambiguous about the emergence of an armed village force, controlled by DOLA, a civilian entity.

To further complicate these on-going power machinations, DOLA's ultimate master was the Minister of the Interior, an army general who also was vice-prime minister.

It was almost impossible for foreigners to appreciate fully the ever shifting ins and outs of these complex maneuvers. While the American side tended to look upon military and civilian assistance in the light of the communist threat to Thailand, the GOT was even more concerned about the implications for the different factions in its internal balance of power struggles.

Within USAID, the Public Safety Division was the largest division and, in some respects, its most powerful with a direct line to AID/W. They were not enamored by the VDSF project as they were trying to make points with their counterparts by defending the position of the Thai police within USAID.

Sir Robert Thompson, the former governor who had put down the Malaysian insurrection was invited to review our VDSF project. He told the Country Team in the presence of the visiting Deputy Administrator (William Gaud) that we had developed a realistic concept (speaking of the development component) and a pragmatic approach to our objective. The VDSF team felt vindicated.

Yet, except for localized successes, the progress of the VDSF project was halting as it simply did not have the full support of very powerful factions within the GOT. Eventually, we drafted a

memorandum for the Ambassador pointing out the actions that needed to be taken and what leverage the American side could and should marshal to pressure the GOT. If it were to be the conclusion that such actions were not feasible or counterproductive, the project should be terminated. The Ambassador, after a lengthy rounds of review, concluded that for a number of overriding reasons we should not pressure the GOT to support the project.

The Thai hated the term "advisor" as they felt it put them on an inferior student level. The police were especially sensitive. The colonel in charge of liaison with USAID, member of an elite family, with two Ivy League degrees, was also the head of the Investigations Division. He complained that he was being "advised" by a former police sergeant, "a high school graduate", he said with contempt. The Director told me to work something out and it was agreed that the signs on the doors of our Public Safety 'experts would simply read "USAID" rather than "USAID Advisor".

The Thai would have done without many of our public safety and a few of the other advisors as opposed to commodities. Privately they pointed out that their perceived inefficiencies, e.g., separate procurement divisions for each police branch, was an essential element of the Thai system (the implications are rather obvious). At the same time we were under great pressure to AID/W to increase the number of police advisors. I remarked to the colonel "look at the jeeps, the radios, laboratory equipment, etc. and simply accept that the bodies come with the goodies." About a year later, the Director asked me to inform the colonel of upcoming major reductions in the public safety project. When I imparted the information over lunch, the colonel smiled sardonically and said "well last year you explained that the bodies come with the goodies. Now, we are saying "fewer goodies, fewer bodies."

Our central counterpart, except for public safety, was the Department of Technical Coordination (DTEC) staffed largely by American educated officials. On the classical technical assistance side, the Thai came closer to AID's definition of looking for transfer of techniques by training, teaching and demonstration than any African country that I am familiar with. Project proposals were elaborated bilaterally, including sizeable Thai contributions (including the cost of housing for U.S. experts) that would increase as U.S. project assistance was being reduced.

The Thai insisted on having counterparts that would understudy our experts and training periods were carefully calculated to dovetail with the project timetables. Even when it came to recurrent costs, the Thai took a very analytical approach to the longer-range budgetary implications. The qualifications of proposed American technicians were carefully evaluated by DTEC. They were not above rejecting a candidate. I remember the case of an automotive motor instructor was turned down because his basic background was in diesel rather than in gasoline engines. I found this assertion of independence by the Thai refreshing and validating the term "cooperation"

Once the head of DTEC complained about the inadequate progress of a technical school project. The Director asked me to investigate. I found that the USAID instructor had no Thai assistants though he had been teaching at this institute for three years. I suggested to him that it might be appropriate to put priority emphasis on training Thai instructors so that the GOT could gradually take over this project. He replied angrily that he had no intention of working himself out of a job as he planned to return for at least another tour. The expert left a few weeks later. He would have

fit perfectly into a French aid mission.

Just when the VDSF project demised, I was TDY'd to AID/W to serve on a promotion board. After we had been sworn to evaluate individuals impartially without regard to race, sex, creed etc. the Director of Personnel (Johnny Johnson) made a brief speech urging us to give special consideration to women and minorities. When asked how this could be reconciled with the oath we had just taken, he gave a graphic response: "you have been very carefully selected in the belief that you have the qualifications to handle an admittedly difficult mandate. Goodbye and good luck!".

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The Director/USAID (Rey Hill.) requested my return for a 2nd tour to Thailand to fill the new position of Implementation Officer. Its tasks were broadly defined. The Director and his deputy felt that their field travels involved so much protocol that they seldom had an opportunity to form independent assessments of the over-all impact of our activities. The division chiefs were unavoidably biased advocates of their projects and the evaluation office tended to look at individual projects.

I did not want to lose this challenging job over several extensions of my TDY. Ambassador Ferguson was understanding. Requests for extension of my Geneva assignment went to Bangkok, captioned "from Undersecretary (Richardson) for Ambassador/USAID Director" and couched in the first person ending "request your priority concurrence". Lo and behold, they always concurred promptly.

Back in Thailand, I traveled extensively. We had a network of provincial offices, patterned a bit on USAID/Vietnam, headed by senior area representatives. These were, for the most part, seasoned AID veterans.

My immediate task was an examination of this system, level of delegations from USAID/Bangkok, existence/lack of parallel structure on the GOT side, imbalances in authorities, how to strengthen coordination of the USAID and Thai budget process at various levels, etc.

Much of the job was a public relations effort within USAID. I was always careful to discuss problems and recommendations for possible solutions with the responsible division chiefs and avoided springing any surprises. Some observations, especially, in the personnel field, I made orally on a personal basis. This was much appreciated and earned me some chits that I could redeem at later occasions. Whenever possible, I involved the Thai counterparts in the process. Even the most worthwhile efforts became largely ineffective when the GOT did not support them. I had learned a good deal in this respect from the VDSF project.

This was a great job as I loved the extensive field travel involved. During my first tour I had taken night classes to acquire some facility with Thai, not an easy the language. While I never reached the level of professional conversancy, I knew enough to break the ice. I had the advantage of remembering some Lao, an older, closely related country dialect. This got me occasionally in trouble as some perfectly respectable Lao words have become four-letter words

in the more evolved modern Thai language. I will spare the reader an example.

I oversaw a Mission evaluation of our staff's Thai language capabilities. We had several ex-Peace Corps volunteers who were quite fluent. However, only a minority of Americans could cite a few courtesy formulas, count or ask simple directions, even after having spent more than one tour in country. Of course, there was also a number of individuals who made it their hobby to learn Thai. The Director wanted to attach a minimum language qualification to all positions. He pointed out that any Thai embassy officer in Washington who couldn't count to ten in English after two years in America would be considered an idiot. Surprisingly, the proposal encountered considerable opposition at the senior staff meeting.

Points raised involved budget implications, loss of time from work during business hours, legal aspects of requiring mandatory overtime, lack of need to know the local language in view of the many counterparts who spoke English, disruptions of the assignment cycle in AID/W if a one month course were required there, etc.

The matter was to receive additional study and I lost track of what happened. I found it unacceptable that some Foreign Service members refused to make the slightest effort to communicate in the language of the host country. Such individuals, undoubtedly upstanding citizens, should stay home and not be assigned to overseas positions, all of which include a measure of cross-cultural relations.

**JOHN H. KELLY**  
**Political/Military Officer**  
**Bangkok (1968-1969)**

**Principal Officer**  
**Songkhla (1969-1971)**

*Ambassador John H. Kelly was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin in 1939 and was raised in Atlanta, Georgia. Ambassador Kelly received a bachelor's degree in history from Emory University. His Foreign Service career included positions in Adana, Ankara, and Paris. Ambassador Kelly was interviewed by Thomas Stern on December 12, 1994.*

*Q: Your tour in Ankara ended in July, 1967. What happened next?*

KELLY: I was assigned to Thai language training, which lasted for one year at the Foreign Service Institute. I had asked to be assigned to Arabic language training; the arab world seemed like a good place for a professional Foreign Service Officer although I must say that at the time, I didn't know how long I would last in the Foreign Service -- I didn't really have a strong self-image and thought that possibly I might not succeed in my career, even though by this time I had been promoted twice in three years -- although I didn't find out about my first promotion for six months because the Department had fouled up the paperwork. My paycheck reflected an

increase, but I never received the form which announced my new grade. I was so naive in those days that it never occurred to me that the new pay reflected some kind of promotion. My bosses kept telling me that I was performing well, but I always had some self-doubts about my future in the Foreign Service. I didn't know whether I had learned the "secret hand-shake" or whatever it took to be a success in that profession. In any case, my progress was rapid for someone my age. For some reason, I didn't think I could penetrate the "Western Europe" club; I was not a member of that self-anointed elite. I thought that the people in Bonn, Paris and London had a special line into the decision-makers that I didn't and that I might find very difficult to learn. I did love the work -- with exception of that brief tour in the Economic Section. So I decided that the Arab world looked interesting and that it was one that might challenge me as a political officer and one that could be a home for me.

But Personnel thought otherwise. It decided that Thailand was in my immediate future. So I knew when I left Ankara where I would be spending the next year. Thai is a difficult language; fortunately by the end of the year, I was rated as a "3-3" speaker -- minimal professional level proficiency. As a matter of fact, it was perfectly adequate for Bangkok where I spent a year because so many of my contacts spoke English -- everybody I dealt with at the Foreign Ministry or SEATO had been to Harvard or Oxford or the Sorbonne. I was glad to have for every day life, but professionally, I could have gotten along without it. In fact, many Embassy officers had Thai language fluency, although they also conducted much of their business in English. Ambassador Unger knew a little Thai, but not enough to use in official settings. He gave some speeches in Thai which had been written in advance, but he could not negotiate in Thai. Unger's Thai was fine for social occasions, which was very helpful for public relations efforts, but, as I said, not quite good enough for professional use. As for myself when I was sent to Songkhla to open a post there the following year, I found the Thai very useful, if not essential. I could not have operated in Songkhla without Thai. It became good enough so that I could use in negotiating sessions

The prospects of an assignment to Bangkok didn't fully please me. I had visited the post the year before when working on President Johnson's visit. I remember that I got lost in that city one night. I was riding in a *samlar* -- the three-wheeled motor bike taxi cab. A terrific tropical storm broke out and I hopped into the cab just to get out of the rain. The driver didn't speak any English; at that time of course I spoke no Thai. So we rode around in this violent storm -- rain by the bucket loads, thunder, lightning. I thought I was in that cab forever. Finally we ended up where we had started and I left the cab, thoroughly disgusted and soaked. I remember thinking that Thailand was really a foreign country -- it had a culture and a language that I couldn't comprehend and one that I thought I could never master. When I returned to Ankara from that trip, I told my wife that Thailand was one country to which I never wanted to be assigned. I should have kept my mouth shut because I know that the good Lord was listening as I spoke.

Later, I found out that my assignment had been pushed by Bob Dillon; he had been in the Political section of the Embassy in Ankara and we had become good friends -- as a matter of fact, we had traveled together in Eastern Turkey. When he left Ankara, Bob went to work in Personnel in the Assignments Branch. Several years later, Bob told me that my name had been on a list of officers to be assigned to Vietnamese language training to be followed of course by a tour in Vietnam. At the time, officers assigned to Vietnamese language training could only be

excused from that if they went to Thai language training instead. He didn't have time to call me to ask my preferences, but thought that I would prefer Thailand; so he went ahead and changed my language training from Vietnamese to Thai. None of this was known to me until several years later. All I knew that around May, 1967, I got a telegram saying that I was assigned to Thai language training. My first reaction was that that was one country I didn't want to serve in. But I had learned that a good Foreign Service officer goes where he is assigned and that I did. That probably was naive, but I was young and inexperienced at the time.

I should mention that we had pulled an "April Fools" joke on one of my colleagues in Ankara. He worked for USIA and was vehemently opposed to our Vietnam policy. So, with the assistance of the communicators, we wrote a fake telegram assigning him to Vietnam to some remote provincial town, dated April 1. The cable looked legitimate and the USIA guy hit the ceiling and immediately called Washington, threatening to resign if the Agency insisted on assigning him to Vietnam. I am sorry that I didn't get a chance to monitor that conversation because I am sure that it must be a very interesting one with Washington not having a clue about what my friend was talking about.

So I returned to Washington to attend FSI. I not only became immersed in the Thai language, but also had an opportunity to read up on our relationships with that country. Every Thursday afternoon, we would meet with some knowledgeable officer to discuss some Thai or Southeast Asia issue. I read books about Thailand and attended some lectures on my own. I attended especially those delivered by Joseph Campbell who later made a very successful television series. Campbell used to lecture at FSI and those sessions had priority for me ahead of anything else. I thought he had the greatest insights into other cultures and what made other people function as they did. I also listened to Ed Wright on inter-cultural matters. I also talked to many people who had been in Thailand; everybody, but the Thai desk, was very helpful. I think I worked hard on preparing for my assignment to Bangkok.

When I finally got my travel orders, I did not know what position I would fill in the Embassy. Someone in Personnel may have told me that I would first work in the Political Section, concentrating on international organization issues -- UN, etc. I thought that might be alright; I think I would have been happy with any assignment to a Political or Politico-Military section. But after some time had passed, Personnel told me that the incumbent in that position had extended and that no other assignment in Bangkok seemed to be available. It was suggested that I might go to Laos as a consular officer. The Department was willing to give me a three months conversion course that might have enabled me to learn Lao. That came as a real blow having believed for six months that I was going to Bangkok. Nevertheless, still believing that a Foreign Service officer went where he was assigned, I went along. Then about a month before the end of the Thai course, Personnel said that a vacancy had opened up in the Politico-Military Section; I was to replace Linwood Starbird who was leaving Bangkok. I never knew who made all these moves; I found out after I arrived in Bangkok that in fact many of the decisions were made by the Embassy. That was a reflection of Ambassador's Graham Martin's operating style which spilled over into the Leonard Unger and Norm Hannah regime. In any case, the final assignment sounded a lot better to me than consular officer in Laos.

The Embassy in Bangkok was huge; it probably had 1,000 Americans working for it. I think it

was greatly over-staffed for the programs it was trying to conduct. We had a separate and independent Politico-Military Section. It was large -- probably about ten officers. It was unique in that it was staffed by both Foreign Service and military officers -- about half and half. I knew very little about this set up before leaving the US. Because the final assignment decision was not reached until the very end of my stay in Washington, I really didn't have a chance to bone up on Thai Politico-Military matters. In fact, I had the wrong name for the Counselor in charge of the section. I thought it was Monty Spears, but in fact it was Bob Foulon. My misunderstanding was straightened out by whoever brought me into town from the airport.

As I said, Unger was the Ambassador and Hannah was the DCM. Because of the circumstances existing in Southeast Asia, there were other huge sections in the Embassy. For example, the Embassy had a large Counter-Insurgency Section separate from the Pol-Mil or Political Sections, headed by a non-career officer, George Tannen, former Vice President of Rand. That Section was to develop counter-insurgency doctrines and strategies for the Thai situation. It had been set up by Peer DeSilva, the former Station Chief in Saigon who had been brought to Bangkok by Graham Martin to head up our counter-insurgency effort in Thailand. That Section was part of the Embassy; it was not a CIA operation. As I said, Tannen was the head of the section; his deputy was Bill Stokes, who also headed up an Embassy Section called "Mission Coordination". The embassy's organization chart looked like a spaghetti bowl. As might be expected under those circumstances, there were tensions and rivalries among the sections, mostly about which section had responsibility for a particular issue or program. There were too many people worrying about the same thing. In fact, the Embassy grew even during the year I was in Bangkok.

The Counter-Insurgency Section also had US military officers in it, as well as CIA officers under cover and Defense Department civilians whose Washington "home" was the International Security Affairs Bureau in DOD. In addition, that Section also people detailed to it from ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) in DOD. In fact, Thailand had become a laboratory for our counter-insurgency and political stabilization efforts in Southeast Asia.

We also had two Economic Sections, one to handle Thai issues and the other devoted to regional economic development -- e.g. the Mekong Valley project and other regional economic development projects. In addition, there was an assistance mission. In fact, Bangkok was a perfect illustration of bureaucracy out of control. Martin managed to run this hodge podge well as did Unger.

My position in the Pol-Mil section was the SEATO affairs officer. I was the one person in the embassy who spent most of the time worrying about SEATO, even though that was a flimsy organization, primarily in paper. It was important because it provided some, even if thin, juridical underpinning to our role in Vietnam particularly and in Southeast Asia in general. SEATO had a large headquarters building in Bangkok, a large bureaucracy and a large military planning staff headed by an American Major General. The organization consisted of eight nations; its founders had tried to model SEATO after NATO, but in fact it never reached that level -- not even close. In the first place, the French had essentially abandoned SEATO and were only conspicuous because of their trouble making predilections. The Pakistanis played no longer a constructive role even though their nationals still participated in the international bureaucracy. Vietnam was never a member of SEATO nor were any of the other former French colonies in

Indochina. Washington cared passionately about SEATO -- it was in our interest that SEATO remain alive and provide support to our efforts in the region.

SEATO held annual ministerial meetings. The PermReps met at least monthly; our Ambassador in Thailand was the US Permanent Representative. I staffed the Ambassador for those meetings; I wrote all of the papers and telegrams dealing with that organization. I attended all of the meetings. SEATO had an Intelligence Assessment Committee in which we were represented by our Station Chief and I was his deputy. In that committee, we shared Southeast Asia intelligence findings. SEATO also had a Permanent Working Group which met weekly to oversee the day-to-day SEATO business and decide on operating issues. I was in essence the US Representative on that Group although I was never given the title. A more senior Embassy officer had the title, but he never went to any of the meetings or did any of the work. But my role as the SEATO officer gave me greater access to the Ambassador and the DCM than an officer of my rank would have had under normal circumstances. I was the only Embassy officer that spent full time on a subject that both Unger and Hannah had to become personally involved from time to time. So I got to know them relatively well. I remember one time, just before one of the SEATO Perm Rep meetings, Stokes came to me to suggest that I take certain actions -- write certain papers, etc. Stokes was not my boss, but he was a senior Foreign Service officer. Sometime later, he asked me whether I had done what he had suggested; Foulon had left by this time and the new Section chief was rather weak and unwilling to tell Stokes to mind his own business. So in one of my meetings with Unger, I had an opportunity to tell him about Stokes' interference and his request for a lot of unnecessary papers. Unger asked me the nature of Stokes' requests and when I told him, he said he would take care of it and that I didn't to worry about it any longer; it was obvious that Stokes did not have enough to do. I never heard another word from Stokes. But this also illustrated to me that the Embassy leadership was aware of the over-staffing of the mission. It is true that the Embassy met its goals, but it took more people than were really necessary. I must say that the Embassy's team work was pretty good on important matters despite the disputes over jurisdiction.

My Washington contact was Bill Clark -- later an Ambassador and an Assistant Secretary. Bill came to Thailand in connection with the one ministerial meeting that I attended in the Spring of 1969. Secretary Rogers came and it was his first meeting, with the Nixon Administration just having taken office. We had received advance notice that Rogers and his senior staff viewed SEATO as a Cold War institution. Indeed, Rogers said so in Bangkok. The US was not opposed to peaceful settlement in Vietnam; therefore the final communique for that meeting, unlike all of its predecessors, did not start with the usual pledge that SEATO members would never permit the Communists to take over Vietnam; rather member countries pledge to seek avenues for a peaceful solution to the Vietnam war. That was a major change in tone and emphasis. Rogers was of course new to his position; he was an able lawyer and he handled his participation in the SEATO ministerial in an American lawyerly fashion. He had a little problem with the Secretary General -- Jesus Vargas of the Philippines -- who felt much more comfortable, I think, with the hard line that the US and SEATO had taken previously in Vietnam. He voiced his differences with the new US approach as evidenced in the communique.

My job required me to have daily contacts with the American military. I was particularly involved in the work of the Military Planning Staff, headed then by General Autry Maroun.

SEATO had prepared in the preceding decade a number of military plans covering all the contingencies that anyone could think of -- e.g. a Chinese military attack across the Mekong. When Maroun took over, he decided to update and revamp all of these plans. That was probably a normal reaction for any military planner. He started with SEATO Plan V which dealt with the liberation of Laos. His planners came up with a new plan in August, 1968 -- shortly after my arrival. It called for 6-8 US divisions to invade Laos, along with the usual air power and naval forces. The plan was over 150 pages long and took the military step by step through a process to drive the Pathet Lao and the Communists out of Laos. Soon after I arrived I was handed this document which was being circulated to all member governments. There was a strong belief in the Embassy that anything that SEATO produced that was circulated to member states also ended up in Moscow and Beijing and their allies. I read the plan and was surprised that it had been written because I had never heard in Washington any mention of the possibility or desirability of invading Laos. I thought that there was absolutely no chance that we would provide 6-8 divisions particularly when we already had 500,000 troops in Vietnam. So I thought the plan entirely unrealistic. Not to mention that I was flabbergasted that Plan V was even being considered. I talked to Unger, Hannah and Foulon and they all agreed that even raising the subject was completely foolish. Had we been certain that the revision would just be placed on a shelf to collect dust, that would have been one matter, but assuming that Moscow and Beijing would read it, we were very concerned that those countries would believe that this was a major SEATO effort which needed to be taken seriously. That would have crossed the "invisible line" which I believed was developed in 1961 when the neutrality agreements with Laos were being worked out. In theory this line would not be crossed by either side, although I think the record will show that the line was in fact breached by both sides. But the very thought -- or even the perception -- of putting American divisions in Laos would have changed totally the nature of the conflict in Southeast Asia as we saw later when Nixon sent American forces into Cambodia.

After having read the plan several times, I wrote a "Top Secret" telegram to Washington and CINCPAC outlining it. Everybody was horrified; it was beyond the pale. So I, a very young officer, was instructed to see Maroun to straighten him out. No one else showed any interest in taking on the General -- which is not unusual. I was to get Plan V out of circulation and to kill it. I think Maroun had told the Pentagon and CINCPAC that he had planned to review all of the contingency plans and undoubtedly got no objection. He picked Plan V because he probably didn't like the idea of the Communist being in Laos; he may well have also seen himself as the head of the expeditionary force to free Laos. In the absence of any clear direction, he just started his revision.

Then Admiral John S. McCain, Sr -- who was CINCPAC at the time -- visited Bangkok. We briefed him, although the Admiral was fully familiar with SEATO Plan V, having read our cable traffic with Washington on the subject. Bob Fearey -- a Foreign Service officer -- who was the Admiral's Political Advisor had previously sent us a message saying that he was unable to get the Admiral to tell General Maroun to back off. So the Admiral's visit started with a meeting at the Embassy with the Ambassador, the DCM and the Pol-Mil Section. McCain listened to our pitch that the issuance of the revised plan might stir up anxieties in the Communist world, far more dangerous than the revision of an entirely unrealistic plan might be. At the end of our presentation, McCain said that he would take care of General Maroun, using the usual salty language of a military officer. I should note that General Maroun, with whom I had been

discussing the issue for months, had told me repeatedly that I didn't know what the President wanted to do and that it was clear to him that Washington wanted to rid Southeast Asia of the Communists and that he would not listen to a second secretary of the American embassy. In the final analysis, McCain explained the facts of life to Maroun; that brought the General back to the real world. I spent much of the rest of my time in Bangkok redrafting Plan V to make it a more realistic and acceptable document.

I should note that I don't think Secretary Rogers understood anything about SEATO Plan V. He showed little, if any interest, in the subject when he came to Bangkok for the ministerial meeting, but by that time, fortunately, the issue was well under control thanks to McCain's intervention. I must say that I still had a picture of Secretaries of State being able to "walk on water" and that his senior advisors also were a members of the "club" and knew things that a junior officer like myself had never learned.

While in Bangkok, I was involved in a process called "country clearances". This was a function entirely unrelated to SEATO. It was a process established by Graham Martin which prohibited any American military personnel from entering Thailand without the Embassy's approval, partly at the urging of the Thai government which continually complained about the size of the US military presence in their country. That applied to a private as well as a four star general. Unger continued the enforcement of that rule. By this time, in addition to the 500,000 troops in Vietnam, we had 50 or 60,000 troops in Thailand itself. So the "clearance" requests were a mountainous pile every day. I was supposed to ensure that only the absolute essential military into the country. That of course always put me at odds with the military who thought that every one of their people was essential and would argue about any denial that I might issue. The military sometime invoked their friends in the Pentagon who would call their contacts in the Department who would then issue instructions to me to release the clearance. So we rarely made any of our denials stick. I made a *cause celebre* of combat artists. They are the people that cover the walls of the Pentagon and other offices with sketches of American troops in action. I think their paintings and drawings are wonderful and tell a real story. But whether they needed to be in Thailand was another question; I didn't think that there was a compelling reason to let them into Thailand; I didn't think that the success of our efforts in either Vietnam or Thailand depended on their presence. I lost that battle as well. My whole function was essentially to tilt at windmills.

Along the same lines, the Thai had delegated to the American ambassador the authority to approve combat missions to be flown from Thai bases. That was then a secret agreement. That meant that every day, the Embassy received from the Seventh Air Force command in Saigon and from SAC headquarters in Omaha -- for the B-52s -- what were called "launch messages". These messages contained a list of the targets in North and South Vietnam and Laos to be hit the following day by planes using Thai bases. The Pol/Mil Section was the action office. The duty to review these messages rotated among the military officers of the Section, except on weekends or holidays when one officer of the section would be "on duty" for this action. Colonel Bill Baker would plot the targets on a map and then either the Section Counselor or the DCM authorize the strike or deny the request. We did have certain targets and zones that were off-limits as established by Washington. If we believed that a strike was targeting one or more of those zones, we would block that action. If problems arose, then the Ambassador would become involved. Those issues were almost always targeted on the Cambodian border or across the border. The

new Nixon policy of hitting Cambodian targets did not translate into a revised list of "off-limits" targets. I found out later, from documents that I read, that in fact, the Seventh Air Force, after running into Embassy objections, was ordered by the White House to deceive the Embassy and provide us with a false list of targets to be hit.

The last thing that Bob Foulon did before the end of his tour in late 1968 was to ask us to draw up plans for the reduction of our military presence in Thailand. He understood that the Vietnam war could not on forever and that in fact, President Nixon sounded anxious to bring it to a conclusion. It was a plan to which all members of the Pol/Mil Section contributed. I think that our maximum presence was reached in 1968, with perhaps an increase in 1971 when we were drawing down our presence in Vietnam. In 1968, we had seven major airfields in Thailand and a port at Sattahip. We had a gigantic military presence that Bob knew could not be there forever and believed that the time had come to plan a phase down. The Foulon plan was put in effect in 1973; it stood the test of time well, although I should note that after we had put it together, it was in fact "put on the shelf" after having submitted it to Washington. I think it was probably reviewed by EA and PM; I know it was put on a shelf at the Pentagon because when I became the Thai desk officer in ISA (DOD) in 1973, there it was and we used it. At the time we submitted it, the Washington civilian community essentially said "Good plan, but premature" and the military asked whether we were trying to undermine their fighting efforts. We had shared the plan with our military in Thailand, but never asked for their concurrences; it would have impossible for the military to give such a plan serious consideration.

In any case, after 1968, I think there were no more new units coming to Thailand; if they did, they replaced units already in country. There occasions when on a temporary basis we would expand the presence of one combat unit or another, but these were all temporary assignment and the military associated with them were withdrawn right after a particular combat need was met. But single individual or small groups still tried to enter Thailand for one reason or another and that is why the "country clearance" system persisted. Periodically, we would report the size of our presence to the Thai government. These reports were as accurate as we could make them except they did not include people on temporary detail. That was a large loophole because the US military uses TDY assignments widely, even though their tours in Thailand were essentially limited to 180 days. The Thais did look to us to try to limit the US presence in their country and we did try. The Thais were basically concerned that we might leave it in a lurch at some stage. They were happy to have us in country, but were not at all sure that we would be there for the long haul. They were especially concerned about the eventuality that would have the Viet Cong or the Pathet Lao march across the Thailand border and on to Bangkok. They depended on our presence to defend them in that case and were not sure that we would be there when needed. I don't think they really cared much about what was happening in Vietnam; they hated the Vietnamese and didn't want the communists to take over Thailand; they saw our presence as the real barrier to that eventuality. But they worried about our constancy.

We did not have a Status of Forces agreement covering our troops in Thailand. Our Section did get involved in issues raised by our military presence, but that was not my job. Contrasted to Turkey, there was much less Embassy involvement in the issue of troop behavior than there was in Thailand. The major reason was that our military in Thailand had a special fund which allowed it to settle claims on the spot if we had caused any damage to property or life. Had we

had such a fund in Turkey, we could have avoided most of the complaints that we had to settle. There are always unexpected incidents created by the presence of our military -- not major to us perhaps, but of considerable importance to the indigenous population -- damage property or person. In Thailand, the day after the incident, a US officer -- mostly likely from the Judge Advocate's Office -- would show up with cash in hand and settle the claim right there and then. That would end the case and kept the negative reaction of the local people down to a minimum. I ran into a similar system in Germany where payment for damages was taken care of immediately and most often to the satisfaction of the injured party. But unfortunately, that was not the case in Turkey. There claims had to go through a long bureaucratic channel which ended usually with dissatisfaction by all concerned. I never did understand why a standard practice was not applied in Turkey; it would have saved all of us a lot of time and effort -- and would have been good public relations.

Let me now turn briefly to our counter-insurgency efforts. All of us in the Pol/Mil Section were involved in one way or another, although, as I mentioned, primary responsibility for this function laid with a separate Embassy section -- in fact, we were viewed by them as poachers. My assignment was to follow events in North Thailand, which was one of the country's three regions. I had to attend meetings about the counter-insurgency efforts in North Thailand; I read all the papers on the subject and had considerable contacts with the people who were conducting the operations. I became involved in counter insurgency also because SEATO had a large program and funded a number of large counter-insurgency projects -- largely with US money. Some of the money went to the procurement of what was called "SIOP jeeps"; that is, jeeps with movie projectors in the back that could be readily used to show films -- mostly propaganda -- to the smallest hamlets. SEATO would send fleet of these jeeps to the Thailand hinterlands. Counter-insurgency was a big program in Thailand; we had US efforts, Thai efforts, SEATO efforts. This was THE program of the time. I believed that foreigners could never really have a successful counter-insurgency program in Thailand; I thought that the Thais could conduct a successful program. In that respect, I agreed with Mao. That view was also the Embassy's view, starting with Graham Martin, even when he had DeSilva set up the special section. He insisted that Americans play a supporting role only; the Thais were to take the lead and be seen out front on counter-insurgency. Unger full embraced that view and if anything was even a stronger proponent of Thai efforts. This Embassy view led to a lot of Embassy-military disputes as well as Embassy-AID and Embassy-CIA bickering. I certainly could appreciate the difficulties that our doctrine created for the US military. They had advisors assigned to Thai units, who, however, when those units engaged in counter-insurgency efforts could not accompany their units into the field. We took these restriction seriously and a number if US military officers who had accompanied their units into the field were transferred out of Thailand in a hurry. The Ambassadors were determined not to repeat our Vietnam experience.

The Thais eventually became quite proficient at counter-insurgency. Some of their small military units became very effective; some of the governors and provincial officials became well motivated and very effective. Some officials were corrupt and brutal and disasters for counter-insurgency programs. However, in the final analysis, it was probably geo-strategic events that probably effected the insurgency in Thailand, such as China's cessation of support for the Thai insurgents.

Most of my contacts with the Thai government were with the SEATO Division of the Foreign Ministry. I found them easy to work with: bright, well trained, knew their business. We never really gave the form of the Thai government much thought. It was hard for us to see it as a dictatorship, even though it obviously was. But it was then very benevolent; there was no sign of authoritarian rule. The average Thai lived a normal life, disturbed very little by the government. There were no troops in the streets, no road blocks, no check-points. A Parliament did meet, even though it may not have been as representative or as deliberative as we might have wished. I think the Thai government in this period was certainly one of the most benevolent dictatorships in the world. If you use Jeane Kirkpatrick's definitions about authoritarianism and totalitarianism, one would have to conclude that authoritarianism isn't always bad for the people of a country, at least in the short run. In Thailand, there was the overwhelming presence of a King, supported by the common belief that if things really went bad, His Majesty would always be there to correct them. He would not permit the military rule to get out of hand. In the context of Third World governments I have seen in action, I would consider the Thai military one of the late 1960s to be one of the better ones. It was certainly much more efficient than many of the Middle East governments with which I later became acquainted.

It is true that there was corruption everywhere in Thailand. Corruption has been an integral part of Thai society for at least 1,000 years. There was probably no governor in the country who was not corrupt. Even the SEATO permanent staff I dealt with did not escape suspicion; there were some allegations that they were getting cuts out of SEATO projects. I think the Filipinos and the Thai there had their hands in the till. I couldn't prove it, but I certainly believed it.

There is such a thing as prebendalism -- an arcane word -- which is used to describe the practice of supplementing governmental salaries through bribes or kick-backs. For example, a citizen had to get his or her identity card renewed. The fee for that service might be ten bahts. From time immemorial, the district official, as authorizing officer, was allowed to take 10% of the costs as his cut from the renewal fee. That supplemented what everybody agreed was an inadequate government salary. The population all knew what the fee and the take was; for them this was an acceptable way of doing business. When we reached the modern era, the district officer's household expenses rose sharply -- kids had to go to college, most likely outside of Thailand; he has to drive a large foreign car; he has to have a color TV. That requires a major increase in income. Consequences: the identity card renewal fees jumps twenty fold and the district officer's take increases to 95%. The Thai people accepted prebendalism -- the concept that all officials were permitted to take a small amount from the fees paid. But they resented the corruption; that is the large increase in both the fees and the official's share. The standard 10% gave way to the venality of the officials who took as much as the traffic would bear. All this I learned later when I went to Songkhla. I learned about the difference between acceptable fee taking and corruption. The English word "corruption" had been absorbed by the Thais and used as part of their language.

The American community in Bangkok was huge. We saw each other socially; I had an advantage in that one of my uncles and his wife were stationed there. My wife's uncle, Walter Snowden, was there with the CIA. He was under cover as a first secretary in the Political Section. They helped us get started in the social whirl of the community. Also Bob Foulon managed to run a Section with the highest morale of any section that I have observed in my career. The five FSOs

and the five military officers and their families were happily together both day and night and I still see a number of them now twenty five years later. The military officers in the Section moved along in their careers and all ended with stars in their shoulders before they retired. I still some of them. The Pol/Mil Section had an amazing *esprit de corps* which stood it in good stead during the working hours and socially after work. In addition, as the SEATO officer, I had contacts in the international community, which brought into contact with a lot of other nationals stationed in Bangkok. Our representational life was certainly active -- much more than one might expect from an officer at my grade.

Both the work and the people we met made the tour in Bangkok a very good one. I enjoyed it greatly, as I did all of my Foreign Service assignments, except the one tour in the Economic Section in Ankara. There are a number of things I learned from this tour that stood me in good stead in my career. First of all, I learned to be suspicious of any Embassy that had a Deputy Ambassador -- that is the formal title. Hannah was the DCM, but because we had a Deputy Ambassador in Saigon, pressures were continually applied to Unger to establish a similar position or positions in Bangkok. The head of the Counter-Insurgency Section wanted the title as did the AID Mission Director. It never happened in Bangkok, but I was always on guard against such "title creep". I also learned to guard against the proliferation of the "Minister" title. We had seven Ministers in Bangkok and that was certainly too many and created a lot of unnecessary tensions. I also learned in Bangkok that it is far better to work and entirely "up front" with the American military than going behind its back. That lesson was first brought home to me in Turkey by Cash and Pugh, but was really reinforced in Thailand. There is no point in being devious with the military; they don't behave like that and if they find that you can't be trusted, then there is no relationship. The best illustration of the direct approach is illustrated by the story I told earlier about McCain and Maroun and SEATO Plan V. A lot of people told me that I shouldn't involve CINCPAC or if I did, I would find that the military always supports its own. That was not my experience; if you have a good case and present forcefully and openly, then the generals and admirals will give you a fair hearing.

I also learned that with the right leadership, inter-agency teams can be very productive. Military and civilians can work together, civilians from different agencies can work together. The key is to getting the right people; then their agency parentage is immaterial. It is a lesson that I had to learn because I had somehow I had become suspicious of personnel of agencies other than that of the Department; that probably had been inculcated in me by my Foreign Service seniors. One example of the inter-changeability in Bangkok was Jim Devine who was a Pentagon civilian assigned to the Embassy in Bangkok. Graham Martin then took him to Rome as the Pol/Mil Counselor and later Jim ended up in OES. There were others who had ended up in various capacities after their Bangkok tours.

*Q: After a happy year in Bangkok, you were then assigned to open a new post in Songkhla. How were so lucky?*

KELLY: Songkhla was in South Thailand, 600-700 air miles south of Bangkok -- about 1,000 miles by road. Ambassador Unger had persuaded the Department that the US needed to have representation in South Thailand, primarily to coordinate the counter-insurgency programs -- police advisors, military advisors, propaganda, special forces training, experimental projects run

by ARPA -- that were being supported by the US government in that part of the country. There were other US programs -- Peace Corps, AID -- in the region which needed some supervision, but they were of less importance than the counter-insurgency ones. By 1970, we had consulates in Ching-Mai and in Udorn in the North-east. State Department had no presence in South Thailand, which is the long peninsular stretch from Bangkok to the Malay border. But there were lots of Americans from other agencies, both civilian and military working in South Thailand -- CIA, USIA, DoD -- both civilian and military. There was no mechanism to coordinate these disparate programs except from Bangkok, which was far removed and not able to coordinate the day-to-day activities. There were three weekly flights from Bangkok by Thai Airways, two weekly flights by Air America and two weekly flights by US military cargo planes. There was a railroad connection and a steamer line that ran along the coast. So it was not too hard to reach Songkhla, but still it was hard to coordinate all of our activities from 1,000 miles away.

Some troubling developments had taken place in South Thailand. The exiled Laotian right wing dictator, Phoumi Nosavan, was living in Songkhla; he had permission to do so from the Thai government. He was only 1,500 miles away from Laos. It happened that some of the US government employees in South Thailand had befriended Phoumi and had decided to help him mount a coup which would have returned him to power in Vientiane. These Americans were free lancing and operated without the blessing of their parent agencies. They truly thought that Washington and the embassies in Thailand and Laos would be delighted when they found out about these coup plans. In fact, Phoumi and his American friends worked out all the plans necessary to run the coup; they identified resource sources -- money and weapons. In fact, the Americans brought the plan to the Embassy in Bangkok and told us that all the pieces were in place and that as soon as the Ambassador approved, the plans could be put into action. These Americans were flabbergasted and horrified when they were told that the plans ran against US government policy, but this American participation in what was obviously a "no no" was one of the reasons Unger decided that some State Department representation was necessary in South Thailand.

After the Department approved the opening of a consulate, Lyle Bracken, a young Foreign Service officer, was chosen to open the post. However, simultaneously, some one in Saigon decided that Bracken was needed there and that is what happened despite Unger's appeals. So Unger decided to send me instead. I was delighted with the assignment. I was only 29 years old and thought having your own post at that age was a real reward. Of course, it was a small post and a somewhat unusual one, but I could hardly believe my good fortune. My wife was a good sport. I told her, after Unger had reached his decision, that we had to view the assignment as a sort of Peace Corps tour -- it was a long way away from "civilization" and it lacked many creature comforts. She prepared herself as best as one could and it wasn't until the end of my tour in Songkhla that she told me that she had hated the assignment. She said that she had never mentioned it to me because she thought that I had enough to worry about as it was. That was a disciplined Foreign Service wife!

We didn't know much about Songkhla. I had been reading reports from South Thailand during my year in Bangkok, but I had never been there. We in fact got there on the steamer I mentioned earlier. There were two insurgencies in the area: one was generated by the armed wing of the Malay Communist Party which had been beaten by the British during the emergency in

Malaysia. They had infiltrated into South Thailand and formed four regiments of several thousand armed and hardened fighters; of course, they enjoyed sanctuary from the Malay and British authorities and lived and operated in a strip 10-40 miles deep from the Malaysia-Thailand border. They lived in the jungle and pretty much ruled it the way they wanted. From their jungle hideout, they raided various parts of Thailand wreaking some havoc on the local population.

There was also a small Thai Communist armed insurgent group -- about 400 men -- that operated independently in South Thailand. They were under some control of the Thai Communist Party which operated in the middle of the country. Although small, the group was expanding and was making its presence felt. In addition, there were Muslim separatists operating in the southern end of Thailand. Historically, the four most southern provinces of Thailand had been part of the Malay states. Thailand had acquired them during a confrontation between Britain and France at the turn of the century. So the population in these four provinces was predominantly Malay and Muslim. There were strong separatist currents with many people wishing to rejoin Malaysia. All of these movements made South Thailand a very volatile area with many violent movements operating there. My area of jurisdiction covered fifteen provinces: the four primarily Muslim ones to which I have already alluded and eleven others. The Communist insurgents operated in about five of them, but we had counter-insurgency programs in all of them in an effort to keep the rebellions from spreading.

The US government was greatly concerned in the late 1960's and early 1970's by communist insurgencies. We were involved in a total struggle in Vietnam; that led us to fear other "Vietnams" in the regions. The Communist-led insurgencies in Laos and Thailand were perceived as threats -- the "dominoes" theory. I personally wasn't sure that the outcome in Thailand would be similar to the one in Vietnam. I thought that the Thais had some things going for them that the Vietnamese did not. In the first place, the Thais did not have a history of colonialism; they had always been independent and sovereign. Secondly, the Thai population was homogenous to a very large extent. It had a common culture and religion (Buddhism) -- except in the four southern provinces. Finally, the Thais had a deep veneration and respect for their monarchs. These factors, I thought, made the Thai situation considerable different from Vietnam; Thailand was not likely to fall to communist insurgency as South Vietnam did. I was aware that there was venality, corruption, an unequal distribution of economic assets, exploitation of villagers by government officials -- all factors that kept the insurgencies alive. I, along with many others in the Embassy, was convinced that the struggle in Thailand was one that only the Thais could win or lose; it was not a battle that we could undertake. much less win. There were many Americans in Bangkok, both civilians and military, that believed that we had made a fundamental mistake in Vietnam when we undertook the lead in trying to suppress the insurgency there. It was our view that an indigenous insurgency could only be won by the native population and not by an outside power using methods foreign to the local culture, history and practices. I think that Ambassador Unger and his senior staff sympathized with this view and felt that insurgencies in Thailand could only be overcome by the Thais themselves. The US had a role: to encourage, persuade, hector, induce the Thais to take on the struggle against the insurgents, but that under no circumstances should Americans be out front in the struggle; as a matter of fact, we should not be involved in any actual fighting. I think that the most of the Embassy felt the same way, so that we didn't really have internal disputes about our general policy. There were some individuals in various agencies who felt that the Unger's general policy

was wrong. For example, I had long arguments with one individual in South Thailand about this policy. He felt that the Thais were not competent enough to subdue the insurgencies and that only we, the Americans, could do that job. He tried his best to get us involved in military action, but fortunately, he didn't get any support from his superiors.

The Thai Army had a large presence in the area -- the Fifth Regimental Combat Team and some smaller units. There were some Thai Army mobile units, modeled after some of our efforts in Vietnam; these were trained troops whose principal mission was civil development. There was a large Thai border police presence along with the Thai provincial police. And of course, there were the typical Thai governmental representatives -- governors, district officers, teachers, medical personnel, etc.

Songkhla was a city of 35,000 people, located on the beaches of the South China Sea, filled with palm trees and other tropical flora. It was a beautiful site to see. The Thais are very hospitable and made us feel welcomed. We became part of a very small American community of no more than twenty adults, I would guess. I should note however that very near this "heaven" there was violence out in the countryside. There was a lot of disease in the area. We had Americans stationed in all of the other provincial capitals. There was a small American business community in Phuket -- a famous resort area. Union Carbide had built a tin smelter there -- the largest in the world at the time. That accounted for the large majority of the American business community. We had American missionaries in the South Thailand -- both Catholic and Protestant. Most of the missionaries were very friendly and we had good relations with them. Many of them had been stationed in China and had been forced to leave when the Communists took over in the late 1940s. They were very knowledgeable about Asia, but had a very difficult time making any converts. The successful ones ran schools and health facilities which were welcomed by the indigenous population. The Seventh Day Adventists ran a couple of hospitals; there was a large colony for lepers run by a number of Protestant missionaries. There were some -- Southern Baptists and Pentecostals -- who were in Thailand solely to convert Thais, but as I said, they had limited if any success.

Upon arrival, we moved right into an office that at one time had been the British Consulate. The British had left Songkhla a few years earlier and had turned part of their building over to the Malays. The rest of the building was leased to DOD who used for ARPA personnel. ARPA turned out to be a real boon. They let use some of their space, they lent us some of their vehicles, they provided me a single-side band radio and other equipment. That radio was my life-line to the Embassy and I used it every day to communicate with Bangkok. We did have secure telegraphic communications to the Embassy, but since we had to do operate the equipment which is quite tedious and time consuming, we generally wrote very short messages. I used the radio to communicate with the JUSMAAG components in South Thailand. If I had a message for other military components, the JUSMAAG would relay my message to other military commands. So between the radio, a good reliable Thai domestic telegraph system, an phone system that worked occasionally, we managed to stay in touch pretty well with all American units in South Thailand. Communications were therefore not major impediment.

Roads were another matter; there were very few paved ones. There was not for example a road to Bangkok that was fully paved. Sections had been, but not the whole stretch. I traveled to the

fifteen provinces by jeep. Land Rover, airplane -- I could on occasions request Air America to ferry me as well as small US Air Force planes. Sometimes, I even used Thai helicopters belonging to the police and Army. I would hitchhike on those planes if I had some urgent business in one of the provinces. I also traveled by boat using the existing canal system. So, while I took a trip every week, getting around was not a major problem; we just had to use some ingenuity.

I hired a few locals -- most of whom had worked for the British or other foreigners before. I rented a house -- which was actually the house that Phoumi had occupied. We had no screens, which was a problem because mosquitoes ruled the nights in Songkhla as did other insect during the day. We -- my wife, myself and three servants whom we had brought with us from Bangkok - - pulled our water out of a well with buckets; later we drilled our own well and put a pump in it.

The office set up was interesting. I was the only State Department officer, but I had five consuls - - one from USIA and four who worked for other parts of the US government. These five had all been in Songkhla when I arrived. I had consular privileges, but I was not authorized to issue visas or passports, which left some people mystified. I remember one Thai gentleman calling on me and after a few minutes of pleasant chit-chat, offered me \$25,000 for an immigrant visa. I explained that I did not have a visa plate and therefore could not issue him a visa, even if I wanted to -- which I didn't in any case. He completely misunderstood my statement and thought that my refusal was just a way to up the bidding. So he asked me to name my price! On visas and passports, we forwarded any request we received to the Embassy. In the consular field, we did provide protection and welfare services for American citizens and took care of sending home those that were seriously ill or dead. We did have some Americans who were shot by insurgents, but fortunately, none died of their wounds. For example, a missionary couple was ambushed and shot by insurgents; to this day, I am amazed that they survived. Their jeep looked like it had been made of Swiss cheese. I think I counted 38 bullet holes in the vehicle. But both escaped with their lives, even though seriously wounded.

My role had been made quite clear to me by Ambassador Unger. I was given a written charter -- a three paragraph statement of my responsibilities, including my role as coordinator. That statement was published in a Senator Symington subcommittee hearings publication after he held hearings in 1969 on US security commitments abroad. My charter was published along with those of my colleagues in the other three consulates. In any case, Unger's directives was sent to all of the agencies represented in Thailand through their chief representatives in Bangkok. These agency heads were instructed to disseminate these rules to their people in South Thailand, which was done. The directive was useful, but by itself it would never been very effective. I faced a particular problem since I was younger than most, if not all, of the agency representatives in the area. In fact, if I was at all effective, it was because I worked hard to try to obtain cooperation. I did have run-ins with some people who resisted any effort to coordinate their activities. They would not keep me informed or did not follow my advice. In those cases, I got complete support from the Embassy. In one case, I had to recommend that a USIA officer be shipped out of the country which was done, even over the objections of the USIA Public Affairs officer in Bangkok. Those objections were essentially bureaucratic: "I am not going to have some 29 year old Consul run my program in Thailand". But with the Ambassador's and Washington's backing, the USIA man was transferred out of Thailand. There was also an Army Colonel who was

recalcitrant; he was admonished by a general to cooperate and that took care of that problem. The general, who headed the MAAG Mission in Thailand was very supportive of the concept of coordination. It was true that I could only be of limited help to these agency representatives; if they needed additional resources and if I agreed with their views, I could and did support them in their arguments with Bangkok and Washington. But my role was more of a control; the Ambassador wanted the US presence in South Thailand reduced. I did make several suggestions for reductions which were carried out. That of course didn't make me very popular with the agencies being reduced, but it got their attention real quick!

The philosophical background for this reduction was the thesis that Americans should not be conducting the counter-insurgency effort; we could and should advise, but not conduct. For example, we had a Special Forces A Team in South Thailand -- about 65 men, led by a captain. They were well trained -- almost all veterans of Vietnam. They were supposed to be training the Thai border police; they were not supposed to be going into operations. When I and some people from the Embassy visited the unit, we found that, in fact, it was not engaged in training at all; the Thais were not sending any of their people to be trained. So, not surprisingly, these soldiers were accompanying Thai units of their patrols, which could easily have involved them in fire fights with the Communists -- contrary to US government and Embassy policy. So within three months of my arriving in Songkhla, I recommended that the Special Forces Team should be pulled out of South Thailand and the Country Team approved. We all agreed that when the Thais had soldiers ready to be trained, members of the American Team could come to South Thailand on TDY to conduct the training. I believed that to have a permanent presence in the jungle camp, subject to Communist fire, was not appropriate. In fact, the Communists did enter the Team's camp one night and stole a lot of its weapons.

My relationships with the provincial governors varied. Some were very good; they were the progressive ones interested in the welfare of their people. Other were very venial and corrupt. To be a governor in a border province was a much sought-after position, because he had the ability to control the smuggling activities and therefore a source of considerable income. This particularly true on the Thailand-Malaysia border or on the coast where smuggling took place by boat through the South China Sea. I tried to maintain good relations with all of the governors, but I didn't succeed with all of them. Although I don't specifically remember any governor trying to use me for his purposes, that was not true of some other officials. I remember one Colonel of the Border Police trying to use me to get more M-16s even though his American advisor had decided that they had enough weapons. Such situations arose in other circumstances, but that was not entirely surprising given our major presence and the foibles of some of the Thais.

As I said, I traveled a lot. I visited provincial officials, Thai Army units, Thai police units, schools, as often as I could. I tried to go to the most active provinces -- i.e., those having the highest rate of violent incidents -- every month and to visit all fifteen provinces every three months. I would usually drive to a town in a jeep with a Thai driver. It was on these visits that my Thai language really became useful. Without that capability, I would have been seriously handicapped because in South Thailand, English was known by only a few. So I used Thai every day, all day. By the time my tour was up, I think my Thai was pretty good -- good enough to interpret for visiting Americans; it was rated 4-4 by FSI. The inability to speak Thai hampered many of the Americans working in South Thailand. Most of the American advisors did not speak

Thai and had difficulties communicating with their Thai counterparts. When I really became proficient and was able to pick up some of the subtleties of the language, I did overhear the Thais making considerable fun of their American advisors -- I think that they didn't think that any American could understand the Thai language well enough to understand them.

They called one American the "water can" man because he always carried a can of potable water with him. It was obviously a sensible health precaution, but didn't necessarily sit well with the Thais.

On these visits, I would try to see the governors who would brief me on events and issues. Then I would see his military advisor or the police chief or the education chief or the head provincial medical officer. I would try to visit more than just the provincial capital because I wanted to confirm with my own eyes and ears what was really happening in the province. So I visited villages, although I recognized that Thai villagers were not likely to be fully open with foreigners, but I think I was able to at least pick up a sense of how the villagers felt they were being served by the provincial officials. If I stayed overnight in a village, I would spend the evening sitting around drinking rice whiskey; pretty soon some of the veils surrounding the villagers would begin to drop and I would hear stories about the police and its misdeeds or how the health officials sometimes sold their services -- or withholding their services because many Thai villagers thought the spraying of their huts with DDT would be harmful and would pay the health workers not to spray their homes. These discussions gave me some sense of what was going on and how the villagers regarded their officials. When there were flagrant cases of abuse - rape, kidnaping, major thefts -- I would try to intervene with the provincial governor or at least make the governor aware of the misdeeds of his officials. I was under no illusion that I or any number of official Americans could make a difference; that could only come from the Thai officials themselves.

The governors were essentially independent of Bangkok. In Songkhla province, the governor was a Prince -- the grandson of the previous monarch. The title that he carried had the same weight in Thailand than that of the Prince of Wales in England -- i.e. the heir to the throne. The Thais made a lot of jokes and puns about that situation. The district officers, similarly, were the absolute rulers in their districts.

I think I came away from my tour in Songkhla with a number of conclusions about the causes of insurgency. First of all, there were the exploitable grievances. Every one in the world has grievances, the difference is that some can be exploited by others to force some changes. In the case of insurgencies, the driving force was violence, supported sometimes by non-violent participants who supported the fighters with moral and some physical support such as food or working as a look-out or as a village guard after some training by the insurgents. This cause suggested two ways for subduing the insurgency: a) minimize the exploitable grievances by improving the living standards of the villagers and by reducing the level of malfeasance that the people felt was so burdensome, and/or b) a vigorous suppression of the insurgents, particularly those that had taken up arms against the government and were terrorizing the locals by assassinations and other violent means.

I met some of the captured insurgents. They were mostly the village level leaders or cadre; I

don't believe I ever met any of the real chiefs. I did on a couple of occasions discuss their grievances with them. I talked to some ex-members of the insurgents. I think that most people who left their villages to go live in the jungle permanently as soldiers did so because of the wrongs which they believed had been done to them personally by some representative of the state. Included in this list of grievances were rapes and murders allegedly perpetrated on members of the family. Many of the insurgents were literate and young; they had been persuaded by the traditional communist siren songs that promised "heaven on earth". The Communist used to distribute on a regular basis newsletters in the villages and towns. They also had two radio stations that which could reach every corner of the country. One was a division of Radio Beijing and other was called "the Voice of the People of Thailand", which broadcast in Thai 12-14 hours each day. Both stations broadcast from the Yunnan Province in South China. Eventually, these stations began to attack me by name. I thought that that might become a problem for our security, but fortunately, it did not have that consequence.

Of course, "The Voice of America" was being heard as well; the Thais had their own radio stations. We worked with the Thais on many publications as part of their counter-insurgency efforts. The best Thai propaganda came from the daily newspapers and radio station. TV had not yet penetrated the villages, by and large. USIA had a large unit that wrote stories for the Thai newspapers; it also published monthly magazines in Thai; it translated hundreds of books into Thai and distributed them. I have already mentioned the USIA SIOP jeeps that would show two films in the villages; one would be a popular movie, which was the attraction, and the other was a propaganda piece. They would usually show one reel of one movie and one from the other and then shift back an forth to ensure that people would stay and watch the propaganda film. I have never reached any conclusions whether this movie efforts was useful; it is very hard to measure the effectiveness of propaganda, particularly in a large rural area. I believed then and do now that the best propaganda is the truth, i.e., true accounts of the Thai government performing well for its people. We, as a nation, have a bias against propaganda, but I think we would all agree that publicizing positive governmental actions is a legitimate and useful tool. I learned that you couldn't fool the villagers; they knew when something good had happened. They knew when the government built a foot bridge across a river that was needed; the word of that deed got around quickly and widely. By the same token, if the police stole a couple of water buffaloes, that word got around quickly. The informal network was alive and well in South Thailand!

But back to the intellectual insurgents. They would move into the jungle because they bought the Communist propaganda. But most of these people tended to return to their villages after three or four months; the jungle was not a hospitable place to live and their beliefs, strong as they might have been, did not overcome the difficult living conditions they met in the jungle. Of course, many managed a foray or two into town, but nevertheless, living in the jungle was very difficult. You had to admire those that did for long stretches of time, such as the Malay Communists who had been living in the jungles for a dozen of years.

We did have visitors occasionally from the Embassy and Washington. I would put them into a jeep and take them to a village. I tried to avoid showing them the "Potemkin" villages, in which all the indigenous were trained to answer the questions in the "correct" way. These villages were convenient to visit from Songkhla and therefore had become the stopping places for American visitors. These villagers had seen lot of foreigners over the years and knew what the questions

would be; they had "canned" responses for all of them. The anthropologists that visited came away enthralled by the answers and their experiences in these villages. But I decided that it was far better just to drive away from those villages and stop in others at random. The Thais are very hospitable; they would sit down with the visitors and talk; sometimes they would invite you to share a meal with you and sometimes they would give you a tour of the rice paddies. I enjoyed this escort duty for it was helpful to me as well; I enjoyed the visitors. You have to remember that Songkhla was a very isolated town and in retrospect, I am sure that I was somewhat lonely; so I was delighted when someone took the trouble to visit Songkhla. That was particularly true for the Washington visitors, who brought news from another planet.

There was a narcotics trade that went through South Thailand, but it was not as virulent then as it is now. We did not have any anti-narcotics program in South Thailand at the time. That was done by the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs office in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Occasionally, one of the agents would come to our area and then we might get a request to use our pouch to ship small amounts paraffin or morphine-based drugs that he had acquired which he wanted to have tested in a lab. The narcotics were grown primarily in North Thailand, but they shipped south into Malaysia through our area, either by rail or boats. But the route through South Thailand was not a primary one, as was, for example, Hong Kong; we were at most an alternate and probably not used very often. The going price was about \$25,000 per kilo of morphine-based drug.

I might just add one word about my relationship with the Embassy. The DCM was my official supervisor; that is, he wrote my efficiency reports, which were then reviewed by the Ambassador. That was the same procedure used for all officers who headed constituent posts. But in fact, I dealt most often with the Counter-Insurgency Section of the Embassy, although on occasions, I would communicate with other sections as well. There was one officer -- an Army Colonel -- who had been designated as my liaison and support officer; he was a fully integrated member of the Counter-Insurgency Section. He was a wonderful man, who became a life long friend. He had fought and had been wounded in both Korea and Vietnam. I would talk to him almost daily by radio; I would keep him up to date on what was going on in my provinces. He was there to help me when I needed it. He also provided a lot of wise counsel; he taught me a lot about the reality of insurgencies and how to someone should conduct himself or herself when in dangerous situations.

He was a source of great help and strength for us. One day, our American flag was ripped up in a typhoon. He sent me a replacement. He shipped medicine and supplies. We had an American child who had been seriously injured in a fall; in fact the kid was close to dying. The organization that controlled the med-evacuation helicopters wouldn't send a chopper until the cost and reimbursement issue was settled. I talked to the Colonel and asked him to cut through the red tape; which he did and the child's life was saved. He was a source of real support and strength. He went on to become a two-star general, I must say that that tour aged me quickly. For the first time in my life, I saw people dying from violence. That was shocking and very sobering. It was the first time I had seen a large number of dead bodies. I am not talking about masses when the senses are so overwhelmed that a single death doesn't strike home. But I used to see groups of people -- up to nine -- who had been killed in ambushes. That brings brutality home! I went to a lot of cremations of Thais who had been killed by the communists. Saw a lot of

maimed people. I was with an American as he was dying -- he had been stabbed through the eye socket with a picket fence pole by just a common criminal. These are experiences that are very sobering indeed and which remain with you. I saw a lot of people who became very sick -- about half of the Americans in the southern provinces were medically evacuated; many were in comas caused by jungle diseases. There was a harshness to life in south Thailand which sobered me quickly and thoroughly. I fortunately escaped unscathed; my son caught parasitic amoeba, but was cured. The rest of the family, besides the occasional dysentery that was inescapable, survived Songkhla.

We did have a close call. We had a cook who tried to poison us; I think in retrospect he was mentally ill. We had brought him with us from Bangkok. We did a lot of entertaining and I think somewhere along the line, the cook decided that he was over-burdened. She decided that if she could put small quantities of a poison that she had gotten from a Chinese apothecary into our food -- both ours and that of our guests -- they would get sick and not accept anymore invitations to eat with us. I found out about this "plot" after we had left from some of her co-workers who squealed on her. The Embassy's security officer went to Songkhla and took affidavits from our former household staff and the Chinese apothecary and others who knew of the cook's plot. She didn't want to kill anyone; just make people sick enough so that they wouldn't come to the house and thereby reduce her workload. She did in fact succeed with some of our guests; one guest's heart stopped beating. The local doctor who lived next door to us had to come over and inject adrenalin into our guest's veins. That revived our guest, but he was only one of the many people who became sick from the food we served. I also got sick as did one of my sons. We had to go the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital which was 30 kilometers away; there we had our stomachs pumped out. We did not suffer further damage, but it was not a pleasant experience. But the cook's plot in some ways fit in with the Wild West living that we encountered in Songkhla.

As I said, I was not aware of the cook's plot until after we had left. My replacement was briefed on these activities by some of the other servants. After the story was thoroughly investigated, the Embassy sent me a cable asking whether I wanted to prosecute the cook. I didn't and I hope my successor's meals were better than what we had been fed.

My tour in Songkhla reinforced my views that the US was following a correct policy when it insisted that the Thais take the lead in any counter-insurgency effort and action. In fact, the Thais were up to the challenge and there is no counter-insurgency in Thailand today. The Thai "domino" did not fall. The cessation of insurgency was only due in part to the efforts of the Thai government; important was also China's decision to eliminate any support to the insurgents; that dried up one of the principal spigots of support. China provided much of the financing and some of the weapons. They were shipped into South Thailand in small loads. Many of the weapons used by the insurgents were in fact captured from Thai military stocks. The black market for arms taken from the Thai government was very active during my tour in Songkhla.

When we were lucky enough to get some defectors or other members of the insurgency, they would tell us about the Chinese involvement. The best insurgents, after having spent a year or two in the jungle, would be sent to China for advanced training on insurgency tactics. So we knew clearly that the Chinese were thoroughly involved in the Thai insurgencies. The major contribution was unquestionably financial resources; we had intelligence reports about caches

being shipped to the Thai insurgents. Without those resources, the insurgency probably would not have been as virulent or lasted as long as it did.

**PHILIP R. MAYHEW**  
**Economic/Commercial Officer**  
**Bangkok (1968-1971)**

**Principal Officer**  
**Udorn (1971-1972)**

**Political Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1983-1988)**

*Philip R. Mayhew was born in California in 1934. He received a bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1956 and served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1957-1959. Mr. Mayhew entered the Foreign Service in 1961. His career included positions in Laos, Congo, Vietnam, Thailand, Jordan, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 26, 1995.*

*Q: You went out to Bangkok, you were there from '68 to '71.*

MAYHEW: I was in Thailand from '68 to '72. It was 1971 when I went up to Udorn. The consul in Udorn had gone over to Vietnam to work for John Paul Vann. They needed somebody to fill in Udorn for a while. So I went up there. I think I spent about 10 months to a year up in Udorn, my last year.

*Q: Let's go back to Bangkok. You went out in '68, what was your job?*

MAYHEW: I was an economic officer. It was a fairly large section. In fact, the Bangkok establishment was huge. At that time you had a MAAG which was virtually a corps headquarters without troops. There were 400 to 500 people in AID, and all sorts of other people engaged in counterinsurgency. You even had the Stanford Research Institute out there, and ARPA, and a special assistant for counterinsurgency. It was a huge embassy.

*Q: ARPA is?*

MAYHEW: It was Advanced Research Projects Agency of DOD.

All of them studying about how better to fight insurgencies. You had an insurgency going on. Within Thailand there was not only consulates in Udorn, Cheng Mai and Songkhla but also USIS branch posts in a number of places, the Northeast in particular. Some in the south too. It was really quite a counterinsurgency structure.

*Q: As economic officer, what were you dealing with?*

MAYHEW: I did minerals and general economic reporting -- minerals, energy, rubber. Again it was one of those situations where we probably wouldn't have been quite so interested had not we been so involved in security. It was a period where we were tenants on so many Thai bases. We had such a huge military establishment as well. I didn't mention that, but quite apart from the embassy and MAAG, you had 5 huge airbases and Sattahip-Utapao, one was a port and one was a B-52 base. All for fighting the Vietnam War.

*Q: With all these things around, on the economic side we must have been flooding Thailand with American money.*

MAYHEW: There certainly was a lot of money coming in. Perhaps the most useful thing we did was for military and counterinsurgency reasons, assisting construction of a good highway from Bangkok up to Korat and then on to Udorn. We assisted the Thai in a huge rural road building program, mainly in the northeast because that's where the insurgent threat was thought to be more serious. In the north too as well but mainly in the northeast. In 1972 in the northeast you could in all weather get to all the district capitals, not only provincial capitals, but district capitals as well. While this was done for security reasons, it turned out to be an amazing economic incentive as well.

Another thing we did in hiring and training labor and building all these bases, we created a large cadre of people who were skilled or semi-skilled. When we left, many of these people went off to the Middle East, and they're still going to the Middle East and all other parts of Asia as construction labor.

The amount of money we put in was certainly considerable for the times. However, the amount of US military spending -- not only construction but on everything else, including vegetables bought on the local economy and trucking and all of that -- was helpful, but not determinative to later economic development.

There is a book on AID, which came out 3-4 years ago, which concludes that while US aid in all forms was helpful, it was not a major factor in Thai development. Most development came from indigenous factors. But it certainly did jump-start in many ways areas of development outside of Bangkok.

The trouble of course with a military base is that while it spreads money into the local economy, it's not something which is long-lasting. In the Thai case, it certainly wasn't. Most of the cities, I understand, in the Northeast have done pretty well since the US presence, with one or two exceptions.

*Q: What was the insurgency that everyone was concerned about?*

MAYHEW: This was the heyday of insurgencies and the Thai communist party was attempting the same "peoples' war" that had taken place elsewhere. But it was never a threat to Thai national security. The Thai have always had problems along their borders. In fact, one of the Thai security tenets is to support various minority groups on your border who fight each other and

therefore are less likely to become a problem for the Thai. So the Thai were often not as concerned about the insurgency as we were. We were quite concerned because of the "domino theory" prevalent at the time, and also, of course, because we had a commitment to Thai security against communist aggression.

There were certain small areas in the Northeast that were very insecure. A few districts were largely under insurgent control. There were some very bad areas in the north, particularly some frontier areas. And some insecure areas in the south, where native insurgency was complicated by remnants of the Malaysia Communist insurgency headquartered in Thailand, and Muslim separatism. But the insurgency never managed to penetrate the Thai heartland in the middle of the country. When I was there were perhaps 10,000 insurgents, Thai and minorities, out of a population, at that time, perhaps 45 million or so. A few key areas, certainly, they controlled. When I was consul in Udorn in 1972, I never went into Na Kaa district which was near the Phu Pon mountains. The Phu Pon mountains were a redoubt of insurgents; by the time I returned to Thailand in 1983 the king had police in those mountains.

The Thai were fortunate in developing some comprehensive political/military ways of countering the insurgency, and fortunate also in the development of international circumstances. For example, the PRC dropped support of the insurgents. For them the insurgency was never a major national security threat. It eventually more or less withered away. There may be a few separatists and communists still in the south but it's hard to tell whether they're insurgents or whether they're bandits nowadays. But even there, in the 1980s there were mass surrenders arranged by the government. Many of them, of course, being ex-Malaysian communist insurgents.

*Q: I take it was a large economic section at that time, who was running it?*

MAYHEW: Konrad Bekker was economic counselor when I got there. It had been Bob Fluker before that, who, by the time I got there, was acting DCM.

*Q: How did you all find dealing with the Thai government officials, statistics, and getting information?*

MAYHEW: The Thai are generally easy to get along with. It doesn't mean that you get everything from them that you'd like to have. Or that they are always going to do what you want. They certainly aren't. Culturally speaking, they will nearly always be agreeable and easy to get along with. But a tendency to avoid confrontation does not mean they are ready to cede their interests.

It's important in the Thai context to think of the historical situation. When Marshal Sarit took power in about 1957, he seems to have shortly thereafter made a decision for rapid economic development. Basically the Army would run the government, whether or not the government had a civilian or military face. But they would hand over economic development to the private sector and to the people who knew how to do it. They would leave economic planning to the technocrats. It was a strategy of nurturing the golden goose that brought benefits to all concerned.

The Thai did a terrific job, averaging around 8 per cent real growth a year since the 1960s. And they had a very conservative fiscal stance. So you never had the terrible problems that you had in some other countries that built up immense foreign debts. The military did not overspend on weapons. Sometimes they've had a debt-service ratio which was getting to the point where people were beginning to wonder, but it never got to the point where it was a focus of real concern.

They learned to put projects together well for international financing. I think they became, in certain senses, a pet of the international financing banks, because they were able to put a project together, able to carry it out, and carry it out well. The projects were generally very well selected. There was an enormous amount of private entrepreneurship, the private sector operated extremely well. Wages were low and domestic and foreign investment sufficient. They've done most of the things that have since become so highly praised internationally as the way to go, if you're an undeveloped country, i.e., mainly a strategy of manufacturing for export.

The implied contract between the civilian side, the technocrats, and the military really has carried on very well, to a point where circumstances aren't the same and it doesn't exist in the same form, but in the crucial years, it certainly carried through. The Thai military usually exercised a certain amount of self-restraint in buying weapons, in contracting international debt for weapons purchases. The government, as a whole, obey a kind of golden mean in contracting international debt and in projects. They did very few projects which were solely for prestige, as so many other countries have done. This was just starting of course when I was first there in 1968.

*Q: Was corruption a problem?*

MAYHEW: Corruption has always been something of a problem, but not a major one in spite of pervasiveness. The Thai have a system of what one writer called, adapting a western medieval term, prebendalism, meaning that you have to pay people for doing the job that they're supposed to be doing anyway. Corruption, it seems to me, has operated most of the time in Thailand largely as a predictable factor, in which case it comes down to a kind of tax. The Thai usually have a way of arranging things so no one is too unhappy. It's only when the general system gets upset and somebody wants much more than they are normally entitled to, that things have gone badly. I suppose that if development had gone badly, corruption might have become a major issue. But in some ways you can look back and say it's not dissimilar to the 19th century in many cities in the United States, where economic growth was so rapid that it could stand a certain amount of corruption. It has not become, as far as I can tell, a really limiting factor on economic development, as it has in the Philippines or perhaps in some other places.

*Q: The time you were there Bangkok was sort of the R&R center. Did that create problems?*

MAYHEW: You always had problems, of course, but again, the kind of places that were frequented by American military were not frequented generally by Thai, except by the people making money off of it. The Thai were a pretty tolerant bunch. There were certainly problems which we otherwise would not have had. But they generally could be settled pretty much by the respective militaries.

*Q: How about the embassy, Unger was the ambassador when you were there?*

MAYHEW: The first time I was there, yes, Unger was the Ambassador. He was still there when I left in 1972.

*Q: How did he operate the embassy?*

MAYHEW: Being as huge as it was then, it imitated Saigon in structure and got a touch of gigantism. Most people rarely saw the Ambassador. It was imitating Saigon in that it had a mission coordinator, who had a very difficult role vis-a-vis counselor of embassy. His effectiveness depended very much on personality. During my time I had the impression that only one of the three in the slot made anything of it. In general, Unger was faced with an enormous and hard to manage structure. When you have a USAID that has 400 to 500 people and a JUSMAAG that has 300 to 400 -- and all of those military were, of course not really responsible to him. They are, in a sense, but not really because they have their own chain of command up to CINCPAC. It's an enormous management job. There was also a special assistant for counterinsurgency, which you don't have at most embassies, as well as a counselor for politico-military affairs. So you had a huge country team.

In fact, Bangkok always had big country teams. When I went back in 1983, there were 41 sections represented in the country team meetings even then. So back in the late 60s, you necessarily had a lot of meetings and a lot of consultations to try to coordinate it all. The ambassador was, I think, thought by most of us to be rather remote off there in his corner. We didn't see him too often, but I don't see how it could be otherwise.

*Q: Today is the 12th of June 1995. I guess we'll just start when you went to Udorn. You were there from when to when?*

MAYHEW: From about October of '71 until August of '72. Tom Barnes, who had been my predecessor in Udorn, had not finished his tour there. He'd gone to work for John Paul Vann in Vietnam, leaving the embassy in sort of a lurch, so I was sent up to finish up his tour.

In fact, I was not particularly interested in going to Udorn since I had enjoyed Bangkok. After one got used to it Udorn was quite an interesting place. We had, at that time, 17 provinces, and an active insurgency. We also had five of the big bases which the US Air Force was using for Vietnam. We had a very large US army supply facility just outside Udorn which was involved in bombs, munitions, etc., used both in Vietnam and Laos. We had branch USIS posts and AID officials.

At the consulate I had two junior officers working for me. Each covered half of the provinces. We were interested in the insurgency which was fairly active in the Northeast. We also spent a lot of time brokering relations between the US Air Force at the air bases and the local Thai governors and their establishments. I must say the US military did a very fine job of this, by and large, had consistent liaison with the base commanders, who of course were Thai, and the Thai government establishment.

In some of these small towns, the US Air Force almost overwhelmed the town. Particularly in places that were pretty far out in the woods like Ubon, which was down to the southeast bordering Laos. We also, during my time there, opened a sixth airstrip that had previously existed but was scarcely used. I had never heard of it, had never seen it, but out in the middle of nowhere, in Khon Kaen province, a \$19 million airstrip had been built with nothing else around it. It was scrub jungle, with few facilities. It had been used by the CIA as a training site for irregulars going to Laos, and became the home of a military airwing which, for military reasons, decided to get out of Vietnam. This was, of course, one more thing that we had to deal with local authorities on. They were instructed by Bangkok to be helpful. I remember clearly while this was still top secret, and after I had to be summoned to Bangkok to be told about it, we went out to the site which was off of a road that was not terribly well-traveled. As we got to the turn to go into this airbase, there was a sign at the deserted junction saying that an Indian tailor shop was shortly opening.

We did not in Udon have anything to do with the CIA's operations in Laos. Since I was consul for Udon, I focused on Northeast Thailand. We did occasionally see these people of course. Meanwhile, there was also a USIS and a CIA structure in the Northeast. Many of the capital cities of the various provinces at that time had CIA stations because of our interest in the insurgency and support for counterinsurgency.

*Q: You were great supporters of the insurgency?*

MAYHEW: No, of Thai counterinsurgency efforts. AID, for example, supported a very large road building program which had been underway for some time. As it turned out, most of my attention was focused on the insurgency and Thai-base relations. Those of us in the field generally felt that, like Vietnam, our Embassy had too optimistic a view of developments in the provinces of concern. We spent much time on the road because distances are long in the Northeast. The Northeast has about 1/3 of the Thai population, but unfortunately it has very little in the way of natural resources. There's not an awful lot to develop in the Northeast. This is still the situation today. The laterite soil doesn't hold water very well, the land is not very good. You could develop, I suppose, manufactures there, but there's no reason to develop them there when you can develop them in Bangkok, near the port, the airfields, and so on.

It remains hard to get Thai to go to the Northeast because there's not much in the way of entertainment or schools or social inducements. So it's a poor area and remains the least developed. I think this is one of the problems which the Thai have -- that is, assuring that some of the prosperity of Bangkok somehow trickles down to the Northeast, and some of the other poor parts of Thailand as well, but particularly the Northeast.

*Q: You mentioned the insurgency, what was the insurgency and how was it going and what were we working on?*

MAYHEW: The insurgency had various interesting facets to it. It was led largely by Sino Thai. In the north the recruits, the soldiers, were by and large hill people, not ethnic Thai. In the Northeast they were mainly Thai. We spent our time talking to province governors, and military men who were engaged in counterinsurgency, trying to keep an eye on what was going on, trying

to give Bangkok a straight story of what actually was happening.

As a consequence, of course, there were some provinces where we spent a lot of time and some provinces which I only went once or twice in my entire tour because they were perfectly peaceful. We had no bases there, we had no interests there. You could not possibly try to give equal attention to all 145 districts and subdistricts in these 17 provinces. Therefore I spent most of my time in the provinces that were large from an area, or a demographic point of view, had American bases, and/or had insurgent movements.

The insurgency was interesting from a technical point of view. Contrary to expectations, the insurgency in the Northeast had developed in areas which were not the poorest. In fact, Na Gao, which I mentioned earlier, was a relatively well-off area. Apparently, some resources were necessary to sustain an insurgency. Clearly the insurgency had a great deal to do with the fact that the Northeastern Thai speak a Lao dialect, are probably nearer to being Lao than being Central Thai, and have felt themselves long overlooked by the central government. They did not feel that they were getting a fair share of development. There was also, obviously, the Vietnamese-Lao communist carry-over from Laos. While the insurgency was never a threat to the national security, it was certainly a threat to the stability of the north and northeast, and had the potential, I think, of becoming much larger.

In the end the Thai defeated the insurgency for a number of reasons, some internal and some external. The chief external one being that the communist Chinese removed their support, eventually, for the insurgency because they were much more interested in international respectability and in establishing diplomatic relations with Bangkok. They were no longer interested in insurgencies that they had previously supported in southeast Asia. I think, also, the PRC saw they really weren't going anywhere.

Internally the Thai, due I think somewhat to our urging, but more to their own decision, started to combat it in a much more intelligent way. That is, as well as military involvement they began a joint civilian-military approach. In many cases, they in effect bought off the insurgents, allowed them to come back with amnesty, gave them land, etc. These programs had mixed success individually, but as a whole they worked quite well. In the north, the fact that the insurgency involved non-Thai mountain people, and received enormous attention from the royal family, who interested themselves in these peoples' welfare, was a very important factor.

Another important factor was that low-land Thai could never become convinced to join an organization that started in the mountains and was primarily composed of mountain people. So in the long run, the Thai, by dint of great patience and perseverance, gradually suppressed the insurgency.

*Q: When you were there, were we seeing this as an irritant more than as a real threat?*

MAYHEW: No, I think we took it extremely seriously. We provided a lot of assistance to AID, which had both a development and a counterinsurgency rationale. We had engaged in assisting the Thai in a very large road program in the Northeast. By the time I got there, you could drive to nearly every district and sub-district by all-weather laterite gravel roads, it was sometimes pretty

bumpy but you could get there. AID had worked with a Thai agency to build roads and had done, really, a quite incredible job.

We also, at that time, had a special assistant for counterinsurgency with counselor rank or minister-counselor rank in the embassy. He coordinated with a Thai agency, ISOC, the Internal Suppression Operations Command.

This was a large cross-bureaucratic operation. So the Thai recognized the threat. This was the time that we saw Thailand as the next "domino." In fact, the fall of one domino, Laos, in 1975 proved to be a caution for the Lao speaking population of the Northeast. They saw the refugee flow and learned the experience of their Lao compatriots under communism. It turned out that the Thai insurgents lost some of their appeal.

*Q: Did you see any North Vietnamese or Pathet Lao communist forces playing any part in this Thai thing?*

MAYHEW: I don't think they ever played a major role. There were intelligence reports from time to time, but I don't think they ever played any part except in transiting supplies and training. After all, the Northeastern Thai and the Lao speaking the same language, it's very easy to get across the Mekong River that is the boundary between Thailand and Laos. But I never heard of any Vietnamese serving with the Thai.

It would be difficult to tell the difference between a Pathet Lao and a Northeastern Thai, if you captured one. I think that still, at this time, the Pathet Lao had their hands full in Laos and I don't think they were active in Thai insurgency.

*Q: What was your impression of the CIA operation in that area?*

MAYHEW: I used to work fairly closely with them. It seemed to me that the branch posts, certainly those that I worked with, were very good and very well plugged in. The CIA was performing liaison with the Thai and providing them various kinds of training and other assistance. By and large, they were very good. They really knew what was going on in their provinces. They had very good contacts in the Thai hierarchy. And were, I think, of some use to the Thai. The Thai certainly treated them as if they were useful to them. I thought that in the field, agency cooperation was pretty good. But we did always have the feeling that the people in Bangkok did not quite understand the realities of the field. On the other hand, this is always, I think, the feeling that the people in the field have. Some of it, of course, must have been that they certainly did understand what we were telling them, but they weren't able to do anything with the Thai bureaucracy in Bangkok to change what, after all, was Thai realities.

If you're out in the field constantly, you become aware whether your counterparts on the Thai side, are any good or not, judging from hints you hear from the other Thai, what your own experience is, and so on. Some of the Thai military were good and some were not. Some of the civilians were really quite good. Some of the governors had a terrific appreciation of what the insurgency was all about and how to fight it.

The Thai government was not set-up traditionally to deal appropriately with the insurgencies. For instance, if the governor has an agricultural agent in his province, he does not really report to the governor. He reports, in his own chain, to the Ministry of Agriculture in Bangkok. It's Bangkok that determines his next assignment, his promotion, and so on, not the governor. When you have this multiplied by 20 different government agencies -- you get all of these people into a meeting, you may get a consensus, but you may not, necessarily, get any action thereafter if you're the governor.

This was very difficult for many of these governors which is, of course, why they created a communist suppression operations command which was civilian and military to cut across these bureaucratic obstacles. Well, it didn't always cut across them. I think, as time went on, you began to get younger military officers who understood much more what so-called revolutionary war was all about, and understood the civic action implications, and understood how to set-up intelligence organizations. In contrast to some of the older military

*Q: How about the American military? Did you have any problems there?*

MAYHEW: I should have mentioned them because in addition to the 55,000 Air Force and Army people who were in Thailand, we also had, by analogy with Vietnam, a group of military advisers to the Thai. This had been a very controversial policy question. That is, do you have such advisers, looking at the experience of Vietnam, and if you do, what is to be their role? Do you take part in operations, for instance, as they did in Vietnam? You had the slippery slope argument, and all of that.

The American military advisers that I dealt with were not terribly effective, not because they couldn't have been, but because the Thai didn't really use them. The Thai had their own ways of doing things and were not about to change them. Cooperation seemed to me to be largely on an intelligence basis -- what's going on, and here's what we plan to do, and so on. US advice on actually how to organize things, or to train and fight the insurgents probably was not taken very much.

*Q: Did you find having these airmen, most of them were without families, didn't that cause consular problems all over the place?*

MAYHEW: Not really because they were under military jurisdiction. Otherwise, we would have had hundreds of problems. The Thai and the American MPs patrolled together and, by and large, they handled these things on a military-to-military basis. There were always a few problems that could not be solved that way. There's a famous murder case, of a child in Udorn, which happened before I got there. The fellow who committed the murder was still in a Thai prison when I got there. There was a case near Sattahip of lese majeste.

*Q: You were saying there was another case?*

MAYHEW: There were several cases. One involved a fellow who had too much to drink and deliberately stepped on the face of the King on a banknote. This was lese majeste, a charge we of course don't have in the US. He ended up in jail for a time. The Thai finally released him to us on

the condition that he immediately get out of Thailand and that it not be publicized. Otherwise, he probably would have served on a fairly lengthy tour.

Generally what happened on the difficult cases was that the Thai would imprison an offender for a time and turn them over after publicity on them had died down. After 2 or 3 years would turn them over to us, for us to get them out of the country.

Two things actually were amazing. One is the amount of Thai cooperation on this. The other one was, and it was constantly brought up by senior officers on the American military side, that we really had a new generation of Americans in the military who were much better behaved than they had been in previous generations. And got into trouble much less. I don't know how many times senior officers told me how much better behaved these men were than they had been in their salad days.

But when you have tens of thousands of people, and you have a certain amount of those with lots of free time, plenty of money and alcohol readily available there's obviously going to have a lot of fights and other minor difficulties, particularly on the weekends. When the Marine Air Wing came to Khon Kaen, and were taken for liberty for the first time to Udorn, which was about 80 miles away, it was really fight night because the Army was also in town. The Army had monopolized all the places of leisure, shall we call it, in Udorn. When the Marines showed up, the first night was very active for the MPs.

But again, most of these problems were minor. The Thai generally did not want to interfere if it's an American against an American, he'd rather leave it to the American MPs. It was only crimes really involving Thai, as the lese majeste case, where they got significantly interested. If you were driving a vehicle and you struck a Thai, you'd have to pay some kind of compensation. But you probably would not, even for careless or reckless driving, have to do jail time.

You have to remember, of course, that at this time it was not a democratic government which was running Thailand. We did lots of things through the military. The context has to be kept in mind. Not the least of which was that the Thai saw our presence as being in their strategic interest. However, if there had been a democratic government in Thailand, based on party, you'd probably have had much more prickly relationships. Indeed, it'd even be questionable whether you could have brought in 55,000 Americans. That certainly is not to praise military government, but military government for a military purpose certainly is much easier to deal with than a civilian one.

*Q: Were there any more issues that you had to deal with? Before we move on?*

MAYHEW: I think those are the chief ones that I dealt with. I did not get involved, by and large, with most consular issues. We were a special consular post. We really only existed because of the interest in insurgency, and because of Laos. We did not issue visas. Most of our consular local's time was occupied with the documentation of Thai brides, because there was an extraordinary number of military men who married Thai.

Obviously, a good deal of your time in a place like Udorn is spent on administration. Just

keeping yourself going, particularly when we had a political local, an administrative local, a consular local, 2 officers and myself, the drivers. A lot of your time is spent on administration. We had an American wife who was our classified secretary on a part-time basis.

But circumstances later changed greatly. After the Vietnam debacle and at a time when the Thai were disillusioned with the US relationship, my successor once removed was barricaded in his house by students, for a couple of days. The context I spoke of had changed. But the relationship, when I was there, was extremely cordial and very workman-like. I got to really enjoy being in the Northeast and spending a lot of time out of the office in the provinces.

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MAYHEW: My time was coming to an end, my secondment to DOD. I left that job and went to Thailand, for the second time, as political counselor.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

MAYHEW: From June '83 until August '88.

*Q: What was your job?*

MAYHEW: I was political counselor.

*Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?*

MAYHEW: When I got there it was John Gunther Dean, and later it was Bill Brown. I left a few weeks before Dan O'Donohue took over.

*Q: What was the political situation in Thailand during this -- that's a good long period, almost 5 years.*

MAYHEW: In terms of our relations with Thailand and what was happening on the Thai scene, it was a very interesting period. The '70s had been very chaotic in Thailand. That period had the overthrow of the Thanom/Praphat government in '73, largely by student power. The Thai had then gone through a period of chaotic parliamentary democracy. Probably, it was a time when there was more democracy in Thailand than before or since. On the other hand, it was very disorderly. The student groups who had led the overthrow of Thanom/Praphat found that maintaining their cohesion and maintaining any kind of political unity was extremely difficult. Funding and supporting democratic political process proved much more difficult than opposing a government that nearly everyone thought had gone on far too long.

There was a right wing reaction to the disorder of the very unstable democratic period, which culminated during demonstrations at one of the universities in 1976, which the Thai military and police put down with extreme severity. There were some very strong grass roots right wing organizations, probably covertly funded by the Ministry of the Interior and others that were active.

Thai society is inherently conservative, and the democratic period ended with the pendulum swinging sharply back to the right, with a military controlled government. General Kriangsak Chomanon, who had been important during the period that I had been there first -- in fact he was the fellow that we came over to talk to because he was the man in-charge of dealing with Americans -- eventually became Prime Minister.

At any rate, by the time I got there General Prem was Prime Minister. Prem had come in, I think 1980. Prem was a very quiet, almost diffident, public personality. Did not like to talk to the press, rarely said much in public, did not often say a great deal in private either. He kept his counsel very well. He was a man who by intent or not, left people with the thought that he had said something encouraging to them, when, in fact, he had not said very much at all. A useful political trait.

Prem was, I think, in his early days not thought likely to have a long tenure because he was a compromise candidate. Traditionally prime ministers come out of the military, and Prem proved to be a very good military politician and handled the political parties well. He had an 8-year period of rule, a very long time, and one of stability and economic progress. Prem, I think, was personally honest, in contrast to many preceding military Thai leaders. Unfortunately, for political reasons he had to tolerate a certain amount of corruption. But there was an interesting contrast with the government that came after him which was totally civilian politicians and was seen as extremely corrupt, that of Chatchai Chunawan.

At any rate, during the period that I was there, the relationship with the United States was changing rapidly. Because of the end of the Cold War and the decline of a Vietnamese threat through Cambodia the security became of less immediate significance. At the same time, the Thai economy was developing so rapidly during this period that it affected the complexion of the relationship. We suddenly had a whole host of economic problems with the Thai that we had never had before. When Secretary Shultz visited, on his way to one of the ASEAN foreign ministers meetings, we found ourselves, for the first time, doing talking points for him that had to do with economic matters, where before this had never been necessary. Now we had the problems of intellectual property rights, dumpings, countervailing duties, textile imports, and all of these things.

We tried to tell the Thai that we had these problems with all of our friends, but the Thai tend to look at things in a rather holistic way. We tend to separate things out -- deal with economic items on one hand then you send someone in 10 minutes later, a different person, a different place, to ask for support of a UN vote. The Thai don't separate things quite as much. They look at a relationship much more holistically.

One of the important things which affected the atmosphere of the relationship was that these economic matters began to get us a very adverse press. I'd say the coverage changed about late '83, '84. We started to change from being treated in the press as someone who was a great friend and who in international issues was probably right -- though they might make some exceptions -- to a country that was trying to treat them like a big brother; they didn't need a big brother; this wasn't the colonial period; they weren't a colony and so on. We were "bullying them," was

essentially the feeling. That particular word was used extremely often. Here is the US bullying us again.

From the Thai point of view you could certainly see this. In many cases the economic matters on which we were continually making approaches, were on an absolute basis, not significant in money terms, although they had a certain amount of principle that was important for us. And of course it was a period when we were trying to clear up intellectual property rights questions throughout the Far East.

Textiles were a major concern. The Jenkins Bill, which was a big issue in '84, '85, never passed the Congress. It was a bill which would have returned textile quotas to a level of those several years earlier. Never passed, but for all the harm it did us in Thailand in terms of public relations, in terms of public attitudes, it might as well have been passed.

There is an enormous reservoir of goodwill for the United States in Thailand, not the least of which is because so many Thai have been educated in the United States. But even some of our best friends were getting tired of the economic friction. While they were always polite to us about it, it was clear that they did not like it. It was clear also that when they talked among themselves they thought we were picking on them for reasons which they never quite figured out. They thought we must have an ulterior motive, but they were never quite sure what it was.

At any rate, it was a period of considerable change in the relationship. Domestically, looking back on it, the 8 years that Prem was in power were unfortunately wasted by the Thai political parties and by the Thai political intelligentsia. During that period, Prem stayed in power largely because he had military support and a relatively quiet party situation. It was calm and stable largely because, I think, most Thai developed confidence in Prem. The economy was expanding, and it was clear that he was approved by the throne. Personally, he made no efforts to build up political parties. He was not a member of any political party himself, but did not attempt to hamper their activities.

The parties, which also were relatively stable during the Prem period, really wasted the time. Thai political parties are traditionally based on personalities and are weak on ideas. They continued so. They did not develop principles or organizations. No credible civilian alternative to Prem ever emerged. The politicians largely devoted themselves to enriching themselves and protecting their own interests. It's unfortunate that while the Thai constitution was geared, in fact, to force the creation of fewer, larger, better funded parties, it only had very mixed success in doing that. There remained a lot of not very significant parties, certainly not based on ideology, nearly all based on personalities, very changeable. If you have an election a lot of people jump parties, going to where they see an advantage. The object of politics is to get into power and stay as long as possible.

So it was a period when the civilians could have done, it seems to me, much more than they did to develop a credible, political class and a credible party system. Because they had this long period of stability under Prem. Because Thai society was modernizing quite rapidly. Because the middle class was growing rapidly, and because the importance of the Thai military as a group was in effect, declining. It should have been a period where there was more political evolution.

Looking back now, I think it can be said there was more political consciousness developed, at least in Bangkok, than I thought. It was the Bangkok middle classes that finally forced out the military regime in 1992, albeit after egregious political chicanery by the military.

We, of course, favored change only by democratic means. Whenever we were asked about coups and other political maneuvering, the phrase that we used was that we encouraged the evolution of Thai democracy. This meant that we'd like to see change by elections and democratic means.

The problem of course with political change in Thailand is that change-by-coup had been institutionalized over the long period since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932. There had been 17 coups. They were never social revolutions, there was never any significant social change after coups. Coups were generally reflections of changes in political power within the military, or as the Marxists might say, objective conditions. When it became clear that the objective conditions for someone to move on were such that he ought to move on, there would be a generally bloodless coup. You had a change in leadership but you didn't really have a change in the bureaucracy or society.

By the time that I went to Thailand for a second assignment there were really 3-1/2 important institutions: the bureaucracy, the military, the throne, and you could count Parliament as a half because it had at least gotten to the point where people saw it to their advantage to be parliamentarians. That may have been personal advantage rather than national advantage, but people had begun to think that being a member of a party was worthwhile, that the government situation had evolved enough so that there was considerable freedom of action and influence as a parliamentarian, whether or not one was actually a member of government.

In fact, one of the motive forces of the Thai system is that early on the military seems to have made the decision to allow the technocratic ministries to be run by technocrats. One of the successes of Thai development, is that from an economic viewpoint they have a very conservative leadership, and the military did not go to the budgetary extremes that it has in some other countries. In fact, one of the overall reasons for Thai success is that they don't seem, individually or collectively, to go to extremes. They may have had Marshal Sarit, but they did not have a Marcos. They never had the kind of excesses that the Philippines experienced.

*Q: Was there a political change during the time that you were there up to '88?*

MAYHEW: It was relatively stable politically with Prem at the top. There were some attempts during the time I was there to push Prem out, particularly a period of about a year, which must have been '85, '86. There were difficulties made for Prem by some figures in the military probably loyal to General Athit. Because General Athit had become commander-in-chief and supreme commander. He looked to normal progression to prime minister. But almost no one wanted to see Athit become Prime Minister except perhaps his immediate followers.

In Thai circumstances, if you don't make the step while you're supreme commander, if you leave that position, it's almost like falling off a cliff. One day you're powerful, the next day you are respected. There were times when it looked like there might be some forced attempt to get rid of Prem. But he was able to weather the storm, partly because the throne made its support for Prem

clear. We made it clear that we would not wish to see a change that was not constitutional. In the context this was taken by Athit as supporting Prem.

In the last analysis what we did or said was not a decisive factor. It was the internal balance of forces between Prem and others. The situation was a great deal more complex then and later than I can outline here. But it was quite clear that Prem had more of the Thai military on his side than Athit did. Finally, just after the time that I departed, Prem pretty much ran out of support. The military was a bit restive. General Chavalit was by that time waiting in the wings. Chavalit, who had been a prime supporter of Prem at earlier times, was at that time beginning to maneuver against him. Prem resigned. They called new elections and, I think, most of the public thought that yet again Prem would become prime minister, but when they went to offer him the job, he said, No thanks, and Chatchai became prime minister.

I think that Chatchai, Chavalit, Prem and all of those concerned had at least an implicit, and perhaps an explicit agreement that Chatchai would be an interim prime minister. The problem became that Chatchai liked the job and General Chavalit, who was the putative successor, proved himself not to be the politician that people always thought he was. Chatchai proved very clever in playing by politician's rules, and Chavalit was not. It began to look as though Chatchai would stay on a good bit longer than the year or so that was presumably allotted to him.

Ultimately Chatchai's government ended of course with a military coup. By that time its reputation and political wrangling had left it so low in public regard that there were no mourners at its end. At the time I think the Thai thought, and we thought too, that with the long period of stability and the extraordinary modernization and economic development which took place during the Prem administration that coups had become outmoded. It's another illustration that economic development can get well ahead of political evolution. And I would add that Thai politics currently seem to substantiate that view.

*Q: You were talking about relations with the United States going down mainly because we were beginning to take a more active role.*

MAYHEW: Going down is not really the right expression. It was rapidly changing circumstances bringing about changes and adjustments, some of them overdue. The climate of Thai opinion was changing because of other objective developments. Not the least of course was the rapid decline of the Soviet Union, but that is after this period. Also important to Thai attitude was that they had finally suppressed their own communist insurgency. This of course was a subject of interest to us, having a security commitment to Thailand, but it was also psychologically important to the Thai.

And, of course, relations developed with the People's Republic of China during this period. A factor which we haven't mentioned up to this point, was the Cambodian problem. Once it became clear, I think, that the Chinese and the Thai were on the same side of the street against the Vietnamese, that was a significant factor in Thai public psychology. The curbing of Vietnamese ambitions, and the fact that the Chinese were definitely opposed to the Vietnamese, it was almost a de facto alliance of the Chinese and the Thai. Certainly it was a remarkable change in climate and atmosphere, for the Thai it's really a strategic change.

So there were a number of factors that affected relations with the US. The communist insurgency, the change in relations with China, the decline in the likelihood that they would have major security problems from any of their neighbors, as well as the build-up of ASEAN as an important political organization, or an organization with political weight if it chose to use it, all these things caused the relationship with the US to evolve into a relationship which is a more even relationship, more parity, particularly with their rapid economic development.

A few years ago we were researching some figures for a speech. We found that in 1975, when everybody thought Thailand was the next "domino" which might fall to communism, two-way trade between Thailand and the US was about 750 million dollars. In 1995, this trade is over 15 billion. We have a trade deficit with Thailand. From a period when it was almost inconceivable that you would see something in Bloomingdales saying Made in Thailand, it is now quite common. This took place in one generation.

*Q: When you were there, just to get a feel for how an embassy works. You're the political counselor, obviously you don't want things to upset the Thai because you've got your own agenda. The economic counselor has got his or her marching orders which are to challenge the Thai in certain practices which we feel are to our detriment. How did this evolve within the embassy?*

MAYHEW: You have to set the stage by saying that the embassy was one of the largest in the world because it's a favorite place for regional headquarters. In fact, in the country team meeting we had 41 sections represented. This is a huge management problem, obviously. In fact you could nearly always count on somebody doing something, amongst these 41 sections, that they should have told management earlier about.

At any rate, I think this is one of the things that was difficult because we still wanted Thai military facilities to be available in case of need. Even though military aid was on the way out. We needed cooperation on narcotics suppression. We had major US investments; and significant interest in Indochina refugee questions.

We had to try to weld all these things into one policy. You could have one policy, but you certainly had several facets because we were at many points carrying on these rather irritating discussions on intellectual property, textiles, and the rest of it. At the same time we really had productive relationships on the security side. Fortunately the Thai military was not much influenced, at least as far as we could tell, was not much influenced with what was happening on the economic side. In fact during this period we negotiated a couple of useful agreements with the Thai military.

As I mentioned, there was a great reservoir of goodwill towards the United States in Thailand with which one could operate. It's a long-standing relationship. In fact, we had our first commercial treaty with Thailand in 1833. Townsend Harris went to Thailand before he went to Japan.

Of course, it's only since the second World War that it's become as close as it has. I think that

now that we seem to have passed most of these economic quarrels, I would expect that the relationship would be extremely friendly, cooperative, productive.

Another fact which lends balance to the relationship is that the Thai and we generally agree on our approach to other international issues. The Thai are usually not willing to take stands on, for example, UN votes on controversial matters which they're not directly involved, but they generally agree with most of our positions internationally. Or at least are prepared not to speak out against our position. They have a free enterprise economy. We have a lot of US investment there. All of these things are the basis for a very friendly relationship.

*Q: Going back again to your time, how did you find as political counselor, your operation within the embassy, with the ambassador?*

MAYHEW: As I said, it was a difficult management problem because of the enormous number of sections and a large official population but I had access whenever I wanted it to the DCM and the ambassador. I never had any problem seeing them or talking to them. I should add that one half, at least, of what we did in the political section, which we haven't talked about very much, was the Cambodian dimension.

*Q: Yes, would you talk about the Cambodia dimension.*

MAYHEW: In the political section we had an internal section and an external. At the largest we had 7 officers: myself, 3 on the internal, 3 on the external side as well as 3 secretaries. The external side not only did those things which are common to all political sections, that is Thailand's relationship with ASEAN, with the rest of the world, and so on. It was also reporting on Cambodia, on the efforts of the non-communist groups and the Khmer Rouge, in so far as we could cover them, against the Vietnamese occupation and the government installed by the Vietnamese. We spent a great deal of time on Cambodia.

We also had a kind of watching brief for developments in Vietnam, at that time.

*Q: I might, for the record, say that we had no mission in Vietnam or in Cambodia.*

MAYHEW: Since the war we had not had any representation in Vietnam. It's difficult to cover one country from another and I always thought that much more could have been done in Washington. Because covering Vietnam at that time, to a large extent, was an INR kind of job. You needed extensive files, because you had to be able to look up what happened to the last party congress, and analyze the differences with this party congress and so on. It was Kremlinology in the old sense and was kind of a research rather than a contact enterprise that the political section normally carry on. But we did do, I think, a fair amount of reasonably good work on Vietnam. We also had no mission in Cambodia.

*Q: What was the situation in Cambodia during the time you were dealing with it?*

MAYHEW: The Khmer Rouge had been forced out of power in Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese invasion in the last days of 1978 and held on along the Thai border. The KR were supported by

the Thai and the Chinese. The Thai and the ASEAN also supported two non-communist groups, which we also supported. There were large Cambodian refugee populations just on the Thai side of the border maintained by the international community through the UN. The Vietnamese installed government, composed of Khmer Rouge, was never able to secure international recognition, nor to secure the countryside.

The non-communist organized themselves into a faction which was headed by Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk. While they were never militarily effective they were very important politically in showing that there was a non-communist resistance to the government in Phnom Penh.

When I got there the KR remained a major thorn in the side of the Vietnamese. All of these groups, including the KR -- the KR while certainly being a radical communist group, its main ideological imperatives seemed to be the same as that of non-communist groups -- ethnic hate for the Vietnamese.

At any rate, when I arrived there the longer term prospects did not look terribly good for this resistance movement. On the other hand, it was still in existence. It was beginning to have some minor successes. Much of its successes, of course, were really successes of ASEAN. Because ASEAN, as a group, put together a very impressive anti-Vietnamese Cambodia policy. In the end, it was not successful in driving the Vietnamese out of Cambodia, that resulted from other factors.

But, on the political stage, it was extremely effective. They could maintain a blockade or could get others to agree to maintain a blockade of Cambodia on the economic side. They could mobilize international opinion at the UN and mobilize UN resolutions in a quite effective way.

Meanwhile on the ground, Chinese aid was getting to the KR and some to the non-communists. We were assisting the non-communists not with offensive weapons, but with other kinds of aid. Access to these groups really had to come through Thailand. So, perforce, the political section in Bangkok was doing most of the reporting on Cambodia since we had no presence in Cambodia. The resistance groups were headquartered along the border, and the whole border was under the control of Thai military. You had to have passes, and so on, to get there.

So, therefore, one of the major responsibilities of the political section was reporting on what we knew of what was happening militarily inside Cambodia. As well as maintaining a watching brief on the military situation, and trying to follow the changes of personalities and interests in the non-communist movement. These were very volatile and very unstable groups.

We did our reporting through a couple of officers who spent most of their time with Cambodians and Thai at the border or in Bangkok. We had on the staff an American of Cambodian origin, Sos Kem, who really was on the role of the refugees section, available to us for interpretation.

If there was military action going on in the border, Sos could go out and talk to people and give us some idea of what was going on. Press accounts of military actions were nearly always wrong, very often greatly exaggerated. We really needed to have somebody on the border, and section officers would go there for 3 or 4 days at a time. We would try to do as extensive and as

meaningful analyses as we could on the state of the resistance movements, in addition to what we believed was happening inside Cambodia.

At any rate, the situation was relatively quiet along the border when I first arrived in '83. It didn't really change significantly until the Vietnamese attempted to clear their side of the border. Which, if I remember correctly, began in late '84 or late '85. When one of those coincidences that happened, I was out on the border. I didn't generally spend a lot of time on the border. But I was out in the border when one of the battles started. When troops of one of the non-communist leaders were attacked by Cambodians and Vietnamese. It turned out to be the beginning of a rather long offensive by the Vietnamese. At one point, the Vietnamese actually were on the border with Thailand, which is not something the Thai liked at all.

In the end, the attempt to wipe out the Cambodian resistance by the Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies was not successful. I think in retrospect that campaign severely damaged the KR, however. Because the KR decided to stand and fight on a couple of occasions, especially around Pailin. This was probably a mistake on their part because they did not have the heavy weapons to be able to withstand the Vietnamese. I think, then, they were significantly decreased in strength but I think it was also something that was not realized by most of us until much later.

*Q: Some of this, particularly in Cambodia's situation in Laos, internally, how well did you feel you were served and what were your relations with our CIA establishment in Thailand?*

MAYHEW: In terms of Cambodia, I thought their reporting was very helpful. In terms of what was going on in Laos, well Laos was pretty low priority. We also tried to maintain a little bit of a watching brief for Laos because our embassy in Laos was so restricted. And so much of the border between Laos and Thailand was not accessible to them. But Laos was not all that much of a priority for us. It only really became a priority when we had a Lao-Thai border war in which, quite unexpectedly, the Lao acquitted themselves well. Of course they also had the principle positions. We did a little bit on that.

*Q: You mentioned this Lao-Thai war, battles. What was that about?*

MAYHEW: What seems to have happened, as far as I can determine, is that there were Thai with timber concessions on the Thai side who may have had an arrangement with some Lao to cross the border and take some of the timber there too. The deal may have fallen apart. And then, the Lao military may have decided they ought to get rid of the loggers and fracas may have started in forest areas which were not well defined anyway.

Once the fighting started and once diplomats started looking at maps, it became clear that there were 2 different sets of maps, and 2 different interpretations of where the border actually was. The Thai had a case and the Lao had a case. I think an outside observer would say that the Thai case was probably stronger, but that rarely matters in this kind of a thing.

So the Thai found themselves with a rapidly escalating situation in which they were attacking well-defended Lao position, where the Lao had the advantage of the ground, as it were. The Thai, who always call the Lao "little brothers," suddenly found themselves getting a very bloody

nose.

I went up one time on a tour with diplomats to see the area in question. Once the trees are taken off it's kind of a god-forsaken piece of real estate and not many people would be interested in. But it was very difficult for any of us diplomats, to say -- well, yes the border is obviously here, or it's obviously there. At any rate, I think the Thai were very unpleasantly surprised to find out what military capability the Lao had. Eventually it was settled by peaceful negotiation.

*Q: Did drugs, narcotics suppression play any role in your operation or was that elsewhere?*

MAYHEW: One of the very important facets of the relationship with the Thai is narcotics. Most of the narcotics produced in Burma, which is an extremely large producer of heroin and opium, come through Thailand. I'm not sure it was true then, but now most of the heroin on the streets in the United States comes ultimately from Burmese sources. Burmese production increased substantially, nearly double in the late '80s. A great deal of it is coming across the border. So yes, narcotics suppression is one of the primary topics of discussion with the Thai.

We did have a narcotics suppression section, two State officers, and a large DEA mission. I think it's the largest DEA presence overseas. Relations with the Thai on this question are adequate, but the Thai have never regarded narcotics suppression as the kind of priority item that we have. Working with the Thai on narcotics is one of these rather long processes.

Unfortunately up on the Thai-Burmese border, the Thai have had relationships with various kinds of insurgent groups on the other side of the border for security purposes and for economic purposes, for so long that they've developed a relationship which also leads to corruption in regard to narcotics. There are a great many civilian, police, and military officials in northern Thailand with bad records in this regard.

Dealing with narcotics is very difficult. As you know, we can't control our own borders. Even with the best will in the world, you're still not going to be able, I don't think, to control that border, several hundred miles of jungle.

*Q: How did John Gunther Dean operate as an ambassador, from your perspective?*

MAYHEW: Mr. Dean is a very interesting personality, probably one of the last of the pro-consular kind of ambassadors. A very formal man in many respects, with, I want to say an authoritarian in approach, that's not quite it, but it will do. A man who certainly has a sense of the theater that's necessary for an ambassador. I think this is important in Thailand. The American ambassador after all in Thailand is a very important figure. The Thai expect a certain type of person. I think from that point of view, Dean filled the bill quite well.

But he's also a fellow, that in many ways, I think a lot of people found difficult to get along with, rather demanding, a little short sometimes with people. Though I did not find him all that difficult.

**FRED A. COFFEY, JR.**  
**Press Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1968-1971)**

**Information Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1971-1972)**

**Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1972-1973)**

*Fred A. Coffey, Jr. was born in El Paso, Texas in 1930. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas in 1952. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1952-1954. He received a master's degree from Louisiana State University in 1955. Mr. Coffey's career included positions in Brazil, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Thailand, Argentina, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1990.*

COFFEY: Well, after some three years at the Voice of America, I was assigned to Thai language training and had a year at the foreign service institute, then assigned to Bangkok, to Thailand, where initially I thought my assignment would be to work with an upcountry radio activity that was co-sponsored by USIS.

But because of the reactions of the Thai press to the U.S. presence, the public affairs officer, G. Lewis Schmidt, and the ambassador, Leonard Unger, had agreed that more attention should be paid to the Thai press. Therefore, I was given the job as press officer or press attaché to the Thai press. We had another American of the same rank working within the embassy itself as the press attaché. He worked with the foreign press, of which there were many.

So, my efforts then, with my staff -- and I had another American and some 22 foreign service nationals -- were to work with the Thai press on a personal basis, improve our press placement and content, and improve the Thai attitude a little bit concerning the American military presence.

We had some 40,000 Americans in the country, at various bases around Thailand. This bothered the national sensitivities of a lot of Thais, and quite rightly. But the Vietnam war was going on, and we needed the bases and the space that the Thais provided.

*Q: You were entirely, as I recall, concerned with the Thai press -- and the press attaché, who was operating out of the embassy, who at that time I think was Hugh Woodward, was dealing with the foreign press pretty much, weren't they? You didn't have a great deal to do with the foreign press, as I recall.*

COFFEY: Well, I did. When the -- one of the programs that we revved up was to bring the Thai press into see AID projects, to see the projects that the United States government was working with, to enlighten Thai attitudes, to show that we were supporting Thai aspirations and not just U.S. government aspirations. And in that context we did bring in a lot of American and non-Thai

foreign journalists to join in press trips and interface with the Thai press.

And at the time, too, we promoted a number of seminars with the Thai press, bringing in American journalists to talk with them and to exchange views with them. And we became quite "clubby" in this way, with the Thais realizing there was a language barrier but still they could communicate with their fellow journalists from overseas.

We held a number of receptions -- sport shirt -- for the ambassador to meet the Thai press. At the time I took over this task there were something like 14 newspapers in Bangkok alone, of which 9 or 10 seemed rather hostile to the United States, with a couple of them being communist papers, or supported by communists. In about a year, or a year and a half's time, we counted only two or three that maintained this level of hostility. The answer was, we'd paid them a lot of attention, worked with their journalists, supplied them useful material, brought them in to Embassy press conferences and answered their questions quickly and truthfully.

We set up a club of young journalists, and met regularly with these young reporters, the best and the brightest, and promoted a lot of personal visiting in our homes. This personal contact paid off. Also, we paid a lot of attention to the upcountry press. There were something like 70 newspapers that appeared on a weekly basis throughout Thailand, in the small towns and cities outside of Bangkok.

However, you never can take things for granted. And you can't be too cute with the press, especially with a press from another cultural background. At one time Dr. Kissinger visited Thailand. Actually he was on his way to Peking for his first visit.

The plane landed on the military side of the Don Muang air base, and there were three or four U.S. military guards with dogs, big police dogs, around the airplane.

*Q: These were American guards.*

COFFEY: These were American soldiers. I took a contingent of the Thai press out to see Kissinger when he got off the airplane and, if possible, to have a quick press conference. One of the Thai reporters, a little fellow -- by Thai standards, average size -- walked up to this burly American southern boy with a huge police dog and said, "Oh, what's that dog for?" and his interpreter went ahead and interpreted very literally. The man -- the sergeant said, "That dog is to bite you if you try to get close to this airplane." Well, a photo was taken of that dog, that sergeant, and the diminutive Thai journalist. It appeared on the front pages of three major newspapers in Bangkok that night. The Buddhist religion of Thailand finds dogs offensive and the picture caption said, "Yankee mastiff threatens Thai reporter on our national territory."

Well, in a damage control effort, a friend of mine from the Embassy said, "Hey, Fred, the Thais have a great sense of humor. Why don't you turn this around? Why don't you take that dog and show the Thai press what a friendly dog he is, and that he wouldn't bite anybody. We might be able to get a laugh out of this."

So without too much careful consideration I said, "Let's do it." I called the base, got the burly

sergeant and his dog to come by USIS, and we told him what we wanted. And then my press assistant took him over to the principal newspaper, where he showed that he was just anybody's lap dog and not a ferocious beast, as the press was trying to call him.

In fact, he did a big yawn, and the social editor, a petite, pretty Thai lady, even put her head close to his mouth at the time he opened his mouth. Well, that was when the next picture was taken, and that picture went all over Thailand, all over the interior. The caption read, "Ferocious American Police Dog Tries to Snap Head Off of Thai Editor."

And this even was broadcast on the Chinese communist radio in southern China. So our plan boomeranged, and this story kept being played back to us for about three or four months. At that point I learned a good lesson: Don't try to be too cutesy with the press.

One program that I thought was very useful at the time, because Nixon had made it a point of U.S. government policy to try to close down or to diminish the heroin export out of the Golden Triangle. As you remember, Lew -- you were there -- the Golden Triangle was increasing its exports through Thailand, through Burma -- this golden triangle being Laos, Burma and the northern corner of Thailand -- shipments went out to Hong Kong and eventually -- much of it to the United States.

In 1971, as deputy PAO at the time, I decided that this should be a plank of our country program. I was supported by the new PAO, Jack Hedges. Washington resisted, but the Embassy and Ambassador Leonard Unger supported us. Washington caved in and said, "All right, make it a country objective in your country plan."

We worked very hard for about a year with a major exhibit, with book translations, with radio broadcasts, with local production of film, with press conferences, personal contact, the whole bit. We pulled every arrow out of our quiver.

In about a year's time, the Thai people realized -- and our message was -- that they had a problem. It wasn't just the U.S. consumer -- that they had a problem with addiction, with these drugs coming across their area, because a lot of the drugs didn't go clear across. They stayed in Thailand. And in a country, then, with some 32 million people, they figured that they had close to 750,000 heroin addicts.

So therefore it was their problem, it was a national problem. And the Thai government became very, very concerned about it. So USIS did play a role in turning around the drug issue, pointing out that it was a local problem as well as a U.S. problem. The Thais then did bring about greater resources. The problem was never eliminated, although it was improved, as far as the U.S. was concerned.

*Q: Too many of the police were on the take up there, anyway, letting those drugs come through and supplementing their rather meager salaries on the basis of money from the drug lords.*

COFFEY: I expect that continues today.

*Q: I'm sure it does.*

COFFEY: Well, it was a great experience in Thailand. I had three jobs while I was there: as press officer, then chief information officer, and then deputy PAO. Five years in country. When the PAO was being reassigned, he had asked the ambassador to support me for his job. Washington said I had been there too long, five years was enough. And so, I was then transferred to Brazil as deputy public affairs officer, as deputy to Tom Tuch, or Hans Tuch, as he was known.

**FRANK P. COWARD**  
**Student Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1968-1973)**

*Frank P. Coward was born in New York in 1918. He graduated from Union College in 1942, served in the US Army from 1942-1946 overseas, and received his Master's in Education from the University of New York at Buffalo in 1952. His career with USIA led to assignments in India, Thailand and Burma. In 1993 Mr. Coward was interviewed by Fred Coffey.*

COWARD: Bangkok.

*Q: And how did you prepare for Bangkok?*

COWARD: I didn't actually prepare for Bangkok. I came back to Washington in August or September 1967 for a year of language study and then went out to Bangkok in August 1968. So the orientation was here in the Foreign Service Institute for language and cultural orientation. But, of course, there is a great similarity between the basic, certainly the religious, culture. A great deal of Buddhism in Thailand stems from the considerably older Indian culture.

*Q: Had you asked to go to Thailand?*

COWARD: No, that was the assignment. My general attitude was that it was a big wide world and I only knew a small amount of it and tended to accept what the assignment was because I didn't know it anyway. I don't recall that I was asked.

*Q: What was your assignment in Thailand?*

COWARD: The assignment in Thailand was interesting. It started out as being again student activities.

At that time, of course, in Bangkok there were 13 sub-posts. We were in the midst of the height of Vietnam experience. The handwriting was on the wall, however. But Bangkok posts really had no great interest in a student activities officer so it was not the warmest of welcomes. The Agency had an interest of having this body in place, although the post had very little interest, which I must say I felt on arrival. It made it difficult because they had their remarkable AUA in

operation.

*Q: What is the AUA?*

COWARD: That is the American University Association, which was a big part and an essential part of the Agency presence not only in Bangkok but throughout Thailand.

*Q: Was this a type of binational center?*

COWARD: It was a binational center. An English language teaching center which eventually incorporated to great advantage the American library, which previously had been a separate entity. It had been on Patpong Road and perhaps for some Americans the removal from Patpong Road was a negative, but I am sure from an official point of view the amalgamation of the American library--we built a splendid new library--with the AUA was a big plus. But AUA had a young American unrelated to the Agency, a private contract, who handled their student activities, which made it very awkward because he felt that I was infringing on his territory. So he was less than agreeable. I was perfectly aware that as an official presence if I was to do my assignment, I had to infringe on his territory. It was not very pleasant.

In due course, I guess I was asked, I had my office removed from AUA where it was a regular conflict, into the USIS office where I then began being an assistant cultural affairs officer. I was primarily occupied with the exchange of persons and again promoting programs on university campuses.

*Q: Well, then in Thailand when you started off, did you start visiting universities?*

COWARD: Yes, but local universities. The Thais are extroverted, had been for such a long period of time, that all young people, university students or not, just exported themselves to the States. The butcher, the baker the candlestick maker, it made no difference, you had to go to the States. And professors did the same thing. When Thais went...my experience there when working with exchange of persons...when a Thai family sent a student abroad there was none of the superficiality of the junior year abroad that we talk about in the States. Thais sent their children out intending that they be prepared to do a full four years and get an American degree. If they could afford it they would have them go right on and get a Masters and probably a Ph.D. They wanted a full American education. They would even send children for two years in a prep school to get the grounding so that they could enter better universities. So it was a little difficult. You were sort of bringing coals to Newcastle when you brought American experts to a top university because the Thai universities had so many of their own professors who are in effect American experts because of these full degrees and language fluency. So it was somewhat different.

But then we could bring American cultural people out, performers, which we did. We had André Watts, the magnificent young pianist. The Agency sponsored him under the cultural program. We did produce, also...of course they had the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, all of these groups so there was more competition for USIS programs in Bangkok than we had ever experienced in India. They were more concentrated in Bangkok, Thailand being much smaller than the Indian experience had been.

*Q: In this situation did you find that the Thais were appreciative of the American arts, especially, you mentioned André Watts, and other programs?*

COWARD: They were appreciative, but the Thai audience by virtue of exporting themselves, and this began with the royal family...One had to remember that the present king was American born. His daughter is married to an American citizen and lives in California. She is also a nuclear physicist from MIT. The Thais were much more sophisticated and selective so you had to be sure you were bringing the best. The people who directed their own cultural activities, whether in music or fine arts were highly experienced and sophisticated people.

*Q: Did our Agency, at that time part of the State Department, the CU element, provide the top of the line in the arts or not?*

COWARD: Yes. I recall that CU, which at that time was still located in the State Department, had some very superior, responsive people who tended themselves to be highly selective...Having worked closely with CU when it was in the Department, I would have only praise for the experience, service and standards that those people in CU set. Jean Moretti, for example, to name but one.

*Q: Were the people in CU State Department people or USIA people assigned to the State Department?*

COWARD: They would have been CU people, State people, and some of them, when the amalgamation took place, chose to retire rather than make the change because they were not comfortable when CU moved into the Agency. It was rather a loss to the program because as I say they were people of such skill and level of performance that they were very easy to work with and hard to replace.

*Q: How long were you in Thailand on this assignment?*

COWARD: We were in Bangkok for a full five years.

*Q: Are you saying that the USIS programs there were contributing to this unrest, towards this movement towards more democratic institutions or opening up the system?*

COWARD: I would think they did in just the experience of association because, of course, you were invited in to talk on subject matter. But when you were having your one-to-one conversations with professors and students or when you had them as guests in your home, the conversation automatically became one of this empathetic feeling for participation and they were fully prepared to participate. Of course, my own experience was that the Thais had had a love affair with democratic action for years, but it was always offset by a military preponderant that was the other foot. So no matter how difficult or obtrusive or obnoxious the army might be, the opposite reaction was the continuing and growing push towards a much more democratic system, which has been their path ever since toward greater personal freedom.

They are thoroughly prepared, in my judgment, to undertake it if they can just get the military to one side. But the military is so involved in the economics and control factors, business, in the country as a result of all their years of control, that until that aspect, which is kind of self supporting for the military, can be offset by civilian control the struggle will go on. Of course, they do now have their parliament which functions one way or another and the presence of a very remarkable monarch. I hesitate to think what could take place when King Bhumibol is no longer on the scene because it would appear that no one, certainly not his only son, is as intelligent or qualified. There is a second daughter who may well be, but then this immediately offers opportunities for a pro-son versus a pro-daughter political gambit and the son has had a military education. That could be a difficult period.

*Q: A minute ago you mentioned the qualifications of judges and lawyers in writing a new constitution, that they could call upon their own for language translations, etc. Did you find that the judicial system was oriented towards the West? What was your experience with the judicial system?*

COWARD: A unique experience began when Earl Warren came out. Almost immediately after our arrival the World Judges Conference was held in Bangkok. Earl Warren came out for it, among other distinguished people. USIS had a private showing of a film that we had done on Judge Warren that he was very much interested in seeing. I met Justice and Mrs. Warren at that time as I was asked to honcho him. He was not sponsored by USIS, we were merely facilitating. Through that association and contacts that I made at that time I happened to meet other Thai jurists, the most important one for the contacts I later made was the Under Secretary for Law. A splendid chap. Then through him over a period of time my own contacts among the legal people expanded.

The Thai legal system is based primarily on the French. They do not have trial by jury. They have trial by three judges. This was very interesting because I attended a couple of trials at the high court where the three judges, obviously thoroughly trained, hear the case and make the decision. Legalities in Thailand, perhaps this is Asian, are rather like the Japanese, there is a preference for settling arguments privately, outside. You take things to court when people are unreasonable enough to have a confrontation, but it is not Thai to have a confrontation.

I noted this particularly at meetings of SEATO where I was asked to go twice by the Embassy. When the Thai delegation arrived they already had their point of view, they did not enter into arguments. Whereas the Americans and Australians would have great lengthy arguments going on, the Thais would just sit there quietly and, when appropriate, express an opinion. I remember particularly asking a Thai delegate afterwards, why, when there was an argument over the English wording of a protocol which was to come out of the meeting, they did not state their preference for it. His reply was: "It wouldn't make any difference because when we translate it into Thai it won't say that anyhow." I thought this was a pretty good way to handle it. Nobody was upset and they let the others have all the arguments and fun.

*Q: With the judicial system then as you saw it, what programs or activities did you get involved with or organize?*

COWARD: We didn't do direct programs with the judiciary. What we personally did, meaning by that my wife and myself, was to entertain because of our good fortune in meeting these people and other lawyers so that we had access and they were a very rewarding group. Whenever there was trouble in Thailand, when things got out of hand for the government, they went immediately into their high court to put people into responsible, emergency positions. They would ask the chief justice, in Thailand, called the President of the Dika Court, to take another assignment. They would ask a judge to head a university. When there was a great deal of unrest at Thammasat University, they immediately appointed a judge vice-chancellor with the responsibility to get things under control. The President of the Dika Court was immediately appointed interim prime minister because things had gotten out of hand there. His Majesty made the appointments.

My feeling was that this remarkably well-trained group of people, graduates of various countries, were the balance wheel that provided the stability when the forces of the military versus the forces for greater democratic participation had a confrontation. The judiciary was what poured oil on troubled waters and smoothed things out. In fact, one of the heads of the Dika Court, whom I knew well, Dr. Prakorb Htrasing, had studied in Germany through the Hitler period. Very remarkable because there he was studying law in Germany at the time of the rise of Naziism and Hitler's early years as Chancellor of Germany.

*Q: I sort of intrude in this point because I was working in Thailand at the same time. I do remember that you had monthly meetings with the judicial group which you and your wife formed. You even brought in various people from the Embassy including the Deputy Chief of Mission.*

COWARD: Well, we used to give, without anybody knowing it, on the 15th of March every year a big dinner party. That happens to be our wedding anniversary, so we chose that time to get all of that group together. We did that annually. In fact, even when we had gone next door into Burma, we would come back regularly to give the famous 15th of March dinner. We always intermingled the Embassy officials with the judges and the lawyers. Of course one of the commitments of a cultural officer is to provide contacts and access, which we did, to, I gather, everyone's satisfaction.

*Q: What about your family situation at this time? Did the children accompany you?*

COWARD: Our daughter did. She did all of her high school there and was a graduate of the Bangkok International School. Our son could have stayed on but after his Indian experience and because he had one to German schools and Austrian schools as well, he said that he knew everybody's history but his own and thought that if he was to get into an American university he should stay in the US. So he spent all of our Bangkok years as a boarding student at St. Albans here in Washington, from which he was graduated.

*Q: Did you consider this family separation a hardship?*

COWARD: Well, I think it was a hardship. But I guess it is a problem that confronts a good many Foreign Service families, maybe most Foreign Service families. But it followed along in

our commitment. I had started this to educate the children so I felt this was part of it. His St. Albans experience was a wonderful one. He has now been a Washington resident for 25 years; what we lost he gained. And, of course, he visited us. He would come out regularly. We would bring him out at Christmas time and he would come out in the summer. It was a regret of mine that the American Foreign Service was never quite as understanding as the British Foreign Service. They would send children back to Britain for education and bring them back every summer so that families were not really separated. In our Foreign Service at that time you had one round-trip during the tour that your family was there. We were five years in Bangkok which meant that our son would have had one round-trip had we not brought him out ourselves at interim times.

I think that is something which, if it hasn't been, should be corrected because there is no doubt that somebody has to suffer. You suffer from the separation, if he is getting a superior education, and his education suffers if you keep him at some international school which may not provide the same caliber of education or opportunity for entrance into the university of his preference here in the States.

*Q: But earlier Frank you mentioned you studied Thai before you took the assignment in Bangkok. How useful was this language to you? Why couldn't you work in English?*

COWARD: In effect you could have worked in English. I was not the greatest Thai language student.

There is no doubt that for people who became fluent in Thai it would have been a more meaningful experience because generally if you maintain only professional contacts you can go on in English, but if you are going to enter a culture you have to be able to speak to non-professional people and Thais, like the Burmese, are very unlikely to talk English between themselves. It is their preference, their cultural prerogative that they prefer to speak their own language. They are always aware that foreign language is a foreign language. You need to hear all kinds of things in the native language that you are just not going to hear if you don't know the language. In India that was not true, but in the rest of Asia it would be true. Asians speak Asian languages unless they are talking to you.

*Q: Having been with you in Thailand much of this period, it is my impression you were one of the most effective officers in the old USIS spectrum. And we had a lot of people at that time. Before we move on to your next career step, do you have any passing comments about your experience in Thailand?*

COWARD: Well, flattery will get you everywhere. Again it was a very rewarding experience. I think every country is unique. Any officer's experience in that country is unique even though cultures may be related as the three that we were fortunate enough to have experienced...India, Thailand, Burma...but still every country is a unique experience in its own way. At the same time, for the foreign individual, the USIS officer is a window on America. So for me it was a thoroughly rewarding experience.

I was particularly appreciative in my years in Thailand that I had the experience of working with

Jack Hedges when he was PAO because in my experience he was an outstanding American citizen, USIS officer and individual. He combined all three of these elements in what in my experience would be the proper proportions, the proper outlook and a very effective colleague and Foreign Service officer.

*Q: Before we leave Thailand was there any event that stands out in your mind that portrayed perhaps some kind of in depth US-Thai relationship or on a personal basis a USIS relationship?*

COWARD: Yes. I feel one of the most meaningful experiences at USIS during my time was when we had the Thai patriarch visit and the ceremony on the front lawn at USIS. The patriarch had returned from his American visit. We had made a film of it. He had seen the film and appreciated it. It had been suggested that the patriarch and a group of his attendant monks come and have a blessing of the USIS compound. I believe you were Acting at that time. You approved it and they came. It was a moving experience.

It was not universally accepted as being a thing that USIS ought to do because here was this Asian religion ensconced in a specially constructed pavilion chanting on the front lawn. To me it was exactly what USIS and its cross-cultural purpose is all about. It indicated to the local society that we not only appreciated but valued their cultural context and I am sure that in the eyes of those people in Bangkok who were our primary target group it was an outstanding event representing a cultural exchange of the highest order.

*Q: And Frank, I don't know if you will agree with me, but I interpreted it as a great honor that this supreme patriarch would come to our compound and bless it and preside over a ceremony which was meaningful to all our Buddhist colleagues, our staff and the hundreds of people who stopped on the streets.*

COWARD: It probably represents the association that USIS has in a good many communities where we have offices and it is particularly due to the influence of those unsung heroes, our local employees. Those top local employees represent an elite who make a contribution to the success of American foreign policy that cannot be over emphasized, but is very often under valued. Selfless, timeless, the things that they can and do do, their dedication. I cannot believe in this particular instance that if the influence and acceptability of those local employees, particularly in Thailand, who tend to be very highly placed in the social structure which operates on the idea that self promotion is an inexcusable activity, if this had not been felt in Thai religious circles, I don't believe the supreme patriarch would ever have agreed to come and go through this particular ceremony.

*Q: I found it a very rewarding activity.*

**GEORGE F. MULLER**  
**Political/Military Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1968-1973)**

*Born in Vienna, Austria in 1919, George F. Muller first came to the U.S. in 1939 to escape the impending war and the Nazi regime. He received a bachelor's degree from the College of Wooster in 1940, a master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and a Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Mr. Muller joined the State Department in 1949 as an Intelligence and Research analyst for Austria and later became chief of the Central European Section. Mr. Muller entered the Foreign Service in 1954 and served in Thailand, Germany, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Thomas Dunnigan in 1994*

*Q: Your tour in Washington ended in 1968, you were transferred to Bangkok. How did that come about?*

MULLER: As I mentioned, at one point I did say in my post preference report, that I would love to go to Bangkok. But it also happened that the Political/Military Counselor in Bangkok, Bob Foulon, was taken ill and our medical officer said that he should be transferred. Ambassador Unger put me on his list and Monty Spear was Country Director, so the assignment went through very quickly.

We arrived just in time to celebrate the King's birthday. My first official function was to go to his garden party and nothing could have been more beautiful than the palace roofs glistening in the setting sun and the orchestra playing the Merry Widow waltz. I had to keep in the background, though. The prescribed dress was white tie. I only had black with me. Thai protocol permitted me to come but I was told to stay in the background when Their Majesties passed by.

*Q: I wouldn't give one here but in Bangkok I'm sure it was nice. You were the Political/Military Counselor there?*

MULLER: Right.

*Q: Were you also what they called the Mission Coordinator?*

MULLER: That was another job. At one point Bill Stokes had that job.

*Q: I wondered if they were combined positions.*

MULLER: No. We had, as usual, Counselors for Political Affairs, Economic Affairs, etc., but we also had a Counselor for Counter Insurgency, and one for Political/Military Affairs. Given these partly overlapping areas of responsibility, the Ambassador felt the need for a Counselor for Mission Coordination. Plus, we had, I think, the largest AID mission abroad, or one of the largest, in any case. To pull all that together, that was the job of the Counselor for Mission Coordination.

*Q: Those years that you were in Bangkok, it must have been one of the largest Embassies we had.*

MULLER: It was, yes, counting everybody.

*Q: Of course, there was a heavy U.S. military presence in-country?*

MULLER: Yes, at the height of the Vietnam war, we had about 50,000 U.S. servicemen in-country, mainly U.S. Air Force but also a sizeable army contingent which built the bases, built the roads, largely for us but partly for the Thais, under security assistance.

We helped the Thais with their technical infrastructure as a quid-pro-quo for their letting us operate from what they insisted on calling Thai bases. Although we were the operational element, there was also a Thai base commander and they flew the U.S. and the Thai flags jointly. There were 7 such in the country including the huge B-52 base at U-Tapao, which was for our strategic aircraft, plus a number of fighter bases up country from which the air war in Vietnam was prosecuted.

*Q: Speaking of B-52s, those planes travel long distances at great heights, would they take off from Thailand to bomb Vietnam and then return? Or would they continue on to Guam or some other place?*

MULLER: The Thais were very insistent that they be kept informed on what was going on at their bases. On the other hand, we could not give them information that might compromise a mission. Many started from the Philippines, made their run, and landed at U-Tapao. Others went out to sea from U-Tapao to sort of disguise their objective.

I think the main force of the B-52s used in the campaign came from the Philippines, a tremendous distance for just a relatively short operational time over target. U-Tapao also served as a base for the tanker aircraft used for aerial refuelling of the fighter planes.

The main problem, and I guess why they needed a Counselor for Political/Military Affairs, was that we had no Status of Forces Agreement with the Thais. In any other country that I know of, where American forces are stationed, there is a Status of Forces Agreement. There's one with the NATO countries, there's one with Japan, and so on.

But not with Thailand. Our critical military relations developed slowly as the war in Vietnam developed. In many cases, they were founded on the handshakes and discussions between then-Ambassador Graham Martin and Field Marshal Sarit, who was then the dictator of Thailand. He had passed from the scene by the time I got there.

We had very little written record of how some of these operational arrangements came about. In many instances I was behind the 8-ball because my opposite number, Lt. General Kriangsak Chomanand, who was the Deputy Chief of Staff of their Supreme Command, had participated in discussions of which we had no record. Gen. Kriangsak (in Thailand you always address people by their first names, even in a formal context) was the one who handled day-to-day problems with me.

The range of issues covered everything that had to do with a large visiting military force, from

operational matters to jurisdictional questions. If we wanted to make changes at one of the bases, this required concurrence of the Thai military Supreme Command. Very often our base commanders were so used to doing things their own way and do what made sense to them that they neglected to cut in the Thai base commander, for instance, if a new type of aircraft would be brought in, or a base enlarged.

Then the Thai base commander would complain or draw it to the attention of someone up his line of command, that the Americans had done this or that. Then it would get across from General Kriangsak to me and we would have to iron it out. This also meant that I had to have a very close working relationship with our military to keep informed what they were up to.

The Ambassador, very appropriately, insisted that he wanted one American military officer, a general officer, to be responsible for the combined presence, Army and Air Force, in-country.

*Q: In other words, a commander-in-chief.*

MULLER: As it were, a senior military commander. For most of the time I was there, this was Air Force Major General Ted Seith, who became a close friend of mine. We worked very harmoniously together. Ted had a very good understanding about the Thais' political concerns.

He would routinely inform me of changes in the disposition of our forces, or if a base commander encountered some difficulty with his Thai counterpart. If there were any changes, the Thais would always "approve" them, but if we didn't observe this ritual they could be very sticky.

As an example, we had a huge base at Korat, which was especially built for the F-111s. When we withdrew the F-111s from combat in Vietnam, the base was closed, or partially closed; it had to be kept in readiness for possible reintroduction of the aircraft. These things had to be worked out with the Thais, and on the whole it was a very smooth working relationship.

*Q: Smooth working but did the military attachés get in your way or not?*

MULLER: Very little. That's a very good question. Depending on the incumbent, they tried a little bit but they were told that the military attaché has certain functions, representational, intelligence collection, that kind of thing, but not an operational function. These were essentially operational problems since we were operating from these 7 bases in Thailand.

Also, stemming from the fact that we had no Status of Forces Agreement with the Thais, we had jurisdictional problems. For that reason the Political/Military section was, I think, unique in that I had 3 military officers on my staff, seconded by their respective commands to the Embassy: one army colonel, one air force colonel and one air force lieutenant colonel.

The air force colonel was a Judge Advocate officer (he later rose to become the Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Air Force). An air force officer was chosen for this job since most of our servicemen in-country were airmen. He maintained close liaison not only with the air force Judge Advocate General, but also with the Thai military judges.

The army colonel followed partly counterinsurgency problems. The air force lieutenant colonel followed operational problems, including daily targeting information we received through military channels. Based on the agreement and arrangements with the Thais, we, the Embassy, was given the task of vetting the targets of military aircraft in Vietnam, those aircraft taking off from Thai bases.

Clearly, for reasons of timing and security, one could not check with the Thais but they trusted us that if there were targets that we thought would present a political problem for them, then we could stop that particular action from taking place. Incidentally, the army Colonel, Walt Adams, later became the commander of the Berlin brigade when he made General; he and an air force lieutenant colonel, were vetting those targets.

It took some time to work out these arrangements with our military because of their concerns for operational security, but eventually this is how the standard operating procedure worked: everyday when we got targets, we would pinpoint those targets on our maps and judge their political acceptability to the Thais, acting as it were for them on the basis of our arrangement with them.

*Q: But these targets must have originated with General Westmoreland in Vietnam, through the military.*

MULLER: Oh yes, through the military and were transmitted to us. But these 3 officers were integral members of the Embassy staff, just as I had to serve when I was in the Pentagon to the General there. I wrote their efficiency reports.

*Q: As a point of interest, how large was your staff?*

MULLER: Altogether 10 people. We handled the military assistance program for Thailand, that was 2 people. The relationship with SEATO was also in my section. At least one of my officers, possibly two staffed the Ambassador when he would go to the SEATO meetings in Bangkok in his capacity as permanent U.S. representative.

On the jurisdictional side it was very important, and we insisted, that our newly arrived forces would be properly briefed on dos and don'ts in Thailand. The Thais are very very sensitive, particularly on two issues.

One is that the majesty of the King must not in any way be offended; "lese Majeste" was a very serious felony. The other one was of a religious nature. We had a case I remember of two young Mormon missionaries who came to Thailand and visited, among other places, the ancient capital of Ayuthaya.

Ayuthaya has a long main avenue flanked by perhaps two dozen larger than life-size Buddha statues in sitting positions. One of the missionaries climbed on the shoulders of one of the Buddha statues holding on to its head, and the other one took his picture. The film was developed in a Thai photo shop, and the proprietor took it to the police; they were arrested for

sacrilege against the holy image of the Buddha.

In Thailand it is a sin to be higher, to put yourself in a position higher than either the King or the Buddha. You must always be in a prone position before them. It is also considered very bad manners to pat somebody on the head. The western habit of seeing a child and saying, "good boy" and patting him on the head, is a no-no in Thailand, it's offensive.

So these missionaries committed several sins. Now, why was I involved?

*Q: Yes, I would say, why wasn't the consular section?*

MULLER: The consular section couldn't get them out. These missionaries got 6 months in a Thai jail, which, I assure you, is no fun. The courts were military courts and since I had the connection to the Deputy Chief of Staff of the High Command, I was asked to intervene with General Kriangsak to get the sentence reduced, or even removed. But we were not successful. As far as I know, they served their time. I was hoping to bring military pressure on the military court. But this was one case even the Supreme Command would not touch.

*Q: This brings another question to mind. What happened when an American airman got into trouble off-base? Say with a Thai national, be he male or female, and was picked up by the Thai police. Since we had no Status of Force Agreement, how was that handled?*

MULLER: That's a very good question and that constituted about 90% of the work that this air force colonel Judge Advocate officer had to do. He went to see the military judges or if he was not successful, I would see General Kriangsak. Or we would jointly go over there and present the case.

On base, it was clear that we had military jurisdiction over our people. If something happened off base, it depended on the offense. In most cases, say barroom brawls, if we assured the Thais that we would punish the offender, and what the punishment would be they would turn jurisdiction over to us. They were pretty cooperative in this respect and they didn't particularly want to have to care for Americans in their jails. They knew we had different standards of incarceration and in fact, often tried to bend over backwards to be helpful. On the other hand, they could also be very sticky if they felt we were taking things for granted or infringing upon their sovereignty. Although they had managed to remain free while the British and French carved up the rest of Southeast Asia, they remained sensitive in jurisdictional matters because at one point the powers imposed certain limitations on their courts.

We had one very sad case of an air force lieutenant colonel who had calling cards in the form of twenty-dollar bills. On the outside they looked like a twenty-dollar bill, on the inside it said, "Colonel such-and-such, US Air Force, the last of the Great Spenders". That was his sense of humor and that was also his death certificate. He went to a bar, disappeared with a bar girl and was murdered, obviously because people thought that roll of fake twenty-dollar bills was the real stuff. But that made it easy for the Thais to track the murderer. They found him and within a very short period of time, perhaps 2 to 3 weeks, he was sentenced to death. I received an invitation to participate in his execution, by firing squad, which I turned over to the military attaché and said,

that is something you can really do much better than I can.

*Q: George, I think you're shirking your duties there. Now because of this large military presence, you said up to 50,000 Americans in Thailand, was there a great deal of criticism among the Thai public of this?*

MULLER: Not too much. First of all, the military brought a lot of money into the country. Thai society is very open in many respects. Many of the Thai men have second and third wives. Prostitution, as we all know, flourishes. But the Thais don't like open affection or sexuality in the street. So as long as the boys behaved as they walked along, as they went to the museums or the markets and so on, what went on behind the bamboo curtain, the Thais didn't care.

On the whole, our presence, I would say, was understood and was welcomed. We had, of course, civic affairs projects going on near the various bases. There was no opposition to the U.S. presence of any significant size.

But talking about civic affairs projects, one of the great things that happened in Thailand was General Kriangsak's pet project to start a dairy or cattle breeding industry. Thailand had no cattle to speak of, it was small, scrawny and neither milk nor meat cattle.

*Q: Well the climate wouldn't seem to suit it.*

MULLER: Yes, but on the other hand there's cattle in India, there's cattle in Florida and so on.

A captain in the Army Veterinary Corps, somehow sold General Kriangsak on the idea of starting a cattle industry in Thailand. I think it was Kriangsak's great merit that he saw what impact this could have on the poor farmers up-country. He imported 3 prize bulls to Thailand which were kept in air conditioned stalls at the polo grounds. The semen of these bulls in dry ice containers were shipped to the villages.

General Kriangsak went out himself in his helicopter, sometimes accompanied by this veterinary officer. They picked bright enterprising young peasant kids 16, 18 years old, and they gave them a couple of cows and training in the methods of artificial insemination. After 2 or 3 years Thailand had the beginning of a cattle industry and the cattle survived, particularly in the cooler regions.

I think that if ever there was a man who had a mission come to a very positive fruition, it was that army captain who sold General Kriangsak on this idea.

*Q: So now you can probably get Thai beef there.*

MULLER: Now you can get Thai beef; actually you could already by the time we left. I'll never forget, in his office Kriangsak had a small shrine with a Buddha where he prayed; there was a picture of his wife and his two children; and there was a picture of his prize bull.

*Q: That's very interesting. You had a number of high level visits, I gather during your time,*

*didn't President Nixon come out?*

MULLER: President Nixon came out, yes.

*Q: And Vice President Agnew and other people.*

MULLER: Agnew came to Thailand, yes. The first visitor of the new administration was Secretary Rogers, who came out rather early on, I think. We had a meeting with him, Bill Sullivan was with him, a number of other people, maybe Ambassador Godley came down from Laos.

Anyway, we had a meeting with the Secretary who was not all that enamored of this so-called alliance with Thailand which was based on SEATO, augmented and reinforced by the so-called Rusk-Thanat Communique, Thanat having been the Thai Foreign Minister at the time.

The Rusk-Thanat Communique contained the essence of the special relationship between Thailand and the United States. It provided the political, diplomatic basis for our large operations but it also extended the security umbrella of the United States over Thailand.

My feeling is that Secretary Rogers had second thoughts about this, with a new administration come in, he was succeeding Secretary Rusk and, you know, new brooms and all that. I'm very partial, a great admirer of Ambassador Unger, but he was never more brilliant than when briefing the Secretary and convincing him of the validity of this special relationship.

I sensed an adversarial attitude on the part of Rogers and some of the others, and Unger masterfully turned this around.

*Q: Did you have any problem with the other visitors that came?*

MULLER: No, not really. I think there were so many visitors partly because Thailand was kind of on the itinerary of VIPs traveling to take a first hand look at the situation in Vietnam.

Ambassador Bunker came up quite often. We went to Vietnam to Ambassador Bunker's Southeast Asia meetings. Ambassador Godley from Laos came up quite a bit, as did Monty Stearns, his DCM.

From Washington, in addition to the Vice President, there was President Nixon. There was no meeting with him that included counselors. He met with the Prime Minister, of course, and with all the Chiefs of Mission in Southeast Asia.

My main memory of that visit is that he was in our "bubble," our secure room for about an hour, maybe an hour and a half, with the Chiefs of Mission only. The "bubble" happened to be on the corridor where my office was and I was refused access to the men's room by the Secret Service. So I was bottled up in my office for about an hour and a half while the President was next door.

*Q: The indignities of diplomatic life.*

MULLER: That's right.

*Q: Thailand sent units to fight in Vietnam, as I recall. Did that cause much of a problem or not?*

MULLER: I'm very happy that you're mentioning this because this was really the main job of this army colonel, the one I mentioned earlier. He provided the staff work for the Thai division in Vietnam which we fully equipped and trained. If there was any difficulty, it was that the Thais always wanted more -- better equipment, equipment equal to what the American divisions had, and of course they liked choppers and all those good things of warfare.

So that had to be ironed out. Plus we paid for the bonuses that were given to these Thai volunteers. I frankly don't know all the ins and outs anymore but I know that Colonel Adams was deeply involved in both the equipment and financing problems.

*Q: Did they get into real combat there?*

MULLER: Oh yes, they got into real combat. Also there was some Thai artillery in the Plain of Jarres in Laos, which was a rather well kept secret for a long time. Those, too, were equipped and maintained by us. We also trained Thai forces in Thailand for their counter-insurgency mission.

This was the job of MAC-Thai, the Military Assistance Command for Thailand, of which General Seith, as I said, was the head. MAC-Thai had a training division and they were the people who went out to train Thai artillery and Thai infantry and so on.

The supply of equipment to the Thai forces was MAC-Thai's job under our Security Assistance program. We monitored this as well as the Thai Division in Vietnam. I should say more than monitored: the Embassy made a definite input in the development of the Military Assistance Program and the ambassador insisted on keeping fully informed.

*Q: And of course, the Thais had their own insurrection to reckon with, didn't they?*

MULLER: Yes, the monitoring and policy and operations interface for that was the job of the Counselor for Counter Insurgency. That section maintained close relations with the Thai counterinsurgency program as a whole.

*Q: What was the reaction in Thailand to our incursion into Cambodia in 1970? Cambodia, I gather, is a sensitive subject for the Thais.*

MULLER: I think they were all in favor of it. You mustn't forget that the Thai government was, I would say, a benign military dictatorship that was all in favor of prosecuting the war with all possible means. They were staunchly anti-communist. There was a parliament but it was not a parliamentary body in the western sense. The Thais had no problem at all, they had no objection to our move into Cambodia. If anything, they were concerned about the restraints under which we were fighting the war in Vietnam.

As far as their own insurgency is concerned, some of the people, again like General Kriangsak and the General who was in charge of counterinsurgency, they understood the problem that insurgency feeds on basic inequalities and basic difficulties of a socioeconomic kind. But how to come to grips with this is another thing.

The insurgency in the northeast of Thailand was essentially carried on by the hill tribes. The hill tribes have been in these often inaccessible hills for centuries. They had essentially a slash-and-burn economy. The Thais wanted to preserve their stock of teak and other timber. The hill tribes broke the Thai law with their basic habit of living, moving from one hill top to another, cutting the timber as they went along.

So the Thais realized that they'd have to give them a substitute form of livelihood. But it was much easier for the tribes to grow opium and sell a kilo of opium, than to try to plant potatoes or whatever, and market that. Growing opium poppies was also prohibited, so they were again in violation of Thai law. The insurgency fed on that. There was also the ethnic factor; the Thais looked down on the hill tribes as inferior, so you had great divides that had to be very slowly bridged and eventually they were. Much of the credit for that goes to the King. Right now, I think the insurgency is no longer active.

*Q: Now you mentioned the problem of drugs, raising opium which becomes heroin, a curse for all of us. I remember reading years ago about the involvement of the American School in Bangkok in that question. Did that come up during your time or not?*

MULLER: In particular I remember one case of a girl under the influence of drugs; she walked off a roof and killed herself. It was not called the American School, I should say, it was the International School. It was administered by a Board on which Americans were predominantly represented, including our Counselor for Administration. He was very active and very helpful in this. However, the Thais could not show any preference for us so they insisted that this be an International School. It also had an international faculty, though heavily American. The student body was drawn from the international community.

Our son was there between the ages of 8 and 13, he never got involved in the drug scene, I think mainly because the kids that were involved were somewhat older. I thought the school was academically excellent; first rate, both as to program and as to teaching, discipline if you will. Our great disappointment was when we were transferred to Germany and he had to go to a military dependents school in Stuttgart. There was a decided drop of quality and level of learning. For a year he more or less coasted along on what he learned in Bangkok.

*Q: There was a coup, with a junta taking over in early 70s in Bangkok, and the long time Prime Minister was thrown out. Did that cause any problems for the type of work you were doing?*

MULLER: That happened just after my departure. I remember Ambassador Unger telling me afterwards that he sensed something brewing for some time. Actually there were two coups, the first one was not very significant. But the one you're referring to is when the students took to the streets, and...

*Q: Overthrew the government.*

MULLER: Indirectly. This is one of the cases I always cite when I'm asked about the authority and the function of the King. The King is not involved directly in politics, but in this particular instance, as an example and in others as well, the King brought tremendous moral authority to bear.

It is my understanding that he made it quite clear to Prime Minister, Field Marshal Thanom, and General Praphas, who was the Minister of Defense and at the same time the Commander in Chief of the Army, which was of course the main military force in the country; the King made it quite clear that there must be no bloodshed in the streets and that the students must not be fired on.

The crisis ended with the resignation of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. In a way, if you will, the students won because they...

*Q: Forced a change.*

MULLER: Forced a change and had the tremendous moral authority of the King on their side.

*Q: During those years, the early 70s, we were negotiating for a settlement in Vietnam. Did you think that the Thais feared the type of settlement we might reach there or what might happen later in Vietnam?*

MULLER: I think so. I was not really privy to what was going on in Paris and elsewhere. It was clear that we were beginning to withdraw. And then came Watergate. I remember the early investigation on the Watergate break-in hit us at the Embassy pretty hard. I think the top of the Thai leadership was also concerned. Thailand had sided with us. They didn't want to be left exposed to Vietnamese expansionism. Cambodia was only an uncertain buffer. The Khmer Rouge insurgency was spreading and took over the country later, starting a terrible reign of terror.

*Q: We began to withdraw our troops in Thailand too about that time didn't we? The drawdown.*

MULLER: Yes, we were drawing-down even before I left in 1973. That was a lengthy and involved process. The Ambassador got instructions that had been worked out in Washington of what base closures and troop withdrawals had been decided upon. I staffed the Ambassador in meetings with Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman. He had as his assistant and note-taker a young, sharp diplomat named Bira Birabonghse, also a graduate of the Fletcher School, who happens to be the current Thai Ambassador in Washington. He was then already marked as a "comer."

This went on for a matter of weeks, perhaps even two months. Thanat had a reputation as a sticky negotiator, but we encountered no particular problems disengaging from these bases on the understanding that we retained re-entry rights and that certain equipment was to be left behind. Understandably, perhaps, the Thais wanted some things that we couldn't leave, but in the

end a good deal was either left as surplus or transferred to them under Military Assistance. It was uneconomical for us to transport some of the stuff back to the U.S.

At almost the same time, or maybe even a little bit before we began to withdraw, the air force wanted to establish a huge radar dome up-country on a mountain called Doi Inthanon. This was to observe Chinese rocket development. In order to build this a road had to be built up the mountain. In this case the negotiations were between the Ambassador and Air Chief Marshal Dawee, who was Kriangsak's boss and the Chairman of the Joint Staff of the Thai forces.

We managed to get Thai permission to build the road and to establish the dome. It became operational in the time period specified. But again there was a quid pro quo in terms of the width of the road, the quality of the road, and so on. In other words, the Thais were ready to deal but they always wanted certain emoluments at the same time.

Perhaps the most dramatic incident that occurred during my tour in Bangkok was the take-over of the Israeli embassy by Palestinian terrorists on December 27, 1972. They took several hostages, including the DCM and his wife, who worked in the embassy, as well as the Israeli ambassador to Cambodia, who happened to be in town. The Israeli ambassador to Thailand, however, was at a ceremonial occasion marking the formal investiture of the Crown Prince, which was attended by all members of the diplomatic corps. The embassy was immediately surrounded by Thai police and soldiers and the government set up a command post in a building almost directly across the street. Social functions were cancelled as the stalemate continued throughout the night. I forgot the terrorists' demands, but the hostages were clearly in great danger.

The next morning, which happened to be the Crown Prince's birthday, General Kriangsak appeared unannounced at my office and asked whether the U.S. army had a non-lethal knock-out gas that would render the terrorists unconscious before they could harm the hostages. He asked me to meet him at the command post with the reply. I quickly ascertained from our military that we had no chemical agent that could instantaneously knock out the terrorists without giving them time to pull the trigger.

When I reported to the command post, there was the Prime Minister, flanked by Air Marshal Dawee and a few other top generals. Also present was the United Arab Republics' ambassador (Egypt and Syria were joined in those days) who was asked to mediate. He told the terrorists that the Crown Prince's investiture was a national holiday, an "auspicious" day, and to mar it, or the birthday, by shedding blood would have anti-Palestinian repercussions in Thailand, and perhaps the Buddhist world generally.

In the meantime, the Israeli ambassador appeared at our embassy, understandably in a highly emotional state, with the request to use our telephone lines since he had been unable to get through to Tel Aviv. This was of course immediately granted. But going through several military switches before reaching State's Command Center took some time and he was almost apoplectic by the time he got the Foreign Office and couldn't reach the person he wanted to talk to. "Get me anybody," he shouted, "get me Abba (Eban, the Foreign Minister); get me Golda (Meir, the Prime Minister), I want to talk to Golda." At this point our staff withdrew tactfully, and I didn't

find out until later that he got his instructions right then from both.

It turned out later that the terrorists didn't know they had captured an ambassador and the No. 2, with his wife. The hostages maintained that they were just lowly clerks, that all the important people were at the investiture.

Eventually, the following compromise was reached: the terrorists, hostages and Marshal Dawee would jointly proceed to Bangkok airport by bus, where a plane was standing by to take the terrorists to Copenhagen; on boarding the aircraft, the terrorists would release the hostages unharmed; but, to assure that the Thai side kept its word of free conduct, Marshal Dawee would come along as a guarantor. As this scenario unfolded on December 29, we listened intently to the step-by-step report of an embassy officer who was posted at the airport.

When it was all over, the Thais were justly proud of the way they had handled the situation, but also gave credit to the United Arab Republics' ambassador for his role; for instance, he knew who the hostages were, but did not give them away. Considering the terrible massacre at the Munich Olympic Games only a few months earlier, everybody heaved a sigh of relief. In later hostage crises, this episode was referred to as the "Thai resolution." When I asked Marshal Dawee a few days later whether he had felt threatened on his flight to Copenhagen, he said "absolutely not;" he added that he bought a new watch and that all the Danish girls wore see-through blouses. He had a penchant for mixing the serious with the lighter things in life.

Let me finish this chapter by mentioning that my friend Kriangsak went on to become Prime Minister. I last saw him when he visited Washington in that capacity during the Carter Administration.

**JAMES MARVIN MONTGOMERY**  
**Political/Military Officer**  
**Bangkok (1968-1971)**

**Consul**  
**Chiang Mai (1971-1974)**

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MONTGOMERY: Thai language training - at last! What I'd wanted in the first place but was diverted to studying Vietnamese. The Thai language training was at the Foreign Service Institute. It was given in a room about the same size as we used to study Vietnamese in 1959-1960. We moved from room to room. The course was marginally better organized than the Vietnamese language training. I was eight years older - 34 - and so it was harder. As we all know, language is an athletic exercise. It's not an intellectual exercise.

Going back to Vietnamese language training, I finished my thesis for a master's degree and got my degree from Emory University while I was in training. Actually, I received the degree when I was in Saigon. My thesis was on Grant's first campaign against Vicksburg.

Anyway, I came back from Mexico and went into Thai language training. We had more Thai tutors, so we didn't get so sick of seeing the same person. However, it was more difficult because, as I said, I was older, plus the fact that I didn't have an office or support. This was much more of a problem at that age, 34, than it was when I studied Vietnamese at age 24. I felt, in a way, that I was sort of regressing in terms of maturity and development. The elevators in that rattletrap building where the Foreign Service Institute was then located, on Key Boulevard in Rosslyn, didn't move very quickly.

Anyway, I got through the course and went off to the Embassy in Bangkok. I actually went to Bangkok after studying the Thai language! I thought that I was going into the Political Section, but when I got there, they put me in the Political-Military Section. I was annoyed at this at the time but I ended up being grateful for this, because that's where the real political action was at that time, because of the Vietnam War. The Political Section would talk to the Thai Foreign Ministry - that was about it. There was no Parliament to speak of and not much of an opposition to the government. The main question for the Embassy was the political management problems of having 55,000 American troops stationed in Thailand. They were spread out over seven major airfields and a bunch of smaller installations.

The interesting part was the legacy which Ambassador Graham Martin had left. Len Unger had taken over as Ambassador from Graham Martin before I arrived in Bangkok in January, 1968. People were still there - in the Embassy and in the Thai Government - who remembered how the arrangements were put into place because of Ambassador Martin's extreme chutzpah [boldness]. Ambassador Martin played for all it was worth the fact that he was the personal representative of the President of the United States and that he was not running a field office of the Department of State. He was running an Embassy of the United States. He was running the Mission and was in charge of it because he got his authority directly from the President.

*Q: When did Graham Martin arrive in Bangkok and when did he leave?*

MONTGOMERY: He arrived in Bangkok in 1962 and left there in 1967. He set the framework for our presence in Thailand. The arrangement basically was that the Thai willingly gave access to all kinds of facilities and all kinds of cooperation, thanks to Ambassador Martin. However, these arrangements were to be managed, not by the Chief of JUSMAG [Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group], or even MACTHAI [Military Assistance Command, Thailand], which replaced JUSMAG. These arrangements were to be run by the Embassy. There was a continuing dialogue between the Embassy and the Thai Supreme Command, Forward, under Air Chief Marshal Dawee Chulasop, who was the Thai Supreme Commander. Dawee's deputy was Lieutenant General Kriangsak Chomanon, who was really the person we dealt with.

Whenever the U.S. military wanted to do something, we would go to see Gen. Kriangsak. He would say, "Yes," or "No," or "Yes, if you do this or that." The military operations conducted out

of Thailand were to be kept within the parameters that had been established with the Royal Thai Government [RTG]. To that end the Political-Military Section would get a telegram every day from Seventh Air Force in Saigon, laying out the bombing missions for aircraft based in Thailand. We would check the map coordinates for those missions with the parameters we had established with the Thai Government. About once every three months Seventh Air Force would have to scrub a mission because we wouldn't let them do it - because it didn't fit within the agreement we had with the Thai. Then we'd go and see the Thai and would have to explain to them why we wanted to use the airplanes at Utapao Air Base to do this or that, instead of what we had been doing (Utapao Air Base had B-52 bombers. It was south-southeast of Bangkok and was part of the Sattahip military complex). Generally speaking, the Thai would then agree, but they never let go of that relationship.

Because of this arrangement, this was an enormously permissive relationship. The Thai let us do just about whatever we wanted to do, as long as it was within reason. You know, they wouldn't let us bomb Beijing from Utapao, or anything like that. However, this arrangement drove the Pentagon nuts, because none of it was written down. It was all on the basis of Memoranda of Conversations. There were desultory negotiations for a base rights agreement, which were never completed. And there were desultory negotiations for a status of forces agreement, which were never completed.

*Q: How did you handle ordinary criminality?*

MONTGOMERY: First of all, there was surprisingly little of it. I had a theory - and I still do - that, fortuitously, the knobs and indentations of American culture, particularly as carried by our troops, and the knobs and indentations of Thai culture matched and fit. There were 55,000 American troops in Thailand - without a Status of Forces Agreement. The number of jurisdictional cases that we had was, for all practical purposes, insignificant. It was just incredible. I think that we ended up with one American airman going into a Thai jail - for having killed somebody!

*Q: Happened all the time in Thailand.*

MONTGOMERY: In that sense it was a remarkable feat. But the Pentagon hated this arrangement. They would much rather have had much less in the way of facilities, in actual practice, if they had it written down.

This brings us to the historical background, which is very important for understanding this very cooperative relationship which we had with the Thai. It was thanks to Ambassador Graham Martin that this happened. In 1962, after Martin had arrived in Thailand, you may recall that when the Pathet Lao got close to the Mekong River, we had some diplomatic negotiations with the Thai which resulted in the Rusk-Thanat Communique. This communique said that our obligations under the SEATO Treaty [Southeast Asian Collective Defense Agreement] were singular as well as collective. In other words, if the French and Pakistanis didn't want to go along with helping the Thai, we could do it anyway under the SEATO Treaty.

When the Pathet Lao got close to the border of Thailand, President John Kennedy decided to

send American troops and aircraft to Thailand to snarl at the Pathet Lao. I think that the Thai read about this decision in the newspapers. Ambassador Martin had to pick up the pieces. The way he did it was to say to the Thais, "Look, we have the SEATO Treaty. We have a long history of adherence to collective security. You stood with us in Korea." And they did. The Thai were the first country to send troops to Korea. He continued, "We are both concerned about your border because of the Pathet Lao. We have things that we can provide, and you have things that you can provide. This is a partnership. We are going to be doing a number of things to support this partnership. One of the things that we have learned, as a result of the deployment of American troops, in pursuit of this joint objective, is that you have certain logistical shortcomings." He then began to set out a list of Thai logistical shortcomings that was exactly the same list as the U.S. military had set down. He portrayed them as part of a joint effort. This was called, The Special Logistics Agreement - Thailand, or SLAT.

The SLAT involved railroad reconstruction and building communications facilities and some highways. The Thai loved this, because it not only strengthened their logistical capabilities for military action but it also strengthened the country's economic infrastructure in a very real way. So this was okay with the Thais.

When we decided to deploy large numbers of aircraft and supporting troops to Thailand, in the wake of the decision in 1965 to begin Operation ROLLING THUNDER, the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, we obviously needed a lot of cooperation from the Thai, because we planned to put some of these troops and aircraft into Thai air bases. We were also going to have to build a large number of infrastructure projects in Thailand, expanding port facilities, and so forth.

The genius of Ambassador Graham Martin was that he went to the Thai when this happened, and he said, "All right, it's now time for the second SLAT agreement. It is time for SLAT II." Martin took all of the U.S. military's logistical requirements and sold them to the Thai as part of a joint effort, not as part of the U.S. doing what it had to do to support itself. It was truly making a diplomatic silk purse out of a sow's ear. This complex of arrangements became known as SLAT II, an agreement reached between Ambassador Martin and the Thai. However, the thing is that Martin never told Washington about this package. We found out about it later on, and inadvertently, when Gen. Kriangsak, at some point, when he wanted something from us, kept saying that this was consistent with SLAT II. It took us a while to figure out what he was talking about. The Thai had institutional memory because many of their people dealt with us for many years. The Embassy had less institutional memory because of periodic transfers of personnel. Part of SLAT II was the idea that the political control of the American military presence would never get out of the hands of the Embassy - because if it did, the whole thing would fall apart, because the U.S. military would start talking about its requirements, rather than the U.S.-Thai jointly agreed upon effort to contain aggression in Southeast Asia. That was the secret of Thai generosity and Thai willingness to deal on a very open-handed basis with our requirements, because this was constantly portrayed as a U.S.-Thai effort. We contributed what we could, and the Thai contributed what they could. Ambassador Martin was able almost perfectly to sell almost every logistical requirement that we had - particularly because some of them were major programs - as an expression of this joint SLAT II concept.

This almost broke down when Martin went to the Thai to obtain approval for the deployment of B-52 bombers to Utapao. The air base was already there, but the landing strips would require major strengthening to be really heavy runways to handle B-52s. The Thai were very concerned because the B-52s had the range to reach China, and this would upset the Chinese. The other aircraft we had, the F-4s and F-5s, didn't have the range to reach China.

So Martin told the Thai, "Listen, what are you worried about? One, we're not going to attack China. That's clear. Two, if we decided to attack China, we would use B-52s based elsewhere. Three, if we decided to use B-52s from Utapao, we wouldn't do so without your agreement. Four, we have all of these tactical, fighter aircraft in Thailand anyway. They would stand between Thailand and any Chinese pre-emptive attack. In any case, I can tell you that, if the Chinese were to attack Thailand, we would put those B-52s under Thai operational command." The Thai said, "On that basis, we'll let you deploy B-52s to Utapao." The Department of State never knew about this until much later. It was all down in Memoranda of Conversations.

*Q: But this was recorded in the Embassy in Bangkok.*

MONTGOMERY: This was recorded in the Embassy, and I'll tell you about that in a minute. Out of it came a strange document called The Joint U.S.-Thai Air Defense Agreement, which didn't make sense until you knew the history behind it. However, it was an attempt to do two things: codify in writing Martin's commitment to walk the cat back so that we really were not going to put U.S. aircraft under Thai command, and do it in such a fashion that the Thai wouldn't notice. That was the zenith of Martin's silk purse approach to Thai-U.S. requirements.

Of course, the B-52s were deployed to Utapao, and they never attacked China. That was fine, and the whole thing was never called into question. However, the Thai felt secure about it.

*Q: This is the Thai military, who were still running Thailand at the time. The Thai civilians were not.*

MONTGOMERY: This is when the highest rank in the Thai military was Prime Minister. The Minister of Defense was also the Prime Minister - Thanom Kittikachorn.

So this is sort of the situation that I inherited and the political dance that I did for three years in the Political-Military Section of the Embassy in Bangkok. It was a very interesting exercise. I think that our ability to continue the Vietnam War as long as we did depended on maintaining that framework, even though, in large part, we did so unknowingly because no one in Washington knew about the SLAT II arrangement. When I arrived in the Embassy, nobody in the Embassy knew about the SLAT II arrangement. It had been forgotten. I arrived in 1968, and the SLAT II smoke and mirrors arrangement had been pulled off in 1965-1966.

The way we found out about the SLAT II arrangement was that Gen. Kriangsak kept referring to it. We kept thinking, "What's this? Well, he doesn't speak English all that well." Then, in July, 1969, we received notice that the Symington Select subcommittee, which was investigating U.S. security commitments and arrangements abroad, was looking into all of the arrangements which the United States had made around the world and what kind of unauthorized promises had been

made to foreign governments by the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government which could lead us into another Vietnam War. The Subcommittee was going to wring all of these out and find out what was going on.

To that end, the Subcommittee decided to send a team of investigators consisting of Walter Pinkus, who still reports for "The Washington Post," and Roland Paul, who, I think, is a lawyer in North Carolina. They were the outriders of this rediscovery of the SLAT II arrangement. They wanted to know all about U.S. security commitments and arrangements with the Thai. Ambassador Unger asked me to prepare for their visit. The first thing he wanted to do was to find out about our security commitments and arrangements with the Thai - something that nobody then in the Embassy had looked into.

Fortunately, the Embassy in Bangkok had not followed the established practice of retiring its files every two years. So I got into the files. I came up with a loose-leaf notebook about 3-4 inches thick. It was filled with copies of security commitments and arrangements that the Embassy had forgotten about, and Washington never knew about. These agreements were pretty amazing. There was a CONFIDENTIAL addendum to the Rusk-Thanat Communique of 1962 in which Secretary of State Rusk said that we would never do anything less for Thailand than we had done for the Republic of Vietnam.

There was a Memorandum of Conversation about the Utapao arrangements for the deployment of B-52s. I put this in a telegram and sent it back to Washington. Norm Hannah, who was the Deputy Chief of Mission in Bangkok, said, "You can't tell that to Washington!" I said, "Well, it's in the record." He said, "What asshole wrote that down?" I said, "You did." [Laughter] We also found out about the SLAT II arrangement in the Embassy files and how Ambassador Martin had obtained authorization for the deployment of B-52s to Utapao, using the precedent of the SLAT I arrangement.

So this is the way we got ready for the visit of Pinkus and Paul. They came to Bangkok and spent about a week. I was their Escort Officer. We toured every U.S. military outhouse and went to just about every U.S. installation that we could find. We never gave them a copy of the Black Book I mentioned before but would draw from it as necessary. I had one of those little moments of glory that one occasionally has in a career. On the way to the airport, when Pinkus, Paul, and I were speaking to each other again and were being friendly, Pinkus said to me, "Well, Jim, I guess you get a lot of people from Congress coming through and asking questions like that." The light bulb went on, and I said, "You know something, you're the first. Nobody from Congress has been out here asking questions like this in living memory." This was in 1969.

Then I went back to Washington with Ambassador Unger in November, 1969, for a week of hearings before the Symington Select Subcommittee in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee room, on the first floor of the Capitol. At this hearing Ambassador Unger and his team, including me, were on one side of the table. I was a presence grise, seeking eminence [an adviser trying to make myself useful to Ambassador Unger]. On the other side of the table were Senators Fulbright, Mansfield, and Symington, dragging out the full nature of our security arrangements and commitments to the Thai. The dominant emotion that came across that green baize table was one of embarrassment because these Senators had voted for these authorizations and

appropriations all of these years and never asked any questions. This was the beginning of Congressional reassertion of its prerogatives and authority - not just in Southeast Asia but in the conduct of foreign policy as a whole.

They had been content, up until this point, to let the President of the United States act like a Prime Minister with a solid, Parliamentary majority behind him. We are not a Parliamentary democracy. We are a Congressional democracy, which is something different. In many ways these Senators had sort of abdicated their responsibilities since the beginning of World War II and they never really took them back until this set of hearings in 1969. They began to reassert themselves on everything else, as we saw, and everything else flowed from this hearing.

*Q: Of course, we had had a series of Presidents from the Democratic Party, with the exception of Presidents Eisenhower (1953-1961) and Nixon, who came into office in 1969. In other words, most of these security commitments and arrangements had been entered into by Presidents Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson - all of whom were Democrats, as these Senators knew full well.*

MONTGOMERY: Well, this was in 1969. What was interesting when we arrived in November, 1969, for the hearings, was that the White House wanted nothing to do with Ambassador Leonard Unger. He was on his own. He was given no guidance or anything else. The implication was, "If you get out of this, you can continue as Ambassador to Thailand."

*Q: Henry Kissinger was the National Security Adviser to the President at the time of these hearings.*

MONTGOMERY: He was the National Security Adviser. It was right in the midst of one of the main demonstrations against the Vietnam War, aimed at shutting Washington down. Ambassador Graham Martin testified, too.

*Q: He was Ambassador to Italy, wasn't he? He was presumably brought back for those hearings.*

MONTGOMERY: I think so. This is when all sorts of things began to fall into place, once we had that Black Book. We began to understand just what Martin had done in the way of entering into U.S. security commitments to Thailand. He had basically given a NATO-type [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] commitment to the Thai - an unequivocal commitment. In return, he had gotten back this enormous operational flexibility. That explains what happened. There was a time when the Thai - that is, Gen. Kriangsak - wanted a road built. He didn't get it, because it didn't fit in with U.S. military requirements.

*Q: What road was this?*

MONTGOMERY: It was a cut-off road to Ubon, near the Mekong River in the southern part of northeastern Thailand. The road was to go due east from Korat. The existing road made a sort of right angle, and Gen. Kriangsak wanted to go across the hypotenuse. We tried and tried to get the Pentagon to fund this road. I think that eventually they did, because there is a road there.

I think that what happened is that the Pentagon didn't understand that there was a commitment to

the Thai. They didn't understand it until they wanted to deploy a group of C-130 gunships to Ubon to support operations in Vietnam. The Thai never asked for a direct quid pro quo, but they made it clear that it certainly would be easier for them to support those C-130s if that road were built - and it would be.

There was an incident where I think that I touched history. In the early days of the deployment of United States forces to Thailand Ambassador Martin had sold the Thai on the idea of an air control radar on top of Doi Inthanon Mountain, the highest mountain peak in Thailand - about 8,000 feet high. It's about 60 miles south of Chiang Mai. We had sold the Thai on this idea and then, later on, decided that we didn't need it. It then sort of disappeared as a subject of interest to us.

It was finally built because the Thai later decided that they wanted it. We wanted to put in a space tracking radar station to track Chinese missiles at Kokha, an abandoned Thai airfield, south of Lampang, in northern Thailand. The Thais said, "Well, if you want a space tracking radar to track Chinese missiles, that might annoy the Chinese. We need to 'beef up' our air defenses. Let's get the radar station at Doi Inthanon up and running." The U.S. was not interested in building Doi Inthanon. So I brokered a deal. The U.S. Air Force got the Kokha space tracking radar station, and the Thai got the Doi Inthanon radar station. Boy, the Pentagon hated every second of this transaction. However, it was clear that the Thai were not going to allow one radar station to go in without the other. The U.S. Navy Seabees showed up, built a road, and put up a radar station on top of Doi Inthanon. The Chinese never fired a missile past the Kokha radar station. [Laughter]

So for me this assignment was an extremely interesting exercise in military diplomacy. The SLAT II arrangement continued until the SS MAYAGUEZ crisis. I was gone from the Embassy by that time. On this occasion we violated every understanding we had with the Thai about our use of their military facilities and went ahead and did things that we had never cleared with them. I think that this was one of the reasons why the Thai kicked us out of our bases in Thailand. They made us close Utao, from which we launched some of the helicopters in support of operations during the MAYAGUEZ crisis - without telling the Thai. We probably could have hung on to our Thai bases for quite a while after the fall of Saigon, with residual facilities. Who knows when we would need them? But the Thai were having none of it. There was a civilian Prime Minister at the time [Kukrit Pramoj], and he couldn't stand the pressure from the Thai military.

*Q: This sort of brings us to the end of your time in the Political Military Section in the Embassy in Bangkok. Your next assignment was in Chiang Mai.*

MONTGOMERY: There is one other thing I would like to mention about my time in Bangkok. You may recall that there was a false start in the drawdown of American forces in Thailand in late 1970 or early 1971. We were already pulling some of our planes out of Thailand. We were reaching the point where we were really thinking about turning facilities back to the Thai. In other words it was clear that we weren't going to be there much longer. So we began negotiations with the Thai.

This is really where the construct that Graham Martin had put together began to fray very

severely around the edges because the U.S. military were no longer interested in Thailand. They thought that they weren't going to need the Thai any more. They were just ready to loot, pillage, and leave. I caught somebody taking a barometer off the control tower wall at Takhli Air Base. That sort of thing was going on. Obviously, your career in the U.S. military was enhanced, the more things you could get out of Thailand. No provision had been made to help the Thai bridge the gap between American maintenance of these facilities and getting the Thai budgets up to supporting them.

*Q: We had the same problem in England at the end of World War II in Europe. The war in the Pacific was still going on. Here was all this equipment at American bases in England. There was an astonishing change in the attitude of the American military - exactly parallel to the attitude in Thailand which you were just describing.*

MONTGOMERY: It was too bad, because this drawdown of American forces in Thailand started, and then it stopped. The written record is pretty good on this. Somebody may set out to write the history of our relations with the Thai during the Vietnam War, which I consider a very worthwhile project. Maybe this is something I should do myself, instead of what I'm doing now. This was an interesting episode.

*Q: What you could do, Jim, is to talk to the Office of the Historian of the Department of State. They might be interested in having you sketch out more or less the principal points. It would save them a lot of trouble, because historians with no special background in Thailand are going to be doing this. You could speed the process up considerably.*

MONTGOMERY: In any case, this was not a happy episode. Actually, I think that we did it better when we finally did it - because we'd had this false start in 1970-1971.

This was also the time when we reneged on a promise to turn over to the Thai a fully functional field hospital in Korat. That was sort of the deal when we built the hospital. It was a case of saving nickels and dimes again. It totally violated the understanding we had with the Thai. I think that, after the exchange of an incredible number of telegrams, we finally got the Pentagon to do the right thing. Was it ever grudging. They thought, "How are we ever going to explain this to Congress? This is the end. We aren't running an assistance program, you know. We support U.S. forces, and they don't need that hospital any more." So we had to go back and dig out the record of the original negotiations and show the commitments that had been made to get the Pentagon to come around. The commitments had been made by their predecessors in the Pentagon, and they didn't feel obliged to live up to them.

Even by the time I left the Embassy in 1974 for Chiang Mai, we still hadn't gone through the final drawdown.

*Q: That happened in 1975. I was in Bangkok as Political Counselor by that time. The withdrawal of American troops had been going on for some time. I arrived in Bangkok in August, 1975. The strength was in the order of 40,000, so it hadn't gone very far.*

MONTGOMERY: So, after three years of faithful service in Bangkok I was rewarded with the

job of Principal Officer at the Consulate in Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand. I wanted this particular assignment very badly. After the testimony before the Symington Select Subcommittee Ambassador Unger asked me if I would be interested in being assigned as Principal Officer in Chiang Mai. He had had the chance to see me up close for quite a while and felt that I could do the job. I certainly felt that I could do the job and very much wanted it. So, after a lot of cables were exchanged with the Department, the assignment finally came through.

So, on June 1, 1971, we piled our family into an Embassy car and went to the Hualampong Railroad Station and got on the night train to Chiang Mai. My family included Deedee, my wife, Laura, Darrow, and Danielle, our children, and two dogs.

*Q: Where was Danny born?*

MONTGOMERY: Danny was born in Mexico, in 1965, in the British-Canadian Hospital.

So we arrived in Chiang Mai on the morning of June 2, 1971, were met at the railroad station, got into the official Consulate sedan, a Holden [Australian General Motors version of the Chevrolet], with the U.S. and Consular flags flapping from the fenders, and drove off to the Consulate. We had a Holden sedan because it was a General Motors product, with the wheel on the right hand side. America was no longer making right hand drive cars - only Canada was, in North America, and, of course, Australia was also. Australia was considerably closer to Thailand than Canada, so that's how we ended up with a Holden.

I sent the customary telegram saying that I had assumed charge of the Consulate. At this point I'm probably going to get a little more discursive, if I may.

*Q: Sure, but first of all, how big an office was the Consulate in Chiang Mai?*

MONTGOMERY: Well, let's see. That's a very complicated question to answer. Before I get to the Consulate itself, I'd like to talk a little bit about Chiang Mai and what made it unique and different.

In many ways, when we arrived there, Chiang Mai was out of time. It was in a time warp, as it were. None of the mass marketing phenomena - so apparent in Bangkok - had visibly reached Chiang Mai. No McDonald's, no Taco Bell's, no Pizza Hut's, no Kentucky Fried Chicken. When you went to buy things in a hardware store, for example, items were not neatly packaged. The nails were in a keg. The laundry detergent was in a big box, and you bought it by the kilogram. Hammers didn't have labels on them. Hammers were hammers, made by a local iron and steel forging operation. A lot of handicraft items were still made. I had a fulltime carpenter on the Consulate staff to get things done, run the Consulate, and keep it up to snuff. The final segment of the all weather road had not yet been put in, linking Chiang Mai to Bangkok. It was put in shortly after we arrived, but you still could not drive on a paved surface from Bangkok to Chiang Mai.

In some ways Chiang Mai was still the independent, autonomous Kingdom of Chiang Mai. There was a Chiang Mai Royal Family. There were princes of that family still around.

*Q: In fact, didn't the Consulate occupy buildings and space belonging to the Chiang Mai Royal Family?*

MONTGOMERY: Yes. They lost it to the Thai Government during the Depression of the 1930s, and we rented it from the Thai Government for \$150 a month. That's a pretty good price. The Prince of Chiang Mai, Chao Ratchaburi, was the last of his line. He was still alive when we got there.

As you know, the King and Queen of Thailand would visit Chiang Mai several times a year. They would come up on a plane, and the Consular Corps would gather to meet them. We'd wait at the airport. He would never come in when he said he was coming. I spent a lot of time waiting at the airport. Always waiting with us was Chao Ratchabut, in his wheelchair, with his wife. When the King would get off the airplane, the first person he would greet would be Chao Ratchabut. For his part Chao Ratchabut would hand the King the Sword of Chiang Mai. The King would hand the sword to an aide. Then, when the King would leave Chiang Mai, he would give the sword back to Chao Ratchabut.

Well, Chao Ratchabut died. The first time after he died, the person standing there with the Sword of Chiang Mai was the Governor of Chiang Mai, appointed by the central Thai Government. He gave the sword to the King. When the King left Chiang Mai, he gave the sword to his appointed governor, thereby symbolizing the last step in the disappearance of the separate status of Chiang Mai.

*Q: This Governor had been appointed to various places previously?*

MONTGOMERY: Yes, he was like a Foreign Service Officer. The death of Chao Ratchabut symbolized the end of the last flicker of Chiang Mai's local authority. I had the impression that I really was living in a different place. In many ways I was in an imperial outpost.

The position of a foreign Consul in Chiang Mai was very special, because during the 19th century, and well into the 20th century, Consuls had extraterritorial authority over their own nationals. They could hold courts - Consular Courts - and hang people - and they did. American Consuls never assumed that authority and never exercised it. But the British and French Consuls did. So the idea of a Consul was that he was a pretty heavy hitter in that context. That sort of increased the air of feudal authority that Consuls had. Consuls were expected to provide advice and service, particularly to their staff. I'm answering your question in a roundabout way, because I was the Consul.

I remember one night that the guard called up from the gate at about 3:00 AM. The guard was the son of Uncle Som, the carpenter. He needed to see me. So I went down, and he said that his father, Uncle Som, was in the hospital. He had a ruptured appendix, and the doctors wanted to operate on him. He was distressed with these doctors. He wouldn't let the doctors operate unless the Consul told him to let them do it. So I whipped on a pair of pants and a shirt and went over to the McCormick Hospital, which was run by American Seventh Day Adventist Missionaries. I went into the hospital and was shown into the room where Uncle Som lay in his bed. I said,

"How are you, Uncle?" He said, "I'm not too well. I'm certainly not going to let these doctors cut me open." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Well, I've been to the Buddhist monk who gave me medicine that's going to make me better. My son brought me here to the hospital." I said, "Well, you know, I think that maybe you should do what the doctors say." He asked, "Do you really think so?" I said, "Yes, I think so. I've seen this kind of situation before and I think you had better do this." So he said, "Well, if the Consul says that I should, I'll do it." So I signaled to a nurse who was lurking nearby. She came running in. They hauled him off, cut out his appendix, and he was fine.

This incident was of a piece with the annual Dam Hua ceremony. This involved pouring water on another person's head during Song Kran, or the water festival. This was a big festival at the end of the dry season, just before the rains start. The way it worked - have you been in the Consulate in Chiang Mai?

*Q: Yes.*

MONTGOMERY: You know that little sala off to one side when you enter the Consulate gate? Well, my wife, Deedee, and I would stand there, wearing traditional Thai costumes. There would be a chair with a table next to it. In the middle of the table was a big, silver bowl that had been blessed by the Buddhist monks down the street. All of the local employees of the Consulate were there, not only those of the Consulate but also of the Agency [Central Intelligence Agency], which had a facility within the same compound as the Consulate. All of them, their families, their children, their grandchildren, and their grandparents would all gather behind the Consulate Residence - sort of diagonally across the lawn, looking out from the sala. When I sat down in the chair, a couple of musicians with drums and cymbals would lead off a procession, beginning behind the house. There must have been almost 100 people by the time they were all gathered together. They would come dancing across the lawn in a procession with the drums beating and the cymbals clanging. They would carry a float made out of palm fronds and so forth, with fruit, vegetables, eggs, and offerings of all kinds in it. They would dance up and bring me the offerings. I would thank them.

Then they would line up, from the most senior down to the youngest. I would lean forward in my chair, with my head extended. They would take a little cup of the blessed water and pour it on my head. They would catch the drops as they fell off my head and splash the water on their faces. This was for luck for the New Year. Everybody would go through this ceremony, all the way down to the youngest member of the clan.

*Q: By young kids, you mean...*

MONTGOMERY: Little toddlers, yes. Then we would wheel out the food and liquor, and many of them would get roaring drunk, throw water on each other, and dance late into the night. I don't think that you do that in too many posts.

*Q: I doubt that they do that any more at the Consulate in Chiang Mai, either.*

MONTGOMERY: They probably don't. But it was all part of this impression that Chiang Mai,

when I was there, was really out of time.

The American community in Chiang Mai, in many ways, was also out of time, particularly the non-official American community because it was largely composed of missionaries. An arrangement had been worked out that the Catholic missionaries went to northeastern Thailand, after they were kicked out of China and Burma. The Protestant missionaries, who had similarly been expelled from China and Burma, ended up in northern Thailand. So in the Chiang Mai area there were families who went along with the missionary function. The Protestant missionaries started a school, the Chiang Mai Educational Center. It was originally intended to teach missionary children but later grew to take care of the whole missionary community. They had their churches, their congregations, and each other. There were enough of them so that it was a little like an American community - but it was out of what you might think the 1930s were. So we lived in that American community, as well as in the larger international community, as well as the Thai community.

There was no television. We didn't have much in the way of local radio programs. You could get short wave programs and that type of thing, but most of us didn't speak Thai well enough to follow local programs. There was a limited supply of books in English.

*Q: There was a USIS [United States Information Service] library there, wasn't there?*

MONTGOMERY: Yes, and it had part of the limited supply of books in English which I mentioned. So we had to amuse ourselves in ways that our parents amused themselves in the 1930s and before. That was another sort of unusual aspect of life in Chiang Mai.

Leon Owens, the son of Anna Owens, who figured in the book and movie, "Anna and the King of Siam," opened a lumber mill in the late 19th century, when he was an adult. You could almost feel as if he was still around. There were people who remembered people who knew him, and you could talk to them.

Chiang Mai was a very special place for the Thai because, in many ways, it was what everyone thought that Thailand should be, and Bangkok no longer was. I don't know whether I'm getting this across...

*Q: Yes, you're making your point.*

MONTGOMERY: It was a special time and a special place. I think that this sense has largely disappeared now. The international market has arrived with both feet and landed on the place. At the time of which I speak, there were no signs for Coca Cola to speak of and really no supermarkets. If you wanted things, you went to the market. I think that the highway to Bangkok made the difference, because the big trucks began coming in. In the time I am talking about, air travel was expensive. You brought things up on the train from Bangkok. Our visitors would come up on the train. But there weren't all that many of them, and it was also expensive. Refrigerated trucks began to arrive, and that made a difference.

The liquor that we drank came out of the military post exchange system. I don't remember

whether you could go and buy a bottle of scotch whisky at that time. On second thought you probably could in Chiang Mai. I just never had the occasion to buy it on the open market.

So, enough of the scene setting. What was the U.S. presence in Chiang Mai? I was going there, not just as the American Consul, but, somewhat like Ambassador Graham Martin, as the senior U.S. representative. I was not the representative of the President of the United States, but certainly of the American Ambassador in Bangkok. It was a variegated presence.

There was the Consulate, which had three officers, if you include the CIA representative. I had an American secretary whom I had to finagle to arrange for her employment, because she wasn't authorized in the staffing pattern of the Consulate. The Embassy wouldn't give her a security clearance, which might have limited her usefulness. However, I arranged for my CIA friends across the yard to give her a security clearance, and I figured that what was good enough for them ought to be good enough for the Embassy in Bangkok. So that's how I dealt with that problem.

When the CIA Base in Chiang Mai had to change its name from the Border Patrol Police Advisory Group to something else, they almost had a contest in the newspapers to pick a new name, since everybody knew exactly who they were. It was no secret as to who was in the CIA group.

The Consulate probably had about 20 local employees. We had the CIA group, a Drug Enforcement Administration detachment, USOM [United States Operations Mission - Agency for International Development], USIS, and Peace Corps volunteers. I had an Agricultural Attaché attached to the Consulate. He had been sent out to help the United Nations group come up with substitute crops that might be grown instead of opium poppies.

There were also several military units, some of them associated with MACTHAI [Military Assistance Command, Thailand], or JUSMAG [Joint United States Military Advisory Group] detachments. Some of these people were in Chiang Mai. The headquarters of the regional advisory group was in Phitsanulok, south of Chiang Mai. That was where the Thai Third Army Headquarters was located. The supervisory JUSMAG detachment for the area was there. There were satellite groups in Chiang Mai and Nan [in northern Thailand]. There was a one-man advisory unit at the Chiang Mai airport. There was a detachment of Thai OV-10s [ground support and reconnaissance aircraft] there. There was a U.S. military unit that operated the communications link from Chiang Mai to the rest of the world, using a military system. Chiang Mai was really the end of the line. My phone was just about as far away as you could get from Washington, using land lines.

*Q: Could you phone Washington from Chiang Mai on your office phones, through this U.S. military system?*

MONTGOMERY: Yes. It took a while, but I could do it. There was a Radio Detection Unit about 10 miles north of Chiang Mai. It communicated via a microwave relay to another Radio Detection Unit in the Chiang Mai airport, which then linked into the U.S. military communications system. There was one military person attached to the Commissary.

There was the space tracking radar station, with perhaps 100 U.S. military personnel assigned, over in the next valley from Chiang Mai - in Lampang Province. Also outside of Lampang was a U.S. Coast Guard detachment, 400 miles from the nearest ocean. It ran a LORAN [Long Range Aid to Navigation System] station. This station triangulated with several others in Southeast Asia. South of Chiang Mai, working on the Doi Inthanon radar which we talked about earlier, was a U.S. Navy Seabee detachment. There was also an APO [Army Post Office] detachment. There was a small U.S. Air Force unit on the road up to the Thai radar station at Doi Inthanon which ran a seismograph. This was part of the worldwide nuclear explosion detection system.

*Q: I visited it in 1975.*

MONTGOMERY: Had we turned it over to the Thai by then?

*Q: No. I visited it initially when it was still a functioning U.S. unit, during my first visit to Chiang Mai. Then I visited it a couple of years later. It had been turned over to the Thai. What had been a very well kept, beautifully maintained base had been ransacked. The Thai had no need for it. There was no point in their trying to operate it. By agreement we turned the facility back to the Thai.*

MONTGOMERY: Did we turn the seismographs over to the Thai? There was some thought that they might go to Chiang Mai University.

*Q: That was under consideration, but that arrangement fell through.*

MONTGOMERY: That's too bad. I remember that shortly after this facility was installed, somebody started a rock quarry operation on the other side of the mountain, without telling anybody. The first few explosions were reported as involving nuclear devices.

*Q: It happened that that facility really duplicated another facility in central Australia, which I also visited. It really wasn't needed.*

MONTGOMERY: It became an issue because we never told the local Thai officials what it was for. Finally, it became an issue because Thai students were starting to say that it was some kind of a spy facility or something of that nature. So I took the Provincial Governor up there, gave him a tour, and that was the end of that problem.

So, one way or another, there were a lot of Americans in and around Chiang Mai. As is often the case, they were perfectly prepared to go off on their own and do things that may or may not have been helpful to overall U.S. interests. The trick for the Consul - that is, for me - was how to hold them all together, particularly as I was given no direct authority to do so. To deal with this problem, I drew upon my father's skills as a ward healer. I remembered the power of a favor. I was willing to accept responsibility when these various units needed a decision made and wanted somebody to refer to, so that they wouldn't do something stupid, because the Consul in Chiang Mai wouldn't let them do it. I never had my knees cut out from under me in that connection.

I remember the time when the Chief of Base [senior officer of the CIA detachment] came to me and said that he was under orders to poison streams up along the Burmese border to stop the caravans transporting opium to market. The idea was to kill the horses. I said, "Well, what about the people downstream?" He said, "Well, nobody said anything about that. They just told me that I had to poison the streams." I said, "What would you do if I told you not to do it?" He said, "I'll tell Bangkok that you told me not to do it, and I wouldn't do it." So I said, "Don't do it." He said, "Thank God!" That was the end of it - we never heard about this idea again.

*Q: Somebody's hot flash which got stopped in time.*

MONTGOMERY: Yes. The APO detachment was in my back yard. So all of the Americans assigned to the Chiang Mai area had to come there to get their mail. This created a central function.

I used ceremony when I could, to hold the official U.S. community together. For instance, when Chao Ratchabut died, we attended as a group, with representatives from every American entity in the area - in full uniform for the military. We all attended the funeral, called on the widow, and so forth. We had a rehearsal at my residence before we went to the funeral. We would call as a group, with selected representatives from each of the various units, on the Provincial Governor on the King and Queen's birthdays. I would always be the first to give a dinner or host a reception for a newly-arrived, official American. I would gather everyone in the Consulate to establish that point.

The U.S. Navy Seabee detachment commander came to me and said, "You know, our Admiral is coming to visit us. We don't have a nice car. We've just got these rotten old jeeps." He got my car. I asked if the Admiral had a flag. He said, "A little one." I said, "Well, put it on the flag post on my car." That took care of the admiral. That guy would do anything for me after that. The captain running the communications detachment at the airport had a Thai girl friend. He didn't want to leave her and wanted to stay another year in Chiang Mai. I sent off a telegram to his boss in Hawaii, saying that this man had to stay in Chiang Mai, considering the politics of the situation, and so forth. So he got to stay for another year. I never had any trouble with him. This was the ward heeler approach. It was the only thing that I had. I couldn't ask the Department for instructions.

This also led into something else. Foreign Service posts are not supposed to have slush funds, but it would be irresponsible to run a post without a little money on the side to deal with various contingencies. We had 11 Lam Yai trees in the yard, which produce something like a leech nut. We would let the harvest from 10 trees out on bids. We would get several hundred dollars from this source. The eleventh tree we would harvest for ourselves, for big baskets of fruit to send to the Ambassador, the DCM, and the Political and Economic Counselors.

*Q: They stopped doing that by the time I got to Bangkok in 1975.*

MONTGOMERY: Too bad. As a part of the feudal quality of life in Chiang Mai, we put the Lam Yai money in a little red box, which we would trot out from time to time. We always needed a little bit of money from time to time - say, \$50 to do something.

*Q: Were you inspected by the Foreign Service Inspectors? Did you refer to that?*

MONTGOMERY: I didn't refer to that. I also hid my two unauthorized cars. The money was in this little red box. We could hide that. We didn't tell the inspectors about that.

At one time we almost had an embarrassment of riches because that U.S. radio unit north of town, which I mentioned earlier, was connected to the airport by copper wire. People kept stealing the copper to melt down, make statues of Buddha out of it, and sell them to the tourists. Eventually, we replaced the copper wire with a microwave relay. We had 10 miles of copper wire left over! The Air Force detachment wanted to split the proceeds with me. They would melt it down and sell it, and it would bring in several thousand dollars. This would be too much and might cause trouble. So I said, "Look, there's an orphanage in town which needs a new roof. Let's spend the money on that." They said, "All right," and that took care of that problem. However, I was pleased that they asked me about it.

A lot of my time was spent managing relationships between American agencies. The most difficult and potentially dangerous relationship I had to manage was between the CIA and DEA detachments. They were always out to get each other. The DEA had the reward money to pay to people providing information on the narcotics traffic, and the CIA had the operational smarts to get things done. So the thing was to keep the DEA sufficiently involved in the operations to avoid problems.

*Q: I think that this is a difficult relationship, all over the world, including in the United States.*

MONTGOMERY: I finally dealt with it by holding a meeting every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, at 11:00 AM in the little classified conference room I had built on the side of the Consulate. I would sit down with the DEA and CIA guys and make them talk. It really lowered the temperature. They found that they had things to tell each other and they did. And problems were resolved before they became too troublesome. Nobody wrote down the proceedings of these meetings. The situation became more manageable. That was consistently the most demanding problem. Later on, as I'll mention later, something came up when I was on home leave, which almost tore things up.

That was consistently the most time-consuming thing I had to do, managing the DEA- CIA presence, figuring out ways of keeping everybody looking to me, in the first instance, to provide the answer. We generally pulled it off. There were a couple of times when we missed but, generally speaking, nobody went off and did something that was truly dangerous without checking with me. Except on one occasion. I will tell that story because it was my most blatant failure, and it was my fault.

Shortly before I went on home leave in 1972, the CIA Chief of Base came and told me that they were bringing in an officer who would figure out how to cooperate with the Thai and get at Lo Hsi Haan's opium refinery across the river in Burma from Mae Sai, in the town of Ta Chi Lek. This new officer would be brought in under Consulate cover, as the Treasurer of the American Consulate. I neglected to tell Jim Bullington, my Vice Consul, that this was going to happen,

before I went on home leave. I had just given Jim the background on this assignment but didn't tell him that it was imminent. They brought in this officer while I was on home leave.

This CIA officer worked with some Thai hired guns. They came up with a plan to take some explosives out of Chiang Mai, up the road to Chiang Rai. Then they would take the explosives up the Chiang Rai-Mae Sai road. The designated person would sneak across the river into Burma and plant the explosives in the opium refinery, which you could actually see from the Thai side of the river. You could throw rocks at it! This effort was intended to confound the bad guys - the narcotics traffickers. This was being done under CIA auspices.

So they loaded up a taxicab with explosives - about 50 pounds of plastique - in Chiang Mai and headed north. Now, at the same time the CIA also had an advisory function with the Thai Border Patrol Police [BPP]. They were working with the Border Patrol Police to improve automobile surveillance in northern Thailand, so that the drug traffickers couldn't bring narcotics into Thailand in taxicabs.

On the same day that the Treasurer of the American Consulate in Chiang Mai was headed north with 50 pounds of plastique explosive in the trunk of a taxi, the other part of the Agency had gotten its advisory function up and running and had a bunch of Thai police out on the road, stopping taxicabs - to make sure that they weren't carrying bad things. Needless to say, the Thai Police stopped the taxicab of the Treasurer of the American Consulate in Chiang Mai and found 50 pounds of plastique explosive. Our Treasurer, an American, ended up in jail.

There was a great flurry and fluttering of 100 baht notes, and all of that type of stuff. They finally got the Treasurer out of jail and out of Thailand. The Agency then tried to blame the DEA for this episode. They actually stole stationery from the DEA. Can you believe this?

*Q: I can believe this with difficulty but I can believe it.*

MONTGOMERY: The Agency stole stationery from the DEA and sent letters to the Thai Police, apologizing for what had happened, and all of that kind of thing - without telling the DEA. The DEA had people in Mae Sai that day with some officials from the Narcotics Control Board, which the Thai Government had established. Obviously, if that explosive device had gone off, the DEA would have been blamed, because there was the visible presence, right across the river. There was no coordination between the DEA and the CIA on this.

This incident occurred shortly before I returned to Chiang Mai from home leave. One Sunday after I came back from home leave Jim Petit, who was the DEA representative in Chiang Mai, came to see me and told me this story. He had been piecing it together. The CIA people still hadn't told him about their involvement. He said, "They stole my stationery, this guy went to jail, there were all of these explosives. They talked about Lo Hsi Haan, but nobody told me anything about it. I was in Mae Sai that day."

Then it all fell into place, so I had to come clean with Jim Petit. He was furious. I talked to him for about eight hours. He was going to resign and go public with this affair. I had to promise him that I would go down to Bangkok and tell the Ambassador what had happened. I did this the

following day. I got on a plane, went down to Bangkok, and told Ed Masters, who was Charge d'Affaires. Ed was really sore about this. The CIA Chief of Station in Bangkok had lied to him. Apologies were extended all around, and it was at that point that I started the business of meeting with the DEA and CIA representatives three days a week.

*Q: Did the DEA office in Bangkok know about this operation?*

MONTGOMERY: No, I don't think so. The authorization for this operation went from the White House to CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia, to the Chief of Station in Bangkok, to the CIA Chief of Base in Chiang Mai. By "White House" I mean that it was probably Egil ("Bud") Krogh. He was one of the "plumbers" who ended up going to jail in connection with the Watergate Affair.

The CIA people in Chiang Mai arranged to go out and snatch an opium caravan without telling the DEA people - and then expected the DEA to pay the reward to the Thai Border Patrol Police! That incident took me 24 hours to talk through, too.

*Q: You were in Chiang Mai in the early 1970s. Later on, in the late 1970s, when I was in Bangkok, there was a question about the rewards policy. This caused infinite trouble because there were people in Washington who really...*

MONTGOMERY: Didn't we have a private army on our payroll at that time?

*Q: I don't think so. Regarding the rewards policy, I thought that it was a pretty good idea. However, some people in Washington felt that it was terrible because it would lead to the production of opium, heroin, and so on, for turning over to the U.S.*

MONTGOMERY: That's the way they broke the code. [Laughter]

*Q: This caused a lot of trouble because some people said that the rewards policy amounted to rewarding sin. I thought that it wasn't rewarding sin. Otherwise, what would happen to this heroin? It would wind up in the U.S., ruining the lives of Americans. Anyway, we never really got the rewards policy going.*

MONTGOMERY: Well, it's essentially an insoluble problem. Rewards will have the effect of promoting the production of opium, as you will see in several more stories that I'm going to tell you. In any case, keeping the peace between the CIA and the DEA in Chiang Mai turned out to be my principal occupation. When I got to Chiang Mai, I was surprised to find out that this was the case. It's something that I pulled off with a measure of success, though obviously with a couple of glitches here and there.

When I went to Chiang Mai, the priorities that I took with me were the narcotics traffic and the communist insurgency. We were still convinced that we had a lot to tell the Thai about how to combat communist insurgents. [Laughter] This is another thing that Ambassador Martin stopped - the buildup of American advisers in Thailand similar to the buildup of American advisers in Vietnam, prior to the deployment of organized U.S. forces and with U.S. aircraft flying missions

in support of the Thai forces. The man deserves a medal for that, despite the fact that he was an irascible, difficult human being. He was right on a number of occasions. General Richard Stilwell, the commander of MACTHAI, always hated Ambassador Martin for that. That's why MACTHAI was created, with the name changing from JUSMAG to the Military Assistance Command. Just as our advisory structure in Vietnam went from the MAAG (Military Assistance and Advisory Group) to MACV (Military Assistance Command - Vietnam). MACTHAI was established to accommodate a larger American presence in Thailand, but that presence never existed. Nevertheless, the MACTHAI structure remained in place, with a lot of spinning wheels, duplication, and extra expense, etc. MACTHAI never really had anything to do. They spent a lot of time fooling around, thinking up highly inappropriate military assistance programs for the Thai Army.

Let's talk about the communist insurgency. There was a detectable, visible communist insurgency in northern Thailand, centered primarily, but not exclusively, on the hill tribes. The leaders tended to be ethnic Thai. They were located principally near the Laotian border, in Chiang Khong District of Chiang Rai Province; in Pua District of Nan Province, also near the Laotian border; there were some communists adjacent to Burmese dissident groups in Tak Province; and finally there were some communists straddling the border between Phitsanulok and Loi Provinces. There was a "Voice of the People of Thailand" radio station transmitting from southern China, whose broadcasts would be picked up by FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service). Occasionally, I would star in those broadcasts. From time to time, and within 24 hours, they would broadcast my previous day's itinerary, which really scared the hell out of me. [Laughter] The question was, how was this information getting to Yunan Province in southern China? I don't know what these broadcasts were supposed to do, but they scared me.

*Q: As long as they didn't have your schedule for the following day.*

MONTGOMERY: [Laughter] They may have but they never broadcast it.

So the communist insurgents were present. The Thai Third Army, operating out of Phitsanulok, was deployed against them. The Third Army had a Cavalry Division, which really didn't have any horses, in Nan Province and troops operating out of Phitsanulok in Phitsanulok Province. I don't think that the Thai Third Army had anybody much in Tak Province.

The Thai Third Army struck a deal with the old Kuomintang forces in Chiang Khong District of Chiang Rai Province. This happened shortly before I arrived in Chiang Mai in June, 1971. There were two Chinese Kuomintang armies in northern Thailand. There was the Third Army up in Fang District under Gen Lao Li. Up in Chiang Rai Province there was the Fifth Chinese Army. I may have these numerical designations backwards.

The Thai Army was mangled a couple of times going after the Communist Terrorists [CTs] along the Thai-Laotian border. The Thai hired several thousand Kuomintang soldiers to go into Chiang Khong District and drive the communists back into Laos. The Thai paid them. It was not only a pragmatic decision to commit some presumably effective troops against the CT's and open the road that went up to the Chiang Khong valley. It was also a final symbol of the fact - I thought that it was a conclusion by the King of Thailand - that these Chinese Kuomintang troops

were in Thailand to stay. You may recall that Gen. Li Mi's 49th Division in Yunan Province in China was defeated by Mao Tse Tung in 1949. They fled into northern Burma, where they were adopted by the CIA, with a view to returning to China.

*Q: This was in the early 1950s. It was done without the knowledge of the Embassy in Bangkok.*

MONTGOMERY: That's right. Everybody else knew about it, but the Embassy didn't. These troops hung around in northern Burma and then began to filter into northern Thailand in the late 1950s or early 1960s. They established themselves basically as part of the Thai "cordon sanitaire" against Burma.

I said that my initial priorities in Chiang Mai were the communist insurgency and drugs, in addition to managing the American presence in northern Thailand. The other abiding reality was the Thai-Burmese border and all of the politics that went along with that. This was something that I did not fully appreciate when I got off the train in Chiang Mai but came to learn as time went on. So the Thai Army hired these Kuomintang troops to go into action against the communists, and they were fairly effective. The Thai Army and the Thai political structure were extremely effective in pulling it off. The Thai provincial governors cooperated, they got the police and the military to cooperate. They got everybody together in the classic CPM mantra - civilians, police, and military - which George Tanham and his crowd were always trying to sell to the Thai. The Thai were never fully successful, except when they thought that it was important. They did two things. They pulled this off, and they excluded us from the operation entirely. George Tanham wrote a lot about counterinsurgency. He was Bill Stokes' predecessor as Special Assistant to the Ambassador for Counterinsurgency in the Embassy in Bangkok.

The thing about the use of the CIF, the Chinese Irregular Forces, a euphemism for the Kuomintang, is that this illustrated a truth about the Thai military. That is, when the Thai Government, which in many ways WAS the Thai military, decided that it needed to deploy actual fighting troops with the obvious possibility that some of them would be killed, they would not use regular Thai Army units for that purpose. They would create a special unit, or find a special unit, that actually would go and do the fighting. The regular Thai Army was not to be employed in risky situations like that. Because the truth is that the Thai Army was primarily a political organization which happened to have uniforms and guns. Above the level of company, political considerations prevailed over military considerations. Below the company level a military requirement might take precedence.

When the Thai decided to join us and send troops to Vietnam, did they send a regular Thai Army unit? No, they sent a special unit, called "The Queen's Rangers." And then they formed "The King's Rifles," again, a totally volunteer unit, separate from the Thai military structure. When the Thai went into Laos, when we paid them to go into Laos against the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao, special units were created for that purpose once again. When the Thai wanted to attack the communists in Chiang Rai Province, they used the Chinese Irregular Forces.

The other thing that happened in the Thai counterinsurgency program when I was there was that I came to realize that Nan Province was a difficult area. There were several different units in operation against the communists. There was the Thai Army, the Border Patrol Police, and the

Provincial Police. Then there was the Provincial Governor's CSOC - Communist Suppression Operations Command, which represented the governor's attempt to pull all of this together. The governor was a sort of fourth player in the counterinsurgency operation, if you will.

Over the years either USOM (United States Operations Mission) or MACTHAI had provided each of these units with perfectly capable tactical radios. We were increasingly in a situation where, a couple of kilometers down the road, a police unit might be under attack, while a Thai Army was sitting here, perfectly capable of getting the police out of trouble. However, the police unit couldn't get in touch with the Army unit because their radios didn't mesh. This was happening increasingly. I figured out that I could scare up enough money to build a little facility in Nan Province, put up the appropriate antennas, and put one radio of each Thai force in this little Operations Center, so that they could communicate with each other more efficiently. I sent my Vice Consul, Jim Bullington, over to discuss this idea with the Provincial Governor. I talked to the USOM people and got it all up and running. It was a modest step but, nevertheless, it made sense. The Thai Army, the Thai Police, and the Thai Border Patrol Police all said that they thought it was a good idea.

So I said, "Go ahead." And the Thai built the building. We were going to have an inaugural ceremony. The Governor of Nan Province and I were going to cut a ribbon and stuff like that. I sent Jim Bullington ahead for a final check. He came back and said, "Well, so much for that idea." He said, "It's completed, a beautiful building, a nice antenna, and nobody is using it." I said, "Hell!" Jim said, "The Thai Army said, 'Well, you can't really expect us to let the Thai Police listen in on our radio.' The Thai Police said, 'You can't really expect us to let the Provincial Governor listen in on what we have to say.'" He went around, and nobody was willing to let anybody else listen in on their radios.

It struck me at that point - and this is where I bailed out on Vietnam. You may wonder what the connection is. This is where I pulled the plug on Vietnam in my own mind. It struck me that, on any given day, in Nan Province, there was always something that was slightly more important than defeating the bad guys. Then these given days add up, until the bad guys get you. I figured that if this was true in Nan Province in northern Thailand in 1973, it was true and had been true, in spades, in Vietnam. As far as the Vietnamese political, governmental, and military systems were concerned, on any given day there always was something that was a little more important than paying the price to become a little more efficient against the Vietnamese communists. I figured, "If they can't solve their problems in Thailand, where the pressure is very limited, they aren't going to solve anything in Vietnam." And those days had been adding up and adding up. It wasn't going to change, and the bad guys, the communists, were eventually going to win, because our side would get tired. As they did. That sort of sums up a lot of the counterinsurgency efforts by the Americans in Thailand.

Once the Americans pulled out of Thailand after 1975, apparently the communist terrorism movement collapsed. The Thai solved this problem without our advice. However, I wasn't there for that and I can only speak from what I read in the newspapers.

Another thing that happened on the counterinsurgency front which the Embassy in Bangkok didn't want to hear came up when the King of Thailand was planning to visit Nan Province. Here

was Nan Province up against the Laotian border. Here was the District Capital at Pua. What the Thai wanted to do was build a road to Pua, then over to the Laotian border, down, and over to Nan. This road would form a square. The Thai had been trying to build that road. They had a Thai Army engineering battalion trying to finish the road from Nan to Pua. They went out there to build the road, and they were shot at. They didn't like this. This was bad news. However, the King was coming, and they needed to build the road. So the Thai Third Army in Phitsanolk made a decision. They said that they were going to quit beating their heads against a wall. They were going to bribe the communists to let them build that road. So the word went out to all of the provincial governors - not just here but everywhere else that they were trying to build roads, to bribe the communists. They said, "Let's get these roads finished." And they had classes in Phitsanolk on how to bribe the communists. Ban Chop, my Political Assistant, a guy who had worked for the Consulate in Chiang Mai for years, was down in Phitsanolk one day when they were holding one of these classes. They invited him to sit in on the class. Ban Chop sat in, took notes, and came back and reported to me. I reported it to the Embassy in Bangkok. The Embassy went into orbit, because this wasn't in the scenario. Then I started calling on the governors and on the District Officer in Pua and I discussed this matter with them. They confirmed it.

*Q: It's embarrassing, but sometimes it's the only way to do it.*

MONTGOMERY: The Thai District Officer in Pua said, "We've got to build this road, but the communists are being 'difficult' about it. We had the communist District Officer and his staff here last week. We had lunch and played soccer. We discussed the matter. I told him how much we were willing to pay them. I gave him some cash as a sign of good faith. I gave him some medicine and a sewing machine for his uniforms and stuff like that. Then the communist District Officer said that they would have to go off and consider it." The Thai District Officer said to the communists, "You know, here's the sewing machine and here's the money." The communists came back in a week and said that this was not doctrinally sound, and they couldn't do it. They couldn't be bribed.

In fact, the communists were too honest. This was happening about the same time when we were cutting our support of our private armies in Laos, as you may recall. Over in Xieng Khouang in Laos, which is due East of Pua, there was an Air America station, and we had some Thai mercenary troops there - not just hill tribesmen. We cut off their support. They had no work. About this time I called on the Governor in Chiang Rai. While I was there, I called on the commander of the Thai Cavalry Division. He said, "Come on, I want to show you something." He took me downstairs and showed me a table with dirty, bloody uniforms, some banged up rifles with blood all over them, and a cap with a hole in it. I asked him, "What is this for?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you a story. These guys are from your old base in Xieng Khouang in Laos. As you know, you cut off their support, so they were out of work. They heard that people were paying for permission to build roads here in Chiang Rai. So they decided that they might as well 'sell' some permission to build roads. They came over here to call on the Ital-Thai contractor up in Pua, thinking that they could 'sell' him permission to build the road. The contractor was suspicious. He told them to come back three nights later. He was suspicious because he knew about the soccer game, the sewing machine, and all of that. He figured that these Thais were 'free lancing.' He told us, we laid an ambush, and we shot them. This is their equipment. I thought that you'd like to know." I copied down the number on a rifle, and it checked out.

So, this is a story that goes from counterinsurgency to bribing to free lancers who were no longer on the CIA payroll in Laos. While I'm on that subject, I was up in Chiang Rai Province at the airport, waiting for Congresswoman Bella Abzug and a Congressional Delegation to descend on me from Laos. They were coming in on a Pilatus Porter aircraft. There was a silver, unmarked C-130 aircraft there at the airport. Hanging around it was a bunch of armed Thai in camouflage fatigue uniforms. A couple of American pilots were leaning out the window of the cockpit. I went over to my driver and asked him to go over and see who those guys were. He came back and said, "Yes, I know one of those guys. He used to be a bellhop in a hotel in Phitsanolok. They're going over to Laos to fight the communists." I said, "Who are they with?" He said, "They're just fighters. Jungle fighters." I said, "Who's hiring them?" He said, "The Americans are doing it. The CIA's taking them over there." I said, "Oh, how long are they going to be here?" I was looking at my watch. He said, "Oh, probably about a couple of more hours." So I walked over and talked to the American pilot and said, "Listen, you're taking these guys East, right?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Why don't you do it now rather than later. Congresswoman Bella Abzug and several other Members of Congress are coming in here." I said, "They'll be here in about 15 minutes." He said, "Yes, Sir," and that was it. Those guys from the hotel piled into the airplane, and off they went east into Laos.

I think, as I said before, the Thai got out of this adventure in Laos remarkably unscathed. They certainly were involved in trying to frustrate North Vietnamese designs in Laos. Certainly, a lot of North Vietnamese died because of airplanes which took off from Thai soil. There's no doubt about that. The Vietnamese were right next door, but, still, they didn't do any harm to Thailand. It was certainly within their capability to do so, particularly in the initial stages, when military installations were so unprotected. They certainly could have attacked these installations in Thailand in coordination with the Tet offensive in Vietnam in 1968 and really done some serious damage. But they didn't. Once again, the Thai came out of a very difficult situation, relatively untouched, just as they did, as we discussed earlier, out of World War II.

The other major priority in Chiang Mai was drugs. The U.S. administration had reached the decision that relief for the streets of Detroit and Chicago was to be found in the mountains and hills of northern Thailand. This was a fundamentally unsound decision. Nonetheless, it is one which is very difficult to argue with. From a political point of view, you absolutely have to try to do something about this. Once you conclude that heroin is a danger and should be stopped, you can't ignore the source of the heroin, even though, as history has proven, it is absolutely the wrong place to go, if, indeed, there is any right place to go in connection with something like this. Since the time that I was in Chiang Mai, the production of opiates in the Golden Triangle area of Thailand, Burma, and Laos has increased from 600 tons a year to 2,400 tons a year. I think that this demonstrates the efficacy of at least somebody's agricultural program.

The problem with finding a substitute crop for opium poppies is that poppies are the ideal substitute crop. It is a high value crop, easy to produce, easy to transport, and so forth.

There we were in the Golden Triangle. We were going to try to stop the flow of drugs. To that end we had CIA and DEA detachments. The DEA was beginning its presence there. The DEA chief was Jim Petit. I forget the name of the other guy. They had never been outside of the

United States before. They had very little idea of how to operate in a society like Thailand's. Much to their consternation, they found themselves dependent on the good graces and indulgence of the CIA, which had contacts and was able to pinpoint certain aspects of the opium traffic and, indeed, to think in terms of action against it.

One of the first big successes began when a Thai Police Major came in to the DEA or to the CIA - I forget which. He offered to turn an opium shipment. In return he wanted \$50,000 and a visa to the United States. So we agreed to give it to him. He did. He turned in a shipment.

*Q: You had to report this to Washington to get authorization.*

MONTGOMERY: It was done through other channels - that is, other than the Consulate. This worked. He fingered a Caltex [California-Texas Oil Company] truck, apparently loaded with oil. The bottom half of the truck was phony. It was filled with several tons of opium. We gave him his \$50,000 and his visa to the United States. We trumpeted this seizure of opium, which was locked up in a jail cell. One of my CIA buddies quietly pointed out to me a couple of days later, after we had finished congratulating ourselves, that we could have bought the same quantity of opium on the open market for \$30,000. [Laughter] So much for the reward problem we were talking about earlier.

It never got much beyond that type of episodic seizure, at least when I was there.

*Q: It never did.*

MONTGOMERY: One year we got our hands on something like 25 tons of opium. No Foreign Service post will ever get as much as that again. That is the equivalent of 2.5 or 3.0 tons of heroin, after refining. In the United States the police get a promotion if they seize three ounces of heroin. So we got 25 tons of opium, and another 375 tons slipped through.

*Q: The average annual seizure during the years I was in Bangkok, 1975 to 1979, came to about 10 percent of the estimated movement.*

MONTGOMERY: If that.

*Q: Well, that was an average. The drug smuggling organizations could afford to give us 10 percent, just to keep us happy.*

MONTGOMERY: Sure, given the price margins. When I was in Chiang Mai, you could buy a kilo of pure heroin for \$1,000 on the Thai-Burmese border. You could sell it for \$2,000 in Chiang Mai, take it to Bangkok and sell it for \$5,000, strap it under your Brooks Brothers suit and sell it wholesale in San Francisco for \$35,000.

*Q: I always thought that as long as the rewards price was below the market price, we were doing well. However, we should not put the rewards price above the market price, because that's just crazy. However, there were these people in the United States Government in Washington who felt that it was immoral to reward sin. Therefore, they were opposed to the whole rewards policy,*

*no matter what the price.*

MONTGOMERY: It probably would not have made a significant difference, because the drug trafficking organizations had lots of heroin. Several years later they had four times as much as they did at the time I left, for heaven's sake.

Another interesting exercise occurred when Gen. Kriangsak came to us. Kriangsak was not only the Supreme Command person in charge of the American presence in Thailand and negotiations with us. He was also a Marcher Lord of some proportions in northern Thailand. He was in charge of dealing with some, but not all, of the ethnic groups.

*Q: What's a Marcher Lord?*

MONTGOMERY: He was a Marcher Lord in that he watched the border between northern Thailand and Burma, much as William the Conqueror watched the borderlands between England and Wales - the March area. The Thai tend not to look at a border as a single line on the map. They don't think in terms of a single line. They think in terms of a zone. Things went on in Kriangsak's zone that don't go on in the lowlands of Thailand. So in this zone Kriangsak had some responsibilities with the Kuomintang forces. I would say that, probably, he was one of the intellectual engines behind the decision to assimilate them into Thai society. He was certainly behind the decision to hire them to go to Chiang Rai and fight the CT, or Communist Terrorists. Kriangsak contacted the Americans in Bangkok - I was in Chiang Mai at the time. He said, "Look, I've been talking to the Kuomintang forces. They are prepared to get out of the opium business. They understand that the time for that is past. They understand that they need to settle down and become 'honest farmers.'" Some of the Kuomintang people were getting older. By this time they had become almost a separate hill tribe themselves, in many ways, although armed to the teeth. He said, "Their problem is that they put up \$1.0 million for this year's opium crop. They need that \$1.0 million back. If you Americans come up with a million dollars, they will turn over 20 tons of opium which they were going to buy. You can do whatever you want with it."

We mulled this over, and it was too good to refuse. We agreed to do this. Arrangements were made in Bangkok. The Embassy didn't want to tell us about it - it was too sensitive and too secret. Of course, there are no secrets in northern Thailand, so we knew all about it from the contacts Ban Chop, our Political Assistant, had in the hills. They kept us fully informed on these negotiations. The day agreed upon came, and the Kuomintang forces came out of the woods with 20 tons of opium. They turned this over to the Thai Supreme Command and stacked it up on a farm where the Thai Army raised mules on the northern side of Chiang Mai. The Thai Army burned it. They invited a bunch of newspaper reporters to see it burned. The Thai Army got the million dollars from the U.S. and turned it over to the Kuomintang generals. As far as I know, what the Kuomintang did was to bring the opium up to the Thai frontier. The opium traders would have to cross 10 yards or so into Burma, pick it up, and bring it into Thailand. They lived up to the letter of the agreement.

The interesting part of it was that, after this triumph that we didn't want to acknowledge, the cover story was that the United Nations had done this.

*Q: Poor UN!*

MONTGOMERY: I was at a birthday party of the Thai Army's Seventh Regimental Combat Team - a black tie affair. The Chief of the Provincial Police came up to me and said, "Mr. Consul, I hear that you guys are buying opium." I said, "Well, we don't buy opium. That just encourages the production of more opium." He said, "Well, I understand what you're saying, but, you know, you paid too much for that opium that you bought from the Kuomintang. If you want to do it again and give me the same amount of money, I'll bring you twice as much opium!" [Laughter] I'm sure that I would have had it in my front yard within a week!

*Q: We have great difficulty in dealing with problems like these.*

MONTGOMERY: Another incident of some interest involved THE major opium dealer in the Golden Triangle, Lo Hsi Haan, who had that heroin refinery that we didn't blow up, across the river from Thailand. Lo was the leader of an armed group called the Kak Kwai Ai. This was a Burmese term, meaning Self-Defense Group. This was a name which the Burmese Army assigned to a number of the private armies in Burma which ostensibly agreed to cooperate with the Rangoon authorities against the BCP, the Burmese Communist Party. In return for his cooperation against the Burmese Communist Party he was given certain franchises in the opium business. With these franchises he purchased opium and became a big dealer in it. He moved a lot of it through Thailand. He was of mixed Chinese and Shan ancestry and had lived in Terry and the Pirates country for his whole life.

For reasons I don't fully understand, involving some pressure from the United States and internal Burmese politics, the Burmese Government revoked his Kak Kwai Ai license and his opium franchise. In a fit of pique he announced that he had become a freedom fighter and that his troops would work to overthrow the tyrants in Rangoon. At that point the Burmese authorities became rather angry. They started after Lo Hsi Haan with contingents of the Burmese Army. So Lo Hsi Haan began to work his way out of northern Burma, down to the Salween River, and across to Mai Hong Song.

We were able to follow his progress - let me put it that way. We knew when he was getting close to the Thai border and that he was planning to cross it. We were a little puzzled as to why he was doing this. We were working with the Thai Border Patrol Police at the time and were keeping them informed. They were getting ready to grab him. The day came when we knew that he was going to cross into Thailand within several hours. The Border Patrol Police went off and stationed themselves on the only path leading out of Burma at that point, and Lo and a couple of his followers, unarmed, came smiling down the trail. The Border Patrol Police stepped out, and Lo greeted them like long lost buddies. Then they put handcuffs on him and took him away. Clearly, this was dirty pool that was being played.

Some of our people from Bangkok were sent up to Mae Ream, where he was being held, to interrogate him. Mae Ream was the BPP Headquarters North of Chiang Mai. At that point Bill Young came to see me. The Young family were missionaries in Burma before World War II. They were kicked out of Burma when the Burmese Government kicked out all missionaries in

the 1950s. They moved to Chiang Mai and went into various businesses. I think that they continued some of their missionary activities. The father of the family opened the Chiang Mai zoo, for instance, and Ruth Young was a good friend of my wife, Deedee. They were very unusual leftovers in a time warp, as it were. Bill Young went into business for himself. Basically, he became a gun runner. He was involved in that whole situation along the march area between Thailand and Burma.

Bill Young said to me, "Did you hear that the BPP has Lo Hsi Haan?" I said, "No kidding." He said, "Yes, there's a Thai Army captain up here from Thai Supreme Command, and he is 'furious.' He is trying to get Lo released." I said, "Why?" He said, "Supreme Command had given Lo a 'safe conduct pass.' They wanted to talk to him. And then the damned Border Patrol Police arrested him. He was double crossed!"

I reported this to the Embassy in Bangkok, but our people there tended to discount what Bill Young said because he was a rather raffish fellow. You know, Lo Hsi Haan had 5,000 men, and they were over in the next valley, in Burma. And the word came down that they were coming across the mountains to get the Governor of Chiang Rai province and me and hold us hostage for Lo's release. I took this seriously. The Thai packed Lo up and sent him down to Bangkok, which made kidnaping the Governor and me less likely. Then the Thai entered into negotiations with the Burmese to turn Lo over. The Burmese put Lo on trial. They would bring him out for a day's testimony, during which he would implicate a certain number of Burmese officials, and then they would lock him up again. The Burmese finally let him go. As far as I know, he's back in business.

However, an interesting sequel to all of this came in 1989, when Deeded and I were in London. We were staying at the Seagram Town House. Seagram's, for which I work as a consultant, has a town house in London where visitors can stay. We were sitting in the lounge having a drink and watching TV. A show came on, called, "The Opium Lords." It had been shot by several British TV cameramen who, in 1973, had been with Lo Hsi Haan in Burma. They were with him when he crossed the Salween River and headed toward Thailand. They had footage of him walking into Thailand to have his meeting with a representative of Thai Supreme Command. They talked about his safe conduct pass as he was shown on the TV screen, crossing the river into Thailand. Here we were, watching it, 16 years later. Then, the next footage showed them on the following day, milling around and cursing the Thai for having snatched Lo Hsi Haan and taken him away in handcuffs. There was confirmation of Bill Young's story! Needless to say, I almost fell on the floor! Lo Hsi Haan was the biggest opium dealer in the world! His arrest didn't do a damned thing to the flow of opium. I sent Ban Chop, my Political Assistant, to survey all of the other dissident opium groups. He came back and said that they had commented, "Well, it's too bad about Lo, but we'll keep the opium moving."

*Q: What about Khun Sa? Wasn't he also a big opium dealer?*

MONTGOMERY: I think that Khun Sa used to be called Chiang Chi Fu. I think that Khun Sa is a title, rather than a name. There was another Khun Sa when I was in Chiang Mai. He used to send me Christmas cards. The cards would say, "Merry Christmas. May your wisdom equal your strength." [Laughter] He used to send me maps showing the caravan routes used by rivals in the

opium traffic, for us to use and snatch them, which we would do. The maps were good. We would give them to the Border Patrol Police, and they would go and get them. It worked very well. This Khun Sa had a town house in Chiang Mai, across the street from one of my Vice Consuls. The name of this man was Khun Sa, but he was not Chiang Chi Fu. So I think that Khun Sa is a name for the chief opium trafficker.

*Q: I've seen alleged pictures of him, but they may all be confirming the same photograph. It may not have reference to anything.*

MONTGOMERY: Now this brings us to talk about the dominant reality, the Thai- Burmese border, or the March. The Thai look upon the Burmese as their principal enemy in the world. You may think that that is crazy, but look at the way we think about Fidel Castro. How could we possibly think of Castro as a threat to the United States? I was having dinner at the Royal Palace in Bangkok once, where the King and Queen of Thailand were present. I was standing in line with Ambassador Unger. The King and Queen were going down the line. I greeted the King while the Queen was greeting Ambassador Unger. She said to Ambassador Unger, "You Americans must remember that our principal enemies are the Burmese."

In any case, there were all of these groups along the border. In varying degrees they were in rebellion against the Burmese Government in Rangoon. I say, "varying degrees," because some of them had been in rebellion for so long that they had almost forgotten about it! They were really arms merchants. The Thai looked upon all of these groups with favor, as their protection, their shield and buckler against Burmese aggression along this vulnerable strip of their frontier. The Thai didn't give these groups a lot of money, or anything like that. However, they maintained contact and pursued a policy that I came to call, facilitative acquiescence. The Thai acquiesced in what these groups did and were helpful to them, from time to time, in what they did. Through this liaison arrangement the Thai kept informed on what was going on.

There was a kind of political game played between the various groups which was like the shifting politics of an Italian Renaissance city. You can't understand the opium problem of Thailand if you don't understand these groups. I didn't realize that until Ban Chop, my Political Assistant, took me by the hand through it all. I prepared a directory which is now available as a public document. It's called, "The Armed Groups of Northern Thailand Not Under the Control of the Thai Government or the Communists." I left those other groups out of the list.

In this directory I started from Tachilek and Mae Sai in the North and worked down to Tak. I think that I listed 17 separate, identifiable, discrete armed units. That included two CIF-Kuomintang armies. It included a unit controlled by the IBMND, the Intelligence Bureau of the Ministry of National Defense in Taiwan. They had several thousand armed men, up in Chiang Rai province. Their liaison officer lived in Chiang Mai, and his son was a friend of my son, Darrow. There were several different Shan armies. The Karen had several armies. There was the Kachin Independence Army. There was the Lahu United Liberation Movement, or LULU. There was a Chin group and another group involving the ethnic Burmans themselves. The Kareni had another unit. Obviously, there were some I've forgotten. I haven't looked at that directory for 20 years.

All of these guys were up there. The way they made their living was that they would mount up caravans of 500-700 horses and mules, load them with consumer goods, basically from the Chiang Mai market, and give them an escort of 1,000 to 1,500 well-armed men, with the latest weaponry. They would fight, sell, trade, and negotiate their way into northern Burma over a period of several months, all the way to the northern Kachin States - selling their merchandise and buying. Then they would come back down to Thailand with opium, gems, antiques, precious woods, and raw jade - large chunks of it, which was one of the major commodities they obtained in trade. Down closer to Thailand they would bring across old teak logs, cattle, pigs, and tungsten ore. Man, this wasn't smuggling. This was international commerce!

They would sell anything. An opium caravan might also be another kind of caravan. Some of them had political pretensions. Now, the IBMND clearly had long ago given up the idea of slashing into the soft underbelly of Communist China and that kind of thing. There was also another IBMND unit which used the cover story that they were sub-contracted to our guys. They ran a listening station in Lampang Province which followed radio broadcasts in southern China. They said that they were working for the CIA, but they weren't - they were working for themselves. So there was this whole hodge-podge of things going on. And opium was a part of its life's blood. The Burmese authorities hated these groups, for obvious reasons. On a very official level, I was unable to be in touch with them. This just wasn't done. However, we also wanted to know what was going on. So that was the genius of Ban Chop, my Political Assistant, who was then in his 60s. He had been with the Consulate in Chiang Mai since it reopened after World War II. Ban Chop knew everybody. He had grown up in northern Thailand, had gone to Prince Royal College, a missionary school in Chiang Mai which graduated many of the upper crust of northern Thailand. Ban Chop had gone to school with a lot of these dissident leaders.

When we wanted to find things out, I would ask him, and he would do what he called going bump. He would say, "I'll go bump." He would go down to the coffee shops in Chiang Mai where, he knew, some of these guys used to hang out. He would sit there, these guys would come in, and they would have an accidental meeting, where they could exchange information. The convention that I inherited from my predecessors as Consul was that this was okay. These people would not look upon this kind of contact as official recognition by the American Consul. This was a way to keep communications open, which, obviously, was necessary, since these guys played a role in the overall situation. Ban Chop would do this.

One day Ban Chop was late for work. He came in and said, "I'm sorry that I'm late, but General Li's son came by to call on me." I said, "What did he want?" Ban Chop said, "Well, he's got a problem. He just got back from Lincoln, Nebraska, where he graduated from school. He's having a fight with his father. His father wants him to take over the army. He doesn't want to take over the army. He wants to open a Toyota agency! He said, 'What do I know about armies?'" Ban Chop had this whole set of relationships. He knew these guys and could keep track of what was happening. It was a very delicate, very Thai arrangement - and extremely effective.

I would ask, "What do these guys think about the capture of Lo Hsi Haan?" So off to the coffee shops went Ban Chop. He came back with a good account of what the opinion was in that part of Thailand. Every time we were talking about mucking up the opium trade, we were talking about mucking up this complex of relationships. This never really became a problem because we never

really got that good at it. It took just as much effort to penetrate a 10 kilogram conspiracy as a 100 kilogram conspiracy. They were just as hard to do. The profit margins were such that the traffickers might say, "Well, we'll move 10 shipments instead of one." This was no problem. They could do it. The money was there.

I remember one time that Congressman Lester Wolff [Democrat, New York] came to visit us. The Thai did a number on him. He was talking with a Thai Police officer who was making \$100 a month. He would say stupid things like, "We're really counting on you because we have to keep narcotics out of the United States. It's really very expensive there." Then Congressman Wolff decided that he wanted to buy some jewels. The Thai Police said that they would help him. They took him up to Mae Sai, where he went down the street to the Bata shoe store, whose owner is one of the biggest opium dealers in the world. So there was Congressman Lester Wolff and the biggest opium dealer in the world going into the back room of the Bata shoe store to have a private conversation and buy some jewels! The Thai really ragged me about that! They just kept a straight face and said to Wolff, "Oh, aren't those jewels nice."

On this occasion we were standing there at this bridge in Mae Sai, with Burma on the other side of the river. We didn't cross the bridge. We walked down about 200 yards from the bridge along the river. There was a rustling sound in the bushes. Four guys came out with four automobile tires hanging from bamboo poles. They splashed across the river into Burma. I asked the Thai policeman, "Did you see that?" He said, "Yes. It involves a car, I think." Then, sure enough, there was more rustling in the bushes, and an engine block was carried out and then across the river, splash, splash, splash. I said, "Well, why don't they just cross the bridge?" He said, "Why, the Burmese police would arrest them if they did that!"

So this was the situation that we were dealing with. We had a guy whose name was Gross. He was one of the early Coordinators for Narcotics in the Department of State. I say this with some reservations, because I may not have remembered the name correctly. I think that he was a prosecutor in northern New Jersey. He came down to Washington and talked to some of the CIA people. He said that we should find out the names of the chemists who processed opium into heroin, assassinate them, and be done with it. The reaction on the part of my friends was really marvelous to behold. They were wondering, "Who is this guy? Does he really think that we're going to go out and assassinate people?" Eventually, Mr. Gross wound up being indicted for jury tampering, or something like that.

There was one issue on which I demanded that one of my telegrams be sent to Washington, which the Embassy in Bangkok did. This concerned the decision to provide helicopters and other forms of military assistance to the Burmese. I thought that it was a snare and a delusion that this was going to help the narcotics situation in any way. I thought that it was going to put us on the slippery slope to involvement in an insurgency in Burma. Frankly, the provision of this equipment was designed to help the Burmese Government operate against these dissident units I have mentioned. Some of the dissidents were not involved in opium smuggling at this time, such as the Karens, against whom the helicopters would be used, because they most directly threatened the Burmese Government. I argued very vehemently against providing these helicopters to the Burmese, almost as a matter of conscience, as this could get us involved in the Burmese civil war. I said that we would find that this conflict in Burma was infinitely more

complicated than anything that we did in Vietnam.

I lost, in the sense that the helicopters were provided to the Burmese. However, I won in the sense that it didn't have much of an effect, so nobody really got mad about it. The Burmese were continually pulling the wool over the eyes of the Americans.

I remember at one time reading two separate CIA reports out of Rangoon. One of them, in effect, praised the Burmese for having seized about 10 tons of opium in northern Burma. This reportedly showed that cooperation with the Burmese works. About six weeks later there was another CIA report from Rangoon stating that the Burmese Government's morphine and opium pharmaceutical facility in Rangoon had to shut down because they weren't making any seizures of opium and had no opium to run through this processing facility. I sent a telegram, asking about the 10 tons of opium that had been reportedly seized. Nobody replied to my telegram, needless to say. The narcotics issue is exceedingly complex. Whatever approach you take, whether decriminalization or the present policy, has a price. Prohibition of alcoholic beverages in the 1920s and 1930s carried a heavy price. We ended prohibition because the price was too high. That does not mean that we do not pay a price now for having alcohol freely available in the United States. I think that most people now would say that the price is less than the price we were paying for prohibition of alcohol.

After I left Chiang Mai I had a discussion with Sheldon Vance, then the Coordinator for Narcotics in the State Department. I told him, "Look, after having presided over some of the biggest opium seizures, literally, in the history of the world, and done this and that, I can say with some authority and credibility that trying to solve the problems in the streets of the United States in the hills of northern Thailand is like trying to fix a leaking water faucet in the State Department toilet down the hall by bailing out the MacArthur Boulevard water reservoir with a teacup." I think that this was a very useful analogy. I was never called upon for further counsel on the subject.

*Q: I think you put it very well. The tragic aspect is that, despite all of our efforts - and we've had a major anti-narcotics effort under way since the 1970s - the results have been insignificant.*

MONTGOMERY: If we have a war on drugs, drugs have clearly won. Basically, opium is cheap. So it may cost 10 times what aspirin costs, so what? You end up with incredible results, like the problem of the jail population. The majority of assault and burglary cases are drug-related. There is so much nonsense spread about drug use. Alcohol kills more people every year than drugs, and so does tobacco.

When I was still working full-time for Seagram's, after I retired, I had a discussion with a man from R. J. Reynolds, the tobacco company. He said to me, "You guys in the liquor business should be grateful to us guys in the tobacco business because we're taking all of the abuse, all of the heat." I said, "No, you've got it wrong. You guys in the tobacco business should be grateful to us guys in the liquor business because if it weren't for our experience, you would be facing prohibition of tobacco products right now." He said, "You know, you're absolutely right."

*Q: Discussion of Thailand is endlessly fascinating, but is there anything further about Chiang*

*Mai that you would like to go into at this point?*

MONTGOMERY: No, it's just a sort of nostalgic comment in a way, but I don't think that opportunities like this are going to come very often to young or middle grade Foreign Service Officers. I think that I was uniquely privileged to have had this opportunity to live and serve in Chiang Mai and to represent the United States there. I would like to get across, in some way, just how zany, scary, and endlessly fascinating this was. I imagine that somebody more talented with the pen than I could probably do more justice to it.

**JOSEPH P. O'NEILL**  
**Political/Consular/Administrative Officer**  
**Chiang Mai (1969-1970)**

*Joseph P. O'Neill was born in New York in 1935. From 1953-1956 he served in the US Army. After joining the Foreign Service in 1961 he served positions in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, India, Portugal, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, and Eritrea. Mr. O'Neill was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in May 1998.*

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

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

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

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

*Q: Were you still staff?*

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

*Q: Who was your consul general?*

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

*Q: American citizens in north Thailand were mainly missionaries?*

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

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

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

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

*Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?*

O'NEILL: Leonard Unger.

*Q: He was in Bangkok?*

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

*Q: Who wrote our efficiency report?*

O'NEILL: Ben Courtney wrote the efficiency report.

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

*Q: What was your impression of the Thai army?*

O'NEILL: The Thai army had not fought in 20 or 30 years. It was involved in politics. It really wasn't a terribly good army. But it was also not a brutal army. It did not "bang on" its own

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

**JOHN T. MCCARTHY**  
**Political Officer**  
**Chiang Mai (1969-1971)**

*John T. McCarthy was born in New York, New York in 1939. He graduated from Manhattan College in 1961 and entered the Foreign Service in 1962. His career included positions in Belgium, Thailand, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Washington, DC. Mr. McCarthy was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.*

*Q: You arrived in Chiang Mai, you were there from 69 to 71. What was the situation in Thailand at the time?*

MCCARTHY: This was already Nixon time in the States. We were already beginning to withdraw from Vietnam. We were looking for a negotiated solution. From the Thai point of view, we were sort of off the mark. They were a little worried about us as reliable allies. At least in the provinces, they couldn't figure out why we didn't drop nuclear weapons on Vietnam. That would have helped win the war, wouldn't it?

In a sense, that was funny, that was strange. There I was coming from Belgium which had turned against American policy on this one point. From a year in the states where everybody was questioning what we were doing in Vietnam. To southeast Asia where people were questioning it too but from exactly the opposite point of view: Why are you Americans debating this? Just go in there and bomb the hell out of them, basically.

So Vietnam wasn't an issue with the Thais. It was more an issue of internal discussion among people at the consulate. So that wasn't a problem.

The serious insurgency in Thailand was happening in the northeast. But in northern Thailand there were insurgent areas, it was probably backed by the Chinese, by the communist regime in Laos, ethnic people, Mao, hill-tribes people, in several of the provinces that were in our consular district. So a lot of what we did consisted of going around.

The consulate was small. There was a consul. Most of the time I was there, in fact all the time I was there, Wever Gim, myself, I was the political officer and then there was another person who did the administration and the consular work, whatever else had to be done.

But Wever and I, Wever in particular but I as well, went around and did a lot of reporting on what was happening in terms of the individual provinces in our consular district. There were about a dozen of them. Or what was happening in terms of development, in terms of institution building because we were into that.

The USIS operation was enormous in those days. Very much like Vietnam, we had something like 12, around the country, 12 branch posts. In our consular district in addition to Chiang Mai there was one other one in a place called Pitsanulok and I would go there once in a while. We were trying to win hearts and minds, we were very involved in that, and reporting on the insurgency.

It was, again, a very interesting job. A lot of traveling around the district, a lot of reporting, a lot of meeting people. Chiang Mai has its own university. There were a fair number of Brits on the staff of the university as well as very interesting, very well-turned out Thai people. We had a very pleasant couple of years in very good company.

*Q: With the insurgency could you get around very easily?*

MCCARTHY: Yes, you had to be a little careful. There was in fact one terribly dramatic awful moment toward the end of my time there. Three of our USIS Thai employees had gone to a province called Nan. In an area where we had all traveled and had assumed was safe but for whatever reason they were ambushed. Their jeep was ambushed. They were killed. We buried them. Tremendous catharsis. Really very unhappy people, very strong emotions.

I was never at risk, in any way. I would go to the provinces. They were the ones in the north basically, right around the Lao-Burma border. Talk to the governors, talk to the vice-governors and talk to some of the local police officials. Basically reporting on what was going on.

The Thais have done very well. I was back as a tourist a few years ago. That's really pretty much all behind them.

*Q: Who in the insurgency, who was doing what? Were these local Thais, tribes people?*

MCCARTHY: Tribes people pretty much. In north Thailand it was tribes people disaffected from the Thai majority. In northeastern Thailand it was peasants who were ethnically Thai but north easterners who also felt that Bangkok, the central Thais, had mistreated them. It was financed and arms were brought in from the Soviets, the Chinese, the Vietnamese, the Laos.

The other thing we did and that was kind of fun -- Burma. Everything going on in north Burma. The Shan states, the Kerrin rebellion, the leftover nationalist Chinese groups who had gone into drug running from the late '40s. Everybody was up in Burma and you would pick up tidbits about them once in a while.

There was one wild group of American missionaries who had been ordered out of Burma sometime in the mid-60s. Instead of obeying the order to leave, they led 5,000 Lahu tribes people up into the mountains somewhere and they lived there for several years. This was an old missionary family that had been in Burma for 75 years or so. One of the wives eventually got tired of it and she and 6 of her kids walked across the border one day. Somehow, I was delegated to deal with her. She decided that she would stay in Chiang Mai, trying to convince her husband and the rest of her family to come out. They did in the end but I was gone by then. But it was dramatic.

Burma was always romantic and weird. Anything going on in Burma was strange.

*Q: This is tape 2, side 1 with Ambassador John McCarthy. Why don't we cut at this point. We'll pick up a little more with Chiang Mai dealing with the military as we had big bases up there and all that.*

MCCARTHY: Not in north Thailand.

*Q: So Chiang Mai was not really a military...*

MCCARTHY: Chiang Mai, very much by Thai design, was kept off limits. They never allowed the north to be used as an R&R post directly by soldiers coming from Vietnam. We never asked but I think had we asked they wouldn't have. Because again, it was too remote. We never built any bases in the north. All of that was in northeastern Thailand. Totally different world.

I went over there a couple of times. I had a good friend in USIS who was in Ubon, Udorn later, one first then the other. There what an American was doing, an official American, was very much tied up with the military presence.

North Thailand was immune Thailand, it was really rather very pleasant. I think the Thais did it on purpose. They liked the north. The north has the most beautiful women in the world, according to the southern Thais, in Chiang Mai. It's the site of the old cultures and they didn't want us to spoil it. They succeeded pretty much.

*Q: Did you have any problems with relations with the embassy? How did the embassy treat you?*

MCCARTHY: Very well, basically. The man who was the ambassador there, Leonard Unger...

*Q: We've interviewed him too.*

MCCARTHY: He was wonderful. I kept him in mind myself later on when I was dealing, largely as DCM in Islamabad where we had 3 constituent posts, I had Leonard Unger very much in mind. I never went to Bangkok without my phone ringing in the hotel and the ambassador inviting me for lunch, tea, a reception whatever he was doing. He always made time for me in the office, and he always saw us socially somehow. He was superb. From that vantage point that's how he ran his relations with the consulates. He wanted you to be an integrated part of the

embassy.

*Q: One last question maybe on this, maybe something else may occur later, how did you find Thai officials that you had to deal with in your area in the north?*

MCCARTHY: That's an interesting question. They were, first of all, very polite, incredibly polite. They recognized me, particularly the senior ones, the governors, the vice-governors, the ones I would normally see as a consular official, as someone from the American government. They knew that we were allies. They knew that we were trying to help them. They were rather forthcoming. They would pretty much tell me what was going on in their area. So relations with us were fine.

Thailand was then going through a lot of pangs in terms of modernizing itself. It was quite clear that relationships between officials and citizens in Thailand were traditional. What that meant basically was that they were corrupt. There was not very much government and what government you got you paid for if you needed to have a service performed. In terms of the way the government worked, vis-à-vis its own people, it was not very good particularly in these remote areas. I think that was the root of some of these insurgency problems. I think the Thais have gotten beyond that.

I think they've done a marvelous job of sort of modernizing their structure and bringing themselves together. We were back there, must have been about 87 from Pakistan, just as tourists. We went to the north and it was incredible how much had been done.

So two things, dealing with me as an American -- marvelous, wonderful people, very helpful. They sometimes told us what we wanted to hear, as well. You get used to that. But, in terms of running their bureaucracy it was kind of scary. They were still rather primitive.

**KEITH EARL ADAMSON**  
**Political Affairs Officer**  
**Bangkok (1970)**

*Keith Earl Adamson was born in Newton, Kansas in 1917. He received a bachelor's degree in economics from George Washington University in 1943. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1943-1946. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Egypt, Turkey, Colombia, Vietnam, and Laos. Mr. Adamson was interviewed by Earl Wilson on January 12, 1988.*

*Q: You were talking about being transferred to Bangkok.*

ADAMSON: That was in April of '70.

*Q: What was the situation there?*

ADAMSON: The situation was that President Nixon and Prime Minister Kittikachorn had signed an agreement that the U.S. should get out of running the counterinsurgency program for the Thai Government. It was agreed that we would train their people and transfer physical equipment, our inventory of the mobile units on the motion picture side and all of that sort of thing over to the Thai Ministry of Information for operations. So when I got there, that's where we began.

*Q: What was the situation in Cambodia at that time, when you were being transferred?*

ADAMSON: When I was being transferred, it was still possible to make a visit to Cambodia.

*Q: Could you?*

ADAMSON: Yes. Then it began to deteriorate from that point on G. Lewis Schmidt was my predecessor in Thailand. He had been there several years. He briefed me on what was happening. You should interview Lew on this aspect of it, because he can discuss it better than I But he did not agree completely with orders that he had gotten from Washington.

*Q: Yes, I understood that.*

ADAMSON: He felt that they were moving much too fast, it was not going to happen, and many of the personnel that remained on after he left felt the same way. So it was not an easy period. But we were told to press ahead, which we did, and get back to operating a normal USIS operation.

*Q: We are discussing your tour in Bangkok.*

ADAMSON: Right. There were difficulties, of course, of getting out of the business that we'd been in for quite some time and quite heavily. I can't recite them off the top of my head, but we had a large number of branch posts out of which we were operating the counterinsurgency program, in cooperation with the provincial governors, the chaoqueng, for the areas where there were serious insurgencies.

The task of training people to take over and closing those posts which would no longer be necessary was going to disrupt the lives of a great many people, both our American staff, as well as our Thai staff. Number one problem was in transferring personnel. The equipment was material stuff, but on the question of personnel, the salaries to be paid by the Thai Government for similar work were way below the scale that we had for our foreign nationals. So they were going to have a very difficult time going to work for the Thai Government.

In many cases, we had people who had been with us for years out in these branch posts, so the task then was to try to keep them either in a different branch post or in the headquarters operation in Bangkok. There was a great deal of argument as to whether or not Thailand was really run from Bangkok. Many of our branch PAOs said that it was important to keep the branch post operations going, because they were critical to the understanding of U.S. policy, U.S.-Thai relations in that area. But again, in effect, the Thai Government itself had been trying to decentralize, had been trying to get regional operations for the military and for the information

and for various ministries going, with a notable lack of success.

So Thailand was really still run from Bangkok. I made the decision that we were going to put most of our eggs in that basket and only keep one northern branch post and one southern branch post.

*Q: To go back a bit, as you say, the President's administration policy was to turn over the counterinsurgency programs in Indochina and in Thailand to the local government, and that Lew Schmidt, for one, and others felt that much was going to be lost if this was not done in an orderly manner. My understanding was that they more or less wanted to axe it from Washington.*

ADAMSON: Washington just said, "You can't wait." And Lew said, "That's a mistake. We need to go slow, we need to make sure it's done properly. We need to make sure that the Thai can operate it." That was his concern.

We did our best to make sure that the Thai could operate it. We had very good training programs. We put all projectors and other equipment into intensive repair and refurbishing so that all would be in excellent condition when transferred. Finally, one great day, the Deputy Prime Minister, Praphat Charousatien, and Ambassador Unger and I on our side gathered before a long line of jeeps, mobile units, with motion picture projectors out on a series of tables USIS and Ministry personnel lined up for the formal transfer. That was just the beginning That was the symbolic beginning. The training programs continued for their personnel, and the transfer of equipment was made in an orderly fashion, so there was a quite clear record that it left our inventory and went on theirs.

The reason that the Deputy Prime Minister, who was also Minister of Interior, was there was because his governors were going to be the operating heads of the counterinsurgency program in selected provinces. It was not going to be somebody in Bangkok who would be operating it. So the Minister of Interior took over that responsibility, since that Ministry is responsible for the governors.

*Q: Some felt that the local government, whether in Thailand or Laos or Vietnam, but perhaps more in Thailand, really didn't have a tremendous amount of enthusiasm for, let us say, PSYOPS per se if it came to their money. It's all right as long as Uncle Sam wants to spend money and buy jeeps and whatever. That's one thing I'd like to ask your reaction to, if they genuinely supported it.*

*The other thing is if they did, if they didn't see it more as a political device to keep them in power.*

ADAMSON: I couldn't prove it in a court of law, but my impression is that they wanted to see it done. They didn't know how to do it. I don't know if they really had a lot of confidence in their ability do it. For example, there was one radio broadcaster in Khon Kaen, who did a tremendous job of talking the insurgents into town and away from their living in the jungle and fighting the Thai forces. It's because he talked to them as an individual. In other words, he realized that usually the guy listening to a radio is the same guy that would be sitting across the table from

you, having a cup of tea. And that was the way he broadcast. Everybody else in Thailand was making speeches, as if they were orating before a crowd of thousands, and they were ineffective. They never could communicate.

*Q: That's a very interesting point.*

ADAMSON: So I have a feeling that it was primarily that they didn't know how to do this kind of a job; not that they didn't agree in principle that it was important.

Staying in power? I don't think that had much to do with it, because power was still, at that point, a decision of a few people at the top, and elections were not necessary in order to decide who was going to run things. But obviously, the program, once it was transferred to the Thai Government, lost a great deal. Lew [Schmidt] was right. In other words, it would not be the same program, it would not be as effective.

*Q: What was your judgment? As the U.S. was turning over equipment and everything in Vietnam, the Vietnamization program, and in Laos and now in Thailand, obviously it was apparent that the U.S. was beginning to draw back. Were people getting nervous on this score?*

ADAMSON: I'm not sure if I understand exactly what you meant by "beginning to draw back."

*Q: I mean shrinking from responsibilities and expansion, contracting now. Of course, that was leading, under President Nixon's program, to eventual withdrawal from Vietnam.*

ADAMSON: Right. There were two things involved. One, a realization that we probably shouldn't have gone in the way we did in the first place. Limited warfare is nice on a textbook, but it doesn't work out very well in practice because of the political aspects of it. So I'd always felt, as I mentioned earlier in our discussions, that we would have been a lot better off had we behaved in Vietnam as we did in Laos, and not try to do everything, do it immediately and do it ourselves, but be more patient and assist them to the extent we could.

*Q: I didn't make myself clear. My question is: in Thailand, the Thai people, the Thai Government, did they feel that the United States was beginning to back away from them, as you were giving this material to them?*

ADAMSON: Quite the opposite. The reason we were giving it to them is that they were getting very upset that we were taking over Thai Government prerogatives.

*Q: I see.*

ADAMSON: We were much too much involved. In other words, their sense of sovereignty was being bruised at a minimum, and it was the same thing that was happening in a lot of places. Their pride in being Thai made them insist that we just not do things that foreign governments are not supposed to do. So I think that was largely responsible for it was their reaction against our continuing to play such a large role, rather than their feeling that we were withdrawing or backing out and showing less interest.

*Q: In Thailand, you also had a lot of American military personnel.*

ADAMSON: Correct.

*Q: Did you have problems on that score?*

ADAMSON: There were problems -- surprisingly few, though, is what amazed me. Around the bases at Korat and Sattahip in the south, the beginning of the supply route, and in Bangkok itself, of course, we didn't have such large numbers, but it was R&R for a lot of guys. I don't think the Thai were happy with the neighborhoods that grew up around the whorehouses and all of that. But we never had the kinds of community relations problems, thank God, in Thailand that we had, say, in Germany or in England or in France. It was just a different environment.

*Q: Were the problems different in, say Bangkok, than up in the northeast, around the airfields up there?*

ADAMSON: No, they weren't much different. It's just that "in the country," you had less sophistication, and also there wasn't the caste system of separating that part of town and those people off from all of the nice people.

**JOSEPH P. O'NEILL**  
**Political/Public Affairs Officer**  
**Phitsanolok (1970-1971)**

**Regional Refugee Officer**  
**Songkhla (1980-1982)**

*Joseph P. O'Neill was born in New York in 1935. From 1953-1956 he served in the US Army. After joining the Foreign service in 1961 he served positions in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, India, Portugal, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, and Eritrea. Mr. O'Neill was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in May 1998.*

*Q: Then in 1968, you went back for language training in the Thai language. Did you ask for that?*

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

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

O'NEILL: Lyndon Baines Johnson.

*Q: Congratulations.*

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

*Q: What was that for in particular?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Q: In Bangkok?*

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

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

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

reporting, and the rest.

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

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

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

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

*Q: Many of them were trained, educated.*

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

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

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

*Q: Was there much fighting among the refugees themselves?*

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

*Q: How about incursions by the Vietnamese?*

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

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

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

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

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

*Q: He was consul general in Hong Kong.*

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

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

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

**RUTH McLENDON**

**Political Officer  
Bangkok (1970-1972)**

*Ruth McLendon was born in Texas in 1929. She received her bachelor's degree from Texas Christian University in 1949 and her master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1950. Her postings abroad following her entry into the Foreign Service in 1951 include Sao Paulo, Manila, Adelaide, Rangoon, Bangkok and Paris. Ms. McLendon was interviewed in 1995 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

McLENDON: In '70. In August of '69 I went into the War College and in June of '70 I went on out to Bangkok.

*Q: What was your position in Bangkok?*

McLENDON: I was deputy to the political counselor.

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

McLENDON: '70 to '72.

*Q: Who was the ambassador then?*

McLENDON: Leonard Unger.

*Q: Yes.*

McLENDON: Bangkok was one of our largest embassies at the time because it was kind of our political base for the operations in Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos. We had not one political section, but three on the State Department side of the house and we're not talking about the third floor.

*Q: The third floor being?*

McLENDON: CIA.

*Q: The CIA.*

McLENDON: Which was and of course, they were very large. We had a conventional political section, that was the section I was in and we had a political military section and then we had, what did they call it, public safety? Development in safety? At that time we were deeply involved in helping the Thai government develop its rural areas so that it would not easily become a Vietnam, not that the two countries were similar in a way.

*Q: I take it we were concerned about rural insurgency?*

McLENDON: Rural insurgency and strengthening village democracy and the economy and all that and we had a lot of our aid that went in that direction. We had our USIA deeply involved. They had a lot of their junior officers assigned in provinces where their main function was not running a branch office, but helping the local government with its public relations. They were inspected about that time and that policy was changed shortly thereafter and they pulled out their personnel from divisions of that type.

*Q: Now, when you look at this, in those countries we had huge political sections and all this and when you think about it, what does it translate into when it gets back to the people who use it. Sometimes one almost has the feeling that we tend to throw people at a problem and money at a problem rather than it's hard to decide what are our interests and all.*

McLENDON: I thought that our whole approach in Thailand was sadly skewed in that direction - throwing too many people in and doing things that the Thai could only do for themselves. The Thai aren't that bad for doing for themselves. The government we were dealing with was corrupt at the top, but the king was a force of strength as he is now. The Thai have for the most part been very capable of looking after their own best interests in foreign affairs and they were doing it then. I had the highest respect for their foreign minister and their staff. There was one policy, one policy proposal of ours that I won't go into because I doubt that it has been declassified that I thought was really suicidal, well, not suicidal, but really about the worst thing that we could do. It was being pushed very strongly from the White House and our ambassador had to try and present it there and did. I know I worried about it until I finally read the report of the meeting and saw the questions they asked and thought thank God they know enough to protect themselves.

*Q: Did you have many dealings with the Thai government?*

McLENDON: No, I didn't. I didn't speak Thai, which wasn't necessary. Most of them either spoke very good English or had their translators, interpreters with them. I did not in Burma develop skills at representation and developing and using contacts. I didn't pick up on it in Thailand and that was fine. Before I left Thailand I made a decision to drop out of political work and return to consular work where those skills could be less in demand and where I thought I did have skills that I could put to good use. I liked political work from the research and analysis point, but I just didn't take to it.

*Q: I know how you feel. I stayed in consular work mainly because the development and the work with representational skills, really is social as a long term, but it's a very strong social component. If you feel that that's not your thing, there are other things one can do.*

McLENDON: I had a good friend who was director general of information in the Thai foreign ministry at the time and I wouldn't have even used him. When we were together it was as if we were old friends and classmates and we relaxed and enjoyed each other's company. He knew that I didn't pester him with questions and he didn't pester me with requests.

*Q: What feeling, what were you getting from the Thai seeing our effort in Vietnam, this was '70 to '72 really winding down, where was it going? Were the Thai beginning to wonder about our*

*commitment or what were you getting?*

McLENDON: Yes, they were. I don't know how we handled that with Thailand after the collapse of Vietnam as we pulled out of Vietnam with the collapse of Vietnam, but someone must have handled it reasonably well because we remained close. We remain close allies and there was a time I didn't think our relationship would survive that.

*Q: What was your feeling about the CIA?*

McLENDON: They had some of the smartest people around and they had very good sources. Our political counselor, Larry Pickering, was a Thai language officer and this was his second or third, third tour I think in Thailand and he had good, useful contacts. He did very good reporting. Most of our other officers were talented. But they were largely wasted because Ambassador Unger was running such a large operation and he felt he had to be informed in detail on such a wide area including all of the neighboring countries that most of our political section junior officers and most of the mid-career officers spent most of their time doing briefing papers for the ambassador and seldom were given the time to go out and develop information for reporting. I thought it a terrible waste. It's just a function of the size of the operation when you're trying to.

*Q: What was your impression of Ambassador Unger?*

McLENDON: Again, he was a Thai specialist, fluent in Thai, deeply knowledgeable. He cared deeply about the country. I thought he was too willing to carry out bad instructions from Washington without questioning them. We were so wrapped up in Vietnam and I thought the embassy was out of touch with the feeling back home. I thought they underestimated the strength of the opposition and the fact that we were one way or another going to be forced out of that war and that we couldn't play around as we had before. They were not as sensitive as I thought they could be to how much we used to conceal from congress about what we were doing. This was of course after some of our former allies in congress were opposing us very strongly on Vietnam and questioning everything we did. I was out of step. I was totally out of step at that embassy. That was another thing, another reason that made it the hardest assignment I ever had and I thought the least, I thought I was at my least effective.

*Q: Well, then I thought we might stop at this point. You left there in 1972? I take it you asked for a shorter tour, didn't you?*

McLENDON: I managed to get my position abolished after an inspection. I volunteered it, which did not raise my rating with my boss.

**RICHARD E. THOMPSON**  
**Diplomatic Courier**  
**Bangkok (1970-1972)**

*Mr. Johnson, a Californian, was educated at the University of Southern*

*California, the University of Madrid, Spain and Occidental College. Joining the Department of State as a Diplomatic Courier, his career took him to diplomatic courier centers in Washington DC; Frankfurt, Germany; and Bangkok, from which he serviced US Embassies throughout the world, collecting and delivering diplomatic pouches. His later assignments in Washington were of a senior managerial nature. Mr. Thompson was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2001.*

*Q: After four years in Frankfurt, what happened to you then?*

THOMPSON: I was transferred to Bangkok. They had just recently moved the office from Manila to Bangkok. I was the first courier actually to be assigned there. The others had all just moved up from Manila.

*Q: Now the Manila then Bangkok regional office covered the rest of the world that was not covered out of Frankfurt or Washington or was there somewhere else too?*

THOMPSON: No, it covered the Far East and parts of the Middle East. In those days we would connect with the Frankfurt couriers in Beirut.

*Q: Oh, so you go as far as Beirut to the west, from Bangkok.*

THOMPSON: We would carry the material to Beirut, the material we didn't enter into the defense courier system in Bangkok or Manila we would carry to Beirut and pass it off to the Frankfurt couriers there and they would take it to Frankfurt.

*Q: How about material coming across the Pacific from Washington?*

THOMPSON: In most cases, that would be transported by the Defense Courier Service to Clark Air Force Base in Manila and we would pick it up there.

*Q: It wouldn't come all the way to Bangkok.*

THOMPSON: No, we had to go down and get it.

*Q: But this was the period beginning in 1970, and of course Vietnam was very active. You went to Saigon many times I suppose.*

THOMPSON: Yes, but again, that was infrequent because they were mainly serviced by their own courier, the Defense Courier Service.

*Q: Who would also take care of the diplomatic...*

THOMPSON: Yes, but I think we went there about once a week, and they were there a little more frequently.

*Q: Once a week from Bangkok.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: Okay. Any other differences of significance between working out of Frankfurt and working out of Bangkok? Or was it pretty similar types of patterns?*

THOMPSON: Operationally, the patterns were similar, of course there were differences in the lifestyle. In Bangkok, you got your own housing on the economy and the embassy paid for it, and in Frankfurt you had government housing. Little things like that.

*Q: And you probably didn't go behind the block countries like the way you did from Vienna, or did you? You weren't going into China yet.*

THOMPSON: No, not yet. Although we started going in there pretty quick during my tour there. No, we didn't. We'd go as far south as New Zealand, Fiji, and as far north as Hong Kong, and we'd go out to India and Pakistan of course, Afghanistan, Nepal.

*Q: Did you go to a place like Dacca in East Pakistan before Bangladesh became independent or was that pattern within Pakistan by the embassy? I guess I'm wondering about consulates under the supervision of an embassy. Were they handled differently than embassies?*

THOMPSON: In general, the consulates are the responsibility of the embassy, but in the case of Dacca, obviously it was so far apart that we went there. The same thing with Hong Kong, you can't say that the United Kingdom should send a special courier out to Hong Kong because it happens to belong to the United Kingdom. [laughter]

*Q: [laughter] Well, Hong Kong has always been a very different kind of place. So you would go to Dacca...*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: Any other differences in terms of the operations? You would use American carriers whenever you could.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: But also Asian airlines, I suppose to a significant extent.*

THOMPSON: Yes, it mainly Asian airlines, mostly Thai International because we negotiated a favorable air cargo rate with them.

*Q: Why was the office moved from Manila to Bangkok? That was before your time.*

THOMPSON: It's still a question of some controversy. Some of my colleagues still say that that was a mistake because we did have the DCS station right there and we had to go down and pick up the stuff. But they just felt that there was also a DCS station in Bangkok and it seemed to be

more central with more airlines transiting Bangkok and it seemed to be the most cost-efficient place for us to live, for us to be stationed.

*Q: How long were you in Bangkok during this time?*

THOMPSON: Two and a half years.

**JAMES R. BULLINGTON**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Chiang Mai (1971-1973)**

*Ambassador James R. Bullington was born in Tennessee in 1940, and received his BA from Auburn University in 1962, when he entered the Foreign Service. His assignments abroad include Hue, Saigon, Quang Tri, Chiang Mai, Mandalay, Rangoon, N'Djamena and Contonou, with an ambassadorship to Burundi. In 2001 Ambassador Bullington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Where were you put in INR?*

BULLINGTON: I was in the Southeast Asia part of it, basically the Vietnam desk. I didn't like the guy that ran that office. After the NSC job I managed to get myself assigned to Thai language training, studied for ten months at FSI and went off to Chiang Mai.

*Q: How did you find Thai language and the training?*

BULLINGTON: Oh it was an excellent program. I learned Thai pretty well, with a 3+ on my exam. There were just two of us in the class, so it was very intensive. Hal Colebaugh was my classmate. The teachers were great. When I got to Thailand I still had a lot of language learning to do, but I was basically able to communicate at the professional level and read a newspaper. That's not easy in Thai because it's a tonal language and doesn't use Roman script. I felt the language training was very good.

*Q: Chiang-Mai, when you went there, you were in Chiang-Mai from when to when?*

BULLINGTON: That would have been 1971 to '73.

*Q: What was Chiang-Mai like when you got there?*

BULLINGTON: Beautiful place. It had the reputation then of being the nicest city in Thailand. It was certainly a lot nicer than Bangkok, which even then had grown to be a metropolis with all the typical big city problems of traffic and pollution and crime. Chiang Mai was more the 'real Asia', more what one's romantic notions of Asia were, but at the same time it had modernized to the point where there were a couple of first class tourist hotels and a few good restaurants, a fairly good infrastructure in terms of roads and public utilities. It was a really pleasant place.

*Q: What was the staff of the consulate like?*

BULLINGTON: We had three officers. I was the number two to the Consul.

*Q: Who was there?*

BULLINGTON: Jim Montgomery was Principal Officer. I was the political-economic officer, and the third officer did the consular and admin work.

*Q: Who was that?*

BULLINGTON: Jim Henderson. Mahlon Henderson, he went by Jim. It was fairly quiet, but we got very much involved in narcotics work. Chiang Mai at that time, and still today for that matter, was at the heart of what was termed the 'golden triangle' of opium production in northern Thailand, Laos and Burma, where the opium was grown and transformed into heroin, and then trafficked down through Bangkok to markets in the United States and Europe. That was the biggest U.S. interest there at that time and what we spent most of our time on. There was also the remnant of an insurgency in northern Thailand that was still of some interest. We were just at the tail end of our AID program, so we were still doing some economic assistance; we still had one AID officer there. But I would say 70-80 percent of our time was focused on narcotics.

*Q: Well, as the political economic officer, what were you doing?*

BULLINGTON: Reporting, traveling around the provinces, meeting the local officials, learning about the situation. Talking to the opposition parties, if I could find them. Going out to the areas where the poppies were growing. Working with some of the NGOs and international organizations to see what they were doing in terms of crop substitution, trying to get rid of the opium production and replace it with beans or corn. They were trying to get the farmers to grow beans, and they found out eventually that the beans simply provided a great fertilizer for the poppies and made them grow better. Farmers began to inter-crop them, one row of poppies and one row of beans, and it just did wonderful things for the poppies. None of these efforts worked. I became, after those two years of working on narcotics, a little bit... a lot disillusioned with the whole idea of trying to deal with our domestic narcotics problem in places like northern Thailand. I know it didn't work there and I'm dubious that it works anywhere. There's just too much corruption involved. The poor peasant growing those poppies gets almost nothing for the opium, but by the time it gets to the streets of Washington or New York in the form of heroin it's worth tens of thousands of dollars. The profit margin is just too great. Suppressing production didn't work, and I'm dubious that it ever will.

*Q: Did you sort of find payoffs at almost every level?*

BULLINGTON: Oh, there was enormous corruption, yes. The labs that transformed opium to heroin were just across the Thai border into Burma where we couldn't get at them from Thailand. But I'm sure had we been able to get at them from the Burmese side they would have gone to Laos or somewhere else. Interestingly the biggest traffickers were elements of the old

Kuomintang army that had fled China in 1949. For a number of years they still had some connections with Taiwan. But by this time, the early '70s, any political content had disappeared and they were just criminals, even though they had originated as a division of the Kuomintang army that had come down out of China.

*Q: Were there efforts on the part of central government to get non-corrupt governors and local people in or was it pervasive up and down the whole..?*

BULLINGTON: The government made some efforts and for a time they would have limited success. In particular they established a new outfit called the Border Patrol Police, BPP, and we had advisors with them. Both the Agency and DEA had agents in Chiang Mai, working with the BPP. But this did not succeed for long, as even the BPP became corrupt. If you got the traffickers at one level they would go to another level, if you got them in one area they would simply move to another. In my judgment our war on narcotics has been unsuccessful.

*Q: Where were the drug lords themselves living, I mean the ones who were making at least the primary, the first cut of the big profits?*

BULLINGTON: Most of them were living in that border area, over in Burma. But many of them reportedly had mansions and girlfriends and families in Chiang Mai and would periodically come there for the high life. They managed always to avoid being arrested.

*Q: How did you, was there any political life going on there?*

BULLINGTON: Not a lot. The Thai government is very centralized, and the regional governors are creatures of the central government. There was some interesting economic development activity going on, already the beginnings of substantial foreign investment, and lots of new dams and roads. You could see it was a fairly rapidly developing country.

*Q: How about, well this would be about the textile period, wasn't it?*

BULLINGTON: Yes, there were textile plants there that were coming up. My wife bought a lot of beautiful cloth. The Thai silk of Chiang Mai is famous.

*Q: Could you travel around fairly easily, or were places too dangerous to go to?*

BULLINGTON: You could go almost anywhere. There were a couple of places way up into the border regions where it got a little difficult, but the government didn't put any obstacles in the way. If we judged it to be a reasonably secure place we could go there. I traveled a lot, including close to the Burmese border.

*Q: Did the Vietnam war play any role where you were at that time?*

BULLINGTON: Very little. We didn't have any U.S. bases in northern Thailand. They were over in the northeast, pretty far away from Chiang Mai, so we didn't have any GI's visiting or any real impact from the war in our consular district.

*Q: Did, would you give tourists, I mean American kids getting in trouble, that sort of thing?*

BULLINGTON: Yes, there were a lot of those, the hippies. Chiang Mai was a stop on the narcotics road. They would typically go to Nepal and then to Chiang Mai and Vientiane and places like that where narcotics were available. Some of them got in trouble, and we had occasional consular problems of that sort, but not an awful lot.

*Q: Did you have much problem getting them out?*

BULLINGTON: No. The government was friendly and cooperative, and worked with us very nicely.

*Q: Did you go to Bangkok much?*

BULLINGTON: Not when I could avoid it. I preferred being in Chiang Mai. It was a much more pleasant place.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador?*

BULLINGTON: Goodness, you put me on the spot now. That shows you how much I went to Bangkok (laughter). I remember Ed Masters was the DCM. He came up to visit, but I don't think the Ambassador ever came to Chiang Mai while I was there.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

BULLINGTON: '71 to '73.

*Q: It would have been Len Unger.*

BULLINGTON: Len Unger, that's it, Len Unger.

**IRVING SABLOSKY**  
**Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1971-1973)**

*Irving Sablosky was born in Indiana in 1924. He graduated from Indiana University in 1947 and served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1945. His postings abroad have included Seoul, Cebu, Hamburg, Bangkok and London.*

SABLOSKY: In 1971, off to Bangkok as a Cultural Affairs officer.

*Q: You were there from 1971 to?*

SABLOSKY: 1973.

*Q: Who was our ambassador and what was the embassy like when you got there?*

SABLOSKY: The ambassador was Leonard Unger. It was a big embassy. Of course, there was big American business in Bangkok. There was the U.N. AID program in which Americans were involved. There was a U.S. AID program. There was an Army hospital. There were nearby bases. The huge air base was in southern Thailand. There was a big American military presence. There were many activities in Bangkok at that time.

*Q: Who was your Public Affairs officer?*

SABLOSKY: Jack Hedges, during that whole time.

*Q: Cultural Affairs officer meant what at that time in Thailand?*

SABLOSKY: Cultural Affairs officer meant contact with the universities and cultural community. We had branch posts in Chiang Mai, Song-kla, Khon Kaen... In those places, there were information centers - libraries - under our office's supervision. In Bangkok, we had a binational center, called the AUA, American University Association. The binational center had a mixed Thai and American Board of Directors with a distinguished Thai president and with an American executive director, Jack Juergens at that time. Again, it was very comparable to the Amerika Haus in Hamburg. It had the same kinds of programs. I wasn't exactly in charge. Jack Juergens and I worked together on that. Our programs were very much coordinated. We would program lectures at the AUA and worked very closely with Jack. He helped to carry out the cultural programs. There was also a book publication program, a translation book program that was in our office. There was the exchange program. There was a Fulbright commission in Thailand. I was the vice chairman. There was a Thai chairman, and I was the vice chairman of the Fulbright Commission, which again had a board of Americans and Thais, with an American executive director, Doug Batson. The Commission was in charge of awarding Fulbright grants, supervising the selection of American Fulbright scholars who were moving to Thailand, and choosing those Thais who were going to the United States under the Fulbright program.

*Q: How did this exchange program work? I would have thought you would have a lot more Thais wanting to go to the United States than Americans wanting to come to Thailand.*

SABLOSKY: I think that is true. I don't remember the numbers, but the number of American Fulbrighters coming to Thailand was probably smaller than the number of Thais to go to the United States.

*Q: Where were the Thais going in the United States? What were they mainly after?*

SABLOSKY: They were mostly at the graduate level. They had come from the university in Thailand, and were going for an advanced degree in the United States, and went to a wide range of universities, depending on what university was interested in having a Thai scholar. Thais have a good record of going to the U.S., staying there two or three years, getting their degree and

coming home to Thailand.

*Q: What about cultural events? The Thais being an Oriental society. I would think they would be less interested in American culture than maybe the Europeans.*

SABLOSKY: No, the Thais are extremely open culturally. They are very confident in their own culture. I didn't discover any xenophobia in Thailand. I think it is partly because of their history of having never been colonized from the west, with a brief Japanese occupation. But there is no chip on their shoulder. So, they were interested in other cultures, and always have been open to western culture. There is an interesting thing going on there; western countries working to bring western cultures to Thailand. The Germans, for example, the Goethe Haus in Bangkok, our counterpart, actually sponsored a Thai orchestra that played western music. They hired a conductor to come live in Thailand and conduct this Thai orchestra. The concertmaster, and really the leader, was a man named Usni Pramroj, the son of a former Premier, Seni Pramroj. An American project was under the auspices not of USIS or the U.S. Government, but of the JDR Third Foundation. They brought to Bangkok a string quartet of American players which was to be in residence at the Department of Fine Arts in Bangkok, which was the center of Thai music. But the aim of this was to introduce western music into Thai curriculum. The quartet was led by Edgar Schenkman, a very fine musician who had been conductor of the Richmond Orchestra and the orchestra at Norfolk. He had been head of the opera department at Juilliard School. He was a first-rate musician. His wife was an accomplished violinist. There were just two other members. She was the first violinist in the quartet, and then there was a second violinist, and a wonderful young cellist. They played concerts of string quartet music, and taught western music at the conservatory, at this Department of Fine Arts. Of course, we took advantage of the presence of these people. That is, we arranged for them to play public concerts in Bangkok and in outlying places in Thailand. We even coordinated with other posts in southeast Asia to have the quartet travel under USIS auspices. The concerts were a demonstration of American accomplishment in string quartet playing. So, we tried to ride piggyback on such things as that.

*Q: If I recall, early on, maybe when he was crowned Prince, the King of Thailand, I connect him with jazz.*

SABLOSKY: Jazz, that's right. He played the clarinet and I think the saxophone, too. King Bhumiphal Aduljadet... At that time, the American pianist Agustin Anievas came to perform at the AUA, under our auspices. He gave a wonderful recital. We had word from the Queen's office that they would like to have a Anievas give a command performance at the palace. Our senior Thai staff member was M.R. Puckpring Thongyai - really, a member of the royal family. Through her, we had a direct line to the palace. She relayed the Palace's invitation to Gus Anievas and was prepared to make the necessary arrangements. Fortunately, he had the time and we went to the palace. The Queen herself was ill at the time, so the royal audience consisted of the King and his young daughter who was studying the piano. I got a kick out of being there.

*Q: During this time, did Vietnam intrude at all?*

SABLOSKY: Oh, it was ever-present. We were aware of the B-52s flying from Sataheep over in the direction of Vietnam, when we said we were not bombing Cambodia. Vietnam was a

presence, but it wasn't talked about very much.

*Q: Was there general interest in American culture and all in Thailand?*

SABLOSKY: Oh, yes. Thai artists were very much influenced by the abstract expressionists. Art exhibits of Thai artists were often dominated by that kind of art. They were very good, too. Even pop art was coming into Thailand at that point. The Thais were very much abreast of whatever was going on. But, they were also very proud of their own culture and very protective of it.

*Q: Was there much effort by the Thais to export their culture and what type of culture was coming out?*

SABLOSKY: One of the people I got to know there was Princess Chumbhot, who was prominent in the art world in Thailand, what Usni Pramoj was to the music world. She had, in her small palace in Bangkok, a Thai music group, which she was very proud of. She asked me if there was a possibility, if she had a recording made of her group, that I could help her get it pressed and distributed in the United States. So, I actually got in touch with Moses Asch of Folkways Records and asked if he was interested in an authentic recording of Thai music, made with very fine equipment the Princess had access to in a studio in Bangkok. He was interested and we sent him a tape. He did publish a record called Drums of Thailand in the Folkways library, which is still extant.

*Q: What about the performing arts, plays and things of this nature? Was there much, either in translation or in the original language that we were pushing?*

SABLOSKY: We weren't pushing that sort of thing. We had musical groups and there was a theater group that came. In Thailand, there was enough of an American and British community that they had their own theater group and put on plays. Edgar Schenkman of the quartet also took a hand in the Bangkok Opera Company, which was mostly British and Americans, but some Thai singers, too. They put on the Menotti opera, *The Medium*. They did a very good job of it. So, there were things like that. We had visiting artists. The Duke Ellington orchestra came through under commercial sponsorship.

**DAVID E. REUTHER**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Udorn (1971-1973)**

**Political Officer**  
**Bangkok (1973-1976)**

**Temporary Duty**  
**Songkhla (1975)**

**Chief, Anti-Privacy Unit**

## **Bangkok (1985-1987)**

*David E. Reuther was born in Washington in 1942. He received a BA from Occidental College in 1965 and entered the Foreign Service in 1970. His assignments abroad include Udorn, Bangkok, Songkhla, Taipei, Beijing, Khartoum, and Kuwait. Mr. Reuther was interviewed by Raymond C. Ewing in 1996.*

*Q: So, you had a few weeks on the Thai desk and started language training.*

REUTHER: Yes.

*Q: How much language did you have?*

REUTHER: Well, I was lucky. At the end of our training we were provided a list of posts with junior officer positions and asked our preferences. My recollection is that there were only three Asian posts on the list and a Political Section job at the embassy in Thailand was as close as I could get to China. I checked Thailand and on the last day of the class, assignments were announced. Bangkok it was! Unbeknownst to me, however, State inspectors had recently completed an evaluation of the staffing in Bangkok. Their report recommended abolishing my junior officer position in the political section. So, suddenly I was in language training, but without an onward assignment. In time the embassy suggested waiting until the next Thai language position opened the following summer. That allowed me a full year of Thai study, a luxury considering junior officers were only supposed to receive six months language training.

I think one of the interesting things about Washington, going back to David Brinkley's book on wartime Washington, was its lack of major immigrant communities, such as New York or San Francisco. With the start of language training in the fall of 1970 the teachers were eager that we have an opportunity to experience Thai cuisine. But, Washington at that time had no Thai restaurants. So, the next best thing was to go to a fairly broken down Szechuan-style Chinese restaurant that had spicy food. What is remarkable is that when I returned five years later, Washington was full of Thai restaurants. Large numbers of Asian immigrants finally arrived in the Washington area.

*Q: Do you think that change in Washington was related to the end of the Vietnam war and the influx of refugees?*

REUTHER: Not necessarily. We should first understand the attraction of American academic institutions for overseas students. Many of these restaurants were operated by people who had come for a university education, liked the U.S., and stayed. The establishment of ethnic restaurants is a vital and common part of America's immigrant tradition. Consider: why is it easier to establish a Chinese restaurant in the U.S., than an Italian restaurant in China? My favorite place is a Thai restaurant on Connecticut Avenue. There's an interesting Foreign Service story here. When we came back from Thailand, it was one of the first Thai restaurants to open in the Washington area. Nearby in Bethesda there was a Shakey's Pizza (This is 1976.) and I suddenly realized I could understand the non-English conversation in the next booth -- Thai. I

leapt over the booth and said in my best Thai, “Who are you? What are you doing here?” It turns out this is the owner of ‘my’ Thai restaurant on Connecticut Avenue. He was embarrassed to say his American born kids only ate out at pizza restaurants. He had come as a student and thought opening a restaurant was the thing to do when he decided to stay.

*Q: And now there are plenty of Thai restaurants in Washington.*

REUTHER: Wonderful Thai restaurants!

*Q: They cater to those who like Thai food, but also the Thai community, part of which is still students.*

REUTHER: Yes.

*Q: So, you finally got to your first overseas post in 1971?*

REUTHER: Right. We got there in August/September, 1971.

*Q: Was that your first trip outside of the United States?*

REUTHER: Yes, if you don’t count Vancouver, Canada, which is a Seattle’s neighbor to the north.

It was all quite a wonder. We stopped in Japan on our way. An A-100 colleague was already in Tokyo so we had an inexpensive place to stay. We rode the bullet train and visited Kyoto. I had seen Kabuki performances in the States; on our last day in Tokyo we watched with the luggage in the lobby until the last minute dash to the airport. We arrived in Bangkok on a weekend, were met at the airport, and taken under the wing of an embassy colleague from the Political Section. In those days there was somebody from the embassy to get you settled, you were not just tossed into a hotel room. With our administrative check-in completed, we immediately flew up-country to take up the assignment at the consulate in Udorn. My stomach was already suffering the effects of new diet and new spices.

*Q: Why don’t you remind me exactly where Udorn is in reference to Bangkok and to neighboring countries?*

REUTHER: The travel books always tell you Thailand looks like an elephant’s head with an ear off to the right-hand side and the trunk becoming the peninsula. That ear is northeast Thailand, about a third of the population of the country is there. The Thai center of gravity, if you will, is the Chao Phya River valley that stretches from Chiang Mai in the north to Bangkok. All of the Thai capitals since the 13th century are on that river one way or another. Northeast Thailand is on a plateau, about 500 feet above sea level and except for one little stretch of mountains is literally as flat a piece of land as I have ever seen. In fact, what was so remarkable about the northeast plateau --to a Seattle boy -- was that the horizon didn’t leap out in front of you and soar another 10,000 feet. It was boringly flat.

*Q: In those days we had a consulate also in Chiang Mai.*

REUTHER: That's right. And in Songkhla.

*Q: How big a post was Udorn?*

REUTHER: Udorn was a three-person post. A consul and two vice consuls.

*Q: You were one of the vice consuls, probably the junior vice consul.*

REUTHER: Very junior vice consul!

*Q: You did consular work, visas, etc.?*

REUTHER: No, actually the post had no visa issuing authority, so I missed the consular experience which most of my A-100 colleagues had. State Department standard practice was that the A-100 graduates' first assignment was a consular tour. But, Udorn, Thailand, was a very unique assignment. The post's primary responsibility was political and economic reporting, with a focus on the local insurgency and oversight of the U.S. military presence. There was an insurgency in the inaccessible, mountainous parts of northeast Thailand, funded and assisted by the Vietnamese and the Chinese. This made Thailand one of the dominos. So, we were very focused on how the Thai were responding to the local guerrilla threat. The consul in Udorn when I arrived was Tom Barnes. Tom already had extensive CORDS experience in Vietnam and was a strong admirer of John Paul Vann. His focus and dynamism played out in many ways, but he was intensely interested in counter-insurgency issues. This worked to my advantage. We were in southeast Asia, next door to the Vietnam War. There was plenty of responsibility and little need for formality. Junior officers at Udorn had more responsibility than was the normal case for the Foreign Service. For example, administratively Tom Barnes divided the 13 provinces in the Northeast between the two vice consuls, one in charge of the northern half and the other in charge of the southern half. Your job was to visit each of your provinces, each district within each of those provinces and gain a feel for the caliber of the local officials stationed there, the tasks and challenges that they faced and the nature of the insurgency. We did a tremendous amount of traveling in our consular district. We wore out two British Land Rovers on those laterite roads. We were knowledgeable about each district, but in considerable disfavor with the embassy administrative officer whose budget couldn't support new vehicles. Tom, himself, traveled extensively and was known as the officer who had visited every district in the northeast, some 126.

The consulate's interest in the insurgency wasn't our local fixation, but an integral part of the American presence in Thailand. At that time the embassy included the Development and Security Section, in addition to your typical political and economic sections. William N. Stokes was counselor of embassy for Development and Security in the early 1970s. In bureaucratic theory, organization reflects interests and here was a whole separate section focused on the insurgency in Thailand and the Royal Thai Government's response.

*Q: You mentioned that the two vice consuls covered half of the northeast. Which half was your*

*responsibility?*

REUTHER: I had the southern half which included the provinces from Korat to Ubon along the Cambodian border. I also monitored the U.S. Air Force facilities on the Thai bases in Korat and Ubon.

*Q: To what extent was there interaction with what was going on in Cambodia and Laos in that period? Were their refugees coming? Were you interested in what was happening there or was that pretty much being taken care of by others?*

REUTHER: Reporting on Cambodia was not our primary responsibility. The Thai- Cambodian border is extremely rugged, steep cliffs, sparse populations on both sides so interchange was difficult. From time to time we would forward a report from our conversations with the Thai Border Patrol Police who were responsible for the Cambodian border. During one of my trips a Thai Border Patrol Police patrol escorted the consulate political local, Wongphan Na Lamphon, and I to the temple at Khao Phra Wiharn. The World Court ruled years earlier that this temple stood on Cambodian territory. Standing on a cliff overlooking a valley that reminded me of Yosemite, it was clear that the temple was inaccessible from Cambodia. We interviewed the local Cambodian commander in one of those Cambodian-French-Thai-English conversations that doesn't reveal much. The consulate's priorities were elsewhere and we didn't have the refugee problem that later emerged from Cambodia and Laos. From 1971-73, the borders were very quiet. Of course, there was the time when the Vietnamese infiltrated a sapper team all the way across from Laos to Udorn and attacked the base in late 1972.

*Q: Attack what base?*

REUTHER: The Thai base in Udorn in late 1972. One reason the consulate was located in the Northeast was to monitor the presence of some 42,000 GIs, primarily air force personnel, stationed at four Thai bases -- Udorn, NKP (Nakhon Phenom), Ubon and Korat. At each of these bases, the USAF had a wing of aircraft. Udorn also held the 7/13th Air Force subquarters. By 1971, other bases used earlier in the war, such as Thakli, were closed. The arrangements for the bases reflected common ground between Thai pride and our needs. In the 1960s this translated into an arrangement where we used these facilities at the invitation of the Thai Government. These were not U.S. bases; the senior commander was the Thai base commander. The consulate's role was to make sure that the American component on those bases had good relations with the Thai civilian community.

Consulate officers were well placed to monitor base-community relations. We had the language; we stayed in town, not on the base, when we visited. We often invited a government official to join us for dinner and as the evening progressed people from a variety of Thai offices might stop by our table. We could quiz these officials on the insurgency, base-community relations, whatever was of interest. We also made formal calls on provincial officials from the governor on down. Our frequent visits and passable language skills supported camaraderie with the local officials that kept us well informed on local attitudes and problems. These consulate trips were an important part of making certain that the Thai and American governments were informed and comfortable. The governor or mayor knew that he could talk to us and, therefore, resolve a

problem. It would have been a shocking departure for a Thai official to call in the ranking American air force officer and say, “Your people have erred, I want you to do this, that and the other thing.” That sort of explosion is the worse case scenario we were there to prevent. The consulate and its American officers were an important part of a feedback mechanism. Errors or arrogance could be costly.

Thankfully, cross-cultural errors they were infrequent. My primary United States Air Force contacts were the base commanders and the wing commanders at the two bases I covered, Korat and Ubon. These air force representatives were absolutely marvelously trained, culturally sensitive and profession gentleman. They understood the importance of base-community relations and were very willing to listen to whatever feedback we might offer. You have to understand that I was the equivalent of a second lieutenant in my own organization and I was interacting with a senior colonel of another organization. The exemplary cooperation I saw between those two American national defense establishments was key to smoothly advancing America’s interests.

*Q: Did the embassy take a lot of interest in your area? Did the ambassador travel up often? Or was it pretty much left to the three of you?*

REUTHER: The embassy exhibited a strong interest in our insurgency and political- military reporting. It would commission reports or ask for contributions to larger reporting projects. We would have some visitors, but I can only recall one ambassadorial visit. Leonard Unger was the ambassador. He had been ambassador since September 1967 and earlier served as the DCM in Bangkok from 1958-62. He had already met everybody in country during his long ambassadorial tour. The rumor around the embassy was that the ambassador’s long tour represented Washington’s general reluctance to move ambassadors in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. The argument was that this was a way of avoiding the prospect of public testimony before Congress upon reassignment. Ambassador Unger was a strong and knowledgeable ambassador, much beloved by his staff. His wife, Anne, was delightful and sympathetic to family problems overseas. The ambassador and his wife demonstrated the best professionalism and humanity of the career service.

*Q: He came in 1967 and you are there in 1971-73. He left post in late 1973. So, he was there 6 years.*

REUTHER: Then William R. Kintner came in for little over a year.

*Q: Besides the substantive political reporting and working with the American Air Force, did you do anything else? Any economic or commercial work?*

REUTHER: Northeast Thailand was an outpost of the Vietnam War, so economic and commercial work didn’t come to Udorn. Because the Northeast was the poorest part of Thailand, one focus was to monitor implementation of joint AID/Thai government rural development programs. One AID representative was stationed in almost each of our Northeast provinces. Over the years AID program in the Northeast had been extensive and covered a number of development issues: finding new crops for the people to grow, and locating scarce water. Th

Northeast benefited from one of the best road-building programs in the world. The Thai were lucky there was any room left to grow any crops! The idea behind the road building was to make it possible for the most rural farmer to bring his crop to market and not lose revenue to a middleman.

*Q: Including feeder roads? I hope they were a different kind of feeder roads than we knew in Africa where they were very rough.*

REUTHER: By the early 1970s Thailand had an extensive feeder road network. Of course, the best roads linked the provincial capitals. The farther from the provincial capital, the more primitive the road. When we visited district-level offices along the Cambodian border, we often traveled unimproved, rutted laterite tracks. Passengers and vehicle were totally covered in dust by the time we reached our next stop.

*Q: Surely AID had a mechanism to report on its programs. What was the consulate's role?*

REUTHER: The high water mark of AID officers in the field had passed. For budgetary and other reasons, AID presence was shrinking; programs were turned over to Thai agencies, such as Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) of the Ministry of Interior. With our language skill, our regimen of visiting every province and acquainting ourselves with Thai officials, it was natural for the consulate to submit follow-up reporting from time to time on development issues. When we traveled to a province, we called on the governor and his immediate staff and, with that entrée, talked to the police or representatives of other Thai agencies.

Toward the end of my tour I recall reporting on Thai implementation of a program to provide up-country villages with water pumps. Despite the stereotype of Southeast Asia as lush jungle, northeast Thailand was almost a desert plateau, so, improving access to water was a important quality of life program. We found, in our trips to representative villages and the provincial headquarters, that the Thai program, administered out of Bangkok, was broadly based and evident in every province. A large number of the pumps, however, were broken and unrepaired. An interesting lesson in the complex process of modernization. The AID/Thai program sank the wells and provided the pumps. Overuse, misuse, or age rendered the equipment unusable after an interval and then village leaders were at a loss as to repairs. ARD had no maintenance or follow-up program.

I found this dilemma interesting because of the academic debate over initiative versus organization in any society. This debate was most succinctly stated in a common self-comparison between the American and German armies during World War II. The story paints a picture of the American GI dashing around Europe until his jeep breaks down. The American finds some gum, fixes the problem and dashes off. When the German vehicle breaks down, the Germans would sit by their vehicle and await the arrival of the organizational unit responsible for fixing vehicles. Well, what that means is that maintaining requirement is an acquired awareness. The Thai villager who had never dealt with much mechanical equipment was untrained, not incapable. In the end our suggestion was that the Thai water agency provide the village headman with a post card to call for help.

*Q: Reporting on insurgency, base-community relations, program monitoring, is there any other responsibility which was a priority with the consulate?*

REUTHER: One of the programs to which we contributed was USIA's International Visitor Program. At the height of the American Foreign Service presence in Thailand in the late 1960s we had three consulates, and a USIS library and an AID mission in almost every province. We became very familiar with Thailand. The embassy was always on the alert for highly talented people from all walks of Thai life. Our International Visitors Program gave us the opportunity to pick some of their best and brightest and provide them an opportunity to experience the United States, its people, institutions and history. The program was successful at recognizing talented Thai. Some Thai agencies saw our IV program as sort of a genius award sort of thing. If we choose one of the officers in their ministry, that was a boost to his career. The Interior Ministry, in particular, understood what the Americans were looking for, initiative, understanding, get-up-and-go, can-do attitude. The IV program paid enormous benefits for us both in helping the Thai understand the U.S. and in stimulating the Thai bureaucracies to select on the basis of talent.

*Q: So you were able to nominate people that you identified as you traveled around?*

REUTHER: Exactly, and because of our extensive travel, we met district officers or deputy district officers. So, you are talking about somebody 28 to 35 years of age who easily will be in the service of his country until age 60. In identifying talent so early, we built a reservoir of goodwill toward the United States. Of course, we also picked more senior officers, governors, deputy governors and program directors. I suppose the point is the high quality of our choices was a function of our contact with a broad range of the Thai people, not just the talent that might accumulate in a nation's capital.

*Q: How many districts were you involved with?*

REUTHER: I had seven, I think.

*Q: How many provinces?*

REUTHER: Oh, I'm sorry, my sector had seven provinces and probably 60 districts.

*Q: And there would be a governor as key officer in each province?*

REUTHER: Right. There were 72 provinces in Thailand at that time.

*Q: Were there Peace Corps volunteers in Thailand?*

REUTHER: Yes. Thailand hosted an extensive Peace Corps program. Thailand's was one of the largest programs that the Peace Corps ever had and I think it remains in the top five programs. As official Americans, we were instructed to stay away from the Peace Corps Volunteers. We certainly didn't need to turn to them for information on the local situation, we had our own very accessible official and unofficial sources. So, our contact with the Peace Corps volunteers was pretty much confined to Thanksgiving and Christmas when we would host an American party.

We invited the volunteers in for good food, good company and a long hot shower -- some of them had rather basic accommodations. Their programs were all quite interesting but out of our vision.

*Q: How about American missionaries?*

REUTHER: My next door neighbors in Udorn were an elderly American missionary couple, who arrived in Udorn in 1938! At that time they landed in Saigon, unloaded their vehicle and drove to Udorn. It wasn't until long after the war that you could drive into the northeast from Bangkok. They stayed in Udorn during World War II with the Thai partisans protecting them. The Japanese apparently did not bother them. Because of their long residence in the area, they had seen a significant change in Thailand's economy and had taught every Udorn governor English since the far recesses of history.

*Q: Were there any other consulates in Udorn?*

REUTHER: No. Americans were the only ones so crazy as to be out there. In all reality, the consulate's presence was a function of the fact that the subquarters of the 7/13th Air Force was on the Udorn base, as well as a fighter wing, and the Air America operation.

*Q: And that post was closed?*

REUTHER: Yes, just recently closed. One third of the population of Thailand and an increasingly dynamic economy just disappeared from American awareness. I can say that because Thailand did not have a national newspaper that covered the provinces as well as consulate reporting covered it.

*Q: If Udorn was a reporting outpost collateral to the Vietnam War... It was upcountry. I don't suppose there were any congressional visitors.*

REUTHER: In the two years I was there, no congressmen visited. When I worked refugee issues in the mid-1980s, I escorted a number of concerned congresspeople, such as Congresswoman Pat Schroeder. The Vietnam era was a different time in relations between Congress and State. The one congressional incident I had at the time was an encounter with Moose and Lowenstein.

*Q: They were a notable pair, staffers from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I believe?*

REUTHER: That's right. Richard Moose and James Lowenstein were staff investigators for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and by the early 1970s had a reputation with the Foreign Service. As I recall, when they visited in 1972 I was alone at the consulate. Tom Barnes and the other officer were traveling. A telephone call from the embassy's Political-Military Section alerted me that Moose and Lowenstein were in Thailand and might come to Udorn. I was to be polite, but not accommodate their rumored interest in entering the Thai Air Force base at Udorn. At issue for us was that the bases we were flying from in Thailand remained under the control of Thailand. We had no status of forces agreement. The RTG [Royal Thai Government] was in total charge. It would be a violation of the arrangements between the American and Thai governments

for me to assist Moose and Lowenstein to enter a Thai base.

The embassy's warning turned out to be correct. Moose and Lowenstein - I think this was 1972 - showed up in Udorn, came to the consulate and demanded that I gain them access to the Thai base and the American units it contained. They were not interested in being deflected from their task. I remember this conversation because I was threatened and insulted in ways that I had never previously experienced. The one threat that still rings in my ears was their threat to ruin my career, if they did not get their way. I may have been on my first tour in the Foreign Service, but I was a China scholar and I had heard stories in the hallways of congressional blacklists and the reality that Congress can and does destroy Foreign Service careers. What made the threat all the more believable was that you know that the highest levels of the State Department are not about to protect some first tour officer from congressional wrath. After the browbeating I took from Moose and Lowenstein, I was certain that my career was over. Others tried to cheer me up, but I lived with this fear for some weeks until nothing happened and I decided that I was too small a fish for them to waste their time on.

*Q: Was your reporting primarily to the embassy or directly to Washington?*

REUTHER: Our line of command went directly to the embassy and the embassy decided whether it would forward our reporting or include it into broader embassy reporting. I can't recall whether the embassy ever failed to pass on our reporting. On the other hand, there is what I call the distillation issue. My experience is serving -- in succession--an up country consulate (Udorn), an embassy political section, and then a Washington desk. What I saw in the course of three tours was that our beautiful 4-5 page reports on the insurgency situation in, say, Chaiyaphom province would be come a paragraph in the embassy's weekly report to the Department and distilled further into a mention about political stability in a report to the assistant secretary. You see the squeezing of information very quickly in that sort of situation. Direct reporting avoids some of this, if Washington is properly staffed, otherwise it just clogs the desks of the few Washington officers.

*Q: There is always a certain tension there depending on where you are sitting and at a particular time. Sometimes there are people in Washington who have been known to say that we want more and more information from the consulates, from the field, not filtered.*

REUTHER: If we wanted, we had a tool in the old airgram for which the distribution rules were different. The originating post designated the distribution on airgrams and sent them to whomever. But those were five or six pages of information that was of such detail it was only of interest to the Washington analytical community. The policy officer won't have the time to consume such detail.

*Q: Were there times when there were differences in the analysis of something between the consulate and the embassy?*

REUTHER: A few, mostly confined to the issue of the insurgency. The embassy's Development and Security Office seemed wedded to the Thai perception that everything was under control. In Udorn was Consul Tom Barnes with long experience in Vietnam and who claimed the honor of

having visited every district in the Northeast. So, we would report an ambush or guerrilla movement, some military activity, and the government in Bangkok would say it was no big deal. DS accepted the Thai evaluation and blocked our reporting and analysis that the Thai weren't doing enough in the field to hold these things down. Udorn reported that the Thai were not quite doing the military necessary, and perhaps actually avoiding the guerrillas in some areas. And, in fact, it was a fairly low-level insurgency that fed on peasant resentments but lacked a claim to nationalism. Insurgencies that do not have a nationalism appeal can be managed.

*Q: Where there was a difference in views, did you feel you could convey that through an airgram to Washington or was the embassy preventing that from happening?*

REUTHER: Because this transpired during the Vietnam War insurgency reporting was cable reporting. When Tom thought that the DS section was grievously wrong he would go to Bangkok and raise his objections in conference with the DS section and the ambassador. The ambassador had been there for a long time so as things tended to reoccur he had the awareness that perhaps we shouldn't always take the word of the Thai that everything was going okay. Like Tom, there were large numbers of Foreign Service officers with Vietnam experience who were willing to hear all sides of an issue. At stake in the intra-American discussion of the insurgency in Thailand was a cross-cultural issue about whether the Thai shared the American can-do attitude. Some argued the Thai were handling the situation, others argued that if the embassy didn't hold them to a can-do standard, then they will succumb to somebody who was more adept.

*Q: Was the Thai military quite strong within the country? What was the government system in Thailand at that time? Was it pretty centralized without much democracy?*

REUTHER: By contemporary standards the Thai Government in the early 1970s would rank low on anyone's 'freedom index.' The government was run by two military officers, Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphat Charusathien. There was no parliament, it had been disbanded at the start of the Vietnam war period. Factions based in the military controlled the country's political life. The key event in post-World War II Thai politics occurred when Sarit Thanerat, who ran the army, faced off in 1957 against another faction headed by Phao Sriyanon, which controlled the police. Sarit's success left the country with a military dominated government. The casual observer at the time could have seen a typical Latin American military run country.

*Q: Thailand in recent years has been extremely successful economically in exports. Had any of that begun to get underway during the time you were there in the early '70s?*

REUTHER: From the perspective of the consulate in Udorn most of that economic growth would come later. What we saw was the groundwork; the infrastructure projects; the tremendous road system; the various water projects; the development of human skills and dedicated administrative organizations to direct development resources. Japanese investment was just arriving. Thailand's economic blossoming was in the future. By the time I returned to Thailand for another tour ten years later, these economic seeds came to fruition.

One of the keys to later development was American spending on the Vietnam War in Thailand. This included the development of significant skills within the Thai population. For example, the

payroll section of the American Air Force unit on a Thai base might consist of an NCO and seven Thai, three or four of which the Air Force would have taken back to the United States and given further training in finance, financial management, statistics, accounting and related subjects. When the American military presence departed, we left a sophisticated, English speaking middle class. Our departure coincided with the Middle East oil embargo that placed vast amounts of wealth in the coffers of the oil producing countries. Companies with on contracts in the Middle East hired American-trained Thai as skilled overseas workers. So, vast numbers of Thai who worked for us at the up-country bases went to the Middle East for jobs as office workers or project managers.

*Q: Which was well paid.*

REUTHER: Well paid by Thai standards. When I went back to the northeast in 1985, I couldn't believe it. Streets were paved, new housing was going in, agricultural processing plants existed where there hadn't been any before. It was just totally different. But, again, all of this was in the future. When I was there first, it was a military run government, no parliament. Who could have predicted the consequences of the Thai students studying in the U.S. at the time, the increasing professionalization of the Thai bureaucracies established as counterparts to an American or international equivalent, the impact of Japanese investment, and the role of Thai self-confidence?

*Q: It sounds to me to sort of summarize, you had an unusually diverse and fascinating first tour in a country that was obviously very important to the United States at the time and in part of the country where a lot of interesting things were going on.*

REUTHER: I was fortunate that my interest in Asia brought me to Thailand under circumstances which exposed me to the U.S. military, AID programs, and humanitarian assistance. Subjects which would weave themselves in and out of my career for the next 25 years. In fact, two decades later I was working in the Pentagon and realized that the Air Force general I worked for was an F-4 pilot at Udorn at the time I was there. Starting from the same place, we both had full careers within our own professions and again came to work together. However anecdotal, this illustrates how intimately involved State and Defense are and should be.

Another illustration of Foreign Service and uniformed service cooperation in the field - and the resource differences at the time between our departments - was the "brick" that we carried in Udorn. Today we think nothing of lightweight cellular phones, but the early 1970s equivalent was the Motorola portable radio. Each of use in the Udorn consulate had such a portable radio and a recharging stand for its battery, issued to us by the American military. We were hooked into the U.S. command net at the Udorn base. This arrangement was necessary, not only to maintain 24-hour contact with our military, but also to overcome the unreliable Thai telephone system. The radio was literally the size and weight of a brick and uncomfortable to carry. At social occasions people would often set them down (together) resulting in a scramble to select the one that was beeping!

Let me say something of cross cultural communication and its application to problems on our side. My next tour was in the embassy Political Section and one of the things that we consistently did was use the ambassador's dinners as venues to introduce sub-Cabinet Thai officials to each

other. Many Thai bureaucrats worked similar issues but didn't professionally meet. So, we performed the function of acquainting Thai officials to each other. The American penchant for interagency meetings - a mark of the value we placed on policy coordination - is a value that the Vietnam War forced the Thai to adopt. Other bureaucracies simply didn't understand the value of coordination. Such dinner parties with their theme of coordination sounds nice of us, but we were just passing on hard-won lessons. One of my lessons from this first tour was the absolute need for liaison with the Air Force, the Agency, AID and with all the other organizations that were out there. You were part of a team.

*Q: Was it pretty much the Air Force rather than the Army or Navy?*

REUTHER: The Army had a small facility at Udorn, but not much of a presence.

*Q: So you finished your two-year tour in Udorn and then went down to the embassy in Bangkok. You didn't go up to Mexico City or to issue visas somewhere?*

REUTHER: My luck held. My DCM was very pleased with what we were doing up-country and he was quite willing to encourage personnel to make sure that my next tour was in the embassy political section.

*Q: You had home leave but no further training?*

REUTHER: That's right.

*Q: What sort of job did you have within the political section?*

REUTHER: The political section at that time was divided into two sections, external and internal reporting. The external reporting unit followed Thai attitudes towards Cambodia or ASEAN issues; Thailand's foreign policy stance, that sort of thing. There was even a China watcher. Bill Kushlis, myself, and a couple of other people were assigned to the internal reporting unit. We looked at domestic issues: we sought to identify who were the movers and shakers in the Thai system, the major political factions, and what were the personality and policy issues within the Thai bureaucracies. The Thai ministry of Interior was highly centralized and attractive to a talented Thai civil service. Because I already met a large number of Ministry of Interior officers up-country, it seemed natural to be in the internal section. My previous experience thus gave the embassy an advantage in working with the important Ministry of Interior.

I think my first few weeks in the Political Section were typical of Foreign Service political work. One of my early jobs was to write extensive political biographies on the main Thai players. I particularly remember writing on Air Vice Marshal Dawee Chunlasap. Biographic writing may not sound fascinating, but it is key to the skills of the Foreign Service. To write a bio, you have to investigate history as seen by those in the country where you are stationed. What was their view of history as they lived it and what did they take away from that experience? In Dawee's case, he was a young officer when World War II broke out. He was a member of the faction that associated itself with the United States. That faction prospered in the post-war world, vice the faction that allied with Japan. So, one quickly learns the basic lesson of diplomacy - if you don't

understand the other side's history, you will miss the common elements needed to build friendships and international consensus.

Within weeks of my return from home leave in the States, Thailand was in crisis. October 16, 1973 was a day I will never forget. Since early October, the Thai student union organized anti-government demonstrations in Bangkok protesting the lack of democracy. As was oft the case, the students and their leaders represented elite academic institutions. There was considerable popular support for the students. The public provided food and blankets during the student sit-in at a central park. Suddenly, that October day, it all went sour. Shooting started. Army units associated with the son of Prime Minister Thanom shot on student marchers, so it was a pretty messy business. For the embassy, this crisis raised a number of issues. We still had a major military presence, extensive commercial interests, and a large American community. We needed to know what was going on and we needed to protect American interests without meddling in an internal Thai matter. At the time I supervised the Political Section's internal reporting unit. Our first task was the same as any media journalist, get the story and get it in the hands of our Washington leadership with dispatch so that the Department could make the policy determinations. We had officers from every section of the embassy working in our crisis center or out on the street during the gunfire. I remember one of the military attachés put on this loud Hawaiian shirt and had one for his son, and the two of them got into his radio-equipped car and went to where the shooting was. They would pose as two lost tourists, poke around a little bit, and then return to the car and radio in what they saw. About 150 people were massacred and many more injured. It was just one mess, just incredible. Everything was rumored, and we had to chase down every rumor. We had to keep vacationing GIs and American tourists out of harm's way. The consular section people called hotels to pass the word and be alert to missing tourists. We ran a 24-hour operation for days.

*Q: As a result of that the government fell?*

REUTHER: The government fell. Thanom and Praphat had to leave. There was no way they could recoup the loss. The king moved against them and they flew off to Taiwan -- an interesting destination for these two.

*Q: And the new government?*

REUTHER: Sanya Thammasakdi, a senior member of the judiciary, conservative and close to the King, headed the new government. It was a very difficult time for Thai authorities and for the embassy. We had 42,000 Air Force personnel in the country. Washington's concern was the change of government's impact on our troop presence. As Vietnam wound down the White House had its hands full, and was sensitive to congressional reaction. The image of having fought in Vietnam to thwart the paradigm of dominos falling to the communists and then getting kicked out of Thailand by a democracy movement was a nightmare for some. I understand that Secretary Kissinger and Ambassador Unger spoke often. There was an ambivalence to the protesters' attitudes toward the U.S. On one hand we were accused of supporting the previous regime; on the other we were the paragon of democracy. In the meantime we were reporting everything we could uncover on attitudes toward the U.S.

In reporting the coup events and their aftermath, my internal affairs unit competed with the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), another USG agency, which was sending Washington translations of the local Thai press, a source that was a little flamboyant, if not misleading, at that time. We were under great pressure to transmit our reporting cables and beat FBIS's translations to Washington. Rapid composition, with balance, and covering the appropriate subjects; that's what the Foreign Service teaches. The absence of balanced reporting leaves Washington in a difficult policy situation. I mean, we literally had the impression that the Secretary's office would call the ambassador and say, "What is this we read in the Thai press that the Americans are going to be thrown out, or the Thai government can't respond, etc." For weeks after the coup, Washington's sensitivities were such that the political section was chained to subjects FBIS reported and driven to beat FBIS deadlines. That went on for about three months before sanity finally prevailed.

*Q: The FBIS bureau was in Bangkok?*

REUTHER: Yes, FBIS was one of a number of offices in Bangkok that made the embassy the second largest mission in the world at that time. Because Bangkok was a transportation hub across the Pacific and from Europe, the embassy encompassed all the State Department's regional officers, payroll, courier, and medical. As well, we had a large State/USIA representation, an enormous AID contingent, and an extensive military contingent. An embassy performs many functions and often hosts a variety of federal agencies. In our case, when all assigned staff was counted, Bangkok was the second largest embassy in the world. Cairo was the largest at that time.

*Q: And the ambassador during your time in Bangkok was?*

REUTHER: Ambassador Unger was still there when I first returned to Bangkok for my second tour. But Vietnam was winding down and he was eager for another assignment. The issue of who would be the next American ambassador became an important psychological element in post-coup Thai thinking. I fundamentally believe that the Thai-American relationship was sound and family close. Since World War II, we had been through a lot together, but the coup brought new actors to the Thai stage that didn't share this history or camaraderie. A new American ambassador was coming at a time when the Thai were feeling very sore from this bruising that they had inflicted upon themselves and they looked to the U.S. for support and encouragement of their new democratic direction. American attitudes toward the coup were important because many young Thai leaders and the Thai academic community were once students in the U.S. So American approval was important, especially because no one was certain what the Thai military would do in the wake of the change in government. The new government was not necessarily effective. Strikes and demonstrations continued, inconveniences mounted. The new government was supposed to be kind, not effective. That is what Sanya was noted for, his judicial equanimity, Buddhist scholar in his spare time, close to the king, somebody who would just stand there and by virtue of his presence make people feel good and sit down. But, the insecurities grew. Anyway, the Thai public, the students, the government and the military looked for a sign from the United States. The Thai public, the students, the newly vocal commentators wanted that sign to be an approving one.

Into this uncertain environment appeared a new, politically appointed ambassador with a military background. Many Thai saw this as a chilling American commentary on their recent overthrow of a military government. The ambassador would have to handle considerable skepticism about the direction of American policy.

*Q: This was in the Nixon administration.*

REUTHER: That's right.

*Q: William Kintner, who probably had some Vietnam experience?*

REUTHER: Ambassador Kintner was a 1940 West Point graduate who served until he retired from active duty in 1961. I believe he was an artillery officer, because he was hard of hearing. After his retirement he held an academic appointment at the University of Pennsylvania's Foreign Policy Research Institute which some in Bangkok in 1973 considered a conservative think tank overly concerned with cold war issues. The ambassador was co-author with Robert Strausz-Hupé and others on a 1959 book entitled Protracted Conflict: A Challenging Study of Communist Strategy. The eyes of the moderate Thai reformers saw a cold war warrior, with a military background, coming to Thailand just when the civilians had thrown the military out. Some Thai groups interpreted his appointment as a sign that the United States wanted the military to come back. Given the fluid situation in Thailand, suspicions of the new leaders made the ambassador's tour a delicate and difficult assignment. The ambassador's image became a diplomatic problem for the smooth execution of American foreign policy. In this case, the fact that Ambassador Kintner was politically-appointed worked to his disadvantage, because it made the Thai focus on his background and give consideration to what he 'represented.' A career Foreign Service officer would have been more 'neutral' in local eyes because an FSO represented not his personal background and political mentors, but his country. Unfortunately, the ambassador had other personal characteristics that contributed to a rocky job performance. In fact, his tour was cut short. We understood that the Royal Thai Government signaled that his presence was not beneficial to a continued productive relationship.

*Q: That is pretty unusual.*

REUTHER: It is extremely unusual. Thailand was never a Western colony and had the self-confidence to bend with the times - up to a point. But, in fact, the ambassador had seriously erred in the Royal presence. His conduct in other ways was very frustrating for Thai officials. For example, as an artillery officer he was deaf in one ear and therefore he spoke in a tone of voice loud enough so that he could hear himself; that meant he was shouting. So, dinner parties at the ambassador's residence -- which were the vehicles for building friendship, looking over the talented officials, gauging the direction of Thai policies -- became painful occasions as the ambassador sat at his end of the table speaking in a dominating voice. You couldn't talk to your neighbor under these circumstances.

The background to these events, of course, was that Thailand was starting a new uncharted course into the stormy waters attendant with the reconstitution of parliamentary democracy. As an officer in the internal reporting unit of the Political Section, my responsibilities were to

monitor and analyze the student movement and the new Parliament. Because of the fluid political environment of the time, this was by far the choicest portfolio. My portfolio put me in the unusual position of having CIA colleagues come to me for information or introductions to the student activists!

*Q: He also had a difficult act to follow, Len Unger having been there six years or so.*

REUTHER: I'm not certain the issue is whether Ambassador Unger was a difficult act to follow as a politically appointed ambassador, or whether Ambassador Kintner was just the wrong person with the wrong talents at the wrong time. When he arrived we were looking forward to easing his transition with briefing papers on the culture and politics of Thailand and whatever else it took. It was clear early on, however, that he did not perceive the American Foreign Service professionals as part of his team. This attitude cut him off from our feedback. And things began to snowball. When your Thai contacts tell you, beg you, not to be invited to the ambassador's residence, this was terribly, terribly unusual. For their own reasons the Thai weren't even willing to sit through a normal rotation and they actually came to us in a very covert way and asked for relief.

*Q: It sounds like some of these problems could have been anticipated?*

REUTHER: I suppose it depends on your focus. Most politically-appointed ambassadors are chosen for domestic reasons, not foreign policy reasons. To that extent you are gambling that the receiving country has the stability and maturity to allow you to ignore its needs while fulfilling your domestic needs. In this case, Kintner would have had less of a problem if the military regime had not been overthrown. When he was nominated for the position and approved by Congress, the needs of the Nixon Administration may have been to 'shore up' our image in Congress and Southeast Asia in the wake of our slow withdrawal from Vietnam. It is ironic that if we were in Vietnam to support the forces of democracy, those very democratic forces in Thailand complicated the job of Ambassador Kintner.

On the other hand, Ambassador Kintner had other traits that complicated his tour and discomfited the Thai. I later learned that a visiting delegation from Pennsylvania questioned whether Ambassador Kintner had the proper disposition for this position. The DCM, Ed Masters, kept this information to himself and, in fact, took the opposite tack with us. He told us privately and in staff meetings that we had a great opportunity to demonstrate our professionalism to a politically-appointed ambassador. We were excited to have this opportunity to demonstrate the talents of the Foreign Service. Masters was smart.

*Q: Were you there when the new ambassador came?*

REUTHER: Yes, that would be Charlie Whitehouse who came down from Vientiane.

*Q: And he was quite different?*

REUTHER: Ah, Ambassador Whitehouse was different from anybody else I had ever seen at that time. He seemed from a different era. His father was a Foreign Service officer. The

ambassador was born in Paris, I believe. He struck me as patrician, correct, old school.

The arrival of Charles Whitehouse changed the atmospherics in terms of the embassy's relationship with the Thai government and society and within the embassy. By then, the embassy and the Thai had gone through quite a bit together between the coup in October, 1973 and his arrival in late 1975. I left shortly after he arrived.

We had gone through one or two parliamentary elections. The public regarded the Sanya Government as an indecisive civilian government. On the other hand, Thai reformers and knowledgeable elites looked to us for that welcome hug that everything was going to be okay. If Ambassador Unger knew everybody, Ambassador Whitehouse started at square one. Ambassador Whitehouse ran a more formal mission and rebuilt a more formal relationship with the Thai government. In retrospect, I think that his strategy was helpful at the time--let's start correctly and become friendly later on. But the relationship went through additional strains at that time.

In the spring of 1975, Saigon fell. The Thai were fairly confident that they would survive, they had survived the Japanese and weren't too worried. But shortly after the fall of Saigon was the *USS Mayaguez* incident. Because the United States ordered armed aircraft to fly from Thai bases and attempt to rescue the crew, many Thai saw our response as a blatant violation of Thai sovereignty. The civilian government at that time was upset with the United States. Concerned about the fragility of democratic government in Thailand, the civilian administration saw this as an incident in which it was made to look impotent and ineffective. Thai democratic forces were trying to strengthen their case with their public and were concerned we were undercutting them. There were some in the embassy who shared the Thai concerns.

*Q: The military had not tried to come back into power yet?*

REUTHER: That's right, they had not. That would come later. There would be another confrontation between the students and the military in 1976. That confrontation forced some student leaders to join the guerrillas in the bush. Later, the insurgency collapsed. The students were uncomfortable in the jungle, the Chinese withdrew their support, the Vietnamese were occupied elsewhere and the insurgency always lacked a claim to Thai nationalism.

*Q: You mentioned you went to the consulate in Songkhla. When was that?*

REUTHER: That was the spring of 1975. There was an opening because the incumbent was due long postponed leave and transfer. One of the values of a small constituent post is to provide training for young officers. The DCM's invitation to gain a little management experience at this one-officer consulate was a rare honor. The Songkhla consulate had political and economic reporting responsibilities - there was a Moslem based ethnic insurgency along the Malaysian border - and it coordinated USIA programs with local universities. It was a fascinating 10 weeks.

*Q: Now, that is in southern Thailand in the elephant's trunk.*

REUTHER: That is right. The temporary sojourn to Songkhla turned out to be more exciting

than my young family, complete with infant daughter, originally thought because we were there when Saigon fell on April 30, 1975. At the time the embassy informed me that Washington had announced we had evacuated all the people for whom we were responsible out of Saigon. So, if anybody showed up on the beach, we were not to approach these refugees, make any contact or otherwise communicate to the Thai that we had any responsibility towards these people. The issue wasn't that we were just washing our hands of the Vietnamese, but there obviously were going to be large numbers of different kinds of people arriving and we didn't want to close our options, if you will, by creating the presumption with the Thai Government that we would take care of each and every refugee. So, my orders were to stay away from them.

Within three days, boatloads of people began arriving. Shortly, there were large numbers of people on the Thai beaches. My instructions not to become involved didn't prevent me from enlisting the assistance of the local missionaries, a couple of Americans and a couple of Swiss. The missionaries had already taken the initiative to minister to the humanitarian needs of this refugee population in the makeshift camps the Thai arranged. I indicated that, if the missionaries came across any identifying papers or information that the Vietnamese wanted to pass on, I would take them. For about three weeks, list of names and U.S. government identification numbers dominated reporting cables from Songkhla to the embassy. Fairly dull reporting compared to the insurgency in the northeast or parliamentary elections, but my DCM later said that Songkhla's reporting played a crucial role in focusing Washington on the fact that we had residual responsibilities toward these people and that the numbers involved were significant.

*Q: Did a number of those eventually come to the United States?*

REUTHER: I would presume so. I had moved on by then. My reporting, indicating that there were Vietnamese employees in the refugee stream, was the first such concrete evidence. That reporting contributed to the establishment of a refugee program.

*Q: In the ten weeks you were in Songkhla you also did the kind of thing you did in the northeast earlier?*

REUTHER: Yes, a lot of traveling to the provinces, talking to the police, governors. There was an ethnic Malay insurgency in this area. At the peak of the Thai dynasty's power and just before the Europeans arrived, Thailand had expanded down the peninsula with the result that the last four Thai administered provinces were predominately ethnic Malay. An insurgency, with antecedents in the communist anti-British emergency, continued to sputter. Our interest was the impact of the insurgency on political and economic developments, Thailand's modernization, and the effectiveness of the Thai bureaucracy in delivering services.

*Q: Your consular district went down to the border of Malaysia?*

REUTHER: That's right. The consular district stretched from Nakhon Si Thammarat to Pattani in the south. Tin mining was a major industry and tourism was growing. One of the Democrat Party parliamentarians that I had met in Bangkok represented a province in the Songkhla consular district and we continued our close relationship when I was in Songkhla. As I prepared to depart Thailand at the end of my tour, he presented me with a large painting in appreciation of

the year and a half we had worked together. I was very pleased to see that, twenty years later, he became the prime minister. At that time we were both young men starting our respective careers. In the early 1970s although the Democrat Party had the largest block in the Parliament and was the oldest organized political party in Thailand, no one believed it could come to power. There was serious animosity between it and the military. There are two lessons here. First, every country experiences political change over time and the internal dynamics may move in unexpected directions. Second, the United States is well served if the Foreign Service has the resources to take advantage of the future by meeting another country's potential leaders before they get to the capital. It seems to me that, in countries of particular interest to the U.S., the Foreign Service ought to have a core of officers who have the appropriate language skills and who experience a country in their first or second tour and then return ten years later. So, you would have a political officer, or an economic officer, who was an old acquaintance of someone who is now the minister of finance, etc. There is no better way of creating acceptance for American policy than a familiar face. Friends are cultivated, not commanded into existence.

*Q: I think your experience was good and significant but also unique to have essentially your first five years devoted to one country with language training, and service in a consulate and then the embassy.*

REUTHER: I think what you are seeing is that I was the beneficiary of some excellent senior officers who took seriously their roles as mentors. I remember at the end of my tour in Udon writing to Personnel in Washington saying, "Gee, I would like to stay here. I'd like the job opening up in the political section," and Washington not being encouraging at all. I mentioned this to the DCM and he made it happen. He also provided the Songkhla opportunity. When I later assumed supervisory responsibilities, I included in my vision mentoring as well as directing.

There were many lessons I took from my first two tours. I was struck by the consequences of congressional antagonism toward the Foreign Service reflected in our strange financial situation. The diplomat's skill is the skill of developing a human relationship, friendship. Friends are cultivated, not ordered up. There isn't a society that doesn't associate food with friendship -- except when it comes to performing the business of the American public. What I am thinking of are embassy representation funds. You have to understand that we had a 13 person political section and our entire representational budget, for the political section of the second largest American embassy, was \$1500. For comparison, each officer in the New Zealand embassy's political section had \$1500 for his own representation. Yes, **each** New Zealand officer had the same amount of money allocated to the entire American 13 person political section. Our individual share of the section's allocation was insignificant, meaning to perform our employer's requirements of developing contacts and meeting our host government counterparts, we would have to pay for it from our meager junior officer pay. If Congress's paradigm that Foreign Service officers were independently wealthy were true, then this parsimony would be understandable. But that stereotype died years ago and was but an embarrassing hardship for the vast majority of the junior officers whose background was middle class, state university.

I solved my problem by teaming with a colleague at the New Zealand embassy. He had representational funds, but didn't have Thai language. We both had responsibility for following parliamentary issues. He would pay for the lunch, I would chat with the Thai parliamentarians,

and then we would share notes later. We would write up one set of notes and file them with our respective capitals. But, it still seems strange to me that the New Zealand government paid for my contact work in Bangkok.

*Q: At the end of your time in Thailand you went back to the United States. Is there anything else you would like to say about that period in Bangkok or Thailand?*

REUTHER: No, I think we have covered everything.

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*Q: Is there anything else you would like to discuss about your time in Taiwan? If not, maybe we should go on to your next assignment, which was Chief of the Regional Anti-Piracy Unit, Refugee Section, American embassy, Bangkok. That got you back to Thailand, but that is an unusual Foreign Service assignment to be involved with pirates.*

REUTHER: More than unusual. Many Foreign Service assignments stress reporting or negotiating skills, rarely do people have program management opportunities. In this case there was a massive outpouring of Vietnamese starting in 1978-79. Actually most of those people were Chinese, although perhaps second generation. In any event, in the eyes of the Vietnamese government, these refugees were Chinese and Hanoi wanted to get rid of its Chinese population. As a consequence, large numbers of people fled into the Gulf of Siam, only to be plundered by the Cambodian/Thai/Malaysian fishermen in the area. Like the refugees at the time of the fall of Saigon in 1975, some in this refugee population had connections to the United States. In any event, the death rate, rape, robbery of the refugees was unacceptable. The U.S. felt a responsibility to act. AID invited Fred Cluny, who was later killed in Chechnya (former USSR territory), to design a program to halt these deprecations. He was a brilliant man and really understood humanitarian relief programs. Congressman Solarz, whom I knew from Taiwan, organized congressional funding for the program.

Cluny's idea was to work on a regional basis with the Thai, Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian governments to centralize crime reporting. One of the legal problems was that each country's judicial system was handicapped if the victim ultimately landed in another country. If we were to identify and bring perpetrators to justice, we needed the cooperation of the countries surrounding the Gulf of Siam. My job was to use the prestige and resources of the USG to facilitate that interregional cooperation among the respective governments. I contacted Thai, Malaysian, and Singaporean foreign and interior ministry officials in pursuit of our objectives.

The core of the program was an attempt to professionalize and strengthen Thai police forces to handle this criminal outbreak. My liaison with Thai interior ministry officials, many of whom I knew from ten years previously, was as the blocker for the quarterback. The key member of the team was a DEA agent who first came to Thailand as a Peace Corps volunteer. An absolutely brilliant man, Tex Learly had both the language skills and the law enforcement professionalism to gain the active cooperation of the Thai police.

*Q: Was there a narcotics element to this?*

REUTHER: Not necessarily, except that Tex was the absolute perfect person for this assignment. He originally came to Thailand as a Peace Corps volunteer, acquired excellent Thai, and enjoyed the country. He later went into police work and DEA. I think while with DEA he had an assignment to Thailand, which he also found attractive. So, when they were looking around for someone who understood police work, had excellent Thai (he could even speak the royal vocabulary), and would understand the needs of the police, his name surfaced. By the time I arrived, Tex was already there. We also had a contractor, Steve Kraus, a young man from Minnesota with extensive understanding of refugee issues and programs, who completed the team. His enthusiasm, knowledge of Thailand, and familiarity with refugee issues was a great addition to the program. My job was liaison with the Thai civil authorities to see that the Thai Ministry of Interior supported this program.

Now you have to understand a little bit of Thai history. Remember we earlier discussed the student demonstrations that sparked the October 1973 coup? One of the consequences of that public uprising was, even though it was the army shooting down the students, the public burned down every police station in Bangkok. Public enmity for the police has a history. The police had lost the coup of 1956. The penalty they paid was that military officers were assigned as heads of the police from that time. The military officers had no interest in suppressing corruption and building a positive public image of the police. So, by 1973 the police had a reputation for venality and corruption. When the public had the opportunity, it burned down the police stations. In protecting the boat people by supporting the police, one is running against the grain of benign neglect into which the police had fallen. So, my job was to liaison with the Ministry of Interior as a symbol of our interest in encouraging a professionalization of the police. There were two police forces actually, the Border Patrol Police and the regular national constabulary.

*Q: And in this program we were working with both?*

REUTHER: Yes. One of the advantages that I brought to the program was that, because of my previous time in Thailand working the northeast and visiting every district chief and every governor, etc., all those officials I had known ten years earlier had moved up in the Thai system. They were now at the assistant secretary level in the Ministry of Interior. So I could walk in and have immediate rapport with a ranking government official. Of course, the program would have to survive on its own merits but at least one got in the door. In fact I have always thought that one of the things that the Foreign Service should aspire to in these major countries is a situation where people come in as young officers, go on to other assignments, come back as middle level officers, and finally return as senior embassy officers. That way you have your friends moving up with you or you move up with them and you have instant rapport. It certainly made a difference in this case.

So, what we were trying to do was to provide training, encouragement, and political cover to our interest in protecting Vietnamese boat people.

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*Q: Today is October 10. Dave, you have been talking about your responsibilities as Chief of the*

*Anti-piracy Unit in Bangkok from 1985-87. We have talked about the boat people and the pirate threat to them that you dealt with. What were some of the other things that your responsibilities evolved into during your time in Bangkok?*

REUTHER: The anti-piracy program was enormously successful and drew the attention of Ambassador Bill Brown. He and Lacey Wright, who was the counselor of embassy for Refugee Affairs at that time, decided that the embassy needed to have a better handle on what we called refugee protection issues. Over the years since the end of the Vietnam War a large number of refugees flowed into Thailand. Extensive camps were established as the international community dealt first with humanitarian subsistence issues and then resettlement questions. In the meantime, any number of things happened from time to time in these camps--general security issues, for example. There were camps on the Cambodian border where rival political groups would clash. While the UNHCR was responsible for organizing services to all the camps in Thailand, the ambassador felt that the embassy should take a more active role and independently evaluate the situation. So, we took our little group and expanded it from anti-piracy, a very specific issue, to being the office in charge of refugee protection.

*Q: Did you work with not only Thai authorities but I suppose with UNHCR and some of the other agencies?*

REUTHER: Exactly, there was a tremendous expansion in our contact work and all the agencies we dealt with, both UN agencies and NGOs, that is, the volunteers in the camp who provided the sanitation facilities, the training, the health care, etc. The facilities being provided at each camp varied with how long the camps had been in Thailand. For example, the Vietnamese camps along the Cambodian border were fairly sophisticated by this time. The NGOs in these camps had been there for years and were very familiar with their work. But, still it was a difficult time. We woke up one morning to hear that one of the camps had been mortared. We dashed down there, about a two and a half-hour drive to the Cambodian border, to check it out. We were there to play detective: who did this? What does it represent? Who do we need to pressure to do a better job? What we found out was the incident involved RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade) rounds rather than mortar rounds. My contribution was to dig up pieces of shrapnel to bring to our military colleagues so they can identify the weaponry and start identifying whom might be responsible.

On the other hand, there were camps in the northern part of Thailand, in the Chiang Mai area, which represented Laotian groups that were coming over as the Communists were taking power or as the insurgencies of which they were a part began to fall apart. Most of these people were Hmong tribesmen. The Thai were quite eager that each camp represented a separate ethnic group. It was easier for them to manage. The Thai Government, of course, also was concerned about its security. Harboring refugees could seem like a political challenge to Thailand's neighbors. The Thai authorities were torn between their international responsibility to care for and resettle the refugees, i.e., making being a refugee attractive, and their self-interest in closing the border. There was a constant struggle between us and the NGOs and the Thai on that very issue. As I was joking with somebody recently, one of the disasters we had in the anti-piracy program was that a Vietnamese refugee once won a million dollars in the California lottery. This was instantaneously broadcast to Vietnam and for four weeks we had this spike in exits. It just drove the Thai crazy because they are very anti-Vietnamese, they didn't want any more

Vietnamese, they didn't want anything done that would encourage Vietnamese. They were willing to be a way-station for those people who legitimately could go on to other countries, but they did not see themselves as a settlement place of last resort.

*Q: Do you recall the order of magnitude figures on the refugees in Thailand at that time?*

REUTHER: We are talking about 100,000 people in ten camps or so. One of the things we tried to do to stem the flow and show the Thai that we were on their side was to start up the ODP, the orderly departure program. This was a program where we would put people in Saigon to interview Vietnamese who identified themselves as possibly having relatives in the United States. This way people did not have to make the hazardous journey or at least already knew they did not have a good resettlement case.

*Q: These would be American consular officers who would do that?*

REUTHER: That is right.

*Q: They would fly over?*

REUTHER: They would fly into Saigon where there was a small office. But, the Vietnamese were not eager to admit that their people were leaving so we were torn by our promises to the Thai to cut down on the number of people coming in and using the ODP program to do that, and the Vietnamese desire not to admit that anybody wanted to leave. So the Vietnamese would try to close down our program or hobble it or not cooperate and the Thai were always watching the numbers saying we were not moving enough cases, and hence continuing to encourage the land and sea exodus. This became a very important issue between the two countries and was one of the issues that the ambassador spent a good deal of his time on, briefing the Thai Government on our efforts.

*Q: Besides the sensitivities involving the Thai people and government and the Vietnamese government, there were also domestic political sensitivities in the United States. Were their congressional visitors? Did you get involved in that debate of how many refugees we should accept and what our responsibilities were?*

REUTHER: Those kinds of issues were generally fought out in Washington. But we would often get congressional delegations that wanted to go visit the camps. I recall one particular time Congresswoman Schroeder was in country and wanted to visit the camps. While we all know there is domestic criticism of domestic congressional people traveling, the schedule Congresswoman Schroeder set for us was pretty demanding. And she was inquisitive. I remember sitting in this one small house before we reached the main camp and my Thai assistant is translating from Cambodian to Thai and I translated the Thai for the Congresswoman. It was a little bit slow, but everyone enjoyed it. Of course travel conditions to the camps were basic, Toyota Land Cruisers over dirty, dust blown roads. But there were people like Congressman Solarz and Congresswoman Pat Schroeder who made those trips.

*Q: That was certainly a very important part of the end of the Southeast Asia wars, the handling*

*of the refugees. There was obviously a very important human dimension, but also an international geopolitical one.*

REUTHER: Yes, and the Thai were very focused. The Thai National Security Council and its leader Colonel Prasong gave a high priority to the refugee issue in Thai-American relations. Colonel Prasong became NSC director when the refugees first arrived. He was still there in 1987 when I left because he made it a personal pledge that he wouldn't move from that job because he was the person who received the assurances from the United States that Thailand would not be left holding the refugee bag. So, rather than move on to other jobs, he stayed there as the institutional memory of that pledge.

*Q: We are in 1996 now, do you know what the general situation of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in Thailand is today?*

REUTHER: There still are camps but I must say I haven't dealt with the issue in recent years.

*Q: Anything else about your third time in Thailand that we should cover?*

REUTHER: A couple of little anecdotes about what it means to be a professional officer and how you handle friends in a changing circumstance. With the end of the Vietnam War, the intimate relationship that we had with the Thai had to shift to a new footing. We discussed earlier that a political appointee ambassador in the 1970s was unable to make the transition to a more equal relationship. Ambassador Brown, however, was quite adept at using all his talents to get himself well and favorably known with a government that had seen all kinds of American ambassadors over the years. I remember when he first arrived in country, one of the things he did was go to Saraburi where the Thai have their Army parachute school and jumped out of a plane with a local group. Now, he is an former Marine and knows his business, but it was an important little adjustment which then took care of that whole segment of the Thai politic, the military. From then on, he gained their respect and received priority consideration for American interests.

The ambassador took very seriously his responsibility to inform Americans about events in Thailand and the issues the embassy faced. He was always available to brief groups, whether tourist, business or academic. He encouraged his other officers to make themselves available if he couldn't. Once we had a congressional delegation coming through Bangkok that very explicitly had said it was on a shopping tour and didn't want to be bothered. The ambassador just was not going to let an opportunity to brief pass by. We met the delegation out at the airport with one of these tourist vans, a nice well-appointed bus with a PA system. The ambassador stood on the steps of the van as it was coming into Bangkok. It take between 35-40 minutes to drive from the airport to downtown Bangkok and he took that time to welcome the congressional delegation, offer his embassy staff for anything they needed and then proceeded to give them a briefing on the Thai economic and political situation.

*Q: I can remember doing the latter, briefing a congressional group from the middle of a bus, but I never felt that my calling to serve my country required me to parachute out of an airplane, so I think Ambassador Brown was a special kind of person to be able to do that.*

**ROGER ERNST**  
**Mission Director, USAID**  
**Bangkok (1973-1976)**

*Roger Ernst was born in New York in 1924. He graduated from Williams College in 1948 and the National War College in 1956. He served as an overseas Captain from 1943 to 1947. His career with USAID included assignments in India, Taiwan, Korea, Ethiopia and Thailand. Mr. Ernst was interviewed in 1997 by Arthur Lowrie.*

ERNST: 17 years. I direct transferred to Thailand. And the theory was, the Ernst magic of terminating the AID program. It didn't work. The war went on with such intensity that there was no predisposition to make the move to close the door, go from grants to soft loans. Secondly, the Thai are smart as hell about how they handle relationships. And outfooted me all the time. Not unpleasantly, not unpleasantly. The program has been terminated subsequently, I was there '73, '76, during the democratic interregnum between a military oligarchy and another one. When I arrived, I had as my Ambassador my old friend Len Unger, with whom I had worked when he was in SAE and in EUR, and I'd been in the Pentagon. He had dated my sister before I knew him. I had visited with him in Taipei, when he was Ambassador there. Len and Ann. Charm, to work for. Ed Masters was the DCM, later Ambassador in Dacca and in Jakarta, a close friend, I just talked to Ed on the phone ten days ago. Links. He went for me ten days ago to a briefing by Ambassador Sasser, who is the U.S. Ambassador to China, 'cause I couldn't go, was in Washington. I got my notes that I've shared with Harvey here at USI.

Then we had Bill Kintner, came out of the Army, worked in the Pentagon in Nelson Rockefeller's OCB, Operations Co-ordination Board. After his foreign service tour in Bangkok he went to the University of Pennsylvania, the head of their foreign policy "think tank." Difficult guy to work for, a little self-important and know-it-all. But he was right on the issues. When the Thai asked us to leave Thailand, after the Shanghai communiqué, the Thai felt very exposed. If the Americans are going to make peace, make friends with the Chinese, the Thai said, "We're their neighbors. We've got a common border, you don't. We've got to have a shift in our diplomatic relations. And the way we can show the Chinese that we are sincere in their friendship, and we don't want their boot in our country, is to tell the Americans to get out of here." We had a visit from the then Deputy Secretary of Defense, a fellow from Texas named... I'll think of it. And we briefed him, around the table, in the bubble room. And Kintner went around the table, very openly, he said "Political Counselor, Head of the Military Assistance Group, Economic Counselor, Head of the AID mission, what do you think about the proposition that the Thai are serious about asking us to leave militarily?" And we each said "Yes, we hear it from our contacts. And the Deputy Secretary of Defense didn't believe it. He went home and got Kintner sacked. He was a political appointee. For the wrong reasons, Kintner was right. Kintner had an arrangement made with the Thai that, if we were prepared to have an outfit there out of uniform, could be military, DOD contractor, to listen, an elite operation, it would be okay to listen to Lop Nor and the Russian...

*Q: Who was Lop Nor?*

ERNST: Lop Nor is the Chinese missile testing station in Western China, Sinkiang. This was a station up in the northeast of Thailand, and it was a great big ostentatious place. Fences, guys with guns, soldiers, the Thai said "Hey, you want to do your listening. Put 'em in civilian clothes, contractor, we'll do it. But we don't want your military, we'll take your Military Attaché, we don't want a lot of military stuff, the war in Vietnam is over for us. We've honored our obligation to you. " It goes back to, it was interesting, back to World War II, Mr. Churchill tried to keep the Thai out of the United Nations as charter members, because he said they had obliged the Japanese by letting them walk through to Singapore, and if they had fought the Japanese, the British could have held Singapore for another two months, and it would have changed the dynamics of the war in Southeast Asia, in Malaysia. And the U. S. Government prevailed, got the Thai a seat as a charter member of the UN. The Thai remembered that when we went back to them and said "We want facilities to mount the war in Vietnam." The Thai said "Yes, we owe you one. For what you did in '45" Little important note of history. But they were caught, because we hadn't told the Japanese, we hadn't told the Chinese, we hadn't told the Thai, we hadn't told any of our friends, about the Kissinger discussions with Chou En-lai, and Nixon's trip to Shanghai, left them all in the bloody lurch, and Kintner got the backwash of this from the then Deputy Secretary of Defense. I had known Kintner, we got along fine. And then he was succeeded by an absolutely super guy, Charlie Whitehouse, who was a smooth professional. My pleasure, I interviewed Charlie for this Oral History Program out at his place in Virginia.

*Q: Didn't he become Deputy Secretary?*

ERNST: Assistant Secretary of Defense, ISA, or Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, ISA. He may have been in the Department, but his official job was in Defense. He's retired and is out in Virginia. Super guy. Everything marched along, support.

There had been some bad feelings between AID and the embassy when I arrived in Bangkok. I routinely would go to the Ambassador's staff meetings, Unger and I went to the Econ counselor's meetings, the Econ counselor came to my staff meetings, sat next to me, we were friends, we put on an act of friendship, the staff knew they were to work together. We all work for one Ambassador, and I was insistent on that in all my assignments. The Thai assignment was the least satisfying, in the sense that they needed us the least, they had the most to work with, and it was the least pleasant conditions of life, because it's dirty, noisy, harassed, hot, humid. The countryside is lovely, but Bangkok is not a nice city to live in.

*Q: One thing that strikes me. It was a small program, 20 million dollars, but you had a staff of 500. How is that?*

ERNST: Left over.

*Q: Left over from bigger programs in the past.*

ERNST: One of my jobs was to bring that down. I think when I left there were 40. So I wasn't very popular.

*Q: 40 out of 500?*

ERNST: 40 Americans and maybe 100 Thai. We outplaced, I set up a program, everybody got outplaced that wanted to. We were ahead of the pack, so if they had done a good job I could give them a recommendation.

*Q: Is it unusual to have 16 years without a Stateside assignment? It wasn't so unusual in AID, was it?*

ERNST: I guess not. I didn't seek a Washington assignment, I didn't want it, really. I still don't. I went back from Thailand, and I had two years, '66 to '68. I spent a year with the Assistant Administrator of AID, who was in charge of the Technical Assistance Bureau.

**JAMES A. KLEMSTINE**  
**Thailand/Burma Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1973-1976)**

*James A. Klemstine was born in Pennsylvania in 1930. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1952. He served in the U.S. Army from 1952-1954 and received a master's degree from Yale University in 1953. Mr. Klemstine entered the Foreign Service in 1956, serving in Germany, the Soviet Union, Taiwan, and Korea. Mr. Klemstine was interviewed by Jeff Broadwater on April 15, 1993.*

*Q: What did you do?*

KLEMSTINE: Well, the first year I was sort of the economic officer, and then the second and third year... '74 to '76, I was deputy director. I went back into some political work at least for four or five months when the director was on a leave of absence for some training, I ran the office. That was a transition period between the end of the Vietnam war, and what was to be our new relationship with Southeast Asia. It was an era of uncertainty. It was an era of uncertainty in the Department what we were going to do, and it was an era of uncertainty among the Southeast Asians, especially after the North Vietnamese took over Saigon. The Thais were beginning to get nervous, to say the least. And then the Communists took over Cambodia and Laos, and they were suddenly on the border. What were we going to do, and what were the Thais going to do? In '74 the military government had been overthrown; Thailand sort of fluctuated between a democracy and the military. It had been overthrown after some student riots, and then they had two parliamentary elections. Again, this is vague because this is quite a long time ago. They had to form coalition governments because there were 20 some parties, and there was wavering in the government. Another question was, should the U.S. get out of its bases in Thailand, because we had about five or six bases, Air Force, and naval. The Thai military wanted us to stay, but some Thai politicians wanted the Americans out. It was an era of uncertainty between the two countries.

*Q: What were American relations with Burma like. You don't hear too much about Burma.*

KLEMSTINE: Not very much. In fact, there was some talk about normalizing but the only real thing we had going with the Burmese at that time was narcotics control in the Golden Triangle. The rest of the things with the Burmese was about as minimal as you could get. They sort of welcomed our support on narcotics strictly because the people who were trading narcotics in Burma are the tribes, the Shan and the Kachins, who the downhill Burmese had been fighting ever since independence. The people up in the hills want their own states and the Burmese central government has been trying to put them down. So they welcomed our cooperation on narcotics interdiction because one, we furnished them with helicopters and things like that so they could do their campaigning against these dissident rebels; and two by denying narcotic money, deny the rebels money to purchase arms. Outside narcotics, things in Burma were minimal.

**PERRY J. STIEGLITZ**  
**Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1973-1977)**

*Perry J. Stieglitz was born and raised in New York. He entered USIS in 1961. His career included assignments in Laos, France, Thailand, and Belgium. Mr. Stieglitz was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1992.*

STIEGLITZ: At the end of several years in Washington, it was time to be on the move again. One of the positions that was going to be available was cultural attaché in Warsaw, and I was asked about that. I thought it would be just fine, even though it would have meant a long, intensive course in the Polish language at FSI before assuming that post. But just at that time, I went in to see my so-called advisor who was looking for an assignment for me. He said, "By the way, we have just learned this morning that the Cultural Affairs Officer in Bangkok is leaving."

*Q: It was Ken McCormack?*

STIEGLITZ: No, Dan Eisenberg.

*Q: Who was the PAO then?*

STIEGLITZ: Jack Hedges. Well, when I heard of that possibility, I jumped up and said, "That job is mine. Don't even think of offering it to anyone else." A cable was promptly sent to Leonard Unger, our Ambassador in Bangkok, to the effect that I wished to be his new cultural affairs officer. An immediate answer came from Len saying, "Tell Perry and Mouné we are waiting for them."

*Q: Wasn't he Ambassador in Laos when you were there?*

STIEGLITZ: Yes, he was. During the year I was in Vientiane as Information Officer, Len was Ambassador, and so I had gotten to know him well. As you know, he is a fine man and was a fine ambassador.

*Q: He was Ambassador most of the time I was in Thailand. He arrived about four months after me, and was still there when I left.*

STIEGLITZ: And I got there after you left, and Jack Hedges was PAO.

Our four years in Bangkok from the point of view of what we were able to do professionally in cultural affairs were excellent. But those were also the dark years. In the middle of that period, Saigon fell. And then, when Saigon fell, Laos fell. One of my brothers-in-law swam across the Mekong to escape -- he had to for he knew he was being sent up to prison camp the next day. My other brother-in-law and his family were able to flee across the river in a pirogue one night some months later.

In Bangkok during those years, we watched the expansion of the American Alumni Association where vast numbers of Thais came to learn English. That center became, I think, almost too successful.

*Q: When I was there we finally combined the USIS library with the cultural center under the guidance of a wonderful elderly Thai gentleman, Phra Bisal, who had founded the center several years earlier. He is really the father of it all -- a wonderful man. I understand he is still living but in a wheelchair and in very bad shape.*

STIEGLITZ: I heard a few months ago that he was very ill.

When Len Unger left, we had an unfortunate interlude with an American ambassador who never should have been ambassador. It took, I am afraid, almost two long years before he was recalled. Then he was replaced by the veteran diplomat Charlie Whitehouse.

*Q: When did Len leave, and who was his replacement?*

STIEGLITZ: Len left shortly after we arrived. The next ambassador -- so help me, I see him clearly but can't remember his name (name provided by transcriber: William R. Kintner). I remember much too much about him, but suspect that anyone who served with him bears indelible memories.

*Q: Was he a political appointee?*

STIEGLITZ: Decidedly. He came from some right wing institute. He couldn't hold his drinks and got out of hand on several formal occasions. He was quite disgraceful as an ambassador. It was an absolute embarrassment to be in the presence of this man as he carried on, and harangued high ranking and highly dignified Thais.

Otherwise, aside from the international situation and the problem I have just mentioned,

Bangkok was, as you, Lew, know full well, a great place in which to live. The hyperactive social life is part of the professional life -- we would often know two weeks in advance where on each of the following nights we would be going to a reception and afterwards to some dinner party or other -- but it was fun. I had some very good friends in the ministries and among the heads of the universities -- personal relationships that proved enormously helpful in accomplishing our goals. The Fulbright program was outstanding.

*Q: There was a big organization in Bangkok supporting the Fulbright program there. The best I have ever seen.*

STIEGLITZ: It was exceptional.

You may have remarked that at the end of speaking about each of my assignments, I say it was an excellent one. They were all excellent, and Bangkok was certainly so. After I had been there for almost four years, the PAO asked me if I would stay on for another two years.

*Q: Who was the PAO?*

STIEGLITZ: Jim McGinley. I spoke to Moune about staying another two years, and the idea appealed. Then we decided that we were becoming so much part of the scenery of Bangkok that if we stayed on for two more years, we would never want to leave. So we decided the time had come to say farewell to Bangkok.

Then Jim McGinley asked what I wanted for my next assignment, and I replied without hesitation to be cultural attaché at a large European post. He insisted that that would be a major mistake -- that in the Agency for me to remain as CAO would reflect adversely upon me. He stated there was no future to that, and the time had come for me to become a PAO. I explained that I wasn't interested in being a PAO -- my interests were primarily in cultural affairs.

Soon, thereafter, the position of cultural attaché in Brussels became open, and I was offered that position -- precisely what I had wanted. So we went to Brussels.

*Q: Before you get to Belgium, you probably know that in my day in Thailand we had a very extensive field program, which was not oriented so much culturally as it was towards the insurgency that was taking place in the north. We had been forced by Washington to discontinue that program, and we turned the whole thing over to the Thais who clearly didn't want it in the first place and didn't do much with it. But we did have this big network of field offices. Do you think anything was lost in your program by the loss of these offices?*

STIEGLITZ: There were only three of four branch posts open when I was there, and I think the BPAOs continued to make some use of those contacts, but they, of course, couldn't use them to the extent that you did. Those contacts didn't make much difference to my programs which were targeted principally at the universities. I did travel to all of the universities -- Chiang Mai, Hat Yai, and the others -- quite regularly. I tried to keep our relationships there strong, and sent lecturers, some performing musicians, and even art exhibits to them. One semester I gave a course at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Chiang Mai, though, was, I guess, everyone's

favorite city.

*Q: That was the number two city in Thailand.*

STIEGLITZ: Chiang Mai was very different, but the university in that city was quite good. Perhaps, though, I was just too engaged in Bangkok to be able to sense those changes in the field that you speak of.

*Q: Well, with the exception perhaps of Khorat and Chiang Mai, at that time the cultural aspect of the program was not nearly as important as trying to get out into the boondocks and convince the rural Thais that they ought to withstand the attempts of the communists to recruit for the insurgency. That is all changed now. When President Nixon accomplished the opening with China in 1972, the Chinese stopped subsidizing the Thai insurgency and everything changed. So I don't think the change would have affected your program so much.*

STIEGLITZ: As I mentioned, we were there when Saigon fell and when Laos fell, and we fortuitously had a large house and a guest house which was often filled with refugees, mostly members of the family.

Therefore, all in all, those four years in Bangkok were mixed between this most pleasant sense of being there and the terribleness of what was happening all around us.

**JAMES J. GORMLEY**  
**Financial Reporting Officer**  
**Bangkok (1973-1977)**

**Narcotics Counselor, Bureau of International Organizations**  
**Bangkok (1987-1989)**

*James J. Gormley was born and raised in New York, New York. He received a degree in management from Fordham College School of Business before being drafted into the U.S. Army in 1954. Mr. Gormley joined the Foreign Service in 1964. His career included assignments in Mexico, Vietnam, Thailand, Paraguay, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.*

*Q: Then you went to Bangkok; you served what, about five years with a hiatus going to Vietnam?*

GORMLEY: I served four years; I went there in about June of 1973 and stayed to the end of 1977, leaving just before Christmas as I recall, with six months out for Vietnam.

*Q: In Bangkok, where you served five years except for this hiatus, what were you doing?*

GORMLEY: I was the financial reporting officer. It was at the time a big Embassy and it had a

big economics section. My main job was macro economics: the balance of payments, the budget, the relationship of the central bank with the Ministry of Finance, also with American bankers coming through in a steady stream, and with the local American Chamber of Commerce.

*Q: What was your impression of Thai finance?*

GORMLEY: I have a very good impression of most of the economic parts of the Thai government. I have a very good impression of the Thai government, as a bureaucrat myself I sort of admire a system where bureaucrats have as much power as they do in Thailand. The system there when a new political group comes in there are only two jobs in each ministry that they get, the Minister and the deputy Minister, nothing else changes. An even stronger bureaucratic system than the British system which I think goes a little further down; not like in our system where almost down to desk level you can get the niece of some big contributor. I learned street Thai, I never took Thai in FSI; I took the Embassy program and got to about a 2 level speaking, which is enough to deal with taxi drivers, restaurants, bars and busses and so forth. So I dealt in English but the people I was dealing with were graduates of Oxford, Cambridge, MIT and Harvard. The elite in Thailand is well educated. On any particular issue that I would get instructions from Washington to go and get the Thai view on such and such and influence them to our view, nine out of ten times the person I was dealing with would know more about the issue than I did which was not true in any other country I have served in. Most of the people, young people that I knew at the time, are now very high in this new government. I know the Minister of Finance, whom I knew when he was a young banker in Thailand. The same for the head of the central bank, the people in the budget bureau; here it is twenty years later and there is such a continuity of these people that they are the ones running the country.

*Q: So you have a variety of coups and changes of governments but really many of the basic underpinnings don't seem to change very much.*

GORMLEY: No. Two of my investments are the Thai Fund and the Thai Capital Fund and every time there is a riot or something and the market goes down, I buy, because it's ephemeral.

*Q: How was the effect of the fall of Saigon, in the spring of 1975, and also of Laos and Cambodia, seen from the Thai vantage point?*

GORMLEY: From the Thai vantage, one, there was a lot of gnashing of teeth that they had latched on to a loser in the United States; which was why we had tremendous difficulty in keeping the bases that we had used during the war and the Thais certainly made it very difficult and in the end we kept none of them. That whole negotiation was quite interesting.

*Q: Did you get involved in that at all?*

GORMLEY: Only as an observer and as a source for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

*Q: What were your impressions of how that went?*

GORMLEY: They were badly handled. The Ambassador, who was a very bright man...

*Q: Who was that?*

GORMLEY: Charlie Whitehouse...basically a Newport playboy. He never, despite the fact that he had been an Ambassador in Laos, he had been deputy of a CORPS in Vietnam and he had had long experience in the CIA, took Asians very seriously; he was a dilettante. And he was dealing with a newly elected, democratic government -- every once in a while you have one of these things there -- that was headed by Kukrit Pramoj; and Kukrit, despite the fact that he looks Asian talks like he is from Cambridge (England, not Massachusetts). This throws you off because the guy is a Thai. I remember we were presented with a list of conditions under which some bases would continue to be used by the Army. By this time the permanent secretary in the Foreign Ministry was a guy named Anand Panyarachun, who had been Ambassador to the United States. The general gossip or feeling in the Embassy was -- well, Anand had never been taken seriously by the State Department in Washington, he hadn't been treated with the deference he believed he deserved, especially by Kissinger, and he was basically sort of a dog in the manger about the United States, so this list of conditions was just a reflection of Anand's pique and not of Thai policy. Which was nonsense, this was the Thai position, and anyone who didn't realize this was just barking up the wrong tree. So we got this list of conditions -- again most of this stuff I saw only because people were showing it to me, I was not on distribution -- and Whitehouse sent a telegram to Washington that he was going to see Kukrit and "straighten out Anand." So he goes to see Kukrit, and Kukrit like a good Thai says "Don't worry there's no problem." What Kukrit is telling him is, I don't have a problem, you may have a problem; then he wrote a telegram to Washington saying he had talked to the Prime Minister and that the Prime Minister was going to take care of Anand. It was a number of weeks later that it finally dawned on him that this was the Thai position, it was not Anand. I told that story to Anand when I was back there in the late eighties and he just roared laughing. He made the observation that "you people never know who your friends are." Anand is a terrific guy, who has recently been Prime Minister. Again one of the great bureaucrats of Thailand.

In the negotiations I was only an observer, but I had some good friends with the press. I have always liked dealing with the press; I have never tried to mislead them, never tried to apologize, never tried to fool them. I think a tremendous number of people in the government and in the foreign service distrust reporters terribly. They are defensive, they lie, and then it becomes the press's job to "get them", and they usually do. Of course, I dealt with these people mostly on economic issues, but they would ask about the base negotiations and I remember one time I said to one of them, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* -- we were near the end of the Ford administration by this time -- "To the extent that Henry Kissinger has a future in this government, Charlie Whitehouse doesn't." That got into the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, credited to a western diplomat. I assumed that Whitehouse could figure it out but he never said anything about it.

*Q: Just one question before we move to that, since you were in the economic section what was our impression during the time you were there of the development of ASEAN, because it was essentially an economic alliance.*

GORMLEY: Well I don't know that it was essentially an economic alliance; to the extent that it

was anything it was more political than economic. These people are more natural competitors than customers for each other and I never took ASEAN that seriously. I don't know what it is today, it seems to be an occasion for the Foreign Ministers to get together and have their parties. I do remember one occasion -- I went through so many Prime Ministers when I was there -- after the military came back in 1976 they put in a dreadful incompetent little man called Thanin as Prime Minister, a puppet; unguided he would do the wierdest things which even the military didn't want. He had gone down on some trade mission to Singapore and been completely flummoxed by Lee Kuan Yew. Lee Kuan Yew had gotten him to make all sorts of concessions that certainly the bureaucrats had not wanted. I had a friend in the Finance Ministry and I said, "How can you allow this guy to be in the room alone with Lee Kuan Yew?" And he said, "God, we can't even trust him with Suharto." Before we leave Thailand -- certainly there was an awful lot of pessimism around 1975 about being the next domino, by the press, by a lot of casual observers. And certainly the US Commerce Department wrote a very negative report on doing business in Thailand. I happened to be back at the time and they looked at my report on economic trends in Thailand at the time which I think started out with "Thailand is not a teetering domino." They said, "your report completely contradicts what we have in this report, how do you account for that?" I said, "I account for that because you are wrong." I remember a Memcom, which I still have, of a conversation with a group of Thai economists in the summer of 1975 in which the whole conversation was basically so upbeat on long term, at the same time there was this panic in the streets and in the reporting going on in the states.

*Q: It shows an inability to understand the situation.*

GORMLEY: And Solarz came out and Solarz...

*Q: This is Stephen Solarz who was a very influential Congressman in dealing with Asia.*

GORMLEY: He was a freshman at the time and he knew everything, of course, that's the way most freshman Congressmen do, and he insisted that he have a meeting with the lower level officers of the Embassy as he didn't want to be brainwashed by the Ambassador. So he came in and his general thesis was that this country was on its way to the same thing that Vietnam was, including the Vietnamese Army. And we said "this is nonsense, this is not going to happen, this country is not militarily strong but it is a terribly strong country culturally and the Vietnamese will never make a foothold." And he said, "Tell me why it is different." And I must admit Solarz is very educable because at the end of that meeting I think he went out and realized that he was not in another Vietnam. Solarz also became one of the leading champions against the Khmer Rouge later on; Solarz was a very knowledgeable guy by the middle of his Congressional tenure, which I guess is now ended.

*Q: Then we come to your last assignment. Your last time was basically dealing with narcotics, is that right?*

GORMLEY: Yes.

*Q: From 1984 to 1990. You have written an article about part of this time. What period did that cover?*

GORMLEY: The article really hit all of the highlights, but it focused on Mexico, which was only one year.

*Q: The article was in the Foreign Service Journal, and so that people can be referred to it, of June, 1992. How did you get off to narcotics?*

GORMLEY: I got off to narcotics because I couldn't get any other job in 1984, or whenever it was.

*Q: So in your first phase in narcotics where were you assigned and what were you doing?*

GORMLEY: I was in Washington, I was head of the Latin American division in the program office, which at time consisted of three people, including myself.

You may notice in the article, and I meant that article to cover the whole period of my time, there is virtually nothing said about Thailand, even though I spent more time in Thailand than in Mexico. Basically because the Thai program was pretty decent you did have a reasonably effective movement out of production of opium in the north of Thailand; but how much of that was due to our efforts and how much the result of a general economic development of the north? I think the development was the key that allowed it; it just became easier for them to produce cabbages for the Chiang Mai market than to deal with the army coming through and cutting down their opium crop and they could make just as much money raising vegetables. So you did have a pretty successful crop substitution program there, but across the border they were producing more than they ever were.

I had very little use for most of the people involved in Mexico. The head of it is portrayed very unfavorably in *Desperado*, which is why I recommend it. He had been in Mexico too long, I think he was on his fifth tour there, maybe longer. He had just been there too long, was too much in bed with the Mexicans; he was an apologist for what they were up to. Since they have difficulty in getting good Spanish speaking people, very often they turn to Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and a lot of them seemed like time-servers to me, to whom the war on drugs was just a ticket to continued employment. I must say that I felt very differently about the organization in Thailand; I don't know why I keep coming back to Thailand, I guess because I like Thailand and I like the Thai people. The head of DEA in Thailand became my best friend; a really super guy. Of course he had a better police force to work with there than you did in Mexico. I think they were reasonably effective in Thailand.

*Q: But as you say, you knock it off in Thailand and things just get better for Burma and Laos. You left there and retired in 1990?*

GORMLEY: I left Thailand in 1989 and I spent some time on TDY in Peru, and most of the rest of the time I was working on some projects to improve the program in Mexico.

*Q: Bangkok at the time we are talking about had turned into the sex capital of the world, hadn't it?*

GORMLEY: I don't know of the world.

*Q: There were package tours coming from Europe and from Japan and elsewhere, with this very much in mind; more than anywhere else I can think of.*

GORMLEY: Oh yes, and there were very little preventive measures taken.

*Q: It came just at the time that AIDS was beginning to spread out into the prostitution area as opposed to having been limited more to the homosexual world before that.*

GORMLEY: Of course you have an enormous male homosexual prostitution population in Thailand. Although oddly enough at least our statistics showed that most of the AIDS was in the female prostitutes. I don't know why that was.

*Q: Just to nail things down, when did you serve in Mexico and when did you serve in Thailand?*

GORMLEY: On the narcotics business I got into Mexico in August of 1986 and stayed until October of 1987?

*Q: You were the narcotics officer?*

GORMLEY: The counselor. And then from October of 1987 up until August of 1989 I was in Thailand.

*Q: How were you received in Thailand by the Embassy and the Ambassador?*

GORMLEY: Very well. Our Ambassador there was Bill Brown who was in his last days and then Dan O'Donahue came in. The DCM was first Joe Winder and then Vic Tomseth. Winder took a very, very active role in narcotics. In Mexico the DCM had one meeting on narcotics while I was there and that was about a silly-ass telegram from USIS and that was it, nothing else. Winder had a meeting every week, and when any issue came up you always had access to him. He was very, very active. And there was a very cooperative spirit between ourselves, DEA, and the Agency. The Agency played a very big role, in a way an overt role, in Thailand because they did the crop survey in the north. Again, in Mexico they wouldn't allow us to do anything but in Thailand we went over every inch of that territory and took pictures. So the Agency and ourselves and DEA had a very good relationship, managed by the DCM and the Ambassador. Much less so Brown; O'Donohue was a very activist type who gets involved, overinvolved, in every aspect of the Embassy's operation.

*Q: Well he had also been in Burma, too, hadn't he? And obviously concerned about the problem as in Burma that was our main thing, so he was well indoctrinated into that.*

GORMLEY: Yes and you really were a major part of the Embassy team in Bangkok which you weren't in Mexico.

**FRANCIS J. TATU**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Chiang Mai (1974)**

**Thailand Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1974-1976)**

*Francis J. Tatu was born in New York in 1929. He served in the US Navy from 1946-1952. Afterwards, he received his bachelor's degree from University of California in 1955. His career includes positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Washington D.C., Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Australia. Mr. Tatu was interviewed by Susan Klingaman in October 2000.*

*Q: Now, that was at FSI here, so you must have been assessed with having a good language aptitude. Did you take that language aptitude test? How many people were in your Thai language training?*

TATU: I did take the aptitude test, but that was way back before I started Chinese and I don't recall how I scored. In the Thai class, not many. I think there were five others.

*Q: Was this your choice, Thai, or the Department's choice?*

TATU: No, I put in for it. At that time there was concern that Thailand was going the way of Vietnam, so the Department had plans to have postings all about and have language officers in these postings. They idea was to build up a corps. I can't think of any of my colleagues in that course who became superstars.

*Q: How was the training? My experience with language training was that every language had its own method of instruction.*

TATU: Yes. I think the methodology there was good, based on the personality of the tutor. We really had good tutors, and they were fun. The Thai had a wonderful group sense of humor.

*Q: So the Thai language tutors taught you a lot about the culture and some of the tricks of the language and so on.*

TATU: Absolutely, and they had been there a long time, so they knew Americans, which was another favorable thing.

*Q: And that was how many months, or years? That's a hard language.*

TATU: It is a hard language, but it wasn't a year, I think six or eight months, thereabouts.

*Q: Was there a good book, or was it mostly...?*

TATU: Yes, we had very good material, some of which I still retain in the unlikely event it should come in handy.

*Q: So that was at a time when the U.S. government was concerned about Thailand going the way of Vietnam?*

TATU: Yes.

*Q: The domino theory and all that?*

TATU: Absolutely, yes. I think there were three additional consulates opened up. See, traditionally we had, in addition to the embassy, a consul in Chiang Mai - spelled 'Chiang Mai,' two words; and it appears differently in different places - but also we opened one up in Udorn Thani, and another one which place name has escaped me - perhaps Songkhla there was enormous expansion, really.

*Q: In Thailand, yes.*

TATU: Well, we had over 50,000 Americans there at any one time in the military services and also our civilian presence, and it was just a terrible mess.

*Q: And what were they all doing?*

TATU: They were all cashing in, I think, on the American concern. We had ARPA. Are you familiar with ARPA, the Advanced Research Project?

*Q: ARPA?*

TATU: Here are all these academics studying every conceivable aspect of Thai culture, environment, and history and so forth.

*Q: Who was paying for all of this, the U.S. government?*

TATU: Yes. As a wonderful example, I have a picture book in my treasure room in there on the types of fishing vessels in the Gulf of Siam. It cost the U.S. government at that time \$40,000 to put out this study.

*Q: Well, it sounds like all these researchers were able to just do their own thing and persuade somebody that it was important for U.S. funding.*

TATU: This happens in academic ranks, I think. They all look out for each other. It was not just academics, but so many different projects. This is a very minor anecdote. Being a language student you might appreciate it. The articulation of the Thai term for 'province' is *jangwat*. The way it's spelled in English. When I lecture I say, "There is no Asian language where the spelling

in English comes out as the pronunciation seems to be.” So one of these academics came around to receive this in writing. They were going to reclassify the provinces, and she wanted some instruction related, and she begins talking about the “*changwas*.” She’s supposed to be a linguist, she’s supposed to be a specialist, and she’s got an advanced degree in Thai studies, and she’s pronouncing I, her major item, incorrectly the way any layman would.

Anyway, I was assigned to the political section there and one of my jobs was to monitor the work and the highly-respected daily translations by three local employees of the Thai and Chinese press. Our ambassador at the time was Graham Martin, and he decreed that nothing should be in these translations that was derogatory to the U.S. presence. There was one hell of a lot of derogatory reporting and commentary

*Q: So, in other words, the press summaries were totally pro-U.S., so they weren’t really accurate summaries of the press.*

TATU: That’s what they amounted to. I jump way ahead in the story, but after Martin left and Leonard Unger came in as ambassador we could do it. The commanders of various U.S. military installations were just flabbergasted: “What is all of this?”

*Q: That they had never seen before.*

TATU: Yes. You don’t make a move that you’re not observed by some Thai.

*Q: That’s quite amazing.*

TATU: Well, it’s one of those things that happens.

*Q: Hopefully not too often.*

*Some of those stories are very interesting, I’ll just allude to them. Anyway, you were doing the daily press summaries to the extent that you could in a way that was pleasing to Ambassador Martin. What else did you do in the embassy?*

TATU: I did the international relations with regard to Southeast Asia. This got me a lot of TDYs over to Vietnam, and I had a lot of interesting experiences there.

*Q: Doing what?*

TATU: Basically I was concerned about the Cambodians, and that was one of my prime functions actually, that I was the “Cambodian watcher.” There was nobody else watching, so in a way it was my own show. I had wonderful assets because we had an FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) station in Bangkok. When the FBIS guys picked up broadcasts from Cambodia that were pertinent, they would call me immediately and I would have information sooner than the people who were stationed in Phnom Penh. Now, the Australians in Phnom Penh were taking care of our interests, with a formal “interests section.” I was taking care of their interests informally in Bangkok of the guys who were there. Were on a more formal basis, but all

of this helped me in my Cambodian hat.

*Q: Do you want to give me an example?*

TATU: There was an Army group pulling a barge up the Mekong. You know, some of these details I've forgotten: what they had on the barge, why they had the barge, and all that. They were captured by the Cambodians. They took a wrong turn in the river or something, and the Cambodians incarcerated them. When the U.S. media got hold of this, it immediately became they were pulling a barge full of beer. I don't think they were hauling beer. They were there, in a makeshift prison about three months, and the Australians were taking care of them to be sure they weren't badly treated. So when Cambodian National Day came, the prince, Sihanouk, deigned that the boys should be entertained for National Day. They were all taken out and fitted for new white suits. In those days white linen suits were formal attire in Southeast Asia.

*Q: The tropical attire.*

TATU: And they were taken around to these various celebrations, and then they were taken to the leading restaurant in town. Everybody cleared out; it was their restaurant.

*Q: Quite a story.*

TATU: They were not the only group. There were others that came through also.

*Q: So you were the Cambodian watcher?*

TATU: I got a piece of paper from then assistant secretary Marshall Green that says I was probably the preeminent American authority on Cambodia, that no other American knew as much about Cambodia, which really, really did me great good for promotion purposes.

*Q: Because those on the promotion panel probably had never heard of Cambodia.*

TATU: I won't wax sullen about this.

*Q: But it must have been really interesting.*

TATU: It was fascinating. People would come and see me from all sorts of places with Cambodian information and stories.

*Q: Now, in Bangkok did you have good contacts with the Thai community there too? Did you live on the economy there?*

TATU: Yes, we did that - actually not so much with common people as with foreign affairs officers. It was more difficult to get into the local communities there. There's an expatriate American there who was just fabulous. He's been there about 40 years.

*Q: Who's that?*

TATU: He's very modest and wouldn't want his name used in a publication like this. My wife made a good contact with him. He's basically an academic but he's very integrated into the Thai community. He doesn't have any American connections. He was a good entree anywhere we wanted to go. We became very good friends as did our children, and we remain close friends to this day.

*Q: So he was very helpful.*

TATU: Yes, I probably scores of Thai through him.

*Q: There were some of those in Indonesia too, people who'd been there for years and were almost like the locals, more like them than Americans actually. Who were the ambassadors, Graham Martin*

TATU: No, no, first Graham Martin and then Leonard Unger. Marshall Green, when he wrote that, was the Assistant Secretary, then exiled to Australia.

Let me mention that my wife was briefly tutor to one of royal princesses. It gave us great prestige when the Rolls with royal license plates came to transport her to the palace.

*Q: Leonard Unger became ambassador and very different from Graham Martin, I would imagine. Were we accomplishing what we wanted to accomplish in Thailand? We knew what it was we were trying to do.*

TATU: We were trying to preserve them, and I think that that worked okay. But I think, all things considered, that we let them take advantage of us, and this enhanced their corruption, to the detriment of the "little people."

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*Q: Today is Friday, November 10th. After your assignment in Kathmandu, you went as principal officer to the consulate in Chiang Mai. I believe that was in 1974.*

TATU: Yes, correct. I went to Chiang Mai in July of 1974, precisely July 4th, leaving Kathmandu and proceeding direct, giving up home leave again for maybe the second or third time in my checkered career. I wanted to tell you one Vietnam anecdote here, a meaningful anecdote, I think, before it's lost. I think this is something that should be recorded in history. I mentioned earlier that when I had been posted in Bangkok one of my responsibilities was following developments in Southeast Asia, and in that capacity I used frequently to go over to Saigon primarily to keep track of the Khmer Krom, who were a Cambodian group, under the direction of CIA actually, conducting cross-border operations. On this particular occasion I proceeded with Ambassador Unger, who had other business, and I went about my own business on the border. That evening dinner was set up for me by a political officer in the Saigon embassy by the name of Andy Antippas had set up a virtual trap for me. It seemed that the Thai troops who were participating as part of the program of bringing in the so-called "Third Flags" were

behaving there egregiously. I was quite aware of this from our side that the Thai troops proceeded to Vietnam carrying large amounts of narcotics, illicit narcotics, and in fact on one occasion, cooperation with BNDD, the precursor to DEA, we had sought to stop a shipment of APO mail, Army Post Office. The Thai had access to APO, and we had word that they were shipping heroine in this particular APO.

*Q: Why did they have access to the American postal system?*

TATU: They had access to everything. This was a payoff for the Thai participating in the Vietnam War. In fact, the word was that any Thai soldier who went was a corporate entity. They had to pay, in terms of about \$5,000, to be able to go and “fight” in Vietnam and, once there, they had not only access to APO, they had access to the PX. The word was that when a shipment of large gear would come into the PX, such as refrigerators, stoves and so forth, the first ones there were the Thai, who arrived with six-by-six trucks. That evening for this dinner there were also present a number of military people up to ranking bird colonels. Their complaint was that the Thai were oppressing the Vietnamese to such an extent. They would come into a village, and our military would come across them coming out with severed heads on the antennae of their personnel carriers. The atrocities on the part of the Thai, according to these guys, were just incredible. There were maybe three or four of these people, and Antippas also was substantiating what they had to say. So I said, “Okay, gentlemen, we’ve heard all the other stuff, the PX and narcotics and so forth, but this is a new one, and you can be assured that I will report this in full detail.” So going back on the plane - we had our own little jet - I began briefing Ambassador Unger on this, and he expressed astonishment and chagrin. The follow-up on this was to find out who was at that dinner. In other words, the military wanted to get these guys who had reported to me. This is all back I feed to me from Antippas. No action was taken against the Thai, but action was taken against the informants, whistle-blowers, so to speak.

*Q: Very interesting.*

TATU: I think history should be aware of that.

*Q: So this was the temper of the times, I guess - win at all costs.*

TATU: That’s absolutely right.

*Q: How large a post was the consulate at Chiang Mai?*

TATU: Chiang Mai had a deputy, Linda Irick, who actually hadn’t arrived yet when I got there. It had an administrative deputy who was an ex-Marine captain by the name of Bruce something-or-other and a CIA guy buried in as a vice consul. The consulate was very curious little outbuilding attached to the residence. Incredibly I walk in there and I find the toilet that’s accessible to visitors is approached by a short hallway in which there is a refrigerator filled with morphine. You will recall that Chiang Mai is the “capital” of the Golden Triangle.

*Q: For what?*

TATU: For what - and needles, injection needles, piled up on shelves nearby. So I questioned, "What the hell is this?"

*Q: This was the restroom in the consulate?*

TATU: Yes. "What the hell is this?" There was no residual memory really. The Marine, Bruce, thought that this stuff was stocked because there was a concern that there was a rabies threat, and this was the way we treat rabies.

*Q: Morphine?*

TATU: Yes. So I checked this out through channels and found that this morphine, while it could produce some ill effects, had exceeded its shelf life. I then went about destroying it and had a couple of people witness me doing it. There was a DEA station there also, located separately, newly established, with a chief agent in charge and three subordinates. I had the SAIC come over, Special Agent In Charge, and witness me destroying this morphine. He said that, despite the fact that the shelf life had been exceeded, it would be worth about 40,000 bucks on the street. So that says something about something. It says something about the management of the post.

*Q: Let me ask you: Who was your predecessor?*

TATU: Jim Montgomery. I had known him in Bangkok, in my early Bangkok tour, and considered him to be a friend. At any rate, this later was held against me, the fact that I destroyed this stuff. It was considered to be an irrational act. I think the crunch came when I ran into a windmill here that terminated my tenure at the post, when the SAIC, again the DEA Special Agent In Charge, and wife were out on a motorcycle run, inexplicably on a road that was not open yet to the public, when two assailants stepped out of the bushes and fired a shot at them. She was hit, the wife was hit. The name of this SAIC, by the way, was Bud Shoaf - I don't remember his formal first name. The wife was hospitalized, and from that point on the whole thing became a circus. Everybody was covering up facts, but I was trying to investigate. The question was whether this was narcotics related, whether it was related to the insurgents. In other words, there was a threat to the American community, and that was my responsibility. The administrative counselor then, after I had been at this for several days, sent me a cable in which he ordered me to desist my investigation. Of course, he had no authority over me; I was in my own consular district. So this came down to a conflict, if you will, between me and the counselor with really no backing there in a good part of the embassy.

*Q: Now, who was the DCM?*

TATU: The DCM was Ed Masters, Edward Masters, who during this period was on home leave.

*Q: So you really had no one to turn to, except the ambassador?*

TATU: Well, even the ambassador was incommunicative, he was a political appointee. The first time I went to meet him in his office one morning he pulled out a bottle and offered me a drink. What I did - this was surely a mistake and something I may want to write out later - I appealed to

the ambassador in Laos.

*Q: Who was that?*

TATU: Charles Whitehouse, do you know him?

*Q: I don't.*

TATU: Charlie Whitehouse, former CIA. Bangkok and Vientiane always worked very closely together. I, as you recall, had been stationed in Vientiane and there was some resentment there that Bangkok considered us, Vientiane, as being a kind of younger brother or something that they could order around. But there was close communication, so chance would have it Mrs. Whitehouse was leading a group of ladies down to visit Chiang Mai just as all of this blew up. I thought I could send Charlie a letter with his wife and see if he could be of any help. What he did with my letter was he sent it to Bangkok, so that made me seem insubordinate. As a consequence, I was removed from the post.

*Q: I see. Well, it sounds like everything was all tangled up together, insurgency and narcotics and so on, very much like what seems to be going on in some of our posts in Latin America right now. So when actually did you leave your post in Chiang Mai - later in '74, I suppose?*

TATU: If you can recall the date on which Nixon left office and Ford took over, it was right about then.

*Q: In August of '74.*

TATU: There you are.

*Q: I remember, because I was on home leave myself.*

TATU: And one of my actions, also an eccentric action, was to seek to get photographs of Gerald R. Ford to replace those of Nixon that were in the consulate.

*Q: Well, his photograph did in fact go to all consulates when he became President. So that was a very short and difficult post?*

TATU: Exactly, but considering my experiences and preferences, Chiang Mai was my dream post, and it broke my heart to have to leave it.

*Q: After Chiang Mai where did you go?*

TATU: After Chiang Mai I was assigned then to the Department as Thai desk officer.

*Q: Thai desk officer was in an office, as I recall, at that time that included what other countries? What was it called - EA...?*

TATU: Now wait a minute. It certainly was in EA, that was the Bureau. You're creating mental blocks here.

*Q: I'm sorry.*

TATU: It was TIMS at one time but not in my time. Thailand, Laos and Burma, TLB.

*Q: Oh, Thailand, Laos and Burma. Then there was an INBS at one point - Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma and Singapore.*

TATU: We also had bacon, lettuce and tomato.

*Q: Were you the Thai desk?*

TATU: I was it, yes.

*Q: And who was the country director?*

TATU: George Roberts - do you know him? The author of "Cookie Push," that we discussed previously in connection with Laos.

*Q: Was he - I'm just digressing here - was he in Manila, or am I thinking of somebody else?*

TATU: No. You may be thinking of House of Usher.

*Q: No, no, I'm thinking of the Internal Affairs division chief.*

TATU: Walker, Givins?

*Q: The person who came before Bill Owen as internal, Tom something. Anyway the Thai desk in the Department, what was involved in that?*

TATU: What was involved there, the main thing, was that we were pulling out of Thailand, much as we had pulled out of Vietnam. So there was something called Ammunition In Thailand, AIT. We had these enormous stores of ammunition in Thailand, and what are we going to do with them? Were we going to pull them back, which would cost an enormous amount of money? Were we going to give the supplies to the Thai, which would seem to be a poor precedent, or were we going to sell them to the Thai? So there was a lot of activity there, and I think we ended up just giving most of to the Thai.

*Q: Now, wouldn't this have been something the Defense Department was primarily responsible for?*

TATU: We were in it because of the considerations of offending the Thai. The military was not quite a subtle as we would like them to be. So that was a big item.

*Q: What did the military want to do with it?*

TATU: They didn't have any set policy. Anyway, it was an item, but it was an item that impacted then upon our relationships. One of the things was that Henry Kissinger didn't care very much about Thailand. I recall - this is anecdotal but it says something - the prime minister at that time was a character named Chatchi. Chatchi was a politician and he was seeking, as all politicians, to be in the public eye and to demonstrate that he was an important world character, so he was constantly hounding us to get him an appointment with Henry Kissinger. So we set that up finally. God, you know how much time and paper that takes. I got a call from Henry's staff: "Okay, we got it set up. Here's the date for a luncheon." "Fine, a luncheon. When are the substantive talks?" "There are no substantive talks. It's a luncheon. Take it or leave it." "Okay, we'll take it."

*Q: How do you spell Chatchi? That sounds like a spice.*

TATU: I think it's C H A T C H I.

*Q: All right, we'll go with that.*

TATU: He was an unguided missile, incidentally. Here he comes with about six staff people. This huge luncheon is set up on the eighth floor. Of course, I didn't attend; George Roberts attended. He comes back and he confirms, "Yes, there was no substantive discussion. They just told each other jokes." My God! How much did it cost for this guy to come here, all this way with that group just for lunch?

*Q: Well, he got maybe what he needed for his political purposes.*

TATU: Well, wait. He gets back to Thailand and he gets off the plane, and he says, "Well, we discussed, and we discussed, and we discussed" this whole menu of things of which there was no discussion whatsoever.

*Q: But it probably served his political purposes, or at least he may have thought so.*

TATU: That's right, it did. It was good for him.

*Q: I think a lot of people wanted to be seen with Kissinger.*

TATU: Oh, yes. Well, he had the flair of showmanship himself. So anyway, there I was on the Thai desk.

*Q: For how long, two years or so?*

TATU: I think it was about two or two and a half years. There were some options for posts that came and went, such as Kinshasa, wherever that is.

*Q: Kinshasa, Congo?*

TATU: Yes, yes, on some horrible lake that's filled with flesh-eating insects or something.

*Q: What was it like dealing with the Thai embassy here? I assume you had to do that.*

TATU: I had very good relations with the Thai. I don't know the extent to which I touched on this when we were discussing Bangkok, but again I had good language capability. That goes over with them. They're very warm people. No problems. I'm trying to think of any particular incidents.

*Q: Did you have much in the way of interagency issues? Were you involved with other departments?*

TATU: Yes, with defense, the AIT thing, and with CIA with various things that would come up. Here's a good CIA story that relates to Chiang Mai. You know, my predecessor had sent a "Thai" named "Putaporn" to the U.S. on a small businessman's grant." -The reason I put it in quotes was that actually he was a Kiren, one of the minority groups there, and the Kiren were very much involved in narcotics trafficking. So this guy comes here to the U.S. and carries with him a huge film can of the type in which you would have movies, and he has it labeled 'unexposed film'. However, the dogs could smell through it, and he ended up in the slammer outside of Chicago. Former senator Charles Percy got involved in this. You remember Charles Percy, formerly of Bell and Howell?

*Q: Sure.*

TATU: He was raising hell, and they were really preparing to throw the book at this guy when CIA turns up and pleads the "national security" question. So he's sprung and he goes back to Thailand, where he goes to the station chief in Chiang Mai and threatens, in effect blackmails, them and says, "Either you pay up or I'll expose your whole operation here," which was actually cross-border operations into China. Unbelievably, the chief paid up. I couldn't believe it. So where I get into it - they come to me again, the people who are at Langley, and say, "Our chief in Chiang Mai paid this guy, and the guy's back for more now. What do we do?" "What do you do? The policy is you never pay blackmail." That was just one of the little things that come up. The Agency actually leaned on me for a lot of advice, cultural advice and so forth. But what I'm leading into now is that my buddy Charlie Whitehouse, who really had me skewered, if you will, in Chiang Mail - I'm thinking of appropriate wordage here - is appointed ambassador to Thailand. So guess who is responsible for his briefing? So he comes around, and he doesn't say word one about our prior association or Chiang Mai or whatever, and I conducted his briefing as best and as professionally as I could. Time comes for us to go over to CIA. As I said, he was former CIA, and Bill Colby was then DCI, Director of Central Intelligence, and we get there and - surprise - we're invited to lunch in Colby's office. Colby then had about - actually this relates more to Vietnam - six guys there. For the life of me, I can't reconstruct who they were; I knew them all. They were his Southeast Asia, his Vietnam, experts. I don't know who did the seating, because I was on Colby's right. Inevitably the question of Vietnam came up, what's happening. This was in April of '74 - I got my years off here; we were kicked out in '74, right?

**MARGARET J. BARNHART**  
**Consular Section Chief**  
**Bangkok (1974-1976)**

*Margaret J. Barnhart was born in Pennsylvania in 1928. She graduated from Goucher College in 1950 and entered the Foreign Service in 1961. Her postings abroad included Tokyo, Paris, Jerusalem, Bangkok, and Rio de Janeiro. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ms. Barnhart in 1998.*

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

BARNHART: August of '74 to March of '76.

*Q: What was your job in Bangkok?*

BARNHART: I was head of the consular section.

*Q: How big was the consular section?*

BARNHART: It was quite large. I'm trying to remember. There were four officers and quite a large staff. Actually, the position had been Consul General, and Wendell Jorgensen, I think, was my predecessor. Because of my grade then, we downgraded it to some extent. I was on the country team.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador?*

BARNHART: It was William Kintner. He was, retired military, and wrote at least one book, if not more, on arms control. He was a specialist in nuclear medicine, arms control, and that sort of thing. He could be a nice person, but he would have receptions and go to sleep in the corner. One time - I think it was a Marine ball, one of the first I went to - he just staggered. It was clearly obvious what was wrong with him. Charles Whitehouse replaced him while I was still there. When I got there they had just moved the consular section from the Embassy grounds to the USIS grounds.

*Q: What was the reason for moving?*

BARNHART: The Ambassador did not like the visa applicants and all the general public coming through his front lobby. I think at one point they had a side entrance, but then they'd still be waiting outside, and he didn't like that. So he had the admin officer find a new location, which was interesting because it was an old warehouse. They refurbished it with green carpeting, drapes, etc. I remember it had a second floor, and I thought, well, maybe I'll just make an apartment up on the second floor. It would be convenient. No, because that was unsafe. The floor, they said, was not stable enough to support an apartment, refrigerator, whatever. A little aside on that particular issue was in 1984 I went back to Bangkok as a refugee officer on a six-

week TDY, and I worked with the voluntary agency group, all of them, on the second floor of that building. There was a huge number of files on that floor. It was just a coincidence. I was there actually when the refugee operation moved to another building, and so I moved once into that building and ten years later out of it.

*Q: What were sort of the challenges of consular work in Thailand in '74 to '76?*

BARNHART: Actually, it was not easy. There were a lot of students, but all of our students were screened by USIS language program, which meant that not only did they come in with the proper documents for a student visa but they had an okay from USIS. So that was fairly easy. We had a lot of American military, and so we had a lot of couriers with passport applications. Actually the military, I believe, were allowed in the country. I think they were allowed in the country without a passport, although status of forces didn't quite apply at the time you let them in, but if they wanted to go anyplace, they had to get a passport. I don't know why they weren't encouraged to get a passport before they came, but we had a lot of passport work. Immigrant visa work - the very interesting part was that during the time I was in Bangkok, particularly the first year, non-preference visa numbers were available to anyone who could prove that they had sufficient money, sufficient financial resources that he/she would open their own business and hire Americans. Because Southeast Asia in general was a little shaky, it was amazing the number of very, very high, prominent Thais that would come in, usually referred by the Ambassador, and I would help process their immigrant visas. One example was Johnny Sue.

*Q: Who was he?*

BARNHART: Well, he and his wife owned Johnny's Gems, a big jewelry business that serviced all the military catalogs and the military bases. So he was going to set up shop, I think, in Hawaii, and he had no problem whatsoever with the visa. A very good Thai friend of mine, then came to the United States and wanted an immigrant visa. He was going to go and live in New York as a retiree. Because of the Vietnam war, they were worried. Anything could happen any day in Thailand. My landlords came in. It was kind of a status symbol to have an immigrant visa, and there was no problem giving them visas. I forget the minimum amount you had to have, but these Thais had more than enough. The wife whose husband owned Singh beer had a penthouse in Watergate, and she thought it would be nice to have a green card to come and go. Immigrant visa work was good for me in a way because it brought me into a lot of contact with the Thais, some of which whom I have kept up with to this day.

*Q: What was your impression of the situation in Thailand during the '74 to '76 period?*

BARNHART: In general, I think, it was quite good. Thailand was doing very well. There was a lot of American military, not right in Bangkok but in outlying. There was a military mission in Bangkok. Basically the economy was doing well. Traffic was bad, but nothing compared to what it was ten years later. It was really a great time for the first year. Actually it stayed that way for the whole time I was there vis-a-vis Thailand, but in April of '75, Indochina fell. We had the Laos coming in along with the Cambodians and some Vietnamese refugees. That was where the Vietnamese military - South Vietnamese - brought this whole fleet of American planes in right after Saigon fell. They had intended to leave. They were just bringing the equipment, and they

wanted to go home, because their wives, families were in Vietnam. We did expeditiously send them on to Guam for processing. Didn't think anyone would want to go, but their lives would be in danger. But a lot of them did filter back in, I understand. We built refugee camps, and I had a role in handling the refugees situation along with the administration office. And then the chargé decided that wasn't working too well, and so I was in charge of it for a little while. It was just too much. I didn't have the cooperation of the staff. But it was interesting.

*Q: You say you didn't have the cooperation of the staff.*

BARNHART: Well, my own consular officers absolutely didn't want to work overtime. For the amount of work during that brief period, it was like 12 hours a day. It was interesting. I got to fly around in helicopters and little F4s to and from the Embassy and the refugee camps. But, you know, one had a family, another one - you know, it was a nine to five job, period, end. And I guess I pushed them, but it didn't do any good, other than the fact they were unhappy.

*Q: I was just wondering, with our embassies having collapsed in Indochina, I would have thought there would have been some spare officers floating around who could have been brought to help you.*

BARNHART: Not really. When Laos fell, I think we kept an office there, as I recall.

*Q: We did.*

BARNHART: They had evacuated the great majority of people. They kept the consular officer because the consular officer was part of a husband-wife team - Steve Johnson and Judy Rose, I think. So Steve took over. Judy was the economic. I guess there was an economic and a political. So there was someone there. In Phnom Penh the Ambassador came out there on a plane. He brought a number of refugees with him and the admin officer and a few others, and he set up office in the embassy in Bangkok and had his name up there as the Ambassador. By then Kintner had gone, and his replacement wasn't there, so we had a chargé. It was a little difficult for the chargé, but he did put a stop to the fact that when the Ambassador to Cambodia started sending cables to Washington and signing them.

*Q: This was John Gunther Dean, who was a very powerful figure - person, more a personality.*

BARNHART: He brought his administrative officer, Art Goodwin, and Art had been down earlier. He had adopted a Cambodian child, and we worked on the paperwork in advance, knowing that something was going to happen. Anyway, I remember, we processed the visa, the orphan visa, but we went through all the paperwork. I mean, he did a lot of it, and the child came out and stayed with someone else at the embassy, and went to the United States to assist her. He himself was evacuated, brought out another child and said, "I want to send this child to the United States. I want you to issue an immigrant visa as an orphan to be adopted." We didn't have any paperwork. To this day he gets annoyed. There was no way to document this kid as an orphan, or any of the paperwork. There was nothing there. There was a group of orphans sponsored by World Vision, so we arranged for this child to go with that group to the States. There were big signs hanging on him, "This is the property of - I forget Art's sister's name - and

don't touch him." Anyway, they gave even this child a hard time. For a day or two the sister had trouble getting hold of the kid, and Art blamed me for the whole thing.

Graham Martin came in. He was floating around. I was told to go get his passport. He was not going back to the States. They wanted him back in the States, and I said, "No way." I wasn't about to take away his passport. He was going on to France, very quite, low key.

*Q: He was our Ambassador to Vietnam and had just been evacuated.*

BARNHART: Yes, and the Midway came into Bangkok. Many of the evacuees out of Vietnam office, of our people, went on to Hong Kong or the Philippines, but the Midway came in to Utapao in Thailand.

*Q: This is a big aircraft carrier.*

BARNHART: Yes, and these people, including my friend Pat Wayhugh, were on it. There were several consular officers. They were going to be moved back to the States right away. There were some reporters, quite a group of them, and AID people. We dealt with them for about a week. They came out with nothing. It was very sad.

*Q: Did the Thais go into any kind of panic? Did you notice any change when Vietnam went down the tubes?*

BARNHART: Not really. It was more with the visas. I think by then, as I recall, the non-preference, I mean the green card, wasn't as easily accessible as it had been. But the Thais had been worried all along that if Indochina fell, they might be in trouble, but they weren't in trouble. In fact, I suspect that financially they may have profited. Since Utapao was a big base that brought into Thailand, to Bangkok, considerable financial resources. Because a lot of refugees came out, a lot of money came in. I remember handling a group of five or six women. They were Vietnamese Cabinet officers' wives, and I move them on to Utapao very quickly. It was interesting. You could help people. Lon Noll came in my office, he and his whole family of 40 people, a sweet little man.

*Q: He was the Prime Minister of Cambodia.*

BARNHART: Cambodia, yes.

*Q: Of course, at this time, the great genocide in Cambodia was just getting started.*

BARNHART: That really came later with the Pol Pot regime. I saw more of that when I was dealing with refugee matters. I wouldn't trade that experience for anything. It was busy, always. Also, by then, when Indochina fell, our U.S. military bases started to close. We had a lot of passport/visa work with Thai wives and the military. I was asked if I would go around to all the military bases, up to the north and east, to discuss consular matters. I said, "Sure," and they provided a plane. It was a great way to travel. The commercial officer said, "Can I go with you?" He wouldn't mind seeing some of it. I said, "Fine." We had a wonderful time. I loved it. It was

the best way to fly. You had someone meeting you right out there when the plane landed, a little six-passenger or eight-passenger, little jet, but it was fun. There were a lot of things like that really.

*Q: When you were dealing with the refugees, did you get involved with the non- governmental organizations, the NGOs, who deal with refugees?*

BARNHART: Oh, yes.

*Q: This is fairly early on in this great flood. How did that work?*

BARNHART: No, they weren't involved in them then, or at least they hadn't even set up business at that point. We were shipping most of these refugees without any screening. Anyone who had gotten out of Laos, Vietnam, or Cambodia, was allowed to stay in Thailand briefly, but they were to go. We sent a lot to Guam and some to Camp Pendleton in California, where they were processed there - that may be where you would find the voluntary agencies starting to get involved. But this was right in the beginning. When you asked whether I worked with them, I did but that was 10 years later.

But it was interesting, and I really liked the Thais very much, and they're the only group, not that many but three or four of the families - and remember this goes back 20 years, more than 20 years-that I keep in touch with. Now, I've never done that at any of the other posts, even more recent posts. But they're just friendly people, and, as I say, I met a lot of the president of the bank and some of the royal family, the second and third degree. It was kind of a fun thing. I got into the Royal Sports Club, a nice little golf course right in the heart of Bangkok, which is nice, and some interesting people too. Socially it was a fun for a consular officer. I was on all the diplomatic lists, as head of the consular section, and over at the embassy there would be the Ambassador and the DCM. Usually one or the other of them went, and I would go, but they didn't get down to the political counselor. We had a lot of, many more, senior people, but for me it was fun.

*Q: Wasn't Bangkok - I'm not sure if it was at that point, but it certainly became so shortly thereafter - sort of the sex capital almost through the world, which means tourists coming in including Americans, and all the problems that occur when you throw sex and drugs in a foreign country. What about the protection of welfare?*

BARNHART: We did considerable work in this area. We also had four, five, six people in jail, usually on drug charges, and we'd visit them fairly regularly. I had one officer particularly who did the Welfare Whereabouts and visited jails. She was beloved, because she would carry in cartons of cigarettes for them. I went out once and carried a few packs. "Well, you're not as good as Mrs. Fisher." There was one that was funny, a young man, no money. He was brought out. He was found on the border. He had been in Vietnam, and some journalist thought, well, we'll help this poor American citizen who has no money, no nothing. And they got him into Bangkok and brought him in to me. I took one look at him, and he looked at me and said, "I know you." He had been a welfare case when I was in Jerusalem, and he was still just going around the world. His father said, "I'll send the money if he goes to Israel, cuts his hair, and gets rid of his guitar."

That's what he had to do, and then Papa would send a ticket, nontransferable and one-way from Bangkok to Israel. Well, he finagled his way around that. It was interesting. But we didn't really have too much trouble. On the sex thing, everyone went down to the Pat Bong area - I mean tourists did - but they didn't seem to get into trouble. I used to take visitors down there at lunchtime, IRS, anyone that came to town. It was a fun place.

*Q: I was there at a consular conference and went out with a bunch of other consular officers, and we spent an evening.*

BARNHART: This is the thing. When were you there?

*Q: This was about '77 or '78.*

BARNHART: When I was there, Ralph Nader was there, and he knew the area very well. So when we had anyone around for lunch, the two of us would take them down to Pat Bong, to a couple of favorite places, and let these little dancing girls with nothing on sit on their laps. I think one night I took John Vessey in at nighttime, and poor, young John. I have to backtrack. Did I have help? Yes, from other Thai posts, Barbara Bodine. Well, Barbara Bodine was already in Bangkok, but John Vessey came down, loved to come down, and he did a lot of help. It was tiring, and I think I came down with sprue out of that whole assignment. One little episode out of that - I don't know whether I should mention it, but people remember it. I drove into the kwang one night.

*Q: You might explain what a kwang is.*

BARNHART: Well, it's a canal. They covered up most of them, but they were water passages. If you know anything about canals in Venice, for example, it was the same sort of thing, but they called them kwangs. They were on the side of each road. I had left a party at our head courier's office one night, and there was an Australian Qantas representative behind me. He said, "You please lead me out, because I don't know my way." It was night by then, 12, one o'clock, and we all had a few drinks. So I drive out this little side street, and somehow I got confused and I thought, well, the street is wider than I remember it. You could see a white fence over there, so I just pulled way over, and then I thought, well, there's a lot of water. But in Bangkok, in the city too and outside, potholes a foot deep were perfectly normal, and I thought it was a big pothole. I could see the headlights of the car behind me had stopped, and I thought, why. I don't know how long it took - not long, because suddenly the car wouldn't go further and I could look out and see water, and I remember thinking of Chappaquiddick and I thought this is stupid. I kicked off my shoes - you don't swim with shoes on - left my little evening purse there, took the keys out of the car, and tried to open the door. I couldn't get the door open, and so I started to roll down the window. About the time I did that, which is the way I got out actually, the poor Australian had jumped in this water, which is filthy dirty - it's used for sewage and everything else, there are snakes in it, who knows - but he jumped out and he tried to open the right-hand door. That was about the time, I guess, the whole thing went down, but I got out, and he helped me, and we went back to our host and hostess and had a brandy, and I think he took me home then. That night I had called my insurance agent, because the USAA representative lived right above me in the same apartment. He said, "At one o'clock in the morning, there's nothing I can do. Call me

tomorrow." So I called him the next morning, and then I called the one garage that dealt with foreign cars. It was a very dramatic thing. It was Barbara Bodine actually and John Vessey who came by and they took me out to where this was. People never forgot that. To this day, someone will say, "Oh, she's the one that drove in the kwang." It was an embarrassing situation, but I didn't see any need. But the Ambassador was very nice. He even said I could get permission to bring in a new car. But I got this one fixed. It was just one of the many things. There were lots of experiences in that slightly less than two years in Bangkok.

*Q: Well, in '76 were there?*

BARNHART: Well, in '76 I asked to be transferred. By then we were back to the chargé business, "Well, your staff doesn't like you very well." I said, "No, I know they don't," because I tried to push them. I never could put up with this "Well, I have to go home and take care of...."

*Q: When you talk about the staff, you're talking about the American staff?*

BARNHART: My American staff. Oh, no, the Thai staff was very good. But it was basically my American staff was annoyed at being asked to work beyond 4:30 when one had to go to exercise class and another one had to go because he had to spend all of the time and weekends with his family. No, they just didn't want to do anything other than basic work, and they wanted no part of the refugees or anything.

*Q: Normally the Foreign Service Officer expects to, in a time of emergency all of a sudden, you know, you do things.*

BARNHART: I had never experienced this. Yes, in Jerusalem, in Tokyo, wherever else I had been, you pitch in. But they absolutely were not going to help at all. This was not part of their work. I had never heard a Consular Officer or any other Foreign Service Officer say, "Well, my job description calls for this." In any event, they went to the chargé. He asked me about it, and I explained, yes, that was perfectly right, and particularly since he was the one that had made me run this whole refugee business. I said I had no support. So I talked to Washington, and they came up with Brazil. I had never been in South America. First they came up with Rio, and I said, "I want to go to Sao Paulo instead." Never mind, that had already been assigned to someone. I couldn't be happier that I went to Rio, believe me. I spent four great years.

**RICHARD W. BOEHM**  
**Political/Military Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1974-1976)**

*Ambassador Richard W. Boehm was born and raised in Queens, New York in 1926. Upon graduation from high school, he entered the U.S. Army. He received a bachelor's degree in English from Adelphi University in 1950. Ambassador Boehm served in Japan, Germany, Luxembourg, Turkey, Nepal, Cyprus, and*

*Oman. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 27, 1994.*

*Q: Shot down over Sverdlovsk.*

BOEHM: Who was exchanged in Berlin for the Soviet spy, Colonel Abel, during my tour there. We had these problems. But the U-2 operations had come to an end when a group of American reporters had been invited down to the air base at Utapao, Thailand. The U-2's had been carefully tucked around the corner of the buildings so that nobody would see them. However, the reporters did see them, this fact was published, and the Government of Thailand then had to ask us to stop U-2 operations. That happened before I arrived there.

In 1974 we were still conducting significant air and supply operations out of Thailand. Supply operations also covered Cambodia. The Vietnam War was clearly winding down, but until we were out of there, until the war was over, we were going to go on with these operations. My job was the usual political-military effort to coordinate between political and diplomatic requirements, on the one hand, and the US military requirements for operations, on the other hand. We tried to keep these requirements in balance. This enabled us to continue to operate as smoothly as possible.

At that time Thailand for years had been in the hands of a military government, so that the political-military job meant that we were dealing with the Thai who were actually running the country. So it was a very interesting time. However, it was clear by the time that I got there in 1974 that the Vietnam effort was coming apart, that our objectives there were not going to be achieved, and that the Viet Cong were going to come out on top. At least, it appeared that way. So it was really a holding operation, I would say, at that stage. That was the way it turned out. In 1975, of course, the Viet Cong won, Saigon fell, and Phnom Penh had fallen a few weeks earlier.

From Bangkok we were very much involved in the question of the evacuation of Americans and US Embassies from both Phnom Penh and Saigon. In fact, I had gone over to Phnom Penh with the US Air Force commander in Thailand, General Burns. We flew over to Phnom Penh to have a meeting with the Ambassador, John Dean at the time, to plan the evacuation, which later became known as [Operation] EAGLE PULL. It was a very exciting trip because by that time the Khmer Rouge -- we're now talking about Cambodia -- had gotten within rocket range of the airport [at Phnom Penh]. Rockets were coming into the airport, so that when you came in there by plane, you had to fly to a point directly over the airport and then describe a very tight spiral right down to the airfield. You couldn't make the usual flight approach because the Khmer Rouge were there. They could have shot you down.

We came down, circled there, and landed. We all jumped out and dove into a bunker. The plane just touched down, we got out, and it took right off again. We had to leave the same day because Congress had ordered that there could be no more than 100 official Americans in Phnom Penh. The Executive Branch chose to interpret that as meaning overnight. You could bring in people during the day. People would leave by evening, so that you would have no more than 100 Americans there overnight. We were among those who had to come in and go out the same day. We had our meeting. We could hear the rockets on the periphery of Phnom Penh.

In the evening we were going back out to the airport. The decision had been made that we would go to a schoolyard near the Embassy, get into a helicopter, take that to the airport, get into our plane, and get out of there. We left the Embassy in a convoy. We were all wearing bulletproof vests. As we approached the schoolyard, we could see that there was some kind of demonstration or rioting. There was a crowd around the helicopter. The convoy commander decided that it would be inadvisable for us to try to get through and into the helicopter and that we would go on by road to the airport. So we did. As you came into Pochentong airport, the military side was opposite the civilian side. We drove around the inside of the airport perimeter toward the military side, where we were going to board our plane. We drove past a couple of Cambodian military aircraft that were refueling. We got to a bunker which was only a couple of hundred yards farther on, around the perimeter. A couple of rockets came in and hit those planes that were being refueled, and they exploded like a nuclear bomb. We dove into the bunker. Then we reversed what had happened that morning. Our plane came in, touched down, we all rushed to board it, it took right off, and we went back to Bangkok. It was only about a week after that that Phnom Penh actually fell.

*Q: When you were talking to Ambassador John Gunther Dean, what was the attitude then? One can't help but compare and contrast what happened in Saigon later on. Ambassador Graham Martin would not, at least publicly, acknowledge to his staff that Saigon was going down the drain.*

BOEHM: Of course, John publicly wasn't acknowledging anything, but he was very realistic about this. He knew that Phnom Penh was going to fall very soon. He made realistic plans accordingly, and they worked. It was a very effective and successful evacuation. The evacuees were all brought over to Bangkok. The evacuation was very well run.

*Q: Back to Thailand, to the political-military situation. How close were we to the Thai military?*

BOEHM: We were quite close to the Thai military. The designated Thai contact for the U. S. was General Kriangsak Chomenan who was my contact and had been the contact of my predecessor, as Political-Military Counselor. We saw a lot of Kriangsak and got to know him quite well. We had lunch and dinner with him at various times. He loved to cook. You would go out to his house, and he would cook these enormous meals. Kriangsak later became Prime Minister. He was a very close contact.

*Q: What about the Thai royal family? Did they play any role?*

BOEHM: No, at least not as far as we were concerned. Sure, there was a role that they played on the Thai side, but it was a role that was so low key and subtle that it appeared only very rarely, as perceived from outside. Once in a great while, if things were going off the track, the king would intervene, but not very often.

*Q: We were talking about our closeness to the Thai military. Was there a problem, as there was in Vietnam, of corruption there?*

BOEHM: Oh, yes, of course.

*Q: Could you talk about this? How did we deal with it?*

BOEHM: Well, we didn't deal with it. We didn't like it. I'm not disclosing any secrets when I say that many of the senior Thai military were, and, presumably, still are quite corrupt. They were denuding the Thai forests of precious timber, including teak and various other kinds of fine wood. They did this illegally. They were enriching themselves in what we would call a corrupt way -- which, in many countries, is simply regarded as the normal system. Yes. They were very corrupt, but there was nothing that we could do about that. My own feeling was that it isn't up to us to try to change the morals and mores of foreign authorities. It is up to their own people to take care of that. We did not actively cooperate with them in their corruption -- at least not as far as I am aware. There might have been a few U. S. military who, somehow, were playing the game. However, generally speaking and as far as I can recall, the US authorities did nothing to promote or assist this corruption. On the other hand, we weren't actively involved in trying to suppress it, either.

If corruption became a problem for us in some way, if, for example, US convoys carrying materials from the port down at Sattahip to our bases in the North, were being systematically robbed by land pirates, as they sometimes were, and the generals or others were somehow tolerating or collaborating in this, we would approach the Thai and say, "This has to stop." We would sometimes stretch the limits of intrusion into the sovereignty of another country by mounting armed escorts for the convoys or covering them with helicopters. You might have some conflict in this respect because, clearly enough, the Thai -- both for reasons of sovereignty and for reasons of self-interest -- didn't like us to get too active in policing inside their country. But we would do it if it was affecting our operations. However, apart from that, there was nothing we could do about corruption, and we didn't attempt to. After all, we had a stake in remaining on cooperative terms with the Thai military and the Thai government. We were using bases within their country.

After the fall of Saigon, of course, the situation changed dramatically. The Thai, who have made a career for hundreds of years of carefully bending with the wind...

*Q: Like bending bamboo.*

BOEHM: Bending with the wind and flexible borders. [Laughter] There is a Thai heartland that they used to talk about, which is the area just north and south of Bangkok. The rest of the country has flexible borders. You don't want to get into too much trouble with your neighbors by being too sticky about exactly where the border is. This attitude was coming to the surface once again as the Thai saw the handwriting on the wall. When Phnom Penh and Saigon fell, the Thai felt that they had better make their peace with these neighbors, against whom they had previously collaborated with us. They started to adjust their relationships.

[In the wake of the end of the Vietnam War] a question came up about our bases in Thailand. Did we want to keep them or not? There was a period there of confusion, or apparent confusion, as to what we wanted to do. It was very difficult to get Washington to say, "We want to keep the bases" or, "We don't want to keep the bases." It was hard for the Embassy -- or for me, anyway --

to operate under those conditions and to know what to try to do. The Thai finally asked us to remove the bases from Thailand. We agreed. We retained a few facilities to use, but basically the whole structure of the U. S. military presence in Thailand was closed down.

*Q: How did we feel about the threat from Vietnam and Laos to Thailand itself?*

BOEHM: Obviously, we were very much concerned because the prevailing idea at the time was still the so-called Domino Theory, according to which Thailand would be next in line since Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam had been taken by the various communist movements. A serious communist insurrection had been going on for years in northeastern Thailand, in addition to a different insurrection in southern Thailand. But it was the northeastern insurrection that was of concern to us. We felt that Thailand would be under heavy pressure and was endangered. The Thai were trying to put the best face on the situation and were projecting an air of confidence that, if they could do things their way, they could probably get through all right. Of course, they continued to be members of SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization].

*Q: Did we tell them that, "We are always with you" and make soothing sounds like that?*

BOEHM: Yes. A strong effort was made on the US side to indicate our continuing intention to resist the spread of communism from Indochina to neighboring countries. In fact, it didn't spread.

*Q: Did you have the feeling that the fact that we had opened a kind of relationship with Communist China a little before you arrived in Bangkok take off some of the pressure?*

BOEHM: I'm trying now to recall the sequence. I don't recall that kind of connection arising from our establishment of relations with China. Of course, we came to see, not long after that -- maybe the seeds of it were already visible there -- that China and Vietnam were not friends. They ended up fighting each other. [Laughter]

*Q: The relationship of lips and teeth which the Chinese had previously spoken of was not exactly applicable. It just didn't turn out that way.*

BOEHM: They ended in a war of their own along the border between China and northern Vietnam. I just don't recall that the element of China was all that significant in our view of Thailand.

*Q: Well, Laos didn't present much of a threat to Thailand, did it?*

BOEHM: It did, if you think of the map. An awful lot of Laos abuts Thailand, along the Mekong River. There was a lot going on back and forth across the border. Laos was a supply base for the communist insurgency in northern Thailand. Laos was not a major problem, but at that point we were looking at Indochina as a whole -- and probably looking wrongly, in that respect, as if it were one territory. We seemed to be saying that there was this threat, coming out of what used to be called Indochina, which consists of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

As it turned out, none of that materialized. It all kind of simmered down, and we know where we

are now.

*Q: What about the CIA? Indochina was certainly their great field of operations in those days. Did you have any feel about what they were doing in Thailand?*

BOEHM: I was not much involved with them. Of course, as a senior Embassy officer, I knew of some of the things that they were doing, and I was a consumer of some of their product which, quite frankly, I found unhelpful or irrelevant. There was nothing there that any intelligent observer on the spot couldn't figure out for himself. I found it to be the case in a number of other countries, too. In terms of the intelligence produced for the consumer, their output didn't tell you anything that you didn't already know or could not figure out for yourself.

*Q: We had two ambassadors when you were there. One was William Kintner, and the other was Charles Whitehouse. Could you talk about how they operated and what they did?*

BOEHM: As I said when we started this interview, I wasn't going to talk about personalities. However, I could say a few things about how they operated.

Kintner was a retired military officer who had gone into academia. He had been involved in the Foreign Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania and then was politically appointed as an Ambassador by the Nixon administration. He liked to have a lot of discussion. He liked to have meetings. He liked to examine broad questions. He would take the key figures in the Embassy down to a beach house, where there would be a two-day workshop or seminar at which such questions would be discussed as what US interests really are in Vietnam. He liked to have these discussions. I personally found him quite stimulating.

*Q: That's the type of thing that we seldom have in the Foreign Service. We get so operational that we don't really think what we're being operational about.*

BOEHM: Ambassador Kintner liked to talk about policy matters of fundamental importance, and I think that that was good. Although himself a retired military officer, or perhaps because he was a retired military man, his relations with the military were a little dicey at times. Perhaps he knew more about them than they liked. They didn't get along too well with him. Eventually, Kintner was withdrawn by Washington. He didn't come to the end of his normal tour. He was sacked, in effect.

I liked Kintner. I thought basically well of him. Maybe I was biased, because I'd gone there as the heir presumptive of the DCM. This was the basis on which Kintner had hired me, although I hadn't known him before. Ambassador Macomber had recommended me when he met Ambassador Kintner in Washington. Kintner expected that his then DCM would be leaving.

*Q: Who was that?*

BOEHM: Ed Masters. Kintner was looking for a new Political-Military Counselor who could become DCM when Masters left. Macomber recommended me, and Kintner hired me, so that I went there with the expectation of becoming DCM.

After I'd been there for about 8-10 months, Kintner left. Charley Whitehouse came from Laos. He had been Ambassador in Vientiane and moved on to Bangkok. So he was already familiar with the area. When Charley arrived, I called on him as soon as I could and said, "You might be aware of the circumstances under which I came here." Ed Masters was still on hand. I said, "I want you [Ambassador Whitehouse] to know that I don't regard any commitment made by Ambassador Kintner as in any way binding on you." Charley said, "That's fine." [Laughter] It was left there. Apparently, that was that. He didn't say, "I'm not going to make you DCM." However, on the other hand it seemed probable to me that he wasn't going to. He probably had his own nominee in mind. So I said that I would like to leave, then, because I had come to Bangkok at least partly because there was the prospect that I would become DCM. Charley said, "OK, but I'd like you to stay until all this settles down." At that point Saigon was falling, and things were changing. So of course I agreed to stay on. It took a little over a year before I could leave. Ed Masters and I left on the same day. [Laughter]

Charley Whitehouse's style as Ambassador was different from Kintner's. It was a very informal, laid-back kind of style. Charley was kind of enchanted with the military. He wanted them to think of him as a former Marine pilot, which he had been during World War II.

That was not my approach. In several assignments in political-military work, I was primarily concerned with establishing and operating on the basis of civilian primacy over the military and the notion that the military had a restricted job to do. When it came to policy or the relations with foreign governments, that was the State Department's or the Embassy's job. So that ultimately brought me into some degree of friction with our military. I found, when I arrived in Bangkok that that was not the way in which matters had been handled. Our military had been given a freer rein than I thought that they ought to have. So in trying to sort that out and get them into what I regarded as the appropriate posture, it inevitably created friction. Our military tended to think that I was against them. I wasn't against them at all. It seemed to me that only people experienced in dealing with foreign governments should have the responsibility for getting what our military needed. Our military tended to act as if they were in the United States. They often seemed to attract strong counter-reactions from foreign governments because they wanted too much, went too far, or didn't handle matters properly.

So I felt that my approach, which was to compel them to have all of their dealings with foreign governments through me or the Embassy, would eventually get them more of what they needed than if they did it their way. I think that was true. But, as I said, inevitably this produced some friction. That settled down. Generally, they could see that I could deliver for them what they needed. Then they would accept my role, as I saw it.

*Q: Let me ask a little about family life in Bangkok, because Bangkok was a special place. In the first place there was a large U. S. military presence. I have never served there and only visited there once -- very briefly, a couple of years later. It was renowned then, and now, much to its detriment, as the sex capital of the world, as well as a center for drugs. This must have created tremendous problems for families and for the Embassy itself. Could you tell us a little about that?*

BOEHM: Yes, it raised very serious problems for the American families living there. I was living there as a bachelor, so I didn't have the kinds of problems that people with, say, teenage kids had. I didn't have them in my own life, but as a senior Embassy official, I had some responsibility for considering and trying to do something about these problems, although others in the Embassy, especially the Administrative Counselor and the DCM, had far more responsibility than I did.

I suppose that Bangkok had a much older tradition in this respect. My own awareness is that it was the Vietnam War that really gave Bangkok its big impetus as the sex capital of the world. It was an R&R [Rest and Recreation] center for our troops coming out of Vietnam. Tours were organized for our soldiers. Thai operators -- I'm sure with connections with the Thai military -- made a fortune out of these things. The typical R&R tour for GI's coming out of Vietnam would be to bring them to Thailand. Then the whole thing would be packaged for them, including the girls. They'd be taken to certain shops to buy jewelry and gems. Yes, it was a big business. As I said, it brought a lot of money into Thailand.

Around the more remote bases up country, tiny villages developed into towns whose entire living was made off sex and related services.

For the American families at the Embassy -- those living in Bangkok, as opposed to those coming over for R&R -- the problem was more a matter of drugs, rather than sex. Bangkok, I believe, was the first Embassy that established a serious drug education program in an effort to protect American teen-age kids against involvement with drugs. It was a problem and remained so. Some headway had been made, but it was still a problem. There was a strong effort being made by the Embassy to educate the kids and cope with this problem -- with recreational facilities, educational programs, and shipping people out, if necessary. All of those things were being done, but I was not directly involved in them. I was interested in them, obviously.

*Q: When you left Bangkok, what was the prevailing mood? Here you were, in the major country in Southeast Asia. We're talking about 1976. The question of where Southeast Asia would go must have been a major concern for the Embassy.*

BOEHM: It was. The main question under discussion was how long it would be before Thailand fell to the communists. Estimates varied, but many of us thought that it probably would.

*Q: You really thought that Thailand was a falling domino.*

BOEHM: You felt that the domino was going to fall unless the Thai cleaned up their act and got serious about corruption and other injustices that were going on. It seemed doubtful to a lot of people that they would be able to do that, that they would, in fact, as we saw it, be able to straighten themselves out. As I said, there might be others who wouldn't agree that they needed to be straightened out because they were acting in their traditional way and that this was acceptable in that culture. But I'm not so sure about that. So I think that there was a general expectation that Thailand was at serious risk of going the way of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. That was the general mood as I perceived it, a mood which I shared. I thought that Thailand's prospects were quite bleak at the time.

*Q: Were you passing any of this feeling on to the Thai military in one way or another?*

BOEHM: No. Well, I don't know how they perceived the situation. Discussions with them were designed to bring out how they saw it, but we had no official position of telling them that we thought that they were going to go down the tubes. On the contrary, we encouraged them not to go down the tubes. [Laughter] So we tried to draw them out on how they would deal with this threat, as you might say. As I said, you got varying reactions. Some of them would shrug and talk about flexible borders. Thailand's borders had been expanding and contracting for centuries. They might take that approach again. If the Laotians or Cambodians wanted this or that, they speculated as to whether they should make a big deal out of it. The idea was that they would survive by a flexible approach.

Well, as the situation turned out, as many people thought that it would, surprising things happened in Cambodia. You had the Khmer Rouge takeover. Then you had the Vietnamese push the Khmer Rouge [out of Phnom Penh]. We all know what the subsequent events were. There were such distractions that, certainly, Cambodia was in no position to attack anybody. Laos, by itself, was insignificant, except as a land mass. Vietnam addressed its internal problems and the China problem. They all got distracted, attention went elsewhere, and nothing happened. [Laughter] Thailand, in the meantime, is booming, although no one can say how long the boom will last.

**RICHARD E. THOMPSON**  
**Diplomatic Courier**  
**Bangkok (1974-1977)**

*Mr. Johnson, a Californian, was educated at the University of Southern California, the University of Madrid, Spain and Occidental College. Joining the Department of State as a Diplomatic Courier, his career took him to diplomatic courier centers in Washington DC; Frankfurt, Germany; and Bangkok, from which he serviced US Embassies throughout the world, collecting and delivering diplomatic pouches. His later assignments in Washington were of a senior managerial nature. Mr. Thompson was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2001.*

*Q: This would have been about 1974?*

THOMPSON: Yes. So I went back to Bangkok. I had a total of four tours there, and this was my second tour.

*Q: That was where you were the most, and in Frankfurt you were there twice?*

THOMPSON: Twice.

*Q: Four times in Bangkok. And this time, in the mid-'70s the Vietnam war was winding down or*

*ending...*

THOMPSON: It was winding down and I think I was the last courier to go in there.

*Q: Into Saigon?*

THOMPSON: Into Saigon. Yes. And also into Phnom Penh. I was the last, if not the last then certainly one of the last two to go in before it fell as well.

*Q: Were either or both of those trips difficult for you to accomplish?*

THOMPSON: No. It was a little bit stressful, because in Phnom Penh we had to circle in ever smaller circles to get down instead of flying straight down because the city was completely surrounded in those days at the last. But no, it wasn't difficult.

*Q: You were on a commercial airline.*

THOMPSON: Yes, it was Air Vietnam and I believe it was Thai International going to Cambodia.

*Q: Okay. Those were just basically airport transfers I suppose and then you went right out on the same plane?*

THOMPSON: No, if the plane went out, then we would have an airport exchange. I recall that the last two times that I went to Phnom Penh and Saigon I overnighted there.

*Q: Because the plane left presumably the next day.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: Anything else about this second assignment in Bangkok?*

THOMPSON: We interfaced with the Australian and New Zealand military to a great extent. We carried material down to Melbourne, Australia and handed it over to the Australians almost directly. We signed it over to a pouch clerk and in the same car he handed it over to the Australians. That was the first time that I experienced that.

*Q: Did we do the same thing with the British? No.*

THOMPSON: Well we might have, but I didn't actually see it. There was a cooperative military agreement where we actually carried classified material for them.

*Q: And we would do the same for them. They would do it for us...*

THOMPSON: No, to my knowledge, they never did it for us. We only carried our own material, but we carried things for them.

*Q: Carried things for them and handed things over to them when we had gotten to the destination. So that was presumably that was arranged at higher levels, government to government.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: And then you would make sure that the person receiving it was the correct person and then that was it.*

THOMPSON: Well, I would just sign it over to the Americans, and he would open the pouch and give it to the Australians. It was very interesting.

*Q: And we would be kind of bringing material worldwide for them to Melbourne that they could pick up in various places?*

THOMPSON: I don't know. This was just some kind of a special military intelligence material. What I'm telling you isn't classified because it was openly done.

*Q: But you still had to go to Melbourne, to Australia, to Wellington, to somewhere in New Zealand?*

THOMPSON: Yes, except that normally we didn't go to these consulates. Of course we had to go to Sidney because that was where the plane landed, and so we used that as kind of a central point. But normally we didn't go to consulates. But we did in this case just to move this material.

*Q: Because of that special requirement.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

**WARD BARMON  
Commercial Officer  
Bangkok (1975-1977)**

*Ward Barmon was born in Huntington, Long Island in 1943. He graduated with a double major in American and Chinese history from Yale University and then studied at the University of Madrid for a year before coming into the Foreign Service in 1967. In 1992 he served as Director of the Narcotics Affairs section in Bogota, Colombia. In addition to Colombia, he was posted to Belize, Taiwan, Thailand, El Salvador, and Honduras.*

*Q: How was Bangkok in 1975?*

BARMON: Bangkok was a nervous place. Saigon had just fallen a few months before. People

were really concerned about what might happen there.

*Q: How was the embassy?*

BARMON: Huge. Overwhelming, it was so large. It made Taipei look tiny, not to speak of Belize. Hundreds and hundreds of people. This did not include the military and USIS posts up in the Northeast and elsewhere.

*Q: What were you doing?*

BARMON: Again, I was a commercial officer and worked in the commercial office across from the embassy. There were three American officers and a number of Thais.

*Q: What was your major interest?*

BARMON: Thailand was just starting to flourish economically. There were lots of major project opportunities, which I kind of made my own. I decided that I would go after those. It was rather ironic to me that most of the Department of Commerce officials did not seem to place much importance on major projects, except for the major projects people themselves. I got a nice little note after I had been to Thailand for a year from the major projects people saying my work in Taipei on major projects had been appreciated as was my work in Thailand. They noticed a significant decrease in reporting of major projects since I left Taiwan and a tremendous increase after I had arrived in Bangkok. So, they were very appreciative, but the rest of the Commerce Department was not interested. They were more interested in the much more traditional trade opportunities. So, to answer your question, I kind of made major projects my special area.

*Q: You say major projects, what do you mean?*

BARMON: These are mainly major construction projects. Electrical generating, plants, transportation projects, bridges, airports, seaports, gas/oil pipelines, which were usually multimillion-dollar deals. I would try to report on these early to American companies so they could pick what interested them most. And, to help them if they wanted to compete for any of them.

*Q: How responsive did you find business at the time?*

BARMON: American business? Oh, quite responsive. The big construction companies were very interested in competing on projects, like Westinghouse, General Electric, etc. Many of them had small offices in the region. They were sending people through quite regularly. They would come in and talk to me and I would be as helpful as I could.

*Q: How did you find Thai officials?*

BARMON: Very open, seemingly open, responsive, and helpful. Sometimes they did not know a lot themselves if it was a private sector project. Yes, very helpful.

*Q: Was there a lot of under the table negotiating, influence of money, what have you?*

BARMON: Well, there was a fair amount of that going on. Particularly the European companies: the Germans, the French, the British. Sometimes it made it difficult to compete. We tried at least to provide early and accurate information so the American companies could compete. Then if they wanted to play that other game that was up to them. I did not want to hear about that. It was illegal as far as we were concerned. Our hands were tied. We could not even push one American company if there were more than one. So, it was difficult.

*Q: In a way we really did not have a coherent policy, did we?*

BARMON: Well, it is just the way we operate as a government. The Japanese were probably our biggest competitors out there, and then later, the Koreans. We just operated differently. I think some of the Asian countries appreciated it. However, I am sure there was an awful lot of corruption. I am sure we lost a lot of projects because of that. I am convinced in many cases that we had the best project presentation and probably among the best equipment. It was always tough to compete against the Germans, because they had such a good reputation. Then, later, it was the Japanese. On the commercial side, we just did not know how to market products in Asia. During that period in the 1970s, GM [General Motors] and Ford did such a poor job. They basically controlled the market in Thailand in the 1950s and 1960s. They lost it to the Japanese in the 1970s for a very simple reason. They did not know how to finance the sale of the cars and trucks. The financing was for too short a period of time. The Japanese came in and offered 10 year financing, or five to 10 year financing. GM, Chrysler, and Ford could not compete, or chose not to. So, we lost that market.

*Q: Were we trying to make them aware of how the game was played?*

BARMON: Those companies are so big, they do not listen to us. On the financing side, they were very short sighted. They wanted the money up front quickly, and were not willing to extend longer term financing. It was too bad.

*Q: Were we concerned at the time (since it was close to the fall of Vietnam) about maybe there would be some convulsion in Thailand that it would be taken over by the Communists?*

BARMON: I do not think the concern was too great. There was some concern. We watched the border area very closely. The Thais were more concerned with internal subversion. There was one incident that happened when I was there that had everybody all excited. There was a lot of concern about the flood of refugees. Among the refugees were agents that came across the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. Largely in the Northeast, and along the border area closer to Bangkok. I can't remember exactly how this started, but there was a rumor going around to not eat the watermelons or the ducks. The Vietnamese along the border largely grew these two products. This was a conspiracy to do in the Thais. The rumor got around, and into the media very quickly that if you ate these products in any amount, it would have a negative effect on the size of the male organ, and on women's breasts. They would shrink and fall off, or eventually disappear. This was taken quite seriously. Those of us who were not Thai found this very amusing. But even we did not eat that many ducks or watermelons. We did not go to some of the

lengths of the Thais though. We had a friend who was a U.S. Navy doctor. He was posted to Thailand with a naval disease research organization. He was asked to come up and visit the northeast area by the head abbot of a wat. He went into this room, where there was a whole line of males (In another room was a line of females.). At the abbot's say so, they dropped their pants. He looked at them and said to me later that they looked perfectly normal, except that a certain number of them had fish hooks to keep them from shrinking. He thought that was a little strange. He went into the other room and saw the women. They took their tops off and did not see anything unusual. But, the abbot was quite concerned and some of these people had obviously done some physical damage to themselves. He wrote all of this up and reported it back to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. They went through the motions and came back and said that they knew of no disease or virus transmitted through watermelons or ducks that would cause this. This panic eventually died down. However, there were serious repercussions by the Thais against some of the refugees. Some refugees were killed. This panic swept the country and continued for a couple of months. People actually finally realized that nothing was going to fall off or shrink in significance. To the Thai male, this is very important. So, the Thai people took it quite seriously. Quite an interesting story. This was the only time while I was there that there seemed to be a real concern of the average Thai that the Vietnamese really wanted to take over Thailand.

*Q: Did you get involved in the disputes over American cigarettes with the Thai people? Or, maybe that came up later.*

BARMON: I do not think that happened while I was there.

**CHARLES H. TWINING**  
**Political Officer**  
**Bangkok (1975-1977)**

*Charles H. Twining was born in Maryland in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Virginia in 1962 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1964. After entering the Foreign Service in 1964 his assignments included Tananarive, Dalat, Abidjan, Bangkok, Cotonou, Douala, Ouagadougou, and Honolulu with ambassadorships to Cambodia and Cameroon. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ambassador Charles H. Twining in 2004.*

TWINING: I went to Thailand in June 1975, and I left mid-1977.

*Q: Well, were you involved in the long, drawn out efforts on the missing in action POW issue, there?*

TWINING: Very much. As I noted, the Defense Department had two people stationed in the embassy in Bangkok to support that effort headed by Col. Paul Mather. My job was to support them, to interact with the Thai, to get Thai support for their effort. These were the early days, thus the importance of when Congressman Montgomery's delegation to Hanoi and Vientiane in

late 1975, seeking Vietnamese and Lao authorization for our military to start working with those governments, to look for POWs, or MIAs. It was a time when a lot of people thought there were still prisoners of war in those countries. Anyone, whether State or the CIA, who had anything to do with those countries, first on your list was always to try to find what you could about any prisoners of war, or a case where remains might be found.

*Q: Did you get involved in work of confidence men, people who were peddling bones and dog tags and pictures, and all that?*

TWINING: Yes. I guess that is human nature. You found out there was a whole process of manufactured dog tags in Saigon, for example. People were trying to sell these things to Americans, as a way to get to the United States. "If you let me go as a refugee, I'll give you the information." The same with bones. You got involved in that. That is why you wanted your military experts there. They're the ones who had to sort out truth from fiction.

*Q: Did you have much work with the NGOs, the Non-Governmental Organizations?*

TWINING: Yes, you needed to keep contact with the NGOs, as well as the international organizations, because these people were working in refugee camps. The American Friends Service Committee was up in Laos. The International Committee of the Red Cross, UNHCR, and other private and international organizations often could give you insights into what was happening, at least in Vietnam and Laos. You never had insights into Cambodia because they couldn't get into Cambodia.

*Q: Later, not now, in the 1980s, I talked with people who were dealing with the refugee situation. At that point, they thought there was almost an institutional bias to keep the refugees going, calling them economic refugees, and other things. These are real, honest to God refugees.*

TWINING: You have all kinds of people, you really do. Where do they come from? You had a lot of Chinese showing up in Saigon, who said, "We're refugees, the communists are persecuting us." It may have been true, but it was equally true, I think, that there were people looking for a way to get to the U.S. to run businesses. You had a lot of that kind of thing. It took Solomonic judgment to distinguish who was legitimate and who was not.

*Q: Of course, they had no great future in Vietnam.*

TWINING: At least that is how it appeared in 1975-1977.

*Q: They were entrepreneurs. When the North Vietnamese took over, being an entrepreneur is not exactly a good occupation to have in a communist regime.*

TWINING: The North Vietnamese really hurt themselves in the first three years after they took over the South, in controlling things so much that business could not flourish. Employment was not created. Thank heavens, they finally woke up, and realized they had messed up a productive system, instead of trying to benefit from the system.

*Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop. We'll pick this up next time. When did you leave Bangkok?*

TWINING: 1977.

*Q: Is there anything else you should mention?*

TWINING: I was also in Thailand at the time that the Thai government asked the American troops to leave. I found myself, due to vacancies in the embassy, running the political section for a while. I accompanied Ambassador Whitehouse to meet with Thai Foreign Minister Pichit in mid-1976, in the midst of hostile demonstrations, indicative at the time of the genuine mood of nervousness. The Foreign Minister told me, "We have to ask the American troops to leave. We think there is no longer an advantage to having them here." Whitehouse earned my admiration when he left the Minister's office. I was standing next to him when he met the press. They asked, "Well, are you Americans leaving?" His answer was, "We do not stay where we are not wanted." I often thought, "Hats off to you." Whether he had instructions to say that, I don't know. But, I thought of Secretary Colin Powell recently when he was asked, "If the Iraqis ask you to leave, will you do it?" His answer was basically the same answer.

**THOMAS F. CONLON**  
**Political Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1975-1979)**

*Thomas F. Conlon was born in Illinois in 1924 and received his BS from Georgetown University in 1948. He served overseas in the US Army from 1943-1945. Upon entering the Foreign Service, he was posted in Havana, Surabaya, Singapore, Saigon, Le Havre, Manila, Nice, Canberra, and Bangkok. In 1992 Mr. Conlon was interviewed by Arbor W. Gray.*

*Q: Then came your last post overseas in the Embassy in Bangkok. How were you chosen for this position?*

CONLON: By 1975 I had been in Australia for four years, about a normal tour of duty. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs Phil Habib came through Canberra in May, 1975, and asked me if I would take the East Asian position on the National Security Council staff in Washington. I said that I would, though I was not particularly enthusiastic about returning to Washington. I had been in touch with Hugh Appling, the former Deputy Chief of Mission in Canberra and then Deputy Director General of the Foreign Service in Washington (who also serves as chief of personnel matters). I told him what Phil Habib had asked me. Hugh said that, as Phil had been traveling, he was not up to speed on personnel matters. The position on the National Security Council staff had already been filled. However, Hugh asked if I would like to be Political Counselor in Bangkok. (It later turned out that Tom Barnes, the former Political Counselor in Bangkok, was involved in a somewhat messy divorce case and had asked for a Washington assignment to handle this. He was assigned to the National Security Council staff

position which Habib had asked me to take.) It was easy to switch the two assignments around.

After I had accepted Phil Habib's offer of the position on the National Security Council staff, I mentioned the matter to Ambassador and Mrs. Marshall Green. Marshall was fairly noncommittal. However, Lisa Green, always outspoken, told me that "they will eat you up," as this is a high pressure job and always has been. I was somewhat relieved when I learned from Hugh Appling that the job was no longer available and that I could go to Bangkok if I wished.

*Q: Had you had much contact with Thailand previously?*

CONLON: I had passed through Bangkok several times, but knew little about the country, other than what I knew from my readings on the history of Southeast Asia. In this respect Thailand is unique in never having been a European colony. The Thai therefore did not have the kind of inferiority complex which many ex-colonial peoples have. Moreover, Thailand is a relatively homogeneous country with few minorities and no serious border problems.

I had the good fortune to serve under a particularly capable Ambassador, Charles S. Whitehouse, whom I had previously worked with in Saigon. The Political Section was fairly large, with seven capable officers. They had, perhaps, developed bad habits of not doing very much, or so Ambassador Whitehouse and Deputy Chief of Mission Ed Masters, immediately told me, on my arrival there. Oddly, neither Whitehouse nor Masters was aware that Barnes had a rather complicated family situation. Barnes was married to Joan Barnes, a very agreeable American woman, by whom he had three children. Barnes had been a Vietnamese language officer whom I knew in Saigon in the early 1960's, when he was noted for being something of a womanizer. It turned out, however, that he had acquired a Vietnamese "minor wife," by whom he also had three children. He was able to handle this situation until Saigon was falling in early 1975. He spent almost all of his time in those early months of 1975, trying to get his Vietnamese "wife" and children out of Saigon. No wonder he hadn't been doing much as Political Counselor in Bangkok. The Political Section had been left to run itself, which is never a good idea.

After four years in Canberra, where I had done a substantial part of the work myself, I was used to working fairly steadily. I encouraged the other officers to buckle down and do some work for a change, an effort which bore fruit fairly quickly.

Thailand had the problem of adjusting to the situation at the end of the Vietnam War in which it had participated alongside the U. S. It had contributed two divisions of troops and committed itself in a way which was unusual in the cautious Thai approach to foreign policy. Ultimately, the Thai were successful in making the adjustment, in cooperation with the other members of ASEAN (that is, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

I became more involved in narcotics problems than I really wanted to be, since Thailand is a major producer of opium and the site for a substantial amount of narcotics trafficking. For a time I did much of the narcotics reporting for the Embassy, though ultimately another officer was assigned to handle this responsibility, in a separate unit.

Our four years in Bangkok were quite interesting for both me and my family. Of course, several

of our children were now in the U. S., though the younger children were still with us, attending the International School of Bangkok (ISB), from which three of them eventually graduated. Joan found a personally rewarding niche for herself as copy editor for Sawaddi, a quarterly publication of the American Women's Club, where she worked with several women up to 20 years younger than she was. She recalls once referring to the evils of split infinitives, only to have one of the young women ask her, "Joan, what's a split infinitive?" We did a good bit of travel around this fascinating and friendly country.

Professionally, it was a very rewarding experience, though it had its negative aspects. With one exception the Deputy Chiefs of Mission I worked under were nowhere near as capable and helpful as the DCM's in Canberra. Moreover, after three years under Ambassador Whitehouse, I found the final year, under Ambassador Morton I. Abramowitz, very trying. Whitehouse was and is true American establishment and a very wealthy man whose background is far different from mine. However, we were always on good terms, and if I were to be thrown together with him tomorrow, we would pick up again with great confidence in each other. Abramowitz is a very difficult person. He has few friends, is remote and almost unfriendly, and never opens himself up. The door to his office was almost always closed. Whitehouse's door was almost always open, unless he had a visitor. In the British phrase, they were as different as chalk and cheese.

**JOHN R. BURKE**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1976-1977)**

*Ambassador John R. Burke received a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1947 and a master's degree from Wisconsin University in 1955. He immediately joined the Foreign Service. His career included positions in Thailand, France, Vietnam, Haiti, Guyana, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

*Q: Well, before we end this interview, I would like to turn back to your time -- because we were more pressed before -- when you were in Bangkok as deputy chief of mission between 1976 and 1977. We just sort of hopped over that. You worked with Charles Whitehouse, who was the ambassador. I wonder, because he's a man who has had some important assignments, could you describe his method of operation and how he worked?*

BURKE: Well, first of all, I've got high respect for Charles Whitehouse. I enjoyed working for him. He's a man of many qualities. He has wonderful sense of humor. He's a marvelous raconteur. And in terms of his managerial style, I would say it was a very relaxed managerial style in that he was quite willing to let me manage the embassy. But he wanted to be informed, of course, on all matters that he felt should come to his attention. But he would leave that up the DCM. I think he was extremely well-liked by all members of his staff because of his good humor, because of the way he handled meetings and the way he dealt with people on a personal basis. He had, I think, a very good way of dealing with foreign officials as well and people of the government in which he was posted, in this case Thailand. There are several -- oftentimes you'll

run into an American ambassador serving abroad who may have been superb bureaucrats on the Washington level, but they don't always function as effectively in a foreign environment in that they don't sufficiently take into account the customs and the idiosyncrasies of the country and people in which they live. I'd say in Whitehouse's case, he was very sensitive to the local environment, and I think that's one of the reasons he was such an effective ambassador at least while the two of us were together. I think that's about it in terms of him. I guess, it reduces managerial style to wanted always to be kept informed and never wanted to be surprised.

*Q: Well, you were both there at a time when there was a change of government and a coup and all this.*

BURKE: Yes.

*Q: How did you all view -- could you explain sort of what happened and how did you view this? There was an election in April of '76, and then there was a military coup in October of '76. How did the embassy respond, and how did you see the situation?*

BURKE: Well, actually, he was either on leave or on consultation in Washington at the time of the coup.

*Q: This seems to be the standard operating procedure.*

BURKE: Yes. I was chargé at the time of the coup. It was a rather remarkable coup in many ways. The government rather lost control of the situation, and it involved students, and there were demonstrations by students in Bangkok. In one case, the students hanged a figure in effigy which looked remarkably like the Crown Prince of Thailand. Now, this produced a very sharp reaction on the part of students in a neighboring institution who were really a trade school as opposed to a university. And they burst into the other campus, and the whole thing began to unravel very quickly.

The government seemed to be incapable of meeting Kukrit Pramoj, I believe, was the prime minister at the time, and seemed to be incapable of handling the situation. It began to get badly out of hand, rioting in the center of Bangkok, and the military moved in and took over the government almost with extreme reluctance, and that was it. At least from the point of view of the military, they got control of the situation. There was a certain amount of bloodshed but largely the bloodshed was as a result of the conflicts between the students themselves and not the military against the students or against the populace.

*Q: Well, what did you do? I mean, here you are chargé and there is a coup. What does one do during a coup?*

BURKE: What you do at the time of a coup is you try to gather as much information as possible about the contending forces.

*Q: How do you do this?*

BURKE: Well, I did it largely through the attaché office. I was fortunate in that we had an Army attaché. I was really fortunate in that I had an extremely good Army colonel who had been in Thailand for at least a couple of years at that point, and he had excellent connections within the Thai military. So he was able to get first-class information on the situation as it developed. And there was also a Naval attaché, a captain, who had a social relationship with the man who ultimately became head of the coup group, an admiral. And between the two of them, I'd say we had the coup pretty well taped from the beginning in terms of the people involved, what their purposes were and all the rest of it.

As I mentioned before, it seemed to me that there was a great reluctance on the part of the military to move in and take charge. They didn't really want to, it seemed to me. I think that's a fair judgment. They did because they felt the situation was beginning to unravel so badly and did take over and did restore order and things calmed down. The monarchy was never threatened, and, of course, the monarchy in Thailand in recent history at least provided the great stabilizing force in terms of the society.

Now, it was interesting in a way, I was quite pleased -- if one can say one is pleased -- that we had the distraction of a presidential election in the United States almost coincidentally with the coup.

*Q: This would have been with Ford?*

BURKE: This would have been Carter-Ford, yes. And I really felt that if Washington had not been so preoccupied with the presidential election, I would have been receiving instruction of the most detailed sort to get well involved early on and probably in the wrong direction. But as it turned out, I didn't get any such instructions. We just played it the way we saw it, and there wasn't any important U.S. involvement as such. We were monitoring the situation, and it evolved and developed. It produced a situation which was inimical to U.S. interest and regretful though it may have been that the elected government of Kukrit Pramoj was swept aside. It seems that there probably was no other way to go given the situation.

*Q: Well, you were there in Southeast Asia as a rather critical time, too, although it was only for not much more than a year when we were really disassembling what we had in Southeast Asia. Particularly, we were pulling out our bases, weren't we, at that point?*

BURKE: We had already pulled out our bases, really. We had a very, very small contingent of U.S. in country left. So the great dismantling had gone on before my arrival.

*Q: Is this leaving any repercussions, economic or politically? I mean, were you feeling among the Thais an unhappiness or were they pleased that we were out?*

BURKE: Well, it was certain that the government wanted us out and had asked us to leave. The Thai, I think, the ordinary Thai, missed to a certain extent, the economic infusion that the U.S. forces had provided in terms of money and whatnot. But there was enough dynamism within the Thai economy itself so that the slack was picked up in fairly short order after our departure, after we pulled out our bases and our troops. So that the economic downturn was only a slight jolt and

not anything profound or important. So I'd say it went well, and in retrospect it was probably a good thing.

*Q: Well, one last question on Thailand. I mean, again, for some years at the height of our involvement, which you were also much concerned, we were talking about the Domino Theory, that if Vietnam went, the rest of Southeast Asia would go. And at the time you were there, I mean, basically Laos and Cambodia had gone. Thailand would have been next on any domino agenda, and it was still at a time of great pressure. Would you say the concept of the domino thing was faulty from the beginning? Or had something changed between the time we were propounding this in the 1960s particularly and the mid-'70s after Vietnam had fallen?*

BURKE: Well, I personally believe the Domino Theory, always have. The difference, of course, was that we had provided the shield for roughly 12 years by our continued presence in Vietnam - the two reference points being '63 and '75, really. So that in that time, ASEAN became an important element.

*Q: ASEAN being?*

BURKE: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which of course is made up of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. And the economies of those individual countries began to move smartly during this time. Certainly the procurement and whatnot by the United States in Thailand helped their economy. But the Thailand I saw in the mid-'50s when I was there the first time and the Thailand of two decades later, just remarkable the self-assurance of the Thai in both the people and the government, really, in terms of being able to handle themselves, that it would have been, say, ten years earlier. So I do feel that if we hadn't hung Vietnam for as long as we did, that the domino process would have taken place, if we had left, say, in '62, '63 or whatever. And Thailand at that stage would have been under great pressure. And of course, the events of China in the meantime and the China of the early '60s was a much more aggressive and maneuvering animal than it was in '73. After all, you had already had the Nixon visit and the relationship with the United States was beginning to grow and become important to China. So that it's a completely changed situation in Southeast Asia.

**JOHN J. HELBLE**  
**Country Director**  
**Washington, DC (1976-1977)**

*John J. Helble was born in Appleton, Wisconsin in 1934. He received a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Wisconsin. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. Ambassador Helble's career included positions in Puerto La Cruz, Saigon, Hue, Kuala Lumpur, Dacca and Honolulu. This interview was conducted by Thomas F. Conlon on April 5, 1996.*

*Q: He went into this whole question of supplies during this whole period in detail. He sets out what was actually delivered and the impact on ARVN morale. He concluded that, on the whole,*

*we replaced about 20 percent of the military supplies, including ammunition, which ARVN expended between 1973 and the end in 1975. This is precisely what you've been talking about.*

HELBLER: I think that probably answers your question. As I indicated previously, I left the Special Assistant's job after three years and moved on to a line job as Country Director for Thailand and Burma. This was just about the kind of operation I wanted at that point, because it gave me a different kind of experience and different countries than I'd had experience in before. It would be something less of a pressure cooker, and I liked both the Thai and the Burmese with whom I had had contact over the years. I liked both countries and felt that it would be a pleasant and essentially non-crisis area of assignment, although there was this strong undercurrent of concern, particularly in Thailand, about its future, in the wake of the Indochina disaster.

From a policy point of view I had to deal with the withdrawal of U. S. military forces and facilities from Thailand. I made a trip of one month or so after I took charge of the Thailand-Burma desk. The Country Directorate for Thailand and Burma was a relatively small office, with several officers and two secretaries. I remember meeting you in Bangkok.

*Q: I was Political Counselor in Bangkok.*

HELBLER: I made a trip up to Chiang Mai.

*Q: When Dave Sciacchitano, a Political Officer in the Embassy, never turned up to accompany you.*

HELBLER: With the mysterious Mr. Sciacchitano as my escort. Then you loaned me another officer from your staff, Linda...

*Q: Stillman.*

HELBLER: To accompany me to Burma because the Political Section in Bangkok always had an interest in what was going on in Burma.

*Q: Linda had served at the Consulate in Chiang Mai and was very familiar with issues and personalities involved in the opium and narcotics traffic in Burma.*

HELBLER: So she and I went off to Rangoon and up to Mandalay, where I came down with a very devastating malady for 36 hours. It simply flattened me. I couldn't get much done in Mandalay.

*Q: There wasn't much to do there, anyway. However, there are some very impressive Buddhist temples and shrines in the area.*

HELBLER: I also made a stop in Malaysia, because I hadn't been there for a couple of years -- or a year, anyway. I had lots of friends there.

Aside from that trip the daily grind on the Thailand-Burma desk, we had the Golden Triangle

heroin problem, which affected both Thailand and Burma. Heroin originated primarily in Burma and moved into Thailand for worldwide distribution.

*Q: Probably the bulk of the opium and heroin was produced in Burma, and to some extent in Laos.*

HELBLER: That's right. Three countries were involved, but most of the drugs flowed through Thailand. Of course, we had a major effort going on, trying to stem that flow. Some things never change. Now, 20 years later, we can say the same things.

The Burmese internal political scene was interesting, but we had minimal interest or involvement in Burma, with the exception of the narcotics traffic.

In Thailand we had relatively greater interest but less interest than we had had a couple of years previously. In Thailand we were also interested in paring down our military presence. We didn't have many crises, by and large. I had the opportunity to talk on the phone to Ambassador Charley Whitehouse from time to time, because the Country Director, in many respects, is the Washington backup for the Ambassador. My job, in large measure, was to support the Embassy, deal with the Washington end of its problems, and fight for it when necessary with the Washington bureaucracy, as the situation dictated.

I also talked frequently with John Burke, the DCM at the Embassy, an old friend. He had been an instructor at the University of Wisconsin in 1954-55, teaching my class in "The History of American Foreign Policy." Then he joined the Foreign Service in 1956. This was the first time that our respective careers had touched.

I can't say that anything of great moment or unusual in a policy sense happened at that time in Thailand. There were political developments going on. I didn't have or seek to have any particular influence on what was happening in that, other than to ensure the U.S. did not become enmeshed in Thai politics.

During my Thai-Burma stint, the transition from the administration of President Ford to that of President Carter occurred. During the transition between the election of November, 1976, and President Carter's inauguration Dick Holbrooke, whom we spoke of previously, was the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia-Designate. He was assigned to the Carter transition staff in the Department of State.

Holbrooke sought me out to discuss East Asian matters. I had seen him a number of times in the East Asian Bureau front office between March, 1976, until I left the Special Assistant job in September, 1976. During this time, and on a number of occasions, he and Tony Lake discussed with Phil Habib which job they should take in the State Department when Carter was elected. Of course, when they started that process, it was almost eight months before Carter's election. So Habib and Helbler, at least, thought that this was a very arrogant display, already lining up their jobs in the new Carter administration which has not yet been elected. Well, for whatever reason Carter did win the election. Immediately, Holbrooke became involved in liaison with the East Asian Bureau in the State Department.

He talked only to two people in the Bureau during this entire period of eight months. I was one of them. I suppose that he remembered me from a long time back. On a couple of occasions we talked about various aspects of the Bureau. Referring to my last encounter with him prior to this time frame in 1976, he said, "John, you really did me a favor in that counseling session." I thought that that was rather magnanimous and an unexpected source of praise on the subject, given the way that we had parted at the end of that interview. He said, "I'd really like to give you a very senior job when I take over as Assistant Secretary of State in January 1977." He mentioned the specific job. I told Dick that my pattern was to operate within the system. I had just taken over the Thai-Burma desk. I was content with it, but if he really needed somebody for that job, I would give some thought to any appropriate person. Dick was very puzzled by this, because it certainly was not the way HE operated in life. He couldn't understand why some guy who had stayed within the normal, bureaucratic channels would react negatively when an opportunity came out of nowhere to obtain a higher position.

*Q: Did he ever tell you what the job was?*

HELBLE: Yes, he did. It was an ambassadorship. However, I was not equipped to handle it, in my judgment. Furthermore, I didn't like being beholden to Holbrooke. I felt that I was at the proper level and in the proper job. I wanted to stay in the system.

In any event Holbrooke came in as Assistant Secretary, and in short order we were having problems. Not just me but almost all of the Country Directors in the bureau. Holbrooke started off with a flurry of activity, making policy decisions and trying to arrange things, in 98 percent of the cases, without reference to the bureau's experts and the bureau's country directorates. He should have tried out these ideas on the staff to have some feed-back for his own protection. In short order I know for a fact that, out of the 14 Office Directors, 13 of them were extremely unhappy, myself included. They were disgusted that things were being done without any discussion or reference to them and without their knowledge or utilizing the expertise available. This was just his mode of operation.

For example, I had a particularly bad experience, but I was not alone in this respect. My Burma Desk Officer, who was also my Narcotics Officer, was ordered up to the front office and told by Holbrooke that he was to participate in a narcotics group in the White House, chaired by Dr. Peter Bourne, who had been assigned by President Carter as his drug czar Coordinator of Narcotics Policy. This was a highly restricted, interagency group. Our officer would participate in this group but he was NOT to discuss this with anybody else, including me.

So off to the White House my officer went. He came back from the first meeting and reported to me exactly what had happened, swearing me to secrecy, of course, for his own protection. I understood that and appreciated his loyalty. Then he went to several, subsequent meetings. At one point he learned that Holbrooke had been talking to CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] about providing some military type aircraft to the Burmese Government for them to use to track the heroin transit trails in northern Burma. The purpose was to interrupt such traffic.

My Burma Desk Officer was Richard M. Gibson. He was, of course, horrified by this proposal. I

was outraged by it. Anybody who knew anything about the situation knew, first of all, that we were not doing much of anything with the Burmese Government in Rangoon, as it was then known. It was not exactly an ideal, humanitarian, human rights-oriented type government, and the animosities and hostilities between the ethnic Burmans who dominated the Burmese Government and certain of the tribal groups which ringed Central Burma, including the Karens, Kachins, and others, were long enduring. There was constant warfare between them, at varying levels. Many of these tribal groupings had significant elements which supported friendship with the United States, including U.S. Christian missionaries who had worked in those areas for generations. They felt that the Burmans, and the Burmese Government, were very oppressive toward these tribal groups.

And now Holbrooke proposed to provide the Burmese Government with aircraft. There was no question in my mind that the Burmese Air Force, to the extent that it functioned at all and was able to maintain such aircraft and keep them flyable, would use them, first and foremost, in their own list of priorities, against rebel Karens, Kachins, and others. Secondly, just to satisfy us and for whatever other reason there might be, they would use them against narcotics traffickers in northern Burma. In any event, I was sure that these aircraft would be misused, from time to time if not regularly.

Well, Holbrooke had never consulted anybody in the EA Bureau on this subject. I haven't the foggiest idea whom he consulted. Bob Oakley, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State covering Southeast Asian Affairs, was my immediate supervisor at that point. I left a message for him one evening that I wanted to talk to him when he was available. Well, he came down to my office, and for an hour I expressed my outrage about this issue, the incident at hand, the general management of the Bureau, and the extent of unhappiness in it. I had been in the Bureau for three years and knew all of the people in it. I could speak with some authority about the prevailing views. I really unloaded on Oakley. He seemed rather shocked, but he's usually a very laid back fellow and took it all calmly. I said, "What you do with this information is up to you, but somebody up there on the Sixth Floor in the front office of this Bureau ought to be aware of it. This is too much, and I'm not going to put up with this type of behavior by Dick Holbrooke, which affects this office and our Embassies in Bangkok and Rangoon. I have no idea what their views are, but I could bet what the views would be in the Embassy in Thailand, if they were aware of this matter of providing military aircraft to the Burmese."

In any event it wasn't long after that that I decided that I had had enough. A senior officer in the Department had approached me some months before and asked me if I would be interested in going to Cairo to administer a \$200 million AID housing project. I said, "I don't know anything about contracting or housing. I live in a house, but what else?" I said, "Thank you very much, but no thanks."

I had this discussion with Bob Oakley one evening during the first week of April, 1977. We had only had two and one-half months or so under Mr. Holbrooke's guidance at that point, but I thought, "I can't operate under these conditions and I won't do so." So I called this senior officer who had offered me the Cairo job on a Wednesday and said, "Is that job in Cairo still open?" He said, "I haven't filled it yet." I said, "I'll take it." He said, "Great." I said, "Mind you, you're not getting anybody who has any background in this, but I'll do it." So he said, "All right. Great. I'll

call you tomorrow."

The next day he called and said, "John, you can have that job. No problem about that." However, he said, "The Inspector General is looking urgently for somebody as an Inspector." He said, "In fairness to you, I want to mention this opportunity to you. I have no doubt that you would be acceptable for the job, if you want it. So tell me what you want to do." I said, "Well, give me a chance to think about it. I'll call you tomorrow." So I went home and discussed the matter with my family and presented the two options. They did not favor either one, really. However, their complaint about the job with the Inspector General was that, during the recent jobs that I had had, I had been away from home a great deal and hadn't had much family life. They said, "Now, if you go into the Inspection Corps, you're going to be three months overseas and three months back here for a couple of years."

Nevertheless, I went back the next morning, called my friend, and said, "Well, I'll take the job with the Inspector General." So I went off to be an Inspector. I had called him on a Friday morning to say that I would take the job. Late on Friday afternoon he called and said, "You were paneled (assigned) today, and you are to report to the Office of the Inspector General on Monday morning." He said, "By the way, Holbrooke knows about this, doesn't he?" I said, "He doesn't know anything about it, but you don't know anything about that, either." [Laughter] So between Wednesday and Friday afternoon I had arranged a transfer.

Bill Gleysteen was still in the EA front office. He was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary. I went up to see Bill at about 6:30 PM, having packed up my personal belongings in my office. I said, "Bill, here's the situation. I'm reporting to the Inspector General's office on Monday morning. I've 'had it' with the way this operation is going. I won't be a part of it any more. I have no respect for the leadership here. This doesn't include you -- you know that. However, I'm not going to go in and tell Holbrooke." He had left for the afternoon, anyway. I said, "I'll just leave it to you to pass on the word that we need a new Country Director for Thailand and Burma Monday morning." That was the last I saw of Mr. Holbrooke or of service directly in the East Asian Bureau. I just walked out, and on the following Monday morning I was in the Office of the Inspector General.

**ANDREW F. ANTIPPAS**  
**Consular Section Chief**  
**Bangkok (1976-1979)**

*Andrew F. Antippas was born in Massachusetts in 1931. He received his BA from Tufts University in 1958 and his MA in 1960. He served overseas in the US Army from 1952-1954. Mr. Antippas entered the Foreign Service in 1960 and subsequently served in Lanola, the Central African Republic, Kobe, Saigon, Phnom Phen, Bangkok, Nassau, Seoul, and Montreal. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed him in 1994.*

ANTIPPAS: I went from SCA to be chief of the Consular Section in the Embassy in Bangkok,

on the recommendation of Lorry Lawrence, who said that I probably ought to "bail out." This was before the 1976 elections. Lorry anticipated that the Republicans were going to lose the elections, and he and I would probably be out "on our ears." Given a Republican administrator in Consular Affairs, it was probably time to move. Lorry Lawrence took the job of Consul General in the Embassy in London. He told me, "The Ambassador has told us that he desperately needs somebody in Bangkok 'to clean up that mess out there.' Why don't you go out and do that?"

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

ANTIPPAS: From the fall of 1976 to 1979. An interesting time to be there.

*Q: When you got there, what was the situation that you found?*

ANTIPPAS: It was a very grim situation. A Thai civilian government had finally taken over power from the Thai military in 1973. The Prime Minister was Khukrit Pramoj, who was sort of a socialist. Anyway, the Thai government decided that with the end of the Vietnam War there should no longer be an American military presence in Thailand.

So the thousands of military personnel that we had at these air bases in Thailand were told to get out within a very short period of time.

It became a major consular task to document the dependents of U. S. military personnel. Between that job and the problems posed by the refugees, this created some difficulty. The refugee problem was not as serious as it later became. In fact, the Consular Section was really short-staffed, given the work that they had. The Consular Section was a "zoo." It was really in bad shape. The chief of the Consular Section at the time was someone you know.

*Q: Who was it?*

ANTIPPAS: Margaret Barnhart, an old colleague. We had worked together in Japan. She was in the Embassy in Tokyo when I was in the Consulate in Kobe. She was in over her head. She was so busy that she literally closed her door.

She would go into her office, close the door, and sit at her desk. She didn't know what the hell was going on. She told the senior local just to keep his eye on the Americans working in the Consular Section. It later turned out that the senior local was one of the most corrupt people in the Consular Section. Talk about "putting a fox in the hen coop." The junior officers threatened to initiate a grievance case if Barnhart wasn't pulled out. So I was given the job to replace her and try to shape the place up. I have to say that I think that I did a good job in a rather short time.

Charley Whitehouse was the Ambassador at that time. The DCM [in the fall of 1976] was John R. Burke. He had been Country Director for the Vietnam Working Group when we were in Saigon. He was later Ambassador to Guyana. We were old friends. There were a lot of old buddies there. I don't think that they ever thought of me as a consular officer. They had always known me as a political officer.

Anyway, I developed a plan to reorganize the Consular Section and what I needed in terms of equipment to shape up the section, including some additional people. But one of the problems that the Consular Section had was that the previous Ambassador, William Kintner, was so annoyed at seeing long lines of visa applicants around the Embassy that he ordered the Administrative Counselor to "get rid" of the Consular Section. So they moved the Consular Section down to the old Embassy compound, a mile away on Sathorn Road. The old Embassy compound had been taken over by USIS [United States Information Service]. There was an old, wooden building--almost 100 years old--that had been the Embassy Medical Unit. It was so termite-ridden that if you walked up to the second floor to look at the boxes of documents we had up there, the whole building would shake. The GSO [General Services Officer] wouldn't let us put any safes up there because they would come crashing through the ceiling.

Anyway, the GSO had done a "paint up, fix up" job on this old building, had put carpeting down, and all of that. The Section didn't look all of that bad, but the fact is that we were a mile away from the main Embassy building down a one-way street. Anyway, it was a busy place.

I made a number of recommendations on how we could turn the situation around and what I needed to do this. Ambassador Whitehouse gave me pretty much a free hand and said to go ahead and do it. I think that I turned the situation around. The Consular Section shaped up, and we performed fairly well after that. Of course, in addition to the refugee problem, we had a constant battle with narcotics and visa fraud. There was a major problem with the security of the Thai passports. The Thai passport was so easily "photo substituted" that it was laughable.

*Q: You could remove the photo and substitute another for it.*

ANTIPPAS: You issue a visa to a legitimate person, the passport is taken, and you put somebody else's photograph in it. The American immigration officers had no idea what a Thai name means anyway--whether male or female. It was a major problem. We got to the point where we didn't know who the hell we were issuing a visa to. It got so bad that I actually restricted the number of visa applicants to 50 a day, which created a real problem. People were lining up at 4:00 AM to get into the Visa Unit. But I said, "We have to check everybody to whom we're going to issue a visa."

I worked very closely with DEA on this problem to try to get a line on the travel agents who were obviously facilitating this [the problem of passport substitution].

*Q: DEA is...*

ANTIPPAS: The [U. S.] Drug Enforcement Administration. They had a regional office in Bangkok. I worked very closely with DEA in trying to solve the problem, since many of these fraudulent visas were being used by drug couriers to get into the United States.

I managed to accomplish two things in that area. It was 1977 before I really began to zero in on the problem. Lorry Lawrence had left London and gone back to the Department to become the Director of the Passport Office, just after Francis Knight retired. He very much wanted the job of Administrator of Consular Affairs. That was his great aim in life. He told me, "If I get to be

Administrator, I'll make you my Deputy." He became Director of the Passport Office.

I came back for a conference in Washington on prisoner problems overseas. By that time we had about 25 Americans in jail in Thailand for drug smuggling. I told Lorry, "I could use some help in convincing the Thai Passport Office to make a better product, to create a more secure passport." We had found out that the "crooks" were actually going into the passport office at night to do the photo substitution. The Thai Passport Office put a sheet of plastic laminate over the photo, but that was almost useless as a process, because you could peel the plastic off and paste on the photo you wanted to substitute. Remember, they used to put a grommet through the photo. That provided absolutely no security at all.

Lorry Lawrence was very good. He sent one of his office directors--one of his unit chiefs--for TDY [Temporary Duty] at no cost to the Embassy to do a study of the Thai Passport Office and make recommendations on how they could reorganize their procedures. We had this recommendation translated into Thai, and the Ambassador gave it to the Thai Foreign Minister with suggestions on how he could improve the quality of the Thai passports. Of course, I had few expectations that the Thai were ever going to do anything to "shape up."

Actually, I came up with another scheme, which really solved the problem of "photo substitution."

Do you have time to talk about that?

*Q: Yes.*

ANTIPPAS: I became almost desperate about this problem of "photo substitution" and concern about whom we were giving these visas to. The problem was underscored, at this time when I was sent back to Los Angeles to testify in Federal Court on the conviction of a Thai drug courier who had been arrested, carrying one of these passports with a visa which had been issued to somebody else.

One of the few strong points we had to work with in Thailand at that time was the fact that the Thai Government, because of their concern about communists, had created an ID [Identity Card] program in Thailand--much as we had done in Vietnam. Every Thai citizen was issued a laminated Identity Card which was secure. Because it was an anti-communist tool, nobody dared to fool with it. If you fooled with a Thai ID card, they really "lowered the boom" on you. They would let you do anything you wanted to get an American visa. However, if you started fooling around with Thai internal security, they were ruthless about it. So I used to tell my staff in the Consular Section that when they gave a passport back to an applicant with an American visa in it, make the person show you his Thai ID card. We would at least know that we had given the right passport back to the right person.

After we'd done that for a bit, I had a brain wave and said, "Listen, why don't we do this? Xerox the Thai ID card." The ID card was written in Thai which looks to most Americans like squiggles. But the photo was there, so you knew who it was. Even if you couldn't read it, you could tell who was the bearer of the ID card. I said, "Xerox the Thai ID card, paste it on the back

of our visa form, and attach it, using the U. S. passport 'legend' machine. If they try to remove it, it will destroy the page." American immigration officials wouldn't even have to look at the Thai passport identity pages. U.S. Immigration needed only to look at the U. S. visa stamp and the xerox of the Thai ID attached to it. This cut the "bad guys" out of the business altogether within a week.

*Q: OK, this is Tape 5, Side A, of the interview with Andy Antippas. How about the "boat people" [from Indochina]?*

ANTIPPAS: They started coming out, if I recall correctly, early in 1977. I remember when the first boats started showing up on the coast of Thailand. They started building up in camps established under Thai Government authority along the shore of the Kra Isthmus facing the Gulf of Siam. The first reaction of the Ambassador was to put me in charge of the refugee program. In fact, we were creating a refugee program.

Of course, I was a good soldier and was going to do what I was told. However, I said that I really didn't think that I could do both jobs. I couldn't run a very busy, fraud-ridden Consular Section, with all of the problems we had on that, and try to run a refugee section, unless he gave me a helicopter to ride around in. Just getting around Bangkok was a major task with the constant traffic jams. Traffic was just awful. Since a lot of the refugee work meant direct contact with the Thai in the Ministry of the Interior, you almost had to camp out at the Ministry to deal with this. I told the Ambassador that I really didn't think that I could do it. We needed more people. This was a constant cry of mine in those days: "We need more help if we are going to do the job."

Over time the Embassy built up a refugee staff. Lionel Rosenblatt came in to run that effort. I was kind of concerned about that. Not everyone was convinced that Lionel could handle the job, though he ultimately did very well.

Meanwhile, I had decided that I would become my own "prisoner" man. I convinced the chief of the Thai prison system to consolidate all of the American prisoners into the penitentiary in Bangkok, which made it easier for me to visit them. You may recall that, at that time, there was a lot of pressure in Congress to do more for American prisoners held in foreign jails, because of the scandals in Latin America.

*Q: Particularly in Mexico.*

ANTIPPAS: So this was "take care of a prisoner week." We really didn't have enough people to make weekly visits to the prisoners, so I decided that I would handle this activity myself. I felt that I could get more done, being more senior. I really didn't have time to fool around with the refugee program on top of that.

As it turned out, even though I didn't deal with the refugee program, I ended up creating the "orderly departure" program for Vietnam. After 1976 we in the Consular Section of the Embassy in Bangkok became the recipients of the immigration petitions being filed by Vietnamese in the United States who were obtaining resident or citizenship status and were then able to petition for

the admission into the United States of relatives left behind in Vietnam. Since these petitions had to be sent somewhere, the INS started sending them to the Embassy in Bangkok. I set up files on these Vietnamese. In fact, I became the Consular Section for Saigon in Bangkok. It wasn't really a burden for the first couple of years, because there simply wasn't much more to be done than setting up folders and filing them. There was no real action to be taken, since we couldn't see or communicate with the persons concerned.

Then the communist authorities in Vietnam, for their own reasons, started letting people out legitimately, on Air France aircraft. To deal with this development, we started up the "orderly departure" program, with the approval of the Department, which was hoped would be an alternative to people coming out of Vietnam on boats. The argument was that if you could get out of Vietnam as an immigrant to the U. S., you wouldn't need to take the dangerous trip to Thailand by water, with the perils of the sea, Thai pirates, and all the rest of it.

By the time I left Thailand in 1979, there were 5,000 cases on file under the "orderly departure" program--all being managed by my immigrant visa officer. I only had one officer to deal with this whole problem. This was before we were permitted to have people in Saigon to process these applicants. The way it worked was that petitions were approved, and the Vietnamese were allowing them to leave. The Office of the UNHCR, the UN High Commission for Refugees, in Vietnam would take our list of names of people with approved petitions and contact the Vietnamese communist authorities. These people would be allowed to get on aircraft and come to Bangkok, where we would then issue them immigrant visas.

The arrangement I had was that I would go to the Thai Immigration Office. I would tell the chief of that office that, for example, "The 40 people on this list are coming out of Vietnam next week. We need your permission for them to stay in Bangkok for two weeks, in a hotel near the American Embassy. We'll process them, and I guarantee you that they will all leave Thailand." So it was on my signature that these people were allowed to come to Thailand to get out of Vietnam and be processed. Of course, I had no control over the U. S. visa process itself. If it turned out that there were medical or other reasons to refuse to issue U. S. visas to these people, there was nothing we could do about it. But that's how the Department wanted it, and that's how it was done. It became such a burden after a while that it was putting a tremendous strain on our ability to handle the visa caseload in Thailand for Thai applicants.

I started complaining to the Consular Affairs Bureau, saying, "Hey, my officers are here to work on Thailand, not Vietnam. I need help." As I was a graduate of the system, I knew all of the buttons to push and the telephone calls to make. It was to no avail. I squawked mightily to the Executive Director of the Consular Affairs Bureau.

Finally, as I came toward the end of my tour of duty in Bangkok, I was increasingly "fed up" with the fact that I was being ignored. The system in the Department of State was placing this terrible burden on us, this non-immigrant visa workload, plus about 2,000 immigrant visas a year. This was not a lot, but it kept one officer pretty busy. But we were getting 20-50 Vietnamese every two weeks. This became a full time job. We had to process them and get them out. I was committed to the Thai Immigration Office to get these people out of Thailand.

Finally, I told the UNHCR representatives that I wouldn't sign any more letters. I said that I would not give them any more letters to give to the Thai Immigration Office that say that I "guarantee" these people. In effect, I stopped the UNHCR effort to bring out Vietnamese. That really raised a stink. That happened in the summer of 1979, about the time that I was leaving. I didn't plan it that way. It's just the way it worked out.

There were two issues. One was the scandal that broke out. The Ambassador, Mort Abramowitz, called me up to his office about two weeks before I was due to leave Bangkok. The Regional Director of the DEA was sitting in his office. Mort said, "So and So has told me that So and So, the former chief of your Visa Unit in Bangkok (This individual had left the post in 1978.) made a million dollars selling student visas and was 'planking' the male students."

*Q: "Planking" the male students?*

ANTIPPAS: He was allegedly a homosexual and was sodomizing the male students. I said, "What!!!" I was so shocked that it stunned me to hear that accusation. Mort said that this was from a DEA informant. I said, "Well, the guy left a year ago, and it's a little late for me to do anything about it. We can't set him up and find out if this is really true."

I'd gone into this job in Bangkok, aware that the problem of fraud was endemic there. One of the problems which had faced Peg Barnhart [my predecessor] and which had overwhelmed her was that she believed anything that anybody said to her. I had decided that this is how you can really screw yourself up in this kind of a job, if you do that. I felt that I had to defend the Americans in the Consular Section in particular. Maybe not so much as far as the local employees were concerned. As far as the Americans are concerned, unless somebody could show me some proof, I was going to ignore allegations of American corruption.

*Q: Well, it's endemic in this situation. I was Consul General in Seoul, and the same allegations were made. You're very aware of fraud. However, at the same time, this was a problem in this kind of society. You took what steps you could.*

ANTIPPAS: The oldest story in the book is the visa broker who says, "I need an extra thousand dollars for the Consul General."

*Q: Absolutely. What else? The oldest story in the book.*

ANTIPPAS: Anybody who's been in this business for any length of time knew that. So I said that, as far as my personal philosophy was concerned, I keep my ears and my door open. I wasn't going to do what Peg Barnhart did, which was close the door. Until somebody can demonstrate to me that he has some actual evidence or a sworn statement, I'm going to ignore all that and let people do their job. I'll do things on a very professional basis.

The individual officer charged was, in fact, a very tough consular and visa officer. He had a "bad" reputation for being tough, even mean. In fact, the head of USIS [United States Information Service] in Bangkok at the time [Jim McGinley], a very senior USIS officer [He had been the equivalent of an Assistant Secretary of State in USIA in Washington.], said to me, "I've

had one public relations problem in this country, and that's your deputy." So I thought, "He must be doing his job." He had done one hell of a job, given the situation that I've just described to you.

It was in that kind of context that I said, "What???" Anyway, I took it as a kind of personal vote of confidence that Ambassador Abramowitz had told me all this. That was in 1979. In 1989 I would have been strung up by the thumbs by the Inspector General as probably being part and parcel of any "scam" that was going on! At the same time I was outraged that this allegation might have been true, because a lot of things and recollections then started falling into place.

I knew that this individual, for example, didn't particularly like women. Bangkok is a bachelor's heaven. You might want to die and go to Bangkok.

*Q: I came to Bangkok for a consular conference. I saw things that I had never imagined.*

ANTIPPAS: This was what the Vietnam War was all about, in case you were wondering. It was to save Bangkok. [Laughter]

I had a good time there. I know that this guy didn't have any girlfriends. So little things like that sort of fell into place. We all know about the guy who can be very tough as a visa officer and, at the same time, is doing all kinds of things out the back door. Anything is possible, given human nature.

So I delayed my departure from Bangkok for two weeks to initiate the investigation, working closely with the Embassy Security Officer. In those days we really worked together. We weren't viewed as "enemies," which is the system now, where everybody is suspect.

I started by interrogating my Thai staff. I'll never forget the reaction I got from my Thai secretary. I had an American and a Thai secretary. I said to my Thai secretary, "Vorapon, you knew this guy very well." I was very blunt about what I was looking for. I said, "You knew this guy very well, and I know that you people didn't like him. I know that very few people liked him. Why didn't you come to me? You know that I tried to do a lot to improve the conditions at work [in the Consular Section]." I had arranged to have an air conditioned bus assigned to the Consulate to take people to the Embassy for lunch. I had a shelter built outside so that people wouldn't have to stand in the rain waiting for the American staff to come and open up the office. I did lots of little things like that to try to improve working conditions. I worked hard to get people promotions, money, and all the rest. I said, "How come you didn't come to me and tell me what you suspected?" She said, "Oh, Mr. Antippas, he was always so close to you." Sure. He'd come into my office, and we'd talk about specific cases, tell "war stories," or whatever. He was my deputy. Obviously, I'd spend a lot of time talking to him. The implication of that statement was that maybe I was "bent" as well.

I must say that was a shock. It was really a shock. I never went back to Bangkok until last spring when I had occasion to go to Vietnam and went through Bangkok. What turned me off was just that reaction. I was so personally angered.

*Q: Was the case proven against this man?*

ANTIPPAS: No. The Department never made a case. We dealt basically with the Embassy Security Officer [SY]. I went to the SY guy who was handling this case in Washington. I said, "Look, I'll do anything I can to help you. If you want me to go back [to the Thailand] to help in the investigation, I'll go back, since I know people there." He said, "Look, basically, we don't have a case against this guy."

This is a year after he left the post." This officer heard that he was under investigation and the first thing that he did was to get himself a lawyer. Then the Department backed off, because it had no evidence.

In fact, that officer was subsequently promoted. So as far as I know, he's still in the Foreign Service.

So I don't know. I may be abusing him as well.

*Q: One never knows in these matters, because allegations of this kind are endemic to the situation.*

ANTIPPAS: Exactly. You're taking the word of an unidentified "informant." I thought about my Bangkok experience when I left Seoul, for example. I thought that, even though you try to do a straightforward job and try to be a "tough" American Consul General who protects American interests or what you think are American interests, people out there may hate you and try to ruin your reputation. I'm talking about the local "crooks" whose income you are hurting, but basically that's your job.

I remember leaving Seoul saying to myself, "You know, I think that I'm going to leave here with my reputation intact." I had been tough. I ran a really "tight" ship in Seoul, given the problems that you know very well. In fact, I left Seoul with my reputation intact, with an excellent reputation, and with lots of recognition for what I had done there.

I felt very personally hurt by this whole thing in Bangkok. However, the point of this is that the system at that time was that if you didn't have a case to make against an officer, you close the file, you go onto other things, and you don't ruin the guy's reputation. Now maybe there's another book that the Department keeps somewhere with a "black mark" on it somewhere. As we've noted, this is endemic in the system and you just can't get do anything else.

*Q: You left the Embassy in Bangkok in...*

ANTIPPAS: The summer of 1979.

*Q: Where did you go?*

ANTIPPAS: I had applied for the job of Consul General in Seoul, which you had held. You may remember that my son has a learning disability.

*Q: Yes. We talked about it. The Eighth Army had a school or facility that might have been helpful for him.*

ANTIPPAS: That's right. My problem was trying to arrange telephonic communication between the Embassy in Bangkok and Seoul. The problem was more a matter of getting through to Yongsan. I could get in touch with Seoul, but as far as getting in touch with Yongsan was concerned, I think that the problem was that the telephone system was run on batteries. We could never have a conversation. I waited so long to accept your job that the Department gave it to Lou Goelz, who came out of the Embassy in Tehran. So they offered me Lou's job in Tehran. I thought, "Hell, no, I don't want to go to Iran".

*Q: This was just before the events [of December, 1979] when the Embassy in Tehran was taken over. You would have been one of the hostages held there for 444 days.*

ANTIPPAS: That's right. Dick Morefield took the job and got to stay in Tehran for all of that time.

Anyway, I tried to get the Consul General job in Montreal because Tom Enders was Ambassador to Canada at that time. I told him that I'd really like to go there. He said, "You don't have enough rank. You can't get that job." I think I was also dickering for the job of Consul General in Guayaquil, [Ecuador]. Your predecessor in Saigon was Consul General in Guayaquil. I thought that I'd study Spanish and go to Guayaquil.

One other thing that I was considering. Through all of that refugee work, I had gotten to know the staff at Senator Teddy Kennedy's subcommittee, and particularly Jerry Tinker, who recently died. You may have seen the notice in the press. Jerry was the staff director for Kennedy. Through working on refugees since Cambodia, we got to know each other quite well. I said to Tinker, "How about a Pearson assignment to the refugee subcommittee?"

*Q: A Pearson assignment was a personnel detail to familiarize Foreign Service Officers with jobs in other parts of the government.*

ANTIPPAS: Particularly in Congress. I was "dickering" for a job like this with both Harry Barnes, then Director General of the Foreign Service, and with Senator Kennedy's office. It didn't work out. I don't remember why it didn't work out because, in fact, the suggestion was warmly received. It was probably a question of slots. Anyhow, I ended up with no job when I came back to Washington. My wife was absolutely furious.

I was assigned to the newly created Refugee Bureau, a job which I really didn't want to do. I really had "had" it with refugee work at that point. Part and parcel of that job was that the Department discovered the existence of a famine in Cambodia, so it created another office called the "Kampuchea Working Group." So I was assigned to that. Cambodia was a labor of love, and I got very involved with it.

Before finishing up on my assignment to Bangkok, let me tell you about the case of Bobby

Garwood. For many years, beginning with the Johnson administration and right through the Nixon and Carter administrations, Frank Sieverts was the POW/MIA [Prisoners of War/Missing in Action] guy in the State Department. He is now press spokesman for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He had done the POW/MIA job for many years. I knew him from my Indochina days.

Frank Sieverts got in touch with us in the Embassy in Bangkok and told us that Garwood, a Marine Corps private who had been taken prisoner in 1965, relatively early in the war, had stayed behind in Vietnam. He had never been returned with the other POW's in 1973. He was viewed by some people as a "turncoat" and a collaborator with the communists. He had gotten a message out that he wanted to return to the United States. It turned out that the Vietnamese communists were going to permit him to return to the U. S. Working through the UN Office in Saigon, we learned that he would come out through Bangkok. I was scheduled to receive him, as the Consul General, protecting an American citizen.

Frank Sievert's view was that I should accompany Garwood to Okinawa on a commercial flight. During the flight, I would try to debrief him. He would obviously be in a certain amount of shock--culture shock, if nothing else. It was thought that a low key approach, talking to him about other, missing Americans or people he had known about or had knowledge of might easily be done that way without making it too "structured."

I agreed to that approach. However, by the time that Garwood left Vietnam for Bangkok, some lawyer in Garwood's home town took it upon himself to tell Garwood's family that he [the lawyer] would represent him on a contingency basis and that Garwood should have legal representation. This lawyer, in fact, enlisted himself as Garwood's attorney. He told the Pentagon, in effect, "You can't talk to my client without me being present."

So the whole "game plan" was thrown out the window. The Marine Corps sent down a C-130 transport aircraft from Okinawa with a legal officer to receive Garwood. My basic job was to take Garwood from the civilian side of Don Muang Airport in Bangkok to the other, military side of the airport and turn him over to the Marines, which I did. I stood there while he was being "read his rights." I signed a receipt for him. I have a picture of myself, standing in the C-130, turning Garwood over to the Marines.

Garwood really was in a state of shock when he got off the Air France plane from Saigon. The Air France stewardesses had taken pity on him, given him a lot of champagne and all the rest, and he was somewhat "ga-ga" by the time he got off the plane. My plan had been to take him out through a side entrance [at Don Muang airport terminal in Bangkok], put him in an Embassy car, drive around the airfield to the military side, where the C-130 was waiting, and turn him over to the Marines. I would suggest to him that he say no more than, "I'm pleased to be going home. I'll make a statement later."

We were greeted by such a phalanx of journalists and TV cameramen, who almost overran us, that I grabbed Garwood by the elbow, propelled him right through the crowd, in the process trampling several of these journalists, got him into the Embassy car, and got the hell out of there. My picture appeared in the papers all over the world, propelling Garwood through the crowd. I

got a lot of letters from friends, saying, "Now we know where you are."

There was a great debate about whether or not he had "collaborated" with the Vietnamese communists. Garwood's story now is that he was, in fact, kept a prisoner and was not allowed to leave. He said that he had really "conned" his way out of Vietnam. His book on his experiences was "ghost written" by somebody else. It didn't seem terribly accurate, in my view. It's an interesting story but leaves a lot to be desired. I still think that we would have learned a lot about missing Americans, had I been allowed to debrief him. In fact, everything was put "on ice" for a long time afterwards, and all of his defenses went up.

*Q: What about the American prisoners held in jail in Bangkok? What was their condition?*

ANTIPPAS: It was a tough scene. When I left Bangkok, there were 25 Americans held in prison there.

Besides being a prisoner, being a Thai prisoner in particular is something I wouldn't want. Part of the problem was that they could still get drugs very easily in prison through corrupt guards. Many of them were drug addicts. I had recommended strongly to the Department that we be permitted to set up a program in the Thai jail to get them off hard drugs, using "Methadone." I tried to work things out so that we would manage funds that would be sent by their families. The Thai would only permit them to have a certain amount of money--to buy necessary items from the prison store.

One of my jobs was to make sure that they behaved themselves and treated the Thai with the deference that was expected of prisoners. Many of the Americans were really obstreperous and created additional problems for themselves because of their behavior in jail. Sometimes, when they would talk back to me, I would "bawl them out." This would be in the presence of the Thai guards, which the Thai appreciated. The American prisoners were pretty much a bunch of rascallions.

I went to the American community in Bangkok, through the American Chamber of Commerce, and asked for some funds to support a "slush fund" to make it possible to buy necessities for them. Some of the prisoners had no money at all. I wanted to have a little money so that we could buy them at least a few things to make life easier for them, to the extent that it was permitted. I remember getting a very negative reaction from the American business community. They said, more or less, "Screw those bastards, those dope peddlers." I would say, "Now, wait a minute. I'm as strong a believer as anybody is in being 'tough' on narcotics. However, I want to tell you. If I didn't exist, the American Consul who goes out there to defend these guys, you'd have to invent me. There has to be at least one guy in this Embassy who will protect people. What happens to the person who is unjustly accused? The Thai simply lock him up and throw the key away? What would happen if your son were in that situation? You'd come crying to me and say, 'This kid isn't a dope addict. You've got to protect him.'" If I simply said, "Well, screw you, he's an accused dope peddler or whatever. The Thai can throw the key away." I said that somebody has to be here who doesn't have that attitude.

I had a couple of cases of people who were "set up" by taxi drivers and all of that. They were

thrown into jail. Because of my efforts, I got them off. Those cases are in my official files. There were letters written to the Secretary of State regarding people who were unjustly jailed, and I got them out of prison. They were legitimate citizens. I made that argument to people [in the American community in Bangkok], but not terribly successfully. The prisoners really were an unsavory bunch.

*Q: Bangkok had a reputation of being a "hot bed" of drugs and sex for high school kids. We had a lot of American dependents there. Did you get involved in that, or was that somebody else's responsibility?*

ANTIPPAS: It was really not directly my job. We did have a problem with some of the American dependents--children getting involved with drugs. We had a couple of kids take LSD and walk off the roof of the International School of Bangkok [ISB]. In fact, the Department began a program for treatment of such people because of the problems in Bangkok, which, as you say, was a "hot bed."

*Q: But that didn't fall under your responsibilities.*

ANTIPPAS: It didn't fall directly under my job. I just felt that I ought to do something. It would have been a major problem to visit all of the jails in the provinces. There was no way that I could have afforded the manpower to do that. I don't know whether it was the best idea to corral all of these guys together or not. I suspect that they "fed" on each other.

*Q: I think that this is always a problem. If they are off somewhere by themselves, they tend to calm down and blend into the local scene.*

ANTIPPAS: But after I left Bangkok, the regional DEA office did some soul searching. Through their efforts they doubled the prison population, principally with people accused of drug offenses, the year after I left. I took a strong position about not "setting people up" and trying to protect Americans in that regard. I had enough credibility with DEA because I worked very closely with them. In fact, I got an award from DEA for the work I did with them in Bangkok. I think that they were very careful about not "setting up" Americans. I told DEA, "Look, don't put these guys away here because you can't put them away in the United States." I was very much in favor of having a prisoner exchange agreement between Thailand and the United States. I wanted to send these people home. I didn't want them in Bangkok. They were not a consular problem. They were an American social problem.

**MARIE THERESE HUHTALA**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Chiang Mai (1976-1979)**

*Ambassador Huhtala was born and raised in California and Graduated from Santa Clara University. Joining the Foreign Service in 1972, she studied Thai and Chinese languages and became a specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Her*

*overseas postings include Paris, Quebec, Hong Kong and Chiang Mai (Thailand). In Washington, she dealt primarily with East Asia and Pacific Affairs. From 2001 to 2004 she served as US ambassador to Malaysia and, from 2004 to 2005, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Ambassador Huhtala is a graduate of the National War College and the State Department's Senior Seminar. Ambassador Huhtala was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

*Q: How did you find Thailand?*

HUHTALA: Well, Thai was my first non-European language, and I was fascinated by it. I loved it. My husband took it also. He worked nights so that he could take Thai during the day. We were both studying Thai and it was exotic, it was fun, it was very different. I made very rapid progress. In April the embassy in Bangkok said they needed me in Chiang Mai at once because my predecessor has already left. So they tested me and gave me a 3-3. (I don't know if it was a real 3-3 or not, the standards were probably different back then, but I was more than ready to go and start using Thai on the job.) So they sent me out to post. At that time, in the 1970s, northern Thailand was not a place where you could speak English anyway. So we were moving into a very Thai environment and soon my language got really good.

*Q: So you served in Chiang Mai from when to when?*

HUHTALA: '76 to '79. I extended.

*Q: Let's talk about when you got there in '76 we just pulled out. What was the situation in Chiang Mai when you got there?*

HUHTALA: The Thai had begun to feel very exposed when Vietnam and Cambodia fell because Thailand had been a major base for U.S. forces during the war. A lot of U.S. troops visited there for R & R, and also we had Air Force bases there. For years we were bombing Vietnam out of Thailand. The Thais asked us to leave completely, to close down all of our bases and remove all of our forces. By the time I got there in April of '76 that process was almost completed. There was an Army base up in northern Thailand in Lampang, near Chiang Mai, that was still in the final stages of closing down. So one of my first duties was to deal with the sort of consequences of that. There were young women who came in and said the servicemen had fathered their children, and now they didn't know where they were, that kind of thing. The human side of it was still playing out. Northern Thailand at that time also had an active communist insurgency, supported by China. It was not safe to travel in the hills alone. There was a lot of banditry, there was a thriving drug business and there were refugees coming out of the hill tribe areas who were settled into formal refugee camps. One of the things I had to do was go and visit those refugee camps periodically, kind of monitor conditions there.

*Q: What was our post there?*

HUHTALA: We had a Consul.

*Q: Who was that?*

HUHTALA: His name was Maurice (Mack) Tanner. I was the vice consul and we had about 10 or 13 other people who worked for other U.S. agencies.

*Q: This is Thailand. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) was running the war. They had troops in Laos.*

HUHTALA: That had ended by then.

*Q: But there had been.*

HUHTALA: By the time I got there the CIA post was very focused on the drug situation, primarily heroin coming out of Burma. We also had a DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) office. There were three or four officers plus a secretary. We also had somebody from the Department of Agriculture doing research on alternative crops that could replace opium. We had a USIS branch post, including a library.

*Q: Oh boy. Now what were relations like with the Thais would you say or that you saw?*

HUHTALA: At that time I couldn't have told you what the government-to-government relations really were like, but I can tell you how things were in the North. We had very good cooperation with the Thai authorities. Our major partners were the Thai Border Patrol Police, which the DEA and CIA station worked closely with, and of course the regular provincial officials – the governor, the police, etc. Thais are wonderful, warm and friendly people. They're a lot like Americans in that regard. They don't stand on formality like the French. And they enjoy partying! In a lot of ways it's easy for Americans and Thais to work together, and I appreciated that a lot.

One of the first things I did was go to a party the Consulate had organized with the Border Patrol Police. This is how I began to work out what my approach was going to be as a woman. I walked into the party and all of the men who were going to be my contacts, people that I need to meet and work with, were standing over at the bar having drinks. All of their wives were sitting in another part of the restaurant at a table, having orange soda. What I did was, I went over to the wives first and met them all. "Oh sit down," they said, "have some orange soda." "No, no that's okay." I did not sit down. I talked with them all for about five minutes, and then I went over to the bar, got a drink and started talking with the men. What I was doing was not something that a woman would ever do in their society, but I began to realize that they were seeing me basically as a space alien. I was an American official who happened to be a woman so I could get by with non-typical behavior.

*Q: I think this has become sort of the norm everywhere that people, you're in a different category so you're not upsetting.*

HUHTALA: I had to figure that out for myself because I had no mentors at that time. I thought it was important to first reach out to the women and not let them imagine that I was after their

husbands or something. Parenthetically, I must tell you that the officials I had to deal with in Paris, the police and others, were horribly sexist. As a young woman, they just treated me like dirt. It was really hard to be taken seriously there. But I've never had that problem in the Far East, starting in Chiang Mai; it's just never been a problem.

*Q: What were your main duties as vice consul?*

HUHTALA: This was really fun because we did not issue visas there, we did American services work. We did visa referral letters for our contacts to go down to Bangkok and get their visas. I did what other consular work needed to be done. I also did political reporting, economic reporting and set up a small commercial library; I also did all the administrative work, which was complicated because the folks who worked for other agencies thought it would help their "cover" to funnel all their work through me. They had more generous allowances for their housing, for their furnishing and that kind of thing so it was a little bit tricky to handle that. But I loved the variety of the work.

I did a lot of travel around the consular district to visit the refugee camps or to go with the Consul and official visitors to look at crop replacement efforts. The consulate had an airplane on contract. Pilates Porter, almost like a glider. I signed the rental contract for every month but it really belonged to the CIA Station; they encouraged the Consul and me to use it for our official travel too, to enhance cover. So we could get into our very own airplane and fly to wherever we needed to go, especially when we had visitors from Washington who were interested in the heroin problem, because there were a lot of refineries in Burma just on the other side of the border there. We'd get up in that airplane and over fly the border and they could look down, they could see the little buildings where the heroin was being refined and they could see the people firing at us, only their little rifles wouldn't reach us. It was kind of wild stuff.

*Q: Who was sort of the province, was it several provinces or a province?*

HUHTALA: Our consular district included the whole North. I forget how many provinces, maybe 10. One time I remember we were visiting a hillside in that military region, an area on the border with Laos that was not pacified yet. As I said, there was still an insurgency going on, with active fighting. The Thai government had adopted a very smart strategy of building roads into these areas and building housing developments so that the people who lived there could farm and then get their products out to market; the idea was that this would bring economic prosperity, and in time it did work. They were starting it at that point in the late '70s and we were up there visiting it. It was just me and one of my local employees the Consul wasn't there. The Thais were showing me the housing and all of a sudden we heard these thuds in the background, there was fighting on the next hill. The look of alarm on the colonel's face said it all -- "Get this American woman diplomat to safety, if we lose her we are going to be in big trouble" -- and so they hustled me out of there.

*Q: Well then, were things that you were aware of going on across the border into Burma or into Laos? Were there all sorts of operations going on?*

HUHTALA: I don't believe there were American operations going on. There was a lot of opium

and heroin coming down out of Burma into northern Thailand, on donkeys essentially. In the same backpacks were jade, a lot of beautiful jade coming out of Burma. One of my husband's many avocations while we were in Chiang Mai was doing lapidary work, and he often visited the local jade dealers who had this Burmese jade; he learned how to discuss the jade business in their southern Chinese dialect. Our DEA office approached Eino and said, "Gee, you've got great contacts, would you work with us?" He absolutely refused because he didn't want to have any kind of conflict of interest. He wanted to keep doing jade with them. He was not interested in the narcotics at all. He wanted to keep that clean.

*Q: Did you get involved in the missing in action type of thing?*

HUHTALA: Later in my career I got deeply into it but at that time it was not an issue.

*Q: You weren't having peddlers coming out of Laos with bones and made up dog tags and that sort of thing?*

HUHTALA: No, that happened later. This was the 1970s still. The only thing coming out of Laos at the time were refugees.

*Q: What was happening with the refugees?*

HUHTALA: They were in camps. Camps that were organized along the lines of the society they had had in the past. People who had been hillside dwellers in Laos were in camps situated on hillsides. We once visited our friends at the Consulate in Udorn, in Northeastern Thailand, and visited that refugee camp too. That had an area where the lowland Lao were situated in the low part of the camp and the hillside people were up the hill. The hill tribe people were doing the most beautiful handicrafts, wonderful embroidery. This was just about to take off as a hot item for tourists and everything, and we were picking it up dirt cheap.

*Q: Were you getting involved with the DEA or not? Did they sort of do their thing and you did your thing?*

HUHTALA: The Consul and I very deliberately had a separation of duties on that. He was the narcotics officer for the post and he had a formal liaison with DEA and did the policy things. I was the consular officer, who looked after Americans in trouble. That way when Americans got arrested for trafficking dope of any kind they had me as their advocate, and they wouldn't see me also working with the narcotics officers who put them away.

*Q: This is a problem I use to run across. I remember I was in Greece and they were trying to make me into both the consular general and the narcotics liaison. I said I can't do it. One guy I think left, the rest of the other guys saying I'll try to get you out if I can.*

HUHTALA: It was fortunate that there were two State Department officers there to do that work.

*Q: Did you have, when we pulled out people out most of them obviously were men at that time in the military and the Thai women were the most beautiful women in the world. I would think an*

*awful lot of guys would just sort of disappear in the bush with the ladies.*

HUHTALA: We had retirees actually. We had a small coterie of retired military guys who were with their Thai sweeties and living very well on their pensions.

*Q: So they weren't a particular problem were they?*

HUHTALA: Well, a couple of them were real serious alcoholics and this was really sad to watch. But they mostly kept to themselves and they were okay. We had one of them for awhile running our little branch of the commissary up there. He did fine.

*Q: How about your relations with the Embassy?*

HUHTALA: It varied. One good thing about being up there was that there was a non-pro courier run every week or two. It was mostly stuff for the Station and this was a way to get down to the Embassy for free if you just carried the pouch. For awhile, when it was my turn, the pouch was really light. It was just a bag of papers, nothing to it. The other weeks it would be very big and bulky and heavy. Gradually I figured out the Station thought that a woman couldn't be entrusted with all of their stuff. When we realized what was going on, my boss, the Consul, who was a pretty strong supporter of women's rights in his own way, had a talk with them and said, "Look, you have to let Marie do it like everybody else." I was bigger and stronger than some of the men they had working in that section. Mack said, if this guy can guard the pouch so can Marie. So they readjusted it. This gave me a chance to get down to Bangkok about once every six to eight weeks. I would go to the admin section, follow up on all the different aspects of admin, operations, consular section, check in with political. That's when we had the first CLO.

*Q: CLO is?*

HUHTALA: Community Liaison Officer. The first one started while I was doing my Chiang Mai tour.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

HUHTALA: Charlie Whitehouse and then Mort Abramowitz, two ambassadors.

*Q: Where you involved in political reporting?*

HUHTALA: Yes.

*Q: What was happening? Were you seeing, were the northern provinces, was there a separatist movement or how did the writ of Bangkok run?*

HUHTALA: Before I got to Thailand in the earlier part of the 1970s there had been some serious student uprisings. A big one took place in early 1976, before I got up there. Some of the intelligentsia, particularly students, had fled Bangkok and gone into the north to join the communist insurgency. Beyond that, this was a time of great instability in Thailand. In Bangkok

there were military coups almost every year. During the three years that I was there they had coups two years in a row, always in October when the military promotion list came out. The third year there was an election, though the country was not yet a very good democracy; it was struggling in that way. These events didn't seem to have a direct impact on Chiang Mai or on the North, which was dealing with its own issues. Like I said, there was banditry, the narcotics trade and occasional insurgent attacks. The question of who was in and who was out in Bangkok didn't seem to make a lot of difference for us. The King had a winter palace up there in Chiang Mai. While he was in residence, every time he arrived or departed the whole diplomatic corps, all five of us, had to go out and stand on the tarmac to welcome him. While he was there various prime ministers and heads of government would come through in order to call on the King. That kind of brought us more into the greater world, and it was kind of interesting.

*Q: This communist insurgency, they had these rather peculiar things going on in Burma at one time, red flag, white flag, black flag or something. What form of communism was going on in the upper regions?*

HUHTALA: The Chinese government was actively supporting communist movements all through Southeast Asia up until the late '80s. You had the Burmese Communist Party in Burma, you had what we called the CT's, or communist terrorists, in Thailand, there was a China-based communist insurgency in Malaysia and also one in Indonesia. The whole region was sort of turbulent because China was bankrolling these efforts. There were different manifestations in each country but it was always a low-level insurgency, so an official who was out on his own on a country road would risk being ambushed and killed, that kind of thing.

*Q: While you were there was this a period when the Vietnamese were having a nasty little war with their great Chinese allies?*

HUHTALA: That happened, if I remember correctly, in January of 1979; I remember Ambassador Abramowitz was visiting Chiang Mai at the time. We were with him when he got a call from Bangkok because the Vietnamese had just invaded Cambodia. I remember he wrapped up his visit and hurried back to Bangkok. There was a great deal of fear in Thailand at the time that Vietnam was going to overrun them. When Vietnam started moving west they were very, very worried in Thailand. They had asked American forces to leave in 1975, but in 1979, after that war, they invited us back in. We had our first big ship visit down in Pattaya that year; I remember banner headlines in the newspaper, "The Americans are back, and bar girls are descending from all over the country." The Thais never again allowed us to establish the kind of bases we had during the Vietnam war, but still 1979 was a turning point in terms of the bilateral military relationship.

*Q: Was there any effort, you had these bases, were they just of overgrown or did they keep them going just in case we wanted to move back in?*

HUHTALA: They were all turned back over to the Thai. We didn't keep them although there was a huge installation in Udorn Thani that was still there. I believe it is still there to this day. We have leased back part of it for VOA broadcasting. The airfield at Utapao belongs to the Thai but we are allowed to use it as much as we want. For instance, the U.S. tsunami relief effort last

year was based out of Utapao.

*Q: Did you get much in the way of visa work or was that all taken care of in Bangkok?*

HUHTALA: I had some good contacts in the North, and when they needed a visa we would write referral letter to the consular section in Bangkok. I remember one time I was furious because the wife of the mayor, a member of one of the landed families, a very respectable lady and a solid visa case, came in; I gave her a letter and she went down to Bangkok but the vice consul there didn't issue the visa. I was so irritated. I felt at that time that the consular personnel, certainly in Bangkok, were just horrible, on little power trips and very bureaucratic, with no soul to them at all. That's when I began thinking very seriously that I had to either get out of consular work or get out of the Foreign Service. I couldn't stand it. See, my horizons had been broadened a lot by doing all these other kinds of Foreign Service work in Chiang Mai. In Paris I had only done consular work but now I was beginning to see the bigger picture. I just found them to be very insensitive down there.

*Q: Did you get much supervision or advice or anything from the economic and political sections in Bangkok to what you were doing or your Consul?*

HUHTALA: I got a lot of mentoring from the Consul, who had worked in the political section in Bangkok and who had also been Consul in Songkhla. He was a real Thai hand. I got a lot of training from him. That's when I wrote my first political cables and kind of learned the ropes. I didn't get too much help from the Embassy, although occasionally officers would come up and we compared notes, that kind of thing.

*Q: I assume you had help to take care of you daughter?*

HUHTALA: Yes, and I had my son then too. Our second child, Jorma David, was born in Thailand. Both our children grew up speaking Thai as their first language. We had live-in help, which was great. It was one of the reasons I extended.

*Q: So you were there three years? Did you feel at all the reach of the drug culture? I'm talking about the corruption and all that?*

HUHTALA: Yeah, there was corruption all around us and we certainly saw that. As I said I had a fairly heavy consular workload concerning people who were into drugs. We had a couple of overdoses and that kind of thing.

*Q: Were we getting the international or college kids getting off on their year abroad and back packing around there?*

HUHTALA: We had some of the world travelers. The Australians had quite a few more because Thailand is sort of in their backyard. It's hard for Americans to get as far away as Thailand but we had some.

*Q: What other consulates were there?*

HUHTALA: The British, the Indians, I think that was it at the time.

*Q: Australia none?*

HUHTALA: No. The British handled Australians.

*Q: What were the Indians doing there?*

HUHTALA: This is interesting. There was an Indian community there who had been there for maybe 50 years. They were involved primarily in the cloth trades. They felt discriminated against and they wanted a consul to defend their interests, so they petitioned the government in New Delhi, saying, "If you send us a consul we will take care of him and support him." And that they did. They paid for his housing and all his expenses and that's how they got their consul. It was cool. Even though there were all these Indians in town, there were no Indian restaurants. Indian National Day was the day to go to the Indian Consulate and eat all this wonderful food cooked by the families of Indians who lived there.

*Q: Social life in the towns, was there much?*

HUHTALA: Yeah, there was a lot for us because we spoke Thai, and we had Thai friends. We also had a lot of American friends, including Americans who were married to Thais. There was also a large missionary community there. They kind of ran the school and certain aspects of the social life like the Christmas bazaars and that kind of thing. They were far too sanctimonious for my taste. We didn't socialize too much with them.

*Q: What about Thai students who went to the United States? Was there a considerable, a lot of Thai students I guess?*

HUHTALA: Well there are more now than there were then, but there were some. There was a university there, Chiang Mai University. At the time it was about 10 or 15 years old. They had exchanges with U.S. institutions; for instance, St. Olaf's College sent students over for part of a semester. Because it was a university town there was a lot of cool stuff going on in the arts and that sort of thing.

*Q: Had the information age reached in there? Later the technical age of computers and that sort of thing, I think the Thais tend to concentrate on developing this, training people. Was that happening while you were there?*

HUHTALA: No, no, not at all in the '70s. It was way in the future. I saw my very first video tape then; the USIS office had them. I had never seen such a thing before. But no one else in the community had access to this technology.

*Q: I know, I remember watching with awe at that sort of thing.*

HUHTALA: My husband taught at the local international school. We had an international school

that went through the eighth grade. He taught science and he also took over the woodshop. The kids were tired of making wooden salt shakers and plaques so he brought in jade and taught them how to make jade pendants for their mothers and that kind of thing. That was wildly popular. (He had learned basic lapidary skills at the YMCA in Chiang Mai.) He did that for two years and then he got tired of it and decided not to teach for the third year. At that point the Vietnamese boat refugees were pouring out of Vietnam, this was 1978-79. So he went down on a part-time, intermittent (PIT) job to help out with our Consulate in Songkhla, dealing with those Vietnamese refugees. He did that for about three months.

*Q: How did you find the relationship between, the consulate and maybe the embassy too, but with the NGO's because this is the beginning of a real change?*

HUHTALA: What we had then were lots of Christian missionaries. Some were old and established and others, less so. For example, three congregations in Alabama would get together to support one missionary individual who would come out and teach "the heathens." The missionaries were working largely with the hill tribes. They were doing some interesting work like giving them a written language for the very first time. Giving them a Bible in the Lisu language, for instance, so that they could have written traditions but also spread the faith. Some missionary families had been there for many years, having been pushed out of Burma near the end of the Second World War, or maybe earlier, I don't know. Others were relatively recent arrivals. The Lutherans, I think it was the Lutherans, had been there for a hundred years. They started a local college. There were a fair number of Christian Thais as a result.

*Q: So there wasn't the tremendous establishment of NGOs designed to help refugees, teach democracy all that sort of thing? That came somewhat later?*

HUHTALA: That came somewhat later.

**WILLIAM LENDERKING**  
**Press Attaché and Information Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1976-1980)**

*A native of New York, Mr. Lenderking graduated from Dartmouth College and served a tour with the U.S. Navy in the Far East before joining the Foreign Service of the U.X. Information Agency in 1959. As Public Affairs, Press and Information Officer, he served in posts throughout the world and in Washington, D.C., where he held senior level positions in USIA and the Department of State dealing with Policy, Plans, and Research. Mr. Lenderking was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

*Q: And you were in Thailand from when, '70-?*

LENDERKING: Seventy-six to 1980.

*Q: What was the state of things in Thailand when you got there in '76?*

LENDERKING: It was quiet, as I recall, but shortly after we arrived there was a bloodless coup by the military, not an unusual occurrence in Thailand. I guess that's why things were quiet -- a military dictatorship buttoned things down and put a chomp on any kind of dissent and things went along in their usual Thai way. I mean, the country was bustling with commercial activities but political dissent was carefully squelched. Anyone who strayed out of line, such as critical newspaper editorial writers, overly inquisitive reporters, or politicians clamoring for more democracy, were not treated brutally but they would be squelched.

I had agreed to that assignment because it clearly wasn't a punishment for what happened in Italy and I would get an equivalent assignment. USIS had a huge information establishment -- for example, we produced our own films and TV news clips, radio programs, publications, and had a fast reaction press section. My press attaché job was in the embassy, and the USIS compound was about a mile away through Bangkok's traffic-choked streets. I think many USIS officers would have regarded the responsibility of running that huge information production facility as a real plum, but I came with fresh eyes and so it differently. It was a holdover from the days about ten years ago when Thailand was in the throes of a serious communist insurgency, in the 1960s. There was great concern, and it was legitimate, that Thailand might become a "falling domino" like Vietnam and our staunchest ally in Southeast Asia would be taken over by the communists. So we helped in the fight against the insurgency, and Americans who were involved in that struggle were very proud of that, because they regarded it as the insurgency that won. And there was merit in that view.

Anyway, the large and impressive information program at USIS -- staffed, I should say, by about 60 extremely able and dedicated Thai employees, Foreign Service nationals -- just rolled on out of inertia even though its time had passed. So I said that the size and expense couldn't be justified in terms of our present program needs and the situation in Southeast Asia -- the plant was really a relic of Cold War days and the insurgency in Thailand. Naturally, the PAO, Jim McGinley, didn't see it that way. He was proud of what we could do and he saw my job as finding things to do to justify that large operation. His attitude essentially represented the same kind of mindset that I ran into in Italy, although the issues were different. But the mindset was the same: you are not here to question policy or challenge the program, but to think up new ways to use our capabilities better. Which meant, your job is to carry out my wishes, not question what you are asked to do, but do it in a productive manner.

By this time, I was no longer a junior officer but one knocking on the door of senior ranks, and to be told that I just had to shut up and follow orders was something that didn't sit well with me. (By the way, I said I was knocking on the door of senior ranks, but at this post, with something like 12 American officers, I was only the fourth ranking. We were a bit top heavy.)

*Q: Well, were you beginning to feel now that you were ill suited for a bureaucracy?*

LENDERKING: No, despite a certain pattern beginning to emerge, I always thought the foreign affairs bureaucracy was never dull, but was a living, pulsing organism bubbling with ideas, human machinations, policy struggles and all the rest, and fascinating because it's part of the

perennial struggle over who gets what, what gets done and what doesn't, and who does it. Now, I've never been a rebel but I have been a little bit of an iconoclast. But these things kept cropping up. I always thought my job was to follow the oath we take to do our best to uphold and support the constitution of the United States. That doesn't mean an obligation to put personal loyalty over duty to do what you think is the best way to use the resources we were given; it doesn't mean a slavish devotion to a given policy, because policies change over time; they can be mistaken; individuals can be mistaken and all of this is part of an internal dialogue that we should always have.

*Q: I would imagine that the date, 1976, was important because things were changing. For one thing, we were no longer in Vietnam. And the whole name of the game in Southeast Asia had changed. Now, how did we view the Vietnamese and Chinese threat at the time, from the perspective of Thailand?*

LENDERKING: As I said, many people were proud of our support for counterinsurgency in Thailand, which was perceived as a place where it actually worked, as opposed to Vietnam, and there is a lot of justification for that view. Resisting the insurgency bought time for Thailand to get its act together and lessen the threat. Of course, the threat was not nearly as great as it was in Vietnam if you define the Ho Chi Minh government as the threat. Maybe there was a time when we could have worked out a non-belligerent relationship with Ho Chi Minh but that time was long past. We were still hip deep in the Cold War, the worldwide threat from the Soviet Union was genuine, Communist China was belligerent, so we perceived the world as a dangerous place.

So when, two years later, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and overthrew Pol Pot there was no rejoicing in the State Department or elsewhere in the U.S. foreign policy establishment because one of the most vicious dictatorships of all time had been overthrown, but concern that an aggressive Vietnam had extended its power all the way across Cambodia to the Thai border. And of course the Thai were very concerned; they feared the Vietnamese. Now, if you had taken a long look you might have said this was a good thing; it's better to have a less repressive dictatorship that might moderate over time, than a rigid and brutal totalitarian dictatorship like the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia.

*Q: Well, another factor is that in all of these areas where we saw some overarching generalized threat of communism, there were cracks in the wall -- we thought the Vietnamese, that is, the North Vietnamese and the Chinese, were as close as lips and teeth, to quote the old Mao saying. Well, the teeth were biting the lips. The Cambodians and Vietnamese hated each other from time immemorial and will continue to do so. The Chinese and Vietnamese also have a long history of enmity and in fact fought a vicious battle just a while after you arrived in Bangkok. So nationalism and cultural hatreds often trump grand theories of how countries are going to behave.*

LENDERKING: I suppose in retrospect you have to be dismayed that for all our involvement in East Asia and Southeast Asia, including the Vietnam War where we supposedly learned lessons that we might have absorbed, we were very surprised when Vietnam and China fought that really violent border war in 1977 or 1978 and the Vietnamese gave a very good account of themselves until they were overwhelmed.

*Q: Yes, it's just the same as today, you know, we seem to think Iran is going to take over Iraq if we pull out. Well, the Arabs and the Persians have not gotten along well for some time, we're talking about centuries, and obviously that chemistry will continue to work.*

*Now, to go back to where we were, why wouldn't it be kind of nice to have a big printing place and have a movie studio and the whole thing, as long as you're there to strengthen Thai-US relationships? Or was this capacity a misuse of funds, or counterproductive or what?*

LENDERKING: Well, we had a device called the country plan and although it was much criticized it was developed over years and I had a hand for awhile in refining the annual process but essentially it was a useful planning document that forced PAOs to think about what their public affairs priorities were and how they could achieve them. The way it worked is that once a year posts would set out their objectives in support of specific foreign policy objectives, and would develop a supporting program of activities. The plan had to be approved by Washington, the money allocated to the plan had to be rationally accounted for, and PAOs were supposed to turn down ideas that didn't directly support a country plan objective.

I felt, looking at our country plan, that this huge information plant could not be justified, that we had excess capacity. My main concern was for people, the Thai staff, who were running this thing, the motion picture branch, the radio/TV branch, publications, and press, each one headed by an American officer, all under my supervision. It was ungainly, running on its own momentum, its presence the principal justification for its being. It was a huge operation for USIA but the Thai staff was superb, and you couldn't think about dismantling that thing without thinking of them and their talent. I mean, we would ask them to do something and they would do it and they put out quality work, and I thought that Washington would eventually force us to cut back the program anyway, so we should do it ourselves and retain the option of deciding how we wanted to cut. So I thought well, let's do this rationally and provide for these guys and their retirement and such so they know what's ahead and are not taken by surprise and thrown out on the street and that sort of thing. I cannot remember how many Thai staffers we had but I think it was well over 100 in just the information section; a big, big plant. So basically I wanted rational cuts because they could no longer be justified and in fact that plant was not used full time. I should add I also spent a lot of time working on good projects that would support our objectives but sometimes it was hard going, because just running that bureaucratic machine that we had created years before took most of our energies.

*Q: Could you turn this plant into a regional thing so you were printing things for, or supporting information activities in India or Pakistan or Afghanistan or elsewhere?*

LENDERKING: In fact we already had an even larger printing center in Manila, which produced regular books and textbooks very professionally, and that was a regional printing center, which eventually was undone by budget necessities too, but there was no need to duplicate that operation. The one we had in Thailand was basically just for Thailand and all the regional stuff went to Manila.

*Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?*

LENDERKING: The ambassador when I got there was Charles Whitehouse, who was a Republican. He was a career officer, he had been in the CIA; a marvelous guy, a great raconteur. He had served in Vietnam as one of the CORDS (pacification program) directors, in III Corps (Region Three). I didn't know him then but he loved talking about the Vietnam War and the mistakes we had made and the things that we could and should have done. He was accessible to the press and he loved it when a journalist came in with Vietnam experience and he'd start talking about Vietnam. Sometimes he'd get out his maps and get down on his hands and knees, on the floor sometimes, and go over the maps and talk about the strategy and what was happening.

*Q: Well was he not known at one point, maybe when he was in the CIA, for his previous service in the Air Force?*

LENDERKING: I think so, but I don't know the particulars. I do know he was previously in the CIA and I believe he had a distinguished World War II record, perhaps as a bomber pilot. I can't say for sure.

In any case, Ambassador Whitehouse had a lot of experience in Asia. He was from an aristocratic American family with honorable forebears. He had style, grace and wit, and a fine sense of humor. I was very fond of him.

*Q: Well, I would think that Thailand would be a place where we would be very concerned because our effort in Vietnam had just collapsed and we had pulled out ignominiously from there and Thailand; you talk about the dominos and Thailand was sitting on the border of two potential dominoes, Laos and Cambodia, and we would be very concerned that the Thais would take a look and say, the U.S. is a paper tiger and make their peace with Vietnam and China.*

LENDERKING: That's right, and I am remiss in not recalling that the concern was very real and seemed valid at the time, and because it didn't happen I guess it has receded in my memory but now that you raise it I think that was a very definite perception at the time. But, remember countries aren't dominoes – they're more complex than that. It's not so easy to overthrow a government and occupy a country, as we discovered in Iraq thirty years later. But I'll say this in defense of the domino theory – what we did, especially in Thailand, bought more time for the government and people of that country to get their act together and defeat a tough and determined insurgency. And, although the conditions were different, the Brits did the same thing in Malaya.

*Q: What was your impression of the Thais? You know, you had served in other countries and here you are up against the Thais, who are a very distinct group.*

LENDERKING: Yes. I think everyone loves Thailand and loves the Thais. They are so congenial but no pushovers by any means. There is a sort of a cliché about Thais; you do not want to ever get them angry with you where they feel you have been disrespectful or rude or wronged them or something like that because yes, they do have a temper. But a more gracious, hardworking people when they are on the team, so to speak, you can never find. And people love

living in Thailand, loved the life and got along very well with the Thais. A lot of my counterparts spoke very good English, a high percentage of the Thai elite studied in the United States. There is always a strong contingent of the Thai foreign diplomatic service that has graduated from the Fletcher School at Tufts and other leading U.S. institutions, and there are very strong ties that have been built up and nurtured over the years. So it was a real pleasure to be in Thailand. Of course there were people who were critical of the U.S.; of course there were people who would blast us every day in the newspapers. Most of those people were friendly and approachable on a personal level and you could talk to them. Their critiques often had trenchant things to say about American foreign policy and actions. If they sometimes spoke or wrote sharply, it was generally not because they were anti-American, but because they expected big things from us and we often let them down. I always tried to reach out to those people and if they were at all accessible build a dialogue with them. I did that in Italy and I did it in Thailand.

*Q: Let's talk about the media there. You know, Italy had its own media configuration; what about Thailand?*

LENDERKING: I have to tell you this story. On my way to Thailand I stopped off in Denmark to visit a friend and the ambassador there was John Gunther Dean, a senior career ambassador with a distinguished record. He invited my wife and me to play tennis with him and my friend and afterwards we sat down and had a Coke or something and he said okay, you are going to Thailand. He had just come from there. And he said, "I want you to know that you will have a generally friendly and favorable press when you get to Thailand. I don't want you to think that is because of your efforts or because of your skills; it is because almost all of them are in the pocket of the CIA. So fair warning." And when I got there, I found he was spot on.

Now, the biggest newspaper, Thai Rath, was in Thai, not English, and that was rather consistently critical of us. Because I didn't speak or read Thai and had only elementary Thai courtesy phrases, I didn't have the same level of sophistication or appreciation for some of these political undercurrents that I had in other places like Cuba, Japan, Italy and Vietnam, where I spoke the language and was able to mingle with people who did not speak English. But there was a very vigorous English language press, good journalists and good English newspapers – better than in most other countries I'm familiar with, such as Italy or Peru. And of course I had a lot of contacts among those people and they were generally friendly although they never gave us a free pass.

*Q: Did you have, on your staff, Thai speaking officers?*

LENDERKING: Yes. Our press officer, Ross Petzing, spoke a lot better Thai than I did and he was very energetic. The deputy PAO, John Reid, was fluent; he'd been there for a number of years previously in other jobs and he loved Thailand and had a lot of good Thai friends. His Thai was probably the best in the entire Embassy. There were a few others who spoke good Thai but not many.

*Q: How about radio and TV? Did we have pretty good relationships in those areas?*

LENDERKING: They were tougher to break into. Occasionally something we produced –

perhaps a news clip – would appear on TV, or we'd get a film from Washington, put a Thai soundtrack on it and show it through our own distribution system; and we produced quite a few news and commentary programs that we were able to place. We had American officers for each of these areas, plus an excellent Thai professional staff – radio and TV, film, press and publications, and exhibits.

*Q: You were there during the Carter Administration?*

LENDERKING: Yes.

*Q: The one innovation for the Carter Administration was human rights; how did this play in Thailand?*

LENDERKING: It was sensitive and I can remember at a country team meeting Ambassador Whitehouse said okay, the new human rights person in the State Department, Patt Derian, is coming. (She was married to Hodding Carter, an outstanding journalist in the great tradition of Southern journalists and editors, and who became at some point spokesman of the Department). So Ambassador Whitehouse explained to us that Patt Derian, who already had a national reputation as a human rights activist, was coming to Thailand and we now have a new dimension in our foreign policy. Like it or not- I am paraphrasing what he said- like it or not, we are going to be respectful and we are not going to be dismissive of her agenda and we are going to cooperate to the extent possible. And he added that I, as a traditional diplomat, am somewhat skeptical of this new initiative because I think it may get us off course to no good purpose, but this is what we are going to do and I want you all to be mindful of my instructions.

Well, I thought that was pretty good. So she came and we were involved in her human rights concerns because there were human rights problems in Thailand and I think Ambassador Whitehouse and everyone else felt that calling attention to some of the human rights abuses and rubbing the Thais' noses in the dirt so that they lost face and felt that they were being humiliated or held up to criticism or ridicule by their great friend the United States would be harmful and it was better to work quietly behind the scenes whenever we could. These were basically domestic human rights concerns, strictures on the press for example, treatment of prisoners; some of the usual human rights agendas. As far as benevolent dictatorships went Thailand was probably one of the best in the world but there were problems. So that was a concern and we tried to manage it. Patt Derian arrived and she was a very forceful advocate and she wanted us to do more for the Carter human rights agenda and eventually the impetus that she started became an integral part of U.S. foreign policy, as you well know. So she had an impact, worldwide.

*Q: Yes. I think I was in South Korea at that time and we were also getting involved in this new initiative because we had Kim Il Sung and 40 tank divisions sitting within 30 miles of us, which tended to make us focus. And we had the Park Chung Hee dictatorship, which was not too bad, you know.*

*So, as press attaché, how did you treat human rights?*

LENDERKING: We didn't focus on a lot of local situations but we put out a lot of information

in articles and also in briefings about U.S. policy and how it is not designed to be a threat to countries but to get them to realize that they could observe the universal declaration of human rights without threatening their own regimes and their own survival. And so it was kind of friendly persuasion, I think you could call it.

After the military coup that occurred shortly after I got there, there were strictures on the press and other clampdowns and we tried to work around those to the extent that we could without upsetting the larger relationship with Thailand and to some extent we did. I remember Joan Baez came out and there was concern that Joan Baez, who is outspoken in support of her political beliefs...

*Q: She is a folk singer who was quite prominent in the anti-war movement.*

LENDERKING: That's right. And a peace activist and I would say a very effective one. She came out a number of times and one concert we arranged for her she came out with Bayard Rustin, who was also one of the most prominent of the African-American peace activists, and they were terrific. Very politically astute. Made their points while giving a great concert, and did it without getting anyone angry. The concert took place in the concert hall of the bi-national center there, which was run by a Thai and American board. And there was a lot of nervousness because the new President and some of the senior coup leaders and government officials were there, and Joan Baez gave him a dazzling smile from the stage, saluted him and then sang a song of protest. But she did it so gracefully that no one's back was raised and the hackles stayed put. Bayard Rustin sang a marvelous old folk song that had a sharp political point and got a huge ovation.

*Q: I have to say this while we're on the subject, just for the record. I have the greatest admiration for Joan Baez because, unlike so many of these singer-activists who, as soon as the draft ended, all went on their way. When South Vietnam collapsed Joan Baez took the cause of refugees in South Vietnam under her wing and really did a lot to help, rather than these others who, once they were not involved in being drafted or the girlfriends of guys being drafted, just sort of left the refugee situation and paid no attention to it. She did. I give her great credit for that.*

LENDERKING: Those are exactly my sentiments. And we saw her a couple of times in Thailand. She was dedicated, hard working, she was very savvy; she had one or two people with her, helpers who were also savvy and focused and knew how to deal with people and how to push their agenda in an effective way. I totally agree; she was effective and impressive.

*Q: I read in an obituary in today's paper that her father died. And he was a PhD in, I think physics or something, a very impressive person. Obviously she came from a genetically well endowed family.*

*Well, let's talk about refugees. You were there during the time of tremendous pressure from Indochinese refugees. How did you view that and what was your role in dealing with this huge problem?*

LENDERKING: My tour in Thailand was 1976- 80. The first two years were under the coup leadership and it was very quiet. And then the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and overthrew Pol Pot and suddenly in Thailand we had several million refugees. And we had by now a new ambassador who came out, Mort Abramowitz, who replaced Ambassador Whitehouse when a Democratic administration came in. I greatly liked and respected Whitehouse and I also think Mort Abramowitz was one of the best ambassadors I've ever seen. They were quite different in their mindset and approach to diplomacy.

*Q: Abramowitz is going to be interviewed shortly, not by me but by Tom Stern.*

LENDERKING: I think he will have so much to say. He is a marvelous person; I have tremendous respect for him and still see him from time to time. I really admire what he did in Thailand so much. He took the refugee cause under his wing and he was much more interested in it than Ambassador Whitehouse was and saw this as a major challenge for the United States and American foreign policy. And he and his principle guy for refugees, Lionel Rosenblatt, who is also a very close friend, really did heroic work for the refugees, persuading the Thai Government that this was very important to them and to treat the refugees in a humane manner. The Thais were very reluctant to have all these refugees and wanted to push them back across the border, and in some cases did push them back, right into live mine fields. Ambassador Abramowitz and Lionel Rosenblatt and his helpers were involved in all kinds of things to care for the refugees, to get massive assistance from the executive branch, the Congress, the UN, NGOs, and the public at large. It was important to show the Thai that this huge burden would not be the sole responsibility of the Thai Government and therefore make them more amenable to having these small cities of refugees on their borders. So that was very important work.

*Q: Well, did you have any role in this? Was the USIA doing anything on this issue?*

LENDERKING: By this time I was the full-time press attaché but I also had responsibilities for the information shop about a mile and a half away but I spent most of my time outside of the ambassador's office and we had a very large group of foreign correspondents who were there because of the refugee crisis and also because Bangkok was a great place from which to cover the rest of Southeast Asia. So a lot of the big outfits had bureaus there, CBS, NBC and ABC, and "The Times" and "The Post" and a lot of other newspapers had full-time correspondents there. I dealt with them all the time and it was the part of my work that I enjoyed the most, and the thrust of what the Embassy was doing was to make the correspondents aware of all the things that were happening, to facilitate their visits up to the border so that they could see for themselves, and they would write about what was going on and that would generate support from back home and from other countries. That was much more important than anything USIA was doing, although the VOA also had a full-time correspondent who was a regular journalist and member of the press corps. His status was a journalist, and a U.S. government official. USIA never seemed to realize the importance of the U.S. press. Because we were supposed to be dealing with a foreign audience the U.S. press could in many ways do our work for us by publicizing an item which would then reverberate around the world and purvey information in a much more effective way than if we had written an article and gotten in placed in a local newspaper.

*Q: One of the things that anybody reading this has to look at is that we are talking about 1976 to*

*'80, when there was no CNN or worldwide TV yet, so individual correspondents representing media from all over the world abounded.*

LENDERKING: Of course there was AP (Associated Press), Reuters, and the wire services but you are right – this is some 10, 12 years before CNN, I think.

*Q: Yes. Was there any problem in getting the press to the refugee camps?*

LENDERKING: There was. Initially, the Thais didn't want the refugee story to be publicized, because they didn't want it known that they were sometimes pushing people back. But also they were concerned that if other potential refugees heard about the massive assistance being supplied to the refugees in the camps on the Cambodian border, more and more refugees would arrive and the problem would only get worse. So it was a constant struggle, and Lionel and Mort especially were tremendously effective. Lionel spoke pretty good Thai, Mort did not, but he was a very forceful advocate, knew Washington, had great contacts in the political and media world and made sure he was out front on these initiatives and fully supported by Washington. He arranged for Rosalynn Carter to visit the camps, and we had a succession of important congressmen come visit. My wife worked for Lionel for awhile. Her job was to interview some of the refugees and write case histories of what they had been through. Those stories became an archive that was used effectively to document what being a Vietnamese refugee was like, and were very useful in educating people about the problem.

I have to mention this, because it illustrates the importance of having first hand information. Even I, as the press attaché in Bangkok and being immersed every day in the details of the refugees and the camps, had a hard time visualizing what their situation was actually like. Even after hearing stories from Susan, my wife, who along with Ann Rosenblatt and a few other volunteers plus the NGOs like Medecins Sans Frontieres, sped to the border during the first huge arrival of many thousands and pitched in to save literally thousands of lives, it was hard to imagine the horror and hardship. But after a few weeks, when the camps began to look like places where help was being dispensed instead of just being holding areas for starving and frightened people sitting out in the open in the mud and rain, I was able to visit the main camp at Aranyaprathet on the Thai-Cambodian border. Up to then, I thought the problem was simply too immense for even the U.S. to handle – certainly we could take a few of the refugees to help alleviate the problem, but there was no way we could assimilate hundreds of thousands. But after a day at Aranyaprathet, seeing the refugees, talking to many of them, I was overwhelmed with the feeling that somehow we would have to find a way to take nearly all of them. And we eventually did. I don't know the exact total, but it was about one million people, and most of them were settled in the U.S. and other receiving countries. In the U.S. the Vietnamese community for the most part has done itself and the U.S. proud, and the task of accepting the refugees, providing camps for them, and then screening, processing, and resettling them is one of the most impressive and effective humanitarian operations in all of history.

*Q: You mentioned Lionel Rosenblatt. What was his job?*

LENDERKING: He was the refugee coordinator and he had a large and very able staff. Because the problem was so big he had a number of people who were as experienced and as dedicated as

he was.

*Q: Well Lionel, of course, made quite a name for himself after the collapse of South Vietnam by taking off from Washington and going out on his own with one other FSO, Craig Johnstone, and personally assisted more than a hundred Vietnamese to get away and get to the U.S. It's fair to say that he and Craig saved their lives, because many of them would have been punished by the new regime because of their association with the United States. More power to them.*

LENDERKING: That's right. I guess one of the stories that has now become a foreign service legend is that Lionel worked for Henry Kissinger at the time and Kissinger didn't want Lionel to go out; in fact, someone from the Department sent a cable to the Embassy warning that Lionel might come out and to watch out for him because he would no doubt cause trouble, demanding that refugees be evacuated more quickly and making other "unreasonable" demands. Of course, this is exactly what the Embassy should have been doing, and it's a blot on the whole operation that the Ambassador, Graham Martin, delayed evacuation operations because he didn't want to cause a panic. As a result, many people didn't get out who should have and even many Americans had to exit in panic from the Embassy roof. Not the most glorious moment in U.S. history!

So, Lionel went on his own hook, and at his own expense. And in the final days before the final fall of Saigon, he was able to get several hundred people out just by being tireless and getting them on planes and in whatever way he could get them out and so personally saved probably a couple of hundred people. And when he came back, Kissinger called him into his office to dress him down for being disobedient and then shook his hand and said, in essence, great job, we're very proud of you. That is how I heard the story, I think not from Lionel. But anyway, that's one of the many legends about Lionel that I think are accurate.

*Q: Prior to that, people were fleeing Vietnam before the mob that came across from Cambodia after the Vietnamese invasion. What about the boat people? I mean, their leaving Vietnam and ending up on the shores of Thailand and getting pushed off or being attacked and women raped; there were horrible stories. This was early on; how did we deal with this from your perspective?*

LENDERKING: I was not directly involved in any rescue and assistance operations for refugees, so I can recall some details only in outline. But my recollection is that we were not instantly forthcoming. We were fearful that too many refugees would be coming to our shores and we were not set up to handle them. So it took a lot of effort, a lot of working with Congress and the churches and other humanitarian organizations to try and achieve a general recognition that we had an obligation well beyond our general humanitarian concern to support and do something special for the refugees. And eventually we took well over a million refugees from Vietnam alone, plus more from Cambodia and Laos. The Hmong were a special case. But for some years there were camps around Southeast Asia, including in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, with refugees and later on I did visit some of those camps and we can talk about those later. But it was always a struggle to get any kind of bureaucracy, the UN bureaucracy or our bureaucracy or the bureaucracies of other countries to deal with the refugees in a humane way. Because no one wanted them and that has always been the problem.

*Q: What was your impression of the international press corps that was in Thailand?*

LENDERKING: I got to know many of them very well as friends and we had a lot of interactions, work and socially as well, and most of the established correspondents were superb. There were also some standouts among the independents, and even some of the young ones who came out to make a name for themselves. There were of course a few oddballs – war and disaster always attract their share of them -- but the mainline people who were resident in Bangkok and the veterans who visited often, such as Henry Kamm of the New York Times, were great journalists. I was always impressed by how quickly they could settle in, make their contacts, chase down their stories, and make clear sense of complicated situations. It's a great loss that the major media, which still have resources, have cut way back on international news coverage, reducing the evening news programs to sound bites on human interest stories and ending coverage of many major overseas stories totally. That's because large corporations whose highest priority is the bottom line now control the major media.

But in Thailand, most of the journalists were savvy pros, knowledgeable and serious. There were guys like Neil Davis of NBC, a one-man TV crew with driver, cameraman, and reporter rolled into one fearless journalist, and he was later eventually killed, I think when he got caught in a firefight. He was from New Zealand or Australia, a superb guy, and one of the most universally admired journalists there.

*Q: How did you find places like Chiang Mai and the places where we had those big air bases, and then after the fall of Saigon they were being shut down. Did that impact on you at all?*

LENDERKING: Yes, it did, but you know, my memory is hazy on that. It seems to me there was always some issue connected with the bases. The Thais wanted them there but were sensitive about too much publicity for them and so we had to keep a low profile. I think by the time I got to Thailand most of the big operations from those bases were over.

*Q: What about the Thai provincial press?*

LENDERKING: Thailand is so dominated politically, culturally and economically by Bangkok that sometimes it was difficult to keep in mind that important things could happen “up country” too. Maybe we were too fixated on Bangkok because it was really the horse that pulled the carriage or the country. And I think even when there was so much going on up on the border the local papers on the border were not that influential. You had maybe 2 million refugees inside the Thai border and you would think the regional newspapers would be very important but I don't think they were.

*Q: Were you involved with Burma in any way?*

LENDERKING: Very little. In fact, I never got a chance to visit Burma while I was in Thailand and Burma was mostly important because of all the drug trafficking that passed through the famous Golden Triangle on the Thai-Burma border. We had a big DEA, Drug Enforcement Agency, contingent in Bangkok and they were active and a lot of activities went on in secret channels, outside of the public domain, so most of what we did was publicizing initiatives such a

major drug busts, and providing background briefings to trusted journalists who were always coming to Thailand chasing the drug story. I knew some of the DEA guys reasonably well, and I knew they were going out on raids with their Thai counterparts and that sort of thing, particularly up in Chiang Mai and the border areas that were close to the drug trafficking routes. But it was not something that the public part of the embassy, USIA and the press attaché office, were involved in much.

One humorous story – a leading ABC television reporter came out with his own camera crew to do a drug story, and we set him up to film the drug-sniffing dogs that sniffed the luggage on the conveyor belts underneath the baggage pickup room at Bangkok airport. On one bag that came through the dogs went wild, barking and biting the suitcase, so they opened it up and the dogs went at it. Well, there were no drugs inside, just clothes, and no one could figure out what set the dogs off. So there was nothing to do but stuff the clothes back in the suitcase and send the bag on up the conveyor belt. We all wondered what the look on the passenger's face was when he picked his luggage off the conveyor belt -- clothes strewn about, dog teeth marks in the nice new suitcase. You can imagine.

*Q: Were we in a duel with communist China vis-à-vis influencing the press or not? Did we see that as something or was China not very active yet?*

LENDERKING: China certainly had much greater influence with the Chinese language press, which we monitored for information. There is a huge Sino-Thai population in Bangkok and some papers were closely oriented towards China. So we didn't have much contact there, but we did with the Thai press, for reasons that John Gunther Dean explained, and also with the important English language press.

*Q: With this large press corps there and a significant number of them being involved with America, were we concerned about their reporting about the dictatorship?*

LENDERKING: Yes, to some extent but as it turns out they were not focused much on domestic Thai politics, it was the refugee story they were after. Also on what else was going on in Southeast Asia; for example, when Vietnam and China went to war briefly, that was a huge story. I happened to be on a scuba diving trip with the AP bureau chief, Denis Gray, when that happened and we were incommunicado on this trip for about four or five days. And we get back to Phuket and he finds out a war has broken out and his UPI (United Press International) rival has been up on the border for four or five days writing exclusive stories. He almost had a heart attack. So those were the concerns.

*Q: How could a UPI guy get up there? Which side was he on? I mean, for reporting; on the Vietnamese side?*

LENDERKING: I don't know exactly where he was, but he was able to get pretty close to the hostilities and write first-person stories. The UPI and AP correspondents were of course keen rivals and not especially good friends.

*Q: Well, being a Vietnam hand yourself, did you get any feel for what was going on in Vietnam, I*

*mean from contacts or anything of that nature?*

LENDERKING: Not a lot was coming out of there. We didn't have a lot of good sources of information. Occasionally journalists could get in there and sometimes diplomats from a friendly country were able to go in but it took many years before we reestablished relations. I used to monitor Vietnamese government newspapers and official broadcasts through FBIS, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which was an unclassified service for government clients run by the CIA. Most of the stuff was pretty dry government propaganda, all about "running dogs" and such things, but occasionally we'd pick up a real nugget – an indication something was happening that we hadn't known about.

*Q: Was there any effort that you can recall about trying to work on what later became known as an orderly departure program? In other words, rather than people going out to sea in those sinkable boats, process them in an orderly manner for resettlement to a third country.*

LENDERKING: Yes, there was an ODP program and a lot of people were able to leave via that route. Mort, Lionel and others who were directly involved would be the best ones for details.

*Q: How did you find dealing with Thai government officials who dealt with the press during the dictatorship?*

LENDERKING: I didn't have a lot of dealings with Thai officials; although there was a regular contact who I dealt with to facilitate credentials for journalists. Like all dictatorships, the Thai government then was very sensitive about what journalists were writing and what they were up to. As a dictatorship, this one was relatively benign, but they were still sensitive and expected the American Embassy to take responsibility for stories American journalists wrote. Of course, we refused to do this. And sometimes an American would show up with the flimsiest kind of journalistic record, no media sponsor back home, and demand to be accredited. If I questioned their bona fides, they would say to me, are you telling me, is the U.S. Government telling me that I am not a journalist? Who are you to judge who is a journalist and who isn't? So it was a recurring problem and when someone would write something the Thais didn't like, my contact in the foreign office would call and complain. And I would say we're not responsible for what they write but they are legitimate journalists and under our system they can write what they want. The Thai official I was dealing with was a reasonable guy; he understood my dilemma and was just doing his job. I understood his dilemma and we would try to work our way around the problem, and that was very Thai.

There were far more strictures imposed on the Thai journalists, and they sometimes told me how they had to walk a tightrope to avoid punishment of some sort.

*Q: Did this last the whole time you were there?*

LENDERKING: Yes. It was General Kriangsak who was president and he was an improvement over his predecessor. We actually had pretty good relations with his government, and things began to lighten up a little but he left no doubt who was in charge.

*Q: How did you see the role of the royal family and the press treatment and all that?*

LENDERKING: The Royal Family was always a subject of intense scrutiny and speculation but such was the respect that was demanded towards the King and Queen and the children that you had to be very careful about how you broached the subject with any Thai person because if you showed any disrespect or anything that could be conceived as disrespect or asked improper questions the reaction could be quite harsh; it could be personal, perhaps even violent, although I had no personal knowledge of any such encounters. And then every year a number of people were picked up and put in prison or roughed up or something for some act, sometimes seemingly remote, of disrespect towards the King or the Royal Family. But the King was and still is revered and his influence has been enormous and a powerful unifying figure and force for good in modern Thai history. Much more so, than, say, the Emperor of Japan, who is respected and widely revered, but has much less real influence.

*Q: You mentioned Rosalynn Carter earlier. How did her visit go?*

LENDERKING: That was a major event because of the refugee crisis, and she was an excellent person to call attention to it in a compassionate and humanitarian fashion. Mort and Lionel engineered that trip and it was strictly for refugees. She must have met some senior Thai officials but I don't recall who they were. We had to be careful because the Thais were beginning to think that all we cared about was refugees and they didn't like that – we are, after all, major partners and allies. But the refugee issue was a huge everyday concern, and Mort had to be deft and show that we cared very deeply about Thailand and not just about the refugee issue.

I mentioned how peoples' views on refugees, including mine, changed if they visited Aranyaprathet or any of the other huge camps. After a visit, most people came away deeply moved and seemed to feel that we and others had to find some way to take care of these hundreds of thousands of people – they did not deserve to be consigned to wasting away for years in a soulless refugee camp. The refugee kids played a big part in this – they would approach you, friendly and totally without guile, most of them cute as buttons but some with some kind of physical problem, and your heart would melt.

*Q: Well then, in 1980 you left.*

LENDERKING: That's right.

*Q: By the way, when you went out to Thailand, did your USIA senior people sort of look at you a little bit sideways saying, oh my God, are we going to have problems with this guy or not? From your Rome experience?*

LENDERKING: Most of my colleagues, if they reacted at all, seemed to agree with what I'd done. The East Asia & Pacific Area Director, Bill Payeff, a great guy, authorized official travel to Washington when the American Foreign Service Association gave me the Rivkin Award that year for "creative dissent." The only one who voiced disapproval was my new boss in Bangkok, the PAO, Jim McGinley, who looked askance at Foreign Service employees who criticized policy. In his view, they shouldn't do this and certainly should never be rewarded for it. Bill

Payeff told him to shut up about it and he was authorizing TDY (temporary duty) travel to Washington so I could attend the ceremony. Some State colleagues said, in essence, I would have done it differently but I agree with much of your position, and so on, but in general the reaction pro or con was like a pebble thrown into a lake.

And then one last vignette on that, at the ceremony itself, AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) had arranged for Henry Kissinger, who was Secretary of State at the time, to attend the ceremony. So, in typical fashion he comes in a little bit late and sits down and asks the head of AFSA, "why am I here?" And she says, "Oh, we're giving awards to all the people who disagreed with your policies." And he makes a sound as though he's just been thumped in the stomach, and left at the earliest possible moment. So that was amusing, but it was a long way around to answer your question.

*Q: Okay, 1980; whither?*

LENDERKING: I thought having a big press attaché position was the best job in the world, and I was happy to have another one of those jobs rather than be PAO, because the latter was more of a bureaucratic manager kind of job. Trouble was, I'd never get promoted with another press attaché job, because it was considered essential to acquire management experience in order to make it to the top levels of the Foreign Service. So, since I still had plenty of ambition, I recognized the conflict. Being a PAO involved having to be a naysayer to a lot of people and my experiences with my PAOs in Italy and Bangkok were not the happiest. But people who thought I had some talent kept saying, you know, you should be a PAO, you are senior enough and you have been around long enough. So anyway, I get a phone call in the middle of the night from Bob Chatten, the East Asia and Pacific Area Director who had succeeded Bill Payeff and an old friend, who says, "Congratulations! You're going to Peru as PAO!" I had not applied for that and I said okay, Peru. And my wife, who is Australian, is just awake enough to say, "Peru! Where's that!" She'd barely heard of it and couldn't visualize how it could be any fun or at all interesting. So, Peru is a long way from Bangkok and that was my next assignment, as PAO to Lima, Peru.

**DANIEL A. O'DONOHUE**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1977-1978)**

**Ambassador**  
**Thailand (1988-1991)**

*Ambassador Daniel A. O'Donohue was born in Michigan in 1931. He received a BS from the University of Detroit in 1953 and an MPA in 1958 from Wayne State University. He served overseas in the US Army from 1953 to 1955 and entered the Foreign Service in 1959. His assignments abroad include Genoa, Seoul, Accra and Bangkok, with ambassadorships to Burma and Thailand. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ambassador O'Donohue in 1996.*

*Q: Today is September 3, 1996. Dan, you are now off to Thailand as DCM. When did you go out there?*

O'DONOHUE: I went out to Thailand in July, 1977.

*Q When did you leave Thailand?*

O'DONOHUE: I left Thailand in October, 1978, to come back to be the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs.

*Q: How did you get the job of DCM in Thailand? Usually, the Ambassador has a say in this.*

O'DONOHUE: Well, Charlie S. Whitehouse was the Ambassador to Thailand. Charlie sent a cable to Phil Habib, saying that John Burke, the then DCM, was leaving Thailand to be Ambassador to Guyana. Whitehouse needed a DCM and asked Phil if he had any thoughts on the subject. So I volunteered myself. Phil didn't want me to go. However, by this time I had had enough of the Washington grind. "Koreagate," in particular, had been an emotionally exhausting experience because we went through all the pain and pressure as "Koreagate" surfaced. Then I had to play a larger role in the Under Secretary's office than I should have had to do in maintaining an appropriate balance with the South Koreans. There was a tendency to pile on, not only to exact a proper amount of pain in terms of what the South Korean Government had gotten itself into, but to overdo it. Our point was to hit a balance, in which the basic elements of the Korean-American relationship had to be maintained, essentially intact.

*Q: We tend to get pretty "moralistic" on these things.*

O'DONOHUE: We tend to be moralistic. The EA Bureau found it almost overwhelming dealing with how to hit the proper balance. As I say, that's how in the Under Secretary's office we got more involved. We would have been involved, anyway, because Habib and I had such a long connection with South Korea. However, it was more than we should have been involved. So it had been a long and emotional strain. Then, with the advent of the Carter administration it was not so much the troop withdrawal issue as such, although that also exacted its toll. So, since 1960, with the exception of a total of several years spent in S/S, in Accra, and at the Army War College, I had been continuously involved in Korean affairs. I wanted to do something different. So Charlie Whitehouse readily agreed to take me as DCM in Bangkok, and I went out there.

*Q: As you were out of EA and the office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs and as you inquired prepared to go to your new post, what were the issues involved in Thailand which you learned of, either from the Thai desk or in the hallways of the State Department? What were your principal jobs going to be?*

O'DONOHUE: My vantage point by then was the Seventh Floor [where the principal officers of the Department have their offices]. It was very clear that there was a policy vacuum in Southeast Asia, resulting from the fall of Vietnam in April, 1975. That was first and foremost. Indeed, in Habib's office we had been battling, even with the East Asian Bureau--but more with other offices in the building--about the need to maintain a residual American role and activities. We

felt that we had residual interests in Thailand at a time when, in the EA Bureau itself, there was almost a sense of, “Well, at least one of the results of the Vietnam collapse is that we don’t have to deal with the Thai any more.” So there was a policy vacuum.

When I arrived in Bangkok, there was a resentment and reaction to what had been one of the two, worst negotiations I had ever seen conducted by the Department and the rest of the US Government. The other one, and this happened while I was Executive Assistant to Phil Habib, was the Philippine Base negotiations, which was a “fiasco.”

The first of these negotiations was with the civilian Thai Government over a residual American presence in Thailand, following the withdrawal of most of our troops. We had wanted to keep some facilities and some military personnel in Thailand. We are talking about truly residual facilities, meaning not really large numbers of personnel. There was a combination of arrogance in Washington and utterly confusing signals coming from the various agencies in the US Government, as well as ineptitude in the Thai civilian government which engaged in the negotiations. Both sides, in effect, wanted to keep a residual American military presence. However, by the time that we were through with the negotiations, we had no alternative but to leave entirely as a result of foolish ultimatum by the Thai government.

From our point of view, this failed negotiation turned out to be strategically a benefit because it gave us great freedom of action from that point on. We could determine the extent of our involvement in Thailand. From the Thai point of view the failed negotiation was viewed, particularly by the Thai military, as a disaster. The US had been already forced to leave Vietnam, the South Vietnamese Government had collapsed, and a resurgent and united Vietnam had come into being under communist control with the US withdrawal. Thailand had thus lost the anchor for what had determined and dominated its foreign and security policy since 1945.

The man who conducted the negotiations on the Thai side, Anand Panyarachun, the permanent Secretary of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was later suspended from the Foreign Ministry and later sent out to an almost insulting assignment as Thai Ambassador to Bonn, as a prelude to retiring as still a very young man. In fact, Anand came back many years later to be Thai Prime Minister, after the coup in 1991. He performed exceptionally in this position and is now one of Thailand’s two leading elder statesmen. This showed that in Thailand only the decrepitude of old, old age prevents you from coming back into office.

*Q You weren’t there during the negotiations with Thailand about a residual American military presence.*

O’DONOHUE: I saw them from the Washington perspective.

*Q: Let’s talk a bit about these negotiations. You spoke of the “arrogance” in Washington. What do you mean?*

O’DONOHUE: First of all, this period from 1973 to 1976, when the situation in Thailand was beginning to stabilize, was a period of profound uncertainty. All of this emanated from the general situation in Southeast Asia in 1973. There had been student demonstrations in Bangkok

which the Thai military had at first tried to put down by force. Then the King of Thailand intervened, and a civilian government came into power which presided over a chaotic, domestic situation. At this time in Thailand the Thai military were temporarily cowed. The Communist Party of Thailand, which was supported by China, figured prominently in the mythology of the time as an insurgency. It later disappeared, for all practical purposes, when the Chinese adopted a pro-Thai policy. However, at the time counter insurgency were factors.

Over the long history of our relations with Thailand after World War II we had very close ties with the Thai military, who, in effect, ran the country. The negotiations on a residual American military presence in Thailand took place at the one time when the Thai military had been pushed to the sidelines. We had a CIA Station in Bangkok, which had its own contacts, as did our JUSMAG, the Military Assistance Group. They were constantly saying that we should “hang tough in the negotiations. The Thai military, in the end, will put these civilians in their place.”

We had a negotiation which was eminently manageable and which Ambassador Charlie Whitehouse, in this, as well as in several other cases, suffered the fate of being a Cassandra. As far as I could see, Whitehouse was generally correct in his judgments on Thailand, which were generally ignored in Washington. As a result of all of these signals emanating from other agencies, Secretary Kissinger was insistent that we would set the terms for our residual presence. I’ve forgotten what we were asking for, but, let’s say, at this point we wanted a residual force of about 2,200. The Thai wanted, perhaps, 1,000, or something like that. I don’t exactly recall the numbers. However, this was all eminently negotiable. For their part, the Thai started giving us foolish ultimatums, which is why we ended up withdrawing. As the negotiations proceeded, from arrogance and intransigence on our part, to the Thai getting caught in their own rhetoric and their own ultimata, finally, the conclusion was that there was no way out. We had to pull out our military units and ended up with JUSMAG but no other residual American military presence in Thailand.

The Thai military never forgave that Thai civilian government, not simply because of the failed negotiation with the US, but also because of the chaotic, domestic scene. The Thai military moved back into power with a coup in 1976, installed a civilian government of its own making, or, I should say, of the Queen’s making. The Prime Minister was a favorite of the Queen of Thailand and, to a lesser degree, of the King. That’s the situation when I arrived on the scene.

*Q: In terms of foreign policy, when you were in EA, were you involved or were you an observer of the Philippine Base negotiations which went on?*

O’DONOHUE: No, again it was when I was Phil Habib’s Executive Assistant.

*Q Could we talk a bit about that?*

O’DONOHUE: I was reasonably close to the two negotiations. Essentially, both the Thai and the Philippine Bases negotiations were begun during Habib’s service as Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs. However, the situation in South Korea was all absorbing for me and, though I had a picture of what was going on, I wasn’t directly involved in the Thai and Philippine negotiations at that time. I didn’t think that the two negotiations were handled very well. It was really when I

was Habib's Executive Assistant that we began the negotiations on the residual American military presence in Thailand. Because of Phil's responsibilities, I was following the Philippine Base negotiations much closer. These negotiations started out with a sense of utter arrogance by the Department of Defense and the Bureau of East Asian Affairs in the Department of State. There was constant battling about our draft, so that we didn't reach agreement on a "draft strategy." Indeed, we never had a "tactical" game plan until immediately before the negotiations were to start. Meanwhile, the Filipinos tabled their own draft first, which threw the Washington Departments into even more confusion. So the negotiations started out with the US side having barely papered over the differences between the views of the Departments of State and Defense and having given no consideration to what the Filipinos might demand.

*Q: What were some of the essential differences?*

O'DONOHUE: They were the typical differences which always come up in negotiations. There was the question of maximum freedom to use the bases, criminal jurisdiction, and a whole variety of issues like these. There was the "price tag" question. Consequently, we did not adopt a cohesive approach. We did learn from that fiasco both in a subsequent interim negotiation with the Filipinos of 1981-1983. In 1981 we sat down and said, "What do we want and how do we get there?"

So the negotiations of 1976 with the Philippines started out poorly. Ambassador William Sullivan headed our delegation. I don't think that he ever had a good feel for the Philippines. I may be wrong, because this was the only issue that I had any connection with. Sullivan was convinced that he was going to negotiate the agreement with President Marcos. In one sense, this was true enough, but Sullivan proclaimed it too loudly, thereby embarrassing all of the Filipinos. The nuclear issue was another, very sensitive matter. As the negotiations proceeded, they became almost a comedy of errors. There was one meeting that I can remember. It was held in New York with the Philippine Secretary of Defense. Clements, our Deputy Secretary of Defense, had just come back from the Philippines. He explained what the Philippine position was in the negotiations. Ambassador Sullivan told him, "No, you've got it completely wrong!" He then explained what, in his view, the Philippine position really was. This was what he said just outside the door as he entered the room for the meeting.

So the meeting began, and the Filipinos immediately gave the position as Deputy Secretary of Defense Clements had described it. So this left me with a feeling that there was no sense of hands on or dialogue with the other side. This all happened during the Ford administration. The negotiations stumbled on. The final, sad act was when the President of Mexico was to be inaugurated in December, 1976. Secretary Kissinger went down to represent the United States. He and Philippine Foreign Secretary Romulo got into a discussion. With his typical passion for negotiations, Kissinger immediately started negotiating. Telegrams came flying back to Washington. I remember that Habib called Dean Rusk, who was the foreign affairs adviser to Carter. They had the incoming Carter administration on board for an agreement and made a tremendous effort. Well, as soon as President Marcos heard about this, it turned out that Romulo hadn't received his approval. So this effort simply collapsed.

Then the negotiations went on, with which Phil Habib and I were not involved. There was an

interim agreement reached, followed by highly successful negotiations in 1981-1983 which, in my mind, was almost a model of how to conduct negotiations. Perhaps I shouldn't say that, since I was at the Washington end of it, and Michael Armacost was the Ambassador to the Philippines.

*Q: Let's not leave it there. We can pick it up when we come back.*

O'DONOHUE: When I was going out to Thailand, the first and the most obvious question was, "Whither the United States in Southeast Asia?" That really was a question mark. The Vietnam War had left such a sting. The Thai, most obviously, but all of the other Southeast Asian non-communist countries were obviously very unsettled and concerned. Secondly, even though we didn't have a residual American military presence, we still had a residue of all sorts of relationships, mainly with the Thai military and the Thai intelligence people. Being Americans, we liked to have our cake and eat it, too, so, even though things had changed dramatically, we still wanted to maintain the benefits we had in the Thai-American relationship. We had a residual military assistance program and the beginnings of the Indochinese refugee problem. When I was in Bangkok, the refugee problem grew exponentially, but nothing like the way it did in the years after I left Bangkok. So those were the major issues.

Thailand also no longer had the huge, interagency presence of Americans in terms of numbers--both US military, CIA, and AID. Nonetheless, there still were many US covert personnel in Thailand. As I said, in several areas we still wanted to maintain the previous relationships that we had had with the Thai. These had been very beneficial to us.

*Q: What was the reputation of Ambassador Charles Whitehouse when you went out to Thailand? How did he operate with you and in the context of the Country Team?*

O'DONOHUE: Ambassador Whitehouse had come down to Thailand from Laos in 1975, two years before I arrived in Bangkok in 1977. Laos, of course, had fallen completely into communist hands following the fall of Saigon in 1975. Whitehouse had arrived in Thailand during one of the few times of popular, student unrest which had begun in 1973 and which led to the Thai military withdrawing to the sidelines. During the period 1973-1976, Thai leftists were allowed a freedom which they have never had since then--in terms of demonstrations and so forth.

When I arrived in 1977, there had been the negotiations on an American residual military presence, which had finally failed in early 1976. I think that when I arrived in Bangkok, Charlie did not have a high reputation in Washington for a variety of reasons. In the Thai context, as far as I could see, he was coping and grappling as well as one could. As I see this retrospectively, his real problem was that, as he was not taken seriously enough in Washington, thus the Department was losing the benefit of his views. This was an area in which I had not been engaged, so I could be quite objective about it. I thought that his judgments were right. However, there were difficult, interagency relationships--more so before I got there than afterwards. There had been a strong, CIA presence, a strong US military presence, and all sorts of people who saw themselves as experts on Thailand.

There was a sort of bizarre, political dynamic. The strangest people would float into Bangkok,

see somebody, go back, and have somebody in Washington convinced that they had the accurate story about the situation in Thailand. There were the Thai military, but, beyond the military, there were other Thai who had had a long relationship and many contacts with Americans. The Thai were not at all as systematic as the South Koreans were, in playing with and using various groups. Historically, the American Ambassador had been one of several voices involved in US policy toward Thailand. In a superficial way one could see some points of resemblance to the situation in South Korea earlier on, but this misses the fluidity of the relationship in other respects. South Korea and Thailand are very different countries.

Nonetheless, for the American Ambassador, maintaining control of the various American agencies was not an easy task. Ambassador Graham Martin had created the illusion of control, and I think that he really did have such control, for the most part. However, there were certain things and areas where Ambassador Martin was not in control. However, in this period of confusion and instability in Southeast Asia, maintaining control was particularly difficult. Charlie Whitehouse had neither the Washington support, or understanding that he needed, in almost every case.

*Q: This was no fault of his own. However, the fact that he had come to Thailand as Ambassador in 1975 from Laos, which had “gone down the tubes,” along with everything else in Indochina, did this affect his “corridor reputation” in the Department of State? Was there any criticism of him for having been associated with a “losing cause”?*

O'DONOHUE: No. I would say that it was less than the fact that Charlie was viewed as one of the “old guard” with regard to Vietnam. He had served there in the provincial aid program and had been the Deputy Ambassador in Saigon before he had gone to Laos. Now we're talking about the Ford administration. During the Carter administration, Whitehouse was regarded as a lame duck, which was going to be replaced. If anything, he was viewed as one of the “old guard” who was caught up in the failed Vietnam effort.

However, for any Ambassador the situation in Thailand was going to be difficult and chaotic. I myself both liked working with him and thought that his judgments were basically very good. It struck me that most of the Foreign Service officers with Southeast Asia backgrounds never really figured again in Southeast Asian policy. Remember, my whole background was in Northeast Asia. I think that most of them came out of an Embassy “culture” in which the other agencies and the State Department were always jostling for position. These officers didn't seem to have a very straightforward approach to running the Mission. I think that this was based, not so much on the fact that they were that different, but that their experience had been that each of the agencies, over time, had always been doing “its own thing.” Nobody ever really knew what the others were doing.

I wouldn't fault Ambassador Whitehouse for this or criticize him for not establishing a strong lead and domination of the other agencies. However, we did not have the kinds of problems that had existed even six months before. There had been an almost “impossible” chief of JUSMAG, an Air Force Brigadier General [“Heinie” Aderholt]. When I got there, there was a very amiable Army Colonel on his last tour who had succeeded Aderholt. Whitehouse had his own relationship with the Chief of Station, which meant that I had a “watching brief” but was not as

actively involved as I would have liked to be. It wasn't so much that I did not know what was going on. I would check with Ambassador Whitehouse. It was not a case where I could not go in and discuss my concerns, as he always left his office door open. Overall, though, the Mission was declining in size. The AID Mission was shrinking, as was the aid program itself. The Military Assistance Program was also declining in size. There were a number of challenges. First, there was an absence of clear policy from Washington and then there was the growing refugee problem.

*Q: How did Ambassador Whitehouse use you?*

O'DONOHUE: He gave me immense freedom. In fact, it was quite remarkable, because I did not have a Southeast Asian background, and we did not know each other. Now, Ambassador Whitehouse was away a reasonable amount of time. I was frequently Chargé d'Affaires. I knew that in terms of policy and oversight I've always been active, working on contacts and all of these things. The Political Section chief [Tom Conlon] had known Ambassador Whitehouse at a previous post. He had no difficulty with my exercising my supervision over him. Ambassador Whitehouse certainly encouraged me in dealing at the highest levels, as often happens in Thailand. It's a great job for a DCM.

In terms of Mission management Ambassador Whitehouse wanted to know the "big things," and he paid particular attention to personnel questions. He was really interested in "people issues." He expected me to oversee the daily operational activities, he saw "people issues" as intrinsically involved in the role of an Ambassador, and correctly so. He really paid attention to this. I mean things like births and deaths. He taught me the value of writing notes. He always wrote little notes to people, by hand. He would often call people to congratulate them for one reason or another. On the "people and personnel" side, Whitehouse paid very close attention.

*Q: I would have thought that Thailand, judging from its reputation, would have been a place with a lot of personnel problems because of the drug problem and its effect on the American School and community and problems with sex because Bangkok had become sort of the "sex capital" of the world, with people coming from Europe and the United States for "sexual holidays." This must have put strains on everybody.*

O'DONOHUE: Well, Bangkok was the "sex capital" of the world. All of these things were less, rather than more, during my first tour in Bangkok. Our Mission had shrunk dramatically in size. For instance, the school, called the International School of Bangkok, had had major drug problems. However, we had lost an immense number of Americans and their dependents as Mission components and related agencies were reduced in size or eliminated. We were mainly down to the Mission itself, American businessmen, and missionaries. Previously, we not only had a large American military community but also a large number of American women and children who were in Bangkok on a "safe haven" basis, because their husbands and fathers were serving in Vietnam, and they were not allowed to go there because of the fighting. Many of these "safe haven" families had left Bangkok. So, the International School of Bangkok was coming out of a very difficult period.

Our Mission in Thailand has often experienced "bizarre" events, in a variety of ways. I will give

you two examples--one tragic and one that was not so sad. We were having a Country Team meeting, which I was presiding over. Suddenly, the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] chief was called out and rushed off. He came back to the meeting to report that one of his officers had been carrying a type of gun, which he wasn't supposed to have. He had put the gun on top of his three-combination file safe while he opened it. He had somehow dislodged the gun, which fell. The gun discharged, and the bullet hit the DEA officer in the stomach, causing a wound which was ultimately fatal. The Marine Guards were called. In those days the young Marine Guards had served in Vietnam and, as a matter of fact, knew what to do about gunshot wounds. The Marine Guards rushed in, but it was too late, and the DEA officer eventually died.

The other incident, in a lighter vein, was that the Marine Guard called me as DCM and said, "Sir, there's a reporter here from The Bangkok Post to cover the wedding." I said, "What wedding?" He said, "Oh, the mass wedding in the cafeteria." I said, "What mass wedding?" He said, "Oh, the one the Refugee Office is putting on." Well, when we traced it all back, it turned out that these were Lao refugees who were involved. Say, the name of someone who had been in the refugee camp for, perhaps, eight months or a year would come up for a visa to the United States. He had married, but in a tribal ceremony, and there were no records of it. The Thai had refused to acknowledge legally the presence of refugees in Thailand. You couldn't register a birth or do anything else in the case of one of these Lao refugees.

We had officers from the US Immigration and Naturalization Service detailed to the Embassy, who was really quite understanding. All the INS officers wanted was some evidence to show that a marriage had taken place. The Refugee Officers had come up with the idea of a mass wedding. They weren't really "mass weddings." There may have been eight or 10 couples involved. They would bring in a local, Western clergyman, who would "mumble" his way through a marriage ceremony, which many of the Lao could not understand, anyway. God knows what these people thought they were saying. I think that the refugees thought, "Well, if this is what it takes..." Then the clergyman would sign US Department of the Army wedding certificates which would go into their visa file. Everyone knew what these certificates were and what their purpose was. So the next day the ceremony proceeded. A picture was taken--with the Anglican clergyman that week--although it could have been any clergyman--with the eight to 10 couples, all holding their wedding certificates, with "Department of the Army" printed across the top!

Usually, my view was that, with the Thai, you succeed best when you identify the problem but don't try to "force" your own solution. This was one time when I said, "This is it! The Thai are going to register weddings and births in the camps." And they finally did. We had one American come in with a problem. He had bought a surplus C-47 aircraft. He announced that he was negotiating with certain, Rightist elements to bomb Thai Supreme Command Headquarters! It seemed that there was an unending flow of the bizarre and the tragic. Sometimes they were funny. These incidents happened less frequently later when I was in Thailand as Ambassador, but they still occurred, to some degree.

Thailand is a difficult environment for people if, for example, their marriages are not too strong. Sexual temptations were there.

Drug abuse in the Mission was not a problem, although it was with a few of the children, but not

as many as one might think. The schoolchildren at the International School were easier to deal with. Their parents were either from the Mission, or they were businessmen or missionaries. The atmosphere was, is, and can be corrupting. Indeed, some Americans find it difficult being in Thailand for that reason. They see Thai society and Thai leadership in this sense. I myself never felt that the Thai had a great deal more vices than the general run of mankind, but they are tolerant of almost any behavior if it is not flaunted. There are some people who look at the Thai situation and find it very difficult to deal with.

*Q: Looking at some other things before we turn to the refugee problem, what was the attitude at that time of, "Whither Southeast Asia"? That is, from the perspective of our Mission and what you were getting from the Thai. What were the Vietnamese communists up to?*

O'DONOHUE: At that point [1977-1978] the Vietnamese communists were filled with the arrogance of victory. In Southeast Asia the Thai were the most vulnerable, but by no means alone, as was proven in the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] context. The Thai saw themselves as seriously threatened. There was a much talked about communist insurgency, particularly in northeast Thailand, although the talk was greater than the reality. When I got there [in 1977], I think that, in the real world, the Chinese were already cutting back on their support for the Communist Party of Thailand [CPT].

Thailand was also a country which had the student upheaval in 1973, which brought down a military controlled government. It had a couple of coups, though with little or no violence. It was a country which really was profoundly concerned about where to turn. As I say, their basic security relationship, from their point of view, had been with the United States since 1945. It appeared clear that the Americans had lost interest in Southeast Asia, following the end of the Vietnam War. So there was great uncertainty. The time I was in Thailand as DCM [1977-1978] was before the serious worsening in the situation following the Vietnamese communist invasion of Cambodia in 1979. Cambodia was unsettled, with the Khmer Rouge and their activities, as well as the situation in Laos. This whole situation caused Thailand society great concern. It saw itself in a perilous situation.

From the Embassy's point of view, we were trying to manage and keep alive a relationship in which we were constantly under pressure from Washington, in effect, to do things the US wanted as if the basic Thai-American relationship had not changed. However, at the same time, as far as our own responsibilities were concerned, our previous, strategic relationships with Thailand had disappeared. For the Embassy it was a constant effort--and this was not a case of "clientitis"--to keep in front of Washington a sense that we still had remaining interests in Southeast Asia, despite the defeat in Vietnam. We made the point that we had to pay attention to maintaining these relationships. Paradoxically, both the United States and Thailand focused on the same institution, ASEAN, to meet this policy vacuum. Originally, ASEAN had been a sort of paper entity thrown together by the non-communist governments.

ASEAN was originally a collection of Southeast Asian countries which formed into a regional grouping. It was viewed as essentially an entity with no specific purpose. Its focus was originally to be non-military and nonpolitical, rather economic and cultural. However, there was not much trade between the ASEAN members, and culturally these countries had little to exchange. In

those days what it really meant was that it was essentially an organization which provided a framework for these countries which had more differences than relations in common. As the ASEAN countries looked around, and we're talking here about Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, they faced a threatening, communist Vietnam and no US military counterweight. At that point, there was an equally threatening China. These countries focused on the ASEAN framework as the institutional mechanism through which, in fact, they would handle their common security concerns. So, although ostensibly that was not the purpose of ASEAN, in fact, it became the mechanism that allowed them to fill the void left by our withdrawal from Southeast Asia. The ASEAN leaders did this extremely well.

Under the Carter administration, we had no real policy for Southeast Asia. In fact, under the Ford administration the situation had been no different in that respect. The Carter administration focused on ASEAN because, in effect, it was an organization that allegedly didn't have a security aspect. It was regarded as one of those things like "motherhood" that you could agree on. So the Carter administration gave great lip service to ASEAN. However, in that respect this reflected the absence of a US policy toward Southeast Asia. This ASEAN support was rhetoric in lieu of a policy. We could say that we supported ASEAN, but we did not mean it in a security sense.

This situation continued until the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia [in 1979] and the normalization of US relations with China. The Carter administration never was able to come to grips with what you could call either a strategic concept or a policy for Southeast Asia. I was there in Thailand in that period. Despite the lack of an established US policy, we were constantly involved in dealing with the Thai on all sorts of issues, ranging from, as I said, human rights to refugees to other, foreign policy issues. We were still trying to maintain what had become a small, but nonetheless, from the Thai military point of view, an important military assistance program. It was overwhelmingly the "care and tending" of a relationship which couldn't be described as "frayed" so much as "in traumatic transition."

The Thai came out of this period of transition exceptionally well, mainly because the Thai and the other ASEAN countries developed a cohesive, security approach and one that served them very well during a period when the US wasn't there. By the end of the Carter administration, as was the case with Central America, policy was in a shambles. Then occurred the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia [in 1979] and the US, in effect, siding with the Chinese. So there developed a greater interest in security in these countries, with refugees growing as a separate policy issue. However, it wasn't until the Reagan administration that we had clear and balanced and morale policy and programs, and we were probably more supportive of Thailand than the Thai probably ever expected. Nonetheless, by no means did it mean a return to the "old days" in terms of our Thai security relationship.

*Q: You were in Thailand during the beginning and middle years of the Carter administration.*

O'DONOHUE: I saw it all. I was Habib's Executive Assistant, then I was DCM in Bangkok for 15 months, and then I was the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs to the end of the Carter administration.

*Q: The human rights issue was one of the hallmarks of the Carter administration. From your perspective in Bangkok, how did it translate into action and how were you involved with the human rights issue in Thailand?*

O'DONOHUE: I think that there was about a three-year period in which Patt Derian, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Affairs, had a dominating role. By the way, Patt worked hard and often was better informed, I thought, than the Assistant Secretaries of the regional bureaus. The Carter administration was caught up in the human rights issue. I was caught up in this as Habib's Executive Assistant, sitting in on meetings or representing him when he was not there. It was usually myself and the Assistant Secretaries of the regional bureaus, or their representatives, arguing for a more measured or more balanced approach on issues. We did not often "win" in these discussions, but, usually, the policies eventually were more "balanced," because no administration can ignore underlying foreign policy or economic realities. It always has to weigh other considerations than simply human rights. It was less the effectiveness of our arguments than the inevitability that the senior officers of the Department were not going to risk our various relationships on human rights issues alone.

In Thailand there was an unending series of cables from Washington. One such cable instructed me to go in to inquire about some news stringer newspaper who had been killed. We couldn't even find where the town was where he was allegedly killed! Human rights involved constantly doing what you were told to do, but trying to do it in a way that was not destructive of basic necessary working relationships with Thai officials. We were putting all sorts of demands on the Thai. At times I received as many as three and four cables in a day, telling the Chargé d'Affaires to do this and do that. It was a constant effort to "do what you're told," which is always important. Otherwise, people in Washington will just dismiss you as too client oriented or unresponsive to Washington priorities.

*Q: Well, with Patt Derian, whom I'm interviewing, by the way. The human rights people would pick up almost anything, send it out to you, and you would have to translate it into...*

O'DONOHUE: That's not fair. I have a lot of respect for Patt Derian. As I say, later on, when I went back to Washington as the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs, I was in a lot of meetings, including those with Warren Christopher, the Deputy Secretary.

I felt that the problem with human rights was not so much Patt Derian. She was aggressively and intelligently pressing her issues. She did not operate off the graph. I do not remember Patt personally raising matters which, on the face of it, looked ludicrous. She was serious and usually well prepared. The problem was there was an administration and a leadership in the Department of State which, for a few years, made the balancing act involving human rights and other policy considerations far more painful than it should have been. It was an administration which postured on human rights, rather than prudently pursuing them as part of a broader policy.

Indeed, what struck me is that, if you look at South Korea and compare the attitudes of the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations, in essence all of them had the same priorities. In the end the Carter administration wasn't going to threaten our security relationships with

South Korea. It was under the Carter administration that President Chon came to power. The Carter administration did not know how to handle that, any better than anyone else. This is not a particularly harsh criticism. What I'm saying is that, if you look at it, it's interesting how, with regard to South Korea, the Carter administration ended up just like the other administrations. While I think that this is generally true, the cost in terms of how the Carter administration handled human rights issues, you might say, very often involved an antagonistic or adversarial process. Within the government this involved a higher policy cost than we should have had.

Then in 1979 and 1980 events occurred which turned the process into a shambles. As I said, you had the coup in South Korea, the Vietnamese communists invading Cambodia [in 1979] and the United States, in effect, defending the Khmer Rouge seat at the UN in New York. There were the Sandinistas in Nicaragua whom we accepted as the wave of the future. They turned out to be impossible to live with. An "unraveling" process was under way which, by the end, meant that the Carter administration was left with no real framework for handling human rights. By the last year that the Carter administration was in office, Patt Derian's role had diminished. I wouldn't really fault her so much. She was a person who often had to deal with bureaucratic opponents who were not of her own mettle. Consequently she won more arguments in the beginning than she should have, given our broad policy interests.

What was interesting was that, without a question, and to their surprise, the Reagan administration hit the right note on human rights. I don't know how much credit you can give them on this because I think that they sort of stumbled into it and found, to their amazement, that Latin America was going democratic. Of course, they welcomed developments in Eastern Europe, which was going in the non-communist direction. They also found out that no American administration can ignore human rights as an issue and as a thread in the fabric of foreign affairs.

The Reagan administration learned that there is no way that any administration can ignore this issue. Even Secretary Kissinger learned that, at least tactically, no American administration can pursue a foreign policy without weighing and integrating human rights concerns into it. You can't ignore human rights, as we keep finding out. You can do it better or worse. The curious thing is that the Reagan administration came into office, intending to use the human rights issue against the Russians. They found out that, more generally, there was a "blooming" of democracy and that they, themselves, could not ignore broader human rights considerations. In fact, they managed the issue pretty well.

*Q: Having been dealing for so long with the South Korean Government, how did you find dealing with the Thai in the 1977-1978 period? What was your impression of the Thai Government and society?*

O'DONOHUE: Well, I was in Bangkok as DCM when the government was headed by a rigid, civilian Prime Minister who had been installed by the Thai military. He had been the choice of the Queen of Thailand. He was so rigid that the Thai military ultimately deposed him. Then you had governments led by the Thai military. From my point of view, the virtue of this situation was that I got to know many of the ultimate leaders, like General Prem, who was later Prime Minister for seven or eight years. In my view he was the outstanding statesman in the 20th century in Thailand. I met him initially when he had just become Deputy Prime Minister with a reputation

as a non-political, austere military officer.

Thailand had a society in which the civilian political institutions were very weak, but the basic institutions of state were surprisingly stable. First is the King, who created the modern monarchy. He had been in Switzerland and was brought back to Thailand in 1945 by the Thai military. His brother was to be the King, but essentially as a figurehead. The King's brother died in a mysterious gunshot incident, so the younger brother, the current King, inherited the throne. After he had ascended the throne, he was known at the time as the "saxophone playing king," married to one of the most beautiful women in the world. There was this whole aura about it of "The King and I."

The Thai military determined who was to hold political power. The Ministry of the Interior was a strange and wondrous institution, largely run by senior civil servants and the police. So these three elements, the Thai military, the King, and the senior civil servants sort of ran the country. Politicians held office and briefly might have roles and went back and forth, in and out of power. However, essentially, the Thai military; the Ministry of the Interior, which is a kind of civil service, but is not limited to that; the senior civil servants; and the King provided a stable framework for the country.

In Thai society the monarchy, due to the King's immense efforts, was very important. The current King provided the cornerstone to this whole structure, but that came later in his reign. It was only in the 1970's, after the student uprising in 1973, that the King first intervened to play a decisive political role.

Through the 1970's, the Ministry of the Interior was the equivalent of about four or five ministries in other countries. It was a huge entity in itself. It controlled the Police; it administered the provinces under civil servant governors; it ran the schools up to the fourth grade; it had social welfare programs; it dealt with labor; and it controlled the state prosecutors and prisons. It was an immense entity. Its role has now diminished significantly.

So there were these institutions which provided the framework or the foundation for a society which certainly has violence and a lot of apparent instability external to it. However, it was a very cohesive society. Thai society was utterly different from that in South Korea. As a career Foreign Service Officer assigned to Thailand, I found that what I had learned as a Political Officer in South Korea was completely valid. That is, you get out, you deal widely with various elements of society, you identify people who are important, you work hard with them, and you develop friendships. These, then, become the basis for both your ability to function in Thai society as well as the grist for your analysis. For me it's always been a case of getting out, calling, and doing things that might appear onerous and somewhat time-wasting. However, they drew me into contact with people with whom I later picked up. With my wife we paid serious attention to representational activities. If people like coming to your house, it's not so much that you pull them aside to do business at home, but you find that it's much easier doing business in the office with them.

For me, serving in Thailand involved plugging into a society which, in a sense, was much more established than Korea. It hadn't been rent by war or crisis and had a long established important

figures and families. You had more people to deal with than you could manage. However, you don't rule off as out of bounds any relationships. For instance, the Thai military. I worked at developing relationships there. It paid immense benefits at the time. Then, when I went back to Thailand as Ambassador, most of these people were still around, and I could circulate freely and informally at the senior levels of Thai political and business leadership.

*Q: Let's talk about this time wizen you faced the refugee problem. What was it and how did we see it and deal with it at that time?*

O'DONOHUE: When I arrived in Bangkok in 1977, there was a single AID officer on loan, handling refugees. He was on loan in particular because they didn't know what to do with him except to use him where anyone saw a problem. However, by then we had had an infiltration of Lao refugees and the beginnings of the "boat people" from Vietnam.

*Q Who were the "boat people"?*

O'DONOHUE: People from South Vietnam who traveled by boat and landed in Thailand. While we were there, I had to take action, because the situation was out of hand. In effect, I arranged to have the deputy chief of the Consular Section take over the refugee operation. We were straining our own resources to deal with them. We went in with a recommendation which, when you look at the operation in retrospect, was sort of funny. I think that we said that we were going to need something like 9 people. We were laughed at by the Department for our request.

The Department sent out Tom Barnes. Tom was a Foreign Service Officer, one of the old, Southeast Asian hands. His whole background had been that of a Political Officer. He had been Political Counselor in Bangkok in 1975. Tom was sent out to Bangkok with one Foreign Service Secretary on the verge of retirement [Georgia Acton] to run this refugee program. This was the Department's response. This problem was overwhelming. You have to remember that we were talking about tens of thousands of people. Within a year after I left Thailand, the total number was in the hundreds of thousands!

The Thai were constantly afraid of being "inundated" by these refugees, who arrived in Thailand by boat--the "boat people." Furthermore, the refugee problem continued to grow, particularly after a flow of Cambodian refugees was added to it. They were coming over the land border into Thailand. The Department sent out Lionel Rosenblatt and one other officer to survey the situation. The Refugee Office also got some Foreign Service officer volunteers who spoke Vietnamese and Khmer to help. In this way Lionel Rosenblatt began to set up a large structure, based on the voluntary agencies. When I was in Bangkok as Ambassador, if you counted the "contract personnel" from the voluntary agencies, there were several hundred people involved in this effort.

We were in constant conflict with the Thai over the refugees. We usually succeeded in persuading the Thai to take a more receptive attitude toward the refugees and let them land in Thailand but it was always a battle. There were constant crises which continued more or less indefinitely.

*Q: Could we concentrate on this period, 1977-1978, when you were DCM in Thailand? Can you talk about the type of little crises you encountered?*

O'DONOHUE: To give you an example of one of the things that happened, one night I received a "desperate" phone call from Tom Barnes down in Pattaya.

*Q: That was a port?*

O'DONOHUE: It's really a beach resort some 50 miles Southeast of Bangkok. More of a resort and beach area than a port. The Thai would not let in two or three boatloads of Indochinese refugees and were going to push them out to sea. The refugees were in really imminent danger of sinking.

I had to deal with this. I worked mainly with the Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for operating the refugee camps. Later on, it became the Thai military who dealt directly with the refugees along the land borders. I had to get in touch with the Ministry of the Interior at night, go over, plead with them, get their agreement that they wouldn't push these refugees off the Thai coast, and then pick up the matter on the next working day, trying to get the Thai to accept the refugees. These crises occurred repeatedly.

Then, Mort Abramowitz arrived as Ambassador in late 1978. Mort and I overlapped for about three months. The refugee situation became one of his main preoccupations. Mort devoted an immense amount of time to this situation, and there eventually developed an elaborate structure for dealing with the refugees. From beginning to end Indochinese refugees were a significant aspect of our dealings with the Thai.

*Q: We were talking about human rights. Obviously, Thailand was an integrated society and didn't want to see a "foreign entity" develop there. What sort of backing did you have from the Department in terms of human rights, from an administration under President Jimmy Carter that was sensitive to human rights problems? I don't want to use the wrong term, but the Carter administration seemed to try to be very "Christian" and charitable about issues that came up. How did this attitude translate into action? We were trying to persuade the Thai to take these refugees. I would like to concentrate on this 1977-1978 time frame.*

O'DONOHUE: When I was Executive Assistant to Phil Habib, my initial impression was that the people in the Carter administration were indifferent to the refugees. They saw them as the "residue" of the unhappy experience of the Vietnam War. So initially one would say that the new appointees were not terrifically interested in the refugee issue. Habib saw the issue in personal and moral terms and wanted to help.

Now that Carter administration attitude changed dramatically, as the human dimensions of the problem grew and as they grappled with a very real sense of responsibility for what had happened to the refugees. So first there was consideration of the human dimensions of the refugee problem and, secondly, a sense that, however we viewed the Vietnam War, these refugees were fleeing their homes because of the relationships which they had had with the US. This was something that we could not walk away from.

On that basis I thought that we developed under the Carter administration--and this certainly continued under Reagan--a very sensible and very committed approach to refugee issues in Southeast Asia. We took immense numbers of these people and did make refugees a part of the equation in all of our relationships with Southeast Asian countries. They were an important part of these relationships. In one way or another, from the beginning, when we were talking about saving a few boatloads of people, to later on, when the numbers grew, this was one of the most admirable aspects of our policies in Southeast Asia.

So, initially, the Carter administration's attitude was one of indifference. This changed within months to one of growing concern for the refugees. Eventually, we developed a policy which, as I say, was both humane and just.

*Q: I was going to touch on the relationship with the CIA, but you've alluded to this. I'll come back to it later when we touch on your time in Thailand as Ambassador. You left Bangkok in 1978, which is fairly early.*

O'DONOHUE: Yes, I was asked by Les Gelb, the Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs [Pol-Mil, or PM], to come back to Washington as his principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. This involved leaving Southeast Asia and returning to Washington, but it meant a far greater change than that. East Asia had been involved in wars, and Pol-Mil was an area which every senior East Asian officer had dealt with. However, the issues of nuclear non-proliferation and alliance policies, one of the major focus areas of the Carter administration, were matters which I had never dealt with. I came back as the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, actually to succeed Dick Ericson, who was going off to Iceland as Ambassador.

My basic responsibilities as principal Deputy to Les Gelb were the Military Assistance Program and munitions control activity and arms sales generally and oversight. I should say that those two functions reported to me. Then, beyond that, I would have to say that I operated at times as the alter ego to Les Gelb but more so to Reg Bartholomew, who later replaced Gelb. Reg more so than Les, because we got into pol-mil issues, like our presence in the Persian Gulf and things like that. These were things that I related to more specifically.

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*Q: Today is October 29, 1996. We are continuing with the interview of Ambassador Dan O'Donohue. Dan, how did your appointment as Ambassador to Thailand come about? This is a major country--not one where the position of Ambassador just gets "tossed out" as a "reward," or something like that.*

O'DONOHUE: As I mentioned, I had come back from Burma in March, 1987. I started in S/P as the Deputy Director. Within a few months, by mid-summer, 1987, I was approached about being assigned as Ambassador to Australia. As it turned out--I didn't know the circumstances then--the Ambassador to Australia at the time, a non-career man, had received a very bad inspection report, dealing with his personality. He was debating giving up his position as Ambassador to Canberra. The EA Bureau approached me. I thought that it was unreal in that no non-career

Ambassador was going to go there. However, I said that if they wanted to put my name down on the list, go right ahead. Then it turned out that Mort Abramowitz, who was a close friend, was really interested in the post of Ambassador to Australia. Mort was worried about me if he threw his hat in. I laughingly told him to go right ahead, as neither one of us was going to be appointed to that job.

As it turned out, the incumbent Ambassador stayed on, and that assignment simply evaporated. Within a very short time after that, it turned out that the position of Ambassador to Thailand was coming open. Now, the post of Ambassador to Thailand should have been coming open in accordance with the three-year schedule for the summer of 1988. By this time or maybe by early fall, 1987, the EA Bureau had put up another officer. However, in those days the assignment of senior career officers was still very much a Foreign Service/Department of State function. The process was highly institutionalized. The EA Bureau had put someone else up as Ambassador to Thailand. The group that made the decisions consisted of John Whitehead, the Deputy Secretary of State; Mike Armacost, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; Ron Spiers, the Under Secretary of State for Management; Mel Levitsky; and Charlie Hill, George Shultz's Special Assistant.

*Q: Charlie Hill?*

O'DONOHUE: Charlie Hill played a role. And then George Vest, as Director General was the Executive Secretary of the Committee.

Frankly, in the group of potential Ambassadors to Thailand, as far as three or four of these people were concerned, there was only one officer who could seriously be considered, and that was me. Armacost, Spiers, and Vest picked me. The others agreed quickly. So, as a matter of fact, as the process proceeded, it was a foregone conclusion, given my background. I had served in Thailand as DCM, I had been Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asian Affairs, and then my service as Ambassador to Burma added to the record. It ended up as a fairly straightforward assignment, unlike the way Ambassadorial appointments are now made, and I was assigned the job. This was about September or October, 1987.

This had its effect as far as my job as Deputy Director of S/P was concerned. After a few months in S/P my thoughts were heavily directed toward Bangkok. The formalities involved in this assignment proceeded quickly enough. I was always puzzled, not so much that I was selected, but that Charlie Hill, with whom I had a good enough relationship, was so easily giving up on Bill Brown. It turned out that this was because they wanted to put Bill Brown in Tel Aviv. So that's why the process seemed to ensure that I would be out in Bangkok in no time, since they were pressing Bill Brown to go to Israel.

Then it went even faster. Once you finish the selection process, which normally takes a few months, it turned out that in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee I had nearly no opponents, and they didn't see any need to have a hearing! So I thought that I would be out in Bangkok in March or April, 1988. Little did I know. There was a combination of factors. First of all, Bill Brown really didn't want to leave Bangkok early despite the pressure on him to move to Israel. On the Hill [Congress] I learned a few lessons from this process. Even though my hearing was

waived--I did not have a hearing--I simply paid a courtesy call on the Chairman, Senator Claiborne Pell [Democrat, Rhode Island].

There were people on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, from both parties, who had known me. For slightly different but not conflicting reasons, they were all delighted that I was going to Bangkok. Senator Hatfield [Republican, Oregon] was at the time the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He was deeply upset at what he considered Embassy Bangkok's inattention and insensitivity in the handling of Indochinese refugees. Actually, Embassy Bangkok was not particularly sensitive to the plight of Indochinese refugees at this time. Moreover, as I found out when I got out to Thailand, this was more a problem of perception than reality. Consequently Senator Hatfield wanted me out there in Bangkok. On the Democratic side at that time, the people who knew me were favorably inclined. So the view was that, since I had previously been approved as Ambassador to Burma, my qualifications as Ambassador had been established and no hearing was needed.

I thought that I was just sailing along. However, getting Bill Brown out of Bangkok was no easy task, as it later turned out. Also, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had weekly administrative meetings. For those meetings they had to have a quorum present. Those are the actual meetings which clear things for the Senate floor. Week after week went by, but they were never able to get a quorum for this meeting. By the time my nomination finally got to the floor of the Senate, something like 15 other Ambassadors had caught up with me. I waited for months, with nothing happening. When these nominations got to the Senate floor, Senator Dole [Republican, Kansas, and Republican Leader in the Senate] held them up for a couple of weeks. There was some kind of battle with the White House, so I wasn't approved by the Senate until the beginning of July, 1988.

My meeting with Senator Pell was truly a "throwback" to an earlier, quainter, and nicer age. Since the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had waived my hearings, they thought that it would be appropriate for me to pay a courtesy call on the Chairman of the Committee. I did this. I went up with a representative from "H" [Bureau of Congressional Relations]. Senator Pell had his staff of three or four people. They had prepared their briefing for him. As we sat down, Senator Pell asked me, "Whatever really happened to Jimmy?" His staff was baffled: they didn't know "Jimmy." Well, I knew what he was talking about. Indeed, I had met Jim Thompson's sister in Bangkok years before. So then I picked up and talked about Thompson's sister, whom I had met and had lunch with. Pell's staff was baffled. They wondered what we were talking about.

After a short time, I had mercy on them and got into the conversation the fact that Senator Pell was referring to Jim Thompson, who had been in OSS [Office of Strategic Services] during World War II and had gone to Thailand at the end of the war. He had fallen in love with Thailand, stayed there, and, among other things, was the man who recreated and established the Thai silk industry. He went out into the rural areas of Thailand where the weaving skill still existed. He started showing them new patterns and created a market for Thai silk. He started Jim Thompson's Silks Stores. He was an extremely well known, exotic figure on the Thai scene. Probably, the image was more than the reality. Nonetheless, here was this enigmatic figure and highly successful businessman, living in Southeast Asia. There were suggestions that he was in

the intelligence game, and all of that. These things swirled around him and made him one of the more “glamorous” figures in Southeast Asia at a time when there were a lot of exotic figures.

Well, Jim Thompson went off to a holiday with friends at Cameron Highlands in the Federation of Malaya. He walked out of the house where he was staying one afternoon for a smoke and was never seen again. This created a whole aura of mystery about what had happened to him. He was never found--indeed, no remains were ever found. There was all sorts of speculation as to whether this was a result of communist activity, business rivals, or whatever. This was what Senator Pell was referring to. Jim Thompson had actually come from New England. As I said, I had met Thompson’s sister, whom Senator Pell knew.

After we had that discussion, I explained that Thompson was obviously dead, but nobody knew how it had happened. The conversation then proceeded in a somewhat eccentric vein, ending up with Senator Pell bringing up the request of a retired Methodist Bishop of Rhode Island, whose son was in Bangkok, married to a Thai and who got into difficulty one night, trying to scale the walls of the American Ambassador’s residence, because he wanted to see the Ambassador. Actually, the man had been distraught. His Thai wife’s family had tried to “commit” her to an insane asylum. Nonetheless, because of that, Senator Pell was saddled with charging every American Ambassador who went out to Thailand to take care of this American, when the poor man would probably have wanted to have his experience forgotten, not remembered.

*Q: So the system worked.*

O’DONOHUE: It was the last vestige of the old system. Those who made the selection were officers with a fair amount of experience. It was still an “institutional” decision, although in this case not an EA Bureau decision. Deputy Secretary Whitehead had a view and presided over the selection committee, but essentially deferred to the others--not because of timidity, but simply because the other members of the committee knew the career officers concerned. So this system worked well. It’s another indication that the last “golden era” of the Foreign Service was under Secretary of State George Shultz.

*Q: I always like to get dates of assignments in at the beginning of these interviews. You were in Thailand as Ambassador from when to when?*

O’DONOHUE: I arrived in Thailand at the beginning of August, 1988, and left in August, 1991.

*Q: Before going out to Thailand--obviously, you’d been there. Nobody had to “bring you up to speed” on Thailand as such. When a Chief of Mission goes out to his post, particularly when he’s been “around the block” and all of that, what did you bring in your mental “attaché case” of things you wanted to get done?*

O’DONOHUE: Unlike Burma, where I had a very thin agenda, Thailand was almost the opposite. I’ve always contrasted Thailand and South Korea, in the sense that in South Korea you have a relatively small number of important but intense issues of major importance, whether this involves security or the political situation or major economic issues. These are important to the US and are intensely demanding and emotionally draining. In contrast, there is an effervescence

to Thailand, and you have something of everything. We had the war in Cambodia, the relationship to Vietnam, refugees, narcotics, agricultural problems, civil aviation, and the domestic political instability. There is an inherent, institutional stability in the country, but the way in which Thai national politics function has a certain instability about it.

In addition, we had a detachment from the Department of the Army Tropical Medicine Institute. I suppose that this was the second or third largest single employer in the Mission. It had been called the SEATO Laboratories and had been in existence for a long time. When SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization] was finally wound up [in 1976], they couldn't figure out what to do with this tropical medicine detachment, so it was finally decided to attach it to the Embassy.

We had three different units from the National Center for Disease Control attached to the Mission, as Thailand became increasingly interesting from the disease perspective, both from the statistical point of view and the experimental, on AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome]. In Thailand we had one service or another involving almost the whole breadth of US activities abroad. There was a surfeit of programs. However, when I went out to Thailand as Ambassador, the dominant subject of concern were Cambodia and Vietnam. That is, the Cambodian resistance to the Vietnamese occupation of the country and the perception of a Vietnamese threat to the area. While I was in Thailand the perception of a Vietnamese threat was to be greatly tempered as its economic weakness became more apparent.

However, our principal concerns dealt with Cambodia and Vietnam in several aspects. First was the consideration of Cambodia as it related to the Thai. The Thai perceived our efforts as being intended to support them. In the same framework, were the ASEAN efforts in support of the Cambodian resistance and our support of ASEAN. Then we had two sets of "operational" programs--one covert, one overt in support of the non-communist resistance. For all practical purposes, I was responsible for the programs dealing with Cambodia. So, in a variety of fashions, Cambodia was important as a security issue of importance to Thailand, our ally, and, more broadly, as a major thread in our relationship with ASEAN. Then, there was a fair amount of "operational oversight." I was involved in dealing later on with Prince Sihanouk. This provided me with a series of stories that will last me for my lifetime.

As a subsidiary activity, and I only mean that in a relative sense, there were the Indochinese refugees. If you asked what was the most pressing public issue when I went out to Thailand, it was really the Congressional and NGO [Non Governmental Organization] criticism of the Embassy's handling of refugees. Some of the NGO's played a major role in caring for these people. Some under our programs and others under the UN. Other NGO's functioned entirely on their own.

The refugee programs involved major policy issues and also major, operational responsibilities. If you counted the employees of the contractor agencies as part of the Mission, the refugee program was the largest element in our activities. There were two sections in the Refugee Office--one managed the camps for Indochinese refugees and the other dealt with the ODP, the Orderly Departure Program, involving Vietnamese leaving Saigon to go to the United States to rejoin relatives there.

In 1988 there were more cases of the Thai pushing boat people off from their shores and otherwise treating them brutally.. Initially the Embassy had responded to this situation in a somewhat laggardly fashion. The refugee situation in its various aspects demanded my immediate attention, both because of the perceptions of it and, to a minor degree, the realities. You could have made a mild, though not a strong case, that the people dealing with refugees needed to be more “sensitive in handling them. Then there were the tensions which had crept into the relationships with the NGO’s which were nominally under the Embassy. They had their headquarters back in the US, reflecting and amplifying their criticisms of the whole refugee program.

So those were the policy areas related to Southeast Asia. You couldn’t call them “external” to Thailand, because they were so closely associated with Thailand. You might say that they were overwhelmingly related to Thailand, in a variety of ways. Then, if you looked beyond that, we had the MIA [Missing in Action] issue.

*Q: Would you explain what MIA means?*

O’DONOHUE: This related to determining what had happened to the military personnel who were “Missing in Action” as a result of the Vietnam War. It involved, in varying degrees, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. During my time as Ambassador to Thailand, Cambodia was really a battleground. In any case Cambodia did not figure prominently in the MIA issue. The MIA’s and the refugees were our major concerns with the Vietnamese.

I dealt with the Vietnamese Ambassador, that is, the representative of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. He lived across the Street from me. For two years we had ongoing relationships on that issue. These contacts were very specific and did not involve secret diplomacy. Some people in the US would complain that we had no contacts with the communist Vietnamese Government. They would “blast” us and be critical of us in that connection. This made me laugh. On any one day, between our Consular and Refugee Sections, we always had people going back and forth to the Vietnamese Embassy. This was a fairly active, if limited, relationship. I would repeat that it involved not much more than contacts and activities related to specific issues. As to the narcotics issue, Thailand, like many countries which produce or are the transmission belt for narcotics, seemed to have an ebb and flow in terms of the tensions, frictions, suspicions, and criticisms involved in this matter. Somehow, I don’t think that the underlying situation changes much. There seemed to be periods when the Thai were perceived as doing “better” and periods when they were perceived as being “hand in glove” with the narcotics traffickers. As I saw this “ebb and flow,” in Thailand and elsewhere, it seemed to bear suspiciously little relationship to the ongoing reality--which, I suspect, doesn’t change much.

*Q: How about on the political side?*

O’DONOHUE: In Thailand the political side always “bubbles along.” When I arrived back in Thailand in 1988, I was in contact with the Thai military and what was then the last days of the government under Prime Minister Prem. As I have said, in my view Gen Prem was the outstanding Thai statesman of the 20th century.

Gen Prem was Prime Minister for about eight years, ending in 1988. I had met Gen Prem during the 1977-1978 period, when he was Thai Army commander in northeastern Thailand. He was brought back to Bangkok by the then Prime Minister, Gen Kriangsak. I met him then, as I met most of the Thai military leaders, and had a good relationship with him. He is austere in nature, particularly by Thai standards, so you wouldn't call it an intimate relationship that I had with him. Maybe it was as intimate as you got with Gen Prem.

When Gen Prem became Prime Minister, he presided over a period during which Thailand embarked on its version of the "economic miracle." Apart from its essential aspects, it bore little and only superficial relationship to the South Korea "economic miracle." This period of development was based on a strong figure, Gen Prem, who was not an economist but who provided an umbrella and support for the technocrats. They led the country first, through a very serious, economic crisis, and then into a period of impressive and sustained growth. Gen Prem also weathered a few "mini-coup" attempts. By the end of his period as Prime Minister he had created, in Thai terms, a relatively stable, political framework.

*Q: He was Thai Prime Minister from when to when?*

O'DONOHUE: I've forgotten when he took over as Prime Minister, because I had left Thailand when I served there as DCM. I think that he became Prime Minister in about 1979 or '80. Then he was in office for about eight years-something like that.

*Q: Was he Prime Minister when you came back to Thailand as Ambassador in 1988?*

O'DONOHUE: He had just resigned as Prime Minister. Among the things that he had done was to preside over a return to democratic rule. Anyone who had been in Thailand, even during the period that I was there, might have expected that this would take 20 years, not 10, simply because of the revulsion of the Thai public to the chaos of the three years [1973-1976] when the military had been forced to the sidelines and the civilian politicians were unchecked.

I arrived back in Thailand just after they had held elections in 1988. Prem could have stayed on as Prime Minister. However, his "protégé," Gen Chavalit, was getting tired of waiting to become Prime Minister and was contributing to the criticism of Prem. As I say, Prem could have stayed on, but he decided that he would rather leave with his dignity intact. They had elections which, in one sense, were neither "here nor there," unless Prem and the Thai military agreed with their outcome.

So Prem resigned as Prime Minister. Gen Chavalit was not in a position to make his move yet. So they put in Chatchai as Prime Minister, whom the Thai military saw almost as a joke. Chatchai came from a military family. His father was one of the leaders of the coup d'état of 1932, when the Thai military overturned the absolute monarchy. His family was very powerful until the late 1950's, when their power was stripped from them. Marshal Sarit, moved against Chatchai's family. At the time Chatchai himself was a lieutenant colonel in the Army. After his family was pushed from power, Chatchai had gone into diplomatic exile for 14 years. He served in the US, Argentina, Switzerland, and other places. He came back to Thailand at the time of this

upheaval in 1973. He served briefly in the Foreign Ministry, then became a politician, and “floated” in and out of various ministries.

Chatchai was the leader of one of the many political parties. He was generally viewed as a lightweight. He was clearly picked to be a transitional Prime Minister after Gen Prem resigned as Prime Minister. The expectation was that he would be Prime Minister for a year or two. By then Gen Chavalit would have made the transition from soldier to politician. In Thailand diplomacy isn't conducted in exactly the same way as in some other places in the world. Chatchai came in as Prime Minister. He had around him his son and a small group of his son's friends. Many of his son's friends had been “leftists.” The son, because of Chatchai's corruption and the rest of it, had at one time repudiated his father. The son had then rebelled against everything he thought his father stood for. But they had reconciled.

So Chatchai came in as Prime Minister with his entourage. In terms of Thai foreign policy it was a three ring circus, if you take foreign policy as involving ASEAN, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Prime Minister Chatchai and his son followed a policy of trying to reach an accommodation with the Hun Sen group.

*Q: Who was Hun Sen?*

O'DONOHUE: He was a former Khmer Rouge. He went over to the Vietnamese, who later installed him in office as their second puppet Prime Minister of Cambodia, following their invasion of the country in 1979. In Chatchai's cabinet was Foreign Minister Sitthi, who had been a long time good friend of the United States. He was following traditional Thai policy toward ASEAN. Then the Thai military was following their own policy along the Cambodian border. Life had its ups and downs as we tried to balance all three elements. As it turned out, we were able to maintain good relationships with all three.

It was mainly in terms of Cambodian and Vietnam policy that the major strains developed. The other areas of foreign policy were less of a problem. Chatchai managed to hold on exceptionally well as Prime Minister for a year. In fact, he did so well that the Thai military, which did not want to have a coup, felt impelled to engage in activities to destabilize the Chatchai cabinet, because the Chatchai cabinet was not likely to fall naturally of its own weight. Unfortunately, the Thai military succeeded in destabilizing the political situation. However, Chatchai was so smart, politically, that in the end, after two years, when the Thai military thought that they had him “on the ropes,” they were approaching elections, and Chatchai was clearly going to come out better than he had done before. So they finally had to have a coup, which deposed Chatchai.

During my last year in Thailand as Ambassador, the Thai Government was a collection of outstanding talents. The coup leaders did only one thing right. In their first year, when they seized power, they put in a cabinet composed of the “intellectual elite.” That group, led by Prime Minister Anand, were going to stay in the government for one year, to be followed by elections. They had no interest in politics, but they did an immense job. The Thai military coup leaders followed this by then having elections and deciding to move into power themselves. After a series of truly stupid political moves, they ended up being driven from power. That happened after I left.

*Q: Obviously, we have a very full plate. So let's go after these issues, one at a time. Why don't we continue with the political situation? When you arrived in Bangkok, what was the perception of it within the Embassy and what had you gotten from the Thai desk in the Department? I take it that Chatchai had more or less just become Prime Minister.*

O'DONOHUE: Almost literally.

*Q: So what was the feeling?*

O'DONOHUE: First of all, we'd had a very long run of highly constructive relations with Thailand. Narcotics were always a problem, and the refugee issue was a real irritant at the time. However, from the beginning of the Reagan administration the United States responded appropriately to almost every crisis that the Thai faced, whether it was with the Vietnamese on the Cambodian border, during the various, "mini coup" periods, or at other times.

Our assistance programs, and most particularly the military assistance programs, had gone up to levels which one could never have imagined after we had this tremendous, policy vacuum in the late 1970's.

So the late 1980's was a period during which the US-Thai relationship was a very comfortable one. Gen Prem is a man with a great personal presence, although he does not have a warm personality. On security issues we had a number of things to do with the Thai. The economic situation had steadily improved. Intellectual property rights issues were coming to the fore. These were initially "mismanaged" by the Thai until they became a major issue with us. When this happened, we found it difficult to work out a solution. There were civil aviation problems. However, overall, the situation was that those who dealt with Thailand had a great deal of respect for Gen Prem. We were doing lots of things--most of them fairly well, although there were always operational problems.

There was some "fraying" of the relationship. On the refugee issue there was an international perception of the Thai as callous. On narcotics there were continuing problems. As I said, the intellectual property rights issue was coming to the fore. Overall, I went out to Thailand at a time when specific issues and problems certainly existed. However, the basic Thai-American relationship was a very strong one.

*Q: Was there any relationship, as developed in other countries, between either President George Bush or Secretary of State Jim Baker and their Thai counterparts? Were there Thai leaders whom they would call up on the telephone?*

O'DONOHUE: No. In fact, those who dealt with Thailand had a problem in this connection. I had always felt--and this goes back to the time before I was there as Ambassador--that the Thai role in Southeast Asia and the Thai-US relationship had never really been appreciated. For one thing, this relationship didn't create a lot of difficulties. I used to tell people that this relationship needed very limited resources and only a little Washington high level attention. However, it did need a few resources and some attention, and we had to struggle to get that.

I first ran into this situation when I was working for Phil Habib, back in the period 1976, when he was Under Secretary. When South Vietnam fell to the communists in 1975, the reaction in the Bureau of East Asian Affairs was that, "We don't have to deal with the Thai any more." I had had no real connection with Thailand at this point. Phil and I really had to impress on the EA Bureau the importance of continuing to pay attention to the Thai and keep up a minimal assistance program. There was a "policy vacuum" under the Carter administration which had only begun to be filled, in a reflexive sense, after the Vietnamese communist invasion of Cambodia in 1979. You couldn't call this a "policy," but it reflected at least a slight increase of interest in Southeast Asia in general and in Thailand in particular. My view had always been that the Thai- US relationship had been consistently undervalued. Unfortunately, since we didn't seem to have to pay any penalties for this attitude, it continued.

A good example of this came out during the Gulf War of 1991. The Thai, being Thai, would probably have preferred to have no connection with the Gulf War. They had workers everywhere and liked to be on the sidelines. Gen Chatchai, then Thai Prime Minister, had never been a particularly close friend of the United States, in a country where we had many good friends. However, Chatchai was a "smart cookie" and knew that, in the end, there are some things that you line up with. This was one of them.

For instance, we wanted to move troops through the Royal Thai Air Force Base at Utapao [about 75 miles southeast of Bangkok] and to the Middle East. I was instructed to approach the Thai on this subject. This was one of those issues where you receive a cable from the Department and act on it. This happened on a Saturday. I called up the Foreign Minister, who was a friend, and made an immediate appointment to see him. I explained what we wanted. He picked up the phone to speak to Prime Minister Chatchai. Over the phone they agreed to approve our request! They had only one condition: we were not to announce this. Now, Utapao Air Base is near a main highway [Route 31, and its normal activities are visible from it. The Thai can manage anything with a straight face. You could drive by there, and there were aircraft everywhere. Nonetheless, that was their only condition, no public confirmation. The arrangements were made, and we sent about 7-8,000 American troops through Utapao. The Thai did everything they could to be helpful. They let the troops out of the aircraft, provided tents, and everything worked very smoothly. I think that Singapore let something like 300-400 American troops go through in the dead of night. Now, if you had taken that same period, you might have felt that, somehow, our military cooperation relationship with Singapore was a close and intense one. In Thailand, we were mounting military exercises and doing things like this. Even the American planes that went down to Singapore on TDY were going to have to exercise over Thai territory. We had an immensely close relationship, in fact. The Thai never said, "No" to one of our requests until a few years after I left Thailand.

So no matter how objectively you looked at the Thai-American relationship in terms of trade and the rest of it, Thailand simply never engaged the attention of senior levels of the US Government. It was not a problem for me, because I was on friendly terms with most of the Thai Government officials with whom I dealt. However, the Foreign Minister under a later Thai Government never forgot and resented his treatment when he was Ambassador to the US. In fact, there were two of them in that government--Prime Minister [Anand Panyarachun] and this

Foreign Minister--who had both been Ambassadors to the US but had never gotten to see the Secretary of State. Anand resented that treatment. The Foreign Minister saw this, and not incorrectly, as a sign of a basic US lack of interest in Thailand. Nevertheless, for the two of them, it didn't color our basic relationship, because, as they were Thai, they had a realistic view of Thailand's interest in this relationship. Moreover, I had known both of them, so they weren't going to inflict any resentment on a friend.

Nonetheless, I think that Thailand has never figured as prominently outside of the East Asian Bureau and, indeed, sometimes in this Bureau, as it should have. In part this is because Thai politicians, like the Japanese, tend not to be particularly articulate. The politicians shift jobs from time to time, but you rarely develop any close relationships with them. Organizationally, the EA Bureau has even put Thailand under the VLC [Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia] Office. I may be wrong, but I believe that Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia now get more attention in the East Asian Bureau than Thailand does.

*Q: As Ambassador, did you find that you were trying to ring a little bell back in Washington to ask Secretary of State Baker...*

O'DONOHUE: No. You never needed to adopt this attitude with Secretary Baker. There were different attitudes toward Thailand during two periods. Under Secretary Shultz, Mike Armacost was a good friend...

*Q: Mike Armacost was Under Secretary for Political Affairs.*

O'DONOHUE: Armacost had a great affection for East Asia. He ended up not being able to devote as much time as he wanted to this area. Of course, Mike Armacost had his own oversight responsibilities. Regarding use of the telephone, my tendency throughout my career was always to use cables. I never liked to do business with Washington on the telephone. I just found it easier to write out what I thought and send it in. This didn't mean that I didn't pick up the phone, but it was to "reinforce" the written word, rather than to use the phone to handle business in the first instance. I have always tried to outline what I wanted to do, to state what the issues are, and to send in my views accordingly.

We had a number of significant issues outstanding with Thailand. However, they were rather easily resolved. It was less that they were "win" or "lose" matters. The Thai accepted the direction in which we wanted to go. That didn't mean that we got 100% of what we wanted. However, we didn't have real contention on these issues. I would say that I usually had sympathetic interlocutors in the Thai Government to deal with.

During the early part of my tour in Thailand as Ambassador, Dave Lambertson was the Deputy Assistant Secretary dealing with Southeast Asian Affairs. He was quite supportive of our efforts. I'm not sure that Dave agreed with me all the time, but he never undercut my position. He always made sure that on the major issues my views were incorporated and known. You could call this a good relationship.

The Department of State, under Secretary of State Baker, was more difficult to deal with. There

wasn't the same rapport. This had nothing to do with Secretary Baker who, in any case, didn't pay any attention to Thailand. First, in the Department there was a certain contempt for Prime Minister Chatchai. I had to battle against that because we were doing business with him. Secondly, whatever his idiosyncrasies, I was the person dealing with him. They didn't affect the basic policy very much. It wasn't so much that I lost on given issues. It was just that the process was more difficult.

I must point out that on Cambodia about half of the US Government and Congress had about the same views as Prime Minister Chatchai. They weren't our views and they weren't the views that prevailed, but I couldn't understand why senior officials in Washington were treating Chatchai with such contempt for holding these views. I was dealing with these views in Congress and everywhere else. There was a problem in dealing with Prime Minister Chatchai, in that some senior officials in Washington saw Thailand as having an almost comic government.

*Q: Here you were the Ambassador to Thailand. Where was this contempt for Chatchai coming from?*

O'DONOHUE: I think that this situation is still true today. The principal US Government agencies dealing with Thailand included the East Asian Bureau in the State Department, the NSC [National Security Council] staff, the Department of Defense, and to a minor degree, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], although the Agency at this time was not really involved with Thailand in the policy sense. The people working in those agencies generally knew each other and worked fairly well together, as these things go. Each agency might have its own views. I must say that this fairly negative perception of Prime Minister Chatchai was fairly widespread among these agencies. By the way, there was some truth to this. There are a million stories about him, some of them quite hilarious.

Nonetheless, when you got down to it, we were working with him, he was the Prime Minister of Thailand, and, in his way, he had an appreciation of what he was doing with us. For instance, I had a lot of success with Chatchai on our commercial issues, where we were running into problems with some of the Thai ministries. We had success for a variety of reasons. It wasn't simply because of my eloquence. The outcome had to fit Chatchai's own agenda. However, the point was that Chatchai was someone with whom we were accomplishing all that we could expect. We were better off treating him seriously than constantly "carping" or speaking of him with contempt within the US Government. In all of this I don't think that there was an issue that I lost on, but I found that I was working in a different environment. I didn't have the same feeling of comfort that I previously had.

Part of the reason for all of this is that Prime Minister Chatchai, his son, and the coterie of young advisors wanted to follow a different path on Cambodia than we advocated. This course of action was different from what the Foreign Ministry wanted, which was headed by a cabinet minister well disposed to the United States. A good part of the US Government wanted to go along this path. My point was that we were going along that course and we were managing it.

So there was a perception in Washington of a quasi comic opera Prime Minister and his "boy advisers." During my last two years in Bangkok as Ambassador, we were dealing with some

very serious issues. Paradoxically, there were two issues which involved opposite considerations in those two years.

In the beginning, during the Bush administration in the United States, there was a drive to “unleash” the non-communist, Khmer resistance. In other words, this was a combination of the views of Congressman Steve Solarz [Democrat, New York] and some analysts of various backgrounds, all saying that we should arm the non-communist resistance and “unleash” them. Well, the non-communist resistance was being armed by ASEAN, including the Thai. I know something about this, as I spent much of my time keeping the noncommunist resistance alive. “Unleashing” them was the wrong word. In fact, what we were doing during this whole period was “preserving” the noncommunist resistance as a public factor. If peace was achieved, they could play a political role. They were, militarily, the weakest of the three entities in Cambodia. These included the Hun Sen Government, supported by the Vietnamese; the Khmer Rouge; and then two non-communist resistance groups. I was deeply and intimately involved with the non-communist resistance groups. Within the Embassy we used to have almost daily meetings on Cambodia. We would go over the various programs. By that time CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was quite happy to let an Ambassador deal with it.

*Q: In other words, CIA decided that this was not a winning combination...*

O'DONOHUE: So they had no problem with my handling it. Except, from my perspective, here I was, having to spend much of my time holding these entities together and “keeping them alive.” Then, all of a sudden, we were under pressure to arm them, which meant that the US would arm them. The view of some was that, once they were armed, they would have the strength to “turn on the Khmer Rouge” and defeat them. In my mind, this was utterly unreal.

In 1990, the issue of arming the non-communist resistance was less important than it seemed. A few years before it would have been a watershed issue as we had originally designed our programs to avoid our own, direct, military entanglement. In 1990, I didn't think that we should arm them or contribute to arming them since other countries were doing this, and they were just trying to shift their burdens onto us. That was not so much the issue to me as the misperception that we would then be able to unleash them after arming them.

I had very difficult discussions with Steve Solarz...

*Q: Can you explain Solarz and his role in all of this?*

O'DONOHUE: Congressman Solarz had been the Chairman of the Sub-Committee on East Asia of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. While not the easiest person to deal with, he probably had the closest and most constructive relationships with the EAP Bureau of any Congressman. He had very actively engaged himself in Cambodian affairs. He had gotten an AID assistance program through and he was strongly supportive of our other activities. He saw himself almost as a “father figure” of Cambodia. He was very definitely engaged on this issue. He was the major Congressional supporter of our Cambodian policies. He was certainly a major player on Cambodia.

Some analyst had figures that showed that the non-communist resistance was under armed. Therefore, Solarz believed that if we armed them, they could take on the Khmer Rouge. Well, they were never going to take on the Khmer Rouge. These were more unrealistic hopes. What was surprising was the way things actually played out. As I said, we and ASEAN were keeping the non- communist resistance in Cambodia in existence. They had to exist there and had to control territory. Our hope was that when peace was achieved, in the political process there would be some realignments, and they would be able to play a role. Hopefully, this would give the Khmer people at least the possibility of something other than what they had.

That is more or less the way the situation worked out. The non- communist resistance did split with the Khmer Rouge. There was one visitor after another to Thailand to discuss this issue. In the beginning Vice President Quayle came out and pressed the Thai on arming the non-communist resistance. As a matter of fact, my efforts were directed at trying to keep a picture of reality before us--what it was that we could reasonably hope for. The pressures from the Singaporeans, in my view, related to two considerations. There was entanglement and money. They just wanted to get the US re-engaged militarily in Southeast Asia and to make some money by shifting more responsibility to the US. The Thai really hadn't cared that much about our further arming the non-communist resistance. Nonetheless, it became increasingly clear that that issue was not the key to success.

The issue of arming the non-communist resistance faded from sight, because it was then being replaced in Congress and within the administration, on the part of some people, by an attack on our basic support for the non- communist resistance. So we had gone from one extreme to another within a year.

In 1990 and 1991, looking toward the 1992 presidential elections, a number of Democrats in Congress were looking for an issue and somehow thought that the matter of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia might embarrass the Bush administration. So the whole thrust of this group of Democrats in Congress was that we were really supporting the Khmer Rouge by dealing with the non-communist resistance! We started getting a lot of Congressional attacks and, eventually, legislation which called on the President to cut off aid if he determined the non-communist resistance was cooperating with the Khmer Rouge.

So we went, as I said, from the beginning with this argument about arming the non-communist resistance, which was an unreal course of action, to the opposite--really battling to maintain the programs that we had under way. We were fighting to stay the course. That became a very unpleasant period, because there was immense pressure for us to adopt the policy which, interestingly enough, Prime Minister Chatchai of Thailand personally wanted. In effect, this was to "dump" the non-communist resistance or to coerce it to support the Hun Sen government in Cambodia, on the ground that this was the "lesser evil."

*Q: Who were in these groups?*

O'DONOHUE: These were groups coming out of the US They were very respected people.

*Q: I'm a bit confused. At first, we wanted to support the non-communist resistance to the Khmer*

*Rouge. Then these groups advocated forcing the non- communist resistance to do what?*

O'DONOHUE: There were two, overlapping threads. Actually, our policy remained the same. The attacks against our policy, in effect, advocated either supporting the Hun Sen, Vietnamese-supported government in Phnom Penh in Cambodia, as the lesser of all evils. Or, we should coerce the non-communist resistance to cooperate with the Hun Sen regime. So these two alternatives in fact were variants of the same theme. Of course, this was essentially Prime Minister Chatchai's view.

During the last year of my time in Bangkok [1991], this became a very difficult issue to handle. We had the question of whether to "abandon" the non- communist resistance on the grounds that they were, in fact, allegedly dealing with the Khmer Rouge. This difficulty eased when the Vietnamese and the Chinese "struck a deal." I think that this happened in September or October, 1990. Prince Ranariddh, Sihanouk's son, who ran his non-communist resistance group out of Thailand, told us that the Chinese and Vietnamese had agreed that there could be a political settlement. That agreement was the critical prelude to the next year, during which an international political settlement was negotiated.

You could say that the Chinese abandoned the Khmer Rouge. They didn't entirely walk away from them initially but, in effect, the Chinese and the Vietnamese accepted that there could be a political settlement, each disengaging from active support.

*Q: What was your role in this? You were in Bangkok. We had no official representation in Cambodia at that point.*

O'DONOHUE: There is a difference to be noted. The non-communist resistance was all located on the Thai-Cambodian border. I was much involved with them directly in our support. During the last year, when we reached the political negotiations, I did not have the same rapport with the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. As we went to the negotiating table, the EA Bureau did the negotiating with the other four countries which were members of the five power group, which consisted of the Chinese, the Soviets, the French, the British, and ourselves. They worked out the peace settlement which, I think, was signed in Bangkok about a month after I left Thailand.

The key to this negotiation was that the Chinese and the Vietnamese had agreed to disengage strategically. From that point they proceeded to a settlement. Then there were some realignments, with the Khmer Rouge becoming isolated. Our problem--today as then--is that the non-communist resistance, or the non-communist component of the Cambodian Government, is a very fragile entity.

*Q: Did you have any dealings with Prince Sihanouk?*

O'DONOHUE: Yes, I did, though more usually I dealt with his son, Prince Ranariddh, and the resistance leadership in Bangkok. Of course, Prince Sihanouk spent most of his time in China. He came back to the area from time to time, and I would always call on him. These meetings would vary in substance. We were always delivering "messages" to him from Washington.

On one occasion the message I was instructed to deliver had to do with the Khmer Rouge. The message was addressed both to Prince Sihanouk, who was in Beijing, and to Prince Ranariddh, in Bangkok. The Department had at least written different “talking points” for these two presentations. The talking points prepared for the presentation to Sihanouk in Beijing were not as untactful as those for Prince Ranariddh in Bangkok. But for some reason our Ambassador in Beijing, used the same “talking points” with Prince Sihanouk as I did with Prince Ranariddh. Well, Prince Sihanouk didn’t know Ambassador Lilley when Jim called on him.

Anyhow, Jim Lilley presented these talking points to Prince Sihanouk, who was furious. Shortly after that, Prince Sihanouk came down to Thailand and was staying at Pattaya [beach resort about 75 miles southeast of Bangkok]. I thought that I should go down and pay my respects to Sihanouk. I telephoned one of his aides and said that I was just coming to pay a courtesy call. I said that I had no “business” to handle. So they agreed, and I went down to Pattaya.

Predictably enough, I was subjected for about an hour and a half to two hours of a diatribe against the United States in Southeast Asia, going back to the 1950’s. Sihanouk’s eyes literally “bulged.” At one point I thought to myself, “He’s going to have a stroke right before my eyes!” That went on for nearly two hours, as I say, with Sihanouk just pouring out all of his accumulated outrage over his contacts with the United States. Then, the clouds lifted. He had gotten it all out of his system. He finished. We then had champagne, which he always used to serve. He went on, and we had a very pleasant conversation.

I had to deal with Sihanouk on a number of occasions. Then, when we left Bangkok, we had a farewell dinner which he hosted. All in all, he was the one figure who was central to a settlement in Cambodia. Whatever his idiosyncrasies, of which there are many, and whether, ultimately, he was a serious person, I’m not really sure myself. Nonetheless, to the average Cambodian he was still King. Without him it would simply not have been possible to reach a settlement--because there was no one else who could claim the central role he played.

*Q: How did you find dealing with these two, non-communist opposition groups? Were they opposed to each other?*

O’DONOHUE: When I was Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA, when we started our support for the non-communist resistance, the Sihanouk group was the less significant of the two. It was viewed as a collection of “odds and ends” --almost like an expanded “royal court.” It was unlike the other group. This group, the KPNLF, was a much better educated, “middle class” group. However, by the time I returned to the Southeast Asian scene, the KPNLF led by Son Sann, had been broken by factionalism and was by far the weaker of the two groups. The Sihanouk group was the more dominant at that point.

However, to the end, there were always these elements of a “court” around Sihanouk--maneuvering, scheming, and the rest of it. Prince Ranariddh was always concerned about his “enemies” undermining him with his father. When I returned to Southeast Asian affairs, the Sihanouk group was politically the more important, because of Sihanouk himself. The Son Sann group had become factionalized and had nearly splintered apart.

Most of the serious contact work was with Prince Ranariddh. Also, Son Sann was a very difficult person to deal with--not in a personal sense but in terms of his rigidity.

*Q Did you have officers in the Embassy in Bangkok who would go out and work with these groups?*

O'DONOHUE: First of all, we had two sets of programs going on, one under CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and one under AID [Agency for International Development]. So there were Americans in the border area and others traveling to the border. The political headquarters of the non-communist resistance groups were in Bangkok.

The refugee camps on the border, were dominated by one resistance group or the other. However, the camps were operated by the Thai, with the NGO's [non governmental organizations] of various kinds working there. Those camps were not the bases where military activity went on. In the real world the resistance fighters would put their families in the camps and drift in and out of them, going to and from Cambodia.

This also meant that our officers going out to the refugee camps were running into the same, overlapping leaderships. We had a pattern of relationships in the camps. At no point did we ever deal with the Khmer Rouge. There was charge after charge that we were doing so, but none of that was true. We had no dealings with them. Now, obviously, some Cambodian refugees were in contact with the Khmer Rouge, including some of the people in the refugee camps.

We had officers in the field, including a highly qualified AID officer, who visited the military camps where our aid went.

Within the Embassy I dealt with the leadership. Skip Boyce and Victor Tomseth, the Political Counselor and DCM, also dealt with the refugees. Then the CIA and the AID officers who ran these programs also dealt with them. There were the same patterns on dealing with the Thai side. As far as the Thai side was concerned, we tried to keep them and ourselves roughly on the same path. I had a fair amount of contact with Foreign Minister Sitthi until he was pushed out of office. When he was pushed out, his replacement as Foreign Minister didn't play as big a role. But then other officers dealt with other "players," including officers from the Thai Special Forces.

*Q: You saw the non-communist resistance as being essentially a weak force. What did the "think tanks" and others in the United States think...*

O'DONOHUE: It wasn't so much "think tanks" as some non-governmental organizations, congressional critics and a few "experts" of varying standing.

*Q: Did they get caught up in local Thai politics?*

O'DONOHUE: No, it was their view that the Khmer Rouge were so appalling that this justified dealing with the Hun Sen regime. To my mind, as we've seen recently, Hun Sen struck a deal with Ieng Sary, who is the second most horrifying figure among the Khmer Rouge. The point is

that, from our perspective, or at least in my view, and this is the way things worked out, Cambodia is a country which never had strong leadership. It's a country that would have disappeared in the 19th century if it hadn't been for the French. It was being progressively absorbed by Thailand and Vietnam. Then the French set up Cambodia as a protectorate. It was not independent, but it at least kept its separate identity as a country.

First of all, it's a small country, with a population of 6.0 million or so. As I said, it never had strong leadership. Then, the Khmer Rouge killed or drove into exile what leadership Cambodia had had. So in the real world the remnant of the intellectual and trained leadership is actually in the United States or France. For instance, when I was there in Thailand, I was struck with the thinness of the veneer of educated and trained Cambodian leaders. It was a thin veneer. It really was a situation where you couldn't predict with any great confidence how things would unfold. In any case, the one hope that we had was that there was at least a non-communist, leadership element which attracted these small groups of people and that they would play a role in the political dynamic once peace returned. This is how the process unfolded. The leadership group is still weak. Hun Sen has never given up control of the government apparatus.

However, arguments were advanced by other observers that the Khmer Rouge are so appalling, that the non-communist resistance were "pawns" of the Khmer Rouge, that Hun Sen was in power, and that we could work with him. However, if you asked what was their rationalization or justification for dealing with Hun Sen, it was somehow that Hun Sen was the "lesser evil." They felt that it was the Khmer Rouge that would seize power once again. These critics ranged from those who would argue that we "knowingly" supported a course that would bring the Khmer Rouge back into power to those who would argue that, de facto, we were promoting a return of the Khmer Rouge into the government.

Now, a part of this view was based on an exaggerated sense of the power of the Khmer Rouge. At the time I left Thailand [in 1991] we were certainly describing the Khmer Rouge as less strong than we thought they were a year or two before. Part of that conclusion was based on the fact that the Chinese were already cutting back their support for the Khmer Rouge. It wasn't that these critics of our policy were being disingenuous. As I said, I think that by 1991, as I recall it, we were describing the Khmer Rouge as being significantly weaker than they had been, and that turned out to be correct. So the justification and rationalization underlying the views of US critics of our policy, one way or the other, were that the Khmer Rouge were threatening to take power and that our relationship with the non-communist resistance was appalling and morally indefensible.

During the last year of my tour in Bangkok, the emotional attacks on our policy were significant.

*Q: What was the UN doing during that time?*

O'DONOHUE: The UN role was heavily "operational" in Thailand. It was deeply involved with US power negotiations. It was not particularly controversial. A variety of UN agencies were active along the Thai-Cambodian border. There was a special UN agency set up to handle border matters. Their people were very "operational" and very sympathetic to the refugees. Their attitude was non-ideological.

*Q: Sounds like the way the UN should be.*

O'DONOHUE: Yes. Now, in the negotiations in which we were not involved, the UN played a role there and, of course, played a major role in running the country and organizing the elections after the political settlement. Clearly, the UN didn't "complicate" things. My impression was that the UN role was that of a constructive agent of all of the parties to the settlement.

*Q: We have a lot of things still to cover. Maybe we could finish this session with some of the idiosyncrasies of Prime Minister Chatchai. These helped color the perceptions of him back in Washington.*

O'DONOHUE: First of all, Chatchai was a very "worldly" man. This doesn't mean that he was particularly sophisticated, but he liked to have a good time. The kindest thing, perhaps, was to view him as a 70 year old "playboy." In his own mind, he knew where he was going. However, the way he expressed himself was less clear. He had a shrewd sense of reality. In fact, after talking to him on many occasions, we became pretty good friends. On one occasion, we were driving somewhere together. We passed the State House, which was a former palace. He talked about living there as a boy. As I said, his father had been a senior officer in the 1932 coup which overthrew the absolute monarchy.

In the 1930's his father was later assigned up to northeast Thailand as military commander. Well, the Prime Minister and dictator, Phibun, kept Chatchai with him as a guarantee of his father's loyalty. When the Thai generals would get together to eat, drink, and talk, Chatchai would wait on them, as they just had family in the room. So when you talk about Chatchai, you're talking about someone who, from very early in life and, indeed, throughout his whole life, dealt with the real world of power and politics. He saw the inside of things. He was widely known, and all of the hotels knew him. He would visit them in the afternoon and spend time there with a "popsy" [prostitute or call girl]. You might wonder how he got as far as he did.

Certainly, like many Thai politicians, there was an aura of corruption about him. However, in spite of this he had an innate shrewdness about him which served him well in a very cynical, political process. Chatchai had a charming manner, and people could like him.

Gen Prem was the opposite. He was a man of great austerity who attracted tremendous respect from his contemporaries. Since I had known him from a previous occasion, when I was DCM in Bangkok, he always used my first name.

However, some of these social occasions where Gen Prem was host were difficult, because he had no "small talk." Nobody felt free to talk unless spoken to. There was one Thai doctor who had been a boyhood friend of Gen Prem. The doctor and I were the only two people who could carry on a conversation with Prem. This meant hours of effort. Gen Prem would say something to someone, and they would answer. However, the doctor and I, in desperation, were the only ones who could introduce a new subject. With Gen Prem there wasn't much of a response. You introduced a new subject, he answered you, and that was it.

Gen Chatchai was the opposite. People had very little of that kind of respect for him, but, on the other hand, he was a lot of fun to talk to.

*Q: Well, why not stop at this point? I'd like to put at the end what we've covered. We're now in Thailand, when you were Ambassador. We've talked about Cambodia and Vietnam at some length. We want to come to the major refugee problem when you came out as Ambassador and how you dealt with it. How did we view the Thai economy? Also, what were American commercial and business interests, and how did you promote them, including intellectual property rights, civil aviation, and so forth? Obviously, we want to talk about narcotics and what you did about them at that point. Can we talk about the AIDS problem and all of that, because this was a growing problem? Perhaps we could talk about the problems faced by Americans stationed in Thailand. Bangkok was then and perhaps still is known as the "sex capital" of the world. Then there was a coup while you were there.*

*Perhaps we could start with the Embassy and how you ran this huge Embassy in Bangkok. Then we can move to one of the other subjects.*

O'DONOHUE: At the time I was Ambassador to Thailand, Bangkok was our second largest Embassy in the world, in terms of numbers of Americans assigned to the Mission. Embassy Cairo at that time was significantly larger than Bangkok. Indeed, Cairo had things like a large MAAG [Military Assistance and Advisory Group] and a very large AID Mission--at levels reminiscent of 20 years before.

As far as the Embassy and Mission in Bangkok were concerned, we had about 500 US Government employees from various agencies. Then there were another 100 Americans working under local contracts. So there were about 600 Americans. Depending on how you counted, we had anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 Foreign Service Nationals (FSN's) or local employees. Some were employed under contract. As I think I mentioned earlier, Bangkok or Thailand presented a more effervescent situation, unlike other countries that I knew well, such as South Korea. In South Korea there was a finite number of immensely important issues which engaged the US. In Thailand the depth and intensity of involvement was less than it was in South Korea. However, the Mission was involved in almost the whole spectrum of US Governmental activities abroad.

In Thailand there was the Embassy itself, which had a large, political agenda. There was a medium to large, consular function and a large administrative operation, reflecting the overall size of the Mission. The Embassy was also involved in a whole series of economic issues. Beyond that, on the commercial side, we were dealing with a rapidly burgeoning economy. There was a growing American commercial involvement in Thailand, as well as rapidly growing imports and exports.

Within the Mission we had the JUSMAG and the long standing military relationship with Thailand. There was the USIS [United States Information Service] and the Foreign Agricultural Service [FAS]. Thailand was important in terms of US agricultural exports. Thailand was the world's leading rice exporter, while the US was second or third largest. Our customers were somewhat different, so we were somewhat less than competitors in rice exports than one might imagine, but we were overlapping rice exporters, nonetheless. Then, there was the whole

intellectual property rights issue.

We had a large DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] operation, as narcotics were a major issue in Thailand. Indochinese refugees were a major aspect of the work of the Mission. Indeed, in terms of contract employees and Foreign Service National employees, you could argue that the refugee operation was the largest activity coming under the broad overview of the Embassy. It was an important refugee office, dealing both with immense numbers of refugees within Thailand and also handling departures from Ho Chi Minh City or Saigon, under the Orderly Departure Program.

The Secret Service had an office in the Mission, dealing with counterfeiting and other issues like that. We had an Armed Services Tropical Medicine Laboratory under Embassy aegis. It was formerly known as the SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization] Laboratory. When SEATO was disbanded, it was decided to place the Tropical Medicine Laboratory under the Embassy. We had about 12 or 13 Army scientists and 80 or so personnel working for this agency. We had an office which came under the Center for Disease Control. It was originally focused on communicable diseases related to refugees and immigrants. Then, when AIDS emerged as a major problem in Thailand, the Thai were fairly flexible in terms of what we could do in the way of research. Accordingly, the Center for Disease Control undertook a series of major studies in Thailand on this disease. The US Army also embarked on a project with the Thai military involving research on vaccines.

These are just illustrative of the activities across the board in which the US Mission became involved in Thailand. It was a major effort. In addition, there was the program of support for the Cambodian resistance. So, in addition to our regular programs, we had two programs related to Cambodia. There were two POW/MIA (Prisoner of War/Missing in Action) offices located within the Embassy. In addition, we had a variety of other, regional offices. The Embassy in Manila had moved out the Regional Marine Guard Company, which supervised Marine Security Guards at our various missions in the region. It was relocated at our Mission.

In dealing with the Thai Government, we were concerned with the Indochinese refugees, Burma, and Laos. Furthermore, there was a whole variety of US Government agencies represented in the Mission. They were pursuing, in their various ways, things that were important to those agencies or to the United States in different arenas.

*Q: Dan, here you were. You had a letter from the President saying that you were responsible and ultimately in charge of these various activities. However, most of these people you have been talking about obviously have "other masters" back in Washington. Technically, it was you and the DCM who were trying to coordinate these various activities. At that time, when you were in Bangkok, how did you handle these matters from the executive, management point of view?*

O'DONOHUE: I had given a lot of thought to how you organize and operate a large Mission like that in Bangkok. I had previously served as DCM there and I knew the Embassy. I knew the issues, as I had been Deputy Assistant Secretary in EA and Ambassador to Burma. In a sense, I came to Bangkok on this occasion with a considerable familiarity with these matters, whether they involved the Embassy and its operations or the issues themselves.

Also, there was another factor in Thailand and Bangkok which cannot be ignored and must be taken into consideration. That is, the amount of time I had to spend out of the office. In part, this involved representational activity, which included dealing with the Thai leadership in a “hands on” fashion. The other part was the traffic. On a given afternoon I might set off to the Foreign Ministry, allotting a half hour for the meeting. Then, on the way back, I would find that I would never get back to the Embassy on time. This consideration, of course, applied to every officer in the Embassy. There were real problems in how to manage your time when you have, not only expected but unexpected developments, such as traffic, to deal with.

I considered it important that the Ambassador convey two things. First, his own expectation that all the other agencies should have the sense that they were working for broader US purposes. And, in an executive sense, that their efforts were reflected in the Ambassador’s activities and his agenda. Secondly, though, and I stress this just as much, as Ambassador I had just as much responsibility to contribute to the success of the activities of each of these entities and the achievement of their objectives as they did in supporting me. So I stressed that this was a “two way street.” I would say that during all of my time in Bangkok I had no difficulties, either in executive direction or leadership with the agency having action on a given issue. Whatever problems we had related back to Washington and Washington agencies, but not to the Mission in Bangkok. I don’t believe that I had officers and heads of different agencies working at cross purposes. There might be disagreements with their head offices in Washington.

I kept a “hands on” hold on events. My view was that in Bangkok there was an immense, executive load which I could not allow to absorb me completely. My job was external. Bangkok was also a delightful post in a Foreign Service sense, in that the Ambassador, the DCM, the Political Counselor, and the Economic Counselor all have great jobs to do. It happens at some posts where, say, the DCM ends up being pushed to the side because he handles everything that the Ambassador doesn’t deal with. Or the Political Counselor is so subordinated that he doesn’t have a sense that he is responsible for anything. From my point of view, when I went out to Bangkok, I had to keep in mind, first of all, that we must never lose sight of the fact that we were there to handle a very heavy, substantive agenda. Secondly, it was essential to maintain a sense of firm control in such a diverse Embassy in terms of executive direction.

My approach was two-fold. First, I paid a lot of attention to specific programs. Indeed, in some cases I think that I paid more attention to programs than the agency concerned, and, perhaps, more than my senior officers wanted, when they found out that I took these seriously. I had fine DCM’s, whom I expected to handle most of the operational matters. I had a great Administrative Counselor.

*Q: Who were your DCM’s and your Admin Counselors?*

O’DONOHUE: Joe Winder was DCM for a year, and then Victor Tomseth was DCM for the rest of my time in Bangkok. Victor had a strong background in Southeast Asian affairs. Joe Winder had come up on the economic side. The Political Counselor was Skip Boyce, whom I had brought out after a lot of arguments with the Personnel people. Skip certainly had a broader role than merely Political Counselor. In fact, he was like the third and junior member of a triumvirate

which held the Mission together--myself, the DCM and Skip.

So I expected that the DCM would deal with the various agencies on all sorts of issues. No agency head resented that. On the other hand I had a strong view that the senior agency heads should feel that they had a personal relationship with the Ambassador. So my approach, which took a lot of my time early in the morning, was to structure, first of all, four meetings a week.

One was a limited Country Team meeting. I had a small group that met including the DCM, the Political and Economic Counselors, the CIA Chief of Station, the USIS PAO, and the Defense Attaché. We met for about a half hour, right off the bat, after the people attending this meeting had had enough time to read their cables. So that was my way of being sure that these key people knew what I was doing, while I knew what they were doing. I patterned this meeting after those held by Ambassador Sam Berger who, I think, got it, in turn, from Ambassador Ellis O. Briggs. I had just watched how this was done. So the small Country Team meeting was the mechanism for "serious business." That meeting was held four days a week.

Larger Country Team meetings in Bangkok, where we had something like 23 or 24 different agency entities represented, with perhaps 40-45 people in the room, tended to be "theater." I would go in, and at those meetings I would use them to describe the framework in which I was operating at that time and the major issues that I was dealing with. I would leave it to the DCM to take up mission operational issues, so that we would both have a role in the meeting. Then, inevitably, we would go around the room for individual agency presentations. In a group that size, because I had other structures available to me, this was really for the smaller entities, so that they could feel that they had a role. At those meetings I always took about *five* to 10 minutes to give a sense of where the Mission, as a whole, was heading.

Then I had a series of "cluster" meetings. I had one commercial meeting a week which was attended by the Economic Counselor, the Agricultural Attaché, the Commercial Counselor, the AID Mission Director, the DCM, and myself. We addressed commercial issues at this meeting. I think that every Ambassador now spends an immense amount of time on economic affairs, which we can talk about later.

I had a narcotics meeting at which I had the DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] head, the Embassy Narcotics Officer from the State Department, and a CIA Station representative. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure that there was coordination, that I knew what was going on, and that I didn't have any internal, factional "fights" going on under me. This was never a problem, although historically it had been a major problem in Bangkok. In the 1983-87 period, there had been very difficult, almost ludicrously abrasive relationships between the various narcotics "players." By the time I arrived in Bangkok as Ambassador, that situation had eased. I don't take any credit for having resolved that issue, because it had eased before I got there. I always had keenly in mind that narcotics affairs was a high priority matter and that this was an area where various intelligence and law enforcement agencies tended to be contentious competitors.

I met privately once a week for about 20 or 30 minutes with the AID [Agency for International Development] Mission Director. We would meet on other occasions as well, but I would reserve

about 20 or 30 minutes each week when the AID Mission Director and I met. Interestingly enough, of all the US agencies in Bangkok, I would say that AID wanted most to be left alone. It wasn't that, by that point in time, the AID Mission had immensely sensitive issues to resolve. Indeed, like most of the agencies, they needed me more than I needed them. The AID Mission, in a sense, was a minor economic player although, because of its past contributions, the Thai "technocrats" had a high respect for it. I wouldn't say that the AID Mission had a disproportionate influence with the Thai economic agencies to the relatively small programs that it had. So the AID Mission director and I would have our 20 to 30 minutes to make sure that he had a sense of where AID was going.

Similarly, I met with the Peace Corps Director. There, it was almost the opposite. The Peace Corps loved attention from the Ambassador. So they always prepared themselves carefully for those weekly meetings. They loved to come in and tell me what they were doing, and I always showed a very real interest in what they were doing. When I went on trips in Thailand, I always arranged to see the Peace Corps volunteers. After their arrival in Thailand and their "swearing in," I'd always have the new volunteers over at the residence on a social occasion because they had come from spending about two months in Thai villages. They hadn't had Western food for some time. Just watching what would happen to the food on the table was interesting. Everybody in the Mission attended social events at the residence at one time or another. You couldn't manage the large number of Americans for dinner, but, one way or another, we had functions so that everybody in the Mission was invited to the residence--hopefully, at least once a year. Certainly, there was no one at that Mission who hadn't had a couple of opportunities to be at the residence. Of course, if you were in the Political Section, you were there frequently. If you were in the CDC [Center for Disease Control], or the laboratory people, we consciously worked to be sure that they were at the residence to create a sense of cohesion, as best we could. The JUSMAG officers would also be included.

Meanwhile, the DCM was doing his job with these senior officers from the different agencies. My private meetings were not an effort to cut him out. I just believed that an agency head should be able to come in and spend 15 or 20 minutes talking about different issues with the Ambassador and getting my views. My approach was different from that of some other Ambassadors. My view was that if an Ambassador and DCM are in "lock step," this takes up an immense amount of both their time, doing the same thing. My view had always been that the DCM's time was not well spent when he just sat in on meetings. I tended to use my Political Officers as note takers to cut down the amount of time the DCM spent in meetings with me. In Bangkok the DCM had more than enough to do. He had his own series of contacts in that whole, diverse Mission. This was never a problem. I don't think that the DCM ever felt left out. My view was that there was a mutual responsibility during the day. The DCM and I would get together two or three times during the day to talk about various issues.

So that was my approach. I think that it worked well. I held a meeting once a week on the Cambodian programs, to be sure that they were coordinated. Then, since I am fairly gregarious, I would from time to time call up someone from one of the more obscure Mission entities and ask him to drop by my office. This would give him a sense of my interest, and also give me a sense of what was going on. So it was a lot of work and took an immense amount of time. As I said, in my view, at a post where your external and personal contacts were overwhelmingly important,

and because traffic often took time, the Political Counselor was really more than that. As I said, he was a junior partner of the executive direction at the post.

For instance, if I was caught out in traffic by, say, 5:00 PM, or had called into the Embassy from my car, the DCM would take my “in box,” and take action on whatever was important and had to be transmitted. Similarly, if he was caught out in traffic, I’d tell his secretary to bring me his “in box.” I would sign off on whatever messages had to go. If both of us were caught out, the Political Counselor would come up to the front office and take a look at our “in boxes.” He had less freedom, but, nonetheless, he would also go through the “in boxes,” and the things that obviously should go were transmitted. It was a very cohesive system. For an Embassy or Mission that size we had a very small front office. We had the Ambassador, the DCM, a staff assistant, and two secretaries.

*Q: You had this huge Embassy entity in Bangkok. This means that it’s not just the people working for the US Government but their families and all. Then you’re sitting in the middle of what is probably as difficult a place as any to work in. I’m talking about the “sex trade.” Maybe things will change in years to come, but for decades Bangkok has been a place where airplanes full of European men have come there for nothing else but sex. Then there also was the narcotics problem. You have families, young people--that must have been a problem for you.*

O’DONOHUE: Well, first I was in Bangkok as DCM. Narcotics-related problems at the International School of Bangkok were subsiding, although there were still some problems. However, they did not have the same dimensions as a year or two before then. This was mainly because the American community was shrinking in size, following the end of the Vietnam War. While I was there as DCM, narcotics problems just didn’t figure all that prominently. Within the resident, American community it was not a major factor. However, you always had to be on the alert. When I was in Bangkok as Ambassador, our children weren’t with us for the first time in my career in the Foreign Service. However, in the case of many American families in Bangkok, their children of high school age often went down to Thai discos, taking cabs to the places. That was a relatively higher level of sophistication than they would be exposed to here in Washington. While there were occasional problems, these did not seem to be unmanageable.

Regarding the active “sex industry” in Bangkok, and I’m talking about the Mission now, the problem there was not so much with the senior people as with the various and sundry other agencies. There were certainly temptations. There were marriages that broke up in a social environment which was sexually permissive.

In fact, Bangkok is one of the world’s greatest “sin cities.” Prostitution is at a horrifying level. In the rural areas children were being sold, and there was “white slavery.” Thailand is so far away from the US. While it was a European single man’s “sex stop,” Thailand was too far away for most Americans living in the US. There certainly were Americans involved in such activities, but this was by no means universal. Where sex showed up as a problem was when US Navy ships came to Thailand for port visits, particularly in Pattaya. There might be a visit by a carrier and four or five other ships. The ships would be putting 8-10,000 young men ashore at any given time. The prostitutes would pour into Pattaya during the period of the ship visit.

Prostitution is pervasive in Thailand, but the Thai have a growing sense of embarrassment about it. The AIDS issue also increased this sense of concern. Thailand is essentially a permissive society, and that applies to the whole range of human activities. On the male side, Thai society is promiscuous. I don't blame this on Buddhism--indeed, the Thai have a keen sense of personal responsibility. However, when you get away from the personal aspect, the Thai do not have a high degree of social or institutional responsibility. This is now changing, but partially because of embarrassment, rather than out of a deep sense of moral concern. I was always struck by the very small number of Thai who, at great personal cost, had thrown themselves into various social programs. My own view is that the Thai are often belabored and denigrated in societal terms. The Thai certainly have their share of human frailties, but I never thought that they were more corrupt than elsewhere at the personal level.

*Q: Dan, not to belabor this "sex" issue, but I find it interesting, as I am fishing in troubled waters. From my experience and your experience in South Korea, we know that the South Koreans used bribery and sex to corrupt Congressmen and others. Did you have problems with official visitors from American Government agencies of one kind or another, when they came to Thailand? Was this a problem?*

O'DONOHUE: No. First of all, the relationship is a very different one. The Thai-American relationship is a very good one, and both the Thai and the Americans have benefited from it. Regarding Congress, there have been Thai aid programs, but they have been relatively small and non-controversial. There never were PL480 rice programs, which were the genesis of the "Koreagate" scandals in South Korea. Thai Governments have never focused on Congress in any meaningful sense until recently. Regarding the Executive Branch of the US Government, there undoubtedly were people who became entangled sexually in Thailand. Corruption certainly exists in Thai society. However, it hasn't really shown up as a serious problem in our governmental relations.

*Q: It's not pointed toward...*

O'DONOHUE: The governmental relationship was not an intensely "dependent" one, as was the case in South Korea. The Thai just didn't have the same experience. So I think that when we had visitors coming to Thailand, the whole range of social activities including sex were available to them, but it was a much more personal thing. Corruption was far more related to businessmen and business contacts.

Remember, even with Congressmen, while we had a lot of them visiting Thailand, they usually came on weekends, as part of a trip to other places. Outside of narcotics issues, and then Congressman Steve Solarz and a few others who were interested in Cambodia, Congressional visits to Thailand were an interlude and generally did not involve a lot of serious business to be handled. I myself always thought that these visits were helpful. I never understood why Foreign Service people railed against Congressional visits. I felt that, whatever the problems they might pose, in general Congressional visitors formed a high opinion of the State Department and of the Foreign Service as a result of such visits. I can't see why people would dismiss Congressional visits with these silly criticisms. I've always taken Congressional visits very seriously. However, in doing this I also had keenly in mind that there were certain things that made up a

Congressional visit. By the way, before the visits occurred, I always sat down and went over each visit with the “Control Officers” and others involved in them to make sure that I was satisfied that we had all of the necessary arrangements in hand.

One aspect of these Congressional visits was a briefing by the Ambassador. This was essential to the Committee’s showing that they had met their purpose. I also realized that these visitors were in Bangkok for a variety of reasons, including a visit to Bangkok as a city. My view was that what we should do was to measure the program against their interests, rather than our interests. I used to offer to come down to their hotel and brief them there. I’m not talking about all Congressional visits. However, this offer made things easier and made the Embassy’s reception of them that much more appreciated. I always told the my officers, “Remember, we’re standing between them and Bangkok. In many cases they will have their own agenda items. Our briefing should be concise and to the point. Nobody should ramble on. We can let the questions and answers determine the direction in which the briefing goes.”

Now, when I give lectures to my staff on “terseness” in briefings, which I did frequently, there would be a certain, glazed look on their faces. Their view was that the person who rambled on was ME! I can remember one Congressional delegation that was going to Vietnam. It was headed by Congressman Mickey Rivers, who later died in an air crash.

*Q: In Ethiopia, wasn't it?*

O'DONOHUE: Yes. Anyhow, they were going to Vietnam. First of all, we arranged for the meeting with them. As I always did, I offered to give the briefing at their hotel, and they were delighted with that. They had some interest in Vietnam and no particular interest in Thailand. So even with my own strictures in mind, after about 15 minutes I could see that the eyes of this Congressional group were somewhat “glazed.” So I quickly “wrapped up” the briefing. Congressman Rivers was delighted. He was a wonderful man. He appreciated that we weren't going to take up a lot of their time. He also felt “honor bound” to ask two or three questions--solely for the record.

Now there were other Congressional visitors, like Steve Solarz, who would come out, intending to discuss Cambodia or Burma. He would be very serious and intense--altogether different. Congressman Bill Richardson [Democrat, New Mexico] also used Solarz's method, although he was a very different kind of personality. Again, he would be quite serious. Then, when Congressman Charley Rangel [Democrat, New York] came out to discuss narcotics matters, he had a mixture of interests. Rangel is very typical of Congressional visitors. He had his own agenda, which focused on narcotics. But he was quite ready to pick up any agenda items that I had. Also, in the end, he was very careful that he didn't leave a whole lot of “broken crockery” for the Embassy to pick up.

This was true of most Congressional visitors. We understood what their purposes were. Consequently, they were more than ready to follow my lead. For instance, if we had an intellectual property rights issue, the Congressional delegation was interested, but it wasn't exactly their “bag.” I would just bring up with the head of the delegation the fact that this or that issue was something that we were pressing. We wouldn't like to have a Congressional delegation

come through Bangkok and not “highlight” it for us. I would say, “Could you just bring this matter up with the Thai officials whom you might meet?” And they would do it. They would say that this was a serious matter and that Ambassador O’Donohue would explain it further.

Among Congressional delegations that traveled a lot, such as groups led by Congressman Charley Rangel and others, there was a sense that, no matter how critical they might be, they wouldn’t leave a lot of broken crockery for the Embassy to pick up. They wouldn’t leave damaged relationships with the Thai. Overall, I had a fair amount of respect for the leadership of these Congressional delegations. My own view was that, instead of carping about having them on weekends, which often happened, we benefited significantly as an institution from the professionalism that we showed and how things worked. In any case, if they were traveling to Vietnam or South Asia, where were they going to spend their weekend, if not in Bangkok? But when you came down to it, having Congressional visitors did not present immense burdens, because they did not want us to be hanging around them. I never hung around them. They were in Bangkok, after all. We had some Foreign Service National employees who arranged things for them, told them where they could shop, and all of that.

The Thai Government was a gracious host for these Congressional visitors. However, it never handled them as the South Koreans did. There wasn’t that intensity in Bangkok that there had been in Seoul. The Thai didn’t have an “aggressive agenda” of their own which they were pressing. I don’t recall that there were any economic issues that Congress was particularly concerned about. There were some economic issues that Congress acted on and which affected the Thai, like rice and things like that. However, that just wasn’t the way they did business.

*Q: Did you have any Presidential visits?*

O’DONOHUE: When I was in Bangkok, no--both when I was there as DCM and later on as Ambassador. While I was there as Ambassador, there was one visit by Prime Minister Chatchai to Washington, and Vice President Quayle visited Thailand.

*Q: How did that visit go?*

O’DONOHUE: It went pretty well. It accomplished all that the Thai wanted. President Bush was charming, and we accomplished all that we wanted. Prime Minister Chatchai simply wanted to make the visit for the record. It was a measure of the fact that Thailand had sufficient importance that we were able to “sell” this visit to the White House. However, it didn’t have a high, substantive content. Neither side had a whole lot that it wanted to press, consequently issues were touched on but not pressed.

*Q: Well, Dan, why don’t we turn to narcotics?*

O’DONOHUE: Narcotics in Southeast Asia is an ongoing, major issue. I had seen this issue both as the Deputy Assistant Secretary, as the Ambassador to Burma, where most of the opium poppy fields were, and twice in Thailand, where the Thai-Burma border areas was the major point of transit for narcotics. There were problems of trafficking. Depending on where the pressures were coming from, the refining “laboratories” were on the Thai side and then they would be pushed

into Burma.

Narcotics in Southeast Asia is essentially controlled by Chinese. They are either Sino-Burmese, Sino-Thai, from Hong Kong, or wherever. Starting in the mid 1970's, narcotics caused significant frictions and criticism of Thailand. Narcotics has been a continuing threat to a healthy Thai-American relationship. We had a large DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] office in the Mission in Bangkok. The CIA devoted significant resources to this problem. We had significant programs on the State Department side in INL.

There was an almost cyclical situation. Things never changed dramatically, but typically we ranged from having a relatively benign or positive view of cooperative efforts with the Thai, to taking a negative view of Thai efforts. The underlying situation didn't change much.

Essentially, the narcotics problems in Thailand were the same as those in many of the countries in Southeast Asia. Corruption is a significant part of the narcotics problem. Among Thai businessmen corruption is regarded as a fairly benign "tax" on what is essentially a free enterprise system. They're going to make money, anyhow. Nonetheless, corruption is already present in Thai society. Then there are these borders which were quite porous. During the time that I was in Thailand, the Burmese didn't really control their side of the Thai-Burmese border area. Various insurgent, or pseudo-insurgent, trafficking groups were, in fact, in control of the border area. There were longstanding relationships across the border. There was a steady flow of narcotics into Thailand. The "precursor" chemicals and other products essential to refinement of opium into morphine and heroin were going up in the other direction, into Burma.

The narcotics financial and distribution network, to a great degree, was impenetrable. Ultimately, the narcotics traffic was controlled by the Chinese. The flow of narcotics into Thailand and out of Burma, which is intrinsically linked with Thailand, presents massive problems.

Within the Thai establishment, those who dealt directly with narcotics matters for almost the whole period that I was there, were personally impressive. At one point in time, going into the Thai narcotics police as a commissioned officer was a perfectly acceptable choice for the well-born in Thai society. The man who dominated Thai narcotics control activity [Police General Pow Sarasin] was, as I said earlier, the second son of one of the wealthiest families in Thailand. They paid the most taxes which, again, is a measure of the family's integrity. He placed around him other well-born Thai persons. This was about the only way that they could not be corrupted. The Thai Police as a whole were utterly corrupt. However, the top Thai narcotics police officers were not. This meant that our narcotics people could work with them.

So the DEA had good working relations, at the operational level, with the senior Thai narcotics police leaders. DEA officers were allowed to operate reasonably freely. The Thai didn't let DEA officers "break in doors," or things like that. However, DEA officers could collect intelligence and went along on raids with Thai narcotics police. They coordinated with the Thai narcotics officials. So, as part of the general Thai, "laissez faire" approach to life, the DEA office in the Embassy was allowed a fair amount of freedom. They could work together pretty well on individual cases, including serious ones. Indeed, the Thai were particularly cooperative in getting big narcotics traffickers pushed up out of the country. The Thai liked nothing better than to

cooperate in an effort to arrest a trafficker somewhere else--such as Hong Kong. At that level there was a reasonable amount of cooperation.

We battled long and hard on one aspect or another of the narcotics traffic. One of my main efforts was getting the Thai to pass "money laundering laws." This was moving toward completion when I left.

*Q: Could you explain what "money laundering" is?*

O'DONOHUE: The object is to secure the passage of banking and other legislation so that you can trace money. We labored long and hard in this area. We also pressed very hard to encourage Thai-Burmese cooperation, which had a very checkered and essentially unsuccessful history. The Thai-Burmese relationships have changed now.

From the United States point of view we put a significant amount of resources behind the effort to discourage the narcotics traffic. Thailand was one of the major focuses for our activities in this respect.

My own view is that narcotics is an area where you always describe programs as "successful" but the problem gets worse. However, I think that in Thailand, in a narrow sense, the situation has probably gotten slightly better, because the narcotics traffickers have Cambodia available for their activities. Cambodia has a much more "porous" system for controlling the flow of narcotics. Nonetheless, narcotics was a continuing, abrasive issue in Thai- American relations. It was an excellent example of balancing what you want with what is achievable and, secondly, doing this in the context of a whole variety of other priority issues.

Various charges have been made that we have "sacrificed" narcotics control for other political objectives. I never felt that this was the case. We pressed the Thai as hard as we realistically could. However, the realities of the situation were such that there was no simple answer. Indeed, what I found after 10 years of looking at this issue is that there is no single answer. I remember that once we thought that the answer was to cut out the refineries. Then it turned out that the narcotics refineries were easily replaceable investments. When we were able to "hit" these big refineries, all the narcotics traffickers did was to set up more, small refineries. While you can say that this causes an increase in the cost of business to the narcotics traffickers, a refinery that consists of a few pots and pans and some Chinese "chemists" is not a big expense.

When I left Thailand, I felt that the programs we had implemented had had some success. However, we were left with the reality that we had had little effect on the money flow in narcotics trafficking and on the areas involved in the production of heroin. Many of these areas are not under government control, particularly in Burma. Narcotics trafficking is an enduring problem which you work at all the time, but there was no sense or prospect of finding a single "key" to success. If we did succeed for a time, we had to keep in mind that the traffickers had already begun to adjust to handling narcotics production and distribution in a different way.

While I was in Thailand, and very publicly later on, we had one major problem. One of the major Thai political figures from northern Thailand, who had a fair number of ties to the United States-

-he had attended the University of Kentucky--was certainly part of a group viewed as politically corrupt. He was not known as a narcotics trafficker. There were reliable reports that, behind the scenes, he had been engaged in narcotics dealings. So we had a problem when he became Minister of Agriculture. At first we had been able to "block" him from entering the cabinet, but then the Thai Prime Minister had to include him, for factional reasons.

Subsequently, unbeknownst to us, he was put on the visa "Lookout List" in Washington. This had been done in a very routine way. So, out of the blue a short time before I left Thailand, he came in to get his visa transferred from his old passport to a new passport. We had originally checked with the DEA representative and had found that, while there were these reports of corruption, which we took seriously, then didn't oppose the visa. However, because of the lookout list, we put the matter up to Washington, and the Department refused to issue the visa. So we had a very quiet, intense period in which I had to explain this matter to the person concerned. Of course, he denied the accuracy of the reports. We reported his denial, but that was that. He was rejected for a visa, but this was done quietly and without publicity.

Months later, the coup group was determined to succeed the interim government of outstanding technocrats when elections were held. They formed an alliance with this man and were going to make him Prime Minister. At this point his enemies leaked our visa refusal and the Embassy "went public" confirming it. In effect, the military had to withdraw his name from appointment as Prime Minister, because the US Embassy wasn't going to give him a visa because of his narcotics connections. This episode was one of the considerations which led to the unraveling of the coup group. When this man didn't become Prime Minister, the coup group leader put himself forward. Then followed public disorders and ouster of the coup leaders.

This case is still current. The man is still around and has protested that he is innocent of the charges made. The TV program, "60 Minutes" considered running a segment on it. There was a whole series of news stories on this subject. A former CIA analyst claimed publicly that the source of the negative reports on the politician had supplied false information. By this time I was out of it, so I'm only giving a second hand account. Apparently, in fact, one of the sources of the negative report had provided false information, but the various US Government agencies all maintained that there was still sufficient, credible reporting to bar him from obtaining a US visa.

In that sense we had had a very public identification of one politician as "corrupt." There were two or three others who were notoriously connected with corruption. They have also been barred.

*Q: Was there any "pressure" within the Embassy, with some people saying that we should not refuse the visa to these persons because we have "political fish to fry"?*

O'DONOHUE: I don't know. It was after I left that the other politicians were put on the Lookout List. In this case our view was that, while the reporting was "serious," since we weren't prepared to discuss the sources of it--and he wasn't a narcotics trafficker--we raised the question whether it wouldn't be easier to let him have the visa. But that wasn't the Washington decision. This wasn't a particularly controversial matter. We made our views known, but the Department's answer was, "No." We did not challenge the substance of the reporting or try to put the matter in "political" terms. Rather, we thought that, since we can't explain our basis for refusing a visa, we

might get more headaches than we want if we refused it.

This decision to withhold the visa was made when the man was out of office. We had no idea that he might be appointed Prime Minister. When this surfaced publicly, that was quite a different consideration. But all of that came after I had left Thailand.

*Q: Let's turn to the refugee problem when you were in Thailand. Can you talk about that and what it involved?*

O'DONOHUE: If you took 1977 as the point of departure, up to 1990 or 1991, Indochinese refugees were a major thread in United States policies in the region -- including Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The numbers of Indochinese refugees were large. In Thailand alone there were about 400,000 in 1988. When I was in Thailand as DCM in 1977, the refugee problem and the outflow of Vietnamese refugees was just beginning. We thought that the numbers then were large, but a year later the figure had increased tenfold. When I arrived in Thailand as Ambassador in 1988, I found a situation in which the Embassy was being castigated for its handling of a series of incidents in which the Thai authorities had "pushed off" boatloads of refugees.

*Q: Could you explain what a "push off" is?*

O'DONOHUE: The Thai would refuse to let the refugees land in Thailand. A ring of smugglers came into being--something like an "underground railway-which moved refugees from Vietnam to Cambodia. Then they would take a short boat ride and end up in Thailand. The Thai, who were embarrassed to find this out, started reacting in a very rough way.

The Embassy at first was castigated by the NGO's [Non Governmental Organizations], including mainly those which were under contract either with the US Government or with United Nations entities to provide services to the refugees. These services might include food, medicine, or assistance in case processing. There was a whole variety of services which these NGO's were providing. They were critical of the Embassy for its alleged "indifference," and a really ugly situation had developed.

The NGO's were attacking the Embassy. One, very senior official of an NGO acted in a very cavalier manner. When I reviewed the matter, it did seem that the refugees suffered from relative indifference for a brief period of time initially. The reason for the initial Embassy behavior was "hypercaution" in handling this matter. Consequently some of the NGO's were really "blasting" the Embassy for its handling of the refugees even though the Embassy was, by the time I got there, doing a good job.

These refugees were mainly Vietnamese. Later, there was a second theme in the charges of Embassy indifference. There was criticism for the way in which the Embassy, and INS specifically, handled Cambodian refugees who, by that point in time, were by far the largest component in the refugee population. I've forgotten the statistics on the matter. Let's say that, by that time, there were perhaps 300-400,000 refugees in Thailand. There were, perhaps, 300,000 Khmer or Cambodian refugees. At one point in the screening process, in the view of the NGO's,

the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] representatives on duty at the Embassy had “screened out” too many refugees--charging them with involvement with the Khmer Rouge. The essential point was that the Embassy was very “embattled” on the subject of the way it had handled the refugees.

When I arrived in Thailand, my first order of business was to sit down and find out where in the hell we were on this matter and how to get this matter under control. The first thing I found was that, while the Embassy probably deserved some criticism at the very beginning for not having reacted promptly to the reports coming in about “push off” and maltreatment, the Embassy had responded. The criticism by the NGO’s was exaggerated. Secondly, we had some very real problems with the Thai regarding Vietnamese refugees--in this case with the behavior of the Thai military--which had to be addressed. There were major problems with the Thai handling of the Cambodian refugees which also had to be addressed.

The next consideration was that the relationship between the Embassy and the NGO’s was “bizarre.” In one case there was a briefing of some Congressional staffers, during which NGO representatives started using abusive language in castigating Embassy officers sitting there.

There were a couple of considerations. First, I was blessed with a good reputation on refugee matters. Senator Hatfield [Republican, Oregon] and others looked on me in a very positive vein in this connection. So, from their perspective, I was going to go out to Thailand and would solve the problem. In that sense, part of the problem had dissipated simply by my appearance on the scene. Secondly, I paid a lot of attention to the refugee problem at several levels. In the first place, I paid serious attention to how we could handle these problems. They had been festering too long. Then, publicly, we needed to reply to the criticisms that we paid no attention to the refugees and the rest of it. Thirdly, we needed to deal with the relationships with the NGO’s, which were in poor shape.

Most importantly, I set in motion clear efforts to deal with the issues affecting the refugees. There was the long term problem of what we could do with the Cambodian refugees who had been “screened out” of going to the United States. Secondly, what could we do to show that we were concerned in dealing with this whole question--especially the “push offs.” The next problem really dealt with what the Embassy had done in the past. Then we needed to show that the Embassy placed a high priority on resolving the refugee problem. Publicly, I was very much engaged in refugee issues. This eased the problems everywhere.

I also made the point that American Government officials have to accept criticism. What they don’t have to accept is verbal and personal abuse and that I didn’t want Embassy officers sitting there and taking personal abuse. In the case of the particular incident I previously referred to, I made it clear that if this kind of thing happened again, I would deal with the person who behaved in this abusive way. Somehow or another, this never happened again, whether it got back to the individual concerned or for whatever reason. A much more professional relationship developed.

*Q: When you say, “handle the problem, “I’m just thinking of the 400,000 or so refugees you mentioned...*

O'DONOHUE: What we're talking about is the situation earlier on. It's hard to imagine, but this problem has almost completely disappeared now. The Cambodians are back in their own country. We were talking about the apparently unending problem which the Thai faced then, regarding the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees. The Thai view was that no Vietnamese would be permitted to stay. By the way, I think that our handling of the Vietnamese refugee issue is one of the most creditable chapters in American refugee history. From the Thai point of view, it was time to end this problem. As a general matter, the Thai considered that no Indochinese refugees should remain in Thailand. Now, we had gotten the numbers of refugees in Thailand down and were implementing programs to reduce the numbers of refugees in Thai camps. Our problem was that, in the end, there was always going to be a residual group. We just couldn't help that.

Nonetheless, in this case the problem was to persuade the Thai to resume accepting Vietnamese "boat people" and letting them back into the camps, where they could be processed. This was the problem. We needed to have done with this whole business of "push offs" and maltreatment of the refugees. As I said, in the real world the Thai military really ran refugee policy.

As far as Cambodian refugees were concerned, the problems were twofold. In the first place, we had problems with the Thai which I have mentioned. Secondly, we had significant, internal divisions within the US community. This involved the American NGO's working with the Cambodian refugees. These NGO's played a major role back in Washington, as well as in Thailand. The problem there was coming to grips with how the Cambodian refugees could undergo another, "pre-screening" process. The view of the INS people was that we had screened them once, it was done seriously, they were turned down for entry into the US, and that was that. The NGO's who, by the way, all worked for the US Government under contract, were critical of this process, but, then INS believed they were prepared to let everybody into the US, whether they were Khmer Rouge or not. The view of the NGO group was that the interviews conducted by the INS were not in sufficient depth; there was misinformation provided on the matter; and the whole situation had been badly handled. For this the NGO's blamed the INS people.

The INS people weren't about to admit that. The NGO people, from the point of view of the INS, were just a bunch of "wild men" who wanted to let everybody into the US. The view of the Thai military was that they didn't mind anybody leaving Thailand. However, they had gone through this screening process once and they were tired of all of the upheavals and trouble this had caused them. So we had a triple-faceted problem, in which the Thai were the easiest to handle.

We approached the problem in the sense of, "How would you want to do it?" The Thai expressed perfectly reasonable conditions. It turned out that we were trying to force the Thai to handle the screening the way that we wanted to do something, rather than letting them explain their views. So they were not a problem once the Thai explained their conditions.

I was blessed with the people in the INS Bangkok office. The INS Regional Director and I talked about this issue. He said, "Look, if your approach is going to be that we made a lot of mistakes in handling the 8-9,000 refugees whom we screened, the answer is that we're not going to get anywhere. That's not the way it works." However, he said, "If you approach it from the point of view that there's new evidence to be considered, that's a different issue." They do reopen cases, after all. He said, "New evidence, in my view, is provided if a responsible, State Department

officer reviews the file and comes to a different conclusion. That would be a basis for reopening the case. However, we won't accept having a contract NGO officer come to that conclusion." So that is what we did. It actually turned out to be a kind of "love fest." The NGO's found this procedure perfectly acceptable. We brought out some Khmer-speaking, State Department officers to review the files. They went through them. I can't remember how many files they reviewed. However, a year later, this most exacerbating Cambodian refugee problem had largely been resolved--not that we still didn't have problems of one sort or another. This outcome was in good part due to the Thai and in good part to this INS Regional Director, who found a way to handle these cases which was perfectly acceptable.

From that point on, refugees as an abrasive, highly public issue lessened. However, refugee problems remained very significant. The problems that we encountered with the Cambodian refugees were more manageable. This was because the large Cambodian refugee presence was a function of the hostilities in Cambodia. This meant that they were always going to be part of the settlement of the war. Once a settlement was reached, they would return to Cambodia.

By the time I left Thailand, we were so close to a settlement in Cambodia that planning for the return of the refugees was proceeding steadily. There were several issues involved in this, but they fell more into the hands of my successor. We also went through another process of "shrinking" the numbers of Vietnamese refugees. So these issues, were real enough, but they were highly "operational." We always had a situation where there was this problem or that problem.

We also ran into problems with the Hmong refugees.

*Q: These were tribal groups from Laos.*

O'DONOHUE: They still had very strong ties to a leadership that was in the US and, to a degree, that still controlled the Hmong refugee camps in Thailand. The problem there was coming to some resolution, which involved getting the ones who could do so to leave. They were being kept in Thailand as a body. So that became a problem. Operationally, in terms of Embassy activities, the refugee issues were always very significant. However, the immense, emotional aspects which the refugees had generated had been eased to a significant degree.

The other, major program under the Office of Refugees was the Orderly Departure Program [ODP] from South Vietnam, This was, in effect, an effort to keep people in Vietnam from taking boats to Thailand and instead processing them in place in Vietnam. This program expanded immensely and, indeed, became the basic vehicle...

*Q: Could you explain what it was?*

O'DONOHUE: By the time I left Thailand, this program really was analogous to a relatively normal visa activity. By that time so many Vietnamese refugees living in the United States had become American citizens that many of the people applying for entry had their own visa status. The ODP program had started as an effort to process applicants to give them, in effect, an escape without the dangerous boat journey. It was intended to give them refuge, and later "immigrant

status” in Vietnam, so that they wouldn’t risk their lives on the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.

In the beginning, it was a program fraught with political problems with the Vietnamese authorities. At one point they suspended it. By the time I arrived in Thailand as Ambassador in 1988, we were moving from a modest to a really expanded program. This meant that we would send Foreign Service Officers and contract NGO [Non Governmental Organization] personnel based in Bangkok to Saigon on a TDY [Temporary Duty] basis, where they would process these cases. They would conduct interviews in Saigon and process the people, arrange their departures, and the rest of it. So, without a permanent, ongoing presence in Saigon, we shifted this tremendous workload to Saigon, although it was being supported out of Thailand, with Bangkok as the base.

During my period as Ambassador to Thailand the officers running the ODP program deserved immense credit for their ability to expand and run a program which was surprisingly free of difficulties. Any problems would have been on the side of the Vietnamese government. There were some difficulties, but our officers managed the program very well. In effect, this program became the major vehicle for Vietnamese leaving Vietnam. The problems in the other areas with the Vietnamese related to the “residue”--that is, those who were in Thailand and other areas in Southeast Asia already and what was to be done with them. They had already gone through program after program and still had not been accepted for resettlement elsewhere. So they constituted a “residue” of the refugees.

For the Thai the bottom line was that they considered the Vietnamese residual presence had to be “zero.” With the Cambodian refugees, the problem was related to...

*Q: It was a “holding action.”*

O’DONOHUE: Well, these refugee camps were amazing. They varied, but at Aranyaprathet, on the Thai-Cambodian border East of Bangkok, the camp had anywhere from 140,000 to 180,000 Cambodian refugees, depending on when you did your count.

In the beginning the camps for the Lao refugees had been very large. Indeed, at one point when I was in Thailand as DCM in 1977-78, some four-fifths of the Laos medical profession were in these camps near Nong Khai, in northeastern Thailand. Those groups, who were composed of ethnic Hmong, and “lowland Lao,” had already left. There was a different dynamic there in 1988-91. These camps for Lao Hmong refugees were linked to the Thai military’s policy toward Laos.

There weren’t the same pressures in terms of closing out these camps for Lao refugees. The Vietnamese were numerically the smallest number among the refugees in these camps, but the Thai military were always the most sensitive about what to do with them any time there was an inflow of Vietnamese refugees.

What I described was the beginning and the end of the refugee flow. However, during the period when I was either Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asian Affairs or not connected

directly with the refugee problem, a variety of really immense issues came up. For instance, there was “piracy.” This involved mainly Thai fishermen attacking the refugees on the South China Sea or in the Gulf of Thailand. At best, these pirates stole what the refugees had. At worst, they engaged in raping and killing.

This was an issue where the United States took the lead in getting other countries to help, through a combination of pressures, programs, and the rest. I can’t say that we ended this problem, but, effectively, we reduced what had been a very large problem to a relatively small one. Granted, the numbers of refugees were also dropping significantly. This also was a result of the Orderly Departure Program. All of these things helped.

In this aspect, as in others related to the refugee program, I think that the United States deserves immense credit. I was involved in a support role in Washington during that period but I wouldn’t take any credit for it. It was others who handled this effort.

*Q: Dan, I would like to make an historical note for anyone reading this segment. When I came into the Foreign Service in 1955, my first job was as what was called a Refugee Relief Officer in Germany. There we were dealing with the “residue” of refugees who had been caught up in World War II. They had previously been “screened” and more or less found not eligible for visas under the Displaced Persons Act. Also, we were getting new refugees coming into West Germany from the Cold War--from the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe.*

*We were handling the second “go around” of people, or the “residue” of refugees. The Federal German Government said, “This is fine, but get them out of Germany.” So this is one of the ways that the United States has been populated and, on the whole, has come out ahead.*

O’DONOHUE: I was under that same program in Genoa, Italy. My entering group came into the Foreign Service in 1957. The Department of State was given the money to send us out under the Refugee Act. We all had to go, I think, either to Greece, Germany, or Italy. Now, in the course of time we issued immigrant visas to a trickle of refugees coming down to Italy. However, this allowed me to have my period of, what was it, 18 months in Italy.

*Q: Many of us during this time in the history of the Foreign Service served at various posts under the Refugee Relief Program. I even had some Vietnamese “boat people” in South Korea when I was there. They had been picked up at sea by a South Korean ship.*

O’DONOHUE: That’s fine.

*Q: Today is November 29, 1996. Dan, we were talking about the time during which you were Ambassador to Thailand. We might begin by talking about the economy of Thailand.*

O’DONOHUE: During the time I was in Thailand as Ambassador [1988-1991], the country was in the midst of a tremendous, economic “take-off” that started in the mid 1980’s. Then I arrived in Bangkok as Ambassador in 1988.

Actually, Thailand had faced a very difficult economic situation during the period 1983-1985.

Thailand surmounted this and then, under Prime Minister Prem, the Thai “technocrats,” in effect, created the framework within which the economy is now moving. Now, in Thailand the business community is essentially Sino-Thai. They are people who, in most respects, are culturally Thai, but their grandfathers or great-grandfathers were Chinese small businessmen. Their families became the major business families in the country. There also were Chinese who came to Thailand after World War II and even later. Their children were essentially absorbed into Thailand, but these people were essentially Chinese.

So in the business community there was this entrepreneurial class that, in some ways, you found throughout Southeast Asia. In Thailand this community differed in the sense that, fairly quickly, these families became part of Thai society, rather than remaining a very distinct and recognizable element in the country. The Chinese community in Indonesia, for example, suffered to some extent from this circumstance.

The thrust of the economic policies brought in by the “technocrats” was aimed at the creation of a less corrupt and less regulated atmosphere. On the side of regulations, they largely succeeded. Corruption is an issue which is always caught up with regulations. Nonetheless, when you look at Thailand, what you had was a free market society in which corruption, and regulations with attendant corruption, were viewed by most businessmen as costs of doing business, in what was otherwise a rather untrammelled free market economy.

When I arrived in Thailand [in 1988], the country was in the midst of a period of rapid, economic growth, and this situation continued throughout my three years in Thailand as Ambassador. Thailand was considered one of the “New Asian Tigers,” following after South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. This rapid economic growth was spurred by inflows of capital from Japan and Taiwan. By the time I arrived there [in 1988], there were the beginnings of very significant, new American investment.

In Thailand there were several longtime American companies. For instance, ESSO Oil Company arrived in Thailand early in the 20th century. ESSO competed with Shell Oil Company as the two major petroleum product retailers. They both had refineries and gasoline stations. Then there were smaller companies, Shell which had very long connections with Thailand. A group of American entrepreneurs came to Thailand after World War II who fell in love with Thailand. The most famous one, who passed from the scene in 1987(?), was Jim Thompson. He had served in OSS [Office of Strategic Services], had fallen in love with Thailand, and revitalized the Thai silk industry. There were others like that.

The Thai were fairly relaxed about these foreigners working in Thailand. One of the largest Thai law firms was established by an American. The Thai were fairly relaxed about their participation in elements of the economy, which was not the case in other countries, for instance, Korea. So you had American groups in the services sector. Then you had the American companies, like “3M” [Minnesota Mining and Minerals Company], which came to Thailand in the 1960’s. There was an American business presence in the energy sector, including oil and natural gas, which was major. In the 1970’s an American company had obtained licenses to explore for offshore natural gas. This was a major find. Some 80% of the country’s energy comes from this offshore field. There was a small French involvement in this, but it is essentially an American company,

UNOCAL.

By the time I arrived in Thailand in 1988, there was a significant American business community established in the country. However, when you talk about the tremendous, economic growth in Thailand during the 1980's, this was initially spurred by the Japanese, and then East Asian more generally, including China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. These East Asian investments were usually made in conjunction with these Sino-Thai families I mentioned previously.

The new American investments in Thailand had begun previously but increased steadily during the time I was Ambassador there. We also had the growth of an American airline presence, which led to problems second to intellectual property rights as a major issue in Thai-American economic relations. We can talk about both of these matters. The American airline companies, including Northwest Airlines, were booming in East Asia, essentially based on intra-regional passengers. Within the East Asian region, they were carrying a disproportionate share of the passenger traffic from, let's say, Tokyo to Bangkok. This was essentially because the Asian-based airlines were largely or significantly owned by the respective, national governments and charged higher prices for their tickets. The American airlines were just selling cheaper tickets. There was a tremendous growth of flights by American airlines, in and out of Bangkok, essentially based on Japan travel. This was an increasingly acrimonious area in which we had to negotiate.

So the commercial aspects of my job as Ambassador, as well as the other work of the Embassy, were significant.

*Q: You may want to develop this theme, but I would like to ask a question first. You mentioned the "technocrats" moving into the Thai government. Where did these "technocrats" come from? Where were they trained, for the most part?*

O'DONOHUE: They were mostly trained in the US. However, this was a somewhat different phenomenon from the other country which I knew, South Korea, in that there never was a "tabula rasa" that you had in South Korea. South Korea was a country which was devastated by war. Before that, it had been subjugated by the Japanese. There was a very small, entrepreneurial class. Only a few South Koreans had been able to go beyond the lower ranks of government. In fact, none of them reached the highest levels of government. In a lasting sense, advanced technical training was an American contribution which South Korea could not have dispensed with. In the long term it was the training by AID of a whole class of Korean "technocrats" who played a very special and identifiable role.

In Thailand there was nothing like that. Here was a country which had avoided colonialism and the ravages of World War II. It was a rather stable society, although its politics, as I think I mentioned before, were notably unstable. When you look at Thai society now, it has changed somewhat. However, previously you could identify the military, who saw themselves as the ultimate arbiters of power, and the civil servants, who played a distinct and dominating, guarding role. The "technocrats" were one group of civil servants and not something unique. The senior civil servants in the various ministries held immense power. In traditional Thai society you didn't have politicians playing a key role in policy formulation. The emphasis of the Thai

military's interest was simply on their place in society. They were more or less "content" to let the civil servants run the society as long as the military exercised ultimate political power and preserved its economic perquisites.

The civil servants had a major large role in the ongoing management of public affairs. So the "technocrats" largely dealt with economic matters, but their role was not a unique phenomenon. Also, most of the "technocrats" were well born and most of them were from Sino-Thai families, if you look at their origins closely. They would as likely have come out of their own universities and then have gone overseas for graduate studies as they would have gone overseas as undergraduates. However, it was really a case of these people choosing the civil service as a career field, rather than the case of South Korea, where we were sending thousands of South Koreans to the United States to study. In a sense, we created the "technocratic" class in South Korea. In the case of Thailand, United States programs played a useful, subsidiary role, but US programs were not the principal reason why these "technocrats" emerged in Thailand.

For their own part, though, the Thai "technocrats" always had a very fond appreciation for their relationships with AID [Agency for International Development] In Thailand AID never had the crucial role that it had had in South Korea. Our AID programs were adjuncts to our Southeast Asian security interests. Nonetheless, we had rather "largish" AID programs in Thailand in the 1950's and '60's. We sent large numbers of Thai to the United States for training. After World War II, the Thai educated classes went to the United States, rather than to Europe.

When I was in Thailand, the AID program was progressively shrinking. However, the Thai were always comfortable with, and, indeed, welcomed, an AID presence. United States' influence on technocrats was quite disproportionate to the size of our economic assistance programs. By this time, the Japanese were pouring large sums of money into Thailand as part of a general effort to advance Japanese economic interests. By comparison, our assistance programs were relatively trivial. Certainly, the most important ones were in the military field, related to the Thai border, the refugee program, and things like that. At that time our aid programs were not very large. The Thai appreciated AID's contributions. However, as they were Thai, they realistically didn't see AID as having "remade" their country, but regarded the AID programs as having been a very useful contribution to the country's modernization.

*Q As Ambassador, what were your prime, commercial challenges?*

O'DONOHUE: As Ambassador, the most pressing and difficult issues on my agenda were intellectual property rights and civil air problems, in the generic sense. We had the special problem of apples and "Alar". Do you remember "Alar," a pesticide sprayed on apples at one time in the US?

*Q: Oh, yes.*

O'DONOHUE: That was something on which the Thai moved fairly quickly to ban imports of apples which had been sprayed with Ajar.

*Q: This started out where? In the State of Washington?*

O'DONOHUE: It was used in the US generally but particularly involved apples shipped from the State of Washington. That was a very special problem.

*Q: Would you mention that, and then we can get on to the other issues.*

O'DONOHUE: In the United States one of the consumer or environmental groups came out, charging that Alar was a danger to public health.

*Q: It was a pesticide.*

O'DONOHUE: I think that it was mainly used in the State of Washington. This charge quickly resonated around the world. In this case Thai medical "technocrats" in the Ministry of Health moved very quickly to ban imports of US apples which had been sprayed with Alar.

We in the Embassy were trying to get some reason into this matter and get the Thai to lift the ban and develop some more systematic approach. Consequently, when I dealt with Minister of Health Chuan, who later became Prime Minister, this was an issue on which he had nothing to gain by listening to me. All he could do was get political "brickbats." In fact, he was eminently reasonable on this issue. We went through the matter. He listened and came to the conclusion that the Thai Government had acted hastily. In effect, he took a fair amount of "heat" when the Thai Government moved in a more systematic way and let things get back to normal.

*Q: This whole problem, as I recall it, turned out not to be really based on any scientific evidence.*

O'DONOHUE: No, the campaign against Alar really didn't have any scientific foundation. However, that came after all of the economic penalties had been exacted on the apple exporters. I think that the apple producers finally stopped using Alar. The point was that this was much ado about nothing environmentally, but the economic cost of the flap was significant.

Another area of difficulty which we had, and which was much more sensitive and has become more prominent, in retrospect--indeed, in the last few weeks--involved cigarettes. In the course of my three years as Ambassador to Thailand we dealt with the cigarette issue. There the United States stated position was that Thailand, like other countries, could take any decision that they wanted. They could bar the use of cigarettes. However, we insisted that the Thai could not have rules which barred the import of American cigarettes, while the Thai continued to produce their own. The Thai government, like many countries, had a monopoly on the production and sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products. The Thai objective seemed to be to keep American cigarettes out of the Thai market legally, because of the competitive, not the health, aspects.

In Thailand you can find American made cigarettes anywhere. There were very significant, illegal imports. This was an issue on which we had instructions from Washington to make representations. Over time the Thai accepted that they had to loosen the regulations on the import of American cigarettes. Like anything in Thailand, it was much more a matter of economics, than public interest.

When I was Ambassador to Thailand, I think that everyone who dealt with cigarettes found that it was an uncomfortable issue to handle. In the US Government I have yet to find anyone who admits that they support smoking. In a public sense, consciences were eased by the fact that we weren't endorsing cigarettes. You just stated what the US position was. Any restrictions would have to apply to all cigarettes.

After I left Thailand, our position became much more "aggressive." During my time in Thailand we were discussing various aspects of the legal importation of cigarettes. Apparently, from the latest reports that I have read, this question of aggressive, cigarette advertising has come much more to the fore.

An element in the cigarette controversy which has now appeared is that Thailand has begun to be seen as the "David" who stopped the American "Goliath." When I was there, this aspect didn't appear. Certainly, there were Thai who did not want to see the import of American cigarettes for health reasons. However, for most of the Thai that I was dealing with, those arguments were either amplified or put forward in a fashion which really related to the protection of their own market. As is the case in Europe, also, cigarette smoking by the population and especially among the "elite" is still more common than it is in the United States. They hadn't had almost the revulsion for cigarettes which we have in our society. So cigarettes were not as sensitive an issue in Thailand as in the United States, in the sense that many senior Thai officials smoked. Now, apparently, attitudes on this issue have been changing, and there is in Thailand a public health sensitivity and pressures against smoking, focusing on advertising. So the issue is not the same as when I was in Thailand. This is probably the most uncomfortable issue I had to deal with.

*Q: Did you have "soul-baring" discussions within the Country Team on this issue? Were you accused of being "merchants of death"?*

O'DONOHUE: No, at the time I was in Thailand as Ambassador, cigarette smoking wasn't that sensitive a public issue. That is, it was not a broad-based, public concern. Secondly, the issue of cigarette smoking was one of several matters which I was dealing with. It was not the major issue. I was surprised to find that Thailand today has adopted the attitude it has. When I was dealing with this matter, I was essentially concerned with the Thai tobacco monopoly trying to protect its market. The monopoly was interested in selling Thai cigarettes--not opposed to the smoking of cigarettes, as such.

*Q: Bob Duncan was Economic and Commercial Counselor. He is the only one of my friends who is a "chain smoker." He can't go more than 20 minutes without a cigarette.*

O'DONOHUE: I would describe this issue as one of a variety of matters, all of which had a certain similarity. That is, we were trying to break into a "closed market." I think that any government official who does not himself smoke is uncomfortable in dealing with a matter like this. Smoking is bad for your health. Whether this rationalization of the matter is utterly correct or not, I would rather not deal with a question like this. However, this was a matter on which our stated policy allowed me at least to subdue my conscience. Our own position is that the Thai could have any restriction that they wanted, as long as they applied to everybody.

*Q: May we move on to the intellectual property issue?*

O'DONOHUE: Thailand is actually a very open society. It is unlike South Korea, where the success of any business "outsiders" is often the prelude to pressures to take them over. Thailand is quite an open market. The two largest, gasoline distributors were ESSO and Shell. Caltex was smaller but was also to be found around the country. In addition, there were government-owned oil companies. If you went into the Thai department stores, you could find Gillette razor blades or other foreign goods. There were foreign made goods all over the place. On the whole, Thailand is an open market. Years ago, the Thai had even "grandfathered" as the largest, domestic insurance company, the AIG [American International Underwriters Insurance Group]. AIG had been in the Thai market for so long that it was given special status. You had American lawyers operating in Thailand.

In other words, Thailand was an open society, with generally open markets. However, there were some pitfalls, for instance, all sorts of regulations which usually could be surmounted. Nonetheless, there were certain areas in which there was either "piracy" or, in the case of pharmaceutical products, outright ignoring of patents justified because of lower prices. In fact, the two, most sensitive issues in terms of intellectual property rights were economically minor issues.

One of these issues was in the field of pharmaceuticals. There we had the most constant and aggressive pressures by American pharmaceutical companies to force the Thai to honor their patents. Regarding pharmaceuticals, we were resisted the hardest by the Thai, on the grounds that we were trying to increase the costs of medicines. We made incremental progress on pharmaceuticals, but the atmosphere was very, very bitter. In fact, in real dollar terms, this was a small problem. The initial estimates were that the American companies might be losing about \$15 million per year. When they realized that their losses were so small, they somehow got it up to--I forget what the estimated loss figure was.

*Q: Can you explain what you mean by "losing."*

O'DONOHUE: They were calculating their losses by totaling the estimated sale of equivalent Thai pharmaceutical products.

*Q: Were the Thai pharmaceutical manufacturers "pirating" these medicines for the Thai market, or were they selling them elsewhere?*

O'DONOHUE: It was for the Thai market. And it was not a big loss to the American pharmaceutical manufacturers. The other area of high sensitivity was the pirating of tapes of music and other trade mark items. Thailand is a country where a lot of these companies which pirate tapes of music operate. In the case of the pharmaceuticals the company representatives were very aggressive and pressed very hard, because, in effect, they had very little to lose in Thailand. In other words, Thailand wasn't an important market.

There was a similar problem with video tapes. Frankly, Thailand was singled out by the American trade groups to make an example of it, in great part because it didn't pose much of a

risk in retaliation.

The Thai deserve much of the blame for the constant abrasiveness of this issue of trade “piracy.” At the beginning you could have had a non-acrimonious and reasonable settlement of the issue. However, the Thai engaged in such evasion and delay that it permanently “sour” the negotiating atmosphere. As a result, the American negotiators never, ever, trusted the Thai in these negotiations. They were prone to believe the worst of the Thai because, at the very beginning, the Thai had dragged their feet, had thrown up one obstacle after another, and had been so clearly reluctant to settle these issues. As time went on, and our pressures became much, much stronger, and the Thai started moving toward a solution, a double problem emerged. First, the American negotiators were “disenchanted” with the Thai and were suspicious of them. Secondly, NAFTA was emerging.

*Q: NAFTA means the North American Free Trade Agreement.*

O'DONOHUE: As we moved toward the end of this negotiation on pharmaceuticals, we were dealing with the government headed by Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, which had entered office after the military coup. He and his cabinet weren't politicians and were ready to move on this issue. Because NAFTA was coming up, the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) was most interested in placating the major US pharmaceutical and trade mark associations. The USTR wasn't going to agree on anything in Thailand that didn't represent a clear “victory.” No compromise was acceptable, from the point of view of the USTR. They could have accepted a compromise the year before. However, to get the support and acquiescence of the major pharmaceutical and trade organizations for NAFTA, the USTR wasn't about to appear to have “compromised” on the negotiation in Thailand.

At this point we were dealing with a Thai Minister of Commerce who appeared willing to agree on a compromise settlement, and the Thai went off to meetings to negotiate this issue. The signals we originally received from Washington indicated that we could work things out. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the signals changed in Washington, and it became clear that the USTR wanted “victory or nothing.” So that was an embarrassment that cost me somewhat.

*Q: What was your analysis of why the Thai, who are initially pretty forthcoming in coming up with a compromise, were initially unwilling to compromise and this intellectual property negotiation turned into such a mess?*

O'DONOHUE: From the Thai point of view there was a combination of considerations. First, it was a sensitive, public issue--particularly the pharmaceuticals. Secondly, there was the practical matter that the owners of the Thai pharmaceutical companies were very well placed, politically. Thirdly, there was the attitude that we run into often in other countries, that Thailand “is such a small country. Why are you ‘dumping’ on us?” All of these considerations resulted in the Thai doing what they had done before. The Thai generally try to avoid formal agreement. Rather they try to find an accommodation. The Thai feel that an agreement commits you permanently. In the case of an accommodation, you can adjust to changing circumstances. So there was a combination of circumstances which resulted in their making a bad mistake in these negotiations.

If you look at overall American interests in Thailand and the amounts involved in this matter, this was almost a minor issue. However, due to a combination of factors, including, as I said, the American companies looking at Thailand and feeling that we should exercise leverage and make the Thai an example, these considerations had a disproportionate weight on the American side. On the Thai side, this issue was something which had high visibility. If they wanted to retreat, it was difficult. However, they did retreat, and we eventually got an agreement, but it was reached after I had left Thailand. Throughout the whole time that I was in Thailand, this was the most difficult, long term issue. The civil air issue was the second, most difficult issue.

*Q: Well, let's talk about the civil air issue.*

O'DONOHUE: As I said, over the years the American airline companies had been charging lower fares on intra-regional flights within East Asia. However, in effect, the East Asian airline companies had followed a different practice. I don't know whether "cartel" is too strong a word, but they had established what was almost a cartel. The fares they charged on intra-regional flights--that is, from Tokyo to Bangkok or Seoul were really quite high. When the American airlines came in to pick up passengers and travel onward within or from the East Asian area, they were picking up a major amount of business.

All of the East Asian airlines resented this situation for two reasons. First, the real and ostensible reason was that our agreements basically covered flying from the United States to East Asian countries and not picking up "disproportionately" large numbers of passengers for onward intra-regional travel. However, the real problem, of course, was that the American companies were breaking into an East Asian market where the local airlines had rather "cozy" arrangements. In Thailand the US carrier traffic growth was not based on Americans coming from the United States to Bangkok but involved picking up Japanese and others traveling to Bangkok. That was the basis of the problem.

Royal Thai Airlines is a national airline. The Minister of Transportation sits on the Board of Directors. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an ex officio member of the Board of Directors. There are also Thai military representatives on the Board of Directors. After a long, "golden" period, Royal Thai Airlines was running into serious management problems at that time. So, on the part of Royal Thai Airlines and with the Ministry of Transportation there was an effort to limit the number of American airline flights into Bangkok, which the American airlines resisted. In economic terms all of this travel into Thailand was of benefit to the country, because the Thai got far more from the increased number of tourists coming to Thailand than Royal Thai Airlines might or might not have been losing.

*Q: This is Side A of Tape 10 of the interview with Ambassador Dan O'Donohue. Did you try to make the argument that Thai tourism interests were more important than the problems of Royal Thai Airlines?*

O'DONOHUE: This was an issue where you had a sense of "a pox on all of the parties concerned." We did have the strong argument that you just mentioned. However, the Thai Ministry of Transportation was very much "caught up" in the problems of Royal Thai Airlines. The Thai military had representatives on the Board of Directors, and so these special interests

were playing their role. Secondly, of course, there were the other East Asian airlines and their governments quietly interested in the Thai standing up for their own interests.

From the US point of view we started out by refusing to negotiate seriously. Our view was that we had the rights. However, as we proceeded in these negotiations, it was an issue which on two occasions I thought that I had resolved. On both occasions the American airlines wound up pulling the rug out from under us. The American airlines went from being very defensive to becoming rather arrogant, as soon as they thought that they were winning.

I had gone to the Minister of Transportation, and we went over these issues at a private lunch. There was the economic aspect of this issue, which he accepted. He went back and began, in effect, undercutting his civil servants. I felt that we were making progress but the US side dragged its feet.

Earlier, a State Department officer headed a team which came out to Bangkok for this negotiation. The airline representatives came out with the US negotiating team but sat in another room while the negotiations went on. They were not part of the negotiating team but, in a sense, they had to approve whatever was being negotiated. The negotiations were held in Pattaya [beach resort 75 miles Southeast of Bangkok]. As I remember it, they outlined the three issues involved. I felt pretty good, because I felt that on all three we were in a good position. So after the negotiation, the US side came into the Embassy. It turned out that they had worked out these three issues. Then it turned out that another issue had been introduced by the American side, and those negotiations broke down again.

It was an ongoing, frustrating experience, as I said. You certainly couldn't give the Thai negotiators very high marks for doing anything but defending their national airline. On the American side it seemed that, no matter what, we were always running into a point where US airlines didn't want to concede this issue, because it might be a precedent in another negotiation or, after that was resolved, you would find that something else had come up. As I said, it seemed that with the American airlines it was a case that whenever they thought that we were "winning," they wanted more!

When I left Thailand [in 1991], we had come twice to a point where I thought that we had informally reached an agreement on what we wanted, only to find that, both times, the American airlines either wouldn't go along or wanted more, and we were back to the drawing board.

All in all, those were clearly the two most difficult issues I was concerned with in Thailand. The intellectual property rights issue had a visible, political dimension. It was not so much the amounts of money involved for the Thai. The issue was a very difficult one, politically. At the beginning the Thai handled the issue badly and paid the penalty for that throughout the negotiation.

The civil air negotiation was different, in that, when we were through with it, I think that the American airlines were right, in the sense that, by any standard, freedom to travel is better. What we were dealing with was the protection of another, national airline. There was an effort to maintain unduly high airline fares on the part of the East Asian airlines.

*Q Dan, you were Ambassador to Thailand from when to when?*

O'DONOHUE: From 1988 to 1991.

*Q: Was there any concern on your part regarding the loss of jobs in the United States which went to Asia? Did that issue raise its head?*

O'DONOHUE: Not really. There was some shifting of jobs, like AT&T opening up a factory in Thailand. However, the 3M manager in Bangkok...

*Q: 3M is Minnesota Mining and Minerals Company, which turns out all sorts of products...*

O'DONOHUE: Like Scotch tape and other things. Their manager in Bangkok pointed out that their involvement in Thailand created jobs in the US. It didn't "move" jobs from the US. That meant that they created markets for the products worked on in the US So they really weren't "losing" jobs in the US Now, whether that is true in every instance is another matter. Nonetheless, Thailand has a significant, American presence. There were no specific sensitivities on this matter. Furthermore, there wasn't anything in Thailand which hadn't already happened, to a larger extent, in other places. Thirdly, by any standards, the attraction in Thailand was less the "offshore" aspect than it was the Thai market as such or the Thai workforce.

Another aspect is that, depending on whose figures you use, there wasn't an immense imbalance in exports. While Thailand was a big and growing market, by the time I left it imported about \$10-12 billion in US products. For these reasons, it didn't figure that prominently.

There were these manifestations of world trade, which were unbelievable to me, at least. At one time I visited a small, Christian college, in a small town in Thailand. While I was there, they took me to visit a wood products factory on the edge of town. The manager happened to be a Sino-Thai who didn't speak a word of English. However, his son, who was also present, did. They made various wood products for three American department stores. They made book racks, butcher boards, and things like that. They had containers at the factory site where they packaged these products for the three department stores. They turned out these wooden products, packaged them, and shipped one container full a week to the three department stores. I don't think that this small manufacturer sold his products anywhere but to the United States. He had never visited the US nor spoke English.

*Q: And to three department stores!*

O'DONOHUE: I'm talking about a small manufacturer in a small town. It was not a huge operation. The other extreme was in Chiang Mai, where we visited an American who made "flies" for trout fishing. He made these for his family's company in the US It was not huge but it was the closest thing I had seen in Thailand to an American operation run on Asian lines. It was on the second floor of an unprepossessing building. You went in and found that he had 85 young Thai women, very carefully assembling various and sundry fishing flies, under the supervision of this American. His wife and child were living there. It was a family operation, producing fishing

flies of all varieties.

*Q: Dan, did the question of “child labor” ever come up?*

O'DONOHUE: Not relating to American companies. First of all, the American companies themselves did not approve of child labor. This practice was not found among the American companies. In fact, they often hired young women from the villages at very modest wages but slightly above the normal for wages. The Thai educational system turned out excellent students at whatever level. In this case you were talking about people who had attended primary and middle school. The people hired by the American companies could read, write and they knew how to learn. So the labor force available to the American companies was a big “plus.” You didn't have child labor with the American companies.

But, you had “everything” in Thailand. There was child prostitution, and the working conditions were sometimes appalling. My wife, in particular, worked with Thai women and one of the missionary priests, often going down into the slums of Bangkok. The living conditions were terrible--something like the slaughter houses in the US at the turn of the century. The Embassy had contracted out various work, such as gardening services. We found out that we were “closing our eyes” to labor abuse in that connection. There were appalling situations in terms of living conditions for people hired by Thai contractors who cared for the grounds at the Embassy. We got the services of the lowest bidder, who had to “squeeze” his profit out of the workers. The reason we found this out among the gardeners was that one of my houseboys was feeding the gardeners. So I found out how little the gardeners were getting. We forced the Embassy to “police” these situations--assuring at least minimum legal conditions were met. However, at least the worst conditions were avoided.

In any case, child labor wasn't a problem with the American companies in Thailand during the time I was there as Ambassador. It is a terrific problem more broadly. There is child prostitution, and there certainly are child labor problems.

My background had been political reporting and policy matters. However, the charge that the Foreign Service doesn't pay attention to commercial issues and subordinates them to political matters is generally not true today. Based on my own observation of American Ambassadors, including myself and my peers, there is almost no foundation for this view. In an earlier period, Ambassador Phil Habib in South Korea and other Ambassadors devoted an immense amount of time to commercial interests and local firms working for American interests.

I found that in Thailand, certainly by the end of my tour of duty there, if you looked at my working day, 50% of it was spent on commercial issues. Either these involved basic issues or what we haven't touched on at all--fighting for individual American business interests. In one case this involved an effort by Caltex Oil Company to get Thai Government approval to build a refinery. I pressed and pressed this issue. I pressed Prime Minister Chatchai to revoke the decision not to give Caltex permission to build the refinery. I wrote him a letter and was then charged with “interference” in Thai affairs by Shell Oil Company which was the competitor.

Then there were issues on which we approached the Thai Government on behalf of American

companies to get approval for various projects. One of them involved the Guardian Glass Company. In that case the Prime Minister's brother-in-law, who was a politician of major influence, had invested in a Japanese-Thai company which, in effect, had a monopoly on the glass manufacturing business. By the end of my time in Thailand I was involved either in "generic," or across the board commercial issues and some involving individual companies. As I said, by that time I was spending 50% of my time on commercial issues. At least you would say that commercial issues had as great a priority as anything else.

My view had been that the Foreign Commercial Service, under the Department of Commerce, had not been a success since it had been separated from the Foreign Service under the Department of State. When you looked at the matter closely, all of the important issues were being handled by the Embassy, not the Foreign Commercial Service. This was true in Thailand. The officers in the Commercial Section were useful, but the basic effort on anything important was made by the Ambassador. In certain areas, like civil aviation, the problems were handled by the Economic Section of the Embassy. The people in the Foreign Commercial Service were helpful but simply couldn't operate at high enough levels to be effective.

Later, I changed this view when I joined the Inspection Corps. I traveled to Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other countries. I saw a completely different 'breed' of senior, commercial officers who had been "pushed forward" by the then Director of the Foreign Commercial Service. These officers really were exceptional.

*Q: Who was the head of the Foreign Commercial Service at that time?*

O'DONOHUE: I think that it was Susan Schwab. She left at the end of the Bush administration.

By that time I had completely changed my view. I had seen the work of some very effective, senior Foreign Commercial Service Officers who have been in several instances strong lieutenants to the Ambassador. There is no substitute for the Ambassador in the field of Commercial Affairs. The Ambassador has to be the primary Commercial Officer. If the other side sees that the Ambassador is not interested in commercial affairs, it's going to have its effect. The Ambassador has to be involved in commercial affairs. I found that, in almost every case, career Ambassadors realize this and are deeply involved in commercial questions.

*Q: Let's turn to the coup d'etat of 1991. You talked about the Thai Government and said that various things had happened before or after the coup. How did the coup occur?*

O'DONOHUE: In Thailand, coups d'etat were an established means of changing civilian governments or getting rid of them. I remember one well known Thai politician giving a speech, in which he said that people were always telling him that what Thailand needed is a democratic constitution. He said, "That's not our problem at all. I myself have personally participated in drafting 12 constitutions!" On occasion and for brief moments civilian politicians have exercised actual power. However, generally, the Thai military decided who would hold power. There were all sorts of political alignments which ultimately were based on the Thai military. The military were not tremendously interested in government policy, outside of procuring supplies and equipment for the Thai armed forces. They were more interested in the "fruits" of government,

along with their own role as the ultimate determinants of power.

The first time I was in Thailand, when I was DCM [1977-1978], coups were generally “peaceful,” meaning that they took place with little or no bloodshed. There were minimum penalties exacted, outside of the loss of office by one political figure or another. They didn’t carry out retribution or things like that. There was a mini-coup when I was in Bangkok as DCM. It probably involved no more than a company of Thai troops. This coup disposed of the then civilian government.

However, when I came back to Thailand in 1988 as Ambassador, I knew almost every, major figure on the Thai political scene fairly well. Gen Prem had stepped down as Prime Minister, perhaps a few weeks before I arrived. In my view Gen Prem was the outstanding Thai statesman of the 20th century. He is still on the scene as the King’s loyal right hand. He had presided over Thailand as Prime Minister during a very difficult period. First, he was dealing with the problems associated with the changes in Vietnam and Cambodia. This had started before he became Prime Minister but was accentuated during this period. He had dealt with economic difficulties. To everyone’s mild surprise, he also presided over the return to civilian rule.

When the Thai military “ruled,” this didn’t mean that there was a military government. The Thai Governments were composed of politicians and “technocrats.” When I say that Gen Prem handled economic issues, what I meant was that he supported what the “technocrats” were doing. For a long time he gave them a strong role. However, the power of even the strongest figures tends to erode. The power of Gen Prem was eroding. One of the strongest of his generals, Gen Chavalit, wanted to become Prime Minister. Chavalit had been waiting for a very long time for Gen Prem to retire as Prime Minister. He was Prem’s protégé. For a combination of reasons, including the machinations of politicians who wanted to get back into power and Gen Chavalit’s “chafing” to become Prime Minister, Gen Prem decided that it was time to resign. He could have held on as Prime Minister for another year but he decided to step down.

The problem was that there was no one immediately available to replace him. Even Gen Chavalit really wasn’t in a position to civilianize himself and become Prime Minister. He simply wasn’t prepared to take over that office so soon. So, as they looked around, they picked a Prime Minister who, they thought, would clearly be a temporary phenomenon. He would be a transitional figure of no great weight, because the return to civilian rule did not mean what the Thai military wanted.

So they picked Major General Chatchai who at the time was in his early 70’s. He was viewed as a 70 year old “playboy” and essentially a “lightweight.” His father was one of the original coup plotters, when the Thai intellectuals and military deposed the absolute monarchy in 1932. When his family fell precipitously from power in the mid- 1950’s. Chatchai served for about 15 years in various diplomatic posts, in a form of political exile. He came back after the student revolution in 1973. His family had money, and he became a politician. He was chosen to be Prime Minister in 1988, not because he was a respected political leader, and not because he had a military background, but because he was viewed essentially as a “lightweight” who, at some point in time, would inevitably be swept aside.

In fact, Chatchai was a shrewd politician who was utterly “worldly.” He had a very cynical view of politics and people. However, on the other hand, he had a certain amount of charm and good political sense. He took over as Prime Minister and didn’t do badly the first year. After Chatchai had spent about a year in office as Prime Minister, two things happened. Gen Chavalit, who had waited so long, had based his power in the military on a younger group--all classmates at the Military Academy from a class several years after him and his factions at the military academy.

*Q: Like the US Military Academy.*

O’DONOHUE: However, no one wanted a coup. When the Thai military didn’t want a coup, this didn’t mean that they supported the government or were going to wait passively. It just meant that, in a variety of ways, they tried to push the serving Prime Minister out of office. So an erosion of Chatchai’s position and a disintegration of the political situation began. This process was essentially conducted largely, but not completely, by the Thai military. Thai politicians out of power were quite capable of joining this themselves. So the military had Chatchai “on the ropes.” He had growing problems, and his position weakened.

As the process of undermining Chatchai continued, I was actually getting along with him pretty well. He was cynical but realistic. For example, during the Gulf War of 1991, he agreed to let us send troops through the Royal Thai Air Base at Utapao, Southeast of Bangkok. I was also instructed to ask him for Thai formal support in connection with the Gulf War, which he gave us. On other issues, like the civil air and Caltex Refinery matters, where there was a convergence of his and American interests, he was helpful. On the issue of Cambodia, he was very difficult.

However, the Thai military finally had him “on the ropes” by the end of 1990. You could have predicted that Chatchai would be out of power by the end of 1990. However, in the course of early 1991 he was consolidating political power and moving toward new elections, which his coalition government might well have won. So the military finally reached the point where they could only get rid of Chatchai by staging a coup. Political tensions were high, and we knew that there were problems. “Crescendo” is the wrong word, but one thing after another was happening, instigated by the military. Chatchai was going to fly down to southern Thailand and went to the airport in Bangkok, got on the plane, and then the Thai military pulled the coup. By the time the coup occurred, the Class 5 Thai Military Academy class group controlled everything--the Air Force, the Navy, and the Army. So the coup plotters took Chatchai and his party and put them under arrest.

By then, although Chatchai had outwitted the coup plotters politically and was theoretically in a strong position, his reputation had been so eroded that there was no great regret at his fall from power. But there was no enthusiasm for the Thai military, either. The coup happened on a Saturday morning, Bangkok time. By that time the Embassy had prepared its analysis. The Director of the Office of Thai Affairs in the Department had also previously served in the Embassy in Bangkok. He telephoned us, but, by that time, it was “over.” So we sent in our analysis of the coup which, I think, turned out to be 100% correct. If you summed up our recommendations, they were that the coup group really didn’t want to change anything. Indeed, over the short term, the coup group might even let somebody else run the country. We should condemn the coup publicly but we should continue to do business with the Thai Government as

usual. The King continued to reign.

That evening, though, I got a call on the secure phone from the Office Director. He said that the Department had received our cables, which he thought were probably just about right. He said, though, that the Department was probably going to be more “condemnatory” of the coup than the Embassy had recommended. Otherwise, everything was all right. Remember, that we were about 12 hours ahead of Washington.

By 10:00 PM Bangkok time we learned that the Washington agencies were considering all kinds of options. The CIA was discussing various aspects of the situation, but, remember, the coup was over. In Washington the Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs and representatives of the NSC [National Security Council], the Department of Defense, CIA, the Human Rights people, and others were meeting to discuss how to handle the situation. The discussions were completely “irrational,” and no one was playing the role that one would have expected. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of Defense was so concerned about the coup aspect of this event that he was advocating “strong measures” to reverse the coup. The DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State] in charge of Southeast Asian Affairs was also advocating “strong measures.” The DAS who was not in charge of Southeast Asian Affairs, the Office Director of Thai Affairs, and the Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary Solomon, all of whom knew a lot about Thailand, supported my position. The NSC person who attended that meeting, who didn’t know Thailand, was siding with those who wanted to take “strong measures.”

It was only some time later that I realized that this was happening. My view was, “Why get excited?” This group was talking about recalling me for consultations and taking “draconian measures.” Well, as I understood it, if you had taken a consensus or a vote, the majority of those attending this meeting would have supported taking very “harsh measures” against Thailand. There were people at this meeting in Washington, worrying about “bloodshed” and so forth. However, the group that supported my position was prepared to continue to sit indefinitely at this meeting and oppose the views of the other group. So, as Saturday in Washington wore on, those favoring “harsh measures” started to drift off home or to whatever else they wanted to do! They had drafted a cable which wasn’t going to go anywhere. That became the pattern for the next few days. At the end of each day there would be “agreement” on a cable setting out a “harsh course of action.” However, this draft would not be transmitted and would be diluted on the following day. I think that it took five days before the Department arrived at the position which I had recommended in the first place.

*Q: Did you feel that this discussion was purely a “Washington generated event”? How about the CIA representatives and the DAS for Southeast Asian Affairs? What about our military attachés?*

O’DONOHUE: It was completely and utterly a Washington “hot house” event. Indeed, it was “nutty.” The NSC man at this meeting normally didn’t follow Thai affairs. The next day [Sunday, Washington time] his boss, who was very close to Thai affairs, came into the office. He couldn’t believe what had happened. On the Department of Defense side, I called up CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific, in Honolulu] and asked him to get on the phone and try to get the people in the Department of Defense to be more reasonable. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, who thought that he knew what the reaction would be on Capitol Hill [Congress], felt

that he had to take this “firm position” because he anticipated that the pressures from the Hill were going to be “immense.” Well, the Hill wasn’t particularly concerned. Indeed, this discussion was entirely artificial. It was limited to all these people in a room.

So, at the end of five days, we ended up about where we should have been. There weren’t any great penalties paid for this. In the absence of instructions to me to pack my bags or take one unrealistic step or another, we just proceeded, and the Thai-American relationship continued without change.

I had a very good relationship with the King of Thailand. Through the King’s secretary I learned that the King essentially had no respect for the coup leaders. However, the coup had happened, and the King’s immediate concern was that the country should get back to normal as quickly as it could. Remember, the King has never played a major role on a day to day basis. His dominating role has always been during a time of crisis and uncertainty. For instance, in 1992, he was decisive in forcing the same coup leaders to leave power. However, that was a different situation, in which there was turmoil. His role was essentially to be a stabilizing influence. In the case of the 1991 coup I have been discussing his position was different; the coup was a fait accompli and was not reversible.

Initially, the coup leaders, as I had predicted, set up an appointed government composed of some of Thailand’s best talents. The coup leader, Gen Suchinda, had been an Army Attaché in Washington in 1975 when Anand Panyarachun was Ambassador to the United States. They knew each other, of course, but had virtually nothing in common and weren’t close friends in any sense. Because of his respect for Anand, Suchinda appointed him Prime Minister. Anand went on to be an outstanding Prime Minister. He knew that he was going to be in office for only a year. So an outstanding, civilian government came into power, following this coup. The Thai military kept the offices of Minister of Home Affairs and Defense. However, they allowed the country to be run by former Ambassador Anand.

The only right thing that this coup group did was to appoint the government under Prime Minister Anand. Then, a year later after the elections, they made the mistake of trying to perpetuate themselves in power. First, they tried to put in a Prime Minister against whom there were all kinds of allegations. Then they tried to put in Gen Suchinda himself as Prime Minister. They fell from power shortly after this as a result of public turmoil and political pressure.

The coup of 1991 itself was a perfect illustration of an old time Thai coup d’etat. Also, I was on record as having earlier advised them against staging any coup. So we were active during this period of time. I was at a party on a Friday night, about a week after the coup. The nominal head of the coup group saw me and said, “Dan, we’re going to release Chatchai tomorrow. We’re all going to go over and have breakfast with him. We’re going to apologize for the coup and then release him.” So I called up Dick Solomon, Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, and told him what the coup group leader had told me. Dick couldn’t believe it.

*Q: Dick Solomon was a China expert.*

O’DONOHUE: The idea that the coup leaders were going to have breakfast with Prime Minister

Chatchai, the man they deposed, apologize for having deposed him, and then let him go home was hard for Dick to understand. They actually intended to let Chatchai go home to pack and then leave Thailand in a couple of days. That is what happened. The amazing thing is that when Chatchai left Thailand, nearly everyone was at the airport, including Prime Minister Anand, who had been a protégé of Chatchai's in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So the new cabinet, put in office by the Thai military, all turned out at the airport to say goodbye to Chatchai. The old cabinet, which had been deposed, was also at the airport, and the military leaders were there. This was truly a Thai-style coup.

Later on the South Korean Chargé d'Affaires, who was a younger man, commented to me about the differences between Thailand and South Korea. He said, "You know, we 'tough' Koreans have much to learn from the Thai." He said that in South Korea, if something like this had happened, the first thing is that no one who knew the person who had been deposed would risk being seen with him. They would be in fear of arrest and would have nothing to do with the deposed leader. Secondly, the "deposed person" would be very, very bitter. Thirdly, it would all be done with harshness. The idea of having the new Prime Minister, his cabinet, the coup leaders, and the new cabinet on hand, with everyone saying goodbye to the deposed Prime Minister--would be unthinkable in South Korean terms.

*Q: Dan, is there anything else that we should cover about Thailand?*

O'DONOHUE: With regard to the coup which overthrew Chatchai, I would say that we have problems in handling events like this because of our legal strictures and our avowed commitment to democracy. More flexibility is needed in dealing with specific country situations. In effect, the Washington discussion of the event was handled almost solely as if it were a domestic, US event. People in Washington see such an event only from a Washington perspective.

Now, there were penalties after this happened. For instance, under the law assistance was cut off to Thailand. This had no economic effect, since the amounts involved were small. However this proposed legislation did serve to sever bilateral aid relationships, although, in effect, the Thai were back to outstanding civilian leadership under Anand. I was struck with how "unreal" the Washington perception of this event was, although we managed the transition well.

*Q: Did you find that you had to "mind your tongue" as far as reporting to Washington was concerned, so that at least your reporting would meet the minimum standards of righteous indignation about a coup, and all of that?*

O'DONOHUE: No, I wouldn't say that that was much of a problem. My assessment of the coup had been very blunt and realistic. What I didn't do was recommend that we shouldn't deal with the Thai leaders. What I said was that this coup was carried out by a group of Thai military people in the traditional way. They simply wanted power and there wasn't any real justification for the coup--it was a "harsh" assessment. My conclusion was that this happened in a country where this kind of thing had happened before, and it was not going to be reversed. So, I believed that we should pick up the pieces--which is not too difficult--and proceed. Then you work to get back to having a civilian government. What you shouldn't do is to get more caught up and upset about the coup than the country or society that you're in, particularly Thailand where society and

other institutions play such a large role, not simply politicians. In other countries the situation would be different. For instance, South Korea.

The situation in Thailand was different. In the case of the overthrow of the Chatchai Government, there was an emotional reaction in Washington that the coup, in a country like Thailand, was a setback, which it was. As a matter of fact, there was a year of good civilian government. However, the coup leaders tried and failed to perpetuate themselves in power. Thai society took care of the coup leaders when they overreacted.

*Q: When did you leave Thailand?*

O'DONOHUE: I left in August, 1991.

*Q: You were saying that this was, oddly enough, a period of good government in Thailand. The government headed by Anand Panyarachun was supposedly to remain in power for a year. What was your impression of where Thailand was going?*

O'DONOHUE: When I left Thailand, the Anand government was in power. It was a government of the "well born" and well educated. They had no interest in remaining in power. Indeed, the members of the Anand government set about "clearing up" the backlog of needed legislation and administrative reforms and deregulation. They did as well as they could. When the time came, they left office, with a fairly significant body of achievement.

Unfortunately, the Thai political dynamic did not essentially change. So the Anand government left office, and Gen Suchinda and the military group tried to perpetuate themselves in power. That effort collapsed, because of general revulsion, violence on the streets, and the King's intervention. The figures that sparked the violence on the streets also had a role in what happened. So, you might say, all of the "culprits" paid a political penalty. Until the next election was held, Prime Minister Anand was returned to power but in a clearly caretaker capacity. Anand and his government refused to do anything but manage another election. This was not a "reprise" of the previous, Anand government agenda.

After the elections, came a politician who was among the more honest political figures. Chuan entered office, but it didn't change the dynamic of the system. So it was in power for a couple of years. Thai Government was not bad, although it fell because of charges of corruption. In effect, the democratic, political structure in Thailand was basically in the hands of corrupt, regional politicians. In that sense, one has to look at the prospects in Thailand with a little bit more pessimism than I would have had in 1988 or 1990, because previously there had been a "balance" between the Thai military, the civil servants, the business community, the politicians, and the King. All of these groups were interacting and providing some checks on each other. Unfortunately, we are moving toward a situation where, I think, the military could come back and play a major role. The civil servants unfortunately seem to have lost their former power. The politicians have significantly eroded that.

This leaves the King who has immense authority which at least can be used in time of crisis. His likely successor, the Crown Prince, will not have this authority. This King is now the longest

reigning head of state in the world. He started young, in 1946, but he can't go on forever. So in some ways you are left with the fact that Thailand has not yet been able to create a political framework that ensures a durable and reasonably honest government. In some ways, it is a little worse than it was previously. This doesn't mean that the country is in a state of chaos, because, as I said, there is a situation of social stability. However, politically, you are left with a situation which is far from encouraging. There have been reports that the most recent elections have been the most corrupt in Thai history.

**HARRY HAVEN KENDALL**  
**Director, Language Center, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1978-1979)**

*Harry Haven Kendall grew up in Louisiana and joined the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1940 at the age of 20. He joined USIS in 1950 and served in Venezuela, Japan, Spain, Panama, Chile, Vietnam, Thailand, and Washington, DC. Mr. Kendall was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1988.*

KENDALL: In 1978 I was up for transfer. I had been in Tokyo for three years and was looking for a new assignment. Having spent so much time in Asia I thought it was time for me to go to Europe again. You are familiar with the practice of having officers express their preference for ongoing assignment in a first, second, third fashion. When the list of availabilities came up, I think I put down a list of 17 posts where I would be willing to go. Bangkok was not one of them. So I got a phone call in the middle of the night from Mort Smith, then area director in Washington. He said, "Harry, we need you in Bangkok to run the AUA Language Center."

"But Mort, I thought I was going to go to Europe again?"

"Haven't got anything decent for you in Europe. That's where we need you. Think about it a bit."

I thought about it a bit and said, "Okay, I'll go."

I had been in Bangkok several times, but I had never been to the language center. I didn't really know what it was about. Milton Leavitt was the man who had been there.

*Q: That was the second time by then.*

KENDALL: Yes, he spent a total of seven years there. He loved it. But he was retiring. So the Agency sent me to Bangkok and I can truly say it was just about the best job I ever had in USIS.

*Q: It's a wonderful center.*

KENDALL: Wonderful center. And I worked with a grand old man named Phra Bisal Sukhumwit who had established the center back in 1952 under the auspices of American University Alumni Association, a group of returned Thai students from American universities.

The fundamental purpose of the AUA was teaching English to Thai students, but we also conducted classes in Thai for Americans and other foreigners. USIS contributed the director, who worked with Phra Bisal, and a director of English language courses -- both Foreign Service Officers. The Center was combined with the USIS library which was staffed and maintained by the post but was, as I should say, known as the AUA library. The post also provided for a locally hired cultural director to coordinate Center and USIS cultural programs. Everyone else in the center was employed by the AUA Language Center which operated on tuition income from language classes. I was the manager and administrative director. We had a hundred American teachers, recruited from among the American community, including wives of embassy officials, embassy officials themselves, business people, retired U.S. military personnel, and the like. There were also a number of young American women who had married Thais studying in the United States and come to Bangkok to live. They found a natural outlet for their talents at the center. We trained them all to teach English as a foreign language to our Thai students. This job was handled by Dr. Marvin Brown. Do you remember him?

*Q: He was not there when I was.*

KENDALL: Marvin trained our English teachers, but his specialty was teaching Thai to foreigners, so he also supervised that aspect of our center program. We had a staff of 77 AUA employees, as I recall. It was like a small university. We had something like 7,000 to 8,000 students throughout the whole year. There were some fluctuations, but we taught a lot of English and ran numerous cultural programs. We also operated the best library in Bangkok.

*Q: I gather you felt that and do feel that AUA has made a tremendous impact in Thailand on behalf of friendship with the U.S.?*

KENDALL: It has indeed. It's difficult to find an educated Thai person who has not had some personal contact with the AUA, everywhere from the King and Queen and the royal prince and princesses of Thailand down to humble students. Even today, ten years after I left there, if I mention to a visiting Thai scholar here at Berkeley that I once served as director of the AUA it immediately establishes a bond between us. There are literally tens of thousands of Thai citizens who have gained a working knowledge of English from the American teachers at the AUA.

I recall one very amusing incident quite illustrative of the center's influence. My wife and I and a couple of friends were driving along Petchburi road in Bangkok one night looking for a certain movie theater, and somehow I got lost and found myself going the wrong way down a one-way street. A young policeman stopped me and asked for my driver's license. He wasn't impressed by my American Embassy credentials or by the diplomatic plates. Neither was he impressed by my bright red Pacer.

"Okay," he said, "there will be a fine on this. Who are you? Where do you work?"

I gave him my name and told him I was the director of the AUA.

"Oh, the AUA director. I studied English there. That's a fine school. You just turn right around and go this way."

To this day the AUA is one of the leading cultural centers in Bangkok. We conducted lectures in Thai about the United States and also about Thailand. As a binational center we felt it necessary to satisfy both audiences. The Thai language classes are very popular among foreigners trying to get established in Bangkok, and regularly enroll foreign embassy personnel and businessmen as well as their families. The other day I had a visitor from Beijing, a Southeast Asia specialist, and learned that he had studied English at the AUA in Bangkok. I was pleased to note that he spoke quite good English.

All in all it was a very satisfying assignment, and by that time my children had grown up and were going to college. Margaret, my wife, taught English at the AUA all the time we were there. Our youngest daughter, Judy, was at Mills at Oakland and took a semester off to be with us in Bangkok. We put her to teaching English too.

*Q: Bangkok is one of the very few USIS posts around the world that I find is almost better recognized and perhaps better understood than the embassy itself. Whoever is the director of USIS and whoever is the director of the AUA out there has a standing in Bangkok that is really almost greater than the ambassador, I think.*

KENDALL: That is certainly true. I felt it all the time. I was a member of several committees and organizations and was always given a place of honor wherever I went as director of the AUA. The Crown Princess of Thailand and her sister came there on various occasions. I recall giving a TOEFL [Test Of English as a Foreign Language] exam to the youngest daughter of the King. She was in Berkeley last year and I reminded her of that. She hadn't forgotten.

*Q: Thais were devastated when they changed the name of the program to USICA. They couldn't understand it all.*

KENDALL: That was one of the worst administrative decisions to come out of our Washington headquarters. I was certainly glad when the name was changed back to USIA.

I went to Bangkok thinking that I would be able to remain on post until I reached retirement age at 65, but early in 1979 there came the Supreme Court decision that we had to retire at 60. Since I was turning 60 in December of that year I started searching for something to do. I was not ready to retire. I was still strong, vigorous, healthy, and eager to continue. But I also wanted to maintain the Asian connection. I drew on my academic contacts and wrote to Bob Scalapino offering him my services. He wrote back saying, "I'm going to be in Bangkok on July 4. Why don't we talk about it then." We did, and I've been at Berkeley working with him as coordinator of international conferences for the Institute of East Asian Studies since May of 1980. Naturally, my contacts built up over 29 years with USIA and especially during my final 10 years in Asia have been invaluable to me in this position. To tell the truth, I still consider myself a member of the USIA team.

**MORTON I. ABRAMOWITZ**

**Ambassador  
Thailand (1978-1981)**

*Ambassador Abramowitz was born in New Jersey and educated at Stanford and Harvard Universities. He entered the Foreign Service in 1960 after service in the US Army. A specialist in East Asian and Political/Military Affairs, the Ambassador held a number of senior positions in the Department of State and Department of Defense. He served as Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research and as US Ambassador to Thailand (1978-1981) and Turkey (1989-1991). He also served in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vienna. Ambassador Abramowitz was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 2007.*

*Q: In 1978, you were appointed as U.S. Ambassador to Thailand. How did that come about?*

ABRAMOWITZ: There was a question of whether I would be assigned to Thailand or the Philippines. During my tour in ISA, I had developed a very close relationship with Phil Habib, first when he was the assistant secretary for EA and then when he became the undersecretary for political affairs. We were essentially on the same wave length. He was a unique, wonderful character, almost universally liked and respected. We always got along quite well most of the time. Of course, Phil was one of the Department's experts not only on Korea, but also on South East Asia. I kept him posted on what we were doing in Defense; I testified with him before Congressional committees. He was a superb witness. He used to say: "Senator (or Congressman), that is an extraordinary important question. You have obviously great insights." He could go on in this vein question after question; I could never do that, but I certainly admired his touch. He was much respected on the Hill.

When it was time to move on from DoD, Phil was very helpful. He wanted to make sure that I would get an embassy. Holbrooke was also very supportive and basically made it happen. The first opportunity arose in the Philippines, but Phil thought that since this would be my first ambassadorial assignment, that a smaller post, one less in the limelight, might be more appropriate. He thought Thailand would do. That was fine with me especially since I knew most of the Thai leaders – as I did in the Philippines as well. So the Department nominated me for Thailand.

I had not served in the Department or in an embassy for five-six years. Of course, both as POLAD and as deputy assistant secretary for ISA, I had maintained continual contact with State and especially the EA bureau. So it wasn't as if I had been on a different planet for all those years; I just wasn't physically in the State building or an embassy. I was familiar with all of the EA issues and knew the bureau well. Even though I had maintained this close contact, going from second secretary to an ambassador was a little unusual. I had not taken the usual route – embassy counselor (or deputy assistant secretary in State) to DCM to ambassador.

There were four aspects that helped prepare me to become an ambassador in the area. One was the opportunity to become acquainted with all the major political figures in East Asia. The Thai prime minister, who had been at my house for dinner, was very happy with my appointment. Two, I had spent at least six years working on East Asia – a year in INR, a year as POLAD and

four years in ISA. I knew the area well. Three, I had a regional view and could fit our relationships with any particular country into a regional framework. Fourth, I had worked at sufficiently high levels for several years to understand how to influence policy development and which issues would be of most interest to the highest levels of our government.

*Q: What about managerial experience?*

ABRAMOWITZ: If the truth be known, very few State Department employees have an opportunity to acquire the kind of broad experience that one needs to manage a large embassy. I think my career experiences were fairly unique: I had managed two sizeable organizations – the EA section of ISA (25-30 employees) and the EA division in INR (also 25-30 employees). Was that enough to run an embassy? Probably not, but then as I said I don't think any State employees have much opportunity to have sufficiently broad assignments to prepare him or her for a major ambassadorial assignment. I wasn't even able to attend the ambassadorial training course that FSI sponsors because it did not exist in 1978. I did have eighteen years of Foreign Service experience, much of which was with other agencies, so that in some ways I was better prepared than many other ambassadorial appointees.

*Q: How were your confirmation hearings?*

ABRAMOWITZ: They went very smoothly, like most ambassadorial hearings. There were a couple of amusing stories surrounding the hearings. Vice-President Mondale had taken me with him when he visited South East Asia. He felt that the U.S. was not paying enough attention to the area, despite its many problems. We went to Thailand and as is customary, a formal dinner was given Mondale by the King. I was pretty tired by this time. It came time for Mondale to propose a toast and I could barely move – in fact, I might well have been dozing. The Thai official who sat next to me – who later became a good friend and foreign minister – physically lifted me to my feet and put a glass in my hand so that I could join the toast.

Mondale swore me as ambassador in a White House ceremony. During his comments, Mondale said: "I took Abramowitz to South East Asia. He was so very interested – like hell!", referring to my catnap in Bangkok. He knew what had happened and he took the swearing in occasion to comment at some length about my "attention span" and "my devotion."

I arrived in August 1978, in Bangkok, about a month after my confirmation. Of course, I had been working on Thai issues for five years and was familiar with most of them. I had much to learn about Thailand: the local politics, the country itself, etc. In general my break-in period went smoothly – much different from what I encountered later when I went to Turkey. Before leaving the U.S. I called on the senior Thai officials in the U.S. – the ambassador, the UN delegation, etc. I even gave a speech using the little Thai I had learned at a dinner given by the ambassador for me.

*Q: Were you surprised by anything you had to do as ambassador which was different from what you anticipated?*

ABRAMOWITZ: Not really. In some respects, the job was less intellectually challenging than

my ISA one or some of my other previous assignments. But it was challenging getting to understand where our hosts were coming from.

Our embassy in Thailand was among the largest in the world (700 or so American employees). We had a number of regional offices headquartered in Bangkok which although not requiring much attention, were nevertheless under my jurisdiction. We had a large CIA component. I liked the job immensely, largely because I became involved in one of the major refugee crises of our time. I also enjoyed being in Turkey, which became immensely challenging, particularly when the Gulf War began.

*Q: How did you decide what you expected from your DCM?*

ABRAMOWITZ: I had two DCM's in Bangkok: Dan O'Donohue who had been put in Bangkok by Habib before my arrival and who was with me for about six or seven months. He was enormously helpful. He was very smart, dedicated and honest. He could be a stickler. Dan was succeeded by Burt Levin, also very capable and had great personal skills. The two men were very different. I had asked that Burt be assigned to Bangkok, after Dan was transferred. He had wide experience and knew Thailand and the embassy quite well. He was also an excellent Chinese speaker. He had lots of knowledge that I didn't have and we were a good team. I put great trust in both men.

To some degree, I took care of external relations – with the government and other embassies – and the DCM worried about the management of the U.S. embassy. I emphasize “to some degree” because not all issues fall neatly in such compartmentalization. I always made an effort to get to know our staff – I used to walk to all the sections frequently – but in general, I left the management of the building to the DCMs. I think there was no question that because of my contacts, I was better informed about such issues as the Thai domestic politics than my deputies were. I have always operated with a “hands-on” philosophy; I liked to get information directly from the people who knew.

I remember one major management issue that fell in my lap soon after my arrival in Bangkok. The Department was going through one of its periodic “reduction in size of embassies” exercises. Bangkok was focused on, quite rightly because I thought it was too big. I mentioned the CIA component earlier; its scope had been reduced over a period of years but the size of the staff never reflected the decrease on work-load. The management of a reduction in force is difficult in the best of circumstances; it was difficult in Bangkok in light of the number of agencies that had representatives there as well as their staff sizes. I had a prolonged debate with the Agency about the size of its component; I mentioned earlier the obstinate position I took on one of the military attachés that made Admiral Weisner an opponent for the rest of my career. Reluctantly, I cut some of the AID staff. We made no cuts in the staffing of the group assisting refugees. The State contingent itself had to take some reductions. In any case, I spent a lot of time negotiating with the heads of the embassy sections and the other agencies. It is very hard to be responsive to a Washington directive of this sort, even if you agree with it, without engendering some hostility and hard feelings.

*Q: Talk a little about your relationships with Washington while ambassador to Thailand?*

ABRAMOWITZ: First of all, it should be noted that I went to a country with which I was somewhat familiar with. I also had the advantage of having had an opportunity to meet most of the senior Thai officials. In fact, the Thai prime minister had been my guest at a dinner. The assignment involved managing the continuing change in the relationship between the two countries, which stemmed in part from our withdrawal from Vietnam and in part from a Thai insurgency, and in part because Thailand was growing. I did not foresee a huge refugee problem. I was struck by the difficult situation in Cambodia, which was not news to me, but was escalating without much American attention.

I was also fortunate in my relationship with Washington because I knew well the leadership of State and Defense as well as the NSC. I knew CINCPAC quite well from my tour of duty there a few years earlier. It didn't hurt that some of my personal close friends were in senior positions dealing with EA matters – Holbrooke, Oakley, Negroponte, Armacost, Platt. Not only did we know each other well, but we had worked together for extended periods. Communications were easy. I spent a lot of time on the telephone. Sometimes it was just to pick up the latest news – “gossip” – but most of the time the discussion was on issues of immediate concern to me. Of course, we used the more formal method of communications – cables – when an issue was ripe for decision and detailed discussion was necessary. Telephone was far better for informal dialogues and for providing a better sense of the scene. I also found that in most cases, I would get prompter action as result of a telephone call than from a cable. I particularly used the phone to get action when time was not on our side. There is no question that having people whom you know and in whom you have confidence at the other end of a telephone call not only enhanced effectiveness but was extremely useful when a situation changed radically. That was true even in those rare cases where we had a serious difference of opinion.

I made it a habit to return to Washington at least every three months. This was primarily because I had issues, particularly those that related to the refugee problems in Thailand, that needed face-to-face dialogues to get expedited. I followed the same travel pattern when I was ambassador to Turkey. As a general principle, I think every ambassador who is dealing with complex issues, should return to Washington periodically. I am now referring to important and difficult issues which require continuing ambassadorial attention. In the late 1970's, Thailand was a “major” post; it may well have receded in importance now, but then, particularly in light of the refugee issues, and the fear of communist expansion, it was considered a very important country. Today the issues seem more of a commercial nature, more routine than what we faced at the end of the 1970's. It is a good way also to keep your problems high on the agenda of Washington agencies.

Both the phone calls and these periodic trips helped to short-cut the bureaucratic process. That process on important matters is a mixture of the formal and informal. If it were just a matter of writing a memo and sending it up the chain of command, not much would likely get done quickly. Informal efforts helped move the ball, even such issues of high importance. I was also in a fortunate situation because Holbrooke and a few others involved in EA issues were sufficiently influential that it was not necessary for me to communicate with the Secretary or the deputy secretary. I knew that if Dick got involved in an issue, I would get action from Washington. On the Pentagon side, my old boss was Harold Brown, then SecDef, whom I could contact if necessary. It was also true that during my Washington assignment, I had an opportunity to

become acquainted with Vice President Mondale, Jim Johnson, people on Mrs. Carter's staff, etc. Henry Owen, then an ambassador-at-large, was extremely helpful when the Cambodian crisis arose. This range of personal contacts were simply indispensable.

I also had that head start because of my acquaintance with senior South East Asia leadership. For example, I could talk straight forwardly to Lee Kuan Yew and deliver views in blunt terms. In my Bangkok assignment, I was reaping the fruits of previous incarnations. The proximity to power provides access, which then should develop an atmosphere of mutual confidence and trust which tends to grow over time. I could not replicate that situation today. All the leadership I knew is either dead or in retirement. When I travel to the area today, I often meet old friends whose influence has waned considerably, if not vanished completely.

I think in general it is fair to say that we in Bangkok established a solid relationship with Washington. We had their confidence. It was also important that the people in Washington who handled EA issues were influential in their own agencies and in the broad bureaucracy. That continued in the first six months I was there in the Reagan administration.

*Q: Let me ask an unfair question, which you may not be able to answer. Do you believe that the time senior officials in State spent on Thai issues because you brought them to their attention might have been used for higher priorities issues in other parts of the world?*

ABRAMOWITZ: The Secretary of State has problems raised with him from many quarters. There are times such as today, when one issue – today it is Iraq – drives most other matters off the Secretary's agenda or at least lowers them in priority. There is always a problem between the immediate and the important. When I went to Bangkok, I was surprised, as I mentioned earlier, by the fierce competition among Vietnam, China, and Thailand. We reported extensively on those tensions trying to portray as best we could the case each side was putting forth. The Khmer Rouge was behaving very badly on the Vietnam-Cambodia border. The Vietnamese became very upset which was not helped by China siding with Cambodia; the Thai to some degree also supported the Cambodians. These tensions became very acute after my arrival in Bangkok. It could be argued that we really didn't have "a dog in this fight," but we were at that point trying to normalize relationships with both China and Vietnam and our friend Thailand was deeply worried. Did senior officials need to know about it? Sure. There were many other important or more important issues. I did what I had to do.

The Thai position in South East Asia raised a number of policy issues for us. First of all, we didn't know how they would respond to the Vietnamese approaching their borders. I thought they would do nothing but I could not be sure. The prime minister warned me that if the Vietnamese crossed the border – or even came too close – there would be war. I don't think he meant this literally, but he probably made that comment to me to motivate us to take some action to prevent Vietnamese military movements. Secondly, we wanted to keep Thailand stable, internally so that the government could deal with the refugee problem without having to worry about its domestic position. Furthermore, we wanted stability so that the government could deal with a Vietnamese threat, although we did not see that as a likely scenario. We were concerned with the possibility of the Vietnamese taking action against some of the refugee camps. There were occasional shellings, which raised our level of anxiety, but nothing more happened. Our

ability to assist the refugees depended a great deal on Thailand internal stability which in part depended on the actions of its neighbors. That is one reason we were so insistent on the Vietnamese leaving Cambodia after their invasion.

We tried to assist Thailand in maintaining stability by increasing our assistance programs. We provided funds – mostly for food – to assist those Thais who might have been impacted by the refugee problem. We increased our military assistance program to give the Thai military greater confidence in its ability to defend their country. I spent a lot of time on this whole set of issues. I had long conversations with our governmental leaders about increasing, for example, the Thai tank fleet. I am not sure that they really needed them, but the Thai military thought they were essential; so I threw my full support behind their request for more general reasons.

Of greatest importance perhaps were our efforts to mobilize ASEAN support against the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and to encourage the nations in that grouping to take counter-measures to get the Vietnamese to return to their own territory. I had, I thought, a significant conversation on this issue with Lee Kwan Yew about two weeks after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia – he was visiting Bangkok. I made the point that leadership was lacking in the region and that it was time for ASEAN, at Lee Kwan Yew's urging, to step up, write their views, and take some vigorous action. I said that a regional approach was absolutely essential if stability in the area were to be maintained. There were a number of pressures on ASEAN, which did in fact motivate it to take a strong posture against Vietnam. Numerous ministerial meetings which the U.S. attended took place. Ultimately, these actions helped stimulate Cambodian resistance to the Vietnamese invasion, particularly in the border areas. The ASEAN reaction was also important because for the first time in my memory, it galvanized the regional grouping to act as one on a security issue, thereby setting the basis, hopefully, for future action.

The Vietnamese invasion spurred a closer U.S.-Thai relationship. We provided increased assistance – political, economic, military. We mobilized ASEAN to give the Thais regional support in its efforts to stabilize the region as well as massively assisting with refugees. It was certainly not a one-way street; we used their territory to house over a million people.

I think I should note here that the Thais intensely disliked and feared the Vietnamese. The Chinese also disliked the Vietnamese. So the obvious occurred; the Thais and the Chinese met – secretly – two weeks after the Vietnamese invasion. From that meeting, which we learned about from intelligence sources, came Chinese military assistance to the Khmer Rouge which flowed through Thailand. This program raised doubts in some minds. It also raised a moral conflict. I was personally opposed to any assistance to the Khmer Rouge, except for humanitarian aid to their dependents. The Khmer Rouge were murderers and butchers. For political and moral reasons it was unwise to give them any armed assistance, regardless of the purpose. I urged the Thais not to get involved in this Chinese program. Holbrooke took the same line. There had been no presidential directive on our position toward this program, but at least in State there was general agreement that the Thais should not assist the Khmer Rouge. I suggested to the prime minister that he stop the flow of arms to the Khmer Rouge. I had the opportunity to discuss this issue with Carter and Mondale making my case for opposing assistance to the Khmer Rouge. I thought we should be very careful about supporting them, regardless of what the Vietnamese were doing in Cambodia. This got kicked around a lot.

During 1979, the Thai prime minister and his delegation visited Washington. They had a meeting with Brzezinski who told the Thai to go ahead and support the Khmer Rouge. The Thais were receiving mixed messages and had to figure out whom to believe. I had no doubt whose advice they would follow. The Thais, regardless of what we said, were going to proceed with the arms supply program. They felt that participation was in their own self-interest. In the final analysis, I don't think that the Thais' involvement had any effect on our standing in the region – nor am I sure it was of much help to the Khmer Rouge. At the time, this issue was of great concern to all of us for another reason; we were preparing to assist the non-communist resistance in Cambodia, but not the Khmer Rouge. I had the first meeting with the leadership of the non-communist resistance; it didn't have any concrete results, but it was an important gesture of support on our part. When I left Thailand, the Vietnamese still had control of the border areas and soon thereafter we gave non military support to the non Khmer Rouge resistance and they got military aid from other countries.

Going back before war began, we had considerable arguments. First, would Vietnam invade Cambodia and second, what would China do under those circumstances? What impact would war have on other countries in the area, including Thailand, as well as regional groupings such as ASEAN? There was a major difference of views between the embassy and the CIA. The embassy believed that the Vietnamese would invade Cambodia. I don't believe that we predicted that the Vietnamese would march toward Thailand and occupy all of Cambodia. CIA was less sure. In either case, the U.S. had to be a bystander; there wasn't much we could do about the Vietnamese.

I discussed briefly the moral dilemma on aiding the Khmer Rouge. A second part was the interrelated one of the Cambodian issue in the UN – i.e., should the U.S. allow the Khmer Rouge regime to participate in the UN and thereby not sanctify the Vietnamese invasion. Real politik and morality collided here too. As these developments became a matter of interest to the American public. It may not have been as high on our foreign policy agenda as events in the Soviet Union or the Middle East but it attracted a lot of public interest. The Cambodia issue also brought South East Asia to the attention of the public, and it was not long after my arrival in Bangkok that Thailand also began to be seen once in a while on Page 1 of American newspapers. Thailand was pictured as a “front line” state in our battle with communism.

In Thailand and its neighbors, the instability in Indochina had serious consequences. Most important, there was an increasing flow of refugees across the border. The Cambodian war changed that situation dramatically. The refugee flow increased exponentially. Cambodia's agriculture production plummeted thereby making the situation in Cambodia even more dire than it had been. Compounding the humanitarian problem was an increasing flow of Vietnamese fleeing their country by boats and vast numbers of Lao and Hmong from Laos. The Chinese incursion into Vietnam just further aggravated the refugee problems with more people fleeing their homes in the hopes of finding safety in a nearby country. Although the U.S. was aware of a refugee problem in the late part of 1978, it became my major pre-occupation in 1979.

*Q: Did you spend considerable time while in Bangkok briefing reporters on Thai issues? Did you get good coverage?*

ABRAMOWITZ: I spent considerable time talking to reporters, almost anyone I would talk to about the refugee situation. As I mentioned before, our issues became front page material in the American press, particularly after the refugee crisis really began. Many reporters came from the U.S. just to look at refugee camps and to learn about the crisis. It was a veritable flood.

Not only did reporters seek information about the crises in South-east Asia, but so did members of Congress. I think that during my three years in Bangkok, we had about 300 senators and representatives visit Thailand. Most of them were focused on the refugee issue, a few on inspecting the military post office. President Carter paroled into the U.S. about 164,000 refugees during a two year period, part of an influx into the U.S. of some million and a half Indochinese. Carter's was an extraordinary action, one unparalleled in our history. The problem became so gripping that the embassy was the subject of a CBS special TV program. Secretary Vance called me and said that he had suggested that our embassy be the subject of a program that CBS was developing on what an embassy does day in and day out. He asked me whether I would be willing to be the subject of such a program. I, of course, readily agreed. Ours was a unique situation, but in general we received very extensive coverage by the American media. Ed Bradley spent time with us on the CBS special. I made it a practice to try to have any media visitor eat breakfast or lunch with me. In any case most of the reporters wanted to spend time with me. We were the "point" on the refugee problem.

Let me talk a little about the war itself. It had several aspects: first of all, the vast destruction that the fighting caused in Cambodia was largely responsible for the great exodus and a concomitant severe decline in agricultural production. That became a challenge for the world because we had to find ways to feed the Cambodians. Secondly, refugees were fleeing not only into Thailand, but also to Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries creating political tensions and accelerating calls for international action. Two international meetings were called to focus on the Indochinese refugee problem.

Then there was the challenge of how the U.S. and other interested countries would respond to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. This issue and the refugee problem were separate but obviously related; they both involved Thailand deeply and became central to the efforts of our mission.

The refugee problem started long before I reached Bangkok. But it was a trickle before the war. We were allowing some – not many – into the U.S. But over a period of time, there was a steady growth until we reached flood stage. After the war began refugees from all over Indochina and headed to Thailand. The first challenge was to make sure that the Thais would let them into their country. This was not a one time negotiation; the issue of "open" borders was a continuing and ever-present concern, which was constantly discussed with the Thai government.

Once the refugees were in Thailand, we had to come up with an assistance program for them. They could not be absorbed into the Thai community; there were just too many and how long they would stay was uncertain – something that truly disturbed the Thai. Few refugees were willing to return home – with the Khmer Rouge and a war going on. So these were seen as "permanent" re-settlers so to speak.

So we wanted Thailand to allow the refugees into their country and then assist in their support; two, we needed to feed the people who remained in Cambodia; and three, we wanted longer term actions to help stabilize the area. The embassy took the lead on all three issues. We pushed the Thais to let the refugees into their country and to provide some hospitality; we started a massive feeding program for the people living in western Cambodia, using Thailand as a base of operations; we were instrumental in starting a massive resettlement program, including opening our borders to more Indochinese refugees.

*Q: Why were we so interested in the refugee problem?*

ABRAMOWITZ: In part, I think we had some feeling of guilt stemming from dumping Vietnam and helping create a vast human tragedy. It was all apparent and could not be hidden like in North Korea. In part, it was also because the U.S. is a country of refugees and has usually been quite forthcoming in opening our borders to people in dire straits who have lost everything. The American people had plenty of first hand evidence from the media of the tragedy occurring in South-east Asia. We were interested in helping refugees also for political reasons – the stability of Thailand and the whole area. There were a lot of reasons for our involvement, but basically, our historical humanitarian instincts have often come to the rescue of people in deep trouble around the world. Jimmy Carter was also a dedicated humanitarian.

Moreover, it was clear that we would not return into Cambodia with any military or any other force to reverse the Khmer Rouge coup. A military response was simply politically impossible. But assisting refugees, particularly since we were part of the cause for the human tragedy, was.

When I arrived in Bangkok, we may have had 10-15 thousand refugees in country. The embassy had a refugee office and we were processing some applications for entrance into the U.S. Lionel Rosenblatt, who is one of the real heroes of this story, was relentless in trying to protect those refugees. But in 1978, the program was not large.

It became a massive program during my tour. The war created about 600-700 thousand Cambodian refugees. Then there was the outflow from Vietnam too, which probably ranged in the 200-300 or perhaps even more. There was the outflow from Laos of perhaps 200,000. During the period I was in Bangkok, I would estimate that approximately 1 million people of Indochina became refugees, and countless numbers were displaced in their own country. We conducted negotiations with all the countries involved; we tried to get the pertinent UN agencies more deeply involved; we organized or prodded others to hold international conferences on this human tragedy. We made sure that all relevant U.S. agencies were kept informed of events on the ground through our continual reporting; one huge stimulus was Mrs. Carter's trip to Thailand for a first hand view of the situation in November, 1979. We had asked for a visible major response from Washington and they decided that a visit by the First Lady would have a maximum impact. It was a difficult moment for Mrs. Carter because her trip started soon after the Iranian hostage crisis began and she was deeply worried. Her visit to Thailand was a transforming event, which helped immeasurably in making the U.S. and the world understand the depth of the crisis, and forcing attention to it and encouraging the world to respond. She was enormously helpful, there and subsequently.

We thought up many schemes to get food into Cambodia, including via air drops. We got full support from Washington. Henry Owen, then on the NSC staff, was a bulldozer and would call me frequently to see whether we needed anything. I could not have asked for better back-stopping from Washington. The international agencies unfortunately were not as forthcoming. We had major battles with some of them; they were slow on the draw and initially inadequate for the task. At one stage, I was going to have a press conference to denounce the UNHCR for its desultory behavior, but my staff talked me out of it. As far as I could tell, there were no policy impediments to more active UN participation; it was bureaucratic inertia. I would make one exception to this generalization: the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) was enormously energetic and helpful and the embassy built a good relationship with it.

Many, many NGO's also set up shop in Thailand, most of which were useful. The IRC (International Rescue Committee) created a Citizens' Commission on Indochinese refugees; it sponsored a march to the Cambodian border to highlight the refugees' plight; and sponsored trips to refugee camps by Joan Baez and Winston Churchill, Jr. So the plight was increasingly dramatized and that further heightened the world's concern for these refugees.

One of the many highlights of this story was the establishment of the first refugee camp under the management of the UNHCR at Sakeo. The first UNHCR camp leader was Mark Malloy Brown, who went on to much greater things. Unlike some of his colleagues he was a dynamo and only 26 or so. When the Khmer Rouge fled before the Vietnam attack we established a camp for the dependents of the Khmer Rouge, who were arriving in Thailand half starving, and in terrible shape. This was the camp that Mrs. Carter visited, the only one then around. She spent the day there and, as I said, helped transform the American view of the refugee problem. The visit itself was prepared in two or three days. I got a call on a Thursday, I think, telling me that Mrs. Carter wanted to come and visit refugees. She arrived in Thailand on Sunday, I think.

The Sakeo refugees were truly in terrible shape and thus aroused enormous sympathy. They had left their homes without anything and depended for survival on the bits that others gave them. They had few friends.

The NGOs represented many national and international efforts and were enormously helpful. This is the kind of challenge for which NGOs are created – large disasters requiring major assistance. One of the NGOs established a feeding station from which Cambodian farmers would come from as much as 50-60 miles to get seeds as well as some food. The embassy helped enlarge this project because it was obviously serving at least two good goals. Numerous other NGO activities could be cited. The embassy had an excellent, dedicated, staff working on refugee problems; it can be proud of its accomplishment. We had a large processing unit for those wanting to come to the U.S. and a sizeable refugee protection unit.

Lionel Rosenblatt, who led the refugee section was incredible, a real dynamo on this disaster. He would call me from a remote area to report that one refugee was being mistreated, or being pushed back; he wanted me to call the foreign minister immediately to correct the situation. Lionel devoted his life and soul to these refugees. He had that unique ability to care as much for one as for a thousand.

There were constant debates on the number of refugees that might be coming. We consistently tried to estimate that population, but the ever changing refugee flow made it hard. My attitude was to err on side of over-estimation both in providing basic goods and preparing for them in Thailand. If it didn't turn out to be so big, then we might have some surplus food; on the other hand, under-estimation could be a major human disaster.

I was pleased with the embassy performance. There may a few "snipers" who might have had some minor disagreements with our efforts, but I think by and large the embassy helped save a huge population. I was personally criticized for a number of things; for example, of undermining the new Vietnamese created Cambodian government because our assistance went directly to the refugees near the border, and not through the new Cambodian puppet government in Phnom Penh. Father Ted Hesburgh of Notre Dame denounced me for conducting a "covert" war using humanitarian means to undermine another government. The British press was led by John Pilcher, often negative, and saw our efforts as trying to re-fight the Vietnam War. I had on my staff an employee, who was accused of being the leader of a covert action under the guise of a humanitarian program. On the other hand, I received much more support, which drowned out the negative comments.

The refugee challenge for two years became the concern of all embassy sections. My wife spent a huge amount of time with refugees on the border and mobilizing the American community in Bangkok. She had good rapport with the NGOs, many of which were familiar to her through her work with the IRC. All of the embassy sections pitched in and it became the basic core of our effort. There was some criticism, particularly from the American business community, which felt that I was paying too much attention to the refugees and not enough to their problems. They felt that our other interests in Thailand were being neglected because of the refugee problem. I thought that I was giving the other issues adequate time, but obviously not as much as some people would have liked.

Many of our officers got personally involved trying to assist refugees. It was the only way our efforts could be successful. I felt some moral compulsion, but even more importantly it was clear that without the ambassador's personal imprimatur the efforts could not have been as successful as they had to be. There may have been other ways to organize our effort, but I chose one which called for much of my personal time and attention.

By the time I left the post, we had an effective refugee program. The refugee numbers had stabilized. There were always problems related to re-settlement, but the U.S. had taken major steps to ameliorate those. One of my major internal embassy problems was with INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), which was responsible for processing applicants for entrance into the U.S. INS was turning down large numbers of Khmer applicants. Under the parole program, applicants would be processed by INS in Bangkok and then if approved their papers were sent to Washington. INS was finding all sorts of reasons to turn down applicants. So one day, I went to the processing unit and spent the day processing some cases devoting my time mostly to those applicants who had been rejected by INS. The more I talked to these refugees, the more upset I became. I thought INS was way off base and rigid in their approach to determining who was a refugee and who was an economic migrant. I sent a cable to the State

Department and the Attorney General asking that the guidelines given INS processors be changed to allow for more flexibility. On my next trip to Washington, I had a meeting with the Attorney General, Smith; he was very helpful. I also had a meeting with the associate attorney general, Rudy Giuliani, who also was very concerned. He was actually the No.3 man in the Justice Department responsible for some of the more politically sensitive programs of that department. We got changes in the guidance to the INS field operators, which opened the doors for a greater number of approvals. The local INS representative was not pleased with my activities.

Fortunately, I had a great staff, totally committed to help the Indochinese refugees as best they can. Our political section was also a very good one, as later confirmed by the fact that almost that entire staff became ambassadors. The economic section was not quite on the same level, but it performed adequately.

When I left Thailand, the refugee problem was still large and much more had to be done. But I was satisfied that the embassy had made a big difference.

*Q: I am interested in your view that even after our withdrawal from Vietnam, we still had considerable influence in South-east Asia. Could you expand on that?*

ABRAMOWITZ: After conquering South Vietnam, Hanoi did not try to expand its influence beyond their borders, at least in the period following our withdrawal. The predictions of the “dominos falling” just didn’t happen; the Vietnamese did not try to spread their communism in the area except in support of the Thai communist insurgents. Secondly, we were in continual touch with the Chinese, who, as I said earlier, were quite wary of the Vietnamese. China also cut back on its support of insurgents. Third, the countries in the area adjusted well to the new situation – e.g., the Thais normalized relations with the Chinese, which have boomed ever since. At the same time, we drew closer to Thailand with the expansion of our assistance programs, new defense programs, and our massive resettlement efforts. We tried through our diplomatic efforts to make clear as best we could that our withdrawal from Vietnam did not signal a diminution of our interest in the region. Certainly our deep involvement in the refugee situation was a significant boost to our influence.

Perhaps the major reason we did not lose much influence in the area was that Southeast Asia countries did not notice much difference in the political situation in the region even after we left Vietnam. Both China and Vietnam were internally absorbed after Vietnam fell. They concluded that the United States was still a major power with resources and capabilities that were of interest to them. In fact, thanks to the Chinese-Vietnamese split, the Thais managed to get rid of their own communist insurgents. So what little did change that did occur was mostly positive for the Thais particularly. Moreover, the Vietnam legacy and tremendous American expenditures contributed to rapid growth in the whole area. The “gloom and doom” predictions about the consequences of our withdrawal from Vietnam were flatly wrong.

This is not to say that there were not occasions when a Thai official would mention our Vietnam experience. But by the time I arrived in Bangkok, three years had passed since our withdrawal. Although the Thais wanted our assistance especially against the Vietnamese incursions from

Cambodia, they were careful to maintain good relations with us and their neighbors, particularly China. We had a cozy relationship with the Thai military for many years, paying with military assistance. By the late 1970's that exchange was no longer adequate. We still had a good relationship, but a new foundation had to be developed. Both the Thais and we had moved on. We both had also normalized relations with China, the Thai much more quickly.

It is true that the Thais, when I reached Bangkok, were encouraging us to be more proactive in getting the Vietnamese out of the areas they had occupied close to their borders. We were focused on the refugee problem and the involvement of ASEAN in assisting the refugees, and most important for Thailand, reversing Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. They still viewed us as the power in the area and I guess the American ambassador continued to be seen by many Thais as the man who pulled the levers behind the scenes. This perception was facilitated in part to the uneasiness of the Thai Foreign Ministry in the late 1970's until some major personnel changes occurred.

In 1992, Peter Tarnoff, Dick Holbrooke, and I visited Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. We engaged senior officials on the question of the Khmer Rouge and what might be done about getting rid of them. I was rather strident on it. One senior Thai Foreign Ministry official turned to me and said: "Mort, things have changed in this region. There are no more American pro-consuls here." He was right; life had changed since my days in Thailand and the countries of the region were far more independent than they had been in my days. The relationship between Thailand and the U.S. has moved far beyond the 1960's and 1970's and even the 1990's. That is all to the good.

*Q: You mentioned that Mrs. Carter came to Thailand . Did you have a lot of visitors who wanted to see the refugee camps?*

ABRAMOWITZ: As I mentioned earlier, I think we hosted about 300 members of Congress during the three years I was ambassador. The refugee situation attracted wide Congressional attention and involvement. It was a big deal – the starving Cambodians, the Vietnamese boat people, the Lao Hmong who were our allies, etc. It was also a fertile area for some good media reporting. All this helped produce wide support in Congress and among the American population in general for the Indochina refugee program.

I rarely met a member of Congress who did not strongly support American efforts. We received adequate financial support for our refugee assistance and re-settlement programs. President Carter's opening the doors to the U.S. for 164,000 refugees for two years – a total of 328,000 was un-precedent and it is still a high-water mark in our refugee admission programs. He didn't have any major opposition in Congress for the unique program.

Our earliest visitors were Senators Danforth, Baucus and Sasser. We took them to the border and let them see the concentration of Cambodians. We showed them where we wanted to provide assistance. They returned to Washington and became real advocates for our requests. I remember Danforth saying to me that, besides his marriage, his efforts in behalf of Indochinese refugees was the most important thing he had done in his public life. As an ordained minister, he was overwhelmed by the desperation of the humans huddled together in camps on the Thai border.

In fact the outpouring of pro-refugee sentiment attracted many visitors to Thailand. I became sort of a tour guide for American officials and private citizens. If it was a small group, they stayed in my guest house; the larger groups had to stay in hotels. But I went with most of them to the border; I always briefed them on the Thai situation. I spent a lot of time with visitors. When I would return to Washington, I would call on some of them, particularly those who were so helpful to us. One of those was Congressman Steve Solarz, who remained actively involved. Another was Senator Barbara Mikulski. And there were numerous others. I appreciated all of the help we got.

I mentioned earlier that CBS wanted to film a special report on what an American embassy did day in and day out. Secretary Vance decided that the embassy in Bangkok would be a fine example. Ed Bradley and his crew spent about two weeks with us. They went to the border and held interviews with the refugees and the NGOs working there. The show was televised on a Saturday night at 10:00 p.m. – not a time to attract many viewers regardless of the subject. It did not get high ratings, although I was told that it was still seen by some 4 million people.

There is one other story about my tour that maybe of interest. After the election of Ronald Reagan, I was invited to participate in a conference in Ditchley, England in November 1980. On the way there, my wife and I stopped in Athens to see Bob McCloskey, then our ambassador to Greece. We stayed with him. The day after we arrived – or two days – Sheppie and I walked to buy a copy of The Harald Tribune (European edition). On the front page, there was a big headline: “Two envoys to be removed by new administration.” The story was that Bill Gleysteen, then in Korea, and I were targeted for replacement. The information apparently came from Ray Cline who allegedly was representing the incoming administration on East Asia and had given an interview while in Singapore. He may also have visited Bangkok before giving the interview, but I am not certain about that. Needless to say, The Herald Tribune story came as a bolt out of the blue, particularly since, as I have mentioned, I had recommended Ray to Elliot Richardson when he was looking for an INR director. It brought back all the trouble I had over the Korean troop withdrawal.

*Q: Let me ask you about the internal Thai political situation. Was the country politically stable during your tour?*

ABRAMOWITZ: Thailand had had a communist insurgency for a number of years, but by the time I arrived it was fading – I might even say that it had faded. The Vietnam War was over which was a major factor, because there had always been a debate whether the insurgency in Thailand was a purely domestic affair or whether the Vietnamese or the Chinese had inspired it. Moreover Sino-Vietnamese tensions erupted. Whatever the origins, the support of either of these two countries became minimal by 1978. By 1980, the Thai communist insurgency was over.

Thailand did have a problem with its Muslim population. It was not a major issue then, but more like a thorn in the side. There was a small liberation movement, in the three southern provinces getting some support from Malaysia. There was an occasional murder and infrequent violence. At that point the Thai considered it more a nuisance than a real problem. It should have been viewed as a portent of a more powerful movement if the situation in the late 1970s and 1980s

were not dealt with adequately. Today, the Muslim independence movement is a very serious challenge with thousands of lives lost. During my tour, the Muslims were seen by the Thai as a matter to be monitored but not of great concern. I discussed the issue with the Thai government occasionally to encourage it to take steps to minimize the Muslims' unrest. I visited the area both to show our interest in the issue to deal with the question of Thai attacks on fleeing Vietnamese boat people, but we never took any action. The Thais unfortunately did neglect the rising tide of anger, which now has turned into almost a tidal wave. The Thais were very shortsighted on this issue and still don't know how to deal with this insurgency.

As for the political situation, I arrived soon after a coup had taken place. A military-led government had taken power. Eventually, there were elections and a new constitution was written. The prime minister when I arrived was General Kriangsak. He tried to run a government, while finding ways to satisfy the various competing factions in the military as well as pleasing the palace. There was no question that the military ran the government despite some gestures toward democracy, such as civilizing the prime minister. It was still a civilian government dominated by the military. The constitution was written to assure that the military had a major say over policy, for example, a certain number of seats in the parliament was reserved for military officers. The King was a major player, behind the curtains; he provided a calming conservative view. He tried to insure that there would be no violence among the military. Stability was his principal concern.

The push for "democracy" was not central to U.S. foreign policy as today. I did a small amount of preaching with a variety of Thais and occasionally the prime minister. I think it is fair to say that despite the military-run government, the Thais were inching their way to a more open society. The government did focus on important issues such as economic development, agricultural improvement, etc. They had a long way to go, but they were starting to move in the right direction and the country was beginning to take off. The regime was not oppressive; it lacked a process which would allow the voice of the people to be heard by the policy makers. The newspapers were fairly free; there were elections; there was a constitution. I would describe it as a relaxed, somewhat authoritarian government. There had been so many coups in Thailand. While we opposed the military did what they wanted. We were concerned in minimizing violence and in being able to continue to provide refugee assistance to Thailand. Like many others, we were also interested in maintaining a stable South East Asia, urging regional cooperation primarily through ASEAN. As I said before, the biggest boost for an expanded ASEAN regional role was the Cambodian war.

The U.S. government wanted to see more democratic development but it was not a major concern because 1) there had been a war in a neighboring country and 2) the region was still not stable particularly when the refugee flow became a flood, nor was Thailand a totalitarian country. The region needed a stable Thailand, sympathetic to the plight of the Indochinese refugees and willing to assist in a humanitarian effort.

Many Thai officers had been trained in the United States or by Americans in Thailand. One of the interesting aspects of Thailand is the quality of its civilian government officials. Half of them had PhDs from American universities; they had a higher level of competence in some areas than would be found in many other governments including ours. The extent of the influence of

American education was the presence of some 200,000 graduates of U.S. higher education facilities in the Thai work force in the late 1970's. Thailand placed a priority on higher level education. For a child to go to the U.S. to attend universities and colleges was the goal of every Thai parent. Our long relationship with the Thai military fit their need. The U.S. trained them, we were there when needed, they joined us in Vietnam. A close relationship developed between the two military institutions, which was slightly damaged by our withdrawal from Vietnam and our subsequent relinquishment of almost all of our bases in Thailand. But none of our actions in South East Asia had changed fundamentally the military-to-military relationship in my time.

Let me finish my discussion about our relationships with the Thai military during my time there. They wanted us for three reasons: 1) to provide insurance for Thai independence; 2) to provide American military equipment; and 3) to preserve ties between members of our two military forces, forged during training in the U.S. as well by service by U.S. officers in Thailand. Our relationships with the Thai military were thus close, but so close that we could be and were charged with interfering in Thai politics.

There were close ties between the military and the king. Mrs. Carter came to Thailand to emphasize our concern for Indochinese refugees. The prime minister assigned the Army's commander-in-chief to be her escort while she was in Thailand. We visited several camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. Mrs. Carter stopped periodically to talk to the refugees. The general became quite nervous because the most important assignment to him was to insure that Mrs. Carter not be late for her appointment with the King. That was all he cared about. He kept urging me: "We got to move! We got to move!" Mrs. Carter was most interested in getting a feel for the situation and the condition of the refugees. I use this vignette just to make the point that the commander-in-chief of the Army, as well as most of his colleagues and staff were devote royalists. The King is, of course, highly revered in the country.

*Q: Tell us a little about our military assistance program to Thailand and the challenges it created for you?*

ABRAMOWITZ: The Thai military focused on one issue after the Vietnamese approached the border of Thailand. They constantly stated their fear of a Vietnamese invasion. The Thai prime minister asked me to come to see him early on and to convey to Washington how seriously the Thai viewed the situation; he said if the Vietnamese forces continued moving towards the border, the Thais would invade Cambodia. I was skeptical about that threat; I don't know that the Thais had an adequate force ready for such an undertaking, but I warned Washington of the prime minister's threat. I tried to calm the Thais down lest they proceed with actions for which they might be severely hurt. The Vietnamese continued to occasionally bomb some refugee groups but stopped their advance toward Thailand. An invasion of Thailand was not on the Vietnamese agenda. I understood the Thais' concerns and might have had the same attitude if I had been in their situation, but objectively, I could not envisage a Vietnamese invasion of Thailand.

In part to bolster Thais military confidence and to assure continued unfettered U.S. access to the border and refugee areas, I was always trying to find ways to increase our military assistance program. General Prem, the commander in chief of the Army, was determined to get more tanks for his soldiers. I was willing to go along as long as our requirements were met and General

Prem was key. I made a major effort to get these tanks. After a couple of months of nothing, I finally sent a cable to Mike Armacost, who was in the Pentagon in my old job. I told Mike that I had an appointment with the General to discuss a variety of matters, but that I knew that the first question he would have would be the status of his request for tanks. I asked Mike what I should say. Do I stick to our usual line that they “were on their way”, or do I tell him the truth. I ended the message by insisting that they be shipped immediately. The message was a little sterner than what I have described here, but in any event, it produced results and I could tell the General truthfully that the tanks were to be loaded on a ship and sent on their way.

Getting “surplus” hardware from the American military was almost always a struggle. The tanks that the Thais wanted were not surplus and came directly out of our inventory. The army was unhappy. I ran into a similar situation when I was involved in the issue of sending “Stingers” to the Afghan mujahideen in 1986-87. Our military objected because the transfer of these weapons to the Afghan would reduce our stock of “Stingers” below the numbers determined to be needed for our own defensive purposes. That issue created a major policy dispute which was resolved by Fred Iklé’s intervention at DoD. In the late 1970’s, the military had established a level of tank requirements which it was reluctant to diminish.

The tanks did arrive in two or three shipments. Every time one of the shipments was unloaded, we held a public celebration. We may have in fact held ceremonies both at dock-side and when they were officially turned over to the Thais. We milked the public relations potential of these shipments until the milk ran dry.

I frequently asked for military hardware. We had a small MAAG unit which was helpful in getting the hardware. I must say that I felt several times that I was not clear what the MAAG – and the CIA – were up to. AID was no problem in this respect; I knew their program well and it was totally transparent. The economic assistance program was small; I tried to get it increased partly because the king would on occasions ask for help for his agricultural activities. I viewed our economic assistance program not as a major force in the Thai economic development, but as a stimulant for some specific economic efforts which I felt were useful for the country. The total economic assistance program was just not large enough to be a major factor, about \$25 million. I don’t think we could have made a good case for a sizeable increase.

Both economic and military assistance were for me at this time essentially functional tools for other purposes. The Thai military initially had a perception problem; they saw threats that were not evident to me or to most outside observers. They did have a legitimate concern about the Vietnamese massed on their borders; that could be viewed as a threat. The economic assistance program in certain regions allowed us to have some impact on economic development of that region. But I also viewed it more as a tool to influence Thai actions on other matters of real concern to the U.S.

The aid programs helped achieve some broad policy goals. Both programs had inherent merits, but they were important but not essential for either Thai military or economic development; they were important to us reaching our objectives.

I should mention that my relationship with the CIA station chief and headquarters ultimately

came back to haunt me. But that happened after I left Thailand. Dan Arnold was the station chief in Bangkok. I accepted his appointment even though I had been advised by Dick Sneider to shun him. Sneider, for whom Arnold had worked in Korea, had had a lot of trouble with Arnold. I really didn't know Arnold and despite his reputation, I decided to accept his assignment because I don't like to reject people I don't know personally. I thought Arnold did a decent job in Thailand; we seemed to work well together and he consulted with me frequently. I thought I knew what the station was involved in, but I could never be sure; there may well have been some activities in Cambodia with the Khmer Rouge about which I was never informed. As Arnold was due for reassignment, he asked for my assistance; his reputation in Washington was poor and he was concerned about his next job. I did try to help him, but he did not get the job at headquarters that he wanted. After his departure from post, I read in an intelligence report that Arnold was returning to Bangkok to be an advisor to the Thai government on intelligence matters. That blew my mind; I thought it was outrageous, not to mention very risky for our own intelligence efforts. As it turned out, the Arnold role was greatly overstated in the intelligence report. He did come to see me to describe his duties. Nevertheless, I was quite negative about the whole situation and said so in plain English. My attitude probably poisoned our relationship.

I returned to Washington about a month after a military coup in Thailand. I might parenthetically add that the embassy handled that coup well. I had left Bangkok for Hong Kong and returned immediately. Some military officers tried to overthrow Prime Minister Prem. In a quiet way we helped the Prem government and the coup was quickly resolved. Since as happens periodically officers were unhappy about their promotions, etc, it was not a difficult matter to resolve. General Prem returned to power and most of the rancor dissipated, at least overtly.

I have an amusing story on this coup. The general leading the coup had returned from Burma and was pardoned. I was at a party and talked to the supreme commander, General Saiyut and the Korean military attache. I asked the attaché, with some malice, whether the Korean military, under similar circumstances, would allow a coup leader to return to Korea a free man. The answer was direct: we would hang him if he returned. I then asked General Saiyut what his views were of the Korean approach. He smiled and said, "Mort, It doesn't snow in Thailand." I used that phrase as a heading for a piece for Newsweek magazine on another coup in Thailand in 1992.

Let me go back to the Arnold story. When I returned from Thailand, I thought I had a pretty good reputation as someone who could handle crises. But I knew that the conservatives in Washington were after my scalp, primarily stimulated by Arnold and another one of my detractors; Dick Stillwell, who, as I mentioned, thought I was responsible for the Carter decision to withdraw our troops from Korea and who also mistrusted me because I had worked for Admiral Gayler, whom he detested. When I returned in 1981, six months after the new administration had taken power, I did not know what my next assignment might be. Dick Kennedy, then the Undersecretary of State for Management, told me that Secretary Haig wanted me to be his Assistant Secretary for East Asia. I readily agreed; it was a job I really wanted. I had met Haig briefly at a chief of mission conference, which was in part devoted to griping about the "Troika" (Meese, Deaver and Baker) who were interfering in foreign affairs. I had also known Haig slightly when I was working for Richardson and he was at the NSC as Kissinger's main aide.

I warned Kennedy that my nomination might be an uphill battle because there were some people in town who were after my scalp. He told me not to worry; the Secretary wanted me. I thought that in light of my previous connections with Haig, brief as they may been, we would get along fine and I could serve him well. I also asked Kennedy whether Holdridge, the then assistant secretary, had been informed. The answer was: “No.” John was a good friend and I thought that he should know what was being discussed. So I told John about my conversation with Kennedy; he was shocked. In any case, about two weeks later, Kennedy called me to tell me that there was opposition to my nomination and that the Secretary had decided not to move forward with it. I would be offered another job. I wasn’t surprised by that turn of events; I knew there was considerable animus against the nomination in some parts of the new administration.

I was then offered the ambassadorship to the Philippines, while Mike Armacost was chosen for Indonesia. A few weeks later, I was told that some high level people at Defense objected to my assignment to Manila. DoD of course had a deep interest in the Philippine job because of its major base structure in that country. The main objector was the undersecretary for political affairs in DoD – namely Dick Stillwell. So someone came up with the bright idea of just switching Mike and me for the two jobs. Bill Clark, Haig’s deputy secretary, called me to tell me about this new development. I was still upset with the whole business. I thought the way they treated me was a disgrace and that view lingers still.

So I went off to study Indonesian for two months. Ed Masters, our ambassador in Djakarta, was instructed to tell – informally – the Indonesians of my appointment. My name was not unfamiliar to the Indonesians. My work in Thailand and the area in general, including my tour in CINCPAC and in the Pentagon, had given me an acquaintance with many senior officials. I had worked with the Indonesians on a number of projects for them, especially after Vietnam fell. The Indonesians were quite wary of the Vietnamese, seeing them as a threat to their own security, which we tried to ease to some extent with some increase in military assistance.

Masters carried out his instructions, but later reported that the feedback he had gotten from the Indonesians was primarily negative. Suharto didn’t want me. I could not understand that. After that news from Djakarta, I was ready to call it quits. One close Indonesian friend, Benny Murdani, the head of Indonesian intelligence and at that time, probably carried more influence with Suharto than any other Indonesian official, told me not to be overly concerned and that he would change the president’s mind. I never heard from him, but after two months or so the Department went ahead and asked for *agrément*. There was no answer to that either. I finally told Haig’s office that I just couldn’t hang around the Department without an assignment. So Haig called the Indonesian Foreign Minister, who told him “the well had been poisoned.”

We finally found out what the block was. Suharto had been given a memorandum drafted by Ed Meese on White House stationery, which I subsequently saw courtesy of Jack Anderson. The Indonesians confirmed to me that such a letter had been delivered to Suharto. The memo was in essence an objection to my appointment as ambassador – or perhaps any job in the Reagan administration. The old chestnut of my urging withdrawal from Korea was included; it also mentioned that Sheppie had worked for a democrat, Ed Muskie, and held me responsible for a long list of other iniquities. That memo had been given to Suharto, allegedly by someone who

had his eyes on the ambassadorship to Indonesia. Obviously, the memo gave Suharto much pause; why should he accept an ambassador when it appeared the White House had so many doubts about him. Suharto did not know me. He was relying entirely on members of our government. I certainly understood Suharto's negative reaction.

I learned about all of this after the *agrément* had been withdrawn and the Department sought a new assignment for me. It was clear to me that I was the victim of a backroom conspiracy that succeeded. I learned later that the man who gave Suharto the letter was subsequently proposed as ambassador to Indonesia. The Foreign Service, led by Marshall Green, rose in indignation, partly because he was not a Foreign Service officer, but more importantly because he had served in Indonesia in the CIA, was a big friend of the president, and took care of his son while he was in the U.S. Marshall was well aware of the man's activities in Indonesia and thought the appointment was a serious mistake. In any case, the Arnolds and Stillwells of this world did me in and blocked my assignment to Indonesia. As I said earlier, I learned much about this from Jack Anderson; he just sent me the memo after telling me on the phone that he had something which might interest me. I didn't know Anderson, so I never filled out the whole story for him. When he called me about the memo, it was the first time I had ever talked to him.

I should note that these travails took about six months. I returned from Thailand in August 1981. I was supposed to be in EA till February 1982. Soon after that, I received the copy of the memo from Anderson. So I was in limbo for that whole period, not a happy time.

In light of all this, I went to Rand for six months to do some writing. After the mess that had been created in those six months, the Department was simply ready to let me do anything I wanted. I was still considering retirement from the Foreign Service. I may have discussed my situation with Haig once or twice; Walt Stoessel, the then deputy secretary, was no help. Nor were other Seventh floor principals. The sole exception was Bill Clark, Stoessel's predecessor. He apparently did try to find a suitable post. I think Haig was embarrassed by the whole sequence of mishandled actions. I found the Seventh floor lack of support disappointing. I was also frustrated by their subsequent description of events; they distorted what had happened. I had become something of a pariah. Having made some real contribution in Bangkok and then offered a variety of jobs which never materialized, left me amazed.

I read a lot in Rand's Washington office and wrote a couple of papers. One was on Cambodia which after having read, I decided not to publish it. I didn't believe that it added much to the already known situation in Cambodia and its neighbors.

I used the time at Rand to begin conversations with various people about jobs in private industry. A couple of oil companies approached me, but nothing concrete was ever settled. It was a very unproductive year between the time I left Thailand and my next assignment. The period at Rand let me look at my situation from a more dispassionate point of view.

At about this time, something else happened which made me even more disappointed with the Department. I was asked by an office in the Department to give a speech as part of a USIA program, but then subsequently informed that the agency had in effect "blacklisted" me. I was on a list of people who should not be part of any USIA sponsored program in a foreign country. I, a

senior State Department official, was not to represent the U.S. government in any way or shape. Scott Thompson, the deputy director of USIA and a friend, told me all this. It apparently all went back to the Meese memo. From being considered for assistant secretary to being unemployed – and unemployable – was quite a plunge. Fortunately, I still got paid.

Soon after Shultz became Secretary of State in mid-1982, he asked me to come to his office. I assumed that some people in whom he had confidence had suggested that he talk to me. I didn't know Shultz at all. We talked about China mainly; the meeting took about 45 minutes during which he listened carefully and made a few comments; there was never any discussion about another assignment. In this period our relationship with China was still rocky. Although I had not published anything recently on China, I had continued to follow events closely.

Sometime in this period, I talked to a number of people about China, including Paul Wolfowitz, then in DoD. I think Paul may have talked to Shultz about me. However there seemed to be very little movement in trying to find a job for me. Rick Burt, the assistant secretary for EUR, called me to tell me that he would like to nominate me to be our ambassador to Spain. That sounded pretty good to me at the time, even though I knew precious little about Spain.

Then, in a complete surprise to a lot of people, the administration fired all the leadership of our arms control efforts, the chief U.S. delegation to the START talks, the head of ACDA, and the chief of the delegation to MBFR. In one fell swoop, all the leading figures on arms control were eliminated. Ken Adelman became the head of ACDA. Max Kampelman became the chief of our START delegation. Before all this was announced, Shultz called me and asked me to head up our delegation to the MBFR negotiations.

I told the Secretary that I thought I was under consideration for the ambassadorship to Spain. He said that Spain was no longer available. That left me little choice and I told Shultz that I needed to talk to my wife first. I said I would call him the next day. The choice was really MBFR or retirement. In truth, I knew a little about MBFR – from my days in the Pentagon when the negotiations began – and furthermore, I never much liked long drawn out multi-lateral negotiations. Sheppie urged me to accept the Secretary's offer and after further reflection I accepted the assignment. I also discussed the offer with some friends. I knew that the talks had become a ritualistic exercise and the possibility of reaching some acceptable agreement was remote. Everybody encouraged me to take it.

*Q: Any idea how the Secretary came to his decision?*

ABRAMOWITZ: I didn't know, probably that I was available and had, except in the White House, a pretty decent reputation. I am sure there were people around him urging him to give me another ambassadorial assignment. I also suspect that MBFR did not rank very high on the Seventh Floor agenda. There was very little movement in the negotiations, but increased enormously the Department's paper flow. Our delegation sent volumes of cables back to Washington. I can't say that I looked at the assignment with relish. In fact, later when I was the head of INR, I issued instructions to my staff assistants that I wanted to see important material on all subjects except: MBFR and Cyprus. Ironically, I subsequently became ambassador to Turkey where I had to become quite familiar with the Cyprus problem, which has also produced endless

reams of paper.

I guess I viewed the MBFR offer as the last opportunity to stay in the Foreign Service, which I had until then enjoyed, and I decided to accept the appointment. Had Sheppie advised against it, I probably would not have taken the job. So in 1983, I became the head of the U.S. delegation to the MBFR with the rank of ambassador. In retrospect, I am glad I stayed in the Service, although I quit after a year.

**TIMOTHY MICHAEL CARNEY**

**Consul  
Udorn (1978-1979)**

**Political Officer  
Bangkok (1979-1983)**

*Ambassador Timothy Michael Carney was born in Missouri in 1944 and graduated from MIT in 1966. Carney studied abroad in France for a year before joining the Foreign Service. In the Foreign Service Carney served abroad in Vietnam, Lesotho, Cambodia, Thailand, South Africa, Sudan, Indonesia, and as ambassador to Sudan and Haiti. Ambassador Carney also spent time working with the Cox Foundation, USUN and the NSC. Carney was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: You were doing this work in the EA bureau from '76 to when?*

CARNEY: 1978. Then I started to learn Thai and went to Udorn. In late '78, I arrived in Udorn. That meant until about January '78 I was in the EA/VLC. It was January of '78 that I went to Thai language training.

*Q: You covered what?*

CARNEY: Basically the most important thing we covered was the potential opening of relations with Vietnam. Jimmy Carter announced as a policy that the U.S. should have diplomatic relations with every country. One of the early efforts was a meeting between Dick Holbrooke and a senior Vietnamese negotiator, maybe Xuan Thuy, in Paris in March, April, or May of 1977 in an effort... I can remember going with Dick to the Vietnamese embassy, which of course was shuttered, photographing the whole place so that we would have a little archive to be able to present to the Vietnamese side if we got that far, but we didn't. The first thing the Vietnamese insisted on was \$3.25 billion. This was the promise that Richard Nixon had made as part of the first set of Paris talks which everybody in the United States decided had been grossly overtaken by the events of the Vietnamese communist victory in 1975. Raising that amount was a signal error by Hanoi and it delayed establishing relations until 6 years ago.

*Q: Before you went there, you were dealing with Vietnamese affairs. Were you picking up this as*

*going to be a major theme? Or was this something that sort of popped up at you?*

CARNEY: In what sense?

*Q: When you go with Dick Holbrooke, you had already been on the desk for a while, 6 months, in looking through it, had this \$3.25 billion-*

CARNEY: It came out of the blue. I was not at the time anything close to being a specialist on thinking in Hanoi, although I acquired a little bit of specialization when I subsequently was posted to Bangkok. I really didn't think... I did not study Vietnamese before I went to Saigon for my first post back in '67. I was amazed that they actually seriously raised the \$3.25... It seemed to be serious on their part. It wasn't just a tactic.

*Q: It sounds like, "Okay, we'll get that, but you've got to give us this."*

CARNEY: Exactly. It really seemed to be serious.

*Q: How did we react?*

CARNEY: There was instant congressional action. It might even have been an amendment to legislation that we would not pay it.

*Q: But at the negotiating table-*

CARNEY: I was in Washington. Jim Rosenthal was with Dick in Paris. There were a number of meetings and they just simply couldn't move the Vietnamese. Let me recall where the Woodcock Commission fit in this. The related significant development was Leonard Woodcock's leading a commission to Vietnam. He also tried to visit Cambodia. In Beijing, the Cambodians returned unopened the U.S. request for-

*Q: Who were the Cambodians?*

CARNEY: It was the Khmer Rouge at this point.

*Q: I don't imagine that you felt much was going to happen.*

CARNEY: No. In fact, I can recall I was called down to make a few comments on Cambodia as the Woodcock Commission was getting underway. I simply don't have any dates for you. I think it was before the talks in Paris. It was that commission which essentially opened the prospects for talks up. They asked me about Cambodia. I said, "They're not going to welcome you. They're not even going to respond to you." It was clear... I was enough of a specialist on Cambodia that I knew that the Khmer Rouge were simply not having anything to do with anybody except the Chinese at that point. The decision was nevertheless to push and try to open a channel with the Cambodians as well.

*Q: You had Cambodia, too?*

CARNEY: I was the Cambodia desk officer, but I was a de facto deputy in the office. I did a lot of the drafting of the papers. You know how little it takes to chuff junior officers. The action memo came back and had comments by President Carter on it. Always nice to know the President's reading your stuff.

*Q: What were we getting... Were we getting pretty good reports of what was happening in Cambodia?*

CARNEY: No, we weren't. When I got back to Washington in '75, I had been in Bangkok after the fall of Cambodia in April 1975, and I had had a chance to interview some people who had made it out the following week. So, we already knew that the evacuation of the cities was planned. This fellow gave me an actual form that he had had to fill out from the Exodus Reception Committee. He was clever enough to move all the way north. I had also talked to a couple of other people who had made their way out. The station in Bangkok was getting some reporting as well. All their networks were topsy turvy, if not destroyed, in the Khmer Rouge emptying of the cities and the effective end of international communication and travel within and to Cambodia. The CIA was just gearing up. They had very few Cambodian speakers and were probably relying on the Thais for what was actually happening in Cambodia.

While I was at Cornell before joining the desk, I had produced a monograph of just under 100 pages which was an identification of the people running Cambodia as the Communist Party of Kampuchea. I traced what I was able to dig out of its history back to the 1951 founding by the Vietnamese as the Cambodian People's Revolutionary Party. Then I had gotten copies of one or 2 party youth magazines and one or 2 party magazines that I translated at Cornell to produce the monograph. But the key sources were 2 reports by the teachers who had rallied to the government in 1973 after spending about 9 months in the bush with the Khmer Rouge. They were appalled that there was a communist party. So we had a pretty good idea of how bad things were. On the Hill, I backstopped Dick Holbrooke and the fellow who was going to replace me, Charlie Twining, who was then the Indochina watcher at the U.S. embassy in Bangkok. They appeared before the House on what had been going on in Cambodia in '77 and it took a year to get those talks underway.

*Q: Was the full horror of this coming out?*

CARNEY: Not until '77. The press had begun to pick up in mid-late '76 but you still got this argument from American academics. A 1975 book praised the Khmer Rouge for taking the people to the food, arguing that you couldn't get food to the people. It was the most desperate nonsense by academics D. Gareth Porter and George Hildebrand, neither one of whose reputations has survived intact as a result of that absurdity.

*Q: Having gone to Cornell in the belly of the beast...*

CARNEY: Their side had won.

*Q: Were you seeing a series of apologetics coming out?*

CARNEY: By '77, people who had any intellectual integrity at all – and I can name one of them: Dr. Stephen Heder, who is now at SOAS in London, who was in Cambodia from '73 on, evacuated, went back to Cornell, had enough of an inquiring mind and good sense that while he didn't rule out that something was going on there that was bad, he was nevertheless, at least in the first year or so, more willing to give the Khmer Rouge the benefit of the doubt. He subsequently, when he himself had a chance to talk to Cambodian refugees and ultimately got an INR contract to do so – I was the managing officer for the contract – changed. But, he didn't go 180 degrees to favor the Vietnamese as some of the Australian academics did; for example, Ben Kiernan, now at Yale which has had the bad judgment to give him tenure as a professor. Ben flipped 180 degrees because he was totally a socialist. If one set of leftists weren't any good; to wit the Khmer Rouge, then he flocked to the other set; to wit the Vietnamese. It was just the most bizarre sort of thing.

*Q: I find it very hard to gain a great deal of respect for so much of the academic community because it's playing with concepts. When you start doing that without the real grounding of how things are done in the field... There are a lot more grays, patterns don't work, models don't work.*

CARNEY: Yes. You wind up compressing and skewing and filing the facts to fit your model.

*Q: I would think this whole Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia directorate... I would think there would be a real problem. These places, except for Laos, you couldn't get to.*

CARNEY: Yes. Laos, of course, had its own problem because there was a communist government that took over there. The king of Laos was effectively in reeducation. He died there. The Thais had the interest in Laos and certainly didn't want the Vietnamese to continue to hold the whip hand there. I visited Laos in '76 after I did Cornell. I went up to Vientiane, actually had lunch with one of the Soviet diplomats, the fellow whom I described in our previous chat as having located a Cambodian-French dictionary from the '30s when we met in Phnom Penh. He didn't hold much stock in the Lao as effective managers, much less as communists.

*Q: I take it Laos had almost disappeared from everything since the takeover practically.*

CARNEY: Well, it's still one of the few communist governments left in the world, but it's responded to the U.S. concerns on prisoners of war and missing in action. There is now a bridge the Australians built across the Mekong from Thailand. The last ambassador there was Wendy Chamberlain. She is now back here as well, having left Pakistan because she couldn't have her kids with her.

The only thing I can remember from that period on the desk was the Woodcock Commission, negotiations with Vietnam that didn't go anywhere, and the beginning of interest in the public at large, notably in Congress as well, on the terrible situation the Khmer Rouge were creating in Cambodia.

*Q: I'm trying to get your feeling about this. It's a cause. It's almost a cult: the missing in action.*

*You must have gotten involved in that.*

CARNEY: I did, but this was not a huge issue at that particular time. As the League of Families of Prisoners of War/Missing in Action got organized, and with the politics of the issue in Washington, when I came back from Indonesia in 1990, the issue was completely and thoroughly joined. When I wound up on the NSC staff, I had particular responsibility for that as director for Asian Affairs (Southeast Asia). I essentially replaced one of the gurus of that movement, Richard Childress, an Army officer. At the time, it was not that much of an issue.

*Q: But did you feel and then maybe others around you feel that there were prisoners of war sitting off in bamboo cages somewhere?*

CARNEY: No. We assumed that everybody was dead or had defected if there were any live Americans there. Richard Garwood when he surfaced essentially confirmed that.

*Q: He was a deserter, wasn't he?*

CARNEY: Yes.

*Q: It never made sense to me why... What was in it for anybody on the Vietnamese side of keeping people hidden? But it became a cult really.*

CARNEY: It did.

*Q: Still is.*

CARNEY: To a degree yes.

*Q: In a way, you had in the truest sense sort of a watching brief on these countries. There wasn't a hell of a lot we could do.*

CARNEY: Exactly. Of course, we had implemented sanctions, both foreign assets control and a trade embargo, on all 3 – or was Laos not under such heavy sanctions? Certainly Cambodia and Vietnam were. I don't remember the status of Laos. We still had an embassy in Vientiane with a chargé d'affaires.

*Q: Were you there when the Chinese-Vietnamese war went on?*

CARNEY: I was in Thailand as consul in Udorn. This was in response to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in late '78/early '79.

*Q: But you were there when that happened.*

CARNEY: I was in Udorn.

*Q: There isn't much else to talk about, is there? What was your impression of when Dick*

*Holbrooke took over the bureau?*

CARNEY: There was a lot of glamour there. His wife at the time was Blythe Babyak, (everyone got married having relationships got married if they wanted a senior position in Carter's administration). Part of the glamour was wisps of scandal and what have you. Ms. Babyak fueled all of this by an article she wrote. I can still remember the lead sentence, which is brilliant: "There is plenty of sex in Washington, DC, but the only romance is with power." That says it extremely well.

Dick had enormous energy. This was before computers. You'd go to see him and he'd be sitting there typing a little note out to the secretary. He'd be on the phone at the same time and then talking to you. That's the quintessential Dick Holbrooke, whom over the years I've come to know a lot better, and to admire for imagination and determination and sheer toughness. Not only did we work together... I remember doing the briefing book for him for the House Committee appearance on the situation in Cambodia. I had failed to put an index in it. It was the first briefing book I had ever done. Remember, I'm a field mouse. I'd never served much and never wanted to in Washington. As soon as he said it, I said, "Got ya." I got it back to him within an hour and a half or so with a proper index. I can remember being in the first row as he and Charlie twining were testifying. A question would come up and it would be the usual: "Flip, flip, flip," and then he'd have the text and he would draw from it. He never bothered to read it. He would put his own ideas and experience in, having been an old Vietnam hand himself. Smart. Active. Had the bureau firmly on the map. But completely the opposite of an Art Hummel. He wasn't as measured in any way. Perhaps to this day Dick can never be described as "measured".

*Q: After 2 years, you went off to Thai training?*

CARNEY: I went off to Thai language. I had to get a 3 in speaking in 6 months and did.

*Q: Why was that?*

CARNEY: They really wanted somebody to replace John Finney, who had been my predecessor as consul in Udon for the northeast of Thailand.

*Q: How did you find Thai?*

CARNEY: Actually pretty easy. There are no more violent diphthongs in Thai than there are in Cambodian. The Thai was grammatically pretty forward. Cambodian and Thai have a lot of cognates borrowed back and forth from each other as well as from Sanskrit and Pali. Thai is a lot easier to read because you don't do stacked consonants the way you do in Cambodian. The only difference is, Thai has tones, but the tones are regular. If you see a Thai word written, you immediately know what the tone is once you internalize the grammar of tones, as it were. But I never got to speak Thai as well as I speak Cambodian partly because there are so many English speakers in Thailand. I couldn't pretend, as I did in Cambodia, that I didn't speak the major European language. I pretended I didn't speak French in Cambodia. I couldn't do that with English in Thailand.

*Q: So you went to Udorn. You were there from when to when?*

CARNEY: About August of '78 until I was effectively transferred to the political section in Bangkok in about '80. But in practice, I was in Udorn a little less than a year because the Vietnamese kicked the Khmer Rouge out to the malarial and insalubrious Thai-Cambodian border region, and Mort Abramowitz, who was ambassador in Bangkok then, asked me to come down and take, not exactly residence on the Thai-Cambodian border, but spend 3-4 days a week out there to find out what was going on inside Cambodia. I wasn't doing refugees. It was basically Cambodian internal politics. By then, Desaix Anderson had replaced Charlie Twining as the Indochina watcher in the political section in Bangkok.

*Q: Let's talk about Udorn. First, were you married?*

CARNEY: I was separated at the time and in the process of divorce.

*Q: What was the situation in Udorn the year you were there?*

CARNEY: It had been a major American base. There was a huge signals intercept station there known as the Elephant Corral, one of those circular antenna arrays that really does look like a miniature stadium. There had been an Air America facility there. CIA had a huge operation out of there. The base did not have U.S. bombers or jets. It was regarded as not close enough to Vietnam. Those bases were over in Nakon Phanom and Ubon, both of which were in the consular district.

It was 16 provinces that I covered with 15-16 million people. Poor. The predominant image of the entire area was twofold. Trucks with big dirty balls of string, which was kenaf, that was grown for its fiber to be made into ropes. You would see the kenaf being retted, soaked in water, until the connective tissues dissolved and then they were made into these huge dirty balls of string. The second thing you would see were concrete aprons with chips of "monsamparang," cassava, being dried out so that the prussic acid content would vanish and then it would be pelletized into animal feed for export mainly to Europeans. Those were very predominant images.

Glutinous rice was the staple, although there was plenty of number one long grain and white rice grown as well in the region. Silks... The southern border tier of the region was along the northern border of Cambodia and had been part of the Cambodian Empire. You'd see Cambodian style temples from the Angkor period scattered throughout that part of northeast Thailand and some even further. The empire extended as far as Luang Prabang further north in Laos in its glory days.

*Q: You had a Vietnam boundary?*

CARNEY: No. Laos. The tri-border area was Laos, Cambodia, Thailand. We also had 3 refugee camps, one for hill tribe people in the extreme northwestern part of the region, the part that abuts the north of Thailand where Chiang Mai is the regional capital effectively. Then there were two camps for ethnic Lao.

*Q: How was the area adjusting to the fact that the Americans and the GIs and all had pulled out? This was a tremendous investment and all of a sudden the guys aren't going out to the...*

CARNEY: It was an interesting problem because it was Dan O'Donahue- (end of tape)

The adjustment of the region to the pullout of the American presence was ongoing. We actually closed our information center in Khon Kaen, where the regional university was located towards the second year of my incumbency in Udorn. It turns out that, ironically enough, road building was the economic key. The developmental economists would argue that they had predicted it. The northeast of Thailand was not only a base area for prosecuting the war against Vietnam, it was also a center of Thai communist insurgency. There was thus a focus on building up road networks that would give the military access to the areas of danger, and the economic benefit of that was derived because they opened all that area up to the market. So, all those dirty balls of string and all that cassava essentially helped add to the regional income in a way that brought about enough prosperity to undermine the communist party of Thailand completely. A few years after I left the CPT bellied up.

*Q: Was there fighting going on while you were there?*

CARNEY: By the CPT? Yes. They were still fighting with the government on a very small scale.

*Q: What was your impression of the Thai army as a fighting force?*

CARNEY: The northeast had a major regional Thai army headquarters at Sakhon Nakon, which was between Udorn City and Nakhon Phanom. It also had a major sub regional headquarters that built up after 1979 in Surin, a Thai-Cambodian border province, heavily ethnic Cambodian where there is an elephant roundup every year in October or November as the dry season begins.

I got to know the Thai army pretty well after '79, as I was going along the Thai-Cambodian border. One of the things I would do would be to stick my head into a Thai military post, which was usually company level, and I had enough Thai, although I confess it wasn't good enough as I'd have liked. I'd get into these camps and find an enormous suspicion, so thick you could cut it with a knife. It would take me about 15 minutes of just talking and smiling and joking, dealing with English, finding out where people were from in Thailand, whether they had ever been to training in the U.S. at Fort Benning, advanced infantry or something like that, to break that ice and establish my own bona fides after which I could drop in anytime. If the commander wasn't there, the deputy commander wouldn't have any trouble talking with me. I found they were generally militarily ready. They had pretty good equipment and communications.

But every now and then I would uncover a very bizarre reality. For example, at one base, I came in, and saw they had brand new U.S. made 106 millimeter recoilless rifles. That's a very fine weapon. We knew that there were Vietnamese tanks on the other side of the border and the 106 will do a number on any tank the Vietnamese could get up to the border, often a PT76 amphibious model or sometimes a T55, which I think is the Chinese made copy of the T54. I carried a copy of one of those little booklets on weapons of the communist world just so I could

identify things if I came across them because I had never been in the U.S. military. I said to the captain commanding the base, "You've got the new 106s." He said, "We can't use them." I said, "Why not?" He said, "You see this little barrel alongside the 106 barrel?" I said, "Yes." He said, "That's a .50 caliber machinegun barrel and there is a particular spotting round that is used for that. We can't spot, so there is no point wasting 106 ammunition if we're not sure where we're shooting." That duly appeared in my next cable. The next thing I know, the Defense attaché, who was insufficiently diligent in being out at border where the threat actually was - I would have thought those attaché guys would have been all over that border - They weren't.

Of course, as soon as the Pentagon read that, their immediate cable out to the DATT was, "No 106 spotting rounds? How Please" There was a JUSMAG that was part of the U.S. mission there that got the more serious question from whatever the Defense entity is that does such procurement and assistance. That was amazing. I can remember a cable...

Basically the Thais felt the threat. It is particularly the case that that part of the border around the town of Aranyaprathet, which means "Forest Country" in Sanskrit, is a traditional invasion route between Cambodia and what's now Thailand. The armies at Angkor Wat conquered the Mon by moving through what's called the Watana Gap. It's great tank country for the most part. The escarpment comes around across the northern border of Cambodia with Thailand. Then there is a set of hills that come up from the south. Then you've got the gap. The town of Aranyaprathet is right in the middle of it. It's a clear shot to Bangkok. We used to argue the only thing that would stop Vietnamese tanks if they rolled would have been the Bangkok traffic. (Ambassador) Mort Abramowitz was trying to get the U.S. to commit to refurbishing and delivering some of our older tanks, the M48A5. He wasn't getting anything. He got commitments in principle, but no delivery date, no numbers, no nothing. He finally got annoyed and sent a cable out - I still remember it to this day - "I'm going to see Prime Minister Prem tomorrow morning. He's going to ask me about the tanks. Do I give him the same old crap or are you going to get me an answer?" Outstanding! And he got his answer: "Yes," including such and such delivery dates.

*Q: Was the feeling that there was a threat to Thailand?*

CARNEY: There were 2 aspects of the threat. One was the potential military threat. You knew Vietnamese capabilities. We didn't have any idea what their intentions were. My own view was that the Vietnamese would not be coming across that border, that it was entirely too much for them to bite off, and that strategically they were looking to consolidate an Indochinese federation, something that had been their goal since the '30s, and intimidate Thailand, which they thought they were capable of doing. They believed the Thais were perfect subjects for intimidation.

But there was also the refugee issue. There were huge numbers of Cambodians, 200,000-500,000, who had fled to the Thai-Cambodian border and were in makeshift camps all up and down the border, some of them disguised as refugee camps were in fact Khmer Rouge-controlled populations from which they drew their own recruits and rations.

*Q: I want to go back to Udorn. What was the consulate doing?*

CARNEY: The consulate was doing a combination of classic consular things – Social Security checks, protection and welfare, a crazy American lady in the brown dress whom we finally got out of our consular district to Bangkok.

*Q: What was her problem?*

CARNEY: The Russians have introduced me to this wonderful phrase: roof has slipped. She just wasn't all there. There were Americans who had retired from the Air Force mainly who were married to Thais. They were getting checks. They were dying. Work with their effects and what have you. There were some visa issues. We issued non-immigrant visas. Then there was the whole question of reporting on the insurgency. There was a branch of the station in Udon. There was a whole refugee operation that we helped monitor. AID was still involved. It hadn't yet drawn down and disappeared from Thailand. There were AID projects going on. I had a small self-help fund that I administered. Then there were the whole refugee questions as well as watching what was going on in Cambodia from refugees from Cambodia who made it into northeast Thailand. Then there was the question of the internal politics of the northeast as they bore on Thai national politics. It's always been a volatile area both in terms of politics and food due to poverty.

*Q: What kind of government did Thailand have?*

CARNEY: One of the Pramot brothers, either Seni or Kukrit, was prime minister. There were 2 or 3 coups when I was there, one of which failed, a military coup.

*Q: If you're having the coup a month type government, the politics of what's happening up in Udon don't make a lot of difference, do they?*

CARNEY: Well, the coups didn't succeed. That's what was interesting, that Thailand was emerging from that coup a month period into what it is today, which is much more stable and electoral.

*Q: What was our estimate at the time of the communist insurgency? Who was sparking it?*

CARNEY: It was basically pro-Chinese. But my memory is not... I wound up doing that aspect of Thailand for a little less than a year. Then I moved almost full-time to Bangkok to do Cambodia.

*Q: This was not the equivalent of the Viet Cong.*

CARNEY: Absolutely not. It was too small.

*Q: It was more an irritant?*

CARNEY: It was a little more than that, and it was a matter of great public debate as well. There is a lot of leftism in Thai intellectual thought generated, to some degree, in response to all the right-wing activity of the Thai military, and given currency by the excesses of the Thai military

right-wing side and the political right-wing as well. The Thai king presides over it all and had gained the stature sufficient to keep things from getting out of hand, as he did. The king was directly involved in making sure one of the coups for sure did not succeed.

*Q: Did you feel the military had a heavy hand or did they seem to know what they were doing?*

CARNEY: They were entirely too heavy-handed. There wasn't enough of the J5 civic action aspect.

*Q: Let's move on. You really began from about '79 on to work with political reporting along the border.*

CARNEY: Mort Abramowitz sent me to Aranyaprathet in September '79.

*Q: You were involved with this until when?*

CARNEY: I replaced Desaix Anderson in the political section as the Indochina watcher, so it would have been until May or so of '83.

*Q: What was the situation on the border?*

CARNEY: There was a certain amount of tension because the Vietnamese intentions weren't known. That eased as the Vietnamese began to withdraw their troops out of Cambodia. At the same time, the refugee crisis continued. Mrs. Carter visited. We had 2 congressional delegations in '79 that visited Cambodia traveling through Bangkok. Senators Danforth, Baucus, and Sasser, the last the leader of the delegation in about August of '79; and then a women's congressional delegation mixed American and Australian visited about a month and a half later. I was essentially staff/language facilitator for both of those trips.

You saw the international effort inside Cambodia led by UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross begin to address questions of famine inside Cambodia. You had an enormous effort to send seed and food, rice seed and milled rice, across the Thai-Cambodian border at Aranyaprathet. Then you had people coming in and out including one defector, Dy Lamthol, whom I had met in the foreign ministry when I was with Senator Sasser's delegation. He wound up on the border. You slowly began to get a U.S. effort together with the coalescing non-communist Cambodian resistance, one side led by people like Prince Sihanouk, the other non-communist side more republican under the leadership of the late Son Sann. It was a complex...

*Q: I've talked to people who have been involved with this who have said that the Khmer Rouge was the only real fighting force and that the other groups that were palatable to us, non-communist groups, really weren't very effective and so whom do you arm if you want to get this Vietnamese dominated government out?*

CARNEY: What happened was, the Chinese and the Thais made sure that the Khmer Rouge were armed. We, the Malaysians, and Singaporeans made sure that both of the non-communist

sides were armed and trained, including 3 training camps in Malaysia.

*Q: Did we then work to keep them fighting each other?*

CARNEY: They had their own working relationship. They had established a coalition largely under Malaysia, Singapore, and Thai insistence. It was that coalition and all this was pretty well described in the books by Elizabeth Becker and Nayan Chanda. That kept the pressure on. The Vietnamese, once the Soviet Union collapsed, were under pressure from the Chinese that included an unsuccessful invasion. Nevertheless, victory or not, the Vietnamese were aware that their northern neighbor was interested and serious, and essentially Hanoi had to come to terms, which happened in the early '90s.

*Q: We're talking about '79 to '83.*

CARNEY: That was the period in which the organizational structure of a Cambodian resistance coalesced. It became clear then that the Vietnamese could not succeed in establishing a client regime in Phnom Penh that would itself be able to deal with the Khmer Rouge and the non-communists.

*Q: Our policy such as it was, we did not want to see a unified Indochina.*

CARNEY: That's correct.

*Q: That would be a Vietnamese Indochina.*

CARNEY: Yes. We were essentially in support of the Thais on this because Thailand was then a treaty ally. In fact, it still is. The Manila Pact was not informally dissolved yet. At the same time, there was a lot of animus still towards any Vietnamese objectives. It was assumed correctly that they were against U.S. interests.

*Q: Did you get involved in strategic negotiations?*

CARNEY: I had a serious disagreement. Burt Levin was the DCM. Mort Abramowitz was the ambassador. Burt and I disagreed on whether the U.S. ought to support the non-communist resistance. It went as far as a draft dissent cable that Mort Abramowitz looked at and said, "Let's see if we can't work this out." Jim Wilkinson, who was then political counselor, did a little bit of drafting magic to get the cable out as a front channel cable rather than a dissent.

*Q: The fact that you had the ability to go one way meant that you could bring a dissenting view into the mainstream rather than...*

CARNEY: Rather than having to leave it.

*Q: A dissent cable is good for the soul but it's not sometimes as effective.*

CARNEY: Which is why Jim recast it slightly but left the essence of it intact, which is that U.S.

interests...

*Q: What were you advocating?*

CARNEY: U.S. support for the non-communist resistance, military. Burt Levin didn't believe it was worth doing, didn't believe they could ever be effective nor that it was in U.S. interests to do so.

*Q: Were there concerns about supporting this non-communist group that you might be encouraging a group of people to stick their nose up... The 2 most powerful forces there are the Cambodian backed Vietnamese...*

CARNEY: That was not a powerful force. That was a Cambodian... It went through several changes of name. Let's call it the Cambodian People's Party.

*Q: Who was...*

CARNEY: Hun Sen was the foreign minister then. It was even before he became prime minister.

*Q: You have that on one side. You've got the Khmer Rouge on the other. These nice guys are in the middle. They would strike me as being exposed.*

CARNEY: The nice guys though could handle the Phnom Penh forces. They couldn't handle the People's Army of Vietnam. But the People's Army was beginning to pull out.

*Q: Did you find yourself involved in negotiating, helping, the forces? What are we going to call these people?*

CARNEY: We used their names. Sonn Sann's people were the Cambodian People's National Liberation Front, KPNLF. Sihanouk's people ultimately became the ANS, the Armée Nationale Sihanoukiste. I didn't wind up doing the actual help. That was run in a combination of AID, CIA programs. In Washington, retired is David Merrill, who ran that for AID. He is a former ambassador to Bangladesh and was an AID person. He works for Nathan Associates at this point.

*Q: You were gathering material?*

CARNEY: I had a reporting brief, but I would stick a nose into policy when it seemed that things weren't going in the direction that they could or that would serve a broader goal.

*Q: You describe yourself in Washington as a field mouse, somebody who likes to go out. Here you weren't a Bangkok mouse, but again you were a field mouse. You were out there. Did you find yourself in conflict with the city slickers back in our embassy in Bangkok? Were they seeing the same thing you were?*

CARNEY: The disagreement I had with Burt Levin was the only one I can remember of any significance. Burt had never served in Vietnam and had his own views of the direction things

ought to go. I think he might have been more of an odd person out on what ought to happen in Indochina, certainly farther out than Mort Abramowitz was.

*Q: How did you find your relations with the NGOs who were working with the refugees? They have their own caste and there was quite an establishment there.*

CARNEY: There was a huge establishment. Some of them thought I was a spook. Others for the most part, some of whom I had worked with in the refugee camp for Lao in Nong Khai, essentially knew where I was coming from – International Rescue Committee, people like that. Medecins Sans Frontiers, because I speak French, I got along well with them. The director there was Claude Malhurin, who wound up as a secretary of state in France at one point. I don't remember his portfolio exactly. They knew I was with the embassy. I would drive one of those big white Australian made Chevrolets. There was a big U.S. effort on the border. There was a separate refugee section that Lionel Rosenblatt was running. Mike Eiland was his deputy. A pretty good relationship. See each other, talk. None of these refugee entities spoke Cambodian.

*Q: Did you find yourself dragged in again and again for issues?*

CARNEY: No. I'd often be dragged in just for what's going on more than anything else. Whenever Mort would take anybody to the border, and he took a lot of people, including EU commissioners like Madame Agnelli and some of the ambassadors, he came up with Marshall Sitthi, the Thai foreign minister then, and I wound up doing a three way translation in English, Cambodian, and Thai, which was very difficult. I was a resource person because I had so much background in Cambodia and acquired a huge background in Vietnam. As Desaix left, I wound up with Ed McWilliams as second man in the external unit. Ed was subsequently involved in the Afghanistan thing.

*Q: Did you get involved with Rosalynn Carter?*

CARNEY: Oh, yes, because of her visit, I went up with the advance team to advance the sites that she was going to including the refugee camp at Sakao, which was Khmer Rouge-controlled villagers. Then she went to the Phu Phan Palace in Northeast Thailand. The Thai king has palaces in all the regions. She showed up for lunch there with the king.

*Q: Were you with the visit when she went?*

CARNEY: Yes, I was wandering around as a potential resource but never did anything as I recall. I took some pictures.

*Q: Was there concern about these camps, that the Khmer Rouge was getting too powerful in them?*

CARNEY: I frankly had less focus on what was going on in the camps. What I was looking for were people who were new, could tell me what was going on inside Cambodia, crops or politics.

*Q: What were you picking up about Cambodia?*

CARNEY: That there was clearly an effort to create a Cambodian government. Even before I went down to the border, I did an airgram from Udorn because I was listening to Radio Phnom Penh. The airgram in early '79 set forth the structure of the Cambodian government as it existed, showing that there were people who had 3 or 4 different hats and people were moving from job to job. It hadn't yet gelled but it was in the process. Who held what job, kind of a "Who's Who" of Vietnamese-controlled Cambodia. Over the next year, I was able to establish that the military had begun to gel itself – staff, equipment, training, that sort of thing. This was all essentially drawing on FBIS, and then mixing it with information from the people whom I interviewed. I did a piece in *Asian Survey* on that at one point. My argument was that the Vietnamese had to create a functioning Cambodian armed force that could deal with the non-communists and the Khmer Rouge if they had any hope of a new version of the Indochina Federation, one of voluntary participation rather than Vietnamese control. My conclusion was that the verdict was out. I had my doubts, but it was something everybody had to keep his eye on.

*Q: In a way you had the absolutely horrendous, monstrous regime of the Khmer Rouge so that when the Vietnamese came in, it was certainly welcome and a lot better for humanity's sake.*

CARNEY: But they stayed too long. The problem was that there have always historically been Cambodian suspicions of Vietnamese motives. The whole of South Vietnam, at least up to just north of Saigon, was Cambodian at one point, called even today, Kampuchea Krom, lower Cambodia. The Cambodians know that, and they know the Vietnamese had designs on Cambodia. (They recall) that great period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Vietnamese had sent court dress for Ang Mai, the queen of Cambodia. That Vietnamese effort was only halted by a serious Thai effort in the 1830s and '40s. They had joint suzerainty at one point. As for the Thais, it's more like family and cousins. The Vietnamese are just weird as far as Cambodians are concerned. They don't fit. They aren't Theravada Buddhists for one thing. And they have these weird Chinese customs.

What happened inevitably and predictably... One of the reasons why I had currency with the NGOs was because I was published on Cambodia. The monograph at Cornell on the Cambodian communist party and *Asian Survey*, '80, '81 issues on Cambodia. I was published on the substance of the issue.

*Q: I've talked to people who were in Thailand later on who said the NGOs who dealt with refugees became very proprietary.*

CARNEY: Oh, they always do, of refugees. Like the NGOs that do wildlife: "our elephants." It's the same thing.

*Q: At a certain point, you want to stop people from being refugees or screen them out, get them back in-*

CARNEY: Which we did in Cambodia but that wasn't until the early '90s.

*Q: You couldn't at this point, but were you seeing this proprietary thing?*

CARNEY: Oh, yes, inevitably. What impact did it have on policy? The whole focus was humanitarian relief at that point. There wasn't much of a "Don't you dare touch our refugees."

*Q: There wasn't any real alternative at this point, was there?*

CARNEY: No.

*Q: You were talking about a war going on. You couldn't force people to go back.*

CARNEY: Well, the Thais did, 30-40,000 in early '79, and the legacy of that - people managed to work their way back to the border after a few months - was something that the embassies, including ours, were determined not to see repeated.

*Q: Were any other embassies involved in this process?*

CARNEY: The French to a big degree. A lot of Cambodians wound up in France. The Europeans in general, lots of concern. The political side of it had the Malaysians and the Singaporeans involved.

*Q: Did you run across Malaysians and Singaporeans?*

CARNEY: They were mainly dealing with the Agency. I would run across them because they knew who I was from the publications. Every now and then I would run across a Thai who would say, "But you don't deal with Cambodia. You're not with so and so." I said, "No, I'm on the diplomatic side."

*Q: It's interesting, there are a lot of people who did a lot of reading about the area and there really wasn't much literature about it.*

CARNEY: There was a huge amount, but not always in English.

*Q: So this stood you in very good stead.*

CARNEY: Yes.

*Q: Had we started any program of orderly departure?*

CARNEY: Yes, we started sending people to Saigon for the interviews over there while I was still in Bangkok. Otherwise I wouldn't know about it. If you gave me a few names, I might remember who was doing it. They were part of the refugee office. Or they might have been part of the consular section.

*Q: I think they were part of the consular section.*

*Did the impact of the Chinese-Vietnamese war have any reflection where you were?*

CARNEY: No, except that the Chinese demonstrated their bona fides, and the Thais were therefore encouraged in their cooperation with the Chinese to keep the Khmer Rouge viable.

*Q: You left in '83.*

CARNEY: Yes.

*Q: Same ambassador the whole time?*

CARNEY: Oh, no. We had Dan O'Donohue when I got there. Mort Abramowitz replaced him. Then John Gunther Dean replaced Mort. John Gunther Dean had been ambassador in Cambodia before the evacuation.

*Q: Were there any differences with these 3 men?*

CARNEY: Oh, sure. Huge differences of style. None of them was entirely compatible with the Thais. In fact, of all the ambassadors I know – and that includes Dave Lambertson and the guy who was just there before Skip Boyce (who is in Indonesia), Will Itoh. Thais are funny. Because they've never been colonized, they have a different outlook. To get along with Thais at any level, you need a Third World style. Dan O'Donohue is too irascible. Mort Abramowitz is too much of a policy wonk. Dave Lambertson is too reserved and quiet. John Gunther Dean was too bombastic. Will Itoh was basically too junior. Unger would have been the name the Thais remember.

The thing about the Third World is that you cannot pretend you're interested in culture and geography and people and what's happening because most people in the Third World are underemployed and have enough time that they do a lot of people watching and your insincerity becomes manifest. So you can't be insincere on the one hand, and if you're not generally interested, which lamentably the case for too many senior... By the time you get to be that senior in the Foreign Service, even your career people, there seems to be, unfortunately, a failing of all those impulses that sent us abroad in the first place. I can remember, we were up in northeast Thailand. We had gone to the Thai army command at Surin. We were driving back to Bangkok, quite a long drive. We stopped at Phanom Rung, a Cambodian temple site on a very high hill from which you can see right to the edge of the escarpment south and then into Cambodia. We stopped and got grilled chicken and sticky rice and some Thai som tam, the green papaya salad that can be so spicy. Mort (Abramowitz) said, "You know, you young guys, you really have..." He didn't say, "You have it made," but it was a sentiment similar to that. He himself wanted to be back in Bangkok thinking about policy and who to talk to in Washington. It's unfortunate.

*Q: It's one of the things I've found in this oral history program. People say, "Well, you have to have somebody who is an ambassador who did this." When we first started this, we kind of skipped over the junior years very quickly and moved up. Very quickly I realized that some of the brightest thoughts, the best analyses of what was going on came from people who did reach senior ranks but when they were younger they could get out and around. When you get down to it, an ambassador is a prisoner there and if he goes out he's a showcase; he's trotted around.*

CARNEY: It's even worse now because you've got all the security with you.

*Q: Yes. So they don't really get out and around. A junior and mid-career officer is out there, often doing a lot of the grunt work which is the...*

CARNEY: A political counselor is the best job I ever had to get a feel for a country. Oddly enough, in the Sudan, I was able to do more of that than I ought to have been able to do because there was no staff (once the Americans were drawn down and commuting from Nairobi). I actually wound up having to write the Human Rights Report, the Political Reporting Plan, and all of that.

*Q: The remove of the ambassador often from really what's going on...*

CARNEY: On the other hand, you've got a Paul Wolfowitz in Indonesia who was absolutely brilliant and wife Claire, they're now separated. (She) had been an American Field Service student in central Java. As I said to Paul one time, "You're a first tour officer as ambassador. Your interest and enthusiasm for Indonesia is palpable." Indonesians responded to it. You got that fellow who had been in Pakistan, who was before or just after Stape Roy, and the guy wasn't interested and that conveyed itself. You lose an ability to communicate especially in the Third World. In London or Paris or Bonn it still matters, as that one politico who spoke French replacing Pamela Harriman... But basically in the Third World you have to have it to be effective. With Thais, John Gunther Dean was more effective than many even though he was always saying, "I did this and I talked to that person and I saw the king more times than you did" and that sort of thing because he was so interested.

**EDWARD L. LEE II**  
**Regional Security Officer**  
**Bangkok (1979-1981)**

*Mr. Lee was born and raised in Michigan, educated at Delta College and American University. After seven years service with the US Marine Corp, he joined the State Department as Agent in the Office of Security. Mr. Lee's entire career in the Foreign Service was devoted to Security matters in Washington and in diplomatic posts throughout the world. His postings as Regional Security Officer include Cyprus, South Korea, Thailand and Panama. Mr. Lee was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.*

*Q: Turning to Bangkok, you were there from '79 to when?*

LEE: 1981.

*Q: What was your job and what was the situation?*

LEE: I was the RSO in Bangkok. A large embassy. Sort of an interesting embassy in that the footings on which the embassy was built back in the '50s was not well settled. Each year, the chancery itself was disappearing by about half an inch. It was beginning to take its toll. Since then, there has been a complete renovation and upgrading. But during that period, that was during the period that the hostages were being held in Iran. The Beirut hostages were beginning to happen a few years after that. Another interesting development at that time was the turbulence in Kampuchea or Cambodia. The refugee problem was enormous, one of the largest refugee exodus in political history. The post was really heavily bogged down in trying to deal with this refugee problem. Of course, the Khmer Rouge were very active in killing people in wholesale fashion.

At the post, we had a number of priorities on the security side. We had drug use by many of our dependents, children of the Foreign Service staff. Another factor was increasing crime. Pollution and traffic and many of the other issues were also a problem. We often had a good number of people that were involved in accidents. A topic near and dear to your heart was visa malfeasance. I had gotten involved in that in Korea and when I got to Bangkok, I discovered that there was a problem there, too.

*Q: How did that manifest itself?*

LEE: That manifested itself largely through allegations by a couple of visa brokers that an American consular officer was selling visas. We got very close, but we were always absent testimony. We were able to terminate a number of Foreign Service Nationals that were involved in this on sort of a low level basis. In fact, we used the polygraph in that investigation very effectively through the use of the Air Force and what have you and terminated a number of staff. But we really pursued this American on which we had allegations. To this day, I probably firmly believe that he had made an awful lot of money at selling visas but we just lacked someone who was willing to go into a court, hold up their hand, and testify.

*Q: When something like this happens, somebody who is a consular officer kind of goes to other consular posts... Were you able to put a warning on and say "This person really shouldn't be put in a position where they can collect money?"*

LEE: This fellow was quite smart because he came back to the United States from Bangkok and did not go overseas again. That might have been a built-in feature of not being trailed. But we probably had on that investigation from the time it began to the time it ended four file safe drawers of documentation. We probably interviewed, took statements from, hundreds of people. Of course, not only was there a problem with malfeasance in Bangkok, but there was also, as at most posts like that, a big problem of visa fraud. You've got the rather seedy lot of visa brokers that sort of prey on people wanting to go to the United States and immigrate and what have you. We supported the consular fraud program on that as well. Those were some of the issues we were dealing with.

There was also a period where there was political dissension within the government. During my assignment there, we were the victim of a rocket attack where somebody had put 81 millimeters on the back of a truck and popped 81s into the complex. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but we

definitely picked up CNN's(Cable News Network) interest very quickly. CNN's first year was '79.

*Q: This is a worldwide television network.*

LEE: Yes. It was a very active, very large post. We had about 350 employees at the embassy. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was very big. Again, this next anecdote may offer some interesting thoughts on what it's really like to be in the Foreign Service, particularly for agencies other than the State Department. The DEA, which obviously has responsibility for enforcing U.S. and multilateral anti-drug agreements, had a very large presence in Bangkok because of the Golden Triangle between Thailand and Burma and Laos. One of their senior agents in Bangkok lost his wife. She was murdered. It was a situation where she had gone out shopping one day with a maid and her five year old daughter. She went into a shop to have some shoes repaired. A man walked up to her, looked at her very intently, and grabbed the gold necklace from around her neck. Rather than deal with him, she just simply ran from the shop to get into her car. The car was parked directly across the street from the shop. Waiting in the car was the maid and her daughter. The mother got into the car and pushed the button down on her side of the car. They pushed the buttons down on the back two doors but failed to push the button down on the passenger's side of the front seat.

*Q: We're talking about the locking buttons.*

LEE: Yes. The criminal came out of the shop, obviously a drug user from what people said at the time. He forced his way into the car, pulled out a handgun, and forced the spouse to drive to a different location. Police officers had seen all this transpiring, so the police were in hot pursuit of the vehicle. What happened next was, you ended up with a hostage barricade situation where the police had cornered the vehicle. They couldn't get out anywhere. I remember the photograph that had been taken by the media. It showed the criminal's arm around the spouse's neck. He was holding the gun to her head when the weapon discharged and she was killed instantly. It really sort of hit home very hard for the entire post. Everybody knew her. Of course, the concern for the daughter and the trauma that it had on her. She was probably inches away when her mother was killed. Everybody looked. We investigated the whole incident enormously. In fact, the regional security office in Bangkok at the time... We got a commendation from DEA because of the work that we had done on the investigation in terms of who this guy was, where he had come from. They really wanted to make sure that there wasn't a hidden agenda here where this guy was targeted and it was the wife that happened to have been the victim. But it was just simply a robbery. I think that kind of a case highlights the need for training. Particularly now in the millennium that we're in, looking back, there's just as much a need now for training on how to prevent those as there was then.

*Q: We had the taking of the hostages in Teheran at this time. We had the burning of our embassy in Islamabad in 1978. There was a Japanese Red Army that had hit at some point. Were we concerned about these fundamentalist groups coming after us?*

LEE: We were beginning to. If you look back at some of the major hijackings, aircraft bombings, assassinations, there was a former State Department senior officer named Ray Hunt who after he

left the Department went to work for the Sinai Field Mission operation and he was based in Rome. He was targeted by one of the Palestinian groups and was killed basically in front of his house as he was arriving. We had one of our consular officials in Strasbourg who there was an attempted assassination on. This was in the early '80s. If you look at that '75 to maybe '80 timeframe, you had a lot of fundamentalist movements underway. Palestinians, Japanese Red Army (JRA), European groups, the Bader-Meinhof gang in Germany was linked to the JRA and other groups. We had hostage takings in Malaysia. We obviously had had some of our problems in Bangkok that were more domestic than transnational. At that time, and I think maybe it was the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Teheran that put a lot of things in motion. The Hezbollah, the Party of God, they were a part of that and they used the takeover of the embassy in Iran really as a foundation for a lot of their other activity, particularly in Lebanon. A lot of these things that were happening on the hostage side were somewhat new to the Foreign Service. Another thing that we were operating at a disadvantage on is that we were not really at a fully developed stage in terms of how to protect embassies physically from takeovers, from facility attacks, things like that. Over the period of 1981 to about 1990, we were developing a lot of documentation studies on how to protect things, putting, for example, concrete boulders in front of buildings and controlling parking and protecting windows and doors and developing the access control system we have in our posts today whereby there is a mantrap system where you can't hold one door open. You enter an area where one door closes and then you move into another. We've gone a long way in a short period of time reducing the risk of major incidents, although if you begin to look at the August 1998 attack on the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, you can never let your guard down.

*Q: What were we doing about the drug problem, particularly with the children?*

LEE: The drug problem in Bangkok for the children, dependents, teenagers, of our staff there was really an endemic problem. RSOs going as far back as the mid to late '60s, there were reports in the files that young students and children were taking heroin, they were involved in other kinds of drugs and what have you. Thailand at that time, and it probably has not changed, is the kind of place where buying legal drugs or illegal drugs is not a problem. The drug laws are very severe. Generally, when a dependent of a U.S. embassy staff member became involved in drugs, they did the very best to quickly relocate either the entire family or, depending upon the age of the youngster involved, there was an awful lot of education that we were doing within the embassy. We were, for example, giving classes to parents on how to identify drugs, what they looked like, what they smelled like. It did raise some very difficult legal concerns. Fortunately, the ambassador's office in Bangkok at the time I was there had very good relations with the government. Quite often when a case came up where either there was drug abuse or alcohol abuse, they would generally be very cooperative in enabling us to maybe move somebody out of the country rather than getting them caught up in criminal charges that probably would never go anyplace but still would make everybody look bad. It became a political issue as well as really a personnel issue.

*Q: We maintained a rather tenuous relationship with Laos. Did you get down there at all?*

LEE: I did. My responsibilities as the RSO in Bangkok was also to service our post in Rangoon and Vientiane. I got up to Rangoon and Laos probably once every three months. Laos was much

different from Thailand or even Burma. In '79, you easily could have gone back into the '40s. It was functioning at that level. Basic commodities were almost non-existent or difficult to come by. The diplomatic community was very small. Everybody chipped in and helped each other. You still had an awful lot of holdovers from the Vietnam war that were operating and functioning there. It was a very strange place. The risk was difficult for any diplomat going up there because many of the Laotian security components had very extensive dossiers going back to the Vietnam period. For example, anyone that had served in Vietnam had difficulty getting a visa to even go up there. But I fortunately, even though I had served in Vietnam, was able to go up there with no difficulty just simply because of the way the paperwork was handled. I don't think it's changed that much. It's a very difficult place. If we look at 1999 or 2000, Vietnam is still very dysfunctional from a commercial standpoint and Laos would be well below that.

*Q: How about Burma? We're talking about a very closed society. What were the security concerns there?*

LEE: In the timeframe 1979-'81, you were beginning to have an outbreak of dissent by a number of activists within Burma. That did not gain steam until almost the mid-'90s. When I was traveling to Rangoon a great deal, we had a consulate in Mandalay. People who know Rud Kipling probably can recall "The Road to Mandalay" and all kinds of movies and novels. The consulate was very unique. It was in a very colonial kind of building. Eventually, the consulate was closed simply because there was no longer a need for it to be functioning. I happened to have been involved in a rather minor plane crash traveling from Mandalay back to Rangoon. I was on an Air Burma flight and I crashed on the runway. Many people were hurt but no one was killed. We often used to make jokes that if the couriers had blacklisted Air Burma, why are we still flying it? A very unique kind of country where it was very common to see a 1944 vintage Jeeps driving around town in mint condition. Burma really was extremely poor at that time, still is. It was a very closed society. Only but the best and brightest have a chance of getting out. Despite the interests of the U.S. to help the Burmese intelligentsia go abroad to study and what have you, it was very difficult for them. The conditions were difficult. The big issue at that time in all three countries – Laos, Burma, and Thailand – was drugs. For example, the DEA at that time when I was in Thailand had a staff of nearly 75, which made it probably the largest agency presence of any at that time.

*Q: For our embassies in Laos and Vientiane, or Rangoon, or our consulate in Mandalay, were there any particular security problems in closed communities?*

LEE: By and large, in Vientiane, the biggest problem was electrical power. The embassy there was very small with a staff of about eight people, very isolated, very tough, a big hardship. Their problem was electricity, getting food commodities in. Fortunately, they were able to get many shipments through the Defense attaché flight that often would go up there. No real security problems, although after the takeover of the embassy in Teheran, embassies all over the world were beginning to scratch their head and say, "Gosh, what potentially could happen where I am?" I think that put into play a complete rethinking of how we were protecting our embassies and what have you. In Burma, no major security threats per se. Quite often, there would be a problem of maybe black marketeering by a low level embassy staff member. Problems in Burma often involved the Marine security guard detachment. It's one topic that we haven't really

touched upon yet. Dealing with Marine security guards that are single, young, that are in the tour, is a very time consuming process for either an RSO or a post security officer or a principal officer of the post.

*Q: Talk a bit about Marine security guards. I would have thought that in a place like Burma, where it's so xenophobic, that this would have been one hell of a problem because these are young men who are out looking for young ladies and I don't imagine the Burmese are very receptive to this.*

LEE: Surprisingly, particularly in the few families that might have an educated base, there were some Marine security guards that dated Burmese women. I would say by and large, the Marine security guards that were there (It was a small detachment. I believe they had six Marines) primarily looked to the diplomatic community in terms of dating and recreation and social gatherings. There were outlets for getting close to people of their age, but then again even in foreign embassies most of the people were much older than they were. But on a global level and also on a regional level, sort of keeping the Marine security guard detachments under control and trying to help them protect them from themselves has often been a big job for literally everybody at the post.

*Q: What was your relation as RSO with the regional Marine office?*

LEE: The relationship between RSOs and the regional Marine officers... Maybe I should explain how that system is set up. Of course, the Marine security guard program provides training to Marine security guards in Quantico, Virginia. In each region that the Department of State has, the Near East, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, Africa, Europe, they would have a strategic office set up whereby two or three Marine officers would literally do nothing but inspect Marine security guard detachments within their region to ensure that they were complying with all the Marine Corps regulations and that the Marines were being well cared for and supported. There were often problems with the relationship between the regional Marine officers and the RSOs. The same kind of problems that senior officers in the Office of Security or its predecessor, the Diplomatic Security Service, have in Washington. The way the system was set up in terms of the original agreement between the Department of the Navy and the Department of State was that the Marines basically are a body source to fulfill a function. The way that agreement was clarified was that the RSO or a post – for example, Tokyo – Tokyo has a detachment of Marines with X number of Marines. They would fall under the operational control of the RSO, but then there would be an administrative channel whereby the Marines could communicate and would be overseen by the regional Marine officer in the regional office wherever they happened to be located. In many management manuals that go back 20-30 years, it often talks about the fact that if you're going to have things working correctly, one person reports to one other person and doesn't report to two people. Unfortunately, in this system, the Marines had two channels of communication. Generally, there was not a problem with the operational control. In other words, "Here is how we want our log books conducted. Here is the kind of passes you have to check. Here is what you have to do in the event of a protest or a demonstration. Here is how to destroy classified material. Here is how to inspect an office to make sure that classified information has been secured." The problems really were that often the regional Marine officer somehow felt that the Marines were getting the short end of the stick. So, it became somewhat of a friendly

adversarial role between both the Marine Corps and the State Department. That problem continues to this day. Sometimes Marine security guards adapt very well to a post. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes the detachment commander, who is a senior enlisted man in the Marine Corps, has a hard time dealing with civilians. Sometimes they're just too hard-nosed about things. They really need to realize they're not in a black and grey environment, but a very grey environment.

*Q: Was there any thought in the security officer environment of "It might be better to move to the British system," where they usually use retired, married, non-commissioned officers or some very experienced men to go out? They don't give the military presence, but they give a certain amount of maturity and what you get from that.*

LEE: I think that in terms of the U.S. Foreign Service, decisions were made over a period of years that doing something similar to that would be impractical, one, because it would be expensive. The British embassy or British foreign service system has often used Gurkhas, for example, or retired military. Actually, the British foreign service does not have nearly the amount of embassies and posts that we have around the world. So, they can do it on an ad hoc basis whereby they might put a Gurkha or retired British army sergeant or what have you maybe in a high threat environment, but they would not do that at all the posts. Today, for example, the administrative officer in the British foreign service pretty much handles all aspects of security. Within the U.S. Foreign Service system, that's the regional security officer program. I think the British have probably lost out in terms of benefits of having their own internal system. Particularly today, or even in years past, the British often were targeted not only for political violence but for crime as well. To give you an example of a deficiency in that regard, about three weeks ago in mid-December 1999, a British diplomat in Swaziland, which generally is a relatively low threat post, was the victim of a carjacking. She had arrived home in her car by herself coming back from a dinner party of some other diplomats. She pulled up in front of her house. There was a gate that had to be opened. As she was about to get out of the car, a man walked up with a gun and broke the window and dragged her through the broken window, taking her keys, leaving her in shock as he drove off in her automobile. The British foreign service system does not have a duty officer system, as does the U.S. Foreign Service. In a situation like that, in 1999, this British diplomat called the U.S. embassy because she knew that there was a duty officer on duty that could render aid. There may have been some sort of unofficial support agreement that if anyone got in trouble, they would call the U.S. embassy. That's a good example of not having your own self-sufficiency.

*Q: In '81, you went to where?*

LEE: From Bangkok, I went to Washington.

**PAUL M. CLEVELAND**  
**Office Director, Thailand Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1979-1981)**

*Ambassador Paul M. Cleveland was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1931 and raised in New York and Washington, DC. He received a bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1953. Following graduation, he entered the U.S. Air Force and flew transport planes throughout Europe. Ambassador Cleveland joined the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in Canberra, Bonn, Djakarta, Seoul, Wellington, and Kuala Lumpur. This interview was conducted by Thomas Stern in 1995.*

*Q: In early 1980, you transferred to another job. How did come about?*

CLEVELAND: Early one Sunday morning of the winter of 1979-80, I received a call from Holbrooke at home. He wanted to see me immediately in his office. I wondered what I had done to deserve such an honor. As it turned out, he had reached the conclusion that Fritz, as good an officer as he was, was just overburdened and could not give Ambassador Morton Abramowitz, then in Thailand, enough time to suit Mort. So Dick asked me to take over responsibility for Thai affairs; he gave me an office directorship and two assistants plus a secretary. He wanted me to concentrate on taking care of Mort's concerns in Washington.

It turned out that Mort's prime interest at the time was the porous border between Thailand and Cambodia through which masses of refugees flowed out and rice and equipment flowed in. This major flow of people and assets was caused by Vietnamese attacks on Cambodia. In fact, a major crisis had been created at the border. What I didn't realize at the beginning was that Mort was in the process of taking over responsibility for border issues. In effect he took over the leadership of all the NGOs, the UN and other governmental agencies just by the force of his personality and his exceptional ability. Mort is one of the most forceful, creative and finest officers I have worked with. It was not long after he started his efforts that he was de facto in charge of all border operations. It was educational for me to work in supporting him. He did a remarkable job of making all agencies work together and deliver whatever services each was responsible for. The UNHCR in Bangkok was wringing its hands half of the time because Mort was moving ahead without worrying about bureaucracy.

Mort's activities kept me on the phone for most of the day. First of all, Mort was always inquiring whether his instructions or requests were being complied with and if not, why not. Or why things were taking longer than he thought necessary. I think we spent roughly \$18,000 in long distance calls between Washington and Bangkok in 18 months, which is a sizeable bill any time and real money in the early 1980s. It was a great experience for me. I felt useful -- for the first time since leaving Seoul. I also learned a lot about moving bureaucracies. The Regional Affairs directorship was fine, but being the Thai Office Director was continual action. Having good superiors also helped; my first one was Mike Armacost and then John Negroponte. Both were very good to me and rose subsequently to some of the most important jobs in the Foreign Service. John, when he took over, called all his office directors to a meeting to tell us that he had a terrible temper. He predicted that he would on occasions be in our face and there would be terrible scenes. He suggested that we not take it personally and that we not let the experience linger because it was not directed at us as individuals; it was just his temperament. In fact, everything went very smoothly for the eight months I worked for John, he never blew up at me.

I guess I probably had more slack than most office directors because everyone in Washington knew that I was Mort's representative in town and that whatever I did or asked was on Mort's behalf. That was very helpful because Mort commanded considerable respect in most places. The Pentagon was the most recalcitrant player; Mort had worked there and was well known. He had had some run-ins with the Pentagon bureaucracy, which, like all bureaucracies, have long memories.

I remember one issue in particular. Mort wanted some A-1 tanks to shore up the Thai military, which was part of his whole strategy to secure the border. He wanted these tanks to be provided the Thais under the military assistance program. So I started a dialogue with DSAA (Defense Security Assistance Agency), ISA (International Security Affairs) and the Army. The Army claimed that it had no surplus A-1 tanks; they needed all they had. It refused even to consider giving up even one, much less the four or five that Mort wanted. So we had a bureaucratic fight. I kept going back to the Pentagon, pleading our case day in and day out, trying to find some way to satisfy the requirement. One day, we received a telegram from Mort that said on the following day he was going to see Thai Prime Minister Prem. The meeting would start with the usual exchange of pleasantries over a cup of tea. The Prime Minister was bound to ask about the tanks. Mort wanted to know how he should respond to the Prime Minister; should he tell him that the tanks were on their way, or was he to give the PM the standard "crap" that he had been feeding him for months. That line got to the Army; it did not take kindly to the Ambassador's phrasing and I think it stiffened its back for another period of weeks. Eventually, we wore the Army down however, and I finally suggested to Armacost that he call the head of DSAA. That finalized the deal and the tanks were declared surplus and provided to the Thais. Months later, the tanks arrived in Bangkok on a ship; a big ceremony was held with the American Ambassador turning these tanks over to the Thai command. Later that week, I got a message from Mort reporting that the tanks had been unloaded again. When I called him, he told me that the tanks had been unloaded about five times so that the photographers could take pictures every time they were unloaded. Mort managed to have the four tanks all of a sudden turn into twenty by loading and unloading the same four over and over again. The Thai government and military were delighted.

During my tour as Thai Office Director, I went to Thailand two or three times. But frankly, my job had very little to do with our foreign policy towards Thailand per se. My job was to support Mort as he tried to get a hold of the border problems. I was something akin to Abramowitz' ambassador to Washington. Sometime during these 18 months, I found that there were three awards being granted by private institutions for "outstanding contributions to US foreign policy." I think they were for \$10,000 each. I nominated Mort for each of them; he actually won two of them. That was very gratifying because he really deserved recognition for his work in Thailand. I sent Mort a copy of my nomination. When I talked to him over the phone later, he said that anyone could have won those awards with the kind of write up that I had submitted -- he said that he thought that I might have overstated the case to some degree. But I thought it was all true, and I still do.

**THOMAS B. KILLEEN**  
**Refugee Officer**

## **Bangkok (1979-1982)**

*Thomas B. Killeen was born in Pennsylvania in 1940. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1960-1964 and graduated from the University of Scranton in 1964. He was a Peace Corps volunteer in Chile from 1964-1966. Mr. Killeen entered the Foreign Service in 1967. His career included positions in Vietnam, Israel, Bolivia, Nigeria, Canada, Australia, Thailand, Ghana, Venezuela, and Somalia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.*

*Q: Could you tell me what you were up to?*

KILLEEN: It was an ordinary three year assignment to Melbourne. About the beginning of November or the tail end of October, the fall of 1979, when the boat people had been coming out of Vietnam, and to some extent out of Cambodia, and the real disturbances inside of Cambodia began to become visible, the Department sent out a call for volunteers, for people to go to Bangkok to work on the refugee problem. It was keyed to the people who were in Vietnam but it was in the context of all of the rest of this -- I don't know how much of the animal activities of Pol Pot and his cohorts had yet come to the surface.

*Q: This was the Khmer Rouge?*

KILLEEN: The Khmer Rouge. It certainly was after the little war between China and Vietnam when the Chinese attacked the Vietnamese in retaliation for their incursion into Cambodia. Anyway there was this call for volunteers to go to Bangkok and I answered the call, and was a little surprised -- I thought that there would be a lot of people answering the call -- when quite promptly after I volunteered I got orders. I think, if I remember correctly, that the whole business from the time of the incoming cable calling for volunteers to my arrival in Bangkok was something like twenty two days. Of course, it was a direct transfer -- I had five direct transfers during the course of the time that I was in the foreign service. Five direct transfers and five hardship posts which I think is a lot more than most.

I got to Bangkok and found out what the job was: the then Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs had said before Congress that a program was in existence to move people directly from Vietnam to the U.S. to diminish the perception of people in Vietnam that they had no alternative but to take to the boats. The program may have existed in someone's mind but didn't really exist in any operating form, and the call for volunteers was a call to make real what the administrator of Security and Consular Affairs said -- I am not sure whether he was then an Assistant Secretary, but anyway he was the head of it. Five of us assembled and we were part of the Consular Section of AmEmbassy Bangkok because it was the consular section who had been doing whatever had been done -- not very much -- to take care of these people in Vietnam. What had happened was that files, when the Embassy was closed in 1975, were sent to Bangkok.

The files were sent to Bangkok and then sometime after that, this I know only because of what I was told after I got to Bangkok, the word went out, aided and abetted by promises or semi-promises that were being made by the U.S. government, in the Vietnamese community in the United States -- these were mostly, but not exclusively, people who had departed from Vietnam

when the Embassy departed, that 140,000 people who ended up in Guam and from there scattered throughout the United States -- that there was a possibility of people getting their relatives out of Vietnam. What Vietnamese people in the United States did, some of whom had already naturalized, some of whom had left wives and children behind them in Vietnam, or husbands and children, was to do what they had been told to do. They had gone to the U.S. Immigration and filed immigration petitions for their relatives still in Vietnam to come to the United States. Some of them did it because they had a friend who was here or there. In any event, petitions were sent by U.S. Immigration to Embassies and Consulates around the world. Some of the Vietnamese who were sponsors of people still in Vietnam were spouses of foreign service employees or members of the U.S. armed services in various places around the world. Some of the people were spouses of people working in construction in Saudi Arabia, there were all sorts of these things. The Immigration had sent all these petitions to various places, mainly to Bangkok, and thousands and thousands and thousands had arrived. They had arrived in volume that totally overwhelmed the ability of the consular section in Bangkok to deal with them and there was almost no movement of people. What was happening with these things was that they were just piling up and piling up, being boxed up, sent off here and sent off there.

About a year before I got to Bangkok the consular section had moved from a building -- an outlying building -- to the Chancery, and when it did it left these files behind. Some work was done trying to organize these files in the conventional consular pattern for immigrant files, although they were divided from the Thai cases because no need was seen to mix the two, especially since the Vietnam cases were not something that a way was seen to work on them. When we got there we began to work on things; there was money and there was support and we could do things. I don't know who it was who had the bright idea, it was not me, but whoever it was, it was a marvelous idea: to organize the files and to deal with the people using computers rather than the 3 x 5 index card method of consular work...

*Q: This was early computer?*

KILLEEN: Early computer, this was '79, using the mainframe, big computers of the regional administrative center in Bangkok, who were very cooperative in time and schooling and this and that and the other thing.

*Q: Was Turk Lewis (?)...*

KILLEEN: Turk Lewis was one of them; another guy by the name of Ken Rosenberg (?) -- I can't remember whether it was Rosenthal or Rosenberg. It was he and Turk Lewis. I can't remember who was the director of Ramsey, that was the regional administrative maintenance center, at the time. I think both Ken and Turk were there TDY for the installation of the minicomputers that the Embassy had bought, the then new Wang minicomputers. They were as equally helpful as could be. Maybe Ken was the director of Ramsey and Turk was there as they TDY guy. We got things computerized. It may have been a guy by the name of Lee Peters, Lee McCleod Peters (?), who was the supervisor of what we were then calling the Vietnamese Immigration Program, before we became the Vietnamese Processing Unit, that put this thing together. It may not have been Lee, it may have been the available wise men, not including me, who got this computerization thing put together. It may have been that Lee had an idea that

computers could do it because he had worked in the finance center back in Washington, as a regular state officer he had worked in the finance center, and had an idea of what computers could do and sort of went to the Ramsey people to see what they could do and everybody got interested in trying this new thing. Anyway we put together something that was pretty nifty as to what it would do and how it would help in the processing of immigrant visa cases and eventually of refugee cases when the refugee act was passed. I am talking about everything from generating files and file labels, and post cards, and mailing labels, to actually doing shell outlines of immigrant visas -- the typing portion so that what was needed to be individually typed was that much less. An awful lot was able to be put on in the shell including such things as the name of the beneficiary; obviously the computer couldn't affix a photo. The kinds of thing we were doing with the computer was terrific -- generating telegrams.

*Q: At that time was there a connection within Vietnam to allow people to come out?*

KILLEEN: Yes, there was a theoretical connection and an actual connection. The United Nations had effected an agreement with Vietnam to provide for the orderly departure of people. Nobody really yet understood what that meant or how it would be implemented. An American citizen who was familiar with Vietnam, who spoke pretty good Vietnamese, came from one of the U.S. voluntary agencies -- a guy by the name of Mike Meyers -- and after familiarization with what we were doing and how we were going about doing things, he was seconded to the UNHCR to be in Hanoi; to be in effect the liaison man between the UN, the Vietnamese authorities and us, still in Bangkok. To answer the questions as to, where do we go next? How do we get there? We wanted to get out of Vietnam certain people who were connected with the United States. The Vietnamese were quite content to see substantial numbers of people in Vietnam depart, mainly their Chinese population. The two groups of people were by no means coterminous, they were not even close. Maybe our list at this point, for want of a better term it was a first take on what we had computerized, came up with thirty thousand people; the Vietnamese list had something like three hundred thousand people. We did a computer match of them and we found something like thirty of the people on our list were also, possibly, people on the Vietnamese list of people they were prepared to see depart.

Mike Meyers lasted about a year, which was all he had signed on to do, and he then went back to the United States. He was replaced by a fellow by the name of Mike Melia (?) who continued in Hanoi and then eventually moved down to Saigon in order to better liaise between us and the Vietnamese authorities. That happened as we were gradually moving toward the greater flow of people. In Saigon Mike Melia got involved in pre-interviewing people for us; where there was some sort of question or discrepancy or disparity or curiosity, or whatever, he would interview the person in Saigon, with, and only with, the consent of the Vietnamese authorities, to try and resolve these questions. I just described conditions as they existed from somewhere around December of 1979 through spring of 1981.

There was another channel, another operator; it was a curious thing and it was effective. What all the implications of things were I don't know and I suspect no one will ever know. It was possible for someone in Vietnam to get an exit permit from the authorities and to then go to the Air France office and book passage to the United States. The Air France office would ask their office in Bangkok whether or not we would process the person into the United States, which we would

do if we could do it and we could do it if we had a file on the person, unless something dramatic appeared at the very last moment that changed things. The Air France office in Bangkok would then relay our okay to its office in Saigon which would then actually book the person out. The persons would come out of Vietnam, and again, this informal but effective mechanism got from the Thai authorities permission for the individuals to be in Thailand for up to fifteen days on a transit status en route to their onward destination, wherever it was. It was not only the U.S. that people went to, some people went to France, some people went to other countries. I think both the Australians and the Canadians refused to use the mechanism, insisting that the individuals be interviewed by their own officers inside of Vietnam. But other countries did; I remember some people came out and went to the Ivory Coast in West Africa, and other countries. It was a very thin reed; it couldn't take care of many people in a week. I remember one time I got the job -- we were trying to force the Vietnamese into using the UNHCR mechanism -- to provide credible answers to the Air France channel as to why we could not accept an entire proposed shipment on each individual case. I had some expertise on the immigration law and I was to come up with a reason why their consideration had to be deferred for two weeks; you know, "we'll come back to you on two weeks on these individuals." The Vietnamese, if memory serves me on this, responded as one would expect, that in the next week's proposals were thieves, murders, liars, and perjurers; absolutely horrifying cases who if they had not been concentrated would have been rejected, deferred, so that they wouldn't have been heard from again. One case in that latter bunch was the product of a woman in New York who had, possibly for gain though there was no evidence of it but it was the only thing that one could think, manufactured family relationships with a whole bunch of people and was trying to bring them to the United States as her relatives when there was no way they could have been her relatives.

*Q: How would you find out, for example, whether people coming out from Vietnam had criminal records or not? Obviously the Vietnamese would have complete control over the documents they had.*

KILLEEN: That was the fallacy of the whole way of operating the way we did, or it touches upon it. Immigration to the United States, in the main, is governed by the existence of a family relationship to someone in the United States. What was being done was that people in the United States were being asked to document their relationship to an individual in Vietnam, and the individual in Vietnam was being asked to document his relationship to the person in the United States. Any old thing was being accepted as evidence of the claims. Now I say any old thing but it was not "any old thing"; old shoes, for example, were not accepted as proof of relationship, but lots of things were accepted. Of course, one really cannot rely on documentation anywhere, at any time, as proof positive of anything in any direction. But the immigration law provides that documentation be used in strong, direct, and immediate support of claimed relationships. The presumption upon which the immigration law rests is that from wherever people are coming there exists a U.S. consular officer who can, if necessary, at his call, go to the custodian of the records and ask to see the original records and verify it in fact. A claimed record was created contemporaneous with an event and does reflect the relationships claimed. Well we couldn't do that in Vietnam, so everything, every scrap of paper, every piece of evidence, was deemed to be no better than secondary evidence. Things like police certificates were waived as being unreliable and, if I am correct in my memory, the possibility of waiving police certificates was in those days invited in the case of communist countries. In our own conversations about whether

we should waive police records and military records for our customers it became a joke. We reasoned the proposition that the best we could possibly expect to get as either a police record or as a military record from the then authorities of Vietnam was, "This certifies that so-and-so is of a person of good character, we have no bad marks against his name, he is a good communist." Which, of course, if it said he was a good communist it makes him ineligible as an immigrant, not as a refugee. So we waived police records as being meaningless; they are in fact waived in a lot of places. There were even some countries, earlier than that, that refused to produce them; there were other countries where they were deemed unreliable. It seems to me that when I was in Bolivia they never asked for police records there because, conventionally, when a new government came in -- which statistically in Bolivia was about every nine months -- the records of the preceding government were thrown out because they were about the new government, so there were no police records.

We used these documents, we tried to get the best documentary evidence that was available, we tried to use common sense about things. I think that later, after I left, from things that I heard, the administration of some of that got out of hand; it got to believing that the documents were reliable. They forgot the fact that there was no American officer who could quite literally go to the custodian and verify it. And that is the crucial thing in the usability of documents, they are only there to document the claim.

*Q: Was there any attempt made to see if we could put an officer in? Later we did get officers in.*

KILLEEN: We expected to be in there, when I got there in November of 1979 -- I am probably mingling too much my own reaction and what was the official expectation. When I got to Bangkok I went into a hotel; it was a wonderful hotel in downtown Bangkok which the temporary housing allowance did not quite cover. That was okay, but part of the reason that I thought it was okay was because I did not expect to be in that hotel even for ninety days, that I would be in Vietnam before the ninety days were up. Then came the tragedy of Cambodia -- President Carter's wife came to Bangkok and saw some of the sadness and horrors of Cambodia -- and by the time it got to the policy level our hopes, which may have only been hopes but which I thought at the time and still think I remember correctly, that we were in fact going to Saigon to do our work, got scotched on the U.S. side. The legs got pulled out from under us on the U.S. side. The Vietnamese, we were told, had even prepared a house for us; that somewhat later got withdrawn, then, if I remember correctly, it was restored for that guy Mike Melia, the voluntary agency employee who was seconded to the UNHCR.

I never did go to Vietnam. About September of 1981 the program, under the auspices of the UNHCR, started actually to go. There were among us at the time, of the officers of what had become the Orderly Departure Program, three officers who spoke Vietnamese; by consensus we decided that they would be the ones who would go to Vietnam, with two of the junior officers bearing the brunt of it and the third guy, Lee Peters, would go also in his capacity as head of the program. A fellow by the name of Don Colin, who is dead now, became the head of the program; I don't know whether he ever did make a trip to Vietnam or not. We didn't want to confuse the Vietnamese by too many guys showing up. It certainly made a lot of sense to me, I didn't speak much Vietnamese at all, that the other three guys who spoke considerably more be the ones to go. By that time we were pretty much gun shy of the Vietnamese security considerations. Their

security services were at least seen to be very active, were seen to have a lot of input into the decision making process and we didn't want to see anything come a cropper by inadvertence, especially by inadvertence on our part in something as stupid -- very simply avoided -- as having some new guy show up. Basically, it was two guys who went to Vietnam, in the time I am talking about, on an Air France flight in the morning, did their interviewing, and then exited Vietnam with the people they had interviewed on the same aircraft, the same flight's return trip to Bangkok that afternoon. It was two guys who did most of the work with the third guy occasionally doing it; it was the two junior officers who did most of it.

When I got there we were the Vietnamese Immigration Processing, we changed when the new guys, the volunteers, arrived and became the Vietnamese Processing Unit when we were all in place. It was a very interesting organizational structure. Nominally we were part of the consular section, in fact we were but we didn't have much to do with the consular section. There were five American officers and five or so representatives of U.S. voluntary agencies; American Red Cross was there, Catholic Relief Services was there and I don't remember who else was there. As staff we had a couple of people who were loaned to us by the consular section, we had a number of PIT employees -- Part-time, Intermittent and Temporary -- which meant that they didn't have a permanent job and were limited to less than a forty hour work week in those days, that latter part changed later to less than a full work year. Basically we were divided between officer type work and do clerical type work and it didn't make much difference where you came from, if you were supposed to do officer type work you did it and if you were supposed to clerical type work you did it. We had some clerks who were loaned to us by an outfit called ICEM, which was the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration and is now the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration. Some of the representatives of the voluntary agencies were there because they wanted to get -- the old business of the camel with his nose already in the tent. There was a contract going to be let by the Department's Refugee Bureau to staff this refugee program and it was going to be a fairly substantial program. Once it was signed we ended up hiring on something like eighty-five people -- that wasn't the first week or the first month or maybe not even the first six months. At one point after I left Bangkok it was something like one hundred and forty people and they had moved out of the old offices and into new offices.

What we were trying to do was get the files organized, to get into communication with the people who over, in some cases, years had expressed in one more or less compelling form a desire either to go to the United States and settle there or to bring relatives from Vietnam to join them in the United States. Overwhelmingly it came from the United States, from U.S. citizens, who we felt had a right to expect that their government would listen to them. Since we were the designated hitters we were the guys to answer. There were thousands and thousands of immigration petitions, thousands and thousands of pieces of paper, most of it unorganized. That is what we proceeded to do, to organize this stuff; to create files according to the principal beneficiary, the head of the family, and to stuff into those file folders anything and everything that related to that same person or his immediate dependents and to ask the Vietnamese to let these people go. And to keep asking them and keep asking them. And to try at the same time to get in touch with the people who had communicated with us, in some cases this was five years before, to find out what the state of the play was, where they still were.

At the very beginning the administrative system was sort of nifty; it was before passage of the

Refugee Act of 1980 and everything that was organized was organized in very much of an ad hoc method. After the passage of the act the U.S. government came in and started paying for everything. Before that pretty much the same thing had been accomplished without the expenditure of taxpayer money and had been accomplished, with considerable inefficiencies, because individuals in the United States who wanted relatives to join them would deposit funds with ICEM in New York City to cover the cost of the individual's care and maintenance in Bangkok while in transit and their passage to the United States; final payment due on their departure from Vietnam. After doing that for a number of months, maybe no more than about six months, ICEM found itself with something like a half a million dollars in the bank, and the interest on that half million dollars, in the high interest days of 1979, were becoming to be an embarrassment for ICEM. It didn't really feel it could just take the money and certainly saw the possibility of that if say a hundred thousand people in the United States each deposited a thousand dollars with ICEM. All of a sudden there would be a lot of money and the interest on that would be probably sufficient to fund ICEM's operational budget. The U.S. government stepped in and said, no need to do this any more, we will do it all on the basis of reimbursable loans to the beneficiaries. Then some of the funny, goofy stuff started to happen because for some of the people whom we were dealing with there was no need for them to be refugees at all and the Immigration Service, purely for internal operational reasons, wanted not to consider them as refugees but rather to consider them as immigrants, which status they were entitled to. Not the least among the reasons that the Immigration Service wanted to consider them as immigrants was that if admitted to the United States as immigrants right from the beginning they did not have to be admitted to the United States as immigrants a year after their arrival as refugees. They didn't need to go through the adjustment process. But the Refugee Bureau carried the day and people who were coming to the United States as immigrants with immigrant visas, some common sense prevailed, were treated as refugees for processing purposes so that everyone was signing the same promissory notes and the airline tickets were being paid out of the same fund, right across the board. I have the feeling I am going on in an unfocused way.

*Q: It shows some of the complexities of that operation. When you left there in 1982 what was your impression about how well it was working at that time?*

KILLEEN: It goes back to a question on which we touched earlier. It was hideously expensive and it was nonsensical; the way to do what we were trying to do was to do it with people on the ground, you do it with something like a consular section that is there and you hire people over whom you have immediate and direct control to do certain kinds of work whether it be typing or filing or whatever. You do not need a lot of people, you don't need anything like eighty-four or a hundred and forty people to do these kinds of things. You don't deal with people in the United States to have them deal with people in Vietnam and get from them in Vietnam stuff that they send to people in the United States to then send to you. You don't do all kinds of things like that. A little more than a year after I got there the program was dead in the water except for these few people who were dribbling out via Air France.

I had built up a lot of home leave over the years, I had gone on direct transfer from Melbourne to Bangkok, I was due for home leave the beginning of June. I said to my supervisor, "How about my taking as much as three months of home leave? We are dead in the water; I'll be mostly in the Washington area, if you need me to come back just send a message, I'll come back right away,

no problem." "Sure, sure, sure. No problem." Toward the end of August I called, I was enjoying the home leave, I was enjoying the hell out of it. I called and I said -- I made some inquiries in Washington and was reading the papers -- "How's it going?" He said, "Still dead in the water." I said, "How about if I stay and watch Walter Cronkite do his last election?" He said, "Sure, what the hell." I was on leave for five months; that was a measure of how dead in the water the program was -- this thing that in October, November, December had called for volunteers to deal with an emergency situation. I was the deputy, I was gone for five months. I got back and we disaffiliated with the consular section, the contract was about to be signed between the Refugee Bureau and the voluntary agency, the Catholic Services. We moved into new premises because we needed more space than was available. The space into which we moved was the space that the consular service had been occupying before it moved out a year before I got there, in 1978. In 1981 the Vietnamese Processing Unit moved back in and in the process changed the name to the Orderly Departure Program. We then filled this place with people and with files. Now that was a long parenthesis from where?

*Q: You were talking about how things were going when you left.*

KILLEEN: When we moved we were still supposed to be a temporary operation and the selling point for us, for the State officers, who were the core of the Orderly Departure Program was that what we were doing was of a temporary nature. We had put up with cramped, cramped conditions in the consular section because we were temporary; when we moved into this other space to make room for the voluntary agency people we specifically chose very inexpensive, already owned Embassy space -- a couple of bucks to spruce up and a couple of bucks to install air conditioning -- because we were temporary. Fifteen or so months later when I was leaving we were still temporary, but we were now at eighty-five people with less signs of moving to Saigon than there had been in the fall of 1979. By May of 1982 there was no reason whatsoever to believe that there would be -- we weren't insisting it had to be diplomatic relations between the United States and Hanoi -- some kind of arrangement, whatever kind of arrangement, that would permit us to do our work there where you could work in some kind of orderly fashion. It was in September of 1981 that the people, the human beings, had begun to flow out of Saigon in significant numbers; hundreds per week instead of hundreds per year. People were busy but they were working in such an indirect way. It was clear that there were possibilities, real possibilities, that instead of hundreds per week it could go to a thousand plus per week.

To do things the same way we were doing them in Bangkok, to try to deal with thousands of people per week, week in and week out, we didn't have a clue as to how many people would be needed. I guess they still haven't reached the point of thousands per week, but some of the reason why not was because from the U.S. side a damper was put on the number of people we would accept to come to the United States on an annual basis and that translates down to a per week basis. I am sure there were some weeks that they did get to a thousand after I left.

**LACY A. WRIGHT, JR.**  
**Director, Kampuchea Working Group**  
**Washington, DC (1980-1981)**

*Mr. Wright joined the Foreign Service in 1968 after earning degrees at Mendelien College and Loyola University. His foreign service took him to Vietnam both during and after the War. Other assignments took him to Milan, London and Bangkok as well as to the State Department in Washington, where he worked with International Organizations in matters concerning refugees, and UNESCO affairs. Mr. Wright was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Wright was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.*

*Q: Well then you left the Italian desk in 1980, and then what?*

WRIGHT: Then I went to be the director of something which was then called the Kampuchea Working Group. I did that for a year and a half. And this was a kind of task force which was set up to respond to the tragic events in Cambodia and Thailand at the end of 1980, when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and sent hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fleeing into Thailand.

*Q: Well, who headed this and how was it organized, first. You were doing this, by the way, from 1980 to—*

WRIGHT: Let's see, end of '81.

*Q: Shall we stop?*

WRIGHT: Is that all right?

*Q: Sure, that's fine. Why don't we stop at this point? And we'll pick this up when you're dealing with this Kampuchea working group, which was starting in 1980, and we haven't gotten into this at all.*

*Today is the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 1998. So you were assigned to the Kampuchea Working Group.*

WRIGHT: that's right.

*Q: You were doing it from when to when?*

WRIGHT: I did it for a year and a half, from about June of 1980 to the end of 1981.

*Q: Okay, what was the Kampuchea Working Group. What was the genesis?*

WRIGHT: The genesis was the catastrophe that befell the Cambodians in the wake of the Pol Pot years, when the Vietnamese, at the end of 1979, invaded Cambodia. Now one has to have mixed feelings about that, because they were able to drive the Khmer Rouge out of Phnom Penh, which I think any right-thinking person has to regard as a good thing, but at the same time, they took over the country, which we regarded as a bad thing, and even worse, they created a huge number of Cambodian refugees, whom we didn't want to call refugees—whom we called displaced

persons—who were, whatever you called them, pushed to the Thai border, most of them across the border into Thailand.

*Q: Well, now, what was the group working on? Was it on the relief of this mass of refugees? Was it trying to do something about the situation in Cambodia? It is now called Kampuchea, I believe?*

WRIGHT: That's right. During that period it was called Kampuchea. We were doing relief, and the United States Government put up a great deal of money to feed and house these displaced people, and this was funneled mostly—well there were two main channels of effort going on, I guess. One had to do with the agencies of the UN system, principally the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, assisted, by the way, by the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross, which, by the way, is not part of the UN system but is an international organization, and UNICEF. UNICEF was very much involved.

*Q: UNICEF, the United Nations Committee for what?*

WRIGHT: Let me see, anyway the C stands for children. And it's based in New York, as you know. The other part of the effort had to do with voluntary organizations, many of them—probably most of them—American, but not totally. There were organizations from other countries there too, mostly based in Bangkok, and a very large number of them—I don't remember the exact number now, but probably upwards of a hundred at the height of this disaster—so our job was to funnel out our own money to the international organizations involved and, in some instances, to the voluntary organizations, like Catholic charities and various other agencies in the United States that are concerned with refugees and relief.

The other thing that we did was to do a lot of reporting on the situation there, not so much the political situation but the relief situation. And there was plenty to report about. I would say that another part of our effort was protection of these refugees. Now protection involved not only feeding and clothing these people but also trying to do what we could to assure their physical safety. These camps were very, very large places. I believe that Khao-I-Dang Camp reached several hundred thousand people at its height. You can imagine that in those kinds of conditions, with law and order having largely broken down and with so many other social problems coming to the fore at that moment, there was a good deal of lawlessness. There were many incidents in which minor warlords within these camps would take them over or take over parts of them, and so this was a constant problem. Probably, when we looked at it in a cold blooded way, statistically, even though there were murders in the camps, there were other kinds of violence... I remember at one point we compared this to the conditions, as far as we could determine them statistically, in Thailand as a whole, and they weren't as bad. That also means that Thailand was pretty bad—it's murder rate, for example. But it probably also means that despite appeals of alarm from a number of the organizations that worked there who saw these things first hand, they were not an extraordinarily high level, given the fact that in any society, including in a place like Thailand, a certain amount of violence exists anywhere. But at any rate, that was one of our main problems, and it was a subject of a good deal of scrutiny by our own Congress, people like Steve Solarz, Democrat then from New York, and others, as well as by these agencies themselves, whose job in life it was to look after refugees. So we were constantly under pressure to do better,

rightly so, with regard to the displaced people.

By the way, the distinction between a refugee and a displaced person is an extremely important one here. A refugee had the opportunity to be resettled in another country. He or she was a person who, according to the UN definition, had suffered persecution in his country of origin, and one of the options for such a person was to be resettled in another country. In part for political reasons, because we had just had these waves mostly of Vietnamese refugees who had kind of saturated the market for refugees in the world, and also because, I think, we genuinely thought that the Cambodians would probably want to go back to Cambodia and one day could go back to Cambodia. They were categorized as displaced persons. This too was a constant source of friction and contention between the US Government and various humanitarian groups.

*Q: What were the humanitarian groups pushing for?*

WRIGHT: Well, I wouldn't say they were all pushing with one voice, but first of all, they were all pushing for the best possible treatment of the displaced people—that was not in dispute—but some of them were pushing for some of them to be considered as refugees, and indeed, eventually, some of them were. These began to do this and to make pretty contorted distinctions among people, and often kind of arbitrary ones. People who had arrived before a certain date could be considered refugees; people who had arrived the next day were displaced people. And so there was a certain amount of that, and that was seen as unfair, as indeed, if you were one of the people involved, it probably was, and so on and so on.

Another thing that complicated the matter was that there were also camps for Vietnamese boat people who had washed up on the shores of southern Thailand. Some of them were separate camps, all by themselves, but in another instance, in Site II, as it was called, which was another huge camp, maybe 100,000 people, there was an enclave (inside of Site II) of Vietnamese refugees. Now there is a situation which is perfectly capable of exploding at any moment because the Vietnamese and the Cambodians, first of all, don't like one another and, secondly, the people in the Vietnamese enclave could be resettled in the United States, the people in the rest of this sprawling camp could not. So there were all kinds of problems. The efforts that then went on—although I just realized in the describing of this I am skipping ahead probably into one of my later jobs, so let me stick back with the Kampuchea Group.

During that time, the effort was mostly to keep these people alive. There was, of course, a political aspect to it. It had to do with the Khmer Rouge. The United States was put in the very difficult position because, on the one hand, we were, of course, against the Khmer Rouge because of the atrocities that they had committed; on the other hand, they were the enemy of our enemy, the Vietnamese. They were also in charge of people. That is, they ran some camps along the Thai-Cambodian border on the Cambodian side. So in many instances, at many times, the question was, Do you feed the people in these camps and thereby lend support, aid and comfort, to the Khmer Rouge, or do you let them starve? And there were people passionately on both sides of this question. By and large, we chose to feed them, and then, of course, our adversaries accused us of coddling the Khmer Rouge, which they regarded as a terrible thing to do. So that was a constant *leitmotif* throughout this.

*Q: Were there any signs that the Khmer Rouge had begun to accept the responsibilities of power?*

WRIGHT: I wouldn't put it that way, but one has to ask, who is they? The Khmer Rouge was always a very shadowy group of people, and it's probably a little too much to think that they had, let us say, a government in exile and ministers and all that kind of apparatus, although I think sometimes they did have people who were called those, but these were people out living in the most primitive conditions in camps that they had set up and that they were defending. So it takes a kind of leap of imagination to think of them as a government. Nonetheless, your question is a good one, and it added to the ambiguity of the situation, because sometimes it did appear as though the people in these camps were being modestly well treated by the Khmer Rouge running the camps, despite their atrocious past. So that, as I say, lent some more ambiguity to the situation.

One of the litmus tests that was often applied to this situation was whether the people living in the camps, ordinary people, wanted to escape and whether they would escape if they could. And sometimes, observing the situation, one came up with one answer and sometimes in another camp with another answer. But that too, if you had a situation where people were not trying to flee and where they did seem to be getting the aid that was being sent there, that lent support to the arguments of the people who said, "We can't let these people starve. We ought to feed them like other people."

*Q: What about the parts of Cambodia that had been taken over by the Vietnamese? How were things being done there?*

WRIGHT: I'm not sure I can answer that any more with much enlightenment. There were, of course, vast parts of the country that were in the hands of the Vietnamese. One of the constant questions during that two- or three- year period was how much rice and other foods, but mostly rice, can the Cambodians grow for themselves, and therefore, how much has to be provided by the international community? This, by the way, brings up another point of contention: should the international community, with our help or with our acquiescence, be feeding people in the interior of Cambodia, who, after all, were being ruled by the Vietnamese, who were our adversaries? And there were people in our Congress and elsewhere who said no, we should not be. As I remember it, we certainly acquiesced in the deliveries of rice to the interior of Cambodia and I think we paid for a certain amount of it. But to get back to what I was saying, one of the efforts was to try to cut down on the amount that was needed from the international community by encouraging the growing of rice inside Cambodia. This was in large part in the hands of the FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization, based in Rome, which had a big role in the interior of Cambodia. So they had to deal, of course, with the Vietnamese, who were running the place, as well as with the Cambodians, and that effort, as I remember it, had a certain amount of success.

*Q: What was your role particularly in this?*

WRIGHT: Well, I was the director of the Kampuchea Working Group. We probably had, at any given time, maybe eight or ten people attached to us, some of them Foreign Service officers,

some of them AID people, and it was a group that was constantly shifting and changing in its composition as people came and went. There was a group in New York of the international agencies and organizations, which was headed for a while by Sir Robert Jackson and of which UNICEF was a lead agency, and it was an effort to coordinate the activities of all the players, particularly the large international organizations. And they had pledging conferences and they had other kinds of meetings in New York, so one of our efforts was to follow these meetings very closely, be in touch with all the people involved, go to the meetings, report on them for the State Department and other agencies of our government—that was one of the things that we did. We also did the same kind of thing with regard to the voluntary agencies, which had their own organization in New York, of which Julia Taft was the head for a while, in fact, recently, I think. So we would sometimes go to their meetings. During the course of this, I made trips to Thailand, trips to Rome, to Geneva—not a large number I don't think—because people or agencies in those places were all involved in this effort.

*Q: How did you find dealing with the Thais with this mass of people on their borders?*

WRIGHT: Difficult. The Thais, before I went to Thailand, which I did later, I was given a very good piece of advice by one of my teachers of Thai here at FSI, who was not a very good teacher of Thai, but he did leave me this one piece of wisdom. He said, "Don't forget when you get to Thailand that whatever you do to a Thai he will do back twice to you. If you are nice to him, he will be twice as nice to you, and if you are not nice to him..." The Thais can be extremely gracious, normally are extremely gracious. They have the best hotels in the world, I believe, for that reason, because they have this tremendous capacity for service and for making one feel good. At the same time, they have a very dark side, as is attested to by their murder rate, which is very, very high. That by way of introduction. The Thais, of course, did not want Cambodians on their soil, let alone Vietnamese on their soil. They made that extremely well known to us. We, on the other hand, for humanitarian and other reasons, wanted these people taken care of, and the only option that we saw was for them to be taken care of in Thailand. So we had to try to reach an agreement with the Thai Government for this to happen. And it did happen, albeit fairly grudgingly by the Thais. The Thais were very fond of being sanctimonious about all they were doing, and in some cases that may have been justified, but for the most part we were spending, of course, a very large amount of money in Thailand to take care of these people, and the Thai, on the other hand, were constantly setting up regulations which wreaked hardship on the people involved, not to mention the various kinds of chicanery and corruption that would normally go on in any kind of a situation like that and which did, indeed, go on in Thailand.

So, for example, none of the displaced people was ever allowed to leave the camp, and if such a person did, if he were found wandering around alone in Thailand—which happened from time to time—he was put in jail. And I've been to that jail in Bangkok, and believe me, it's not a nice place to be. And the Thai were pretty unrelenting about this. And we were often involved, for one reason or another, in trying to get somebody out of one of these jails or trying to convince the Thai to treat the people more leniently. Sometimes this was because such a person had a defender in the US Congress who wrote to us about him or her or for some similar reason we got drawn into it. So we were constantly talking to the Thai about better treatment for these displaced people and Vietnamese refugees.

*Q: Well, while you were doing this, and particularly dealing with the Thais, there had to be an end plan. In other words, you had the Vietnamese, who were sort of our enemies, suddenly controlling most of the country. You had this amorphous group the Khmer Rouge, which were beyond the pale for any civilized party to deal with. And in a way no particular end in sight. And then you had these refugees and displaced people sitting in Thailand and also straddling the border. This sounds as open-ended as one can get.*

WRIGHT: Yes, that's what the Thais thought. And by the way, your question has just reminded me. There was another curiosity ascribed to the Thai treatment of these people, and that was that, on the one hand, the Thai wanted people to be resettled because they wanted them out of there in any ways they could; on the other hand, they knew that if the Cambodians started to be resettled in the United States, this would attract vast new numbers of people into Thailand in hopes of being resettled to the United States. So in the end, when you netted it all out, they were very much against resettlement in the United States for the Cambodians.

But you asked about the end game. I guess the end game in our minds was what, in fact, eventually happened, ten years or so later, which was that we always looked forward to the day when conditions in Cambodia would change sufficiently to allow these people to go back. Actually, I was gone from this by the time that eventually happened, and I think that when it did happen there was not too much controversy. I think people did, in fact, filter back into Cambodia, not only filter back but were taken back and assisted within Cambodia by the international organizations in a fairly peaceful way. Now a lot of other things more violent have happened since then, but I think at the time that that happened it was not so contested.

By the way, I've totally forgotten to mention another huge group of refugees—this time—who were in Thailand, and those were the Lao, up along the Lao border, large, large numbers of them as well who had fled in 1975, when the Vietnamese took over all of Indochina, and were still there. And there was a different wrinkle with them still, and that was that there was a great deal of sympathy for the Lao, particularly for the Hmong, which is a mountain tribe of Lao, who are different ethnically from the so-called lowland Lao, and who worked very closely with our Special Forces and others during the Vietnam War. And we felt that we owed them, as indeed, we did. And so we regarded them as refugees, capable of being resettled in the United States. The only problem was they didn't want to be refugees. They wanted to go back to Laos, by and large. Now many of them did come to the United States, and that was one of the problems because I guess they tended to write back the truth to the people in the camps, which was that they were having a difficult time. And so for years, people sat in those camps who could easily have been interviewed by the INS and gone to the United States. And this, too, became a subject of contention with the Thai Government: when are these people going to leave?

*Q: What was the feeling--again we're talking '80-'81—about the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, that this was a sometime thing, or how did you figure that was going to play out at the time?*

WRIGHT: I guess we thought it was a sometime thing, in the sense that the Vietnamese would gradually draw back some of their troops, but I imagine—I'm guessing a little bit now—that we thought that the Vietnamese would do everything they could to maintain a heavy influence over

whatever government there was in Cambodia.

*Q: Was there any reaching out with the Vietnamese occupiers and their collaborators in Cambodia with us or with any of the refugee groups in our dealings?*

WRIGHT: I'm sure they were always trying to put on their best face for the international organizations and the voluntary agencies who worked in Cambodia. I don't think there's any doubt about that. I don't remember any instances where they could have been said to reach out to us. I think we were fairly implacable adversaries at that time and regarded as beyond the pale, although I might be wrong and there might have been instances where some probe was made.

*Q: How about our embassy in Bangkok? I imagine that, in a way, they weren't very happy with the situation and you might have caught some of the brunt of the thing, of, you know, "You're screwing up our normal relations with this interesting country."*

WRIGHT: This came later, I would say. During the period that I'm talking about now, Mort Abramowitz was our ambassador. Abramowitz was a decided partisan of the displaced people. There was no doubt where Abramowitz stood, and in fact, it was he who sounded the alarm to mobilize the US Government to do something about this human tragedy in the beginning. So it would be interesting to talk to him about this, but he was certainly regarded as a decided defender of the interests of these displaced people and, I presume, must therefore have been looked at with a good deal of suspicion by the Thai Government at the time.

*Q: How about in Congress? You mentioned Steve Solarz. Were there others? Steve Solarz, as far as I know—I've been interviewing him and he's been off to Cambodia all the time—he's involved with the Pol Pot matter.*

WRIGHT: Even now?

*Q: How did you find dealing with Congress? Were you being called upon to testify and that sort of thing.*

WRIGHT: I don't think I ever testified, although other people did that I wrote testimony for. And I talked to a lot of staffers. People like Solarz who felt very strongly that the United States had a humanitarian responsibility toward the people in these camps in Thailand, as well as others of them, although I haven't thought about this for a while, but there were a number of congressional delegations, particularly later, when I was in Thailand, who went to Thailand. I'm trying to think of somebody who would have been on the other side of this. It's hard to be against helping refugees, but I would say there were people—this might bear some more thought—who were not involved in this issue, and then there were people, like Solarz, who were very much involved in trying to get the United States to be a part of this humanitarian effort.

*Q: Who did you report to and where did you fit in in the State Department apparatus?*

WRIGHT: I reported to the refugee bureau, although we had a lot to do also with the East Asia bureau. In fact, specifically I reported to a deputy assistant secretary who was, at least, I think,

for most of that time, Shep Lowman.

*Q: How did you find it within the Department? You know we've been so involved in Vietnam. This is five or six years after the fall of Vietnam. Was there a tendency to say, "God, I wish this would go away," or did you find an engaged State Department ?*

WRIGHT: Well, by that time, of course, although this was a big problem, it was by no means the biggest problem in the State Department . It wasn't the Vietnam War. As I say, the East Asia bureau was very much involved in this, particularly in the person of one of its deputy assistant secretaries at the time, who was John Negroponete, so I would say that within the refugee bureau this was a very large item. Up on the Seventh Floor, I doubt that it loomed nearly that large.

*Q: Well, when you left this job in 1981, how did you see the thing standing? Did you see this as an open-ended problem, or did you see that there was a handle on it, did you feel?*

WRIGHT: Well, again, to be honest, I don't remember what I thought, but as I look back on it, I think that we did have a lot of success. I was talking a few months ago in New York with one of the UNICEF officials that was very much involved in this. His name is Paul Altesman. And Paul at that time was a young aide to Jim Grant. Jim Grant was the very much beloved and very competent head of UNICEF during these years. And Paul was saying that from his point of view and his institution's point of view this whole effort was a tremendous success. When you think of the enormity of the job involved and even though it often didn't look like it at the time, to have received all these hundreds of thousands of people from three countries eventually into Thailand, taken care of them by and large, and then had them return either to their own countries or to third countries over however many years it was, eight or ten years probably, was really an effort that everybody involved in it could take pride in.

**CHARLES LAHIGUERA**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Udorn, Thailand (1980-1982)**

*Mr. Lahiguera was born and raised in New York. After graduating from Georgetown University and serving in the US Navy, he entered the Foreign Service in 1963. Though he served outside the South East Asian, his primary duties concerned the Vietnam War and its aftermath, particularly refugees. His overseas posts include Germany, Curacao, Vietnam, France, Hong Kong, Thailand and Swaziland, where he served as the Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Lahiguera was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

*Q: So, you were in Udorn from when to when?*

LAHIGUERA: I left Hong Kong in '79. So after a year at FSI I left for Thailand in the summer of '80.

*Q: So, you were there until when?*

LAHIGUERA: '80 to '82. Yes. To the summer of '82.

*Q: What was happening in Udorn at this point? We had, or maybe we had dismantled our air bases and all that sort of thing?*

LAHIGUERA: Yes. The Thais cooled towards us. We were trying to go somewhere else. We had no military units other than a defense attaché office and a military assistance there.

In the summer of '80 there was still reaction to the aftermath of our departure of Vietnam. The Thais were very concerned about any Vietnamese threat. They are traditionally concerned about the Vietnamese influence in Laos and Cambodia. That was the main focus of our military that I spoke to. Nothing happened that really got people too excited, but we were just keeping a careful eye on the Vietnamese and on the Lao governments. We had a lot of refugee camps there as well. These were indigenous tribes from Laos. We had many Lao camps. These people just had to cross the Mekong which was really a very easy thing to do. Then we had a Cambodian camp in the southern part of our district along the Cambodian border in Surin. All these camps had political operators of some kind. The anti-communist Cambodians were operating in the very corner of Thailand, where Laos meets with Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge were operating. In one camp there were people who were tending fields in Laos. They would come down to live in the camps in Thailand, but they planted their crops in Laos and then come back to the camp. So, you had this constant flow back and forth. There was always some type of activity going on. We were processing refugee applications from all these camps. I was concerned about the welfare of the refugees and how they were being treated. I got them some support from our refugee processing people. We did provide support from our embassy. They would send vehicles over to us for maintenance and that sort of stuff. I was very much interested in the activities of the Thai communist party. The Thai communist party was really dying. My personal feeling is that thanks to our efforts in Vietnam, the Thai communist party never got off the ground. I think it had been more successful earlier. We didn't have any serious insurgencies. There were some minor incidents.

*Q: Was there at your level a coolness of Thai officials?*

LAHIGUERA: Oh, not at all. They were very, very cordial. I had great access. I met every governor in the northeast. I met all the generals and many of the senior staff members. We spent a lot of time together discussing conditions in Thailand including security concerns. We had the aid projects in the north. Ambassador Abramowitz was there first as my chief of mission and then he was replaced by John Gunther Dean who came up and visited some of the aid projects. There was a lot of activity. I suppose the most exciting event when I was there; there was an offensive coup. Ambassador Abramowitz was still there. I went down to Korat to meet the general who was in charge of the forces. After my meeting with the general I went out to dinner and drinks with his chief of intelligence. I can remember we must have stayed out until 1:00 in the morning just talking and drinking. My last question to the colonel before I left for my hotel was there had been rumors about dissatisfaction among the young Turk colonels. Did he think

that there was the threat of a coup? He didn't, he said no he hadn't heard anything. So, I went back to the hotel. The next morning the coup occurred. I'm sure that the Thais thought that I had some inside information. I never even tried to argue with them. You know, they just took it for granted that the Americans know everything. That's their basic approach to life. That was a very interesting time. The colonels grabbed Bangkok and they thought they had everything under control. There were certain rules of the game for a coup. It's sort of seize everything and people take sides and then you count tanks and whoever has the most things wins. What happened in this case was the king was in Bangkok and got into his car. The king liked to drive. The king was really a sacred entity and he got in his car and he drove out of the city. There were no Thais anywhere who would dare go up against the king. He just simply drove to Korat where I was and no one was willing to stop him. I understand that General Prin, who was the Prime Minister at that time, had been arrested by one of the colonels. I wasn't there, but I was told later that when he was put under arrest, the queen called and a colonel explained to the queen that General Prin had been arrested and was being held at gunpoint by another colonel. The queen asked to speak to the colonel and the poor colonel got on the phone with the queen and she was giving him the what for. While she was berating the poor colonel, Prin walked out the door. The colonel didn't know what to do because he couldn't hang up on the queen. Meanwhile, the king got in his car and he drove. I had been talking to my friend, the chief of Thai intelligence, the previous evening and he was conveying to me all their plans and developments. When I was calling this information down to the embassy the phone line went dead. I was speaking to Jim Wilson who was the political counselor. Jim and I had served together in Munich. I was conveying to him all the developments in German. Of course, if the colonels had our phones tapped, they could eventually know what we were saying, but this was very perishable kind of stuff. It may take them a while to dig up a Thai who could speak German. The next day the king and the Prime Minister who were in Korat squashed the whole thing. I think only one poor fellow was killed and this was by accident when somebody fired a gun at a roadblock to get their car to stop. That was the only casualty of the whole coup. That was a very exciting time. I was in a very serious situation where I was the only contact with the Thai government up in Korat because they had all moved up to Korat. The embassy was relaying messages offering to assist and of course we wanted a peaceful resolution. We wanted to restore the elected government. One surprising element in this period was that the queen came out on the radio attacking the coup and that was regarded by the Thais as not very proper. That caused a little bit of pain.

*Q: Who was our ambassador in Thailand at the time and how did he use you?*

LAHIGUERA: When I arrived it was Morton Abramowitz. He was really focused on refugees. He really became Mr. Refugee. His wife was a super activist among the refugees that she dealt with in the camps. His staff was very refugee oriented. So, we were expected to give support to the refugees and to monitor positions of refugee camps. I did a lot of internal and domestic reporting. I would say I reported on a large percentage on the members of parliament. I wrote some stuff on who was going to win elections, covered bread and butter issues and tried to recruit candidates for USIS grants for the United States and that kind of thing. So, I did some domestic reporting. It all went pretty well I think. I talked to members of the political parties on all sides. General [inaudible] also had come up to my area and he became elected as the member of parliament from a province in the northeast. So, we had him as a presence and many of the political figures. I think the present prime minister was also a candidate in my area at one point.

So, I got to meet a lot of the folks there. The “political figures.” After John Gunther Dean came there was less focus on refugees more on the aid side and our political relations. I think they were probably a bit more interested in my political reporting.

*Q: Do you sense a concern to keep Thailand in the whatever you want to call it, the democratic camp or at least out of the communist camps?*

LAHIGUERA: Yes. As I mentioned before we did have a military aid program. The ties were very cordial. I think the one thing they weren't going to agree to would be the presence of the U.S. military because they thought that invited them as a target. But aside from that I think they wanted to have good relations with us politically and certainly encourage American tourists. American trade was of great interest. I had nothing but cooperation from the officials on the political on the military side.

*Q: You mentioned tourists. Around this time I guess it continued before that, too, Bangkok was sort of the sex capital of everywhere, I mean, the Japanese, the Germans had special sex life practically going in there. Did sex rear its ugly head or did your staff have any problems like that or were you sort of out of the line of fire?*

LAHIGUERA: Northeast Thailand makes a great contribution to this trade, they provide most of the women. We'd get a minimum number of tourists. There were some archeological diggings that people were interested in and we had the Surin elephants show, but aside from that there wasn't any major tourist attraction in the northeast. I didn't have problems on that side. We did have a modest number of retired American military living with their Thai wives. Many of them had alcohol and other problems. I managed to meet them all and straighten out some of their problems.

*Q: Was Thailand beginning to become an economic tiger at this point? What was your impression of the Thais as opposed to the Vietnamese as far as economics?*

LAHIGUERA: Well, I think the real economic surge in Thailand was right after I left. It was beginning, but I can't say that it was really in full bloom yet and in the northeast they have a great deal of poverty. This area is almost totally dependent upon agriculture. We were concerned to some degree about the growing of things like marijuana, and we did have the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) come from time to time. We were concerned about smuggling drugs across into Laos. We were really small potatoes. I was most concerned about furthering the development of the area than anything else.

*Q: Well, then in 1982 whither?*

LAHIGUERA: Well, it was time for me to move again. I can remember I was on the road and I got a message from my communicator saying that you've been asked if you want to be DCM in “I think Switzerland.” After some back and forth, it ended up being Swaziland. I was asked to be the DCM in Swaziland. I was originally offered a job to be the political military officer in Panama, but that fell through. That's a story all by itself. So, I ended up taking this job in Swaziland. There was a political appointee Robert Phinny was appointed as ambassador. He was

a Republican businessman from Michigan and they wanted somebody experienced to go with him to Mbabane which is the capital. I accepted the job.

**EDMUND McWILLIAMS**  
**Indochina Watch Officer**  
**Bangkok (1980-1982)**

*A native of Rhode Island, Mr. Mc Williams was educated at the University of Rhode Island and Ohio University. In the course of his diplomatic career he served in several South East Asia posts including Vientiane, Bangkok and Djakarta. Other assignments took him to Moscow, Managua, Kabul, and Islamabad. In 1992 Mr. McWilliams was engaged in opening US Embassies in the newly independent states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While his assignments were primarily in the Political and Economic fields, in Washington he dealt with Labor and Human Rights issues. Mr. McWilliams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005-2006.*

*Q: Well then, you left there in 1980.*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

*Q: Whither?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, let me just say the one little element because it impacted very much on my subsequent work. One of the things that, as I said Thailand, the embassy in Thailand was doing very well for us, was watching things in Laos and Vietnam and Cambodia, a watch post embassy, and one of the issues that began to emerge initially in the press was the issue of yellow rain.

*Q: Oh yes.*

MCWILLIAMS: The whole notion that the Vietnamese and Lao communists were using some sort of chemical, using air dispersed, against the Hmong, our old allies in Laos. And I, I guess sort of a troublemaker; I kept sending messages to Bangkok asking about these reports and what's going on out there. And at some point and I can't remember exactly when in '79 the embassy, I think in some frustration, invited me out to sort of look at the issue myself as a desk officer. So I did go out and work with Tim Carney and a few others and frankly picked up fairly interesting reports particularly out of Laos about this among the refugees who'd come out, the Hmong refugees.

I mention that because when I went to Bangkok in June of 1980 one of the jobs they gave me was to continue to work on the yellow rain story. That job, I went out as I say in June I think it was of 1980, to work as the, one of two Indochina watch officers, the junior one under Tim Carney. Tim was a great Cambodia hand and I was thought to be something of a Lao hand and

because I still had some Vietnamese from my military experience he focused on Cambodia which of course was becoming extremely important because of the refugee movement and I was sort of given the portfolio for Laos and Vietnam although I also worked along the border, the Cambodian border as did Tim.

*Q: So you went out there from 1980 to when?*

MCWILLIAMS: 'Til June of 1982.

*Q: Why don't we follow up the yellow rain story? In the first place, what was, how did it get, become a current issue and then what-?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, it was in the press and I, working with a fellow in the defense attaché office, Denny Lane, Colonel Denny Lane, became quite intrigued with this story and we did a lot of reporting, particularly interviewing refugees. And I think our information, which did get to the press, I think deliberately, was useful in creating some publicity problems for Hanoi obviously and for the Lao government. But it was not taken terribly seriously until it became a question of whether or not perhaps the Soviets had provided the technology for some of this chemical warfare against the Hmong. And I recall Secretary of State Haig at one point in Europe somehow began to speak about this and suddenly it became a major issue, that the U.S. essentially was endorsing the perspective that there was something real here. This all came as something of a surprise to us because myself and Denny Lane had been sort of developing information on this and it was getting, it was rather difficult to get anyone in the embassy or even Washington, we thought, to pay attention to what we were finding. And as a consequence of Secretary Haig's statement we were given a lot of, how should I say, longer leash to work this issue. We also teamed up with a former military doctor, Amos Townsend, who was working with refugees on refugee issues along the border and he assisted us in developing more information about the medical evidence with regards to yellow rain, taking blood samples and urine samples from supposed victims and so on. So for most of my two years there that was a principle element of my portfolio, developing information that would resolve the question of whether or not yellow rain was being used against the Hmong. And also, I should say, there were some reports of it also being used in Cambodia.

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*Q: As you got into this what were sort of the initial reaction and as stuff developed? I mean, was there something there?*

MCWILLIAMS: It's still a great question. There's a book that's just been written or I should say some research just been done at Princeton University, a very interesting study which was a thesis and which I believe is now becoming a book. And interestingly she has come to the conclusion after extensive reviewing of the data that indeed there probably was something there. My own perspective is that notwithstanding critics of our thesis, that the notion that there was real use of chemical weapons against the Hmong, I think there was something there. I think that we never really invested the resources to develop the information so that it would be truly credible to the scientific community. I think that's unfortunately. But my own perspective is shaped by interviews I conducted with Hmong directly in Lao, they spoke Lao of course and I spoke pretty good Lao at that time, and I'm persuaded that there was something the Vietnamese were using.

*Q: As I recall there was something about our sending a team in, you know, special forces trying to get samples and you know, there was something, was this bee pollen and-*

MCWILLIAMS: Well in point of fact none of us, I'm not aware of anyone going into Laos to collect samples. Essentially we did get samples because the Hmong would bring stuff across the Mekong for us. However Denny and I and Dr. Townsend did cross into Cambodia a number of times, this is at the point when it was Vietnamese controlled, to essentially take blood samples, urine samples, collect reports and so on, from not only the Khmer Rouge also some of the other, just simple peasants but also from some of the other anti-Vietnamese, the Sihanouk forces, the Son Sann forces and so on. So there were teams, well I was part of teams that went into Cambodia but we didn't go into Laos. And as I say, my feeling is that yes, ultimately we were on to something but unfortunately I think Washington only took it so far as to use it as a propaganda ploy against Hanoi and Moscow and therefore didn't really explore deeply enough. My view.

*Q: Well then you were the Vietnam or the Indochina watcher but you had essentially Laos and Vietnam.*

MCWILLIAMS: As well, yes.

*Q: What were you picking up from the Vietnamese experience in Cambodia at the time?*

MCWILLIAMS: I don't think much. Well again, Tim would have been doing a lot of that. My reporting tending to be more about the humanitarian concerns related to the Cambodian refugees. I think Tim, as the senior officer, would have done more with the regards to what's going on in Phnom Penh. My interests were more in the Cambodian politics, Son Sann's groups, Sihanouk's group and of course Khmer Rouge groups. We didn't have much contact with the Khmer Rouge except on the yellow rain issue. No, I can't say I worked very much on that question.

*Q: Well were we, speaking of the groups you dealing with and the refugees, did you see- backing any groups, usually the refugees, that they sense. In other words that there seemed to be some, seemed to be going anywhere?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, there were a number of us who had some sense that we ought to be encouraging and assisting the forces of Son Sann and Sihanouk. Unfortunately at one point, this would have been probably early '82, then Deputy Assistant Secretary Robert Oakley came out to a meeting of the Khmer elements that took place in Kuala Lumpur at which we essentially forced forged an alliance between Son Sann's people and Sihanouk's people and the Khmer Rouge. This was with the notion of battling the Vietnamese more successfully. That, I think, was ultimately a terrible mistake because essentially it soiled the image of Son Sann and Sihanouk by associating them with the Khmer Rouge who by that time everyone had recognized had been really beasts. It was, I think, a blunder and I think it set things back considerably because then the Vietnamese were able to say we're dealing with the Khmer Rouge and the whole notion that Sihanouk who had significant political support within the country and even Son Sann, who was a clean, good politician who had his own following, their political strength was tremendously weakened by the fact that we essentially forced them into an alliance with the Khmer Rouge. I think it was a terrible mistake.

*Q: Do you have any feel for the genesis of all this happening?*

MCWILLIAMS: I think it was the old anti-Hanoi desire to deal with these Vietnamese occupiers. It was a subordination of what should have been a very deep concern about human rights and the Khmer Rouge to a strategic perspective that we need to get these Cambodians together so that we can assist them better. And I should say after that, of course, then we began to see assistance moving into Cambodia to support the anti-Vietnamese side, this being assistance moving through the Thai and it was of course a secret at that time. But our assistance and I believe some assistance from others moving as I say through the aegis of the Thais we were able to get some assistance into the Khmer elements. And again, you have to remember that the principle element of the Khmer alliance, if it can be called that, against the Vietnamese, was the Khmer Rouge, they had the military power.

*Q: What were you, I mean were the Hmong, were they just, everybody was against them in this?*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, the Hmong is a very sad, sad story because of course they were not really welcome in Thailand. They were kept at a camp up in Ban Vinai, in a little camp outside of Nongkai and I believe one other campsite. But having to go up there very frequently, usually on weekends, I would take a bus up and then bus back on Monday morning, just interviewing these people, seeing the conditions in which they lived, hearing the stories and the problems they faced

inside Laos, it was heart wrenching. And to remember that these were very critical allies to the U.S. forces and to see how they were left. The point being that many of them were stuck in these camps for many years in Thailand principally because their great leader, Vang Pao, who was in the United States and still had great influence over them, was very reluctant to see these refugees come to the United States. So we essentially collaborated in his strategy to sort of keep them on the border notwithstanding the Thais' interest in getting them off the border as a potential force for use again in Lao apparently. But it was a very sad result for these people.

*Q: What were you getting from, I mean, were you part of the process of finding out what the Khmer Rouge had done?*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes but there again I would have to say that Tim Carney was the principle political reporter. My interest was much more yellow rain but also looking at the humanitarian question of how the international community was responding to this tremendous flow of refugees out to the border.

*Q: Was this a period of considerable exodus of boat people from Vietnam though?*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, yes.

*Q: Could you talk about what we were doing? I mean, because this is a pretty nasty time. I mean, people were coming but it wasn't the Thai government particularly but a lot of people were preying on them.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, if you remember the boat people were not simply coming to Thailand, some did, but many were landing in Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and so on and I was not really a part of that policy development but obviously we were very anxious to encourage these countries to accept these refugees as countries of first asylum with the expectation that they would be moved on to countries of, you know, permanent asylum. My involvement with that was much more, again, as sort of an intelligence collector. I would visit the refugee camps in Thailand and pick up, try to get perspective, what was going on in Vietnam. I recall working very much on the MIA question, of course, but also I developed a line of reporting about what we called then the Vietnamese gulag, trying to determine what had happened to those Vietnamese who of course worked with us. And we developed I think a rather comprehensive set of reporting about prison camps in Vietnam, identifying them, talking about conditions at those camps, and I had the assistance of a young fellow, an intern, his name I can't recall who deserves a lot of credit for that, I can't recall his name now. But that reporting eventually was actually picked up because of course it was a propaganda angle to this as well and the Asia Wall Street Journal published a long report that was based on this about the Vietnamese gulag.

*Q: Well, can you talk a bit about what you were getting about what was happening in Vietnam?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well very clearly, I mean, the Vietnamese and Hanoi were being very effective in identifying and taking in for reeducation, it was called, certainly all of the Vietnamese who had worked with us but in addition they of course were very rough on the Viet Cong. Much of

the Viet Cong leadership had been killed in Tet in 1968 but the Hanoi leadership saw the Viet Cong in some ways as being as much or more of a threat to their control than our allies because they had good popular support, the Viet Cong did, so you had Viet Cong being imprisoned but of course anyone who had worked with the United States would be taken off for reeducation and those who had held senior positions, of course, were in trouble. Many were killed. I think more important they were placed in camps where conditions were not only health threatening but life threatening and many died in those camps.

*Q: Life threatening how?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well in terms of provision of food, medical care, overwork, exposure to malaria. Very, very tough time for these people in the camps. And of course I think much of the impetus for the exodus of boat people was, certainly much of it was economic. I mean, the situation economic was very dire in South Vietnam but I think also and probably the more important impetus for movement of boat people was the threat to individuals or to the families of individuals who had worked for the Americans, remembering of course that while the father or the mother might be taken away to a reeducation camp the family members, the immediate family members were also under a cloud in terms of education, in getting jobs and so on. So it was a bad time in South Vietnam.

*Q: Were you reporting on how the, while you were in Thailand, how the Thais were reacting to this?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well of course my beat wasn't Thailand. I didn't really deal with Thai politics.

*Q: I was wondering, but on the refugee side there were lots of stories about-*

MCWILLIAMS: Oh, well yes, sure.

*Q: Pushing boats off or seizing boats or raping the women or robbing and that sort of thing.*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. Yes. Well, that certainly was a concern although I think that was a concern to some extent as well in other parts of the region. But one of the problems that developed for me at the embassy was that I was hearing and trying to report stories of Thai, particularly Thai military, mistreatment of Thai refugees as they came across, inadequate provision for them and so on. And I'm trying to remember details but that was, reporting it of course in some ways wasn't welcome because it was being critical of the Thai hosts. I think in general the embassy was inclined to give the Thai some benefit of the doubt, some leeway on these issues because Thailand's role was so critical, both politically and militarily in terms of getting supplies through to the fighting Khmer, but also simply in supporting the vast humanitarian project along their border.

*Q: Did you have much contact as still a relatively junior officer in the embassy with the other officers there? I was wondering whether, you know, there was sort of a, particularly at the junior and mid-level often there's a feeling which may be among the officers somewhat at odds with the more senior officers, you know, things are going badly.*

MCWILLIAMS: No, no. I think at that embassy, thanks to very, very good leadership you didn't really have a class structure despite the size of that embassy. When I came in Mort Abramowitz was the ambassador, Sheffie, I keep mentioning Abramowitz; she was almost an officer at the embassy. She knew more and was doing more about the humanitarian work on the border than perhaps anyone in the embassy. They were very, very- it was a very good leadership. Burt Levin was our DCM and they went out of their way to be close to officers and to clerical staff and to families and so on. It was a very tightly knit embassy despite being a very big embassy. Subsequent to that John Gunther Dean came in and replaced Abramowitz, a very different sort of man but at the same time a very good leader and I think the embassy responded very well to him.

I should mention one element that I think is important here. Unfortunately, although Mort Abramowitz and Burt Levin were extremely good officers within the embassy, their rather brusque style didn't go down well with the Thai. If anything I think Mort in particular was not terribly well appreciated by the Thai, who react as do a lot of the Asians culturally poorly to abrupt and brusque American presentations. There was a few finger wagging incidents. You don't do that to Asians and not expect to have a bad result. And I think as a consequence, despite his tremendous skill and dedication that Mort was not as effective as an ambassador as in some ways Ambassador Dean was. John Gunther Dean came from a different tradition, very much a Europeanist and very cultivated, and...

Just one other aspect of that, I recall as Mort Abramowitz left very highly regarded in Washington because he'd handled a very difficult tour extremely well, was to be rewarded by getting an ambassadorship in Indonesia. And he didn't get it because essentially the Indonesians said they didn't want him. The street story back in Washington initially was that the Indonesians had rejected him because he was Jewish. I know for, I know quite securely that in fact he was rejected because the Thais warned the Indonesians that he was a difficult ambassador, that he would insist on things very strongly. I've always thought in retrospect, having subsequently gone to Indonesia that this is unfortunate in many ways because I think Mort Abramowitz in the early Suharto years, well middle Suharto years would have been a very good ambassador to have had there because he would have, I think, been tough. And unfortunately we had a string of ambassadors in Indonesia who basically went along with the Suharto regime and did not question some things the Suharto regime was doing. I think Mort, given his instinct for human rights and so on would have been a very useful man to have had there. Unfortunately he didn't get that job.

*Q: Could you talk a bit about your impressions about the various non-governmental organizations that were dealing with refugees particularly in your bailiwick and all, you know, affected this? You know, their attitude, relations with the embassy, that sort of thing.*

MCWILLIAMS: Basically there were, I think the assemblage of people that wound up on the border really a motley crew, a lot of strange personalities but I think largely very much dedicated to helping the Khmer. I had great respect for all the organizations. I can't remember really there being a bad one out there. I should mention though there was one relationship problem and that was it became clear to everyone working on the border that there was more than just humanitarian assistance going on there, that the CIA or somebody was there and that in fact arms were moving across the border and so on and as a consequence I think a lot of the NGOs, many

of them American citizens, of course, and the press out there were suspicious and skeptical of the U.S. presence on the border. And I know a lot of us and certainly I myself, particularly because I was interested in what was going on and getting intelligence, assumed that many of us in fact were CIA when in fact of course we weren't. But that impeded the relationship to some extent with the NGOs but I must say from my perspective I had a lot of respect for what they accomplished.

*Q: Well then, you left there in 19-*

MCWILLIAMS: Let me just touch one other issue because I think it's important. I mentioned MIA things, MIA information. I was also very interested in picking up MIA information because it had been very important when I had been in Washington, I knew how important it was in our policy. And I recall, particularly talking with Vietnamese boat people, a number of reports that I got that to me sounded quite credible about live sightings and when I got back to the embassy I was required to provide all of my reporting on these topics to a special office within the defense attaché office. And I subsequently found out that much of that reporting never left the embassy and that's always bothered me and confused me, that much of what I got was not passed on and it's always left me a little bit concerned.

*Q: You have any idea why?*

MCWILLIAMS: I don't know. I really don't know. But it was a factor that bothered me a bit. I should say also at the very end of the tour I had, because of essentially too many trips into Cambodia I had picked up two cases of malaria, sort of a double malaria, one of which they treated and one which they didn't know I had so I had a long bout of malarial problems and I had dysentery so my last four or five months there I was still traveling but I was less effective than I would have liked to have been simply because I was very weak. But it was a great tour and it was the first award I picked up, they gave me a superior honor award out there, and it was a very interesting tour.

I had great colleagues. I mentioned Denny Lane and Colonel, former Colonel Amos Townsend, some very good people that I worked with. And I must say I had great respect for the leadership I saw there, both in Ambassador Abramowitz, Burt Levin and John Gunther Dean.

**RICHARD A. VIRDEN**  
**Information and Press Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1980-1983)**

*Mr. Virden was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at St. John's College in Collegeville, Minnesota. He joined the Foreign Service of the United States Information Service (USIA) IN 1963 and served variously as Information, Press and Public Affairs Officer, attaining the rank of Deputy Chief of Mission in Brasilia. His foreign posts include Bangkok, Phitsanulik and Chiang Mai in Thailand; Saigon, Vietnam; Belo Horizonte, Sao Paulo and Brasilia in Brazil;*

*and Warsaw, Poland, where he served twice. Mr. Virden also had several senior assignments at USIA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Mr. Virden was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.*

*Q: Well then, you left there in 1980?*

VIRDEN: Yes, we went from there back to Thailand. Of course I'd previously studied Thai, there was a suitable opening, and we decided to go for it. We might well have stayed in Europe, and when Solidarity was born just a couple months later were sorry not to be there.

It had been hard to leave Poland; we were very much taken with the Polish people, their faith, their gallows humor, their love of country and their valiant struggle against seemingly endless adversity. Linda cried all the way to Frankfurt on the flight out. But my tour was up, it was time to go and so we went back to Bangkok, where I was assigned as the information officer and press attaché for three years, from '80 to '83.

I characterize what was going on in Thailand at this time as the aftermath of war. So what we were dealing with in those days, the main focus of our mission there, were things related to the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

In particular, we had large numbers of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos that were in camps in Thailand. We also had questions about Americans missing in action and trying to find them, or their remains. And those were kind of dominant issues for our entire mission in those days.

The ambassador was Mort Abramowitz for the first year or so. I remember working with him on one occasion in the chancery at 3 or 4 in the morning; this must have been at the end of March in 1981.

Two things were happening at once. Yet another coup attempt was underway in Thailand and President Reagan was shot in Washington. I wrote a statement for the ambassador to release to the press, declaring our non-involvement in the coup and intention to stay out of the squabble.

The first news we got about President Reagan was misleading, saying he was barely scratched and so forth. We all of course learned later that he was much more seriously injured than was believed at the time.

*Q: Was it a different Thailand than when you'd been there before? I realize you'd been off in the provinces, but did things seem different at all?*

VIRDEN: Well, yes, in some ways. Maybe the biggest was that rural life was changing. When I was there earlier, so many of these villages were inaccessible and you didn't have proper roads, you didn't have communications.

Well, now, this is a decade later and you're getting that. A decade of work, with lots of outside organizations helping, including our own USAID, had made a difference. A lot of important

development work had been done in building village to market roads and larger highways and bringing electrification. So that started to result in some genuine improvements to rural life. That's one significant thing, and it was a continuing effort.

As for the refugees, the Thais didn't want them there. We had to twist their arms to allow the refugees to come in even temporarily, promising that other Western countries would take them for permanent settlement.

That was a great point of contention throughout this period: which countries would take these refugees from their camps in border areas, and when. We of course brought huge numbers to our own country. Canada, Australia, Germany and Argentina were also important destinations, as I recall, but that was a constant and thorny problem for U.S. relations with Thailand.

It was a complex job determining which refugees would go where and how they would be selected, screening them. A major section of our embassy was a refugee office set up to deal with this issue. It was the dominant story of the day.

The final two of those three years I was there, the ambassador was John Gunther Dean.

*Q: Oh, yes, I've interviewed John.*

VIRDEN: Okay, well, when I first met him, I said, "I've been to your home town" and he was rather surprised by that, since he was born in what was then Breslau, which was in Germany. It's now in Poland and is called Wroclaw.

He was a genuine pro, and one of the things he did believed in was personalizing how we delivered American assistance. So every time we gave a new grant for something or completed a project, he would go out for a ceremony at the work site and get identified with it, get a picture taken. We would send USIS media teams there and get the story placed on television as well as in newspapers. One Saturday morning he sent his special assistant to track me down at my son's t-ball game to complain that one of these events wasn't reported that day in the Bangkok Post.

Some people might say the ambassador was just on a big ego trip, but I don't think so. I think he was right. His involvement made it meaningful for Thais, about how the U.S. was there for them. It was a sort of personal diplomacy, a way to show that the ambassador and his country were trying to help improve the life of the average Thai. I think it was pretty effective.

*Q: the thing that impressed me about Ambassador Dean was the fact that he, unlike so many of our other sort of diplomatic stars or something, he was almost always out in field. He was not a Washington operator.*

There are various stories, but he was pretty solicitous of staff, too.

VIRDEN: That's very true. He was that way, definitely was with me and Linda. He treated us well and I saw him do that with others, too. He clearly cared about people, and that was very impressive and appreciated.

*Q: He's written a book on his time, based on the oral history I did.*

VIRDEN: Really? I didn't know that.

*Q: He had some problems later on. I think he had what amounted to a nervous breakdown in India. I can't help but feel all the munchkins in the corridors of the State Department jumped on him, maybe because he didn't have a Washington base.*

VIRDEN: He never had a major job back there. I know he was ambassador in the field at least four times.

*Q: A very impressive career.*

VIRDEN: A very impressive man. I liked him very much. I thought he was a great ambassador. As was Morton Abramowitz, both of them. Abramowitz was always showing up in refugee camps in rural areas, too. They were not Bangkok-bound, either one.

*Q: Were the refugees a problem within the embassy, with some pushing for them and others saying, "For God's sake, let's get out of this"? Was this a bone of contention, or not?*

VIRDEN: Yes, we had a lot of congressional interest, too, and you got hit from all sides about our policy. There was an ongoing debate about whether we had an obligation to the refugees. Around this time I also first heard the phrase, "compassion fatigue."

And we certainly heard plenty from the Thais. They felt a lot of pressure on their own society from the presence of so many refugees in their midst. They felt threatened, and they really only very reluctantly agreed to offer even first asylum, with no permanent settlement.

I was rather shocked to discover as recently as a few years ago that some of those camps were still in operation, some refugees still waiting for a permanent home almost three decades later.

*Q: What was your impression of the Thai government in dealing with it?*

VIRDEN: I was not too impressed with the way they did this. I think they could have been more humane about it. They were more preoccupied with potential damage, economic and political, social, to their own society and less focused on the human needs of people who had to flee their own homelands because of war.

They were very reluctant to do much for them and they didn't want to make them too comfortable, they didn't want them to get the idea they could stay forever.

So it was a constant battle. I think some of the people who had line authority over dealing with this issue could say more about that, but I know it was a constant tension.

We're talking about big numbers that were there. You had the Vietnamese and Khmer "land

people,” who came over the Cambodian border, you had some of the Vietnamese “boat people” way down in the southern part of Thailand, and you had the Lao and Hmong up in the north and the northeast. You had quite a variety of them, each with their own individual as well as group-specific issues.

The United States had a major responsibility for this situation, a consequence of our Vietnam War, but Americans were reluctant to take in too many. Our representatives spent a lot of time, too, trying to convince the Canadians, Germans, Australians and others to share the burden.

*Q: What about the Thai media? What was your impression of it?*

VIRDEN: Very lively. Bangkok had a huge number of newspapers in those days. There were a couple of good English language daily newspapers, the Bangkok Post and The Nation. And then there were something like 25 daily newspapers in Thai and even several daily newspapers in Chinese.

There was an equal abundance of radio and television stations. And many foreign news organizations made Bangkok their regional base. So all in all, this was a crowded, dynamic media center.

Many of the Thai newspapers were identified with particular political factions. And some of them were quite irresponsible, scatological and respected few journalistic standards; others were very impressive operations. So you had the whole range.

That was then. I don't know what it's like now, whether anywhere near that number of newspapers has survived. Journalism has changed a great deal, no doubt there, too.

You also had, by the way, a very large foreign press contingent, and they had their own club down near the fabled old Oriental Hotel, sort of modeled on the foreign correspondent's club in Hong Kong, I think.

I spent a fair amount of time there, lots of good times. Linda and I had the pleasure of meeting Walter Cronkite and his wife there one evening, shortly after he'd retired from CBS. He was another of my heroes, and I asked him whether he'd considering taking an appointment as director of USIA. “Not under this crowd,” was his smiling response (This was the early years of the Reagan Administration).

Many of the U.S. and third country journalists based in Bangkok covered not only Thailand but all of Southeast Asia. Now, most media organizations have very little permanent representation abroad. It hurts the bottom line.

*Q: Were you and your organization spending time in southern Thailand, where there was a small Islamic revolution going on, or not?*

VIRDEN: Yes, we were, in both of my tours in Thailand. Back in the early 60s, USIS had two branch posts in the southern part of the country. That area, of course, is ethnically distinct, the

religion is different. The distance from Bangkok is significant.

There are lots of reasons why you would fear a separatist movement down there. And that's before the rise of terrorism and the threat that we feel these days from militant extremists peddling a perverted version of Islam.

So I think to this very day, that whole phenomenon, the Thais worry about their hold on the south and security down there; they are concerned about possible separatist or terrorist movements coming out of that region.

*Q: Did the existent of a vibrant sex industry which catered to the world, practically, in Bangkok, did that impact on the operations of the embassy in any way, or not?*

VIRDEN: No, I wouldn't say it did. I think the consular section maybe most, because you'd get Americans who'd get in trouble; there was sex tourism coming from the U.S., as well as from Germany and some other places.

So that was a factor and I think our consular officers, more than I realized at the time, had to help Americans who got in trouble. There were drug related issues, too. When the Thais, at our insistence, started to enforce drug laws, some Americans got caught in the web, and we had to plea for leniency. There was a certain inconsistency there, to put it mildly.

*Q: Again, how did you find social life there?*

VIRDEN: Oh, well, wide open. There were many great restaurants, both Asian and European, and lots of wonderful things for us as a family to see and do within Thailand itself. Linda was pleased to be back in a country she'd first known as a student, more than a decade earlier. Our son, Andrew, went to the first, second and third grades at the International School of Bangkok and starred on a championship T-ball team. We had fun.

*Q: I realize you were based in Thailand, but had we begun to open up to Vietnam at all, or was there any connection with their embassy in Thailand?*

VIRDEN: Yes, because there was something called the "orderly departure program." During this period we started sending consular officers over to Saigon periodically to interview potential candidates for refugee status.

We were looking at Amerasian children, for example, and other potential refugees with a direct tie to the United States. So we started to send over one or two consular officers every week to screen potential candidates.

There was great interest in this, so I got involved as press attaché in setting up press conferences and interviews for Bangkok-based media to learn more about what was being done.

*Q: Did any stories in the United States have particular resonance or interest within Thailand*

*that you had to deal with?*

VIRDEN: One genre I remember involved periodic kind of adventure stories about guys going in and trying to find American POWs who were still allegedly being held by the North Vietnamese or by the Laotians.

Nothing ever came of any of those stories, but there was still some belief and these stories would appear in U.S. publications. Free lance operators, ex-Green Berets or whatever, would go in convinced there were Americans still being held at this spot or that remote area, and they were going to go in there and rescue them.

There never was any real good reason to believe there was anything to any of these stories, but nonetheless they did get a lot of play.

*Q: Yeah, well, in the 1992 election, Ross Perot, a presidential candidate, basically endorsed the theory that there were Americans in captivity in Vietnam or Laos or Cambodia.*

VIRDEN: And there are lots of people today that believe Barack Obama was not born in America, too.

*Q: You left in --*

VIRDEN: I left in '83 and was assigned next to the National War College.

**RICHARD M. GIBSON  
Thai-Burma Desk Officer  
Washington, DC (1975-1977)**

**Consul/Branch Public Affairs Officer  
Songhla (1980-1982)**

**Political Officer  
Bangkok (1982-1985)**

**Principal Officer  
Chiang Mai (1989-1992)**

*Richard M. Gibson was born in Florida in 1942. He received a bachelor's degree from San Jose State College in 1965 and his master's in 1966. He served in the US Navy from 1966-1971 as a lieutenant overseas and entered the Foreign Service in 1971. Mr. Gibson was assigned to Rangoon, Bangkok, Songhla, Yokohama, Okinawa, and Chiang Mai. In 1998, he was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: We'll pick it up in 1975 when you're the Burma desk officer.*

*Today is the 15th of April, 1998. Dick, in 1975 you were going to be doing what?*

GIBSON: In July of 1975 I took a direct transfer back to the Department to an office called EA/TB, the East Asia Bureau, Thai Burma Desk. My job on the desk was one, to be the Burma desk officer and two, to be the officer for both Thailand and Burma on narcotics issues. That second one ended up taking probably as much, if not more, of my time than being Burma desk officer.

*Q: First you were on the desk from '75 until when?*

GIBSON: Summer of '77.

*Q: When you took over the desk how did you see the situation in Burma and what were American interests?*

GIBSON: By the time I got on the desk, the American interest in Burma was overwhelmingly narcotics and that is why they paired the two jobs basically. I can not remember any other issues that we really had with the Burmese at that time. It was totally narcotics as far as I recall. There would be the occasional *démarche* on a particular vote in the UN but we all knew we were just going through the motions. The Burmese were going to vote or not vote as they saw fit. We tried to follow the course of the communist insurgency but it was sort of related to narcotics as well. Basically the issues were narcotics.

We had already begun, or were in the early stages I suppose of providing narcotics related assistance to the Rangoon government. I think the agreement for that had been signed in '74 or I don't know if there was a formal agreement even. An agreement had been reached and certainly there must have been a memorandum of understanding or something like that in '74. I was not involved in that while I was in Rangoon but when I got back to the desk, one of my major jobs was to work very closely with an office at that time called S/NM which stood for the Secretariat Narcotics Matters. The special advisor for narcotics control or something like that was a man named Sheldon Vance a career diplomat. We worked very closely with his office regarding narcotics related assistance to both Burma and Thailand.

*Q: From the perspective of the desk during this two year period, how cooperative did you find the Burmese on narcotics?*

GIBSON: Actually we found them quite cooperative. It was in their interest. We were providing them equipment which they would use for suppressing narcotics trafficking organizations. The original purpose as I recall was to interdict caravans heading south to the Thai border. It got expanded to taking base camps and that sort of thing. At that time, as today, the political insurgents were supporting their insurgency through narcotics. That was a big debate always. Are these people ethnic political insurgents, freedom fighters, or whatever, or are they drug trafficking thugs? Our view was they were primarily drug trafficking thugs and I think that is probably still the American government's view of the group. I agree with that. I don't have any

problem with that. What we were doing was giving the Burmese the opportunity to help themselves by suppressing their armed political opposition, armed insurgencies, who were trafficking in drugs, therefore meeting our objective as well. It was win-win.

We weren't particularly intrusive. The Burmese were a little bit stubborn as they would be about protecting their own prerogatives and national independence and that sort of thing. They made it very clear that they would not have a bunch of Americans running around the place looking at what they were doing with the helicopters or the communications equipment that we were providing them. This was all non-lethal stuff. We eventually provided them F-28 Fokker cargo aircraft good for moving cargo. We also eventually provided them, well after I left, with spray aircraft, like what crop dusters use, for spraying chemicals onto the opium and destroying the crop that way. It just kept expanding.

All this time the Burmese would fill in the paper work and give us reports. How accurate the reports were, we had absolutely no way of knowing. As I recall at least in the early days when I was there, they sounded reasonable and we accepted them at face value. We had no real choice. They weren't going to let us in and monitor everything which is not a particularly surprising attitude from the Burmese. That's the way they are. They are xenophobic. They guard their independence and their prerogatives but we found them cooperative enough.

We would go over there and visit and they would take us out. They would be cutting down opium fields for us, this was before the spraying. They would have meetings with my bosses and I was there as the note taker type guy. They would come over to the States and we would pay for an executive observation tour and we would take them around and meet with DEA and with Customs. In general it was a pretty good program at the time. A lot of people opposed the program.

There were a lot of sort of the predecessors of today's anti-Burmese government activists who were very much concerned that the helicopters, in particular, would be used to suppress non-drug trafficking insurgent groups. Our view at the time was non-drug trafficking groups in rebellion consisted of two: the Karen and the Mon. That was basically because they were not in areas where opium was available. We made it clear to the Burmese that this was for suppressing trafficking groups. As time went on, the Burmese by all accusation actually did use the helicopters against non-trafficking insurgents. In my time I don't recall that happening but later on apparently that happened. There are enough reports so I suspect they are true but I don't have any knowledge of that.

*Q: Did the human rights side come up again at all during the time that you were on the desk?*

GIBSON: Not really. You know that was still a little bit before the human rights emphasis and I don't recall human rights, while I was on the desk from '75 to '77, being an issue with the assistance to Burma. Later on when we move to my next job, it did become a bit of an issue but not much and I'll tell you why. In those days, '75, '76, '77, I don't recall it being an issue.

*Q: We're moving to Thailand now from '75 to '77. There you were dealing exclusively on the narcotics side is that right?*

GIBSON: Right.

*Q: What was the situation then?*

GIBSON: Going back to the war years and even the pre-war years from the early '50s on, we're really in bed with the Thai diplomatically, politically. We have a lot of equities in Thailand. The military bases are winding down, fair enough. But we've got a huge intelligence apparatus in Thailand for collecting data from all over that part of the world, not just in Thailand. We have a very close working relationship on intelligence issues with the Thai. Politically they back us in the UN. Economically, before the trade friction started with them and everything, we have a whole wide range of important relationships with the Thai.

Somewhere along the line, I'm not sure when, I would say it was probably in the late '60s or mid '60s, we began to start nudging the Thai on narcotics issues. We continued to approach the Thai on taking narcotics more seriously as an issue. The Thai never really took it too seriously as an issue because they didn't really see it as their problem. They had other equities in narcotics related issues and considerations which I'll explain. Mainly this is a period when we are very good at paying lip service to beating up on the Thai about narcotics: you've got to do more. The ambassador or the DCM would go in and make a demarche. With sort of a wink and a nod everybody would go home, everyone would be happy again and nothing would change. The reason was always that the Thai are trying. Whether they tried or not I can't really say. I think many Thai were trying but there were many things working against their efforts. Nothing much got done and because of all of the intelligence cooperation, political cooperation, economic cooperation and so on, we never really got on the Thai case about it.

The thing they were facing in all fairness, Thailand was not a major producing country. Yes they did grow some opium. They still grow some opium, considerably less than they used to. Through a long slow process of economic development in the opium growing areas of northern Thailand, the opium crop was being reduced. The opium farmers were being given alternatives. But the northern Thai border with Burma was basically a wide open no-man's land. There was not much there. Opium and heroin would come across into Thailand. If it was raw opium it was refined in northern Thai heroin refineries, if it was heroin it was being refined in Burma Shan State and coming in. Thailand was this great transit area for most of the Burmese opium drug production in those years. Now it is China, India, and other ways out, but in those years it was almost all through Thailand.

What we were trying to do was to get the Thai to interdict that stuff, do a better job of interdicting it, but the Thai have this basic problem. One, they didn't control their border and that was scary because north of the border up in the Shan State there was a power vacuum and political chaos. There were maybe 30 armed insurgencies running around fighting the Burmese government, fighting each other and they were all supporting themselves on the drug traffic. They all had bases on the Thai side of the border which was their logistics area, their rear area. The Thai were not strong enough basically, or did not want to commit the resources because they had their own internal domestic insurgency and that sort of thing. They did not want to stir up a hornets nest by trying to suppress these armed groups along the border. Instead they took an

approach, live and let live. As long as you guys aren't messing around on the Thai side of the border, you're behaving yourself on the Thai side of the border, what you do in Burma we're not going to get involved in. Basically the Thai had very little choice. They would have had to spend a whole lot of money, deferred a whole lot of army and police resources, up into that area to bring it under control and even then the Thai army was not noted for its fighting ability and there is no guarantee they would be able to do it.

The biggest problem for everybody in this was the Kuomintang remnants that had left Burma and had eventually ended up along the northern border. Long about 1970, the Thai and the KMT remnants sort of struck a deal and this is after the Thai tried for nine years to get them out of the country. They tried to get Taiwan to take them out. Taiwan was trying to get all these guys to come back to Taiwan and disband and disarm. These guys didn't want to go to Taiwan, they wanted to stay where they were. Negotiations dragged on for something like eight years. Finally at the end of that the Thai and the Taiwanese quit talking to each other and they gave up basically. The Thai had to deal directly with the KMT remnants in their own country and they made a deal. We'll let you stay here as refugees if you act as our security paramilitary forces along the border and if you will go fight the Communist Party of Thailand insurgency in Chiang Rai Province, which is in the north. That was the deal. So you have the KMT patrolling and being the security force for the border, keeping all the smaller drug trafficking and insurgency groups sort of in check and behaving themselves on the Thai side of the border and running great drug caravans out of Burma.

That was the problem we were up against with the Thai. We all knew this. We all knew the Thai probably couldn't do much more than they were doing but we still felt obligated to push the Thai to do more. We did that for years and years and years. It was nothing new, it wasn't new policy. We sort of knew we weren't going to get them to do everything we wanted but they were trying in their own way. Eventually now they are doing a good job but it took a long time.

*Q: During this '75 to '77 period, was this the period where we were keeping up rather constant pressure with no great developments?*

GIBSON: Yes, basically. We kept providing assistance. We would provide helicopters to the Thai police, and communications equipment. We would pay for economic development projects in opium growing areas that of course has a spin-off of hopefully providing the farmers with an alternative to opium production. There would be a seizure now and then, a big seizure sometimes. You always had the white ant problem in that you would have opium or heroin seized and it would somehow disappear from the police storerooms which we usually attributed to white ants eating it. White ants were a problem in Southeast Asia. They eat wood, just about anything.

There was nothing big. It was during this period that there were dedicated Thai police in the office of Narcotics Control Board who were their equivalent of perhaps the DEA. They were trying hard but drug related corruption in the Thai police, to a lesser degree in the army, basically negated everything the good guys were trying to do over there. DEA was there. They had a lot of people and they worked very hard. Our intelligence people also addressed the drug issue and tried to do some things there. Not a whole lot changed. We pressured, they gave a little and tried

a little harder when we pressed. The embassy basically served as an apologist for the Thai because the Department was putting pressure on the embassy to go put pressure on the Thai. The embassy would soak it all up and then become the advocate of the Thai and it was not exactly built for progress.

*Q: Who was the ambassador during that time?*

GIBSON: Charlie Whitehouse, an excellent man. He really is. And he was stuck. He had so many issues at stake there including the draw-down of our military forces out of the bases. Charlie didn't have any other choice, I don't think, but I bet in his shoes I would do the same thing I am sure.

*Q: This is a rather crucial period in Southeast Asia, '75 when you arrived. By the time that you arrived South Vietnam had fallen. I was wondering what about the repercussions both in Burma and in Thailand, from your perspective?*

GIBSON: I don't think there were many in Burma that I can recall. It is really a hermit country. In Thailand there were a lot of repercussions. By '75 we were well into our draw-down. We weren't totally out of the country yet with our military forces but we were fixing to be soon. There was the democracy movement. The old military dictatorship in Thailand was gone and you had elected governments. I think it was Kukrit Pramoj at the time. Kukrit was certainly not going to be a lackey of the Americans.

*Q: He was the prime minister?*

GIBSON: Yes, I think it was Kukrit at the time. They were all concerned about what's next. I mean here are the Americans, cut and run out of Southeast Asia. The Thai have to make their peace with the Chinese and with their Indochina neighbors because of their role in the war so there is this reorientation of policy going on in Thailand and part of that is distancing themselves from us. The thing that really put the cap on it was the, I can't remember the name of that ship...

*Q: It is the name of a port in Puerto Rico. It was a ship that was seized by the Cambodians.*

GIBSON: Right. The U.S. Marines staged a rescue operation of the Mayaguez out of a Thai air base without the courtesy of letting the Thai government know we were going to do it. That really pissed a lot of Thai off. Student radicalism was in full swing and there was an awful lot of concern over pressure from the students, the potential for riots and this sort of thing. We were sort of walking on eggs with the Thai. But the Thai establishment of course, they were trying to walk the middle line. They had such close relationship with us and had worked with us so closely over so many years that they didn't really want to cut us off and put us too far afield, but they did want to make their peace with the Chinese and with the countries in Indochina. So it was a difficult time for the Thai.

*Q: Did you have any feel during this time when you were working in dealing with Burma and Thailand that the North Vietnamese or the Chinese were involved in the drug business?*

GIBSON: No. That is an old allegation that got its start with Harry J. Anslinger, I think his middle initial was J. He was the federal narcotics commissioner in the United States in the early '50s and a darling of the right wing, the China lobby and the committee of one million or whatever the heck they were called. He was the one who kept saying the Red Chinese are in the drug business. They are exporting heroin, corrupting our youth, the youth of the west and this sort of thing. It was all bull shit when Harry was saying it and the Chinese government was never involved in anything like that. In fact their suppression of the drug trade was quite draconian when they got power. Subsequently Anslinger's charges were discredited.

The Vietnamese, I know nothing that would indicate they were in the drug business at all. The Laotians were a slightly different story and that really comes a little later. It comes in my next assignment. There were a lot of indications that the Laotian army was shipping out opium into the international markets for profit. Maybe personal profit, but maybe to buy stuff with too, it wasn't really clear. The Vietnamese, I'd be really surprised if that were the case.

*Q: Leaving this in '77 where did you go?*

GIBSON: To the new created INM. S/NM was replaced by a bureau and it was called INM, International Narcotics Matters.

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*Q: You took Thai really sort of from '79 to '80?*

GIBSON: Yes, I took it at FSI.

*Q: How did you find this? You are giving me sort of a laughing glazed look.*

GIBSON: How about root canal with no anesthetic? I am not very good at languages and it was for me like pulling teeth. Not only that, and this is an interesting thing, apparently up until the year before I started they had a method of teaching Thai at FSI which stressed the tones because after all it is a tonal language. It's got five tones and if you botch a tone, no telling what you are going to be saying. You are going to make a complete fool and entertain the local people you're talking to. They used to teach it with a transliteration into English characters with all the little accent marks and this sort of thing. The people who took it under the old way, really had good pronunciation and good tones but they found that they were having trouble reading because they weren't exposed to the script until well into the course.

What they did with the group that I was in, right from day one we were dealing with the script. We did almost no work on tones and they de-emphasized the sitting at the booth listening and repeating with the tapes. They de-emphasized all of that and it was much less structured. You'd sort of sit around in class and you would just sort of say what you think you want to say and you don't do drills and this sort of thing. If you put Thai in an unstructured situation they're not going to do anything because they are just laid back folks. It was all very pleasant. We all had a good time but none of us learned anything. Some of them did. There were some success stories out of the class. Eventually FSI went back to the old way of doing things.

I can remember when I got to Thailand people saying to me, you know all the words. I had a massive vocabulary. My friends who had taken Thai under the old way, they would say to them you speak Thai clearly, meaning you have the tones down. Whereas my group came through and we had this huge vocabulary and we could read fairly well but our pronunciation wasn't much. We had a lot of catch-up work to do once we got to the country. I am not very good anyway and even if they had done it the tonal way I probably still would have screwed them up.

*Q: You were in Thailand from 1980 until when?*

GIBSON: In the summer of 1980 I went to Songkhla which is in south Thailand. It was a small consulate in south Thailand. In '82 I moved up to the embassy in Bangkok.

*Q: You were there from '82 to?*

GIBSON: From '82 to '85.

*Q: Let's talk about Songkhla. Could you describe in 1980 what the place was like and then we'll go on to your work.*

GIBSON: Songkhla is on the Gulf of Thailand and it borders on Malaysia. It is a small port which has been expanded since I was there. At the time it was a small fishing port. I don't remember how big the town was but it wasn't very big at all. There were very few westerners living there. It's about a 30 or 40 kilometer drive from a place called Hat Yai which was, and is, the economic commercial center of that part of Thailand. Hat Yai is connected by road and railway to Malaysia. Songkhla was a delightful place, sleepy, laid back little place. The consulate was quite small. There was me, an American PIT locally hired.

*Q: A PIT is a part-time intermittent temporary, part-time employee.*

GIBSON: 39 hours a week job. There were about half a dozen State Department employees. There were three Thai employees of USIA/USIS so I was concurrently the branch public affairs officer as well as being a consul. There was a DEA office around the corner from me that had three agents, one American secretary and various Thai employees. Our communications was done by radio. We would transmit telegraphically. We would punch tapes and then send it by radio to the embassy in Bangkok. The guy that ran the communications force was a Thai air force major on loan from the Thai military, a hold-over from the old days when we were working very close with the Thai in the south on insurgency issues and that sort of thing. It was a sleepy, very pleasant place.

*Q: Why did we have a consulate in a sleepy, pleasant place down in southern Thailand?*

GIBSON: To provide Dick Gibson with a nice assignment. The history of the thing was it was a holdover from winning the hearts and minds during the insurgency period.

*Q: We're talking about the communists in mainly Malaysia?*

GIBSON: No. There were three insurgencies in the south when I was there. You had the remnants of the Malaysian Communist Party insurgency which was pretty much dying out. They had a few guys and they were all holed up on the Thai side of the border. The Thai, like in the north, weren't doing much about it. They weren't bothering the Thai. Then there were various groups of Muslim separatists which were often confused for bandits. There wasn't much difference. Then there were remnants of the Communist Party of Thailand because while the Communist Party of Thailand in the north and the northeast was almost defunct by 1980, 1981, 1982, (they were really on hard times) the ones in the south were flourishing because the root causes of the communist insurgency in Thailand were addressed in the south more slowly than they were addressed elsewhere: official corruption, official bullying of the people and that sort of thing, mistreatment of the poor folks. There was this big collection of them and they were all on the wane when I was there. At one time the communist insurgency down there had been really big.

Songkhla originally was a branch public affairs office of USIS going out and showing films without psychological warfare, so it went out with the Thai and that sort of thing. Eventually it became a consulate. I'm not sure when, but I think it was in the early '70s. When I was there the justification for having it was we're just finishing up the insurgency and that sort of got wrapped up while I was still there. I remember going to see some of the big victories. After a big victory my Thai army buddies would take me up there. We would tour the area, they would show me all the captured weapons and all this stuff. It was all kind of fun.

More importantly, that was a period with all the boat people from Vietnam coming over to south Thailand. Malaysia and south Thailand is where they would make shore. There was a UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, run refugee camp at Songkhla just south of town on the beach for the Vietnamese. There was a massive piracy problem going on there. The Thai fishermen were doing all kinds of really bad things out there on the water to the Vietnamese boat people. We then started an anti-piracy program down there. It turned out that while I did a lot of reporting on the dying insurgency, the most important part of my work while I was there was looking after the protection and welfare of these refugees. That is why we still had a place there. We have since closed it.

*Q: Could you talk about the boat people?*

GIBSON: It was an interesting thing. I had a philosophical problem with the refugee situation. These people, and you didn't have to be a rocket scientist to be around them a bit, were not political refugees by and large. I'll tell you about a survey that I did on that. It was clear that they were economic migrants just jumping to the head of the cue by coming across by boat. I had real philosophical differences with that which got me cross waves with Mort Abramowitz, the ambassador up in Bangkok, who was very sympathetic to the refugees. I am sympathetic to their problems. I am very sympathetic to the things that were happening to them on the water. In fact I was one of the big supporters, pushers, and activists in the anti-piracy program to make the Thai fishermen stop what they were doing to the boat people. I also had real problems with this idea that these were all political refugees and we should all put them on the next big bird to Orange County.

To give you an example, at some point during my time there my PIT assistant and I, working with the UNHCR guy, a Frenchman Alan Foley, a great guy, used UNHCR boat arrival records and we would take boats as they would come in. We would select them. Some boats would come from say the Delta area and others would come from somewhere else in the south. They would sort of represent this group of geographical regions from where they set out from quite often. Not entire so, but generally. We selected boats that were largely ethnic Chinese and largely ethnic Vietnamese. They were all Vietnamese of course but Sino-Vietnamese versus Vietnamese. We would then select off the registers people by age, by sex, to try to get representative samples. We did extensive surveying with interpreters and looking at the record what they had told the interpreters and everything to try to determine why they are coming. It was clear that probably ten to 15 percent could qualify as political refugees. Probably another ten percent were sort of marginal, pretty hard to tell. The rest were clearly economic migrants or young people dodging the draft or auto mechanics, seamstresses, wanting to immigrate for the same reasons our ancestors wanted to emigrate from wherever they immigrated from. But they weren't political refugees.

I wrote all this up, outlined the methodology and everything. In those days we sent everything up to the embassy and then the embassy transmitted it to Washington. I sent it up by pouch. Before I sent it up by pouch, somebody from the refugee department came to visit. There were two of them that came to visit me and I get them confused. One was Ship Lowman who was a DAS, I think, in the refugee bureau. I can't remember the other guy's name. I think it was Ship Lowman who came to see me and I explained to him what I was doing. He was checking on refugees doing his thing and I told him about all of this. He looked at me and said, "Well, that's not policy." And I said, "What do you mean that's not policy? Policy, you want reporting right?" He said, "No, but our policy is that these people are political refugees. If I were you I would not send that report."

I am stubborn. The minute somebody tells me not to do something, okay, I'm going to do it. I just sat there and I was stunned. Basically here is a senior officer from the Department telling me that I can't report something that is going on because it is not consistent with policy. It's the emperor's new clothes, that type of thing. The minute he left, I called the DCM, Burt Levin. He's a wonderful guy. I just think the world of Burt. I said, "Burt, here's what happened." He says "You send that report." I sent it up. It sat and sat in the embassy. They didn't know what to do with it because they didn't want to send it in. Burt didn't have any problem sending it in. It's reporting. It doesn't mean it is true, as I later said.

It was all up there and what was going on was somebody in the refugee section called the Far Eastern Economic Review and told John McBeth about this. At the time, the Far Eastern Economic Review was carrying a big piece on the refugee issue and one of the simple figures in it was from an American USAID officer in Singapore who basically had sent a report saying the same thing that I was saying and got creamed for it. His career was finished. He found out that my report was saying basically the same thing. I didn't even know this guy, there was no collusion. It was just what was going on. McBeth wrote a little squib from Bangkok after the story telling that the consulate in Songkhla had sent this report up saying something along the same line but it had been spiked by the embassy and it wasn't being sent out. Of course the

ambassador and the head of the refugee operation at the time, Lionel Rosenblatt, had thought I had done it. I didn't call McBeth. I got to know McBeth later and we got to be good friends. Every now and then over a couple of beers I would ask him "John, who the hell told you about that." He'd say, "I can't tell you."

What they eventually did was Rosenblatt rewrote key parts of the cable and changed basic conclusions to tone it way down and distort the facts and editorialize and everything. They sent it in with my name at the bottom. I knew I was in trouble but I'm stuck with it. I sent a cable up to the ambassador saying Mr. Ambassador there seems to have been a mistake here because the cable that went out under my name wasn't the same as the one I had written and here are the differences. He basically sent me a short gram back telling me to shut up and that he is the ambassador and has the right to send out any cable that he wants, which I never argued a bit. My position was that they could have done a lot of things to that cable: tore it up, use it for toilet paper, forgotten about it, sent it as was, or sent it as was with a note or comment from the embassy saying Gibson has been in the jungle too long and he's lost all touch with reality and he's full of shit. Any of these options would have been fine with me but to change the basic conclusions and to leave my name in the text as though I had written those conclusions really ticked me off.

*Q: This is illegal.*

GIBSON: It was certainly improper, if not illegal. As the ambassador I imagine he has the legal right to do whatever he wants and I never questioned that. Anyway, they were really going after me. Then they thought that I must have been the guy that leaked it to McBeth. Burt, bless his heart, phoned me on the phone and he said, "Dick, I'm asking you, did you leak it?" I said, "No." "Do you know who did?" "No." If I knew I wouldn't have told him anyway but I didn't know and I still don't know to this day. I have a suspect who denies it. So Burt ran interference for me and meanwhile Abramowitz transferred. By the time that I got up to the embassy in Bangkok Abramowitz was gone. To Mort's credit, while I was in the political section in Bangkok about a year-and-a-half later and he was with ISA over at the Pentagon, he came through on something. I met him and he was totally gracious to me. No hard feeling held or anything like that, but boy I was angry.

*Q: I don't blame you. Let's say that distorts the ethics of the thing. You can do whatever you want but you don't falsify somebody's reporting. You just don't use it.*

GIBSON: The reason I bring that episode up was to show that the refugee business, I mean business because all these various organizations getting grants from the federal government, it had become a growth business. People like Lionel Rosenblatt who I'm sure is very well meaning...

*Q: I know Lionel. I knew him in Vietnam.*

GIBSON: I'm sure he was doing what he thought was right. It shows that we had just lost touch with reality in our refugee program which I thought was too bad.

*Q: This is tape three, side one with Dick Gibson. You were still down in Songkhla.*

GIBSON: I would like to talk about the anti-piracy program. Let's do the anti-piracy program and then pack it in for the day. Because of the piracy problem down there where, I'm sure everyone who has read the papers know all the horror stories that have been going on and I don't think they were exaggerated. There were really terrible things happening there. I used to go up and down the Gulf of Thailand coast in the south tracking down stories, talking to officials, and talking to fishermen. The fishermen were really a hostile crowd. They weren't interested in talking to me at all. I would talk to officials and everything and they were all in to denial and minimizing. But you would occasionally find a Thai official who would sort of level with you as to what was going on. I was sending in all these reports. This was what was so funny because of this stink over the refugee cable that I described. I was getting attaboys from the Department refugee people all the time because I was describing these atrocities. At one point I had heard about a boat full of refugees being machine gunned, and then I found the boat on the beach with bullet holes all through it and this sort of stuff. I kept getting these attaboys. Then all of a sudden, one ah shit cancels out a hundred attaboys. It was one of those kind of deals. Anyway, it really was a problem.

When I was down there the embassy negotiated (all the negotiating was done up in the embassy, I wasn't a part of that) to establish an anti-piracy program where we would cooperate with the Thai navy. We would pay them basically to stage anti-piracy patrols out of their naval base at Songkhla. They have a little naval base there run by an admiral who is a great guy and we got to be close friends. As part of this program we gave them two O-2 airplanes. An O-2 is a push-pull, made by Cessna. I forget the civilian name for it, it is not an O-2. An O-2 is a military term. We used them in Vietnam as an airport control aircraft a lot. It had a propeller in the nose and one in the tail with a twin broom thing that pushes, push-pull. Anyway, we turned over two of these in Songkhla to go out to patrol for refugees in distress and to look for things going on that shouldn't be going on. We gave them a 95 foot refurbished former U.S. Coast Guard cutter which we sort of overhauled and sent across the Pacific to them. I think it was UNHCR that got into the act also and provided them with about a 50 or 60 foot patrol boat. It was a fast patrol boat with guns on it and stuff like that.

The first admiral down there, Wattana Pom, really seemed sincere and interested in chasing down the pirates unlike most of the cops around there, they didn't much care. They don't like Vietnamese anyway. The Thai don't care much for the Vietnamese. He was pretty good. He did some innovation. He developed the idea of the old Q boat concept from World War I.

*Q: Fake freighters which submarines would surface to capture and then the sides would fall away and they would shoot at them. The British used these.*

GIBSON: Wattana Pom came up with the idea on his own. I would like to take credit for it but I couldn't. He got a couple of refugee boats, because there were plenty of them around that had beached and left or had been towed in by the Thai navy, he got them all painted up and they sort of looked like real boats. He had a bunch of his guys in something like pajamas or funny hats looking like Vietnamese. They would go out and patrol for pirates. In the first couple of months, they got a bunch of them. There were a couple of shoot-outs. Of course all of the sailors on board

had M-16s and so there were shoot-outs there. They made some arrests. That lasted about two or three months then by that time all up and down the coast the grapevine had identified the Q boats and their characteristics and where they were going to patrol and that sort of thing so it didn't do much after that. It showed a lot of initiative on his part.

The use of the patrol boats just astounded me, their non-use. They had the speed boat, the one from UNHCR. It would go out and cruise around. I don't think they ever caught anybody. The 95 foot Coast Guard cutter, you had some real potential there because that is a ship. It has some good sea keeping capabilities and you can go out and stay on it for a few days. That ship would go out and come in. They would never spend the night at sea. I said to the admiral one day, "If you take this Coast Guard cutter and you send it out for say like a weeks patrol and they cruise up and down in the Gulf there and you get way out there, you are liable to see some interesting stuff." He looked at me and said "Overnight? The men would have to be away from their families? The seas get rough at night and it is a little more dangerous out there." He just couldn't see how that would make any difference. I said, "How do you think that that boat got from the United States to Thailand? No one put it on an airplane. It came all the way across the Pacific. That ship, the 95 footer, is perfectly capable of patrolling in the Gulf of Thailand for a whole long time." He just couldn't see to do that. He was a little embarrassed about it so it may have been his orders from above, they weren't going to give him the budget or whatever it was I don't know. But it was real funny because that ship never really got used to its full potential. Then he left after the first year. He left and was replaced by some guy whose name I can't remember who didn't have any interest in the program at all. When I left, there wasn't much left of it.

*Q: What about the insurgency down there, did we play any part in it?*

GIBSON: Not to my knowledge. I was reporting on it and tracking it but not many people were really interested in the insurgency down there. By that time obviously the Thai were going to win and the insurgencies were a nuisance but not any kind of a threat to the body politic in Thailand. I used to follow it because I like that sort of thing and because I had a lot of buddies in the Thai army down there. We would go out. I got a kick out of it. I followed it and probably most people didn't read what I sent up about it. They weren't that interested in it. As I said, there were three insurgencies: the Muslim separatist group, the Communist Party in Malaya, and the Communist Party in Thailand. They were all around.

There were a lot of places we couldn't go at that time. Brigandage, banditry, roadagitry, whatever you might call it, was a real problem down there. A lot of places, even the main highways, you didn't want to drive on at night because of the chance of being hit by a road block of guys with M-16s wearing military uniforms. They were called paramilitary rangers that the Thai used a lot against the insurgency made up of local thugs rounded up out of the villages, unemployed youth and this sort of stuff. It was sort of like the old days when juvenile boy teenagers got in trouble in the States, you could do a year in the boys home or you could go into the army. Oh, I think I'll go into the army. That's the kind of guys they were. They would moonlight by holding up trains. The train from Bangkok to Hat Yai was frequently being held up. It got so bad that while I was down there, there were police units riding the train to protect against being held up by train bandits. The general feeling was a lot of the bandits were these paramilitary guys because they had M-16s and they would be in fatigues and stuff. They would

claim to be insurgents of this group or that group. Security was sort of bad.

I got several death threats, a couple of them by name. This was during the period when our guys were in Iran, the hostages were there. In the south of Thailand there are a lot of Muslims and so Muslim groups would occasionally send me death threats. A couple times I sent my family up to Chiang Mai for three weeks, a month one time because I got this note one time saying they were going to kill my family first and then they were going to kill me. When they were generic addressed to the consul, I didn't pay much attention, but these were addressed to Mr. Gibson and so I took them a little more seriously. It was interesting. I did not drive my official car on trips. When I wanted to go out I'd drive my personal car and I had fake plates so that they wouldn't be blue and they wouldn't show up. I'd put them on and just drive my car. I had a little Nissan that I drove around. There were some bad areas.

I remember visiting one time the governor of Prang Province. The month before I visited him, he had been out in an area just out of town where there used to be a special forces training camp where U.S. special forces used to work for the Thai and now the Thai were doing it by themselves. Out in that area, he got ambushed. This was like a month before I got there. He wanted to show me the place but he didn't want to go in his own car so we got in a Cadillac Gage V150 armored car and we rode out. He wanted to show me where he was ambushed. The communists were still messing around. These were Communist Party of Thailand who did this. Then just before I left in the spring of '82 there was a big communist base area left in Surat Thani Province and the Thai went in there and cleaned them out. That was sort of one of the final big campaigns in the south and it pretty much broke the back of what was left of the communists. They weren't much of a threat, they were just a nuisance. It kept you from driving around.

*Q: We'll pick this up the next time in 1982 when you left your post down south in Thailand and went to Bangkok.*

*Today is the 23rd of April 1998. You were in Bangkok from '82 until when?*

GIBSON: 1985.

*Q: What was your job in Bangkok?*

GIBSON: I was in the political section. The political section was divided into two units, an external unit and an internal unit. I was chief of the internal unit.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

GIBSON: John Gunter Dean. I am trying to think if he was already there when I got up, or if he was en route. I think he was already there.

*Q: How did you find him as an ambassador? How did he operate?*

GIBSON: I am one of those who liked John Gunter Dean and have a great deal of respect for the man. It seems like people either really like John Gunter Dean or really dislike him. I think he was

an extremely effective ambassador. Why was he an extremely effective ambassador? He had a very good ability to identify the people in the Thai government that he had to know and work with. He was able to cultivate them. He is a consummate bureaucrat in the sense that he knew where the centers of powers were and what buttons had to be pushed to get things done. He also at least projected a rather patrician air which I think helped him in getting in close with the royal family. He was very close with the royal family in Thailand. He was constantly on the go. I've never seen anyone put in the hours that that man did. There was not an evening that he did not go to at least one, but it was usually two or three different functions. He was very visible in the capital city. He also liked to get out to the countryside so he really got around. I think he really had a sense for the power structure in Thailand and how things worked, at least in the capital. The problems with the ambassadors, and it has always been this way in Thailand, is they get out in the countryside but that doesn't mean they can understand how the countryside works. It means that they have had a program set up by the consul and this sort of thing.

He ran his embassy as a pretty tight ship. He seemed to have a very thorough grasp of everything that was going on within the embassy. Aside from that, I guess maybe these are things that helped him, his ego was out of sight. I mean the man has a degree of self confidence which quite frankly in my mind I don't think anyone should have. But here again this helped him in his work. He understood very well that he was representing the most powerful nation on earth and he was not afraid to play that part. He was a bully to the people in the embassy. If you got on John Gunter Dean's list you were in a hurt locker because he treated you like dirt. On the other hand if he liked you, if he respected you, or if you stood up to him I found that all of sudden his whole attitude changed.

I still recall a time when the political counselor had been gone for three or four weeks with back trouble and I was acting chief of the section. We had a big hall, a common area, and we all had offices off the common area. My office was way in the back because I liked it way in the back and out of the way. The ambassador's office back door was right around the corner. He came in one afternoon and grabbed some poor soul who had done something which displeased him. He just began to berate this poor officer, just thumping all over him. I heard all the commotion and came out. I went up to him and looked him in the eye and said "Mr. Ambassador what he did is what he was told to do. I am the one who told him to do that because I thought those were the instructions from the front office. It is me that screwed up and it's me that you have a problem with." He just sort of looked at me. It just took all the wind out of him and he sort of harrumphed a little bit and walked away. I thought, oh god, I'm dead now. Just forget it, I'll be on the next flight home. It had a tremendously positive effect on our relationship. After that he would call me into his office. Here's how he operated, everything back channel. If you read the front channel traffic from Ambassador Dean you didn't have a clue as to what was going on. It was all just basically reporting stuff.

*Q: He sounds like Graham Martin in a way, out of the same school.*

GIBSON: I don't know him. I know who Graham Martin was but I never met the man. He would then call me in for his back channel stuff. He was either a terrible drafter or he didn't care because he always had flunkies around like me, for example, to clean them up. What he would do, he would dictate back channel stuff to his secretary. His secretary would give him double

spaced text. He would call me in, not on a daily basis but once a week or so, and he would say, "Dick, take this and sit down over there and clean it up a little bit. It is something I dashed off to the secretary." I would go sit at sort of a meeting table in his office. I would sit down. He'd say "No pride about it do whatever to clean it up." I would think, what a mess. I'd start marking it all up, clean it all up and give it to him. He'd say "Thanks." I think what he said now was, "This is between you and me. Don't even tell your section chief that you are doing this." Yeah, right. I went to see my section chief and I said this is what is going on. I am sworn to secrecy on the text of what I am doing because obviously he doesn't want anyone else to see it. But I'll tell you what, if I ever see anything that affects you personally or anything that affects something that we're very much working on and it's going to screw everything all up, I'll let you know. My boss, what's he going to say. It really paid off because if you got on John Gunter Dean's bad side you were in trouble.

There was one point in my time there with him, the editor of The Nation newspaper, a man named Suittoo Chai Yuan, I still remember his name and he is still the editor that's why I remember, wanted to meet with me. He's a Thai fellow. The Nation is an English language newspaper in Bangkok. Suittoo Chai Yuan has a degree from one of the Ivy League schools. The Nation is actually quite good and he's quite a nice fellow. At the time, the Thai were negotiating with the Americans to buy their first lot of F-16s which frankly they needed like we needed another hole in the head. They wanted prestige.

*Q: Yes, in case they were challenged by the Burmese air force.*

GIBSON: Yeah, right! Or the Cambodian air force or something! Of course the Vietnamese were all upset because an F-16 can destroy them, or at the same time, the later models could reach Hanoi, Haiphong and get home. I don't know how they could with any kind of a bomb load. At any rate, Suittoo Chai Yuan wanted to have an interview about that because in addition to be chief of the internal unit, I was dual-hatted as the embassy's pol-mil officer. Suittoo Chai Yuan set this up with USIS. The USIS public affairs officer came over, a man named Dick Virden. Dick Virden is over here at Georgetown on some kind of a boondoggle where he is a scholar, diplomat in residence or something like that. So there is Dick Virden and Suittoo Chai Yuan and there is Dick Gibson.

The three of us are sitting there and we talked about this. I was rather frank with him with what was going on. Basically the thing I said that was really for background only, which we made very clear, was that we were supporting the purchase. There was a lot of debate within the Thai government as to whether they were going to buy these things or not, do we need them or not. Our judgment had less to do with whether they needed them or not, as much as one, keep the Thai military happy, they are your friends, and secondly somebody, whoever makes an F-16, McDonnell Douglas or somebody, is going to make a lot of money. So it was all a great deal. At the end of it Dick Virden reiterated to Suittoo Chai Yuan the same thing that we had told him in the beginning, that this is for background only and not for any attribution and so on, and so on. Suittoo Chai Yuan looked at us and said "Yeah, but you know I think I want to attribute this last part about the embassy supporting the purchase. I think it is very important and I want to use it." We said, "No you can't do that." He said, "Yes I can." So he walked out and sure enough it was in the paper the next day.

The way the policy was, we were publicly very neutral and we were not letting on that we favored one side or the other. What this did of course was it blew John Gunter Dean's cover. I just expected him to come in and cream me. Well, he didn't. A day went by and I didn't see him. Then we passed each other in the stairwell one day, two or three days later, and he smiled at me and gave me sort of a shit eating smile, sort of a snicker. He said something, and I don't remember his exact words, but it was something to the effect of "Nice interview Dick." He never said another thing to me and I attribute it only to the fact that I happen to be on his good list. If I had been one of the guys that he didn't like, I would have been pilloried hanging by my thumbs, or something like that. He's quite a guy and I really liked him.

The story is knowing how he ended up being ambassador to India afterwards too, against the Department kicking and screaming. It goes back to this guy being such a consummate bureaucrat. He knew exactly who was going to make decisions and how things got done. When Mike Deaver, the White House chief of staff, was in Bangkok doing preparation for the president's visit which never happened, it turned out it got canceled, the ambassador got a hold of Deaver and really just won Deaver over. He ended up being ambassador to India despite the Department's objections. Anyway, I liked him. I thought he was an excellent ambassador.

*Q: We've already talked about the situation down in the south, how did you find Bangkok as a political entity? I mean operating in Bangkok for you?*

GIBSON: For me it was a piece of cake except for just traffic jams and stuff. But I was not at a level in the structure and organization where I would have any problems. I was low enough down and in the trenches so to speak so that my work was not difficult. People I wanted to see on the Thai side always saw me. That was not a problem. We had very good relations. I didn't work a lot with the Foreign Ministry because that was on the external side but when I would be acting in the absence of the political counselor I would have to go over to the Foreign Ministry sometimes and make a demarche on this or that and they were very gracious. I was frequently in the prime minister's office. This was in the days of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda. Prem's staff and I got along very well. They were very helpful and very cooperative. I did a lot of visit organizing, scheduling of VIP visits of one sort or another and everybody was always very gracious and always very helpful. I found it very easy to work with the Thai. I didn't have any problems.

*Q: What was the political situation in Thailand from '82 to '85.*

GIBSON: I wish I could recall the sequence and dates a little better but when I was there the major domestic political issue was a new constitution. There had been a coup attempt in 1980 and Prem had rallied the loyal forces and driven the coup plotters out.

*Q: Was it a military coup?*

GIBSON: Oh yes. It had been a couple of years since the coup so we had to do that. Prem was the knight on the white horse and he came in and drove out the bad guys, typical Thai. Prem ended up as prime minister and in my book he is probably the best prime minister Thailand has

had in probably the last 20 years anyway. There had to be a new constitution drawn up. The body politic was in Bangkok which in those years was basically the body politic for the entire country because that's where the elite lived. It is a little bit lesser today but still largely true. The debate was over the new constitution and the real issue here was what was going to be the role of the military. Prem had retired and had become a civilian but he was still a soldier at heart. There was an interim constitution wherein the Senate was composed of appointed people appointed by the king in theory. It is like the Foreign Service list which gets sent up to the president and he signs it after everybody gets it. Something like two thirds or three fourths of all the senators were all serving active duty military officers. They had basically full veto power over anything that the elected lower house wanted to do. That was the way that the military and the old guard kept control.

These terms were due to expire in something like 1985 and they had to straighten it out by then. They had to come up with a permanent constitution. The debate is what are we going to do with all these soldiers in the Senate? Naturally the democrats wanted to see the Senate elected and they wanted to see its powers trimmed so it could not veto whatever the lower house wanted to do. The power elite wanted to keep it the way it was. Then there was the issue of can you be a cabinet minister without being a member of the elected lower house? Could you be a cabinet minister while you were a serving military officer? These sort of issues were all floating around. It was basically who was going to run the country after the new constitution takes effect.

At the same time there was a rising challenger, a general named Arthit Kamlangek. The old thing about a modest man who was much too modest. He had much to be modest about, but he wasn't a modest man. He was commander and chief of the army and he was obviously taken with himself. He was very out in public all of the time. He was a bit of a populist, always grandstanding and coming out with lower taxes, more for the working people as he loaded money into the Swiss banks or whatever he was doing. It became clear that he was challenging Prem basically, and there were a constant series of coup rumors that Arthit was going to make a coup and he was going to take over. There was a lot of focus on who in the army were his supporters and who in the army were supporters of Prem and also by direction of Chavalit Yongchayudh who was recently the prime minister in Thailand. So there was a lot of attention on this and a lot of people thought that Prem was either going to have to sack Arthit or Arthit was going to try for a coup. As it turned out Prem did not sack him and Arthit did not try for a coup and eventually rode off into the sunset. But this was the main focus of attention back in those times.

*Q: I would think that it would be in a way difficult to be a political officer where so much of the body politic decision making was made in military circles.*

GIBSON: Professionally in that sense, that was a bit of a challenge. In truth the people in the DAO (Defense Attaché's Office) and in JUSMAG (Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group) in Thailand, had far better access than most of us did to the military naturally. What helped me in doing the internal politics is that I was dual-hatted as the political-military officer which automatically made me a participant in a whole lot of events so that I got to meet a whole lot of military officers. Our military officers did not always like having me around but they were sort of stuck with me because it was in my job description. Despite the reluctance of some of the

more senior U.S. military officers to cooperate closely with me, I got on very well with some of the other ones. I basically got on with DAO and the boss of JUSMAG didn't like me a whole lot but his subordinates did and so I basically had access to all these military guys which was a big help to me. I also was helped by having two very, very good officers working for me. They had a lot of energy and were always running around and meeting people. They didn't meet the military guys. I was meeting the military guys. These guys were meeting the right kind of civilian politicians. So it wasn't a big problem. It would have been a problem had not the DAO guys and sort of the second level down guys at JUSMAG been cooperative. Had they chosen not to be cooperative with me, it would have made my life miserable probably.

*Q: What about at the top of JUSMAG, was this sort of endemic to the situation that they were going to be dealing with troop to troop and this political crap wasn't their business or something like that?*

GIBSON: It may be personalities. It depends who you get running the place. JUSMAG has had an interesting past. During the Vietnam War years, JUSMAG was run by a flag officer and they were clearly the preeminent military presence in the country. They were into everything and had great contacts with supreme command and this sort of stuff because they were providing goodies for the Thai, so they had great access. Whereas the DAO guys, they are the spies. Everybody knows them as spies and there is a little bit of arms length up here. At the same time, the DAO guys know the right questions to ask about politics and a lot of time the JUSMAG guys didn't. Anyway, what you had was a general officer and then it fell off. The boss was always army. Army is the preeminent service in Thailand so it made sense. Then it became a colonel slot. After I left it went back up to being a flag officer slot for a while and now it is back down to just a colonel slot. Meanwhile DAO is always headed by an air force 06, an air force colonel. At the time I was there we had a stubborn bull headed air force 06 running DAO and we had a stubborn army 06 running JUSMAG. Why didn't he want to cooperate with the embassy? I think it was he had a personality problem and he didn't like civilians: weenies, striped pants, cookie pushers. He felt that it was none of their business what's going on, this is our operation, that sort of thing.

To complicate it further, the DAO and JUSMAG didn't get along at all because they were both the same rank and they both had different bosses. DAO reported to DIA and JUSMAG reported to CINCPAC. There was always this tension and rivalry between those two guys. Those two guys would never cooperate. They didn't even like sitting in the same room with one another while their staffs did. You get to the next level down and it was okay.

*Q: That's usually how it happens. You let the big boys play their games and life goes on.*

GIBSON: They have to cooperate to get their jobs done. I am told that this was not a situation unique to the time I was there. I am told that this has been a problem in JUSMAG/DAO, JUSMAG/embassy relationship for years and years and years. Of course it is all dependent upon personalities.

*Q: It's not just to Thailand, this is across the board. What about some of the other factors in the internal political situation. What about the little d democratic party? What was your impression of them and contact and their effectiveness?*

GIBSON: These comments will apply to today as well. Basically they are not very effective. Why are they not effective? For a whole lot of reasons. One of the reasons is there are so damn many of them. New parties are born, dissolved, split, allied, disallied. It is almost that you can't tell the players without a program. Because there are so many parties, it dilutes political power in the electorate (and we'll get to that in a minute) so that your governments are always coalition governments. This forces you to have a huge number of cabinet posts and deputy ministerial posts. I think there are always at least two deputy ministers of everything. It means that a party of modest size in your coalition, like any parliamentary system, can hold you up for some really choice seats. Then they get the choice seats and of course they milk them for all they are worth and give your cabinet a bad name. But you need them to stay in power because they will simply move over to the other side.

We are not talking ideology here. In Thai politics there is no ideology, there is only what is in it for me, what's in it for my party? Changing political alliances is very easily done. Why is there no ideology? In Bangkok you have the closest thing to an ideological commitment on the part of the voters and to looking at party platforms as opposed to individuals and so on. You get out into the country where most of the Thai live and where most of the MP's are going to come from, they are in areas where basically it is local godfathers, local political godfathers, sometimes gangster godfathers as well. Quite often it's the same. Where ideology is not an issue the issue is, can you persuade the voters to vote for you? Can you buy the vote with cash or can you intimidate them through your henchmen at lower levels? Or can you bring public works or somehow money to that district?

Generally you find a very conservative countryside and they end up being elected to parliament but their loyalties are very shallow. Their loyalties are basically to themselves or to maybe three or four others in a click, or in a group. You will find even within a political party that may look kind of large on paper, there will be factions within the political party that at any given time and set of circumstances, can cause the party to split and move over and ally with an opponent or simply make their own party. So parties come and go.

You find a few major political players who because of their wealth basically, and influence, are able to hold parties and coalitions together over the years. Guys like Chatchai, the current guy, Chuan Leekpai, who does it because he's just, I think, a tremendously good man at least in the Thai context, and Banhan, Boonchu. There are some big political names over there that always can sort of hold things together and they are always political players. Because of the system also, there is no grassroots politics. There is no grassroots movement like we know about. The political parties, at least when I was there the only exception was the Democratic party, don't maintain offices at the constituent level. In between elections, there is no party presence in any of the provinces and districts out there. In some of them the Democrats would have offices in major cities. There is no identification or loyalty to a party. It is loyalty to a political figure who happens to be the political godfather of your province.

*Q: Patronage.*

GIBSON: Patronage, that's the term. The other thing is, the MP's do not have a staff system like

we do. They don't get a stipend for keeping an office in their home district and for hiring a staff to go out and take care of constituent complaints and this sort of thing. When I was there in the early '80s, this was unknown in Thailand. If you are wealthy enough you could do that. You could have your henchmen, your political subordinates down there, sort of ward heelers and this sort of thing. But they weren't really staffed as such. They tended to be more local figures, either a local businessman or a local politician like the mayor or somebody on the mayor's council or the provincial assembly or something like that, who would sort of serve as your helper in the provinces and you would make frequent trips back.

You didn't have that office system so there is no grassroots, there is very little ideology, there is not deep loyalty to a party. As a result the parties were not particularly effective and the establishment in the military could always manipulate them. They could intimidate, threaten a coup, sow discontent, sow discord of one sort or another and sow confusion by making political statements, by getting their allies in the lower house of parliament to say one thing or another. If all else failed, the house knew that if they passed something the soldiers didn't want, the Senate would veto it. It has been like that forever and I'm not sure of the current situation. I was away from Thailand and back, then away again. It seems to me that under current reforms the senators are actually elected now and I don't think you can be a serving military officer anymore in the Senate. That's until the next time a coup takes place I suppose.

*Q: I would think given this sort of amorphous thing and then you have your establishment, you have the military, for a political officer dealing with internal affairs what were you concerned with and what were issues that would come out of this parliament and this political system that affected the United States and how would we predict it?*

GIBSON: None of it was going to affect the United States because there were no ideological differences. It is not like if one group got in, policies would change because there is no ideology here. There was a general political consensus that you will move in this direction. One of the aspects of that political consensus was you will keep good relations with the United States. If coalition X is in power today and all of a sudden tomorrow there is a big political upset and coalition Y is in, so what? From the standpoint of American interests it is probably not going to make much difference. We weren't under any pressure to sort of influence the outcome of elections and we never really tried to my knowledge. What we would do, we would report. We would say this is what is happening, and this is probably what is going to happen. What does it mean for us beyond, not a whole lot.

*Q: Here we are in '82 to '85. South Vietnam fell in '75 and this was not exactly a shining moment for American policy in Southeast Asia. Did you have the feeling by this time that had the influence and the looking towards the United States in Thailand, wavered for a while and had (end side 1)*

GIBSON: Right after Vietnam in '74/'75 you had the civilian government. In '73 the military clerk was overthrown and you had a democratic government in power. As things were falling apart in Indochina and we were leaving, the Thai made a determined effort to start mending fences with everybody in the neighborhood like the Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodians and so on. That started really in the '70s. There were anti-U.S. riots and everything but that passed

pretty quickly. By the early '80s there was no anti-Americanism or there was no lingering repercussion. The only thing that you had to keep in mind was that now the Thai were very concerned about the Vietnamese in Cambodia because the Thai don't like Vietnamese much, they never did.

The Thais had good friends in Beijing so there was this Thai-Chinese cooperation and good relationships which wasn't there in the old days but it didn't get in the way of the relationship with the United States that I ever noticed. The Chinese were aiding the Khmer Rouge through the Thai. The stuff would come in through Thailand and be shipped across the border to the Khmer Rouge. That is one of the sad parts about Pol Pot kicking off the way he did. We can't grill him. We can't get him into court to see what really happened and of course a lot of people are quite happy about that.

*Q: Pol Pot just died last week.*

GIBSON: But basically the Chinese were their main supporters.

*Q: What was our attitude towards the Khmer Rouge? They were known as sort of the most odious regime of the 20th century which really is something and yet the Vietnamese were messing around in there.*

GIBSON: It's not an area where I worked. My impression that I left Thailand with in '85 from my colleagues in the political section was that at the time there were three rebel groups: the Khmer Rouge, the KPNLF (don't ask me what it stood for), and Funcinpec, Sihanouk's guys. Sihanouk's and the KPNLF were sort of an alliance, a coalition. They the Khmer Rouge were all against the Vietnamese. We were in those years putting our money on the KPNLF. We were sort of keeping the Khmer Rouge at arms length although we knew very well that the Thai were allowing aid from China to pass through to the Khmer Rouge. My impression is later on well after I had left, that it wasn't there any more as KPNLF and Funcinpec, they fell apart. We began to accept the Khmer Rouge as the only viable anti-Vietnamese force and I guess we probably were closer to them than we should have. I found it a strange twist in policy that these guys were such villains and we find ourselves, in order to get to the Vietnamese, sort of backing them. I don't know if we ever aided them or not. That's not an area where I was aware, but I know that we took a much kinder view of these people which I attribute to the fact that there were still too many bad losers from the Vietnam War who felt that since we lost in Vietnam we were going to get those bastards.

*Q: At that point it didn't make too much sense.*

GIBSON: Of course not. Sometimes you win wars and sometimes you lose them and you've got to get on with your life. Before I skip it, part of the deal with the Thai allowing the aid to the Khmer Rouge was that the Chinese would quit supporting the Communist Party of Thailand and the insurgency in Thailand. In the early 1980s, which was when we were watching, not closely but we were watching, the Communist Party of Thailand insurgency basically fell apart. That was a big factor. It wasn't the only factor but it was an important factor that the Chinese agreed to quit aiding them. I don't know if that was ever written out anywhere but that was their

accepted quid pro quo.

*Q: Incidentally when looking at the map of Thailand, Thais are more powerful than the Burmese, why the hell haven't the Thais taken over that very thin stretch along the Indian Ocean?*

GIBSON: I think they did at one time. Historically at one point the Thai owned that part then the Burmese whipped them fair and square and took it. Then the Brits came in and the Brits solidified the border basically and I suspect that that is probably why.

*Q: I would have thought there would have been a logical port on the Indian Ocean.*

GIBSON: Moulmein and Mergui, there is.

*Q: Do the Thais have a free port or something?*

GIBSON: No. They don't need it but in the old days they did. It is Mergui or Moulmein, I forgot which, that used to be ruled by the Thai and there was a very famous Greek adventurer who was their customs agent for the Thai king there back in the 1700's or 1800's, I forget. But then the Burmese won it back and before the Thai could take it back again the Brits came in. That would be my guess as to what happened.

*Q: Going back to the political stew of Thailand, what about students, were they a factor?*

GIBSON: Not during my time. They were obviously in the early '70s. They brought down Thanom and his gang of thugs and opened the way for democracy. It was a brief period of democratic government before there was another coup and before the military took over again in the person of Kriangsak Chomanan. In my time the students were not particularly obnoxious.

Another big issue at the time was succession. There was a lot of talk about who got to succeed the king because the king's health was not good at that time. He was suffering from some ailment. The crown prince who because of the Thai clause of succession was and is in line to be the next to be the next king, is very unpopular in Thailand, extremely unpopular. The king's eldest daughter married an American and opted out of the system basically. The king has a son and three daughters. The eldest daughter is married to a foreigner and therefore she is ineligible to take the throne. The next sister is very, very popular with the Thai so there was always a lot of toing and froing about what does the succession really say? Can it be interpreted to such that the king can somehow disinherit his son, which he can't. There was a lot of turmoil about that but nothing ever got done. The crown prince is still going to be the next king as far as I can see.

*Q: Why was the crown prince so unpopular?*

GIBSON: I get to edit this out right? He's sort of an asshole, generic type. He is a bully, a womanizer. Naturally he had an arranged marriage. He has since divorced her and then he took a mistress who was a well known movie star. He had three or four kids by her and he engineered it so that the illegitimate kids had royal titles. He would travel around and be seen with his movie star mistress and stuff like that. It caused a lot of embarrassment, unseemly behavior. Apparently

he is a terrible bully. He bullies his staff and physically beats them. Of course none of them will hit him back, this sort of thing. He is just not a very nice man in the popular image. On the other hand the daughter is just a gem.

*Q: In your internal politics did corruption raise its head? Was this sort of the mother's milk of Thai politics?*

GIBSON: Oh, sure. Actually I was there during Prem's time and when Prime Minister Prem was in office, corruption was largely kept in check. All Thai politicians and officials do things that are okay to do in Thailand which would land them in jail in the United States. You've got to realize cultural differences. It's a different set of rules. In the Thai context, Prem was Mister Clean and he set the tone in his government and so, while corruption is a way of life in Asia, in the Prem years it was held largely in check. Yes, it was there and it was there in business dealings and major contracts and everything too. Here again this was before the economic miracle of the little tigers, or whatever it was. It was just on the verge yet so you didn't have these massive infusions of funds and that sort of thing. For example on a contract, like an arms sale, yes, there was money leaking out all over the place. Any big investment in, say, telephone where you've got foreign money coming in, there was money leaking all over the place. At the higher levels of government, it just wasn't the problem that it became in later years.

Speaking of arms deals, there was an interesting case and I can't remember the guy's name. I was actually allowed to testify in a Thai court and the Department waived diplomatic immunity so I could testify in the court. The issue was that a Thai general in the procurement system, had procured from the United States through FMS a bunch of small arms. There were M-16s and M-203s as I recall which is an M-16 with a grenade launcher on the bottom.

*Q: We're talking about assault rifles essentially.*

GIBSON: He bought these things through the FMS system and he had to forge a whole bunch of documents to do it including documents with some U.S. signatures on it. The weapons disappeared. We sort of all thought at the time that they ended up in Indonesia. Where they went from Indonesia, who knows, perhaps Indochina or Cambodia. Nobody knew where they went. The trail died. It was a typical case of corruption and the guy made a lot of money out of it and everything but on this one the Thai army went after him for some reason of which I'm not really sure. It was sort of a typical corruption case. The guy was convicted and he was fined. He was probably severely punished. I think he was transferred or put in an adjunct post or something.

That is the nice thing about the Thai military and the police, when you are caught red-handed in corruption and in doing wrong things, they will punish you, they'll transfer you or give you an inactive position. It doesn't mean they are going to take your salary away or anything else, but they transfer you. I don't know if this is true in the army because I think in the army it is a little more on personal relationships, but in the police you basically buy your job. For instance when I was in Chiang Mai at a later incarnation there, to be a traffic policeman in Chiang Mai it cost 80,000 baht. You as a private or a corporate Thai policeman, had to pony up 80,000 bucks as an investment. Once you're a traffic policeman, presumably you are going to make your 80,000 back with interest. So if some guy is paid 80,000 which is small scale, take a colonel, or a major,

or a general, he's paid big time for whatever job he had and then you transfer him, you just broke his rice bowl. That is punishment in itself I suppose if you are cynical enough to look at it that way.

*Q: In '85 you left Thailand.*

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*Q: Dick we'll pick this up the next time in 1989. Where did you go?*

GIBSON: I got to go back to Thailand, to Chiang Mai.

*Q: You mean after two years of Japanese and all?*

GIBSON: Back to my comments on the system. I eventually got back to Japan for a second tour but there was no guaranteed mechanism. I remember when I first came in they used to say that if you study a hard language, a one country language, you have to assume that you are going to do two tours there. Right. I had to fight like crazy to get my second tour in Japan. There is just no system for doing that today.

*Q: We'll pick this up next time in 1989 you're off to Chiang Mai, Thailand.*

*Today is the 18th of June, 1998. Dick, 1989 we're off to Chiang Mai and you were there from when to when?*

GIBSON: 1989 to 1992.

*Q: You were principal officer there?*

GIBSON: Yes.

*Q: Chiang Mai of course had great renown at one point because when we were running our operations against Vietnam, it was a major base area wasn't it?*

GIBSON: I think you have that confused with over in the northeast. We didn't have a base there, we had a MAG group. I think we helped fund the construction of a 10,000 foot runway in Chiang Mai and the Thai have long had an air force base there that shares a runway with the civilian airport. I think all of the missions over Vietnam, Laos, and so on were all run out of the northeastern part from Udorn, Ubon, Korat.

*Q: What was the history of Chiang Mai as a place, and then we'll get to what you were doing?*

GIBSON: Chiang Mai historically, I guess until about the first couple decades of the twentieth century varied between being an independent principedom, fiefdom of a prince, that sort of owed allegiance, and paid tribute to usually the Thai but then at certain periods the Burmese had it. I think the city itself was found something like 700 years ago but it has changed hands. It's been

Thai, it's been Burmese, it's been Thai, it's been Burmese. I think the Burmese had it until sometime in the eighteenth century and then the Thai got it back. There was a ruling family up there who was pretty much on his own until somewhere around the first ten or 20 years of this century the Thai crown in Bangkok sort of made him an offer he couldn't refuse. He sold out for a stipend and the northern area was incorporated into the bigger Kingdom of Thailand.

*Q: Why have we had a post in Chiang Mai for so long?*

GIBSON: We opened it in 1950. Actually the compound that it is on is owned by the royal family and it is rented sort of for nothing. It is the former residence of the last ruler of Chiang Mai as an independent kingdom up there. We opened it in 1950 which is about the time in the chaos of the post-World War II period that there was a lot of trouble up in Burma. That was when the Chiang Kai-shek remnants had come down into Burma and had occupied it and there was a lot of fuss and trouble up there. That was when we opened up Chiang Mai.

Chiang Mai was really opened in its early years, and even to this day, more than anything else because of the Golden Triangle drug business. In the early years it was used as a support base for our operations with the KMT, the Chiang Kai-shek remnants. As that died down, it was always used in training Thai police, training Thai military intelligence operations run out of there and to all kinds of places, including China. The CIA used to run intelligence operations from there into China. It has mainly been a CIA post for years and years until recently that's been being cut back as I understand. It's an open secret that the CIA is there. Everybody in Chiang Mai knows it. We were there for drugs.

*Q: Would you explain what we were doing in this '89 to '92 period?*

GIBSON: What we were doing then is much of what we had been doing for years out of there. The post had five U.S. government agencies there: State, Drug Enforcement Administration (still does), USIS, CIA, and U.S. Air Force. USIS wasn't involved with the drugs much and neither was the Air Force who was up there at a seismic station which they worked with the Thai navy. Other than those two, the other three, CIA, DEA and the State operation there, were primarily there because of the drug trade.

I say the drug trade because in those years, in previous years, and to this day, much of the drug production out of Burma comes down through Thailand, transits Thailand. The DEA working with Thai police, and I guess the Agency guys helping out too, have largely eliminated refining of drugs within Thailand proper. The refining was done in Thailand and the drugs were brought down through Thailand into the international market. There are all kinds of cooperative efforts up there between DEA and CIA and the Thai police and the Thai army in trying to suppress, or interdict these drugs. State had a fairly large program going with the Thai army which involved us paying the bills, or most of the bills, for the Thai army and for the Thai police to a lesser degree, to eradicate opium in the fields and at the same time to provide villagers with alternative crops, seed stock, saplings, this sort of thing and also to establish health facilities and so on. That was really what we did most of the time.

Added to that, this was a period when there was an awful lot of fighting between the Burmese

army and the Karen, primarily insurgents, along the border. Because of our location we could monitor it much easier than could the guys at our embassy in Rangoon so even though it was really sort of internal for Rangoon, we did a lot of the reporting on it. With the troubles in Burma, in Rangoon particularly, in 1988 the Burmese students came to the border and established the All Burma Student Democratic Front, ABSDF. They were all strung out along the border there and it was much easier for us to get to them than anybody else so we did a lot of that too.

We also did a decent amount of refugee protection work. In northern Thailand when I was there in the consular district where we were, there was still a very large UNHCR operated camp that took care of Hmong refugees from Laos. They had been living there for years, along with some Meo and various other groups out of Laos. Along the Burma border there were a lot of refugee camps, sort of informal camps, taking care of the Karen refugees who came across from the fighting there.

*Q: The Burmese were fighting the Karen?*

GIBSON: Yes, the Karen and the Hmong while I was there but the Hmong tend to be a little further south, so the Hmong camps and the Hmong refugee areas were usually down south of my consular district so I never saw them.

*Q: Were these both mountain type tribes wanting to stay out of the central government?*

GIBSON: The Karen-Burma feud goes back to late 1948 and early 1949 right after independence when the Karen basically rose in revolt against the Burmese. They didn't want to be part of the new union of Burma as the Burmese gained independence in January of '48. In January of '49 after many months of preparation, the Karens in the army mutinied. There were many Karen units because the British had used the Karen extensively as soldiers. The mutiny wasn't countrywide because the Karen's weren't countrywide, but it was throughout the area of what is today the Karen State and up into the delta region of Burma, close to Rangoon. In fact Rangoon was almost captured by the Karen. The commander in chief of the armed forces in 1949 was a Karen. They were a military tradition tribe. Hill tribe I wouldn't say, but in Thailand they are hill tribes. The Karen tend to live in the hills there whereas in Burma they live throughout lowlands and highlands in a particular area. They are still fighting today but they are pretty well licked.

*Q: Do we have any particular reason to support, or anything else, what was going on in Burma or were we out of it?*

GIBSON: Our position was neutral. In fact I had instructions from the embassy that I was not to meet with Karen leaders or any other insurgent group leader. The idea was that we were totally neutral in it and that if I were to meet with Karen officials, it would give the Karen false hopes like we were somehow going to support them or something like that. At the same time, there are no secrets on the borders so the Burmese would find out and they would think that we were fooling around with the Karen. We very much kept them at arms length. I remember a couple times I ended up seeing Karen officials purely by fluke. I'd have an appointment with some Thai officials down at the border area and we'd meet at the coffee shop, walk in and have a couple of

Karen's at the next table. I thought, oh shit, if the DCM finds this out he's going to lynch me. I made it very clear that I wasn't supposed to be talking to these guys, no hard feelings. Nothing ever came of it. I didn't bother telling the DCM. We tried to stay at arms length.

I'm all for human rights, don't get me wrong. I don't like bayoneting babies or napalming children, but our human rights policies have skewed. It is good to have human rights as an important aspect of our foreign policy but I'll give you an example of how screwed up it makes things in our policy. For example, none of us in our embassy could talk to Karen, Hmong, or any other insurgent group. After 1988 when the All Burma Student Democratic Front guys came down, took to the jungle with the expressed purpose of going into armed revolt against the Burmese government, they came down into the Karen area and into the Kareni area which was adjoining. They took up arms with military training. These guys were the darlings of the State Department and we just kept wanting to send money and humanitarian assistance, food, blankets, and all this sort of stuff, over to these guys on the grounds that they were the victims of this terrible Burmese government. I'll go along with the terrible Burmese government and all that sort of thing, but not a terrible Burmese government, a Burmese government that did different terrible things to the student demonstrators or any other demonstrators.

It was ridiculous. We could meet with the All Burma Student Democratic Front people. We could go to their camps and we could talk to them. That was perfectly fine because they were the darlings of the human rights people but the same foreign policy issues were brought up. Are we giving them false hope? Not really because we were giving them money and humanitarian aid. But on the other hand, what are we telling Rangoon? We are telling Rangoon that we are interfering in their internal affairs. To me it didn't make any sense at all and the human rights people kept saying "these are just refugees and victims." I kept sending in cables pointing out, in fact to the point where I got into trouble, that these guys are armed insurgents. They were insurgents from day one, that is why they came down to the border so they could operate an insurgency. At one point the DCM slapped my hands because I said that in a cable and disagreed with what the embassy had said. He was right. I should have done it a little more subtly.

*Q: During this '89 to '92 period could you talk a little about your relations with the embassy? Who was the ambassador and the DCM and all?*

GIBSON: We had two ambassadors. The first two years I was there it was Dan O'Donohue and the third year it was Dave Lambertson. Both good guys and both did right by me. Lambertson was much easier to work for than O'Donohue. Dan's a good guy, good sense of humor, but a micro manager, a nitpicker, and sort of a pain in the ass to work for.

*Q: I could see but I think I would just as soon want him some outfit away from me.*

GIBSON: Dave Lambertson is just the opposite. He is not a micro manager. He is much more laid back, much more prone to give his guys some rope and let them go out and do things. Just totally different managerial styles. The DCM for the whole time was Victor Tomseth who is now with the OSCE through the European bureau in Croatia. Victor was a great guy, at least when Dan was there, of soaking up the shit before it rolled far downhill. He was a real gentleman and a pleasure to work with.

I still remember one time when I sent my vice consul down to the border. He was a first tour junior officer, a great guy and we are still good friends. This must have been right after the elections in 1990 when the Burmese government wouldn't let the opposition take power. He was down there in the border area where they were all very pro-Karen and anti Burmese government and this sort of thing. He came back and wrote up his reporting cables. On one he recounted how people were asking him when is the United States going to intervene militarily? One scheme was to have the battleship Iowa come up to the mouth of the Rangoon River and shell Rangoon, paratroopers would go in and various things. So this was a little tongue and cheek cable. I taught him how to write these cables with one paragraph of what the news is, one paragraph with sort of behind the news stuff, and then the third paragraph with comments. For comments in this cable he writes, "Vice consul, unaccustomed to explain why the United States does not go to war with countries with whom we have diplomatic relations, declined to answer these questions." It was something like that. It was really cute.

I said "Jeffrey I can't send that in, O'Donohue will skin me alive. It is just too flip and too cute." He says, "Awe, come on boss, you've got to do it, you've got to do it." I said "Listen you little twit, I'll do it but you watch I'll get in trouble." Sure enough, boy did it hit the fan. Victor Tomseth calls me and he says on the phone, "Dick, the ambassador has asked me to call you about this cable you wrote. He says that the last paragraph" and Victor was chuckling as he was saying this, "that final paragraph is much too flip to have been sent out as a reporting cable to the Department and neighboring posts and everything." He chuckled a little bit and he says, "and the ambassador asked me to point that out to you." I forgot the term he used but anything, bring me up short on it basically like that, he says "There, now I've told you." Then he had a good laugh. This vice counsel was very clever with a good sense of humor and it was really a cute comment. I wish I could remember it. But, O'Donohue was upset over it but not overly. If he had been overly, I would have been in real trouble. So I told Jeffrey about the conversation and said "See, what did I tell you."

They were both fine people and I've seen them both once or twice since and this sort of thing. Victor Tomseth and I by the way are still friends.

*Q: One of the things I would have thought would have been difficult would have been that with both the CIA and the DEA working on drugs and all, here you are the State Department, in a way you would have been presiding but not operating or something over this operation.*

GIBSON: This is why I really fault O'Donohue. When I arrived in Thailand as I report into Bangkok on my way up to Chiang Mai for my welcome talk and meeting with the ambassador and so on, both he and the DCM made it very clear that the State Department lost control of the consulate up there. My predecessor was a very nice man, but both DEA and the CIA had cowboys up there and they would run circles around the guy and they just ignored him basically. It was very clear when you got up there that the consulate general was run by CIA and DEA, it was not being run by the State Department. The ambassador and DCM both told me that one of my highest priorities was to get control over the place.

I got up there and found myself having to deal with cowboys who would not recognize any sort

of State Department role for any of this sort of stuff. They know what they are doing and I am just in their hair. We went round and round for the longest time. For example, there was one incident where DEA was building an addition on their own. On their own hook they just decided they were going to build an addition onto the house that they were using as an office and it violated FBO procedures and this sort of thing. The embassy told me to go and get the plans and the details from DEA and the DEA didn't want to give them to me. I explained and finally I got the papers and I sent them down but then they reported down to DEA that I basically strong-armed my way into their office and stole their documents and this sort of thing. There was just constant bull shit like this.

In fact the guys doing this were eventually finally both thrown out of the country because they were in a bar room argument with some other Western European type. They pulled out their revolvers and put them on the bar in sort of a threatening manner to end the argument type thing. So the boss there was actually thrown out of the country and so was one of his subordinates. These were the kind of clowns that I was dealing with.

Despite O'Donohue telling me, and Victor also, you've got to go shape them up, I got zero support from them. I mean zero. The minute anything happened, "Don't make waves. Don't make waves." Typical State Department that had the senior officer operation with the castration and they just would not back me up. It was ridiculous. It took me about two years and thanks to some personnel changes and me doing things which basically got me in trouble, but in the end I had control of the consulate. It was after about a year-and-a-half into my tour that the State Department was running the consulate again with basically almost no support from the front office which I really fault O'Donohue. That is the only thing I can fault him on. He basically gave me a big responsibility but no authority to carry it out and that left a bad taste.

*Q: You said you did some things. I'm interested in the management side, how does one control these cowboys?*

GIBSON: At first I basically tried to jolly along, cajole, and "oh come on guys, look we've got to do this because of this" and so on. This lasted for about six months. Actually the CIA guy, I guess they are sort of a different personality, refused to attend the first staff meeting when I got there. Okay. So I went over and saw him and I said, "Come on, let's figure out how we are going to work together." I sort of looked him in the eye and said here's how I'd like to do it. What do you think? We sort of got it hashed out. We had a pretty good working relationship after that.

The DEA guy, I played with him, I just chummied him along and jollied him along. I had known him years before briefly in Bangkok. For about six months jolly along worked and then Mel Levitsky, the INM guy, the drug guy, was coming out for a briefing. The ambassador and DCM of course, as I was handling his schedule up in Chiang Mai, wanted me to schedule a joint briefing with State, CIA, and DEA for Levitsky. The DEA said "No. We will give him a briefing privately but we won't participate in a joint briefing. If you and the CIA want to do it, go ahead." I said "Wait a minute, we've got to give him this and this is what the ambassador wants. They said "no", so I sent a cable down. I said "Look, somebody tell this guy to be a team player because I've cajoled, I've begged, I've pleaded and I've got nowhere with him." Did that get me in trouble because the ambassador didn't want to hear that. He doesn't work for me. He's the

senior representative there of another U.S. government agency and I can't give him orders. There is absolutely no way I can. I can cajole and plead. Anyway, finally the ambassador because I guess he didn't want a problem with Levitsky said "Okay, do it." He told the DEA chief in Bangkok and the Bangkok guy told the guy up in Chiang Mai.

After that relations were really strained and the DEA guy refused to let any of his people talk to me without his clearance. If I had a question about narcotics or something, I couldn't find out. There was nothing I could do about it except I just kept working on him and said "OK, well let's have a meeting over at your place." I guess I'm getting this a little out of order. Early on I set up this process where we would have a weekly narcotics meeting, the three of us. One time at my place, one time at the Agency's place and one time at the DEA place. We would just rotate it around and we would sort of talk about what was going on. I always was an activist so I was always up around the border and I was always seeing things that these guys didn't have a clue was going on with the Wa, and Khun Sa's guys fighting. I always had something to contribute and this sort of thing. I had my own contacts so it was pretty much a shared thing. Even after DEA sort of declared war on me, I insisted that this committee keep going. We sort of kept in touch that way then it just went one incident after another. The guy had declared war on me and he had a reputation for being a very difficult guy and sure enough he was. Finally he got his ass kicked out of the country and things got a lot better at that point. The other thing that helped out...

*Q: By the way how did this incident with the revolvers get back to the...*

GIBSON: I happened to be out of the country. I was in Hong Kong with my wife or I was back in the States visiting my son, who was in school here or something like that. I've forgotten where I was. I guess what happened was, I think the guy was a Canadian, he went to the police. He called the police in and the police came. The DEA guy started swearing at the police and said, "You can't take us in. We are DEA" and so on, and so on. The police did take them in and took them down. Of course, then it got out into the press. I was gone and in fact by the time I got back both guys were gone. The ambassador finally moved kind of quickly. It was my view that if the ambassador had all along been giving a little support, this never would have come to this. Anyway I just sort of basically lucked out because they got transferred. Had they not been transferred I probably never would have gotten control of the consulate because I just couldn't do anything.

There were problems with DEA with things like housing board things. The consulate didn't have a housing board and we had 29 Americans up there. The housing decisions were made in Bangkok and DEA would get anything they wanted out of the Bangkok housing board because they had guys on it and they made sure it all happened. At the same time there were six air force guys there working with the Thai navy. We had a beautiful housing compound with very nice houses, a fence, it was good for kids, and all that sort of thing. The air force guys had always been shunted to the side and had never been allowed to be on the compound so they came to me and said "Is it possible for some of us to get on the compound? We've got kids and families." I said, "Yes."

So the next one that came open I said here is our proposal to the housing office. I guess what I

had done, I had established a housing office for the consulate. Meanwhile there was a place coming open on the compound and what I did not realize is that the housing office in Bangkok before I had established my own housing office, had already assigned it to a single DEA secretary. It was a four bedroom house on a compound and the single secretary is ethnic Thai. I didn't know that and our housing board didn't know that because DEA didn't tell them so we tried to assign an air force family into it with three kids or something like that. That hit the fan. I made a stink over it. I said, "You can't do this. You're discriminating against people because they are enlisted people in the air force rather than high paid government employees. They are the ones with kids. This woman is an ethnic Thai. She can function quite well out on the economy in her own house." DEA said "Oh, it's security." Every time DEA didn't get what they wanted, they said it was a security issue. We're at risk up here. They are at about as much risk as I am walking down the street but that was their big pitch all the time. They won. Here again the embassy just wouldn't back us at all and here are the air force guys as second rate citizens again. We just had a constant series of incidents like this but fortunately the bad guys left. The others weren't so hard to get along with. It was just sort of the leader and one of his buddies that were the idiots.

*Q: What was your impression of their effectiveness? The problem with cowboys being free agents running around doing things, often not speaking the language and all, (one always thinks of Oliver North and the White House) is they really are not being very effective. I am wondering, did you get any feel for how they were dealing with the drug situation?*

GIBSON: Oh yeah, I know how they dealt with it. They worked through Thai police agencies. For example the DEA funded a company, maybe it was only a platoon, of Border Patrol Police and they had them up there in Chiang Mai. The police of course were working for their police bureaucracy hierarchy but the DEA funded and trained them and this sort of thing. They would go out on operations and try to intercept caravans as they were coming across the border and they would go after refineries. Basically it was DEA paying for and operating the intelligence net which located the refineries and then they would get together with the BPP guys, the Border Patrol Police, and then they would go out and hit the refinery. It was a cooperative thing. There is an office in Thailand which is sort of semi-modeled on McCaffrey's office, the drug czar, called the Office of the Narcotics Control Board, ONCB. The DEA guys would have a cooperative program with the ONCB guys especially on things like wire taps and intercept kinds of stuff. They would use the Thai technician and that sort of thing but they would pay for it. They had a lot of cooperatives, it was all done cooperatively.

The DEA guys were not authorized to go running around on their own and they couldn't really. They needed to work with the Thai police there. The general consent or the general view of the DEA guys as expressed to me, was that they didn't have much respect for the Thai police. They bad mouthed them an awful lot on grounds of corruption mainly. In fact towards the end of my tour there the successor as the DEA chief had such poor relations with the Thai police that he couldn't get an appointment to see them because he was constantly running off at the mouth about corruption and inefficiency. I don't want to say that it was racism but it was that attitude. It was our little brown brothers, they just can't do things as well as us DEA super guys. The Thai got tired of that and just basically cut off relations with them.

Basically I don't think the DEA was doing much good up there and I don't think that's necessarily a function of DEA, I just think that the problem is interdicting drugs. The most difficult way to enforce drug laws is to try to interdict them once it leaves the area where it has been produced because it can go in any way, shape or form. They would make occasional busts and that sort of thing but there is so much of it coming out that I don't consider interdiction a very effective way to go about the game. I think you do have to do it. You can't just give up, but that's not the way to do it.

Something we were doing, and this is where the CIA cooperate an awful lot, was poppy field eradication. The CIA had a photographic lab and all this sort of stuff in Chiang Mai and they worked very closely with the ONCB also, because the ONCB people sort of coordinated a program of poppy field elimination in northern Thailand with the army. That is what State did. We were paying for that operation which would cut down fields of poppy before they could be harvested. If you do that, you don't have to interdict which is like finding a needle in a haystack. You can find poppy fields if you've got an aerial platform that takes pictures. In this case it was an aircraft which actually the CIA operated. We would fly up there and turn the film over the ONCB. We'd do spot checks on our own but ONCB guys would plot all the fields and we would turn it over to the army. The army would get in their helicopters and chug along out there. We would all go out for an afternoon of cutting down poppy. It was hard work but it worked. It was much more effective in my mind than trying to find the needle in the haystack. DEA was working with the Thai police. I don't think they were particularly successful but I don't mean that as criticism. I don't think anyone could have been successful basically.

To give you an example to show you the poor state of relations between DEA and the police they were supposed to be working with up there, there is a great story which happened about two months before I left or something like that. I had great relations with the police. I had no problems. We read in the paper that a BPP, Border Patrol Police, checkpoint up near the Thai border had seized two Strelas, Soviet SA-7's or whatever, shoulder launched anti-aircraft missiles.

*Q: Strela means "arrow" in Russian.*

GIBSON: The first thing, we are on the phone. "Oh yeah, yeah, consul general come on up." They had brought the Strelas down to headquarters and we are sitting there copying down the serial numbers and all the markings we could find on them. We report all that back and we got the full story of how they did everything. We got back to the office and one of the CIA guys comes in and says "Hey Dick, can you get me in up there too?" "Yeah, yeah, bring your friend." The CIA went and did all the same thing so okay, great. Then DEA had their locals, their FSNs, phone the police. The police wouldn't let the DEA guys even look at it. And of course the Strelas were in route to Khun Sa who was into this big time drug trafficking, the "drug lord", prince of darkness, whatever. It showed that the Border Patrol Police wouldn't even talk to DEA. Relations were pretty bad and I don't think they were getting much better.

*Q: Besides the drug business, were we looking at the politics of the area? You are shaking your head.*

GIBSON: Nobody cared. I think there were two elections during the three years when I was there because there was a coup in-between. When the election would come around, we would all go start tromping around the countryside interviewing people trying to figure out who was going to win and we'd play a little prediction game. Actually we'd come out pretty close thanks to our Thai FSNs, no thanks to us. They would figure it out for us and we would duly report what they told us. They were pretty close. Then they would lose interest and nobody really cared.

*Q: The political game was played in Bangkok anyway.*

GIBSON: Yes, pretty much and in upcountry Thailand the way you get elected is you spread a lot of money around. It's no worse than the way our own system works probably but it is a little more blatant.

*Q: Thailand during this period and I guess up to today and for a long time has been sort of THE vacation spot of Orientals and Europeans for sex. Did Chiang Mai get into any of this?*

GIBSON: Oh yeah. One of the early things that I got interested in when I got there, and this young vice consul who I had who was a bachelor, was AIDS up there.

*Q: AIDS being Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Basically it is a deadly disease and you get it, you die.*

GIBSON: No one had done any reporting that we could see in the State Department so in late '89, I hadn't been there very long, my vice consul went off and he would go into brothels and ask "Are we using condoms in here today?" He would interview the girls, the owners and this sort of thing. The Thai are laid back you know. The guy's Thai was very good because he had been there as a foreign exchange student in high school. We were talking to doctors and everything. We get this picture of AIDS/HIV infection running high and it is scary, really scary. We are finding things like service workers, I think was the euphemism that is usually used for people, including those in massage parlor, outright brothels, or coffee shops where the girls would go home or go in the back room or down to the motel. You put all these guys together and something like, according to Thai officials in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai which were the two big tourist centers, two thirds of the women were infected with HIV.

We found out things about army recruits in northern Thailand. Northern Thailand had a much higher AIDS/HIV incidence than did the rest of the country for some reason. The Thai system of drafting young men into the military is you do it locally. They have local regions, they call them military circles, and they draft from within their provinces and then they train them there. (end side 1)

We were getting data from the army that showed that throughout the north in 1989, the year we were doing this, 11 percent of new draftees or people called in to be drafted, tested positive for HIV. In one province, Phayao Province, it was 17 percent. It was really scary stuff.

We sent a cable in which we also addressed some other parts of the country out of our consular district because we were getting things from the south and that sort of thing from these doctors

and medical professionals. Anything that just concerned the north, we just sent. If it concerned any other part of the country, we sent it down to the embassy for clearance. We sent it down there and we sent it to Songkhla. Songkhla said fine. We sent it to Udorn and Udorn said fine. The political counselor at embassy Bangkok who is now one of our senior officers, he's DCM in Bangkok now, he spiked it. He said "You can't send this because it talks about all this other stuff out of your district. Nobody is interested in AIDS/HIV anyway." I said "Fine." I cut out the parts about the south, the northeast and anything about Bangkok because we just had a composite thing and then I just went ahead and sent it. The next day, or two days later, we got back a big attaboy from the Department of State explaining how they were really interested in this topic and how no one had been reporting on it and this sort of thing. Egg all over the political counselors face. I don't know what his problem was. We then proceeded to report about every six months or so on AIDS/HIV and it is really scary.

Part of the problem was the girls that go into these places are basically teenagers, they are young kids. In some cases, their parents sell them to recruiters that go through an area. In many cases they are basically shanghaied from Burma. They are hill tribe girls brought down from Burma. They hardly speak Thai. A lot of them are Shan and they speak Shan, which is similar to the northern Thai dialect, but it is not really good Thai. It is more like a local dialect in the north. It is perfectly good Shan. It is just they don't necessarily get along well. They are kept basically as prisoners in a lot of cases. These girls don't have a clue. They don't even know what AIDS/HIV is. The Thai men, and, as I'm told, Japanese men as well, (I'm not sure that is true any more) didn't like condoms and just wouldn't use them. You had all these young girls with basically no defense at all, they are prisoners basically, wage slaves, indentured servants, and they had not a clue. These drunken young Thai guys would come in and AIDS was really spreading. There was some homosexual transfer and there was some IV transfer, but most of it was through heterosexual sex. It was really a scary situation up there and we, of course, tried to tell any Americans we could get our hands on that if you go into these places you are crazy, but they did.

*Q: Were you noticing deaths resulting from it?*

GIBSON: No, not yet. No, and this was one of the things that, as one of the doctors up there told us, "You don't have to have an anti-AIDS campaign in Thailand in a couple of years because in a couple or three years everybody in northern Thailand is going to know somebody who has died of AIDS." It was that widespread. Of course, in Thailand, the health system just can't handle it. There were some people dying of AIDS already in the hospitals and their wards. We went in and saw some of them. Boy, that is a scary thing. But basically it was in the early stages. It was HIV, and it hadn't reached full blown AIDS yet but the doctors were saying in a few years people will be dying all over the place around here and our health system won't be able to take care of them. They are going to have to die at home. They are not going to be able to die in the hospitals.

*Q: You've been back to Thailand. Did you see this happening?*

GIBSON: I haven't looked into it. I have been back to Thailand doing research on this book I am working on. I don't have a clue. It has not come up in any of my conversations. I talk about drugs. I've seen in the news or read articles or something that the rate of increase in HIV infection in Thailand has gone down. The Thai public health people are pretty good and once

they get energized on an issue, they usually start making progress. I am told that in the last few years, the rate of increase has declined. It is not as bad as it used to be and it is getting better but there are still an awful lot of people over there with HIV infections. I did notice in Bangkok walking around town that a couple of the massage parlors that used to be down in the Sukhumvit area are empty or torn down and something else has been built. I don't know if that is because people are getting smart or because the property value has gotten so high that they moved them out of town. I don't know which it was but I did notice a couple were no longer operating and they were great big multi-story buildings. It has not come up in any of my conversations.

*Q: Other than the drugs and other things, were there any other things we might discuss about your time in Chiang Mai or did this pretty well occupy your time?*

GIBSON: Yes, that pretty well occupied my time. I did a lot of time in a four wheel drive along the border basically monitoring the insurgency and the drug trafficking operations on the other side of the border. I spent a lot of time out with the Thai army cutting down opium fields and looking at assistance to villagers. I also spent a lot of time looking at the general economic development in the north, working with the royal project which the royal family sponsors for development programs for the hill tribes to get them away from poppy growing.

There is another active organization there sponsored by the Taiwanese government called the Free China Relief Association which has a whole lot of baggage with it in its history including supporting the KMT when they were in Burma and being an intelligence operation as well. At the same time they have done some very good development work and I spent a lot of time with those guys which is now paying dividends and giving me access to talk to the people I want to talk to for my book. I spent a lot of time going out looking at their projects, talking to people, and trying to figure out why did economic development come to a particular area. In other words, how are you going to spend your development dollar? Are you going to spend it for schools, or health, for new plants, new crops, roads, electricity, water? What are you going to spend it on? I learned an awful lot from that on which we duly reported. Whether anyone ever read it or not, who knows. Basically that was what I spent most of my time on.

I spent a lot of time at public ceremonies that you've got to go to. This is a Buddhist feast day so you've got to go give something to the monks. Okay, so my staff would hand me something and I'd go out there and hand it to them. They'd say you've got to go see the queen's sister who is up here, you've got to go give her some money. Okay, we'll give her some money. I was just led around by the nose by my Thai staff like most of us are for the protocol thing. You've got to do this, do that, so that took a lot of time. A lot of traveling around the north. We all traveled a lot.

*Q: In your border excursions and all, were you picking up any feel for the Burmese situation, how the army was doing? What was happening in Burma during this '89 to '92 period?*

GIBSON: Oh yes, anything along the border.

*Q: What was your reading on the Burmese and their government?*

GIBSON: That is an emotional issue and this is one of the problems with, I think, our foreign

policy towards Burma as well as the activists and everything. I think that I am one of the few people around who try to take an objective middle of the road view on Burma. Our government policy is so screwed up toward Burma that it's a joke. We are totally a whipped dog by the human rights activists. There is nothing wrong with human rights, but we take Burma, which is a country where we have no interests basically, and we are really tough with them. We put economic embargoes on, and sanction this, and we bash them and beat them, and everything. Whereas what Hun Sen did in Cambodia a year-and-a-half ago or so ago, far outweighs that and we're not doing anything to Hun Sen. What the Chinese do far outweighs anything and the same is true with what the Indonesian government has done in Timor. You've got a reaction to Burma that it's a country that is not important to us so all of our grandstanding leaders get out there and knuckle under to "Let's Bash Burma Day". I think it is stupid. It's a self defeating policy. They don't understand the Burmese. The Burmese are the most stubborn people in the world and beating on them just makes them tougher. The way to win the Burmese over is with honey. You get a lot more flies with honey, etc.

On the other hand, clearly they are committing atrocities. Clearly the way they are treating the ethnic minorities inside of Burma is not good. Did I get a feel for what they do? Yes. They're press ganging corvee labor for porters for their army when their army is on operations against Karen, Palong, or Shan. Armies in Asia have done that forever. During the 1950s when Burma was under the democratic government of U Nu, the darling of the world's democrats and a fine man, a great man, the army press ganged civilians to act as corvee labor. That has always been that way. Living off the land, meaning fielding rice or appropriating rice from villagers, went on in the '50s. The Chinese operated that way. The Thai to a degree in the early days operated that way. That is how Southeast Asian armies were traditionally operated because there was no budget. Rangoon will send an army unit out in the field, give them a set of operating orders and give them a little bit of money to buy food and stuff with but not near enough. They are expected to live off the land basically.

The Burmese army is doing not nice things. All of these forced relocations you read about of villagers, Shan or Karen villagers, was exactly what we were doing in Vietnam with the strategic hamlet concept. The Burmese call it the strategy of the four cuts: you cut off this, you cut off that, you cut that. Basically what it is, you take an area that is heavily infested with the insurgents and you just move all the people out so there is nobody there to grow the rice for the insurgents, there is no place for them to hide, and the army can go after them. It is brutal and I'm not even sure that it's very effective but that is the way they operate. It didn't work for us in Vietnam. I don't know why it should work for the Burmese in Burma. We refuse to recognize why they are doing these things.

I can see all that happening and you can see it down on the border. You can watch them wage war against the Karen for example. Actually, the Burmese have a pretty good army. They know what they are doing. I'd watch battles. I'd go down on the bank of the Salween River and watch the fighting, watch the bodies floating down or I'd have been on the river and seen the bodies floating down. I'd watch the artillery barrages going back and forth. About three or four years ago I guess, the Karen really lost their last big strongholds along the border. The Burma army just built roads. They just kept building roads into the Karen areas. You build enough roads, you can get your troops in there and you can stay during the rainy season which you couldn't do

before. It is a long slow process but it works. Now in the meantime are they making Joe citizen work for free on the road? They sure are and it's bad. Are they raping Joe citizen's daughter? Yeah, they probably are and that's bad too. They don't all do it but it depends on how much discipline and the quality of the officer that's there. You could see it all going on.

At the same time you could see the ineptness of the Natural Government of the Union of Burma, NGUB, which is the government in exile and some of Suu Kyi's people from the NLD, National League for Democracy.

*Q: She's the one that won the Nobel Prize.*

GIBSON: Right and her party won the 1990 elections fair and square and by all right she should be the prime minister of the country right now. Many of her supporters after the military crackdown ended up along the border. These guys we were also allowed to see because they weren't taking up arms, unlike the students. What a feckless and inept bunch of people, they are hopeless. They are ineffectual, totally unimpressive people. The army has basically eliminated everybody. The opposition has either been put in jail or they have co-opted them, bought them out. The ones like the NGUB, who are the foreign spokesmen government in exile, the cynics in Rangoon say "This is great because those guys are so inept that the world sees these guys as the representatives of Aung San Suu Kyi," which they aren't really. Aung San Suu Kyi is much better than any of these guys ever dreamed of being, but the Burmese say "Well fine, if that's what they want to think of the opposition, let them meet these guys." That's perhaps too cynical but it's sort of the attitude. We could see it all daily because we had this great contact all the time and the Thai had business over there. Some of them were loggers over there.

In fact the logging contracts come in for a lot of criticism by political activists, by environmentalists, and one group or another, quite rightly so. What happened was, starting in 1989 the Burmese figured the insurgents are cutting down all the trees and selling them to the Thai and making all the money. What Rangoon did, they figured we don't control those areas anyway but here's what we'll do Thai. We will grant you concessions and you will pay us royalties per log. You can go in and cut down these teak logs and bring them back out in the border area. We will send our forestry and customs people down to sort of monitor and you'll get letters of credit at the bank and we can check them up. The Burmese officials would be on the Thai side of the border because if they are on their side they would be shot by the insurgents.

The Thai lumber companies would pay off the insurgents. They are paying in Rangoon one hunk of money and then they are paying the Karen or the Shan or somebody another hunk of money, then they are going in and cutting them down and bringing the wood out. It is giving Rangoon money which they can then buy more guns with to suppress the insurgents. But also what it's doing is it's building a logging road system along the border which then if the Burmese can come hook into it with their army built roads, they can change the balance of power along the border, and they have. The Thai made a lot of money and the world lost a lot of very old teak trees and very young ones unfortunately. I guess you can argue, cut down the old ones that's okay, but they cut down the young ones too. A lot of corruption.

**WILL PRIMOSCH**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Bangkok (1981-1985)**

*Will Primosch was born and raised in Ohio and attended the University of Notre Dame and George Washington University. He served in the US Army and entered the Foreign Service in 1975. His assignments abroad included Belgrade, Bangkok and London. In 2001 Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Mr. Primosch.*

*Q: You were in Thailand from '82 to when?*

PRIMOSCH: 1982 to mid 1985

*Q: What was your job when you went out there in '82?*

PRIMOSCH: I had a rather unique position within the embassy. There is a UN regional economic commission located in Bangkok called the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It is a regional UN center whose purpose is to promote economic and social development mainly in the developing countries. Following World War II, the United States along with Britain, France, and Japan were the founding members. Half to three quarters of the time was to attend meetings at the UN body there and to meet with officials and try to get U.S. agencies involved in some of their activities. I did have some contact on internal Thai issues. I picked up a number of different portfolios – things like minerals and some of the oil industry development, which were important for Thailand's economy at the time. But I spent much of my time involved in the UN activities.

*Q: With the UN activities, how did that mesh with ASEAN?*

PRIMOSCH: Really the two didn't mesh much and that was another area which I was also following while I was in Bangkok. The ASEANs within the UN were usually acting together on a lot of different issues. To that extent, there was an ASEAN component, but it was more in terms of their voting within the organization and organized activities.

We had some economic activities out of the embassy involved with ASEAN and trying to promote ASEAN as a forum for Asia, as a forum for promoting economic development. We helped found ASEAN after World War II. The United States still attended a lot of ASEAN meetings.

*Q: Did you feel at least that you were an adjunct of our International Organizations Bureau?*

PRIMOSCH: Yes, because the International Organization Bureau was the bureau that backstopped the regional UN economic commissions. Some of their people would come out to the meetings and provide support for that particular function at the embassy. It was a unique economic section function. I found it interesting in many respects because you dealt with all the countries of the region and had an opportunity to meet a lot of different people?

*Q: What were some of the issues that you were dealing with?*

PRIMOSCH: The overall thrust of our participation was to try to project a presence within the region, try to use this to enhance our presence and interest in the region. My impression of the UN is not very high as a result of that experience. There is a lot of talk and a lot of paper. It doesn't tend to accomplish all that much. I viewed my role as trying to project in statements at the meetings the U.S. perspective on particular development issues and occasionally some political issues came up. We were trying to encourage these countries, which at that time were still flirting with socialism and a more statist approaches to economic development, to recognize the merits of a more market-oriented approach as we had in the United States.

*Q: Some of the countries one thinks of would be Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines... Vietnam wasn't... I don't know whether Australia was in there.*

PRIMOSCH: They were in the UN organization, not in ASEAN.

*Q: It's a very dispirited group of countries going off in different ways. Were they at least under UN auspices working together?*

PRIMOSCH: For ASEAN countries as a group, the UN didn't help them very much. ASEAN members, though, clearly had a political sense of identity as a regional grouping. The Thai certainly felt that way. Their strategy was to act as a group because they could get the attention of the United States and Japan and even Europe. Politically it was thought that they would have a much more powerful voice if they spoke together, if they acted together on some of their foreign policy positions. In fact, they were effective in that respect. One of the forums that worked well for them and that they still have is the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Meetings. The ASEAN foreign ministers met together and then they invited the United States, the European Union, and Japan to attend a post-ministerial conference. If any single one of those countries had invited the foreign ministers from the West to attend, they wouldn't bother. But the opportunity to meet all five or six (with Brunei) foreign ministers of the ASEAN countries and talk about regional issues did attract the EU at a senior level and the United States. Secretary of State George Shultz came out to a couple of meetings in the region when I was there.

*Q: The U.S. normally made a point of going to that.*

PRIMOSCH: That's right. That was an opportunity to have contact with all Southeast Asian governments at a very high level. It served both our and their interests. We needed an excuse to get out there to the regional but just to go out and visit one Southeast Asian country, secretaries of State aren't going to bother.

*Q: Was Burma sort of an outcast?*

PRIMOSCH: Yes, it was still an outcast. We had some Burmese friends in Bangkok; they were kind of political émigrés. There was a significant community in Thailand of Burmese. The Thais didn't like them. This dislike for Burmese probably goes back hundreds of years. The Thais are

polite to everyone, but they really didn't like the Burmese. But Burma was considered an outcast country.

The other big issue that was somewhat coming to an end but was still significant to us with Thailand was a huge border population of refugees, mainly Cambodians, some Vietnamese. There were also a lot of Vietnamese "boat people," people who escaped from Vietnam on rickety boats and ended up on Thailand's southern coast. Many refugees, however, were on the Thai border with Cambodia. There were also camps in southern Thailand where the boat people tended to end up. how the Thai government treated refugees was a big issue. Thailand really didn't like having all these refugees in their country. Initially, they were very hostile and uncaring. I understand that when Mort Abramowitz was ambassador to Thailand, he took this on as a key policy issue. People have said that if it wasn't for his direct intervention, there would have been thousands who would have starved to death because the Thais just weren't going to do nothing. Ambassador Abramowitz finally shook up everyone, including our own government, to intervene and provide what was needed for the refugees. When I was out there, there were several hundred thousand refugees in camps on the border.

*Q: What was the role that China was playing, particularly in the economic sphere?*

PRIMOSCH: China was trying to project more influence in the whole region at the time. My impression was that they were rather clumsy at it. The Chinese did participate in the UN regional organization. They were rather friendly to other representatives there. The Russians were also there. But I didn't get the impression they were all that effective. The Thais, however, are very astute at judging power relationships and had launched a number of initiatives to try to improve relations with China. They were very wary of offending the Chinese in any way. Even when we pushed them to take some hard stands on issues, you could tell they were reluctant to do that because this was a small neighborhood and the Chinese were the big boys in the neighborhood.

*Q: I'm sure you were dealing with the UN bureaucracy there. What was your impression of the international bureaucracy, the UN, as it projected into where you were?*

PRIMOSCH: I did not a very high assessment of the UN bureaucracy. They were usually very nice people. A lot of them were from South Asia or some from the region there. I got the impression that they valued their UN employment as exceptionally good jobs and they were going to hang on to them. They didn't do a lot as far as I could see except organize meetings.

*Q: You're talking about Indians and Pakistanis.*

PRIMOSCH: Yes. A lot of the UN employees were nationals of these countries. The UN employees were very nice and professional in some ways, but they didn't get very much accomplished.

*Q: How did you find living in Bangkok at this particular time?*

PRIMOSCH: Overall, it was an interesting experience. It takes a while to get used to the tropical heat. In Thailand, you can never get away from it. In Malaysia, you can go to the mountains.

*Q: You can go North, yes?*

PRIMOSCH: That's one of the things that for a while is enervating, the heat and the sense that there is no place you can go to get away from it. In Thailand, you could go way north into the mountains around Chiang Mai, but in most of Thailand, it was very hot most of the year. There was about six weeks where it was very pleasantly warm. But the heat really saps you. I got used to it over time. Some people never get used to it and never really like it. Compounding that, Bangkok is a bit of a mess of a city and very congested.

*Q: It's worse now.*

PRIMOSCH: That's what I hear. Traffic is bad. I know the traffic is much worse now. It's a bit of a dirty city, too. There were some very nice hotels and restaurants, but there were some very trashy parts of the city, too. Overall, the combination of the heat, the traffic congestion, and aesthetically the city not being very nicely built could get to you over time. But the Thai people are very nice. They are generally nice to all foreigners, but they really like Americans and were generally very easy to deal with.

*Q: Who was the head of the economic section?*

PRIMOSCH: During most of the time, it was Paul Stahnke, who is retired.

*Q: Were you off to one side?*

PRIMOSCH: I worked under Paul. He was technically the permanent representative to the UN, but he didn't attend many meetings. I attended most of them. Then I would work under his direction for other parts of my portfolio.

*Q: Did you get a feel for the Thai economy as it contrasted to Singapore or Malaysia? How did you see it adjusting to the changes in the world economy?*

PRIMOSCH: Thailand was generally considered even at that time to be one of our success stories for economic development. After World War II, it was a rice-growing economy. There was no industry there to speak of. The Thais were generally very pro-market in terms of their approach to economic development. The government didn't get involved in a lot of things. You saw a lot of very interesting dynamic economic developments in Thailand as a result. Thailand had a very well developed agricultural sector. It used to be just rice. But Thai farmers were so flexible and responsive to the market that they began growing many different types of crops. Anything they could grow in a tropical climate, they would grow. All kinds of interesting fruits and vegetables and corn, and other crops that we grew in the West. They were very entrepreneurial. It helped that Thailand had a strong Chinese immigrant presence. Many Chinese immigrants has been there for 100 or 200 years, so it's not as if they were recent émigrés. Most of the business sector, as it is in much of Southeast Asia, is controlled by Chinese immigrants. They're very entrepreneurial. Thailand was considered to be a strong and growing economy at the time, although there were still a lot of poor people. Most of the farm sector consisted of poor

farmers, but you could also see very visible growth there. The Thai economy was considered rather successful, although not as successful as Singapore, which was the premiere economy in the region. Malaysia was also considered to be very strong. Then probably Thailand after that.

*Q: Did you have family there?*

PRIMOSCH: Yes, I had my wife, who gave birth to our third child there. I had three children in Thailand with me.

*Q: How old were they?*

PRIMOSCH: I think they were six, four, and then my youngest was born over there.

*Q: You didn't really have to worry then about the pernicious influences of Thailand which hit some of the teenage kids.*

PRIMOSCH: No. That wasn't a problem. I understand that drugs had been a big problem, particularly before I had arrived. Someone told me that a couple of teenagers had died from drug overdoses at the international school. Even after I had left, one family had to be sent back because their teenage children got involved in drugs. The drugs and the sex, massage parlors and bars, was pretty wide open. So, if I had teenage children, I'd be very concerned about the influence of that.

**RICHARD E. THOMPSON**  
**Diplomatic Courier**  
**Bangkok (1982-1985)**

*Mr. Johnson, a Californian, was educated at the University of Southern California, the University of Madrid, Spain and Occidental College. Joining the Department of State as a Diplomatic Courier, his career took him to diplomatic courier centers in Washington DC; Frankfurt, Germany; and Bangkok, from which he serviced US Embassies throughout the world, collecting and delivering diplomatic pouches. His later assignments in Washington were of a senior managerial nature. Mr. Thompson was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2001.*

*Q: In 1982, you moved from Frankfurt back to Bangkok again. This time your third time. You were still a traveling courier.*

THOMPSON: Yes. That was my last tour as a traveling courier.

*Q: Anything else special about that time? This was '82-'85.*

THOMPSON: Yes, by that time we were well established in our trips to China. When we started going to China, we went the same way that Henry Kissinger went, I think, that is through

Pakistan, on PIA. But when I went back during that third tour, we were going to Tokyo. The material would arrive at the airbase and we would take it into Beijing on Japan airlines.

*Q: So you'd have to get it from the airbase outside of Tokyo to Japan Airlines.*

THOMPSON: Yes, we would go and get it and store it in the embassy and they would take us out to the airport. This is before Narita, we would see the airport closer to Tokyo.

*Q: Haneda, I believe.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: Before we go on to more managerial roles that I think you played from then on, let's talk a little bit in a general way about the traveling courier experience that you had. I guess one question that has to be asked is did you ever have any unexpected landings, or crashes, or significant problems with the aircraft? You were on an awful lot of airlines with varying maintenance records all over the world.*

THOMPSON: No, I was fortunate, I never did have anything like that happen to me as far as the planes. Of course, we were diverted from time to time because of weather or something would happen to the plane, but never any crashes.

*Q: Did you travel on Ethiopian Airlines all over Africa?*

THOMPSON: Yes, and back in the 60s that was our main trunk all the way down to Nairobi from Frankfurt.

*Q: I can remember in Ghana in West Africa that Ethiopian Airlines came in and it was the only airline that you could take across from East Africa to West Africa. I don't remember whether the couriers took it. Seems to me they did.*

THOMPSON: That could be. When you were there...

*Q: Pan American wasn't operating any more.*

THOMPSON: And Ethiopian Airlines was a very well-managed operation in those days. I believe they were trained by Trans World Airlines (TWA). They had an affiliation with TWA. The cabin service and the air cargo service, the entire operation was very supportive.

*Q: East African Airlines doesn't exist any more, but I think it operated a fairly wide network in the '60s.*

THOMPSON: Yes, and we used them throughout operating out of Nairobi to a great extent. At a certain point, it broke up because there was some political differences between Tanzania and Kenya but before that we used them extensively.

**PAUL K. STAHNKE**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1982-1987)**

*Paul K. Stahnke served in the U.S. Air Force in the Mediterranean theater. He attended the University of Chicago and received a master's degree in international relations. Mr. Stahnke joined the Foreign Service as a staff officer. His career included positions in Hamburg, Kiel, Palermo, Venice, Tokyo, Mogadishu, Copenhagen, and Paris. This interview was conducted by Thomas Dunnigan on June 1, 1994.*

*Q: In 1982, when your tour in the OECD was over, you headed back to East Asia and went to Bangkok where you spent five years. You were economic counselor there?*

STAHNKE: I was Economic Counselor and at the same time the US Permanent Representative to the Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which is a regional UN organization.

Although I had had previous Far East experience, this was a quite different assignment than the one in Tokyo. The Thai economy had not yet taken off as it has in the last three or four years, but it was in the process of taking off and in that sense it was similar to my Japanese experience, although the trade problems involved a quite different assortment of issues and commodities. Dealing the Thai involved different tactics and strategies than with the Japanese, although there were some similarities.

One of the problems we did not have with the Japanese but very important with the Thai was infringement of intellectual property rights - e.g., illegal copying of music tapes, videos and computer software and violations of pharmaceutical patents. We began slowly to resolve these issues during my time in Bangkok but it was slow going.

We had other issues that were important. Thailand was an important textile exporter and we had a bilateral textile agreement with them which had to be renewed during the time I was there. It was a very difficult negotiation, so difficult that they involved the foreign minister directly and others in the cabinet. Somewhat less high ranking people were involved on the American side, but certainly it involved the US Trade Representative who came over to Thailand a couple of times while I was there, partly to discuss textile issues.

On the whole, one of the principal problems in dealing with the Thai was their extraordinary sensitivity to slights, actual, potential or imagined. So one had to be very, very careful to make sure they believed we fully respected them as a people and that Washington kept Thailand as a high visibility plane. That was not exactly true of course but it made them feel good to hear it. They wanted to make certain we were giving them appropriate attention. Indeed, as our trade problems increased, we may have given them more attention than they desired.

It was an interesting assignment, although not at first. I spent much of my first year in Thailand wondering why I was there and not really having enough to do. Consequently, I spent more time at ESCAP than I was later able to do. It was also mainly a series of talk sessions but usually on issues of little relevance to the US. Since no one in the Department or elsewhere in Washington was much interested in ESCAP matters, I could represent US interests in that organization much as I saw fit. So, it was a fun assignment that gave me a certain amount of activity during that quiet period in US/Thai bilateral economic relations.

Of course our political and military relations with the Thai were very important because of their geographic position, with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia nearby. I did a certain amount of interviewing of people who had left Vietnam who gave me some idea of the economic conditions there. We did a little reporting on that, but it wasn't really important. CIA was much better equipped to handle such reporting.

The bilateral front took a sharp turn during my second year. The Thai economy was growing rapidly and, with it, their exports to the US. The intellectual property issue became more serious as we achieved success in curbing such activities in Hong Kong and Singapore. Indeed, some of these moved their know-how and equipment to Thailand. We had an ongoing problem on movies; the Thai had established restrictive quotas on films for the movie theaters which we attempted to reduce or eliminate.

*Q: Did we have an AID program in Thailand at this time?*

STAHNKE: Our AID program had almost phased out by the time I arrived and no new projects were in the offing. We did provide considerable assistance, in money and personnel for anti-drug activities.

Aside from our dying AID program, one of the interesting and useful organizations with which I was involved was the Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce which met annually in various Asian capitals such as Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Tokyo, etc. Usually, the Commercial Counselor and I both attended these meetings which gave us useful opportunity to talk with American businessmen in the large East and Southeast Asia area which this organization encompassed. It was also useful in providing opportunity for the economic counselors from our various embassies in the region to get together with each other and with representatives from Washington who also attended. We were thus able to discuss mutual problems and plan strategies for the future face to face. One of the issues we discussed that remains pertinent today was the increasing role the Japanese were playing in Southeast Asia, the dominant economic position they were establishing in these countries and the effect on US interests, economic and strategic, which these activities could involve. In that regard, the Thai government was becoming increasingly concerned over Japanese investments. On the one hand they welcomed such investment but they also feared potential Japanese economic dominance. They actively encouraged US investment in hopes of establishing a better balance.

**JAMES W. CHAMBERLIN**

## **Computer Systems Manager Bangkok (1984-1986)**

*James W. Chamberlin was born in Miami, Florida in 1945. He received a BA from Principia College and an JD from the University of Alabama in 1972. He served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970 and entered the Foreign Service in 1973. His postings abroad include Sao Paulo, Bangkok, Brasilia, Warsaw, and Rome. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Mr. Chamberlin in 1997.*

CHAMBERLIN: I went to Bangkok to be the embassy computer systems manager which was a complete change of pace for me.

*Q: I could imagine that you may have become quite a science buff by this time.*

CHAMBERLIN: I had, but as my assignment at ACDA was coming to an end, I really didn't know where I was going to go. When I first went to ACDA, colleagues told me it was going to be difficult to get an assignment out of ACDA. They turned out to be correct. At that point the State Department was just beginning to install its first computers overseas. Their idea was to train Foreign Service officers as computer specialists, rather than to hire outside experts, to improve the Department's computer capability. They offered a six month course at FSI on computers, and when it ended students would be assigned as systems managers; so, that's what I did. I really enjoyed it. It was my most enjoyable assignment, because as a math buff, I was doing things I really enjoyed. As the Bangkok systems manager, I had a great staff. I had four Thai women who worked for me, who were all experts on computers. As a result, the Embassy's computers ran fine, even if I didn't show up for work. I could concentrate on the things that interested me. It was an interesting time, because they were just starting to put PC's in offices. This was a first for the State Department, which was not very computer oriented. Some of the Department is still not too friendly to computers.

*Q: Was there any concern about our tie to Wang. We went down one road while others went toward IBM and Apple computers. Wang seemed to be off to one side.*

CHAMBERLIN: When I first arrived in Bangkok, it wasn't much of a concern, but in time it became more apparent that Wang was not where the action was. In Bangkok, Wang was not the overriding problem though; rather, it was the lack of money to buy enough computers for everyone in the embassy who needed one. We would have taken anything, whether it was IBM or Wang. Money was the big problem. I was trying to get PC's to put on the desks of officers and FSN's, but the Department kept buying cheaper, "dumb" terminals with much less capability. Wang had its own office in the Bangkok Embassy, that also supported Bangladesh and Burma. This meant that I had four Wang engineers at my beck and call; I couldn't have asked for anything more than that.

*Q: We were discussing the beginnings from 84' to 86'. What were we doing with computers in Bangkok, and how did they fit into the foreign affairs agenda?*

CHAMBERLIN: We were doing two things -- word processing and data processing. About 90% of the embassy did only word processing, while the admin section used the computer for a whole range of tasks, including personnel management, accounting, inventory control, etc. So, there was a split in the embassy between the political/econ portion of the embassy (which did only word processing), and the admin and consular sections which was using them for data processing, too. I think that the State Department was too strict in standardizing all the data processing programs it distributed. The data should be standardized, so that it can be compared, but embassies have different requirements for how to use that data, depending on size, how housing is handled, etc. The Department standardized everything, but didn't have the capability to keep the standard up to date. So many officers and FSN's were motivated to keep their own data on paper and PC's, and maintaining the data base required by Washington sometimes became an extra task that did not benefit the post. Although the Department could monitor the data to find out what was going on in Bangkok, as well as Hong Kong or London, for users at post, the system it was not all that great. The other big users were the Consular section. The Consular cone got into computers early on, and did a good job of integrating them into their work. In Bangkok we were one of the first posts world-wide to have a direct link back to Washington, that was used mainly for background checks on visa applicants in real time. The communications link was one of the banes of my existence there, because it was temperamental; it went down all the time, but the Consular section made the best non-word-processing use of the computers.

*Q: Did you find yourself in the role of a salesman, going around telling people what they could do and how they could use it?*

CHAMBERLIN: I did, and results varied. Of course, there were a few people who were used to computers, and they wanted more computing power. In general, people were scared of them, particularly the Thai FSN's. So, we started to offer some computer courses. In Bangkok, the Embassy had an advantage, because we had a RAMC, a regional administrative management center, which had many computers and some excellent computer professionals. If we had a problem, I could go over and talk to them about it. They also had extra PC's, so that we could set up classrooms there with PC's for the students. We set up a training schedule and tried to get the FSN's more accustomed to using computers and more enthusiastic about it. I think we were successful with some of the FSN's and some of the Americans. The biggest problem was getting the Thais started on computers; the problem was exacerbated by the fact that the Thai language uses a different alphabet. The local Wang dealer had a version of Thai word processing, but it did not work well enough to use professionally while I was there.

*Q: Often it is the case that people tend to be rather conservative. Once they get into it, suddenly there is a take off.*

CHAMBERLIN: Yes, that happened. I think one of our most interesting cases was the econ section. I tried especially hard to get the policy sections involved. The senior econ FSN did not want to use a PC, but it seemed to me that if anyone could use a PC for something beyond word processing, the econ people could. The econ counselor, to his credit, wanted a PC and was very possessive; he wouldn't anyone else in the section touch it. He wouldn't even let us take it away to work on, while he was in the office. It couldn't leave his desk, but his FSN didn't want one.

We got her one anyway. We showed her how to do spread sheets, graphs and other graphics. By the time I left, she was in seventh heaven with many new reports; she loved it. That was one little success story in Bangkok.

**CHAS W. FREEMAN, JR.**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1984-1986)**

*Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr. was born in Washington, DC in 1943. He graduated from Yale University in 1963 and joined the Foreign Service in 1965. His career included positions in India, Taiwan, China, Thailand, and Saudi Arabia. Ambassador Freeman was interviewed in 1995 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

FREEMAN: On November 2, 1984, I was transferred directly from Beijing to Bangkok, which was quite a shock to my system. Going from a very austere, egalitarian, rather (still at that time) drab society, moving in strange directions all at once, to the sybaritic, hedonistic, colorful environment of Bangkok overnight was amazing.

What brought the difference home to me... I left Beijing in the morning, and many friends came to the airport to see me off. I arrived in Bangkok and sat down on the porch with Ambassador Dean (John Gunther Dean, who was then the ambassador). I had been assigned there to bridge an anticipated gap between Dean's departure and the arrival of the next ambassador, still at that time unannounced.

*Q: You were going to be deputy chief of mission.*

FREEMAN: I was the DCM, and later chargé. The household staff in the DCM's residence took drink orders, and then approached, on their knees, with the drink orders, walking across the entire room on their knees, which, for someone used to the stern egalitarianism of China, was really quite a shock.

Anyway, we could talk about Thailand and the merits or demerits of that enormous embassy, and the activities in which it was engaged. I was there from November 1984 until March 1986, when I was suddenly recalled to the Department to be principal deputy assistant secretary for Africa.

*Q: Chas, could you give me a feel for what the political situation was, during that period of time, in Thailand.*

FREEMAN: This was, in effect, a period of transition in Thai political culture.

The prime minister, Prem, was in office, as previous prime ministers had been, with the support of the military. The Thai supreme commander, General Atit, was constantly suspected of wishing to intervene in Thai politics. In fact, I don't believe he did, during the period that I was there.

There were a number of serious issues, not between the United States and Thailand so much as in our relationship. We still had, at that time, an enormous population, hundreds of thousands, of Cambodian refugees in safe haven just over the border in Thailand, and a very large effort at screening them, partly for resettlement, but also to collect information on the Khmer Rouge.

There was a controversy in the United States, because partisans of refugee resettlement charged that the Joint Voluntary Agencies (JVA), which actually did the pre-screening before an immigration officer (in other words, a consular officer, in effect) did the final interview, had been too quick to find Khmer Rouge connections among those that they were interviewing, and had been too tough in terms of excluding people.

There were also controversies about small groups of Montagnards who had come over the border.

We had a very large population of Hmong along the Lao border.

*Q: That's "H..."*

FREEMAN: Hmong or Miao or Meo, depending on which language you use. I don't think they like any of those terms, actually. But the Hmong, the Free People, as they call themselves, were also, in large numbers, along the Mekong, on the Thai side of the Lao-Thai border.

Finally, we still had a very substantial population of Vietnamese boat people in Thailand, and more coming out, with a terrible problem of piracy being committed against them -- rape and pillage and murder -- on the high seas.

*Q: This was both by Thai and others.*

FREEMAN: It involved Thai, and it involved Malays, but largely Thai, who saw the Vietnamese refugees as easy sources of additional income.

So the refugee issue was quite a preoccupation of the United States and of the embassy.

In addition to that, we had, of course, the longstanding concern to cooperate with Thailand in the suppression of the drug trade. There was a substantial connection between the various rebellions and gangs that operated in Burma, in the Shan State in particular. Khun Sa, an ex-Kuomintang general who was the leader of one faction of the Shan people, was particularly notable. As a result of extensive drug trafficking through Thailand, there was a terrible problem of addiction in the Thai cities. There was also a substantial amount of marijuana grown, for export to the U.S. and other locations, in the Thai northeast. So the largest drug enforcement agency office in the world was then in Bangkok, with branches in Chiang Mai and Udorn and Songkhla, in the far south of the isthmus of Kra.

The third area of concern was, of course, Indochina itself, and watching Indochina. We had a large intelligence presence. The Joint Casualty Research Committee (JCRC), which dealt with

accounting for missing in action (MIAs) and putative POWs who might still be in the hands of the Vietnamese or Lao, was also a part of the embassy. As DCM, I had occasional meetings with the Vietnamese ambassador to arrange for contact on that subject.

Thailand was, at that point, just beginning the pattern of rapid growth that, of course, is characteristic of East Asia, but which had not been characteristic of Thailand. And there were substantial and growing trade and investment issues of one sort or another.

Finally, we had a military relationship that had largely gone into abeyance after the *Mayaguez* incident. As you'll recall, the United States, in the Ford administration, intervened in Cambodia to recapture the *Mayaguez*, a merchant vessel with Americans on board. This operation had been staged from Thai territory without the foreknowledge or permission of the Thai government. That resulted in the removal of American forces from Thailand. So there were abandoned American bases and facilities. There was a robust pattern of exercises, centering on an annual amphibious-landing exercise called Cobra Gold, which seemed to be badly in need of updating and redirection, as it had essentially deteriorated into a sort of operatic performance for the benefit of people in the reviewing stands. Altogether, these operations, plus the desirability of Bangkok as a center for regional operations, given the fine air connections out of Don Muang Airport and the availability of very loyal, competent labor, at reasonable prices, in Thailand, meant that we had a vast number of regional organizations as part of the embassy as well.

So, altogether, this came to an embassy that was about three times as large as the Thai Foreign Ministry, and which had, by my count, somewhere on the order of thirty departments and agencies represented, and which was very difficult to manage.

The manager at that time was John Gunther Dean, one of the great figures of the Foreign Service, a viceregal personality, very much in charge, and very conscious of his status as American ambassador and the authorities that flowed from that.

I arrived, as I said, from a smaller, more austere environment, which was in the process of growing, and which, to a great extent, I had personally shaped and knew very well, to find this sprawling mass. The only mechanism for control was a regular country-team meeting, which was, of course, vastly beyond the span of managerial control of anybody.

I really got, initially, no direction from this rather intimidating figure of the ambassador, someone who knew Thailand and Southeast Asia exceedingly well, and who was in the habit of writing the talking points both for the prime minister and for whatever the American was meeting him. He would literally write both sides of the conversation, and the conversation would always go exceedingly well, because it had a single script writer.

But he didn't really give me much direction as to what he wanted me to do, and about two months in, he suddenly said, "This isn't working terribly well. I want you to be in charge."

And I said, "Well, I thought you were in charge. You seem to be very much in charge. If you really mean that, bear with me as I take charge."

So I cut off most of his cable traffic, and screened it all through me. I reorganized the country team into five clusters, sub teams, if you will, centered on military affairs, consular and refugee matters, drugs and intelligence, Indochina matters, and economic affairs. This cluster system began to give some coherence to the embassy organization, which it had lacked, and, I gather, has in fact been continued by my successors.

Much to my delight, Ambassador Dean did not object to having his cable traffic curtailed, and proved to be a very forceful backer of decisions that I made. We developed, over the roughly eight months that we overlapped, a very close working relationship, and even a strong personal relationship, such that, on the day that he left (protesting, of course, that he didn't want anyone to see him off, though, of course, many of us did go out to see him off), he, very dramatically, went around the room, informing everyone that he had just passed a stress test on a treadmill, and recommending that everyone do the same, and when he came to me, he said that I should definitely take the stress test.

I said, "John, that's what I thought the last eight months were." And he laughed.

We have remained in touch.

*Q: He's where now?*

FREEMAN: He is retired and living, largely, in Paris. His wife is French.

*Q: Talking about the time Dean was there, why don't we examine some of these themes. As a regular Foreign Service officer, but also as a consular officer, I know the distaste that a normal embassy has when approaching something messy like drug problems or refugees. This, of course, was so overwhelming. Could we talk a bit about how, at the time, the embassy and the other agencies dealt with the refugee problem, both Vietnamese and Cambodian.*

FREEMAN: The structure at the embassy to deal with this, really, by and large, did not involve the Consular Section. We had a regional Immigration and Naturalization Service office in the embassy, headed by a very fine civil servant, who, I think, has since deservedly risen quite high in the INS ranks. In addition, as I said, we had an embassy refugee section, which was a State-Department-staffed section, supposedly supervising the JVA, the aforementioned Joint Voluntary Agency effort, which was headed by Dennis Grace. Lacey Wright was the head of the Refugee Section during most of the time that I was there.

Frankly, I don't believe that the supervision that the JVA received from the embassy was at all effective. There was, to my mind, a tendency for people generally in the refugee area, and it was certainly manifest in Bangkok, to think that the end justified the means, and to cut corners in the interests of compassion. So, had I tried to correct that endemic problem, I would have done nothing else in Bangkok. I think I was able to chip away at it.

The issue of piracy arose very early on, because there was pressure in Congress to use this as an issue with which to bash the Thai. And yet it was obvious that, without Thai cooperation and bringing the Thai to recognize that this was their problem and not simply something that the

international community was clubbing them over, we were not going to get the issue settled.

Early on in my tenure, a very talented consultant, named Robert Gersony, arrived, and, with the help of people from the Refugee Programs office, managed to, in effect, work with me and set up some smoke and mirrors and co-opt the Thai by using the anti-piracy program as a means of bringing in the Thai police, rather than going after them.

*Q: You say he was a consultant. Consultant to whom?*

FREEMAN: Consultant to the Refugee Programs Bureau at State. I subsequently worked with him in a number of other contexts. He's just a very indefatigable, wise investigator, who has a habit of getting to the root of problems and dissecting them in a way that facilitates designing a solution to the problem. It's sometimes very useful to bring in an outsider for that purpose, and I think Bob Gersony performed a very useful role in this context.

We did manage to begin a program of cooperation with the Thai maritime police (in effect, the coast guard), and to set up an informant system among Thai fishermen, which slowly, although never entirely eliminating it, very greatly reduced the incidence of barbarous mistreatment or even murder of refugees on the high seas. That effort was centered mainly in Songkhla, in the south. As I say, it was a long-term effort, done in cooperation with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). That was something that RP (Refugee Programs) was initially very uncomfortable about. Refugee people don't like to work with cops and intelligence people. But actually it worked out pretty well, and I consider that to have been a minor success.

The broader issue of how to maintain sufficient off take of Vietnamese refugees, whom Thailand had taken in on the assumption that they would all be resettled outside Thailand and that Thailand would not be left with a residual problem, was a difficult one.

We also had another program, which was quite intriguing and, in a way, promising, but beset with difficulties, and that was the so-called Orderly Departure Program (ODP), whereby consular officers from the embassy flew to Saigon and interviewed the relatives of Vietnamese who had resettled in the United States, or Amerasians (that is, the children of American servicemen and Vietnamese women), and arranged for their direct flight, via Bangkok, to the United States.

So this was a different embassy in the sense that it ran very large programs, which is not characteristic of an embassy. The Orderly Departure Program, the Refugee Section, the JVA, the Consular Section, and the INS sometimes, with their different perspectives, would find themselves very much at odds. So I ended up spending a lot of time trying to forge more of a sense of teamwork among that group. And I think I had some success, although, as I said, I don't think I was able to overcome the corner-cutting tendencies of humanitarians in the JVA and Refugee Program and ODP entirely.

*Q: I'm an expert on corner cutting, so I understand how this works.*

FREEMAN: A certain amount of it is necessary. On the other hand, there is a reason to have policies and then to try to implement them. Striking a balance is not always easy.

*Q: What about the intelligence side of the operations? One, of course, was the pirates, but that was sort of case specific. But trying to find out what was happening in Indochina. This was a time when we had relations with Laos, but not with Cambodia or Vietnam.*

FREEMAN: That's correct. The intelligence presence was very large, partly for the same reason that the embassy itself was large; namely, that a great number of regional support operations were based in Bangkok. There were really two focuses: one was drugs, and the other was Indochina.

*Q: What was our focus as far as what was happening in Indochina? In a way, after the Vietnam War and our withdrawal, it almost fell off the political radar.*

FREEMAN: A major focus of the collection effort was Indochina, and, without getting into detail, we used every means of collection available to us. I think, generally speaking, with regard to Indochina, the brief was a watching one. There were a few exceptions where we had active interaction across the border.

One, which I have mentioned, was the Orderly Departure Program in Vietnam. And we had an interest in tracking Vietnamese policy on refugees generally, not only those who might be allowed direct departure from Vietnam, but those who were likely to go onto the high seas. That was a great concern.

A second area of concern was, of course, the politics of the Vietnamese empire, because at that time, Vietnam very much dominated Indochina. And the concept of Indochina, which was a Vietnamese imperial concept (or a French imperial concept with Vietnamese roots), was very much the operative philosophy in Hanoi. So we watched for evidence of Vietnamese policies in, particularly, Cambodia and, to a lesser extent, in Laos.

We were also very concerned about and spent a great deal of time tracking two other issues. One was the POW/MIA issue, to which I referred, where there was an exhaustive effort to track down and investigate even the most farfetched rumors of sightings of alleged American POWs or the discovery of remains. The other issue (in fact, we had a separate little operation doing this) was so-called yellow rain -- alleged Vietnamese use of chemical weapons against, primarily, the Hmong. We had a small group that would go out and try to collect samples, or obtain samples that had been collected by others, from sites where, allegedly, yellow rain had been used. There was a great controversy as to whether yellow rain was a natural phenomenon, bee feces, or whether it was in fact a weapon. And, I confess, I never reached a firm conclusion.

So these were the principal focuses with regard to Indochina.

Occasionally, we would also have some foolish American sail a yacht into Vietnamese waters, become arrested, under suspicion of being a spy, and held. And then we would have a lengthy set of interactions with the Vietnamese, while we tried to gain the release of whoever this yo-yo was. I don't want to sound uncharitable, but you had to be awfully stupid to sail into Vietnamese waters, at least at that time.

The other focus of the intelligence effort was primarily drugs. Again, all available methods of collection were used. This was not an easy managerial issue, because CIA and DEA have very different professional cultures.

DEA, even overseas, is drawn from the ranks of agents who are more accustomed to kicking down doors than listening carefully at the keyhole, and who are used, in short, to exercising arrest authority, which they don't have overseas. So there was always a bit of strain and stress on them, as they tried to do a job that they felt they were hampered in doing. They had to rely on the Thai authorities for arrests.

CIA was, in this area, quintessentially a collector of information, rather than an action agency, but it also had its Rambo types who wanted to get into the door-kicking business.

*Q: Rambo, just for the record, was a movie character who was sort of a one-man army, who went in and shot up a lot of people and did whatever he wanted to, to the cheers of movie audiences.*

FREEMAN: Fortunately, the senior management of both agencies in the embassy was very sober and serious minded, so the more rambunctious in the ranks of both got some adult supervision. But I had to spend a great deal of time preventing an outbreak of guerilla warfare between CIA and DEA, particularly in Chiang Mai, where the consulate and the people associated with it were under constant terrorist threat.

*Q: Sticking to the drug thing, I'm under the impression that there was considerable involvement by many within the military, and even within the royal family, in Thailand, at least at certain times. How did we view this during the period you were there?*

FREEMAN: I don't think, with one exception, that there was much reason to suspect involvement by the royal family. However, the nature of drugs, or indeed any effort to prohibit trade in a substance for which there is a high demand, as Prohibition in the United States demonstrated, is inherently corrupting. The problem of corruption in the police force, and to some extent in the military, although mainly the police force, was a main target of U.S.-Thai joint intelligence and operational efforts. A separate Thai equivalent of the Drug Enforcement Agency was set up, with elaborate checks to ensure that it was clean from corruption, and to a great extent, it targeted the police.

There were also problems, I must say, in the American community. I arrived, as I said, November 2, 1984, and discovered, to my surprise, that there was no drug policy in the embassy with regard to what would happen to people who abused drugs, which, of course, were readily available. One of my first acts, with the ambassador's strong support, was to establish a drug policy, a fairly draconian one.

Unfortunately, the first case in which I had to apply this was to the son of a friend of longstanding, who was photographed, by a joint DEA-Thai camera team, selling marijuana to other kids at the Bangkok American School. So the first victim (or beneficiary, depending on

your perspective of the policy) was this very nice young kid, whom I had last seen as a baby. Bringing his parents into my office with him, and telling them that he had two days to get out of Thailand, and that they could go with him or stay, as they chose, was not a happy thing.

In an organization of this size (roughly 2,400 people, including the associated elements and local employees), the DCM is both the mayor of a small town and, in effect, the chief janitor.

I remember with particular horror a series of incidents, which happened long after John Dean left and Bill Brown arrived as his successor, where a State Department officer (who shall remain nameless; I'll just call him Mr. E) arrived and, against the advice of the embassy, brought two very large German shepherds with him to a small apartment in an urban complex. The day after he arrived, he went around and shoved a note under the door of everybody in the apartment building, saying, "I have these two large dogs, one called Killer and the other Fang. I will be walking them occasionally, or perhaps my daughter will. They're very large, and she can't really restrain them, so, if you see them coming in the corridor, please get back into your apartment. Once a week, I will clean up the dog doo in the playground. So don't worry about it, because once a week, it will be removed."

This, of course, was not exactly the way for him to start out with his neighbors. We had to demand that the dogs be removed (actually, I offered to take them, because I like dogs and I had the space to do it), but, more important, to insist that he find a home for them, a kennel or something. We then made an effort to find some sort of a place where he could have his dogs, but this was very unsuccessful. And it turned out that Mr. E was a very litigious person, so, for years thereafter, I was answering grievance complaints about my dictatorial handling of this situation, which I had thought, in fact, was rather gentle.

We also had (while I'm on the subject of this kind of thing) a revolt among the military wives over the really very charming, nice, but bizarre-looking, wife of the chief of the joint U.S.-Thai military assistance program. This colonel, with a very distinguished war record, really salt of the earth, had met a Cockney lady, apparently in a bar in Florida, and fallen in love with her. She had the habit of dying her hair green and purple and the like, and was quite spectacularly full figured. Lavinia was really quite a pretty girl, with an hourglass figure, which she displayed to best advantage. This did not go over well with the much more staid military wives, who had to serve under her husband and her.

I must say, the first time I met her, I was a little bit perplexed. But, as I got to know the two of them, I realized she was a wonderful person. She just had a bizarre and somewhat flamboyant sense of dress. Periodically, however, the military wives would land on me and demand that she and her husband be removed, which I would rebuff. So that sort of thing would go on.

Finally, I had the first case of a Foreign Service officer to come down with AIDS. Again, a very nice young man, in his thirties, I suppose, who openly lived with another man and had apparently contracted the disease years before in Zaire. This really was quite an odyssey, because he suddenly went back, with his hairdresser friend, to Washington, and evidently had a private medical examination. While he was back here, his friend died of AIDS. That was the rumor; no one could substantiate it. He declined to allow the State Department to give him a medical

examination. When he returned, I attempted to order him to have a medical examination.

Actually, it got into the Thai press that the American Embassy was spreading AIDS in Bangkok. So it was a political issue, as well as a matter of compassion and morale in the post.

No one, at that time, knew much about AIDS. With the help of the embassy doctor, we ran a very extensive educational program, but there were people who panicked. He had escorted the wife of a friend, one of the embassy employees, who was out of town, to the Marine Ball. People refused to have any physical contact with her, on the grounds that she might be a carrier. They wouldn't swim in swimming pools where he had once been. They insisted that the washers and dryers in his apartment be removed and that he be barred from them. It became very nasty indeed.

The Department of State didn't know how to deal with this. The Privacy Act was invoked as a reason for not being able to compel him to have a medical exam. As chargé, I attempted to expel him from the country, and was told I couldn't do that, because it involved a medical matter. So I fought that.

As the end of his tour approached, I just frankly said the hell with it. I had been trying to get him back to Washington, to have an examination and have some treatment, and get him out of causing both a political problem in Thailand and a morale problem. He was determined not to go, and was fighting and getting a lot of support from the medical division. I was getting no support from anyone in Washington. It came up to about three weeks before he was due to leave, and I just said, oh, the hell with it, he's leaving anyway. A week later, he became extraordinarily ill and had to be medevaced to Clark Air Force Base and thence back to the States.

As a footnote, subsequently, when I left Bangkok and returned to Washington, I inquired what had happened to him, and discovered that he'd been made the lead advance person for George Shultz in his public appearances, which I thought was extremely questionable, given the public-relations fallout that it might generate. But it illustrated the fact that, at least at that time, the Department of State didn't know how to deal with this question and wasn't prepared to back people.

*Q: It was highly political.*

FREEMAN: It was highly political and very much misunderstood. People imagined that AIDS was a disease of homosexuals; whereas, it's just a sexually transmitted disease that is no more the province of males than syphilis or any other sexually transmitted disease.

But I got quite an education on it, and in the difficulties that people have in dealing with issues that challenge their sense of sexual morality and their concern about disease and the safety of their spouses and children and the like. I must say, I was quite disgusted by the inability of the Department of State to come to grips with the issue and deal with it. They did, later, but it took them the better part of 1985 to do that.

*Q: This is typical, in a way. I don't know at that time, but I assume it was true that Bangkok was*

*sort of the sex capital. You had plane loads of German, American, Japanese, and Australian tourists coming in, mostly horny males who were out for... Was this true, and did this cause either consular problems or other problems?*

FREEMAN: I think the American participation in the sex trade was, at that time, not great. The days of a large American military presence were gone. The sex trade, per se, did not pose an unusual problem. The main problem there was starstruck young men bringing in prostitutes whom they had rented for a week and then decided to marry. We tried to counsel them a bit on thinking twice before they got into a relationship they might later regret, with a woman who, in some cases, was twice their age, although she looked young, and so forth and so on.

Now, having said that, in Thailand, sex is regarded as an entirely normal bodily function. Thai men stop off on the way home to go to a massage parlor the way American men might stop at a bar. Thai culture is very hedonistic. In fact, I used to joke that the Thai had done an exhaustive study of the organs of the body, and determined that there was one that was essentially superfluous and should never be exercised, if at all possible -- namely, the brain -- but that all other organs of the body should be used to the utmost advantage.

The greater problem was with drugs, heroin in particular, because Thai heroin was uncut, and American addicts who were users of heroin were accustomed to taking much larger doses than could be safely taken in Thailand, and therefore we had a constant parade of people who were overdosing and dying from heroin. For the Consular Section, that was a constant problem.

We also had a range of other issues, various people who decided to play the aforesaid Rambo and swim the Mekong into Indochina, to rescue POWs that they believed were there, which was not regarded kindly by anyone. Basically, they were just getting themselves in trouble and causing problems for the Thai. So, tracking down these people, hauling them out of jail, and saving them from themselves was also a main activity.

I should say, since I've been talking primarily about managerial issues, really there were some fascinating ones. Indeed, the dominant experience I had in Thailand was managerial. I also did a lot of business with the Thai, which I'll come to in a minute. But I wanted to mention one unit in the embassy, which I became very fond of, called the Armed Forces Research Institutes of Medical Science (AFRIMS), which was conducting world-class, probably the best research in the world on malaria. They were part of the embassy, headed by a very competent medical colonel. No one had ever really paid much attention to them before, but when I established these managerial clusters, they suddenly were brought into the embassy.

Incidentally, the Centers for Disease Control, which was also theoretically under the embassy, just basically refused to show up at or have anything to do with the embassy other than access to the commissary and the like. And that was a constant problem. But there were only two of them, so I didn't worry about them too much.

AFRIMS had a huge battle going with the Civil Service Commission. They had one employee, a Thai, I believe, who, by dint of careful study over decades, had become the world's most infallible mosquito mater. He would take the male and female mosquito, each in a pair of

tweezers, and put them together in such a way that they could procreate, which was a very specialized art indeed. The Civil Service Commission had great difficulty believing that this high level of skill deserved a significant level of Civil Service classification. One can understand how, in Washington, D.C., this might have sounded a bit absurd. But I got involved in intervening in support of AFRIMS's efforts to get this gent the proper level of salary and recognition for his prowess as an arranger of marriages between mosquitoes.

*Q: The matchmaker.*

FREEMAN: Thailand is a remarkable culture, with enormous adaptive capacity and flexibility. A fantastic sense of protocol. There are seventeen words for "I" in Thai that I know, which define the relationship hierarchically between you and the person to whom or of whom you are speaking. When you would have a dinner party in Thailand, a Thai would come in, and instantly the table would rearrange itself to put this person in the right protocol place. A sort of instinctual sense of etiquette and politeness and grace that was really quite amazing and delightful.

But along with this went an absence of willingness, perhaps an absence of ability, really, to talk or think strategically. Everything was tactical for the Thai. So this was a very different experience for me than dealing with the very strategic-minded Chinese. Moreover, the Thai, unlike the Chinese, don't separate personal feelings from professional role very effectively. So it wouldn't be possible to have a bruising discussion with a Thai official and expect that person to remain a personal friend.

In some respects, Thailand, with its color and grace and charm, is a very hedonistic, extremely seductive society, such that many people in the embassy, who had served in Thailand before and were back, would retire in Thailand. There were many Thai wives among the embassy staff. Thailand is the only society I've seen that matches the United States in its power as a melting pot; it assimilates; it attracts. Really very enjoyable.

In some respects, however, from a diplomatic point of view, it almost struck me as more of a costume party than a country, more interested in style than in substance. I found it quite fascinating.

I studied very hard to learn Thai. Shortly after I arrived in Bangkok, Bill Casey, the head of CIA, turned up. The foreign minister at that time, Sithi Savetsila, was a former OSS agent in World War II and retained a friendly regard for the linear descendant of OSS, CIA. Bill Casey and John Dean didn't get along too well, and Mr. Bia, the head of the Thai intelligence service, didn't really want the ambassador around, so I got invited, as the token embassy representation, to the dinner for Mr. Casey. I sat there, having arrived only a week before in Thailand, and watched the Thai across the table conduct a lively conversation, in Thai. I felt enormously frustrated that I couldn't understand what was going on or participate, and determined that I would learn Thai. So I did. I was in Thailand for fifteen months, and I came out with about an S3+, maybe an R2+.

I actually started doing a project, which I never completed, comparing Thai and Chinese, since they obviously had a common ancestor, trying to do some, I guess you'd call it, paleolinguistic research to determine, from the words that were common and the words that were different,

when the two might have separated. The point being that certain technologies, and iron, for example, or the use of animals, were known to have been introduced at certain points. I thought you could tell something by whether the words were the same or different. I actually got quite far with that, but then turned it over to Chulalongkorn University and to the Minorities Institute at Yunnan University in China, where there are also many Thai speakers.

The Thai language is a very beautiful one, grammatically very similar to Chinese, but rather like English in the sense that if you go into a bar in an English-speaking country and listen to the conversation, you'll find that about eighty percent of the vocabulary is German based, twenty percent Latin, Greek, French, whatever. Whereas if you go to a university lecture hall, the proportions are reversed, and you'll find that the bulk of the vocabulary is not Teutonic, but French and Latin and Greek and whatnot in its origins. Thai borrowed very heavily from Pali, which was the linear descendant of Sanskrit. Since I had learned Tamil, and Tamil had borrowed from Pali, I found learning Thai a great deal easier than I might have. The grammar, however, is very much like Chinese.

So I learned Thai, only to discover to my horror that these animated conversations that I had been so desperate to eavesdrop on, if not participate in, invariably concerned only four subjects: boxing, sex, drinking, and golf, and had no substance at all. The supreme Thai virtue is to be sanuk, meaning to be happy and content and at ease. And the Thai are sanuk, in a way that I really envy.

*Q: Just an aside. You mentioned that the Thai are tactical, and the Chinese are strategic. The national game of China and Japan is Go, which is very strategic and a great game. Is there an equivalent Thai game?*

FREEMAN: Thai boxing, which is a game of speed and skill, and very, very tactical, obviously, and quite rough. Beneath the very composed and aesthetically pleasing exterior, the Thai are a very tough people. It's no accident that they manage to drive others out of or assimilate others in what is probably the best farmland and real estate in Southeast Asia, most of which, in prior years, was part of the Khmer (Cambodian) realm. The traditional enemies of the Thai are the Burmese.

As DCM in Thailand with a regional responsibility, through the DEA offices and regional intelligence collection, for drug trade, I would go up about once a quarter to Rangoon, to participate in, or sometimes chair, meetings with the counter narcotics people in the American Embassy in Burma, not to meet with Burmese, because, of course, I wasn't accredited to Burma, but just to try to make sure that what we were doing in Thailand meshed well with and did not conflict with the requirements in Burma, and that the activities in Burma were fully supportive of and consonant with our activities in Thailand.

While in Beijing, I had gone around Southeast Asia a couple of times, trying to get a better angle on the Indochina questions from the Southeast Asian perspective, because they were also important to China and U.S.-China relations. In Bangkok, I continued to travel occasionally to other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) capitals, to try to get a perspective on ASEAN, in which Thailand plays a central role, and to see whether I could gain some insights

from that.

Finally, I was very proud in Thailand, as indeed I was in Beijing and have been in other posts, of the reporting effort that I mounted. There were a number of very talented people in the embassy who I thought needed some electric-shock therapy to get them into full gear, in terms of analyzing Thailand and the various issues, the five issues that I mentioned.

When I was in China, as I'm sure I mentioned, we initiated a series of essays on different elements of the rapidly changing scene in China. Thailand was not a place that was changing that rapidly, but it was a place that was very difficult to understand, a very complicated society, with many, many layers to it, with some key institutions. The reverence that the Thai have for their king, and their king's, in fact, very skillful establishment of the authority of the monarchy, it seemed to me, bore attention. The question of the role of the military in politics, the relationship between regions and the center in Thailand, and so forth all seemed to me to have been unexamined for quite a period of time. So I tried to take the mission back to basics, and tried to establish some benchmarks, through essay-type reporting. And I think we did a fine job. In fact, we were runner-up for the reporting award, as we had been in Beijing. So that was a large focus of my activity as well.

*Q: I'd like to go to the MIA (missing-in-action) issue. This is still a political issue, and it's become sort of a standard of the right wing, the conservatives, that somehow or other there are American prisoners still being held, despite the fact that the figures on the missing in action in Vietnam, particularly since it was jungle war, are not particularly bad, as compared to the Korean War or any other war. What was your attitude toward this? Was this something that we were doing? How did you feel about this?*

FREEMAN: I felt, first of all, that we had been given a task to do, and that it was important that we do it. I made every effort to be as supportive as I could be of that effort, which is quite a complex one, with which I later became even more familiar when I was at the Department of Defense.

At the same time, I have to say that I found it somewhat odd that this was such a national obsession for the United States. I believe, in World War II, there were more than 40,000 people unaccounted for; in Korea, more than 8,000. And the fact that, at that time, there were between 2,000 and 3,000 unaccounted for in the Indochina theater struck me as, in fact, a remarkable achievement by the military: that they had kept the number so very low. So I was puzzled by the political impetus behind this, and by the extent to which both the Vietnamese, foolishly, and the Americans, perhaps without much thought either, had allowed it to dominate our bilateral relationship.

I say the Vietnamese 'foolishly' because it was quite apparent to me, from the information I was seeing and from discussions occasionally with the Vietnamese, that they were, in fact, playing games with us on this issue and behaving in a most, to my mind, self-destructive, counterproductive, and duplicitous manner. So I have no particular reason to doubt the thesis that Vietnam, in fact, had concealed and prevaricated on this issue, and that therefore it was a legitimate topic of investigation.

At the same time, as I said, I wondered to myself, even then, whether the level of attention that we were giving to this was not, in the end, more likely to harm than to help the families that it was ostensibly aimed at helping to solve the question of what had happened to the father of the family who might have perished in Indochina. Keeping hope alive, when hope hangs by the very, very slenderest of threads, it seems to me, prolongs pain. There comes a point when it is simply cruel to do that. I think, when I was there, working on this in the mid-'80s, we had not yet reached that point. The war was only a decade behind us. But certainly, by the time I reengaged on this issue in the early mid-'90s, I think it was the case that diminishing returns had set in, and we were doing something that was, I think, cruel, and exploitative of the families, rather than helping them.

*Q: What about commercial and economic ties with the Thai? What were the issues at that time?*

FREEMAN: The normal sorts of issues for that period all arose. They had to do with textile quotas, child-labor laws, and the usual problems of that sort, and they were quite contentious, as they always are.

Overall, however, the U.S.-Thai economic relationship was very healthy and getting healthier. There was a large American business community in Thailand, with a very active American Chamber of Commerce. One of my first acts on arriving, since I had attempted in Beijing as well to be strongly supportive of the business community, was to try to get to know them, and to participate as much as possible in their activities, and to be supportive and offer briefings to their membership, as well as listen to their membership about its complaints. So I was really quite active with them, spoke at their annual meetings, and had a regular program of luncheon meetings with their board, and made some friends, of whom I'm still very fond years after leaving Thailand, in some cases not having seen them for all of that period. So the economic and commercial dimension was quite important.

In addition, Bangkok is the center of regional support organizations in the embassy. For example, in the embassy, we had the regional accounting center for the State Department, which at that time handled all of the payrolls from the South Pacific to East Africa. The computer support for much of that region was done out of Bangkok. I'm just naming two, but there were many of these organizations.

Bangkok itself was also the center of the U.N.'s Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Far East. The economic minister-counselor at the embassy was the American representative to this organization. I felt that, since I was trying to supervise him and trying to galvanize his section into more creative reporting and more active investigation of the rather obvious radical changes going on in the Thai economy, I should take an interest in ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific). And so I did, although I must say that encounter with a multilateral organization was about as rewarding as sticking your head in an oven with the gas on. Totally soporific, pro forma activities, by and large.

There were also some ASEAN regional organizations, which I tried to get to know.

We still had, at that time, a substantial AID (Agency for International Development) program, focused, innovatively, on cooperation in science and technology. The Thai economy was coming to the point where it clearly would be graduating from an AID program. Technology cooperation was good for us commercially, as well as important to the future of the Thai economy. So the USAID mission was also something that I paid a lot of attention to, not so much going out and looking at projects as going over to their offices and listening to them, and making sure that I understood what they were doing, and that, in fact, it bore some resemblance to the overall objectives that we had established in Thailand.

Overall, the experience in Bangkok, as I think back on it, was a really very memorable and rewarding one, primarily because of the managerial elements that I've referred to, and less because of the diplomatic accomplishments, if any, that I was able to bring off. I think I did bring off a few, but they were less important than strengthening the management of the embassy, in the sense of community, within its far-flung, disparate elements.

*Q: Ambassador William Brown came in. How long did you overlap?*

FREEMAN: I think we must have overlapped six or eight months or thereabouts.

*Q: Was his style different? How did you find him?*

FREEMAN: Completely different, a different personality. Far less resolute and decisive. Very, very bright. Very able, but not at all viceregal, very down to earth. I enjoyed working with him. I know he was very grateful for what I did, but he probably felt a bit of relief when I left, because I think he'd sort of felt there wasn't a lot for him to do within the embassy, since John Dean had essentially shoved everything off to me as he left. The reason I was sent to Bangkok, in essence, was to bridge the anticipated gap between John Gunther Dean and, as it turned out, William Andreas Brown. That gap turned out to be a great deal briefer than many had feared, but I think I was able to get Bill Brown off to a strong start in Bangkok before I was suddenly yanked out.

**LACY A. WRIGHT, JR.**  
**Coordinator/Counselor for Refugee Affairs**  
**Bangkok (1985-1987)**

*Mr. Wright joined the Foreign Service in 1968 after earning degrees at Mendelien College and Loyola University. His foreign service took him to Vietnam both during and after the War. Other assignments took him to Milan, London and Bangkok as well as to the State Department in Washington, where he worked with International Organizations in matters concerning refugees, and UNESCO affairs. Mr. Wright was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. Mr. Wright was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.*

*Q: Today is the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1998. Lacy, how did you find Thai?*

WRIGHT: Do you mean the language?

*Q: Yes.*

WRIGHT: Thai is not a terribly difficult language, at least if you know Vietnamese. They're both similar. They're both tonal languages. The writing in Thai is difficult, but speaking is about the same level of difficulty as Vietnamese. That doesn't mean it's easy, but you know from the start pretty much that it's doable. My problem was that I never had enough. I only had a certain number of weeks of Thai. That's certainly not enough. I was also pretty unhappy with the Thai instruction at FSI—they're all gone now, so I can talk about them—due to the teachers, the Thai teachers that we had, who were not very good. They had some common failings, but they were particularly bad in teachers. One, for example, spent most of his time impressing his class with his excellent English, which didn't do me much good since I already knew English and didn't need to learn any more. In retrospect, I wish I had really complained about the situation, because I did not learn as much Thai as I could have had things been different. And then when I go to Thailand, as usual in an embassy, I found myself dealing overwhelmingly with people who already spoke English, and being in the capital, being in the embassy, even though I tried hard, I never really advanced very far in Thai, which is a shame.

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

WRIGHT: From about June of 1985 until about June of 1987.

*Q: How did you fit in. I mean, what was your title and what were you doing?*

WRIGHT: My title when I first arrived was coordinator for refugee affairs, and then it got transmuted along the way to be counselor for refugee affairs. And I was in charge of all of the refugee programs, except for the ODP program, the Orderly Departure Program, from Vietnam, which was a separate entity, but when I left, my job and the head of ODP were combined into a single job, but that was not until I left. My job was to handle, first of all, all of the refugees and displaced persons who were in Thailand that we talked about before. I had another program under me which was the anti-piracy program, which in terms of manpower and money was a small program compared to the others but which was a very important one and one in which we had a lot of success, not very much due to me but due to the fact that we had—I believe he was—a US Customs officer—was it Customs or another agency? At any rate, he was terrific. Oh, he was DEA, excuse me. We had a DEA officer who had been in Thailand before, spoke excellent Thai, really knew what he was doing and, I think, single-handedly greatly reduced piracy against Vietnamese boat people. These were terrible atrocities when they occurred. And he did that by very successfully enlisting the cooperation of the police in southern Thailand and successfully prosecuting some of these pirates when they returned to land, which had never been done before. So when these guys saw that there were real consequences to raping and killing people out in the middle of the sea, they tended to stop doing it.

*Q: You mentioned before you were in Thailand working with the Thai navy, which you found a very mixed bag. The first man you dealt with was fine; the second one didn't give it much priority. Was the navy element still part of this, or was it more catching them when they got to*

*shore?*

WRIGHT: I don't remember the instances that you're talking about.

*Q: Yes, I may be conflating yours with Dick Gibson. I'm sorry. I was talking about Dick Gibson, who was doing that, and I've got the two together. On your part, how did you find the navy?*

WRIGHT: I didn't deal very much directly with the navy, probably not at all, but I think the answer to your question—and, of course, the guy that I'm talking about did, as well as with the police—is about the same as you would get if you were talking about any Third-World governmental entity like that. A great deal depends upon the personal rapport that you can establish with them, and this guy was able to do that and he spent many an evening out drinking with these guys and getting to know them and establishing trust with them. And he did it, they say, with a lot of success. And I think that's usually the key. When you're dealing with many Third-World officials, trying to appeal to their sense of doing a good job is usually not the best way to go. You have to get to know them, and they have to get to like you, and when you ask them to do something then it becomes one friend asking another, and that's the way you get things done often.

*Q: You'd been dealing with the Cambodian-Vietnamese problems for some time. Where did the Thai Government come down on refugees in '85? I'm sure it had gone through several permutations.*

WRIGHT: They were, I think, suffering from compassion fatigue by that juncture, not that they had ever had too much compassion for the Vietnamese, but I think I addressed this earlier, and I don't think things changed too much. The Thai Government never liked the Vietnamese, were always worried that not only the Vietnamese but these other people would stay in their territory indefinitely, and that, above all, was what they wanted to avoid. They did not generally share our humanitarian concern about these people, although they protested that they did, and what they really wanted was to make sure that they got something out of it as long as those people were there and that they all eventually went home. That led them to adopt rather austere policies when it came to the care and the feeding and the housing of these refugees and displaced people. As I think I've said before, none of them were ever allowed out of their camps, even though in some instances, particularly with the Lao, local accommodations were reached. And this broke down somewhat, and people actually did go out to a certain degree and have jobs in the local area outside and then come back to the camps at night, and in fact, for the Lao, who were so akin to the Thai, linguistically and in other ways, we used to envision that maybe this was the way it would all end. Gradually these people would seep out, and eventually they'd all settle up there in northern Thailand and so on and so on. That never quite happened, but I guess it happened to some degree. But the Thai, as I say, wanted nothing more than for all these people eventually to leave, and they wanted to be assured that that was going to happen.

*Q: What about boat people? Now we're talking about seven years or so, after the fall of South Vietnam and all. Was it a fairly steady flow out, and who were they?*

WRIGHT: Yes, there were still plenty of boat people coming out. I can't give you the numbers

now. They would be diminished, of course, compared with those who came out first, but there were still people landing by boat in Thailand. And in fact, one of the things that we were always on the lookout for and concerned about was that these people not be pushed away by local people when they tried to land, which would have been a violation of the Geneva agreement on refugees. When people did land like that, they were taken immediately to one of the two or three Vietnamese camps and had to stay there until it could be determined what would happen to them. And by that I mean, they would be seen, first of all, by the JVA, our Joint Volunteer Agency, which would do up a little dossier on them, and then they would be seen by the INS, and the INS would decide whether they were "real" refugees, that is, people who had fled because of a real fear of persecution, or whether they had left for some other reason, such as for economic reasons, to gain a better life somewhere else. Needless to say, the line between these two was very murky, so it really came down in very many instances to a pretty subjective decision by the INS officers, which itself was a source of a huge amount of tension. At any rate, that's what happened to people, and many of the Vietnamese did go on to the United States after that, and a number of them stayed for years and years in those camps and were eventually involuntarily repatriated to Vietnam.

*Q: On my interview that I referred to before with Dick Gibson, which was an ongoing one right now, and I can't remember his time frame, but it was about that time, he was saying that they had done a sort of an informal look at who the refugees were and came to the conclusion that a significant number were what would be called "economic" refugees, but he said that he had a great deal of heat from the embassy and from the NGO's, non-governmental organizations, who were concerned with it. He said, in a way, using a good Asian term, that he was breaking their rice bowl by doing this, and he was told to cut it out. Could you talk about how this was reflected where you were? I'm sure it was a continuing thing.*

WRIGHT: Yes, this was a continuing thing, and you had the predictable people lined up generally on either side of that issue. The INS people, particularly, and the Thais on one side, and the voluntary organizations, most of the people in the refugee bureau and the State Department on the other side—very difficult to try to be objective here or to try to figure out what were the proper criteria to use. For example, one of the things that a lot of people thought was if a person risked his life to come out, even if he had done that for so-called economic reasons, it would have been dangerous to send him back to Vietnam because of what he had done. So the line was far from clear; on the other hand, you had people who clearly saw things one way and one way only, and they were on both sides. I'll never forget, for example, I was out in the field once and observing the interviewing of a young Vietnamese man, probably 20 years old or so, maybe younger, and he was being interviewed by a very sympathetic JVA person, a young lady. And in these interviews, one of the ideas was to prepare them for the INS interview, which was the important one; and one of the accusations sometimes was that the JVA people would coach the applicant to say the right things. In listening to this interview, it went something like this:

*Well, why did you leave Vietnam?*

*Well, I left because it was really very hard to live there and I was unhappy.*

*Well, would you say that you were persecuted? Were you afraid for your life?*

*Well, no.*

*Well, were you unable to get a job because of your association with the previous regime?*

No, I wouldn't say so.

*Well, were your parents unable to work, or were they put in re-education camps?*

No.

*Well, were you nonetheless worried about your family and what might happen to them?*

No, I wouldn't say so.

And finally this poor girl got exasperated, and she said, "Well, then, why did you leave Vietnam?" And this kid came up with a brilliant answer. He said, "You don't think I was going to wait around for all those things to happen to me, do you?" But, of course, for these poor people, this was desperately serious business.

*Q: Of course it was. In your job were you feeling any pressure from Washington, particularly from the Department bureau of refugee affairs or from the embassy to take one line or another?*

WRIGHT: You had various people and institutions that had predictable lines, and you were always weaving around them. It was pretty hard to be objective, although if I had it to do over again, I would have tried even harder to be objective. For example, the DCM at the embassy, who was my boss, Chas Freeman, took a fairly hard line. He believed that this refugee business could only last for so long and that many of the people coming out were economic refugees, and that was his view of things. The INS, who was very hard to deal with and with whom I did not get along very well, kind of went up and down. They were always reading the tea leaves—and doing it kind of cynically, I think—and would routinely engage in trades. "Well, okay, look: you lay off of us up in this camp and let us do our work, because we think that we know what's going on there and we're going to be kind of tough, and we'll do something for you down here." And it was just about that explicit. And when I think about it, it's really awfully cynical, and I wish I'd said more about it at the time; but everybody kind of played that game.

*Q: Well, I have to point out that I was in the refugee relief program in Germany, in Frankfurt, in 1955, and the INS was out there, too, and we traded bodies. "We're not going to fight you on this one if you let this one go."*

WRIGHT: Right, right, I believe it.

*Q: There was a rough justice.*

WRIGHT: Yes, and a lot of people took the view that it was better to do that and get something, if you were on that side of the question, than to get the whole INS mad at you and have them retreat into a funk, in which they would then tend to deny everybody. I got into a dust-up with the INS in fairly short order over a matter that had become a real issue, and here we're talking about the arbitrariness of this whole effort. A certain number of the initial Cambodians who had come across in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion, if I remember them correctly, were liable for resettlement in a third country. I'm a little vague on this; now I'll have to remember more when I listen to this. But there were some thousands of them who had been interviewed, and

some had been allowed to go to the United States. Most others had not. There were a number of people, voluntary agencies and others, who had taken up the cause of these people and who felt that they had been treated very unfairly, and that many more of them should have qualified for admission to the United States. We had a name for these refugees, and I can't remember what it was right now. At any rate, I brought up this issue and agitated for their being re-interviewed. Now needless to say, the INS thought this was the world's most terrible idea, but eventually it happened, and maybe about 3,000 of them were re-interviewed, and I believe that most of them were still rejected, but about 10 per cent were accepted, and those 300 or so people then did go to the United States. But I did serious damage, in this, to my relations with the INS, and particularly with the then INS director, from which I never really recovered. And if I had it to do over again, I might try to do the same thing, but I would do it much more carefully and in a different way.

*Q: How did you find the—I want to call it non-governmental organizations. They had a different name then.*

WRIGHT: Well, let's see. You're right, and I can't quite remember what it was, but they had a whole umbrella organization there to try to bring some coordination into the work of these hundred or so voluntary agencies.

*Q: Were they running across the spectrum as far as how they dealt with the refugees, or were they for the most part, they thought their job was to take the refugees and place them in some friendly country?*

WRIGHT: Not necessarily all of them, although I think that's what they tended to think. You know, in the refugee world, as you probably know, when you're a refugee, there are three possibilities for you. You can either go back to your own country, which in refugee lore is always regarded as the best solution for everybody—that is, you can go back to your country when conditions there change. You can stay in the country to which you have fled, assuming you've been accepted there and they agree to keep you. Or, and this is regarded by those who've studied this question as the worst solution, you can be accepted into a third country. Now often from the refugee's point of view that's the best solution, particularly if the third country is the United States, so... I would say that, first of all, staying in Thailand under the conditions I've described was not thought of, except in the case of the Lao probably, as a long term solution. So I guess things were divided between those who thought they ought to wait and go back to Cambodia, in the case of the Cambodians, which was the US Government position, and those who thought they should be resettled in third countries, principally the United States. And I would think that 90 per cent of the voluntary agency people would have felt that that was right, although I think there were a number of them who did not think that because, after all, there were problems in going to the United States, too, not only problems of the US absorbing them but also problems of resettlement and adjustment to a new country. That particularly turned out to be the case with the Hmong, the highland Lao, who had a very difficult time adapting to life in this country, and you may remember 10 or 15 years ago or so a number of them died mysteriously from ailments that no one ever clearly explained.

*Q: Were there efforts that you were aware of, because you had the UN and everybody—this was not just limited to the United States—to work with now the united Vietnamese Government to try*

*to resettle the refugees, bring them back?*

WRIGHT: I think that was later. I don't believe that any of those kinds of efforts occurred until some years later. There were accords, and eventually a number of people did go back. I used the word *involuntarily* before—that's a very nasty word in the refugee world—certainly reluctantly. I guess when it's really involuntary that means you're taken bound hand and foot into the plane, and I don't know that that happened, but certainly people were put under a lot of pressure to go back. That is, they were told, "You can either stay and rot in this terrible camp in Thailand for the rest of your life, or you can go back to Vietnam." And under those circumstances, a number of people did. I think that the history of their treatment back there, though, as far as I can tell, was not too bad. Although there again you had terrible arguments between the people who believed the worst about the Vietnamese Government and the people who looked on them a little more benignly and felt that this was the right solution.

*Q: You had a bunch of junior officers, I guess, working for you, didn't you?*

WRIGHT: Yes, a certain number, that's right.

*Q: How did you find this, because I would think that you, as a senior officer, had been around the block, knew there was the job to be done, but for particularly a younger officer, they can get emotionally involved, and in their eyes, you're part of the problem, or something. Did you run across this?*

WRIGHT: I don't think that was too much of a problem, partly because some of the younger officers were not as emotionally involved in this as you might think. They had not been in the Vietnam War. To them it was a job. And I kind of think it was—it's an interesting questions, I've never thought about this before—more akin to what you would find in any country to which you sent junior officers to be consular officers. Some of them are sympathetic to the applicants, but many of them are not.

*Q: I think your point is well taken, that those of us who served in Vietnam can't help but have a sense of guilt in all this. Were you married at this time?*

WRIGHT: Yes, in 1985. Yes.

*Q: So I was wondering, did your wife get involved, being Vietnamese?*

WRIGHT: Yes, she did. She got involved in taking things, supplies and gifts, to the camps, particularly to the Vietnamese, and more than that, she got involved in visiting the Vietnamese who were unfortunate enough to find themselves in Suan Plu Prison in Bangkok, which is where the Vietnamese and others were taken who had been detained by the police outside the camps. I told you about that. So these were people who were often very sad cases, people who were even more unfortunate than the people who were in the camps. They desperately needed some supplies and needed to be cheered up a little bit. So she did a lot of that and went a fair number of times to that prison.

*Q: Who was the ambassador in '85-'87 period?*

WRIGHT: Let me think a second. Bill Brown.

*Q: Did he have a particular set of ideas towards refugees, or was he involved in other things. How did he react to this?*

WRIGHT: I believe that Brown, who was a very fine man, was personally concerned about the refugees, but he also found himself in that familiar dilemma. The more one, as an American official, the more one supported and tried to make life better for the refugees and displaced persons, the more one got into a position of conflict with the Thai Government. So his struggle was to figure out where to place this among his priorities, and he fell afoul of some of the refugee advocates by appearing to put refugees in a lower priority among the issues which we had to take up with the Thai Government than they would have liked.

*Q: This was sort of the high Reagan period in the United States, the middle of the second term. Was there anything coming out of the White House or from Congress that you had to listen to the winds from that direction?*

WRIGHT: I would say no, in this sense, that I think the refugee question kind of cut across party lines, in the sense that, for example, most of the refugees in this country now are Republicans. They're not refugees any more. Most of the people who came here are Republicans; they're not Democrats, although many are, but I would say the majority are Republicans. I'm not sure I can think of many instances right now, but I think it's fair to say that you had people on the right who regarded these refugees as people who had escaped from a Communist country, who wanted to come to our country and work hard and make a new life, and found that very sympathetic. So it would certainly be far from true to depict the republicans as against the refugees.

*Q: Were there any developments during this '85-'87 period that we haven't touched on?*

WRIGHT: One of the features of our makeup at the embassy was that you had the JVA, the Joint Voluntary Agency, which was a very strange creature, which we duplicated in the various countries, like Malaysia, Indonesia, where we had refugee operations in Southeast Asia. It was headed by one of the voluntary agencies, and that agency would have a kind of contract with the State Department to help look after the refugee population in that country, mostly by, as I say, interviewing them when they came out, preparing them for their INS interview. Because there was so much emotion and feeling with regard to refugees, I guess, and because these were organizations that tended to be in the refugee business, they did not want to be near employees of the US Government and successfully argued, at a certain point when these relationships were being formulated, that they have some autonomy. They were contractors. They were paid for by the U.S. Government—all their salaries and everything else were paid for—and yet they were able to have a relationship in which the person to whom they reported couldn't just tell them what to do. So it was a very tricky relationship, and in some ways not a very good one. It probably generally worked because they and the refugee bureau people who supervised them (in quotes) were generally of the same mind about refugees. They were in favor of treating them as well as they could and generally in favor of admitting them to the United States. But it could and

did create problems from time to time because from time to time the head of the JVA would sort of let it be known that he didn't work for you. By virtue of the agreement between his agency and the United States Government, he enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy. So when it came to the interviewing of the refugees for admittance to the United States, you really had three entities who were in a kind of uneasy relationship with one another. You had the people who worked for the U.S. Government, like me; you had the JVA; and you had the INS. You had the situation, for example, in Thailand where from time to time you'd have a kind of unholy alliance between the head of the JVA and the head of the INS, who were cutting deals with one another, and with the U.S. Government person certainly not having much authority over the INS—

*Q: When you say the U.S. Government, of course, INS was part of the—*

WRIGHT: Yes, I shouldn't have used the word US Government. I should say State Department. The State Department person certainly not being able to control the INS and not really being able to control the JVA either. So it was a job that called for a great deal of diplomacy and managerial ability and all that. And again, if I had it to do over, there are a lot of things I would do differently.

*Q: For example.*

WRIGHT: I think, for one thing, I would have gotten off to a different relationship with the INS. It would still not have been easy, because the INS officials were difficult people to do this with, and one had a tendency to bend over backwards to be friendly with them, sort of to get them on your side, and that sometimes worked, sometimes didn't work. So I think the trick would have been, in general, to be as nice as possible to them in one's personal relations but at the same time as tough as you thought you could be with regard to the policy and try to make those two tracks run. As I say, my relations with them were greatly complicated over this initial business about the re-interviewing of the Cambodians.

*Q: Well, you left there in '87.*

WRIGHT: '87, yes.

*Q: And has there been any particular change by that time, the flow in or out?*

WRIGHT: Again, I don't know the numbers, but I would think that during that time the flow would have gradually diminished. There was still a trickle of people coming out of Cambodia, but not very many; and I guess there was a trickle of people escaping the camps and going back in, but not very many. One of the things—and I guess I mentioned this before, but I might again because it was a big problem—the security situation in the camps was something that we spent a huge amount of time on, trying to bring more law and order into the camps, working often with the Thais, which was not easy because the Thais tended either to let people fight it out—that's kind of a guess, I probably shouldn't say that, but there tended to be a lot of latitude given to the Thais who were running these camps, and sometimes these were good people, and sometimes they were not so good, and they had a lot of power. So this was a constant concern. We were always trying to figure out better ways to do this so that people could live more secure lives. I

think that that gradually improved, although it was something that we were constantly concerned about.

**JOSEPH A. WINDER**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1986-1989)**

*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: When did you go to Bangkok?*

WINDER: I was there from 1986 to 1989.

*Q: How did Bill use you?*

WINDER: He used me as his deputy. The DCM job in Bangkok at that time had a number of specific elements to it that Washington sort of dictated. Two in particular had to do with refugees and narcotics. They were huge issues in our bilateral relationship with Thailand and a number of different agencies had staff assigned to Thailand, both at the embassy and at the consulate in Chiang Mai or in Songkhla. It was my job as DCM to pull them all together, to make sure we were all pulling in the same direction and singing from the same sheet of music. That was not an easy task. The intelligence community had their own interests. The law enforcement community had their own interests. There were NGOs (non-government organizations) that had their own perspective. So I had the task of coordinating those people which meant I had to be involved in the development and direction of policy. That took a lot of my time. Bangkok was the largest embassy in Asia and one of the largest in the world and so it was in good part a management job and Bill relied on me to run the embassy. I had to know what everyone was doing and make sure that it made sense and that I was on top of everything and brought things to his attention ahead of time. It was kind of a standard deputy role.

*Q: I would think it would be particularly difficult because you had both the non- governmental organizations, which in many ways were adjuncts of the government, particularly the refugee process, and then DEA and the drug thing. These are not groups that take supervision well.*

WINDER: Yes, it was fascinating. I enjoyed it. The refugee program in Thailand had two separate aspects. One had to do with the refugees that were in Thailand in camps, a program that was run by an NGO, the international rescue committee, that had a contract with the State Department to provide personnel to help run those camps. And we had an operation in Vietnam, which was the orderly departure program, which was involved in taking people through an orderly process out of Vietnam. That was run by a separate NGO and they both jealously

guarded their turf and I tried to combine the two functions for management efficiency and ran into all kinds of problems. I was able to combine at least the State Department personnel part of that operation under one officer in Bangkok with some difficulty. But, it was a very rewarding task. There were refugee camps all over and I went to visit them regularly. I took congressmen and senators to visit them. We put a lot of time and effort into working with the Thais and the NSC (National Security Council), in particular, which had overall supervisory responsibility in trying to persuade them that they should treat these people well and not send them back and basically provide the sorts of assistance we felt the refugees deserved.

*Q: There must have been a concern on the Thai part and also our own part, that some of the refugees had been there long enough and were beginning to settle in.*

WINDER: The Thais had made it very clear that they were a country of first asylum and that they were only going to be a country of first asylum if there was a second asylum country, somewhere else where these people were going to go. They didn't want to be overwhelmed with refugees. The camps provided them with a lot of problems. First of all, there were security problems such as stealing, having such large numbers of people around. And secondly, there was a problem in terms of comparison of standard of living with people inside camps getting an enormous amount of assistance from the international community, and the small villages outside the camps basically had dirt poor people scratching out a living. That caused political difficulties for the government. In addition, the government was providing assistance to a couple of non-communist resistance troops in Cambodia who had camps along the border and there was some concerns about linkages between the refugee camps on the one hand and the resistance camps on the other.

So, it was a very complex situation and we dealt with the Thais on all levels on it and tried to support the non-communist resistance to provide an alternative to both the Khmer Rouge (Cambodian Communists) in Cambodia and the Vietnamese communist supported government of Cambodia, to try to persuade the Thais to keep the refugees there, not close their doors to new refugees, to have an effective anti-piracy program to stop pirate attacks on refugees coming by sea, and to basically cooperate with the international community until such time as the situation in Cambodia was settled and the Vietnamese boat people stopped coming. This is where we are today.

*Q: This was early days in non-governmental organization and Department of State cooperation with this group. There must have been quite a learning curve on both sides.*

WINDER: Actually by the time I got there it was pretty much in place. There had been some frictions in previous years. Ambassador Abramowitz in particular had some difficulty with the Thais on the asylum policies, but by the time I arrived the relationship between the State Department, the Bureau of Refugees, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the NGOs was pretty good. We still had frictions. The Immigration and Naturalization Service really made the determination of refugee status and there was one incident where the Thais agreed to allow a certain category of refugees into a camp in northern Thailand to be interviewed for refugee status. So, the Immigration and Naturalization Service went in there and found a lot of them weren't eligible. They didn't meet the legal definition of refugee. The NGO community

was up in arms because in their view they had put some of the best candidates forward early on and they had been rejected by INS. So we had to go through a process to see if they couldn't be reviewed. There was a natural tension between the NGOs on the one hand, who considered everyone in Thailand as a refugee and ought to be quartered in the United States and INS who had to interpret law which was rather strict on the definition of refugees having to have a well founded fear of persecution for a certain group of reasons. So, the bureaucratic friction and tension was one of the aspects that made my job lively and interesting.

*Q: I got involved in that during my first job in the foreign service. I was with the refugee relief program in Germany. We worked jointly with the INS and the groups that fed the refugees and had the same battles. This was 1955-57.*

WINDER: The same set of circumstances.

*Q: Did you have the feeling that there was a category of people who really weren't political refugees?*

WINDER: Oh, sure. A lot of them were purely economic migrants. They saw a chance for a better life outside of Cambodia or Vietnam and they wanted to come to the United States. So, they fled not because of persecution, race, religion or ethnic background, but because they were looking for a better life. A lot of them came out without reason and that was the tension because INS would say that some of these people were not legitimate refugees but economic migrants and the NGOs would say that most of them were refugees. So, it was a natural tension that existed in the bureaucratic environment.

*Q: How did you resolve that? You still had the overriding pressure to get rid of these people.*

WINDER: That's right and that was a problem because the Thais said the people who were rejected were not going to stay in Thailand and U.S. authorities said they were not going to come to the United States. So, in many cases we had third countries who would step in and take some of the people. Eventually, these people were to be repatriated, but, of course, that was not something that could be done at that time. I am not quite sure how it resolved itself over the past decade. Some of them may have flown home, some of them may have been provided asylum elsewhere and some of them may have even settled in Thailand, although I think the Thais were very anxious to not have much of that happen.

*Q: Did you or your officers deal with the Vietnamese authorities re this orderly departure program?*

WINDER: We had an ODP office in the embassy that dealt with Vietnamese authorities in Vietnam. We had no diplomatic relations with Vietnam and I, of course, was prohibited from contact with the Vietnamese. I wanted to go and inspect our facilities in Saigon just so I would know what was going on over there and the Department would not let me do it because I was too senior and they didn't want to have a senior diplomat going there. But, the working level people, we had a counselor for refugee affairs, did talk to working level people in Saigon.

*Q: And it seemed to be working?*

WINDER: Yes, it worked pretty well. I don't think they ever got approval to have an office in Saigon. I think they just went in and out.

*Q: Who was counselor for refugee affairs?*

WINDER: Bruce Beardsley.

*Q: Where is he now?*

WINDER: I don't know where he went. Allen Jury was the head of the bilateral refugee office. The two of them were really very, very good.

*Q: How about the DEA, Drug Enforcement Agency?*

WINDER: DEA was a good office there. Again we had very good relations with DEA. Their people in the field, both in Chiang Mai and Songkhla, were in the front lines and obviously they had close ties with the Thai police. But, we didn't have any serious problems with them. We kept very close relations with the DEA. There tended to be friction in the field between DEA and the intelligence people about dealing with narcotics and evidence of continued trafficking or growing narcotics, but we coordinated it quite well I thought. We also had a program of coordination with our counterpart embassy in Rangoon where we would meet once a year, rotating between Bangkok and Rangoon, to share notes. Rangoon was the source of narcotics that went through Thailand. We worked closely with the Thai narcotic authorities providing them some funding for eradication programs. It was tough to make much of a dent because the flow was so enormous and there were refineries all over the place across the border in Burma. But, we had pretty good cooperation with the Thais even though obviously the Thais up on the border often had an interest in working with the narcotics people because they could bribe them. We always had accusations of that which we could never substantiate one way or the other. It was clear that stuff was going through Thailand that the authorities weren't catching. Every once in a while they would make a big haul. They really worked hard to try to keep the problem under control because they recognized the expansion in drug traffic with the huge amount of money involved could really undermine their entire democratic process.

*Q: Did you get involved at all in the prisoner of war issue?*

WINDER: We did indeed. We had an office there run by a colonel who was involved in POW/MIA (prisoner of war/missing in action) search and rescue operations. I think they went to Vietnam from time to time, as I recall. It was a very professional group of military people. We stayed on top of what they were doing but weren't directly involved in it. They got guidance from the Defense Department. Again, we had occasionally NGO groups saying they were not doing enough, that there were live POWs over their and sightings and we ought to be doing something about it. We could never substantiate any of those claims, but our office pursued them and was very vigorous in attempting to provide a way to obtain remains from Vietnam and any evidence they could that there may be live prisoners.

*Q: Now we are up to about 25 years or more and not a single substantiated case has come forward. But, it is a very live issue in the United States and political.*

WINDER: Yes, it always was in our Vietnam policy. It was the single most important issue that delayed our recognition and normalization of relations with Vietnam because we didn't think they were cooperating enough on that. Eventually the level of cooperation reached the point where the administration and congress could agree that it was time to move forward.

*Q: How did you find relations with Thailand?*

WINDER: They were very good. We had good relations with Thailand all through World War II and a lot of those people were still in government. They had extremely close ties with our military and intelligence people. But, we on the civilian side were also able to interact well with the NSC, the military, the foreign ministry and the economic ministry as well. We had agreements with them during that period covering civil aviation, investment, trade, textiles, etc. We had a number of normal bilateral frictions but the Thais were very capable, very professional, excellent bureaucrats with excellent skills and we had a good time there. U.S.-Thai relations were very good throughout my entire time there.

My one sort of whimsical regret in Thailand was that when I was DCM there was no coup. There had been coups before I was DCM and coups after and I sort of felt cheated in a way. In one sense I thought it was a good thing that maybe we were over the era of the coups, but it turned out that we weren't. But, our relations with the Thais were very good and I was thankful for that.

*Q: Did you get involved in the tobacco problem?*

WINDER: I don't recall it. I don't think so in Bangkok. I know in one of my embassy experiences, and it may have been Japan, we had quite a bit of friction between the commercial section, which was pushing sales of tobacco to the country and the regional medical officer who was wondering why we were pushing those "coffin nails."

*Q: When did you leave Bangkok?*

WINDER: I left in 1989 having arrived there in 1986 in time to prepare for the visit of Nancy Reagan, the first lady at that time. The Thais treated her like royalty putting her up in the royal palace. She gave a very respectable speech, quite frankly, on narcotics and the "just say no" message. She was quite an effective spokesperson for the anti-narcotic campaign.

**VICTOR L. TOMSETH**  
**Director, Office of Thailand and Burma Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1986-1989)**

**Deputy Chief of Mission**

## **Bangkok (1989-1992)**

*Victor L. Tomseth was born in Oregon in 1941. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in 1963 and his master's degree from the University of Michigan in 1966. After joining the Peace Corp and going to Nepal he joined the Foreign Service. During his career he had positions in Thailand, Iran, Sri Lanka, and was ambassador to Laos. Ambassador Tomseth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.*

*Q: Turning to Thailand now, 1986-1989, when you arrived as director, what were our relations with Thailand?*

TOMSETH: I think by way of preface, I have to say that in my earlier incarnation in Thai affairs in the 1960s and 1970s, it was a bilateral relationship that was overwhelmingly dominated by mutual security concerns. Very little else counted for much. By the mid-1980s when I came back, there was an important mutual security dimension, particularly with regard to the situation in Cambodia, but economics had come much more to the fore. During the three years that I was on the desk, from 1986-1989, and then when I went off to be DCM in Bangkok for another three years, economic issues often took up as much, if not more, time than these mutual security issues that were hangover from an earlier era.

*Q: I have been interviewing Bill Brown, who was ambassador during this time. I think he was there from 1985-1988. He was saying things were moving along nicely until one day he was awakened by rice. Can you talk about rice?*

TOMSETH: Yes. It was a Farm Act. At that time, Congress on a five-year cycle renewed the Farm Act. It was the vehicle for all of the various programs to support one farm constituency or another, everything from dairy supports to the sugar quota program and rice. Thailand by the 1980s, even well before that actually, had supplanted Burma as the world's leading exporter of rice. In the 1950s and 1960s, even into the 1970s, it was the largest single export commodity. Thailand earned more from rice exports than any other kind of export. By the 1980s, that was no longer true. Manufacturers accounted for a much larger proportion of export earnings than rice did, but you have to understand the Thai economy. Even in the 1980s, 65% of the population were in rural areas and overwhelmingly, those people were engaged in rice farming. So, from the point of view of a very large portion of the Thai population, rice exports were important, even though looking at the total economy, they were of diminishing importance.

During this same period, the United States had become the world's second leading rice exporter. One thing I didn't really understand about agricultural politics in the United States until I came back to the situation is that commodities that are grown in only a few states often can exert greater leverage than commodities that are grown in a large number of states. Rice is basically a commodity of four states: California, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In late 1985 when the Farm Act was up for renewal, literally in the dead of night, the congressional delegations from these four states cut a deal with their congressional colleagues that provided very substantial subsidies for American rice exports. The consequence of that and the great fear that the Thais had was that in a tight world rice market (tight in the sense that at that particular

juncture, the supply actually was a bit in excess of demand), that these subsidies for U.S. rice were going to crowd out Thai exports, particularly in traditional Thai markets. So, the Thai were absolutely up in arms over this program of subsidies for U.S. rice exports. Their sense of grievance, I think, was heightened by the fact that on other trade issues, we were regularly beating them over the head about their subsidy regime, whether that was in terms of barriers to agricultural imports into Thailand or they had a few minor subsidies for some of their major export crops, including rice, although by the mid-1980s, they had eliminated virtually all of the export subsidies for rice. They had some for sugar and a couple of other things. So, that became overnight a very contentious and central issue in U.S.-Thai relations, this system of subsidies for U.S. rice that were provided for in the 1985 Farm Act.

*Q: Did you find it worthwhile or not to sort of explain to Congress what they were doing and to be understanding of this important relationship? I'm saying this while trying to keep a straight face. I have been down this road before.*

TOMSETH: The view in the Department in the East Asia Bureau, certainly on the desk, was like Dizzy Dean used to say, "There were two chances of getting the Congress to do something about this: slim and none." Basically, our tactics for dealing with this in a bilateral context became to try to get the Thais to focus on the international market rather than the U.S. system of subsidies. Our arguments were "Don't worry about this. There's plenty of room for both of us in this international market." There might have been and there might not have been. It really depended upon worldwide weather more than anything else. In the international rice market, you have to watch what happens in certain large rice consuming areas (China, Indonesia, even in South Asia, although by the 1980s, South Asia was less and less a rice deficit area and actually in the case of Pakistan moving to rice exports). Basically, what we wound up doing was not praying for rain, but praying that there wouldn't be rain, at least in Indonesia, China, and the Philippines, and a few places like that. As it turned out, during that period, the international rice market was fairly good, so the great worry that the Thais had never really materialized during that three-year period.

*Q: During your watch.*

TOMSETH: During my watch.

*Q: Which is all one cares about.*

TOMSETH: Well, as it turned out, my watch shifted from Washington to Bangkok. By the time I got to Bangkok, or at least shortly thereafter, a new threat had begun to materialize. That was not the U.S. U.S. and Thai rice were competing for the upper end of the market, high quality rice. In that market, as it turned out, there was plenty of demand for both Thai and U.S. rice. But at the low end of the market, Vietnam, which once had been a major rice exporter-

*Q: This was one of our big deals during the Vietnam War, to develop the Mekong Valley, saying, "You can be the major rice producer."*

TOMSETH: During the 1970s and 1980s, socialism in Vietnam did for rice production what

socialism in Burma had done for rice production. Year in and year out, Vietnam was a significant deficit area. They couldn't begin to produce enough rice to feed themselves. But beginning in about 1988 or 1989, the government in Hanoi began to loosen some of the restrictions on farmers. Almost within one growing season, Vietnam went from a situation in which in some provinces in northern Vietnam, there was really worry of famine to a situation in southern Vietnam where, once again, this Mekong Delta area was producing a substantial surplus of rice for export. The quality of milling in South Vietnam was very poor, so what they were turning out for export was at the low end. It was basically for African markets or other poor Asian markets, but Thailand was exporting that kind of rice, too. So, by the end of the decade, they were much more focused on Vietnam than they were the United States for this low end of the market. Their great worry was that Vietnam was going to improve the quality of its milling and that it would move into the upper end of the market as well and become a really serious competitor for Thai rice in a way that U.S. rice could begin to be.

*Q: What about the difference between the American-style rice and the sticky rice? In Korea and Japan, they prefer a stickier type rice. Was that a factor?*

TOMSETH: To a degree. In the U.S. in the lower Mississippi Basin, in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, they grew long grain rice, which is the main type of rice they grow in Thailand. In California, they grow Japonica, which is a short grain glutinous rice. Thailand had and still does export some rice to Japan and Korea, but not much and it never had because it didn't produce the right kind of rice. So, in that market, we really weren't competitors. Most of the California rice that was exported - much more went to Korea than to Japan. Japan - talk about a subsidy! They really had a subsidy. So that wasn't a real big issue in this U.S.-Thai rice dispute. It was really over long grain rice.

*Q: How about tobacco? You were talking about economic...*

TOMSETH: The tobacco did become a bilateral issue. Thailand itself grows tobacco and at one point actually exported a bit. But by the 1980s, it actually was a significant importer of U.S. tobacco, which it would then blend with Thai-grown tobacco to manufacture cigarettes. But the issue in the bilateral relationship became the importation of U.S. cigarettes into the Thai market. There, Thailand did have a tariff regime that kept out foreign brands. It made them very expensive. You could get foreign brands in Thailand, but they were much more expensive than domestic brands. So, the push on the U.S. side was for a lowering of the tariff barriers as part of the GATT round that during much of this period was being negotiated. I forget when we actually concluded that. I think it was before I left the desk. But in our bilateral trade negotiations, we were constantly beating them over the head to lower tariff barriers on specific products. Tobacco became one of them. It was sort of an interesting one. A lot of people in the embassy, myself included - I am not a smoker and I have some reservations about it.

*Q: The damn stuff kills you!*

TOMSETH: That's exactly right. But I was drawing my paycheck from the U.S. government and this was not the sort of issue that I was prepared to resign from the Foreign Service over.

Ultimately, we succeeded in getting the Thais to lower the tariff barrier so that U.S. cigarettes could enter the Thai market. One of the ironies of that issue, however, was that the negotiations on tariffs became very public. It actually helped stimulate an anti-smoking movement in Thailand. There had always been a nascent one there, but they never really had gotten very far in terms of restrictions on Thai tobacco products. But as a result of these tariff negotiations to allow U.S. cigarettes into the market, the anti-smoking movement in Thailand gained significant strength and the net result is that while U.S. tobacco products got into the Thai market, the Thai market is no longer as friendly to tobacco products of any kind as it was 10-12 years ago.

*Q: In dealing with Thailand and economic issues, you really were talking about dealing with a government where the members of the government had to be concerned about the constituents. It might have been sort of military involvement in the government, but still they had constituents?*

TOMSETH: Yes. The military hasn't gone completely away in Thailand, but I've now - I guess I'm still involved in it to a degree, although I'm no longer in the Foreign Service - but my involvement with Thailand now goes back almost 35 years. In that period of time, there had been some steps back. The most recent one was in 1991 when the military did overthrow an elected government, attempted to manipulate the constitutional process in the time honored way that the Thai military manipulated the constitutional process since 1932. But when you look at that entire period, there had been a lot of steps forward, too. It often is one step back, two steps forward. By the mid-1980s, the system of government in Thailand was much more democratic than it had been when I first saw it in the mid-1960s. Today, a decade or so later, it is more democratic than it was even in the 1980s. But during that period, when I was on the desk and then subsequently as deputy chief of mission in Thailand, yes, you had a government in which there were senior figures in the government who had military backgrounds, including two prime ministers while I was on the desk, Prem Tunseeyoonon and then Chai Chai Chunawon, who succeeded him. Both had been generals at one point in their lives, but at the time they were prime minister were no longer in the military. In Chai Chai's case, it had been nearly 30 years since he had been in the military. But they did have elections regularly. In fact, they had them about every two years because the governments that came out of these elections invariably were coalition governments. It seemed like in Thailand, it was simply impossible to hold a coalition together longer than about two years. The members of parliament did have to be responsive to their constituents. It was not like when my father-in-law was elected to the first parliament in 1933 and he went off to Bangkok. He was actually born in Korat in northeastern Thailand, but had gone to Bangkok as a very small child and went to school and only as an adult after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy went back to be elected as a representative- (end of tape)

He didn't get elected, but typically in the 1930s and 1940s, members of parliament didn't have to pay very much attention to their constituencies, but by the 1980s, that had really changed. Parliamentarians by and large were sensitive to their constituencies. Again, that is even more the case today. So, this was a parliamentary system in which what went on in parliament actually counted in terms of national policy.

*Q: How effective was it and how did the Thai embassy work during this time? Thailand had been around for a long time. We had a close relationship.*

TOMSETH: During the period that I was on the desk, from 1986-1989, we actually had three Thai ambassadors. The fellow who was there when I arrived departed within just a few months. He had been there five years. He was a very senior Thai diplomat, had been permanent secretary in the ministry before coming to Washington and went back to that position after he left. That is the senior career position in the Thai ministry, the equivalent of under secretary for Political Affairs in the State Department. He was succeeded by a younger career diplomat who had succeeded him as permanent secretary when this fellow came to Washington, a guy named Asas Arsin, who was from a very prominent family in Thailand actually of Chinese background. Asas' grandfather was the first Thai to receive a university degree from the United States in the late 19th century. His father, Puts Arsin, who is still alive (He's in his 90s now.) was ambassador here in the 1950s and then very briefly prime minister in 1957 just as a placeholder in one of these periodic military shuffles. Then thereafter, he had several ministerial positions dealing with economic matters.

When I came through Bangkok in late July/August of 1986, I went to see Asas, who was then still permanent secretary. He told me that he was replacing Kasim Kasimsi, who was ambassador in Washington at that point. He wanted to know if I had any advice for him as ambassador. I had worked on the desk in the 1970s and they had a very good ambassador at that time, Anyon Panarachun. But the thing that I hadn't noticed over the years - and particularly for the Thai embassy - is that because relations with the embassy and the U.S. military had always been so close, when people came to Washington, they tended to look at the State Department and the Defense Department as their friends, their primary points of contact. I said, "That is very true. You will be able to count on the desk as being a support in Washington and the same thing with people over at DOD, but where you really need to make your mark is with the Congress." I don't think because I told Asas that - Bill Brown told him the same thing and I suppose any number of people who passed through his office before he came to Washington had a similar message - but when Asas came to town, unlike any Thai ambassador I had ever known, he spent a great deal of time trying to work the Hill. There has been no Thai ambassador since who has done it as effectively as Asan did during the period that he was ambassador here. So, most of the time that I was on the desk, Asas Arsin was the ambassador and he was a very effective Thai ambassador.

*Q: This was one of the problems, that many ambassadors don't really understand how little clout the Department of State has.*

*How did you find as area director your relationship was with the Department of Defense? Obviously, our defense relationship is a major one.*

TOMSETH: When I had been on the desk in the mid-1970s, that relationship - I guess you would say it was more intense in that period and it also required tending all the time to make sure that personalities weren't getting cross-wise and that the right hand knew what the left hand was doing. By the time I came back in 1986, relations between - and it was basically a relationship between EAP and State and ISA (International Security Affairs), and Defense. Occasionally, we would get along with the assistance people over at Defense. But it was basically an EAP-ISA relationship. It had long-since become routinized and things worked very well. Now, I think it helped very much that the assistant secretary in ISA at that time was a great guy, Rich Armitage, who should have wound up being assistant secretary in EAP in the Bush administration but for

Jesse Helms. He and Gaston Sigur, who was assistant secretary in EAP most of the time I was there, had a very good personal relationship and it was true on down the line between the deputy assistant secretary and people on the desk who dealt with Thai issues. So, in the three years that I was there, I never worried about the bureaucratic relationship in a way that I know my directors when I was a desk officer in the 1970s worried about it during that period.

*Q: Bill Brown was saying that he could really get things done by calling the Department of Defense directly. Apparently, that whole group was close to each other and it was probably about the best team we've had.*

TOMSETH: I'm in no position to judge the current crew. But during that period, in the late 1980s, both in State and Defense, you had a group of people that really worked very well together. There is no doubt about that.

*Q: Thailand is both important strategically, but also an attraction for a variety of reasons, for tourism. It is a nice place to go - pretty people, nice scenery, and all that. Sort of like Paris. It's a place that attracts congressional delegations.*

TOMSETH: Yes, it does. It never had as many as Israel.

*Q: Oh, no. That's political.*

*Did the care and feeding and preparation for congressional delegations and other people going there use up a bit of your time?*

TOMSETH: Well, a fair amount, although I think in that earlier period, both when I was in the embassy and in the late 1960s through 1971 and then on the desk from 1973-1975, the number of congressional delegations was even greater because the Vietnam War was going on, but we had a lot. Particularly during that period, you'd get a lot for a couple of different things - refugee issues and missing in action (MIA)/prisoner of war (POW) issues. You got a lot of nostalgic congressional trips, people who had been in the Service during the Vietnam War, some of whom had been POWs themselves and were interested in the MIA/POW issue would come out to see how that was going on and often go to Vietnam, sometimes to Laos.

I wouldn't say that these were by and large a great deal of trouble. There were briefings that you would have to do and they would want papers and things, but this had really been refined to a science by this point. In Bangkok, because it was such a large diplomatic mission, they really had the staff to do these things. You had a group of people that could do them in their sleep. In Washington, we weren't so many. We were five officers on the desk. Again, thanks to word processing technology, recycling these briefing papers was not nearly the work that it had been when I was on the desk in the 1970s and everything had to be manually typed. So, while there were a lot of them, they weren't an onerous burden.

There were some that you sort of had to hold your nose because they had very little to do with serious business. They were basically shopping trips. But you hold your nose and do it.

*Q: Yes. What about the continuing problems, particularly in Cambodia, with Thailand? How did you deal with that? To some extent, Laos, too.*

TOMSETH: The entire three years that I was on the desk and then also the three years that I was DCM in Thailand, the major mutual security issue that we had in Thailand was Cambodia. Trying to ensure that the resistance to the regime that the Vietnamese had installed when they invaded in late 1978 and occupied the country in early 1979 continued to be viable and particularly that the non-communist portion of this, of which there were two major factions, had a degree of credibility within the overall resistance movement vis a vis the Khmer Rouge, which were the other part of the resistance and within that context, trying to find some mechanism for a negotiated settlement. In 1986, the Vietnamese were still fully present in Cambodia. It was during that three year period - actually, they did not withdraw the last of their troops until a few months after I got to Bangkok in September of 1989. So, the military dimension of it during those three years was particularly important, keeping the pressure on the Vietnamese. That included on our side a modest assistance program to these two non-communist factions. We did not provide any so-called "lethal aid," no weapons, to these factions, but there was a lot of training and a lot of non-lethal material aid as well that had to be funneled through Thailand. There was also a group of countries that worked together in running this that included the U.S. and several of the associations for Southeast Asian nation countries, some of whom were providing lethal equipment to the non-communist factions.

*Q: Somebody had to do this.*

TOMSETH: Somebody had to do it. Then there were the Chinese, who were the main supplier, virtually the only supplier, of material assistance to the Khmer Rouge. But they also supplied arms and ammunition to the two non-communist. This all had to be coordinated. The Thais were sort of the central mechanism for the coordination of this assistance from whatever corridor and to whatever faction to the Cambodian resistance.

*Q: Going back to Bill Brown, he was saying that though we weren't happy about it, it was the Khmer Rouge who were really doing most of the fighting. We were trying to get the other groups into the act, but there wasn't much substance there. Was that your observance?*

TOMSETH: Throughout, right up until a peace agreement was finally hammered out in late 1991/early 1992, the Khmer Rouge were the overwhelming factor in putting military pressure first on the Vietnamese occupation forces and then on the Phnom Penh regime military forces after the Vietnamese withdrew. The whole thrust of our effort and our ASEAN colleagues' effort was to try and make these two non-communist factions at least credible. That ended up in a push in the 1990-1991 dry season in which these two non-communist factions were able to seize a little bit of territory in northwestern Cambodia and then hold onto it while we went through a series of negotiations in Jakarta, Thailand, and Paris that ultimately reached an accord that everybody signed onto.

*Q: While you were dealing with all these problems, did China play much of a role in Thailand? They don't have a common border, but it's still the great presence there.*

TOMSETH: If you go back to 1975, there is an interesting progression. In 1975, we had the collapse of the regimes in Saigon and Phnom Penh. The government, then an elected government, in Thailand scrambled like mad to make the best of this situation, a situation in which it looked like the U.S. was hightailing it for home and was not going to have anything to do with Southeast Asia again, Thailand making the best deal it could with both Hanoi and Beijing. Thailand broke off relations with the Republic of China government in Taiwan and established relations with Beijing. But even then, the Chinese continued to support a domestic insurgency in China, as did Hanoi. But then the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and that didn't make the Chinese very happy. They needed the help of the Thais to support the Khmer Rouge, which had retreated to the northern and western borders of Cambodia along Thailand. The price the Thais extracted from the Chinese (and they were happy enough to pay that price. They didn't have any great investment in this domestic insurgency in Thailand.) was that the Chinese would cut off support to the insurgency. So, China then became an arms supplier for the Khmer Rouge via Thailand and cut off their support for the domestic communist insurgency in Thailand. In the early 1980s with this Vietnamese occupation presence in Cambodia and periodically chasing the Khmer Rouge and the non-communists, too, across the border into Thailand, making forays into Thailand. The Chinese added Thailand to countries that they were providing military support to. They began to provide Thailand some military equipment at friendship prices during the early 1980s, largely in response to what the Vietnamese were doing in Cambodia across the Chinese border. So, by the latter half of the decade when I showed up, China wasn't as important a security partner as the United States. I should add that in the 1980s, with the situation in Cambodia, the United States began being a significant supplier of military equipment to Thailand once again and did some special things like prepositioning stocks in Thailand that Thailand could also draw upon if there were an emergency that made it necessary to do so and we couldn't get equipment to Thailand in time to respond to that emergency. But by the second half of the 1980s, China had actually become an important security partner for Thailand, as was the United States, not to that degree, but certainly significant.

*Q: By this time, the Thais' concern about the United States bolting and running from Southeast Asia had been taken care of?*

TOMSETH: It was a different era. I don't think the Thais had any illusions about the United States once again introducing forces into Southeast Asia to deal with a local conflict, but certainly confidence in the United States as a security partner had been substantially rehabilitated by virtue of the response that we had made to this situation in Cambodia.

*Q: What about refugees?*

TOMSETH: With the collapse of all three governments in Indochina in 1975, there was an immediate outpouring of Lao and Vietnamese. Over the next few years, they were joined by Cambodians and then a lot of Vietnamese boat people. The initial exodus from Vietnam tended to be people who clearly were associated with us during the war. A lot of those got out at the time, although a number of them began showing up in Thailand who had come overland through Laos or Cambodia. But in the late 1970s, this phenomenon of boat people began. At one point, Thailand had a huge number of refugees and displaced people. Many of the Cambodians that showed up were not classified as refugees, but as displaced persons. There were close to half a

million Cambodians and at any given moment, 100,000-plus Lao and scores of thousands of Vietnamese. All of that led to several things in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One was the first Geneva accords on refugees, which in effect established a mechanism for dealing with refugees, Lao and Vietnamese for the most part, some Cambodians. That was that Thailand and other countries in the region would provide first asylum to anybody who showed up and other countries would be the destination of ultimate third country resettlement. Among those other countries, the United States, Australia, France, and Canada were the big four.

Another thing that we did and several other countries copied to a degree in Vietnam was to establish something called an Orderly Departure Program. We sent people in to actually interview and screen Vietnamese who might be eligible for resettlement in the United States under the criteria that had been developed in the course of this first Geneva system of the accords on Indochinese refugees. In effect, we were taking people for resettlement in the United States out of Vietnam before they ever became refugees. That was ongoing all through the 1980s. What you had in Vietnam were a lot of people who didn't have close association with the United States during the period of the Vietnam War who nonetheless didn't want to stay in Vietnam for whatever reasons - economic reasons, reasons of ethnic identity (a lot of ethnic Chinese), reasons of their religion - who again started taking boats in the mid-1980s. At first when they showed up on Thai shores, the Thais abided by what had been agreed to at Geneva, but by 1986, their numbers started getting out of hand at the same time in the processing that was going on in Thailand, third countries, the United States included, had begun to reach the bottom of the barrel. They started coming to people who didn't meet anybody's criteria. So, that the Thais saw was "We're going to get stuck with the dregs. In addition to that, we're getting a whole bunch of new people who may or may not meet the criteria that had been agreed to in Geneva." So, they started pushing boats off and the Indonesians and Malaysians started doing the same thing. That led to a second set of Geneva accords that redoubled the Orderly Departure Program and for the first time set up a screening program whereby it would be determined whether or not these Vietnamese arriving in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia even, Hong Kong (a lot of them went from North Vietnam to Hong Kong) would be determined whether or not they met refugee criteria, including these rather liberal criteria established at Geneva. If they didn't, they would be repatriated to Vietnam. Vietnam would take them back. They would go back. There was a lot of controversy, needless to say, with this whole program, but during the time that I was on the desk and then for a bit after I arrived in Thailand, you had this series of negotiations that led to the second set of Geneva accords and then the implementation of it while I was DCM in Thailand and even later when I was ambassador in Laos, that went on. Laos was included in those Geneva agreements, although by the end of the 1980s, there were very few people coming out of Laos anymore. Those who wanted to leave had pretty much left. Those who wanted to be resettled had pretty much been resettled. Among the Lao refugees, there was a small number of lowland Laos who had not met criteria for one reason or another and a much larger number of highland Laos who would qualify, but had opted not to be resettled in the United States. The reasons for that were fairly complicated, but a major factor in it had to do with a resistance movement in Laos and the reliance on this resistance movement on the refugee population, particularly highlanders, in the camps in Thailand as a recruitment base. So, that issue had to be dealt with in a way. Even at the time I was ambassador in Laos from 1993-1996, it was still being dealt with.

*Q: Did you find yourself in the State Department - or was it dealt with by a different organization - dealing with the Thais to assure them that we were going to do everything we could to take care of the people who came there?*

TOMSETH: All the time. On the Thai side, the central coordinating point for all of this... As you can readily imagine, it was a multi-ministry operation. Interior was responsible for running the camps. You had the Ministry of Health and all sorts of Thai government agencies that were involved in this. But the central coordination agency was the National Security Council. The secretary general of the National Security Council was the most senior person who was in a day-to-day decisionmaking position. So, when things got really sticky, somebody had to march off and see the secretary general of the National Security Council to try to sort this out. That was a role that fell to the DCM, certainly during my time, in part because I could deal with these guys in Thai. They found it a lot easier and we just seemed to get more done quicker when we did it that way.

*Q: I can see two groups that might have been hitting you hard. These were people who were really true believers. One is the POW/MIA-type people and the other are the refugee applicants. Did you get these or were they deflected to other bureaus?*

TOMSETH: Oh, no. In Washington, you mean, during this...

*Q: Yes.*

TOMSETH: No. On the POW/MIA stuff, that was very much in the State Department a desk issue, an EAP issue. On refugees, you had the Refugee Bureau, of course. They were responsible for fielding the personnel who went off to Geneva or wherever it was they were having the negotiating meeting on whatever issue it was at the moment. They had the money that went into the Orderly Departure Program. We put money into UNHCR and directly into Thailand for supporting these refugee and displaced person camps and populations. The budget item, that was part of their appropriation. We didn't control that, but we worked very closely with them in managing all of this. So, refugees too were very much a desk issue.

*Q: What about the POW/MIAs? In a way, Thailand was not part of it, but Thailand was the springboard for people going off. This was a group that I would think by 1986-1989 you would have felt that, yes, maybe we could find some bodies, but certainly no prisoners of war. Did you find that you were having to deal with some very difficult people?*

TOMSETH: That's putting it mildly! Yes. At that time, the U.S. policy on MIAs was - and it still is today - that no substantial evidence had been produced indicating that there were live POWs anywhere in Indochina, but there was insufficient information and evidence available to rule out the possibility. That is the approach you take. You can't rule out the possibility, although all of the evidence that has been produced - and now you've got 13 more years of it - has never produced a shred of evidence that would indicate that in fact there are POWs still being held somewhere in Indochina. That is the U.S. government policy.

Then you have individuals and groups of individuals who are absolutely convinced that there are

people there. In the early days of the Reagan administration, the Reagan administration came in with a very strong inclination to believe that if you couldn't prove it, there was a high probability that there were. The Reagan administration lent a lot of new momentum to tracking down leads. By 1986 - they had been in office for five-plus years at that point - I think the failure to turn up any evidence dampened the enthusiasm of some, but certainly not the willingness to follow up on any lead that might materialize. You had individuals and groups in the United States that were, because of their conviction - they were prisoners there - were always on the lookout for leads, which if they could find one and push that with the apparatus in the U.S. government, based in Defense, but certainly involving the State Department and the NSC to track it down. This was market economics. Where there was a demand, a supply will materialize. In Indochina, that supply developed. You got all sorts of things: people who produced bones, photographs, people. We've got pictures of a POW. One of these groups would show up in Bangkok; Orange Country, California; San Antonio; wherever. Hey, we've got a photograph. Track it down.

*Q: Did the groups come to you at all? Did you find yourself having to deal with this?*

TOMSETH: They tended to zero in on Defense. There was an office in Defense that was and is... It's gone through a couple of metamorphoses over the years, but in effect, it's been operating continuously for the last 20 years. But where we would come in is that these people would lobby us, too. If they thought Defense wasn't responding quickly enough, they'd lobby the State Department, the NSC, and several different family organizations and some of these true believers are involved in the family organizations (not necessarily the leaders themselves, although the biggest of these, the National League of Families Missing and POWs in Southeast Asia... It goes on forever, but is usually known as the National League of Families.) has been headed by the mother of one of these MIAs for years and years. She is a very forceful, effective in a bureaucratic sense, woman, and she is responsive to her constituency. So, if something surfaced, she is there to push it.

*Q: What about the other element in relationships and dealing with it from your bureau's point of view, and that is drugs, narcotics?*

TOMSETH: By the mid-1980s, Thailand was only a minor producer of opium. Over the years, the Thais had carried out a fairly effective program of crop substitution and manual eradication so that there wasn't very much opium being produced in Thailand. There is still a bit. The king has been involved in this for a long, long time. He is very interested in national development as a generic issue, but particularly interested in the issue of development in highland areas where the minority groups that traditionally produced opium live. His view was that you cannot take away the main source of livelihood of these people unless you give them some alternative. For a long time, the Thai approach was, you teach them how to grow potatoes or vegetables and other substitute crops, but was not proactive on the stick side. It was just carrots. By the 1980s, there was a general realization that you needed both carrots and sticks, that you had to have development incentives to be sure. What these guys figured out was, I'll grow some asparagus, but I'll grow some opium, too, and sell them both. So, by the 1980s, Thailand had a manual eradication program. They wouldn't spray and they still won't spray. I am not so sure that I don't agree with that. But Thailand was not as significant an opium producer as it is today.

However, during that period, some of the refining operations... There had always been some refining in Thailand, but in the 1980s, some of these groups based in Burma had really set up major refining operations right along the Thai-Burmese border. They wanted them as close as possible to the transportation system in Thailand. So, the operation of refineries was an issue.

The big issue, of course, was Thailand as a transit country. These opium refined into heroin being funneled through the Thai transportation system into the international market. So, when I was on the desk, one of the issues - and this had actually begun before I came on the desk - was wiping out those refineries. That required a joint U.S.-Thai effort. In this case, it was CIA that was funding it, actually created a special Thai military task force to go after these refineries. So that was ongoing. By the time I finished up on the desk, refineries in Thailand had pretty much been dealt with, so the overwhelming focus was on Thailand as a transit country and then using Thailand as the base for information collection, particularly on Burma, but on Laos to a degree as well, even Cambodia in the case of marijuana, as a base of operations for gathering intelligence in neighboring countries on- (end of tape)

The DEA in Thailand had a very substantial presence. While I was on the desk and then later on as DCM in Thailand at any given moment, they had about 35-40 agents working in Thailand. There was a period in the 1970s when DEA agents actually participated with Thai cops in narcotic busts. They were allowed to carry arms. They were integral parts of these teams. By the mid-1980s, that policy had been changed. The great concern was that you were going to get a DEA agent shooting somebody. The policy was that the DEA certainly worked very closely with the Thai cops on cases, setting up, would even go along as a witness to but not a participant in the bust... That can be a pretty fine line. DEA - these guys are cops. A lot of them are recruited from police forces. The instinct of many of these people is to kick down doors, take names, and kick butt. While I was on the desk and then later on as DCM in Thailand, yes, we did have occasional incidents in which agents went beyond their current policy mandate. I guess the most egregious example while I was on the desk was actually the base chief in Chiang Mai got his picture in "The New York Times" in a bust with the Thai police. He had a foot on the back of one of the perps (perpetrators) handcuffing him. He is bending over and he's got his weapon tucked into his pants. That is what you see in this picture in "The New York Times." Not only was it a clear overstepping of that fine line. It was not the sort of publicity that the U.S. government wanted to have.

*Q: While you were on the desk, were there any concerns about changes in government? I'm talking about coups and that sort of thing. Did we have a pretty firm line on how we were going to deal with this sort of thing?*

TOMSETH: In the early 1980s, there had been a couple of coup attempts that failed. We had taken a very unequivocal position on those. We fully backed the governments in both cases. They were different governments, but they were headed by the same person. While I was on the desk, there would occasionally be rumbles, rumors, that the military might be up to something, but by that point, the conventional wisdom was becoming, well, coups in Thailand really are passe. While a government resigned while I was on the desk and there was an election and a new government formed, during that three year period, I can't recall a rumor ever getting to the point where anybody took it terribly seriously.

*Q: Alas, before we stop this session, at that time, what was the feeling towards the Thai royal family from our perspective?*

TOMSETH: I think the very longstanding view of the U.S. government towards the royal family is that as an institution it is a very important factor in Thai political stability and notwithstanding the fact that governments change regularly in Thailand... I think the current government probably is coming about as close to the longevity record of any in the last 30 years. I think they had their third (or was it only two?) anniversary in November. That is sort of the scale of magnitude that we're talking about. Notwithstanding the fact that governments change regularly and that sometimes the military has been involved in those changes, in policy terms, Thailand has a remarkable record of political stability. The view in Washington is that the institution of the monarchy has been a very important factor in that. You can point to a number of examples, one of which was in 1973 where student demonstrations led to the fall of the then-military regime. At that point, the king really for the first time stepped in very directly and told the two senior military leaders that it was time for them to go and not only should they leave office, they probably should leave the country. He then indicated that he would not be adverse to having a member of his privy council, a fellow who had been the president of the supreme court and a very respected person serving as an interim prime minister. It was a very deft move, first telling Tunom and Prapat that they should leave and then engineering this interim premiership of this former supreme court justice and member of the privy council as interim prime minister. It led to a very smooth transition. In a number of different ways, the institution of the monarchy has played that role. I think, in this period, that certainly was the view of the U.S. government: as an institution, it's a very important thing in Thailand.

Also at this time, the king was about to have his 60th birthday. One aspect of Thai culture is, they've adopted the Chinese 12 year calendar cycle. Completion of the fifth cycle is a particularly important one. So, there was a great deal going on in Thailand to commemorate the completion of the fifth cycle in 1987 of the king. The U.S. got involved in that as well. A great deal of effort went into selecting a gift from the President to the king to commemorate completion of his fifth cycle. The embassy in Bangkok, led by the Foreign Service national staff, organized a fund-raising drive to build a traditional Thai pavilion on the grounds of the embassy. It's quite a beautiful building. This was done as something to recognize the completion of the fifth cycle by the embassy staff. The American business community in Thailand did the same thing. They raised money to build a pavilion at... There was an exhibition on some crown property land that then subsequently was turned into a big park on the outskirts of Bangkok. The American business community raised money to build an American pavilion on the grounds for this exposition. That exemplified the official and not so official American view of the importance of the institution of the monarchy and the particular role that this king has played in the Thai political context over the last three decades certainly.

We can talk about individual members of the royal family and the institution of the monarchy as an environment for raising children, if you would like. I don't know that there is an official view on that, but I can give you my private view.

*Q: Alright. Let's hear your private view.*

TOMSETH: I don't know whether we talked about this earlier in the context of Iran, but senior leadership positions tend to foster the kind of "boy in a bubble" syndrome. It becomes increasingly difficult to have a grip on reality in these positions. It is exceedingly so when the external environment treats the boy in the bubble as something even more than human. That is the case with the Thai monarchy. For Thais, the monarchy as an institution is almost a sacred institution and the people within it are more than merely mortal. If you're in that position, having some sense of the real world, it's like George Bush and how much does a carton of milk cost. Multiply it several times. It has an effect on the people within it that is not always very positive. You see that with some of the royal children, the Crown Prince in particular. Even with the king, who is a person who started out as a bit of a playboy, but over time became a very serious person and became very interested in a lot of things that are important to his country, national development being one of them, but because he does live in this bubble, it is often very difficult for him to know what is really real.

*Q: At this time, what about the influence of Thais coming to the United States, getting educated, either going back or establishing the Thai community? I must say that today we've got an awful lot of Thai restaurants. How did you find that at this time - and, of course, with your wife being Thai?*

TOMSETH: We're talking about this period I was on the desk.

*Q: Yes.*

TOMSETH: Let me just say first that over the years among nationalities who have come to the United States for non-immigrant reasons (as students or whatever), the Thais have one of the best records, if "best" is the right adjective, in terms of ultimately going home. The vast majority of Thais really like to be in Thailand. They like their food, for one thing, and I don't blame them. But starting in the 1950s, and it accelerated substantially in the 1960s and 1970s, a huge number of Thais came to the United States for education or training of one sort or another. Inevitably, some of those people wind up staying longer than they intended. You also have a phenomenon of a lot of Thais, whether doing so when they were students here in the United States or because Americans went to Thailand, married Americans. So, you have in relative terms a substantial community of Thai-American families, where one partner is Thai and the other is American here in Thailand, and also one in Thailand, although not nearly as large there as it is here. But on the desk, what struck me was - and bearing in mind that the vast majority of people who had come in the 1950s-1970s had gone back to Thailand - looking at the upper levels of Thai society, whether you're talking about government bureaucrats, academicians, or businesspeople, American graduates were everywhere. If you look at the Thai government today, the Thai cabinet, the Thai bureaucracy, the universities, the business community, the people who run that country are people who have been to the United States for education or training. Compared to those who have European or Japanese educations or training, it's the American alumni who absolutely predominate. That was very noticeable during my time on the desk. The embassy here was filled with people who had had part of their education in the United States. The people that we dealt with in Thailand, same thing.

*Q: Did you find this gave an attitude which might be somewhat different from the Thais? In other words, they could sit down and talk to an American in the manner that an American might be accustomed to, as opposed to... One always thinks of the obliqueness of the Asian society.*

TOMSETH: It did a couple of things. One is, yes, the common vocabulary is immensely useful. You can sit down with somebody and whether you're speaking in Thai or English doesn't matter so much. There is this common intellectual vocabulary that you can draw upon by virtue of this phenomenon. But the other thing that I noticed in coming back to the desk and then later on going on to Thailand was that you had a generation of Thais who by virtue of this American experience in some ways were much more confident of themselves as Thais than the people that I knew when I was in Thailand the first time who by and large didn't have that kind of experience. Rather than turning them into ersatz Americans, it really made them more confident Thais.

*Q: Why don't we stop at this point? We'll pick up next time in 1989 when you're off to Thailand as deputy chief of mission. We'll talk about how you go the job and so on.*

*This is August 30, 1999. You were in Bangkok from 1989 to when?*

TOMSETH: To 1992, three years.

*Q: Who was ambassador there?*

TOMSETH: Dan O'Donohue was when I went. He had gone the year before, 1988. I guess even before he went, I knew that I was going to be his choice to replace Joe Winder, who was then DCM in Bangkok.

*Q: Did Dan pick you?*

TOMSETH: Yes.

*Q: When you got there, what were relations like with Thailand?*

TOMSETH: They were good. By and large, throughout the entire period since World War II, we've had a very close and cooperative relationship with Thailand. It had gone through a little bit of a rough patch in the mid-1970s, something we talked about in an earlier session. But when I got there in 1989, the relationship was really in pretty good shape, although it had changed a good deal from the time I had been in Thailand the first time in the late 1960s to 1971. At that time, it had been overwhelmingly a relationship based on mutual security concerns. By 1989, it had become much more complex. The mutual security consideration was still there, particularly as it pertained to Cambodia. At that time, the Vietnamese still had an occupation force in Cambodia and we and others, including Thailand, were very much engaged in looking for some kind of a negotiated settlement to that issue. But economics had taken on a much more important dimension than they ever had 20 years earlier.

*Q: I've had a long interview with Dan O'Donohue. From your perspective, how did Dan operate*

*in Thailand and how did he use you?*

TOMSETH: I guess I have to say by way of preface that Dan is one of the smartest guys I know. I think he was really a very good ambassador in Thailand in that we had this huge, very diverse diplomatic mission. When I got there, there was something in excess of 500 U.S. government direct hire personnel and over 2,000 Foreign Service nationals who worked for one agency or another, and assorted contract and other kinds of people that were all part of that. The things that they were engaged in ranged from the traditional kinds of Foreign Service things (the political, economic, consular, and administrative functions that every embassy has to deal with) to things as unusual as a joint U.S.-Thai military medical research facility, a very big one, that is involved in the study of tropical diseases and experiments with new medicines to treat those sorts of things. Most people simply wouldn't be able to keep up with all of the things that were going on in that mission, but Dan O'Donohue was an exception to that rule. Not a sparrow fell in that mission that he didn't know about it.

In terms of how Dan and I worked together, I think you have to know a little bit about Dan. He is a very volatile Irishman, brilliant, but I think some people would say his people skills might leave a little bit to be desired.

*Q: I'm thinking of Dan's rather pugnacious Irishism and your rather low-keyed Scandinavianism.*

TOMSETH: Yes. Dan knows himself. I think one of the factors in his decision to take me as his deputy was that he knew he could rant and rave about all sorts of things and it wouldn't particularly upset me and that then I could go out and implement what he wanted to be done in a way that wouldn't upset everybody else. It really worked quite well.

I have one funny thing that illustrates working with Dan. We had a doctor there who shall go nameless. He was doing some pro bono work at one of the local universities. When Dan heard about this, without asking what the nature of it was, he jumped to a conclusion, which was that he was working on government time, and blew up at him. I came into this to patch things up afterwards. When I was talking to the doctor, he was understandably rather indignant, but we ended the discussion by him saying, "But he yelled at me!" I said, "Jesus Christ, he yells at me every 30 seconds! If I can live with it, you can live with it."

But that was Dan. As I said, he knew it. I think he was perceptive enough to try and put somebody between him and the rest of the staff, at least most of the time, so that his pugnacious quality didn't really seriously affect the staff morale. I think he and I worked very well together in that regard.

*Q: How did you use your time? Here is this huge embassy with all sorts of things going on and the pitfall always is that whoever is the DCM will fall back on his or her former specialty, usually economic, administrative, or political. Joe Winder was an economist. How did you find yourself?*

TOMSETH: I had been a political officer for the most part and had a lot of prior experience

dealing with Thailand from that very first Foreign Service assignment to a couple of stints on the desk, once in the mid-1970s and then as director just prior to going to Bangkok. I think - and you'd really have to ask other people in the embassy, I suppose, to get a confirmation of it - that I didn't really try to be the super political counselor, although I was available for the kind of institutional memory or the lore of U.S.-Thai relations that people who didn't have as much involvement in Thai affairs as I had had. What I found is that I really liked and I think I had some talent for the management aspect of being a DCM. Consequently, I tried (and I think I was reasonably successful) letting the political counselor run the Political Section and the economic counselor run the Economic Section, let various people in the mission do what they were there to do and to focus my time and energy on what Dan wanted me to do, which in effect was to be the CEO of this company while he was the chairman of the board.

*Q: We've talked about before when you were on the desk. Here you are in the field. How did you see the Thai government and how did we deal with it at the embassy level?*

TOMSETH: Most of the time that I was there, the government was an elected coalition government headed by a guy who had been involved in Thai politics for years and years going clear back to the time that he himself had been in the army and his father was the army commander in chief. Then in 1957, he at that time was the youngest brigadier general in the army. The fact that his father was commander in chief I'm sure had nothing to do with it. But there was a coup in 1957 and the fact that Pin Chunawan, Chai Chai Chunawan's father, was in lost out. But in typical Thai fashion, they don't sort of execute the losers. They send them off to be ambassador somewhere. Chai Chai went to Argentina, which if you get out a globe is just about physically as far away from Thailand as you can get. He served in Argentina and then he was in Europe for a while and then had come back to Thailand when I was there the first time in the late 1960s and eventually wound up first as deputy foreign minister and then foreign minister and then was in politics. He had been elected as prime minister just shortly before I got to Thailand in 1989 and was prime minister most of the time that I was there. But as somebody who had been around for a long, long time, he was also almost by definition somebody that was very well known to people in the United States government. In that sense, working with him and his government was fairly easy in the sense that we did have this kind of common historical political vocabulary.

As I mentioned the other day, the government by that time was filled with all these people who had been students or in some fashion had been trained in the United States, so dealing with people was usually very easy. That didn't mean we didn't have issues. We did. Probably the most difficult ones tended to be trade related issues, but because we did have this long history of dealing with one another cooperatively, it usually meant that you could find ways to work through these things in a spirit of cooperation. So, unlike some places I've been, dealing with the government wasn't difficult, although specific issues could be kind of thorny.

*Q: You mentioned trade. I always think of rice... We're up against California, Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas. How about rice?*

TOMSETH: By the time I got there in 1989, the impact of the 1985 Farm Act really had dissipated. At that time and for the previous couple of years, the international rice market had

been very good for both Thailand and the United States. So, during the three years that I was in Bangkok, we really didn't have a great deal of difficulty on rice.

But on some other issues we did. Tobacco was one. Textiles were always a difficult issue. By that time, Thailand was a major exporter of garments to not only the United States but other parts of the world as well. Every time a factory in Thailand branched into a new category and started exporting significant quantities of whatever it was, whether it was tee shirts or ladies blouses, it didn't really matter, we would try to put limits on that and enter into negotiations to establish some kind of quota regime for that particular product. So, that went on and on and on.

*Q: How does one establish a quota on tee shirts? You're hurting our market. What is our bargaining? What is our bargaining?*

TOMSETH: The regime has changed since then. At that point, we had something called Multifiber. It was a provision of U.S. law and even though you would never get away with it under the current World Trade Organization rules, at that time what the law provided for was that if exports from a country into the United States in certain categories surged, the U.S. government claimed the right to in effect call for negotiations to establish some orderly growth limits in that particular category. Basically, it was a process of a bully, the biggest kid on the block sitting down with these usually developing country textile exporters and establishing some kind of a regime that would allow them to continue to export in that category and even a little bit of growth, but not unlimited access to the U.S. market. The rationale that was often advanced was that we have to do this because there are multiple exporters in the world and in the interest of fairness to everybody, we want some order in the market. The reality was that this was really driven by special interests in the United States, labor unions certainly being one of them and U.S. manufacturers of a particular product being another. So, what you would find in these negotiations very often (I knew this probably better from the desk than from the embassy because more often than not the negotiations were in Washington.) is that you would have a U.S. team being made up of USTR (U.S. Trade Representative), which was always in the lead in these things, but they had representation from the industry, the Department of Labor, Treasury usually sat in on it, and the State Department. The State Department representative was the only person there who had some appreciation for the overall scope of the bilateral relationship, so the State Department representative tended to be regarded by the country that you were negotiating with as probably their best friend, although not an unqualified friend. The State Department, too, is part of the U.S. government and charged with enforcing this law. But in the negotiations, the other aspects of the bilateral relationship that might be important were most likely to be raised by the State Department representative and he or she would try to make sure that those considerations were factored in along with how many people were being put out of work in South Carolina.

*Q: How about tobacco? Tobacco always seems to be a problem.*

TOMSETH: At that time, this was the Bush administration. Not too long before I got to Thailand, we had made a major breakthrough in Korea and, I think, Taiwan, the first Asian markets where there had been some success in breaking down the high tariff barriers that virtually all these countries had against foreign tobacco products, not because they were anti-

tobacco, but because they were trying to protect the local tobacco industries. Thailand was seen as the next big Asian market where we had a chance of getting in. We brought a lot of pressure to bear on the Thais to lower their tariff barriers against foreign tobacco. Ultimately, it was successful. We did succeed in negotiations. I think, as I may have mentioned the other day, a lot of people in the embassy who were involved in this were not terribly happy with the policy, but not to the extent they were prepared to quit their jobs. But one of the consequences of this negotiation, was it became a very public issue in Thailand. There was a lot of media play that focused on the United States as this great bully trying to pressure Thailand to do away or at least to modify the tariff regime to allow foreign tobacco products in. One of the unintended consequences of that was that it gave a lot of strength to the anti-smoking lobby in Thailand. Starting with those negotiations, that group in Thailand has been increasingly successful in getting restrictions put on tobacco, whatever the source, in terms of warning labels and where you can smoke and where you can't smoke. So, I think people like myself who weren't terribly happy about trying to force open this market for U.S. tobacco products at least got some vicarious satisfaction out of what happened in terms of the filip that it gave to the anti-smoking forces in Thailand itself.

*Q: There seems to be a pattern. Textiles seems to be the first thing when a country is really getting going and then they start moving into the electronics field, the assembly and then pretty soon other things develop. This is where it really becomes quite sophisticated. Was that happening?*

TOMSETH: Yes, although while I was there, this was not a trade issue. You had a significant amount of American investment in the electronics field. The largest by far was Sia Technologies, which makes hard disk drives. I think their single largest overseas operation is in Thailand. At one point at least, they were even the largest or the second largest employer and the single largest private sector employer in Thailand. They had several manufacturing facilities in Thailand making parts of or assembling hard disk drives for computers. So, what you got in that case was the import into Thailand of bits and pieces of these drives that might have been made somewhere else in Malaysia or even in the United States and the assembly of the hard disk drives and then the export of the drives either back to the United States or to wherever the computers were being put together. In that sense, very much a part of what's happening in manufacturing generally, where it becomes increasingly difficult to tell just exactly where something was made because it was made everywhere. Motorola and AT&T all had fairly large basically assembly operations in Thailand. That trend has continued, although it's set back a bit in the last couple of years by the Asian financial crisis, but I think it's only that, a setback. It's not going to stop.

*Q: How did you find the Thais? As we look at the world today, 10 years later, there is a very definite spot in India that many of the college graduates are particularly adept at computer programming and seem to be... You would have been at the beginning, but were you seeing an interest in the Thais mentality, culture, system, and all that was getting interested in this?*

TOMSETH: Thailand and India really are fundamentally different. India produces more engineers than any other country in the world by far. A lot of them are very good. It's also a very low labor cost country. So, what you've got there, particularly in the city in south central India that is sort of the Silicon Valley of India, basically what people there are doing is software

related work using this pool of engineering talent that the Indian university system produces in quantities that far exceed what India otherwise could put to work. India is not a very significant player in manufacturing in the computer industry generally. In Thailand, what you have is a country with a university system that was created essentially to train people for government service and where the university system in the last 12 years or so has really been challenged to try to shift to change- (end of tape)

*Q: You were saying Thailand was very hard pressed.*

TOMSETH: The university system has been very hard pressed to make that transition and produce the kinds of high skilled people that you need in a modern industrialized manufacturing economy to fill all the jobs that are available that were created particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s during this period of tremendous growth in the Thai economy. They had to go overseas, particularly to the United States, and lure back some of these people who had for one reason or another wound up here or even hire foreigners to do some of these jobs. But where Thailand in this context has had a real competitive advantage is a fairly well educated, at least at the primary level, and relatively large rural workforce that could be moved into these manufacturing operations fairly easily. This is something that really comes out of traditional Thai culture: they have very good hand-eye coordination. I mentioned Sia a moment ago. One time when I was charge, Sia was opening a plant. The prime minister, Chai Chai Chunawan, and I were among the guests of honor to cut the ribbon at this plant. When that was done, we then went through the plant and as we were... It's very antiseptic with people who are doing the work in these hermetically sealed rooms. You walk through a hall looking through the glass into the areas where people are working. When we had gone through the hall, one of the Sia people asked me if I had noticed anything particular when we had gone through it. I said, "Well, yes, how clean it was." He said, "No, no, not that. The people working?" I said, "No. They were at their microscopes working." He said, "Yes. In any other country where we have plants, if you brought the prime minister and the American charge down the central hall, everybody would stop and look up at them." Nobody had. These people just kept on working at what they were doing. He said that that was a major reason why they had concentrated so much of their hard disk assembly operations in Thailand - because of the dexterity of the people doing this. If you look at traditional Thai handicrafts, you can understand where they get it or why it is so - and their disposition not to be distracted by anything when they were working, that they were just really very good at this kind of work.

*Q: What about intellectual property rights, patents and that sort of thing? That has been one of those bones of contention that's been there foremost and all. How was this?*

TOMSETH: Again, both when I was on the desk from 1986-1989 and while I was in Thailand as DCM from 1989-1992, intellectual property rights were an issue. It was more the copyrights of video and audio than it was trademarks, although there was some pirating of trademarks going on in Thailand as well. I remember every time a congressional delegation would come out and rail at the Thais about their failure to protect intellectual property rights and then the next thing they wanted to do was go buy their fake Rolexes somewhere. But there was a fair amount of video and audio and then increasingly software piracy in Thailand during that period. So, that was on the trade agenda one of the things that we discussed perpetually. Ultimately, we made some

progress, but again, it was one of those serendipitous things that probably helped more than the actual negotiations themselves. That was that during this period increasingly you had Thai artists or intellectuals who were producing not so much videos, but music and increasingly software that was also being pirated. When that began to happen, the Thai authorities had a greater interest in protecting intellectual property rights than they did when it was only American or foreign intellectual property rights that were being violated.

*Q: What about two of the things that seemed to concern Thailand a great deal: drugs and refugees? Let's talk about refugees first. What was the refugee situation in 1989-1992?*

TOMSETH: Just as I got there, a second Geneva Agreement on Indochinese refugees had been concluded. It pertained mainly to Vietnamese, but also to Laos as well. It was a way of mopping up what was left of the refugee issue that had begun with the fall of Saigon and the Indochinese countries in 1975. But it did something new for the first time. That was that it set up a screening process that would be overseen by the UN High Commission for Refugees. The purpose of it was to determine on an individual basis what had motivated the person to leave Vietnam or Laos. If it was for reasons other than those that qualify a person for refugee status (political persecution or persecution for reasons of ethnicity or religious persuasion), then the person was subject to return to his home country. Vietnam and Laos were part of this, so they had to agree that they would take these people back. But that made it in one sense a lot easier to deal with the Thais. It created a regime which allowed them to know that, one way or another, all of these people that had wound up on their doorstep - and this was true of Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and all of the other so-called "first asylum countries" around Southeast Asia as well - this population of people claiming refugee status would be dealt with, although it might take a fair amount of time to do so. So, during the period that I was DCM in Thailand, it was really implementation of this agreement rather than the kinds of issues that had been very much at the forefront while I was on the desk, which was people - mostly Vietnamese, but some Laos as well - coming into Thailand and the Thais being unsure what would be done with these people and consequently being tempted to retool them, to push them back. That had stopped by 1989. That didn't mean that there weren't specific problems with refugees either individually or with groups. It had to be sorted out. But by and large, it was an issue of process rather than of policy by 1989. That is the Vietnamese and Laos.

There was also a very large Cambodian population. At that time, there were far more Cambodians than there were either Vietnamese or Laotians in Thailand. There were still 200,000 or so Cambodians in camps. But with the exception of the initial wave of Cambodians that had come out after 1975, these people were treated as displaced persons rather than refugees. They were regarded as people who would go home when conditions allowed. The issue there really was much more related to the political negotiations and the military operations of the Cambodian resistance aimed at securing some kind of an agreement that, in fact, would allow these people to go home. That actually occurred not too long before I left Thailand in 1992. When I did leave, people were beginning to go back to Cambodia. That in itself had issues that the U.S. was very much concerned with. Those related mainly to, first of all, the safety of the people going back to whatever areas in Cambodia they were going back to and then, secondly, the sustainability of resettling them in Cambodia. Would they be able to actually make a go of it? There, I think you have to bear in mind that some of these people had been in camps almost two decades. Many of

them had been born in the camps and had never farmed and here they were supposed to go back to Cambodia and become rural peasants once again. So, needless to say, there was a lot of interest in the United States about how this program would be implemented and we spent a lot of time working on that with the UNHCR and with the various NGOs and PVOs that were involved in it.

*Q: Were there still Khmer Rouge camps? In Cambodia, was a low-level war still going on?*

TOMSETH: Yes. The Khmer Rouge were for a long, long time the only really significant counterpressure on the Vietnamese occupation in Cambodia. There was an effort to try and create a viable non-communist military force as well and with some degree of success. Towards the end of this period of war and negotiation, if you will, the non-communist factions were able to seize a small strip of territory in northwestern Cambodia, which was very important in terms of giving them some credibility at the negotiating table. But for the most part, military activity, anti-Vietnamese and the government that the Vietnamese had installed in Phnom Penh, was borne by the Khmer Rouge. They had in Cambodia, along that border, a number of camps that they used as their bases of operation. But in addition to that, one of the displaced persons camps in Thailand was a large reservoir of Khmer Rouge supporters. These were Khmer Rouge that had been pushed into Thailand in the early 1980s and then had settled in camps while the fighters went back into Cambodia when conditions permitted it.

In addition to that, all of these groups - Khmer Rouge and the two non-communist groups - had a safehaven in Thailand if they needed it. That was in the domain of the Thai military and the Thai army by and large. This actually put the U.S. government in a rather ticklish position. For very good reasons, in this country there was a lot of anguish about the Khmer Rouge, part of it driven by guilt because until 1978/1979 when it became clear what was going on in Cambodia - clear because the Vietnamese sort of pushed everything out of Cambodia into Thailand - a lot of people in the United States turned their back on it, didn't want to know what was going on in Cambodia. So, in the 1980s, there was a great deal of concern about the Khmer Rouge in the Congress and among the American public. As a consequence, nobody in Washington really wanted to get too close to these people but because they were the only effective countervietnamese force in Cambodia, nobody really wanted to see them go away completely either. The Thai military played a very useful role in terms of being responsible for all of these groups along the border. Where no one in the United States for political reasons would dare touch the Khmer Rouge, the Thai military did it, not without criticism and they caught a fair amount of flack from some people in the United States for doing that, particularly when the closer you got to a peace agreement, the higher the criticism tended to grow. It was a critical role that they played in terms of bringing that about. They, in effect, did provide all of the groups, including the Khmer Rouge, sanctuary during the 1980s and into the 1990s.

*Q: How did you all at the embassy deal with this? Did you just look the other way or just say, "Alright" or make pro forma protests? What did you do?*

TOMSETH: It wasn't really easy. I'm not sure how much detail I can go into without getting into a realm that is not on the public record yet. You have to bear in mind that we had our own military assistance program in non-lethal aid, but it was coordinated with ASEAN. There were

several of the ASEAN countries - the Singaporeans, the Malaysians, the Thais, obviously, and I think even Brunei from time to time put some money into it to ensure that these non-communist Cambodian groups had the military wherewithal to be credible on the battlefield, if you will. They were just barely so, but without that kind of assistance from ASEAN and from the United States, they wouldn't have been able to achieve even that. So, you had that program out on the border with these groups. At the same time, the Chinese were operating a program to make sure that the Khmer Rouge were adequately armed. The Chinese also contributed to arming the non-communist factions as well. Trying to keep the U.S.-ASEAN program hermetically sealed from what was going on with the Khmer Rouge when all of it was passing through the Thai military was a constant challenge, I must say.

*Q: Were any Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, and the Hmong beginning to seep out of the camps and move into the Thai society?*

TOMSETH: There was always a fair amount of that from the time people began to show up. It was a lot easier for lowland Laos than any of the others because of cultural and linguistic reasons. By the end of the 1980s in the Lao camps, the number of lowland Laos had diminished to just a few thousand. There weren't very many left. The vast majority of them either had been resettled in third countries or had found a way into Thai society. There was still a substantial body of Hmong, of mostly Hmong (There were a few other Lao highland groups.), probably about 40,000 in 1989 when I got there. By that time, this population really wasn't interested in going anywhere for several reasons, one of which was that some of the people from the old royal Lao regime including the preeminent Lao leader, who himself had come to the United States, the Hmong leader, were running a resistance operation out of the camps into Laos and they needed that population as their support base and as a basis of recruitment for resistance operations. So, they put a lot of pressure on people just to stay put. That wasn't the only reason they were doing it. But one of the issues we had to deal with is winding up that population. The Thais were not prepared to keep them forever. So, we, the U.S., found ourselves in a situation where we were trying to convince people you've got to make a choice. Do you want to go to the United States or Australia... Most of the Hmong were in the United States, but France, Australia, and Canada were taking a few. Do you want third country resettlement or do you want to go back to Laos? Those are the choices you have. You cannot stay in Thailand. As that pressure mounted, more and more of the Hmong also began drifting out of these camps into Thai society. It is much more difficult for a Hmong to conceal himself in Thai society than it is for a lowland Lao. But one of the things that happened is that a monk at a temple in central Thailand, actually a Magsaysay Award winner, which is sort of the Asian Nobel Peace Prize, who took these Hmong under his wing and set up in the environment of his rural temple a Hmong society in miniature and worked with them and was active in raising funds to make sure that they'd have enough to eat, shelter, and that sort of thing. Because of his political standing in Thailand, it was very difficult for the Thai government to say "You can't do this" because it was so obviously a humanitarian undertaking. But a substantial number of Hmong wound up there. At least during the time I was there, they were never able to do a census of them, so the guesstimates ranged from 3-4,000 to maybe as many as 10-12,000 Hmong that were settled in this area around this temple in Surabury in central Thailand.

*Q: We're still in the aftermath of the Indochina War. What about the MIA/POW thing? Were you*

*still getting reflections of this?*

TOMSETH: Before we move to that, there is one other refugee population we haven't talked about and one that actually has become the most significant in Thailand, and that is Burmese. While I was still on the desk, but certainly during the period that I was in Thailand, these people began to show up in Thailand in increasing numbers. There had been ethnic based insurgencies going on in Burma for a long, long time, but during that period, the Burmese military had increasing success in their military operations against these people. So, what you started seeing was moving from a situation in which the Burmese military would go on offensive operations during the dry season, people would retreat into Thailand and then go back into Burma during the rainy season. Increasingly, these people started staying in Thailand on a more or less permanent basis. Then in 1988, you had the democracy movement in Burma that also produced a refugee outflow. These were ethnic Burmans, as opposed to Burmese minority groups. So that population increased very dramatically during the period that I was there and it is still there.

*Q: Did we put this into a resettlement program or was this "somebody else do it?"*

TOMSETH: No. First of all, given their experience with Indochinese, the Thais were not prepared to accept that they were refugees. They chose to treat them as displaced persons, as they had done with most of the Cambodians that had come after that first wave in the aftermath of 1975. That was an issue. From the point of the view of the U.S. and a number of other western governments, many of these people should be treated as refugees. They had fled Burma because they were persecuted for political reasons - not so much religious reasons, although Kurans tend to be Christians and some of these other Burmans are heavily Christian - but certainly ethnic reasons. The reason that Kuran and Shan and others wound up in Thailand as displaced people or refugees, whatever you wanted to call them, was because of their ethnicity.

*Q: In a way, we were just watching, but not dealing with them.*

TOMSETH: More than just watching. Sort of regularly going into the Thais and advising them on how we thought they should be treating these people and allowing UNHCR, for example, to have access to camps and to be able to provide assistance to people.

*Q: Was there any pressure on us to turn this group, although it was obviously a mixed group, into a resistance movement, arming and doing that sort of thing?*

TOMSETH: Not really much pressure via the U.S. government, whether from Congress or any other U.S. government quarter. What you had were a lot of veterans of the Indochina conflict who had become freedom fighters, soldiers of fortune, if you will, some of whom had been involved with Indochinese resistance groups that had not gotten very far who then gravitated towards these Burmese groups. They were probably more of a problem for the U.S. embassy than they were for the Thai government, which knew pretty well how to deal with them and in some cases probably didn't even discourage them from doing what they were. But they could be a problem for the U.S. government and for the embassy in particular.

Among that Burmese refugee group, you have to separate a lot of these student activists who fled after 1988. Unlike the ethnic minorities, who did tend to stay fairly close to the border, many of

these people wound up in Bangkok, where they had a lot of sympathy from Thai students, the Thai media particularly, and Thai academics, Thai intellectuals. They tended to do things that the Thai government found troublesome. They would demonstrate outside the Burmese embassy and chain themselves to the gate at the Burmese embassy, which forced the hand of the government to do something about them. They would get arrested and then the question became how do you treat them under Thai law? Typically, the conclusion was, well, do they have travel documents? Do they have a visa to be here? If not, you throw them in the immigration jail, sort of the way that we do with people who are undocumented illegal aliens. Then that became an issue in U.S.-Thai bilateral relations. Our view was that whether they have documentation or not, they should be treated as political refugees, which they by our rights clearly were.

*Q: What about the POW/MIA problem? Could you explain how it was from your viewpoint and how you all dealt with it?*

TOMSETH: I think a little bit of history is in order. That is that after 1973 and the settlement with North Vietnam that resulted in the POWs that they were holding being released, neither the Nixon administration nor the Ford administration which followed nor the Carter administration were very interested in doing much to follow up. In World War II, after all, there were 40,000 or more casualties whose remains were never returned or identified. I think the feeling in those administrations, in the services really, was that this was just part of war, that you have people who don't come home and whose remains are not identified or repatriated. But in the 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan made an issue of this. Part of it was that probably almost as soon as people were released in 1973, because some people who had been known to be prisoners were not returned and were not accounted for, immediately, a view grew up that some people were still being held in Indochina. Reagan campaigned on that issue, that if he were elected, by God, he'd bring any Americans still being held in Indochina home and that he would account for these people who were missing in action. So, when he came into office in 1981, an effort was mounted to do a couple of things. One was to try and find out where live Americans might be held and to rescue them. In fact, one attempt to rescue Americans who were alleged to be held in a location in Indochina was actually mounted. Not only were they not there, it wasn't clear whether they had ever been there. But in addition to that, there was a major effort to try to find the means to recover and identify remains of people. Because we did not have diplomatic relations with either Cambodia or Vietnam and our relationship with Laos in that period was not very good, the main base of operations for both efforts was in Bangkok. We could operate out of there.

By 1989 when I got to Thailand, a couple of things had happened. One was that we were beginning to get some cooperation from both the Laos and the Vietnamese. During the course of the three years that I was there, the paradigm shifted substantially to the point where we were actually able to put military detachments into Panjim and Hanoi and then eventually Phnom Penh as well with the detachment in Bangkok still being the main logistics base for these operations that were planned in the three Indochinese countries. But most of the time that I was in Bangkok, the focus of the embassy really was on this logistics operation for operations into initially just Vietnam and Laos, but ultimately Cambodia as well.

*Q: This is the official thing. Were you having these sorts of freeloaders wandering around? I'm talking about Americans particularly, either con men or dedicated fanatics or not? How did you*

*deal with them? What were some of the problems?*

TOMSETH: Yes, there were several people like this - as you described them, dedicated fanatics or con men and some were both were a problem, in part because several of these people (They were almost exclusively former U.S. military.) had fairly good relations with people in the Thai military. Even when the government decided that Mr. X was a royal pain in the derriere and put him on an immigration lookout list, more than once, we had situations where one or another of these people were able to get into Thailand by exploiting their contacts with the Thai military to get around Thai immigration. They were the source of a lot of wild goose chases. Part of this operation was to try to develop information on anybody who might still be alive. These people tended to believe that there were lots of people alive. As I think I mentioned in an earlier session, it's the law of the market here that if there is a demand for something, that something will appear. If you want evidence of somebody being held in captivity, you will get photographs of somebody being held in captivity. These people tended to be great promoters of that. They would bring people who claimed to have evidence of live Americans somewhere in Indochina into the embassy. By that time, this had become a highly politicized issue in the United States. Given that fact, even in cases that seemed on the face of it absolutely ridiculous had to be taken seriously. The leads had to be followed up. We had a whole crew of people in Bangkok whose job it was to do just that, to develop information, as bad as it often seemed, about the possibility of live Americans being held in Indochina and then trying to track it down in Indochina.

*Q: Moving on to drugs... The Drug Enforcement Agency has been over there for a long time. Everybody I've talked to who's dealt with Thailand has talked about the problems of dealing with essentially an enforcement agency that has a tendency to go off on its own. How was it working?*

TOMSETH: At that time, DEA had its largest overseas presence anywhere in the world in Thailand. They had between 35 and 40 agents at any given moment and various support staff working with them. For the most part during the three years that I was deputy chief of mission, we didn't have any serious problems with DEA. The head and his deputy were pretty good. The deputy actually had served there in a previous tour in the late 1970s. They were pretty good.

The biggest problem you had with DEA was their constant desire to be cops. Their role in Thailand really wasn't law enforcement per se. It was to develop intelligence and to work with the Thai law enforcement agencies in the enforcement of Thai law, but it was the responsibility of the Thai cops to do the police work. The DEA agents were constantly tempted to get in there and be cops, too, and it was a temptation that sometimes they couldn't resist.

*Q: Did you have much of a problem with Americans getting into trouble? I think about sex, drugs, and what used to be called a long time ago the "old China coasters," people who loved Asia and sort of settled in the community, but when they got in trouble became the American embassy's responsibility.*

TOMSETH: By the end of the 1980s, the Consular Section, particularly in a country like Thailand that is on the major international travel routes, you're going to have a few cases where people do something and get thrown into jail for one reason or another or wind up destitute or overdose in a hospital, but that sort of thing was no greater than you would expect in any major

capital on the international circuit. In the late 1970s/early 1980s, actually, in response to a lot of pressure from the United States to get tough with drug traffickers, a lot of Americans had been arrested by Thai authorities and convicted of trafficking offenses and had been given very long sentences. Thailand does have capital punishment, although it's very seldom invoked, but a number of these Americans had been given life sentences in Thailand for trafficking offenses. That led to a buildup of the American long-term prisoner population in Thailand. At one point, I think they had 50-60 Americans serving long sentences in Thailand. That in turn led to pressure in the United States to work out some arrangement with Thailand where people convicted in Thailand and sentenced there could, after a period of time at least, be transferred to a U.S. prison facility. But by 1989, there were 30 or more Americans still serving in Thai prisons for drug-related offenses. This was a major burden for the Consular Section. They had to be visited regularly. Thailand, like a lot of countries, has a provision where prisoners can receive money to buy incidentals and some things can be brought into them. So, one of the things that the Consular Section was involved with with these people was seeing that they were visited once a month and that they got a small stipend and that they got dietary supplements to make sure that they were healthy. But we didn't have a significant number of Americans arrested for trafficking offenses during the three years that I was there.

*Q: You were there during the Gulf War and the oil crisis. What was the effect on Thailand? This was when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Did Thailand become involved at all?*

TOMSETH: To a degree, a fairly important degree, but it wasn't what I would call a major involvement. During the buildup prior to the war itself, there obviously was a major operation to get people and equipment in place and things moving out of the Pacific Theater into the Gulf - one way is right across the Kra Isthmus. There is a major naval and air base at Rutapow and Sedaheep. So, having access to those facilities is quite important for that buildup. Again, we're talking about our relationship with the Thai government and Chai Chai Chunawan and the prime minister. I remember very well in the early fall of 1990, we got on a Saturday morning a cable from Washington saying, "Can you get access to Rutapow for flights through to the Gulf? Yesterday would have been better than today, but certainly we want it today." Dan was- (end of tape)

Dan O'Donohue, our ambassador, was able to call the prime minister at home on a Saturday morning, get a meeting with him within an hour or so, go over to his house, and secure his authorization for U.S. use of those Thai military facilities to support the buildup participatory to the war. That was the kind of relationship that we had with the Thai government and with the key individuals in it.

*Q: Was there general approval of what was being done?*

TOMSETH: Oh, yes. And when the war actually began, it was something that the Thais, at least the Thais in Bangkok, were very interested in. You could follow it on CNN. In fact, there was a funny incident when the war began. Thailand has a - not really like the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It's a Supreme Command. It's supposed to be an interservice command structure for their military. But it functions a little differently than the Joint Chiefs of Staff in our military. In any event, the supreme commander, an army general at that point, called up Dan and told him he was watching

the war on CNN. Dan said, "Well, you're ahead of us. We don't have a satellite dish either at the embassy or at my house, so we've been getting other kinds of reporting on it, but I haven't actually seen any of the pictures." A couple of hours later, the supreme commander's communications people were at Dan's residence and installed a satellite dish so he too could watch the war.

*Q: I've heard people say that in some African countries, almost everything stopped while they watched this war. It was fascinating.*

TOMSETH: This shows the nature of the relationship we had with the Thai government. Just before the war broke out, on a Friday evening, we had a walk-in who was an Arab who had lived in Thailand for a long time. He was married to a Thai. He told the Marine security guard, "I have some information I think you, the American embassy, should know about." It turned out that this guy had been recruited by some agents out of the Iraqi embassy to help set up some kind of an attack against the U.S. in Bangkok. This was part of a larger operation that the Iraqis had in Southeast Asia.

*Q: In the Philippines-*

TOMSETH: In the Philippines and Indonesia. In Indonesia, they actually got so far as to rig a bomb in a flower pot on the terrace at the ambassador's house, but it had not been properly wired and a gardener found it and it was disposed of.

In the Philippines, a couple of people were wiring, setting, a device outside the Binational Center when it went off and blew them away.

In Bangkok, what they had opted for was to go after some senior people in the embassy, the ambassador and myself being the first two choices. But this fellow whom they had recruited to help set this up had a bad conscience at the last minute and walked into the embassy and told us about it, whereupon we engaged everybody in the embassy involved in this (the security officer, the station chief) and quickly got the Thais involved in it. In fairly short order, they were able to round up the two people in the embassy who were the leaders of the operation and four others in the Iraqi embassy. They weren't able to do anything with the two people in the embassy (They had diplomatic status.) other than to work with us in getting them from Bangkok to Austria, as it turned out, where they could be arrested, and they were. But in that operation, the Thais worked very closely with us to track these people down and round them up and get them out of the country and into the hands of people who could arrest them.

*Q: How were we viewing the economy, ASEAN and all that at that time? Not too long thereafter, about five or six years later, by the time you'd left, they had had quite an economic crisis. How were we viewing the economy when you were there?*

TOMSETH: During the time I was there, two out of those three years, Thailand was the fastest growing economy in the world. They had about 13% growth one year and 14% the next. People were very bullish on the economy. I think there is still reason to be bullish on the economy, although the Asian financial crisis actually started in Thailand two years ago with the collapse of

the bat. But even at that time, it was possible to see some problems, one of which was in real estate. I had been involved in Thailand long enough to see several building booms and busts. Often, it was with hotels. Tourism is an important industry in Thailand. You would see the number of tourist arrivals overwhelming the capacity, a rush to build more capacity, more was built than demand could keep up with, and you would have a period of bust. But these usually were not terribly severe and didn't last that long before you started into another cycle. But by 1991 and 1992, I think it was becoming pretty clear that this time, it really was getting out of hand. There were several things that contributed to that. One was that in that cycle, it wasn't just hotels. It was luxury condominiums as well, a lot of which were being either leased or they changed the law so that foreigners actually could buy into condominium projects. There were just too many of these things going up. You had to ask yourself where are the customers going to come from?

Another factor was that the ability of private sector entities to borrow on the international market had changed dramatically from anytime I had ever seen in Thailand where the Thai banks, in effect, could go out and borrow as much money as they wanted because the Thai economy was doing so well and everybody in New York, Tokyo, and London thought this was the greatest thing since sliced bread and they were prepared to lend Thai banks whatever they wanted to borrow. This money in turn was then lent to the Thai private sector for the most part. A lot of that went into real estate projects that you really had to wonder whether or not they would be viable in the aggregate, individual ones, yes, but as many as were being built, you really had to doubt it. At one point, I thought that the construction crane had become the Thai national bird. There were just so many of them around Bangkok. One Sunday, my wife and I were at a Sizzler's. There was an American who's now become a Thai citizen. His father worked at VOA when I was in Thailand the first time, in the late 1960s, and graduated from the International School in Bangkok and sorely disappointed his parents when he said he wasn't interested in going to college; he wanted to go into business. When I came back in 1989, his parents were no longer disappointed. He was a multimillionaire. One of the things that he had done was, he had gotten the Thailand franchises for things like Pizza Hut, one of the ice cream companies, and Burger King, and he had just gotten it for Sizzler, a steakhouse. He had invited us to come to his grand opening of Sizzler, which was on the second floor of a building in the Sukumvit area, which had been a residential area when I was there, but is rapidly becoming commercial. As I looked out of the window from this Sizzler restaurant that Sunday for lunch, I counted over 40 building cranes just from where I was sitting. That is an example of what was going on in Thailand at that point.

*Q: Was the embassy sending up balloons... Was there some concern here or not or did this make any difference?*

TOMSETH: Well, yes, the Economic Section regularly reported on anomalies in the Thai economy that the section believed needed to be watched in terms of what could be expected in the future. One of these, incidentally, was the shortage of engineers, architects, and MBAs that the Thai university system, which was unable to produce enough of them to meet the demand of this booming economy. This was 1991 and 1992, the fastest growing economy in the world. There was a lot more good news than there was bad news. Nobody was predicting a crash, although there were some things out there that bore watching. What ultimately led to the

downfall in 1997, yes, this building boom beyond the demand for it certainly was a factor and lending was a factor, but what actually sparked the crisis was, for the first time in my memory, the Bank of Thailand actually didn't perform very well. This was an institution that had gained a reputation over a long period of time for a staff that was very competent and also very honest. In Thailand, you can't emphasize the honesty part too much. It may not be as bad as Indonesia or maybe some Latin American examples, but corruption was an endemic problem there. But the Bank of Thailand had this reputation for being very prudent and conservative and competent at the same time that its people were scrupulously honest. What happened to produce this crisis in 1997 was that the Bank, too, probably got carried away with the euphoria and wasn't as conservative and prudent as it should have been. In early 1997, people outside of Thailand began to conclude that the Thai economy simply could not be sustained at the levels of growth that it had been experiencing and that in the construction industry in particular, there had been a great deal of overbuilding, and that banks were overextended, and that put a lot of pressure on the bank. The Bank of Thailand initially tried to defend it, rather than cutting it loose, and cut very deeply into Thai reserves before they finally admitted they couldn't defend it and cut it loose, and that set off the chain reaction all around Asia. The same thing was happening in Korea, incidentally, which I think was the other big factor in the crisis.

*Q: What sort of a factor did traffic play in people coming to Bangkok, the life of the city, the capital, and all that?*

TOMSETH: I have never been in any place where traffic is as bad as it is in Bangkok. Teheran in the mid-1970s ran at a close second, but even there it wasn't as bad. The basic problem comes down to the way Bangkok was originally built. The original city was on a bend in the river and a canal was cut through the neck of that bend to create an artificial island. Then over the years, a series of radiating canals went out from that island center and a series of semi-concentric canals were built around it. No roads. Travel in the city in the 19th century was by boat. The very first street in Bangkok was built only at the end of the 19th century in what was then Chinatown in Bangkok just outside of the capital area across that first of the concentric canals. Starting in the 20th century with the arrival of the automobile, they started filling in the canals to build roads, so the grid in Thailand is a number of fairly wide roads that radiate from the old center of Bangkok with a lot of very narrow sidestreets which were little side canals that never went through off of the main roads. Today, there are still relatively few throughroads. You had this series of spokes coming out of the center, but not connected with one another very often. That is one aspect of it. The other one is that the area of road, in a city of New York, where you have a grid, on average, around the world in major cities, roughly a quarter of the land area is in roads. That is true of New York City as an example. In Bangkok, it's less than 10% because of this original system of canals which were filled in to build roads. So, you have two big problems: not nearly enough area devoted to roads and the nature of the grid itself, which does not have very many connecting roads.

*Q: I would have thought that that would have almost at a certain point precluded business from going to Bangkok, saying "The hell with it."*

TOMSETH: When I was there the first time, even though the number of vehicles was nowhere near as great as it subsequently became, the traffic could be pretty chaotic. More than one time, I

said to myself when I was stuck in Bangkok's traffic, "Someday, this is going to get so bad that people will just get out of their cars and start walking." Well, they didn't. They air-conditioned their cars. BY the time I got back the second time, not only were all the cars air-conditioned so you could sit there in relative comfort, because of the time they were spending in them, people had gone to cellphones and even faxes in their cars so that they were doing business from their cars when then were stuck in traffic. Foreign investors, too, seemed to be prepared to put up with an inordinate amount of that sort of thing simply because the opportunity to make money was so great in Thailand and there are other things that compensate for it. We were talking about this a moment ago. The relatively well educated, even still relatively cheap, certainly in terms of hand-eye coordination, very skilled workforce that you have available in Thailand, makes a two meeting a day Bangkok tolerable, not pleasant, but tolerable. It was a two meeting a day city. You really have a hard time scheduling three meetings in a day.

*Q: Did this have much effect on the embassy or were you all able to work around it?*

TOMSETH: Yes, in some ways. When I was there the first time - and most of the government were down in or near the old part of the city - our embassy, we acquired that property at the end of World War II. At that time, it was on the very edge of Bangkok. Now, it's not. But it's quite a ways from the old part of the city. In the 1960s, even though the traffic can be chaotic, you didn't think twice about setting up a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Finance Ministry, Interior, or whatever. In 1989, you did. You planned those meetings very carefully. You knew that it was going to take you a while to get there and it was going to take you a while to get back.

The other area where I noticed that it made a big difference - and not necessarily a bad difference, although on balance, I would say it was mixed - was in the area of representation. I mentioned in an earlier session that one of the jobs that I had in Thailand on my first tour was staff aide to the ambassador. He typically went to three events every night. The second time around, you could do one. If you were really foolhardy, you might try to do two. On the Thai side, in the 1960s, if they were invited to anything the American ambassador or even the American embassy did, you could pretty much count on them showing up. They might not bring their wife or you might bring their cousin (You never knew who they were going to bring along with them.), but they would come. In 1989, the rule of thumb on a guest list was, you would be lucky to get 50%.

*Q: How did your wife find this, being Thai, and particularly with the royal family? Did she find this difficult, fun?*

TOMSETH: She found the first year very difficult and sort of fled to the University of Montana. She had been teaching a course there anyway, so it was something that she had actually planned on doing. She came out in the summer of 1989 and stayed through the holidays, but then went back (Montana is on a quarter system.) for the winter and spring quarters. She found it very difficult - not because of the U.S. embassy. People there took her for what she was - but because of the Thais. Many of them really expected her to behave like a Thai. Her view was that she wasn't ashamed of the fact of having been born in Thailand, but she had long since become an American and she was there as the wife of an American diplomat and her first obligation was to the United States. As an example of the difficulties that she had, the Thai national day is the

King's birthday, which is December 5th. Among the events that they do around the King's birthday, there is a reception for the diplomatic corps. BY the time we came back, the corps had grown to over 80 embassies, so they limited it to three couples from each embassy. What that usually meant was the ambassador, the DCM, and the Defense attaché for us. That first year, I was charge. Dan and his family had come back to the United States for Christmas. So, in the reception, they started out by lining everybody up in a "U." The King would make some remarks to the corps and then he would go around with the Queen and various of the royal children and say a few words to each of the delegations. We were at the head of our delegation. If you're a Thai, you don't touch the royal family. You just never do.

*Q: There is a story about somebody drowning because nobody was...*

TOMSETH: It was a princess in the late 19th century. They were going from Bangkok up to Bonbayan, which was the old summer capital north of Bangkok on the Choptia River. The boat that this princess was riding in capsized and nobody could help her because they couldn't touch her. So, she drowned.

In any event, when the King and Queen came around to our group, Walapa curtseyed. The Queen stuck out her hand to shake hands, as she did with all the ladies in the other delegations. As Walapa was curtseying, she said, "You're Majesty, I'm Thai." The Queen said, "That's okay and took her hand and shook her hand." It was fine as far as the King and Queen, the royal family, were concerned. But all of the "royal orbiters," the ladies in waiting, a couple of whom had been Walapa's classmates in the university, were by and large rather upset by this. It wasn't easy for her. But by the second and third year, I think she sort of reached an accommodation with it. I think by that point, she had persuaded many of these people that she wasn't going to always act in quite the way a Thai would be expected to act in similar circumstances.

*Q: I've heard Japanese experts say that they always have a problem with Japanese women who go to the universities in the United States. They walk differently. They are a different breed of cat by the time they come through. As I think you remarked earlier on, there has always been an affinity between the Thai and the Americans and considerable marriage and also students going away and coming back, which I assume would include some women, too.*

TOMSETH: Yes.

*Q: Was it having a nasty revolutionary effect that people who go to the United States, particularly women, with it becoming a new world, were these beginning to make their way into the society?*

TOMSETH: Well, the influence is certainly, but I think Thailand, for a variety of reasons - the one that's always trotted out is that unlike all of the other countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand never actually was a colonial dependency. It spent much of the latter part of the 19th century in an inferior status to the western colonial powers and was forced to sign some of these extraterritoriality treaties, but it never was a colonial dependency. But it's more than that. I think the Thai culture has always been a very open one. You can go back to the 15th and 16th century when various foreigners who showed up. There was a Persian who arrived and became a very

influential person in the court at Ayutia. Many of his descendants many generations removed now are very prominent people in Thailand. There was an ethnic Greek from Lebanon, Constantine Falkan, who arrived in the 17th century and actually became the King's principal minister at one point. So, there has always been this openness to outsiders and a willingness to adopt foreign things and modify them so that they become Thai. That has certainly been the case with all of these people going abroad. Many of them were women and these days there are probably as many women Thai students in the United States as there are men. Certainly in the Thai foreign service, they've actually had to impose a semi-official ceiling on women because so many of them were passing their foreign service exam and actually at the expense of the men. The ambassador here, who is an old friend, said that in recent years, over half of the people that they have been bringing into the foreign ministry are women, many of them with foreign educations, obviously. But I think one of the qualities of Thai society that has been very important in making the absorption of women with foreign educations relatively easy is that women have always played an important economic role in Thailand. At the risk of oversimplification, you can say the division of labor in a typical Thai family was that men would be in politics and the military. They would do the fighting and the politicking. Women controlled the pursestrings. So, a lot of these women with foreign educations have found a ready outlet in the business world. There are a lot of Thai women in senior positions in the Thai business world, including one of Walapa's sisters, who is a senior vice president of the Bangkok Bank, which is the largest of the Thai banks.

*Q: I find this fascinating to watch this change - and the change really in the United States, too.*

*I think this is a good place to stop, don't you?*

TOMSETH: Yes.

*Q: Is there anything else we should cover the next time in Thailand before you move on?*

TOMSETH: I think we've touched on... We've done Cambodia, refugees, POW/MIAs, Burma, drugs, and economic issues. That is an indicator of how much more complex this relationship had become.

*Q: Yes. I've just finished a long interview with Bill Brown, who talked about all the complexities. From there, he went on to a very quiet time as ambassador to Israel.*

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TOMSETH: Before I got to Laos, while I was waiting to get through this confirmation process that seemed to be taking forever, in the fall of 1993, I started coming over here to the Foreign Service Institute in the morning and sitting in on the Lao classes to convert the Thai that I already spoke to Lao. The two languages are fairly closely related. I had spoken Thai for a long time. So, I spent the fall of 1993, or at least part of it - part of it, I was up in New York - going through a conversion process. When I got to Laos, I made a point in all of my official contacts of trying to speak Lao with the officials that I dealt with, with great or lesser success. These two languages are close enough together and the penetration of Thai radio and television, at least in

Vien Chung, had been so pervasive that in Vien Chung, virtually everybody certainly understands Thai. I would have been able to communicate in Thai even if I hadn't tried to make that conversion to Lao. But there was a certain rivalry between Thailand and Laos that in recent decades has also been a political rivalry. I just thought it would be more politic to at least make an attempt to speak Lao. But doing that turned out to be a great advantage in terms of access to some of these hardline communist senior leaders in the regime. The prime minister is a good example. This was a fellow who had been the commander of the army for a long, long time. While I was still in Bangkok, he had become prime minister. I remember seeing cables out of Vien Chung about how anti-western this person was. For a long time, he would not receive any of the heads of the western missions in Laos. Then when he did, they tended to be very perfunctory meetings. So, when I arrived and had presented my credentials and went to call on him, I went alone. He had an interpreter there, but when we sat down and we started this conversation, initially, it was very much diplomatic boiler plate on his side and then I would respond and wouldn't give hi interpreter a chance to convert that into English. I would respond in Lao. After five or six minutes of this, a great big smile lit up his face and he said like a light had come on, "You can speak Lao, can't you?" Then we had a fairly good conversation for the remainder of the time I was there.

A couple of months after that, the Australians had built a bridge across the Mekong between Thailand and Laos near Pien Jun and that was opened up in April of 1994. Everybody - the diplomatic corps, all sorts of people - were invited to this and they had a joint [ceremony] with the Thais and the Laos to do this. While we were standing around waiting to be seated before the ceremony, people were mingling on the bridge. I encountered the prime minister and he immediately grabbed hold of his wife and said, "Talk to this guy! He can speak our language!" So, the ability to do that, even though the Thai antecedents obviously crept in from time to time, made a big difference in terms of the barrier that ordinarily we had to get over to have any kind of contact with some of these senior leaders. I don't suggest that it went away. It did not. But at least it was lowered somewhat in terms of being able to gain access and to have some communications.

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TOMSETH: One of the projects that we had while I was there was to actually get a DEA person assigned to the embassy in Vientiane. That did not happen while I was there. It has now. There is a DEA person there. But DEA had an office in Udorn in northeastern Thailand and we were able to work out an arrangement where that DEA person would come over every couple of weeks or so to do liaison work with his Lao counterparts. We also had a State Department "Bureau of Drugs and Thugs" person in the embassy. The program was basically aimed at two things. One was the Lao opium crop. That was basically the State Department component of it. We had a budget to do a crop substitution program in northeastern Laos in Whoupon Province. Our State Department person basically ran that program. Also some things with Lao customs and a little bit with the police, although that was more a DEA function. DEA worked with the Lao police. During the time I was there, we were actually able to get the Laos to establish a special counternarcotics unit in the police force to focus on this. DEA helped with the training. The State Department put up some money equip an office for them and buy them some vehicles. Their objective was to try to disrupt trafficking operations through Laos and, when we could find

evidence of refinery operations in Laos, to track that down and shut down the refineries.

*Q: I would have thought that getting evidence and all would be very difficult. Here is a regime which is obviously suspicious of American activities and even though this is not of a military nature, it's still intelligence is intelligence. It means informants and that whole thing.*

TOMSETH: Well, the major purpose of the office in Udorn was to collect intelligence on what was happening in Laos. DEA had/has (They still have the office in Udorn.) a string of informants providing them with "information" on what was going on in Laos. One of the big problems was that a lot of these informants were people associated with the old regime and their reliability was always suspect. CIA had stopped collecting intelligence on Laos by the early 1990s, so there really was very little information available on what was happening, most of it via these DEA sources whose reliability was in some doubt. The other major source of intelligence, but it didn't do much good in terms of trafficking, was satellite imagery. That was okay for the opium [crop] and we were quite open about that. We would share the information that we got from that with the Laos as part of our effort in the crop substitution program.

*Q: You mentioned missing in action. Refugees... How did that work?*

TOMSETH: Not bad. This was really a quadrilateral effort. The main triangle were the governments of Laos and Thailand and UNHCR, but because the U.S. had a special interest in these Lao islanders in particular, we were very much involved in it. We put some money into projects to assist the reintegration of people who actually came back. The biggest problems really were the asylees themselves. If allowed to have their druthers, they would have just as soon have stayed in these UNHCR-administered camps in Thailand. I remember going to one of these things in the 1980s when I was on the Thai/Burma desk. There was a State Department person along with me. We went to this one at Bangquini, which was in Loui Province west of Vientiane, but on the Thai side of the border. It's a very remote area of Thailand. "Bur" in Thai actually means "beyond." Beyond the beyond.

Do we have time for a funny story?

*Q: Yes.*

TOMSETH: When I was in Thailand the first time in the late 1960s, Bangkok had a mayor who was notoriously corrupt. The mayor was then appointed, not elected. Finally, things got so bad that the government knew that it had to get Chun Nan Uaboon not only out of that position, but out of the country. So, like Chai Chai Chunawan, whom I spoke of the other day, the government sent Chun Nan out to Argentina as ambassador. In one of the Thai language papers, somebody wrote a letter to the editor - obviously an older person. The letter said, "I find it absolutely scandalous that the government would appoint a notorious crook like Chung Nan Uaboon to a prestigious position such as the Thai ambassador to Argentina. In my day, the government never would have done that. They would have made Chung Nan the governor of Loui Province and really punished him." We went to this camp at Banwinai in Loui Province and this person that was along with me after we toured around said, "My god, how can people possibly live in these conditions?" It was sort of like a great Lao island village, but it had 40,000 people in it. But the

conditions were pretty primitive. I said, "Well, from their point of view, it's probably no worse than living on a mountaintop in Laos and the good news is that UNHCR delivers the chickens every Thursday." So, there were understandable reasons why many of these people really would have preferred to stay forever in these refugee camps. But in this program to wind down the whole Indochinese refugee problem, the government of Thailand, the government of Laos, and UNHCR were the principal actors in moving people back to Laos if they weren't going to be resettled in a third country. But we involved ourselves in that process very closely and put some resources into helping ease the transition for people coming back. But in addition to the reluctance of people to come back, the problem for the Lao government was to find places where they could go. It wasn't an issue of just taking an individual or even a family or maybe two or three families and saying, "Here is your 10 acres. Do with it what you will." These people wanted to be resettled in villages. They have a very strong clan structure. Finding enough land that was suitable for agriculture to support a whole village was a real challenge for the Lao government.

**ROBERT DUNCAN**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1987-1990)**

*Robert B. Duncan was born in New Jersey in 1934. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1957 he served in the US Army from 1958-1960. His career has included positions in Rabat, Addis Ababa, Algiers, Paris, and Bangkok. Mr. Duncan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 9, 1995.*

*Q: You went to Bangkok from when to when?*

DUNCAN: '87 to '90.

*Q: How did that job come about?*

DUNCAN: In my previous job, I had been the director of the Office of Economic Policy of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. That had given me a chance to travel around a lot, not all, but a lot. I went to most of East Asia. During the course of my travels, I had had the chance to visit Bangkok. It struck me that it was a very interesting place, a very dynamic country. So, I basically decided that I would like to be the economic counselor there and appropriately got on the job. It happened that Joe Winder, a former colleague of mine, was the DCM there. He apparently put in a good word with the ambassador for me. I got the job very quickly. In other words, it was an excellent match. They wanted me and I wanted them.

*Q: What was the political and economic situation in Thailand when you arrived there?*

DUNCAN: On the political side, we had a military presence there in terms of a military training program. We also had very substantial fleet visits. Thailand was the rest and recuperation

location for fleet visits. Of course, the Vietnam War was over when I was there. The major political problem that the ambassador and the DCM seemed to be involved in was the Cambodia development. To be perfectly honest with you, while I was frequently acting DCM, I was only superficially involved in that. I frankly did not get involved in that situation at all. The ambassador apparently had been designated as being the contact point for the (inaudible) group, which was the Sihanouk group in Cambodia. He would regularly meet with him there. He was sort of like an intermediary.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

DUNCAN: For most of the time I was there, it was Dan O'Donohue. When I first arrived, it was Brown, who went on to become ambassador to Israel. He was the one who was basically instrumental in getting me assigned there.

*Q: I have a long interview with Dan O'Donohue. I've got to get one with Brown. What was the domestic political situation in Thailand as you saw it?*

DUNCAN: The country was moving in the direction of what we would more or less call a Western style constitutional monarchy. The King was increasingly revered by the people. He was playing his role very, very well. He tried to stay above the nitty gritty political fray. By playing his cards very carefully, he was sort of like Juan Carlos in Spain. He could intervene when he wanted to, but he played his cards very carefully. The power of the monarchy, particularly in the personality of the present king, cannot be underestimated. He is really revered by the people and no politician would dare take him on. He would be in bad shape.

But the military, who had for years basically put the King and his brother on the throne, and who had dominated (It was a military dictatorship for years and years and years.), while their power was relatively diminishing as the economy was booming, they still played a powerful role in the state. The military, in a way, was almost like the state within the state. It was very interesting. The business community viewed the military as being basically a problem. On the other hand, the business community, in effect, did not feel it would have the power to get rid of them. So, there was this equilibrium type of situation that was going on. It was a very fascinating situation for me as the economic counselor basically because it was a booming economy. It was really a booming economy. It was almost growing at the max level that it could grow. The Thai were very hardworking, dedicated people. So, from an economist's point of view, it was really quite thrilling to see how effective a central market economy could be. It wasn't an entirely market economy. There were still these critical state enterprises, particularly in the infrastructure area that the military controlled, the telephone system, the ports, the power system, and things like that. That was probably the weakest area in the economy. That is, the inability of the political structure to deliver the infrastructure services that were required for the economy to grow at its maximum level. But otherwise, it was quite interesting.

Parenthetically, I had another job, too, but I won't mention it now. WE can come back to that later. I was also the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations Economic Commission for East Asia and the Pacific. That had many fascinating elements to it.

*Q: We'll pick that up later. Looking at the Thai economy and your role as economic counselor, how did you get around? How were contacts and what was your impression of the economic people in Thailand?*

DUNCAN: We start out looking at it in terms of the private sector. The economy was largely dominated, particularly in the Bangkok area, by the Thai Chinese. But American and Japanese investors were flowing into the country because they viewed it as being a wonderful market opportunity not only for Thailand as a market, but for producing things for sale elsewhere in Asia and in America. While I was there, AT&T opened up its cordless telephone plant. There is an example of how manufacturing moves in the global economy. The plant originally was in Louisiana and then it moved to Singapore and then it moved to Thailand. It was basically taking advantage of the labor cost differentials. There was big electronic manufacturing. The whole area was booming. Thailand was basically shifting from originally essentially an agricultural economy. Rice was still a major export, but the role of agricultural production in the economy was minor. The manufacturing sector of the economy was growing constantly relative to the agricultural sector. Also, when we were there, the delightful thing was that Thailand was absolutely in the midst of a phenomenal tourism boom. I think, if I recall correctly, that tourism was the second largest industry. We had loads of tourists not only American tourists, but Europeans, Japanese, Australians, and what not pouring through the country.

The main focus of my attention on our bilateral relations side was trade issues. The two biggest ones that I had to deal with were the general category of intellectual property protection. The major problem I had to deal with was pharmaceutical patent protection. The other issue which was my burden was trying to gain market access for American cigarettes which were legally banned. It was, in many ways, a rather humorous situation. Smuggling of American cigarettes in particular was big business. It was linked to the criminal elements in the country. But the cigarettes were readily available, but not legally available. So, what the American industry was trying to achieve was to gain legal market access for American cigarettes. There were two dimensions opposed to it. One was the cigarette monopoly within Thailand. That was one of the things controlled by the military. I can't confirm that this was true, but I think that, in addition to the fact that they wanted to preserve their own cigarettes from competition, which was a major factor in their resistance, there might have been some linkage with the rakeoffs that were coming through the rather extensive smuggling operation. I don't know that for a fact, but I think that there may have been. There is no question that the interests that were involved with the state monopoly were, in effect, fighting tooth and nail to prevent the legalization of cigarette imports. The other dimension of the problem, which I think was part legitimate and part hypocritical if I can use an analogies situation, take the human rights situation in China. There are perfectly sincere people who are concerned about human rights questions who would be critical of the Chinese for their human rights behavior. But there is another group of people who are primarily motivated by a desire to restrain imports of Chinese goods and, therefore, they use the human rights issue as an argument, in effect, to obtain protection hypocritically. In Thailand, I think that that was also true on the health issue as far as cigarettes are concerned. There were people who legitimately viewed legalization of American cigarette imports, they wanted to ban, in the extreme case, the marketing of cigarettes. But then there were these other people who, I think, were using the health reason, the big dirty Americans trying to get in. I was sort of acting like an agent for the United States Trade Representative (USTR). I like to think of myself as a

wonderful example of how the Foreign Service, in effect, can operate as an agent for a U.S. agency other than the State Department. In this particular case, the USTR people would regularly come out for negotiations. I would get my instructions. But particularly the cigarette question was a bag of worms. I think I'm not being egotistical in saying that they were more than delighted for me carry the bricks on fighting on this thing as long as they felt that I was doing the job well and following their instructions. Therefore, they could focus their attention elsewhere. The reason why I think this is true is, when my term was up, I remember one of the assistant trade representatives saying, "Now that you're going back out, we're going to have to work harder." I only mention this basically arguing that I believe institutionally the appropriate way for the Foreign Service to go is to think of itself as more than being an overseas agent of the State Department. It can and should think of itself as being an overseas agent for the United States Executive Branch, a service agency for everybody. I think, if there is mutual respect and cooperation, it will work. I would use my own situation as being an example of that.

*Q: Sticking right now to the cigarette side, was there a problem within the embassy of dealing with cigarettes? Cigarettes by this time had become rather unpopular because of the medical effects of cigarettes. Yes, it's a major export, but it's a dangerous export.*

DUNCAN: I think that there were activists within the embassy staff who sincerely shared the views of counterparts in the Thai society who felt that this was horrendous in other words, the last thing the United States government should be doing was be pushing the sale of cigarettes. I would get a lot of ribbing, but I never felt that that was a major problem. The reason why I think it was not a major problem is that the policy of the embassy, which eventually became the policy of the U.S. government, was that the Thai had the right to establish any kind of regulation system that they wish for the sale of cigarettes in their country. If they wanted as a matter of national policy to ban the manufacturing and sale of cigarettes in Thailand, that was their privilege. All we were saying was, "Whatever regime you decide is the right thing for your country, then you must treat American cigarettes identically to the way you treat your own cigarettes." If you think about it, that really is an extremely different health argument to walk. That finally carried the day. As I said, I am a cigarette smoker myself, which I think was one of the reasons why the companies had confidence in me. But when I would be dealing with the health dimension, I would just use the case "Look, if you believe that the smoking of cigarettes constitutes a significant health hazard that you believe that their sale should be banned in this country, that is your privilege. But you can't have a situation where the manufacturing and sale of Thai cigarettes is perfectly alright, but the importation and sale of American cigarettes is wrong on health grounds." That's the way it worked out.

*Q: What was the response initially?*

DUNCAN: The argument was not finished by the time that I left. I learned afterwards that, as a result of my effort in this regard, eventually Thailand and the United States concluded an arrangement along the lines that I just mentioned. The technical term is "national treatment." In other words, they agreed to permit the importation and sale of American cigarettes under the same regulatory regime of Thai cigarettes. There is a rather humorous element here because the Thai tobacco monopoly imported enormous amounts of American tobacco to manufacture cigarettes. So, basically, what we were doing here was that, on the one regime, we sold tobacco;

on the other regime, we sold manufactured cigarettes. IT was a never ending battle, but I felt confident that I had a defensible position. I got a lot of ribbing, but I did fine.

*Q: You mentioned to me off-mike yesterday that you were asked to go on a Thai military broadcast.*

DUNCAN: One of the TV stations that was operated by military, yes.

*Q: How did that work?*

DUNCAN: What they had was, they had a correspondent on there. We had an interview taped and then the taped interview was put on the military thing. What they actually did is, they would have countervailing arguments sort of interspersed with it. My own view when they put it on is that it was fairly dumb. In other words, I had a chance to present the American view thoroughly and fairly. Then they had other people putting their comments in. I got two reactions. One was "My God, how could you possibly go on and defend cigarette sales?" Other people said to me that it was fair.

*Q: Did you find on the tobacco issue and maybe other issues that nationalism was, although this may have been a military monopoly, that they were playing the nationalistic card?*

DUNCAN: That was not a major card that was being played. The major card that was being played was the health card. But I don't believe that that was the problem. I think the problem was that there were some strong financial interests in the status quo and they did not want to change.

*Q: You mentioned that there was another issue you were dealing with?*

DUNCAN: A parallel issue that I was dealing with all the time was the protection of intellectual property. The particular issue that I was focused on there was pharmaceutical patent protection. This was a much more complicated problem. What this was was that intellectual property exports are one of America's major competitive exports. Patent of pharmaceutical products are an important element of that. Other countries were basically making counterfeit copies of American medicine that was still under patent. This was being manufactured and being sold in Thailand.

Another element of it was cassette counterfeiting, copyrighted popular music that was being manufactured in Thailand and then being sold on the streets in Thailand. This was not just a problem in Bangkok. You had had problems in Hong Kong, but they cleaned up their act. You had problems in China of this going on. So, this was a major policy issue for the United States, which was to extend the international system of copyright and patent protection, particularly in East Asia.

As I said, my particular area was in Thailand. I had worked on the more general question in my previous job and now I became, in effect, an implementing agent for that area. I worked very closely with the representatives of the Americans and with European pharmaceutical manufacturers to deal with this problem, which is really a multinational problem.

*Q: Was the military involved? Were there political or economic interests that were powerful politically within Thailand opposing what you were trying to do?*

DUNCAN: The cassette operators who were manufacturing the counterfeit cassettes, which was a major problem for the United States, were for videotapes. For the Europeans, it would be counterfeit watches. There was money there, but I don't think... Some of the stuff they said was actually being manufactured by plants that were under military control. But periodically, you would have sort of smashups of this stuff. They would come out and roll a steamroller over the markets. It was one of the big tourist attractions. When the tourists come to Bangkok, they pick up these counterfeit watches and all this sort of stuff. I don't think that that was the real problem. I think that what was the real problem is that there was money to be made in manufacturing generic pharmaceutical products. There was a very strong feeling that patent protection for pharmaceuticals, in effect, was morally wrong. You had problems where they were being manufactured in Czechoslovakia and in Spain. We had had a big problem in India. I think we still do.

*Q: In Iran.*

DUNCAN: It is a mental position. In other words, I guess in a developing country mentality, that "Look, this is capitalist robber baron on our people's health." As they themselves developed I'm thinking of the Hong Kong example, where they started to make movies and they were making musical cassettes. Then all of a sudden, they realized that "We've got an interest in this copyright and patent protection ourselves." They would then shift. I think that that is why Hong Kong, which had been a major problem, became a lesser problem. The reason why is because all of a sudden they realized that it was in their interests. I think this is a continuing problem. We have to incorporate it in the latest GATT round. This was a case of where, in contrast to the cigarette question, I felt that the American attitude was historically demonstrated as being correct. It's the question here of trying to educate people into this being the right way to go for all of this. I used to use the historical example in Thailand that in the United States, we didn't have copyright protection for many years. As a consequence, as soon as an English novelist or what not would publish a book, in America, they would immediately counterfeit copies of it. Everybody had it, was selling it and what not. Dickens would not be getting royalties from this operation. Back in the 19th century, this was a major source of stress. I said that what demonstrated at the time was that American culture itself was terribly handicapped by the existence of this situation, not only because they had to compete with ripoff foreign novelties, notably British, but even if they did produce something, they couldn't protect themselves. It wasn't until the Americans developed an effective copyright system which, in effect, our own culture began to develop... Maybe I was exaggerating the case, but I don't think so. I think there is real historical validity in that statement. I think that that was the issue, that putting it on the broadest balance, "Look, you are engaged now in manufacturing, which we used to do in the United States. This is your imperative advantage to do it like the example I gave you of the wireless telephone sets. If you want us to open our markets to purchase this stuff from you, then you have to permit us to sell the material fairly that we have a comparative advantage." It's at that level. I believe that in the end it's going to work out. But it is slow slogging because, particularly in pharmaceuticals, the problem is the big expense, the research and development.

*Q: In other words, the people who get out there in the labs.*

DUNCAN: Yes. That's the big expense. Once the product is developed in labs and the human and animal testing is done to make sure that it is safe, then the actual manufacturing of this stuff is quite cheap. Therefore, if you can get the protocol of the product and then just manufacture it locally, you can make a fortune. But if you let a system like that persist, eventually people aren't going to develop new drugs because they can't get the return on their investment.

*Q: With copyright problems with books and tapes, these can be done in the back corner of an alley. This can be big business, but at the same time, it also can be done by small entrepreneurs. But the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals requires a fairly large apparatus. We're talking about rather concentrated interests there. I would think this would be more difficult dealing with it politically in negotiations as opposed to the other one, which is really more a police job.*

DUNCAN: Right. Absolutely.

*Q: Were there interests in the pharmaceutical business that gave you problems?*

DUNCAN: It was the American and European pharmaceutical manufacturers who were pushing this.

*Q: I'm talking about in Thailand.*

DUNCAN: In Thailand, the issue was not just the issue of the manufacturing of the pharmaceutical products. The issue was whether or not pharmaceutical products should receive patent protection in Thailand. That was the problem. It was basically a government to government issue. In other words, what the pharmaceutical companies in Thailand were doing was perfectly legal in Thailand. We were basically trying to turn something which was legal into something that was illegal.

*Q: Was this being done at your level or at sort of all levels of government?*

DUNCAN: At all levels?

*Q: We're talking about the trade representative, in the United Nations, wherever this could be done. This must have been an issue that was not just U.S.-Thailand, but U.S.- India and elsewhere.*

DUNCAN: Absolutely. I was just involved in the Thai I hate to call it bilateral because it was also multilateral. We were trying to get the Thais on board to not only support this thing in their own country, but to support an international regime to regulate this thing for everybody, all GATT members. In my previous job, I was dealing with it on an Asiawide basis. When I was in my Bangkok job, I was just dealing with the Thai issue, but it wasn't just the bilateral dimension. It was also the multilateral dimension.

*Q: How responsive did you find the Thai officials you were dealing with on the pharmaceutical*

*problem?*

DUNCAN: It depended. In the Health Ministry, it was a blank wall. It was an uphill struggle. The Health Ministry favored the status quo, which provided cheaper pharmaceutical products for the state. They weren't interested in the trade dimension. They were interested basically in the health of the Thai people and the cost of the Thai health system. They may have had some financial interest in it, too. That was the obstacle. Dealing with the Trade Ministry and dealing with the Foreign Ministry and what not. They understood where we were coming from. So, they were trying to see if something could be worked out. On the other hand, it was agonizing. In the end, I would describe it this way: The Thai were working to participate in an international system. They did not want to do anything bilaterally that would be better than what the international system was. So, we were trying to solve an immediate problem and deal with the bigger problem. I think both sides recognized that the way we were going to eventually deal with this was through the larger problem, but that didn't mean that we still couldn't try with the lesser problem. Eventually, the multilateral trade negotiations came up with a regime.

*Q: As you were working on this thing, in a way, you felt that you were helping both to educate and to exert pressure for them eventually to come around, to point out that the writing was on the wall if they wanted to be part of the international scheme of things.*

DUNCAN: The Thais were a long-term independent country. They had a very strong sense of national identity. It has been preeminent historically in defending national interests. I felt that I was dealing with very intelligent people, very knowledgeable people. They had a domestic interest that did not give them free reign to do whatever else they might want to do. But I think, on the other hand, as I said, in contrast to the cigarette question, where the bottom line was hypocrisy, on this issue, the bottom line wasn't hypocrisy. The bottom line issue was the \$64 question "Should there be patent protection for pharmaceuticals?" There was a difference of opinion on that question. I think the Health Ministry felt "No." I think there were others elsewhere in the world that shared that view. So, this was trying to work out a mutually acceptable arrangement.

*Q: What was your impression of our pharmaceutical industry's response to the situation?*

DUNCAN: This was big business for them, a major target. They had put major pressure on the American government to move in this direction. The American government had really adopted it as probably one of the major pillars of its trade policy. This was "Do it," no question about that.

*Q: Moving to another topic, you mentioned that AT&T moved their cordless telephone to Thailand. Was there concern on our part about the movement of manufacturing from American labor to Thai labor?*

DUNCAN: There may have been problems back in Washington in terms of the congressional protections, interests, and things like that. But that wasn't a problem for the American embassy in Thailand because this was a question of a successful American investment. The Thais were happy to have it and AT&T was glad to do it. From our perspective, this was not a problem.

*Q: This morning, there was an article in the paper (This is 1997.) about the real problem with the Thai economy. The Thai currency was having real difficulties. What was your impression at the time about the state and the prognosis for the Thai economy, its underpinnings?*

DUNCAN: In the '87'90 period, it was very upbeat. In other words, the present problems of the Thai economy seven years later are a result of problems subsequent to 1990. At the '87'90 period, Thailand was not having any financial crisis. It was having an economic crisis in the sense that the economic growth of the country was outrunning the ability of the infrastructure of the country to support it. But there was not a financial crisis in the sense that they had an unsustainable trade deficit, not at all.

*Q: As you and the officers in your section were looking at the Thai economy, did you see any problem areas? You mentioned recently and today that one of the problems seemed to be the educational system at the midlevel. Did you see that at that point?*

DUNCAN: Yes. That was recognized as being a problem in the sense that, to a degree, the Thais tried to upgrade the technological content of their economy, that it was going to require more skilled labor. In other words, at the time that I was there, in the manufacturing sector and obviously in the tourist sector, the agricultural sector, it was basically unskilled labor. It was lowlevel at the skill level. The Thai educational and social system was generating as the boom went on, they started getting labor shortages. For that level of operation, the Thais were terrific. That is why the country was found by manufacturers to be a wonderful place to do these things. Other countries like India or China, which would have comparable skilled labor or maybe not so comparable, but close, would become and did become competitors for the same type of manufacturing. So, like in Singapore, the issue that they had to face was that as the economy grew and the standard of living rose and what not, they were going to have to increase the skill level of the population. This was where the bottleneck of inadequate secondary education appeared. It was back in the '87'90 period that it was recognized as being a problem. The government did not deal with it. That is, their ability as Thai unskilled manufacturing becomes noncompetitive if they can't shift they're going to have a problem. The only way you can adjust is, you reduce the value of the batt, you reduce the cost of the labor.

*Q: What was your impression of corruption within the Thai political/economic situation and how it impacted on Thais' ability to respond to economic factors?*

DUNCAN: The only area where I feel pretty confident in saying that corruption was a problem was in the infrastructure area where the provision of services was designed in such a way that there were rakeoffs to get it. As the economy was booming, this was not only an inadequate provision of services, but the corruption was actually aggravating the problem because it was hindering the system to respond to the market need. The case that I would just give as one example is that the telephone system was inadequate for the needs of the economy. There were waiting lists. You had to wait to get a telephone. The belief was that the shortage was contrived, that they were maintaining the waiting list because the corruption did not come in "paying for a phone," but it's getting on the top of the waiting list to get a phone where the rakeoff would come from. Another example was the crane monopoly in the ports, where the cranes were incapable of coping with the demand. Therefore, they were required to use them. Therefore, in effect, what

you were doing was, you were getting a rakeoff situation. The port was getting clogged because the monopoly couldn't deliver. Maybe it chose not to deliver? I think that the competence level was a problem, too. That's what I'm talking about where I think it was a problem. Maybe there was clearing customs documents and things like that. There may have been some corruption there, too, but that didn't seem to be a handicap. It didn't seem to be a handicap to the economy.

*Q: With respect to the ports and the telephones, who was in charge it?*

DUNCAN: The military. Those were state enterprises effectively run as military pikes. The port was the navy. The telephones was the air force, I think. The railroads was the army.

*Q: What was your impression as an economist of the military control of elements of infrastructure? What was your impression of the military leaders as economic figures?*

DUNCAN: It wasn't their strength. In the electric power generation area, they did basically a very good job. My understanding is that the King had taken a personal interest in this area. They were doing a very good job in delivering heat. The power requirements, in contrast to the Philippines, where they had tremendous outages and things like that, that was not true in Thailand. They had to work like dogs to keep up with the booming demand, but they were doing it because they were responding to the state monopoly. But they were responding to a market demand and making money straightforward on that. I contrast that operation with the telephone thing that I spoke to you about. What I understand happened in Thailand is that the people just sort of got around the bottleneck by going with mobile phones. But this was a case of where like the cranes in the port and the telephone shortages and what not, were a major constraint on the economic development of Thailand. The individuals that were involved were obviously permitting this thing to go on because it was in their "personal interest."

*Q: Looking at this '87-'90 period in the economic sphere, were members of the royal family or were they involved in shortages or deals?*

DUNCAN: I had no indication that the King was involved in corruption. I'm not aware of any case. Certainly his eldest daughter was not. The Crown Prince was controversial in terms of his personality, but I do not believe that where corruption was a problem. Throwing his weight around was a problem. His behavior pattern was a problem. Certainly the Queen Mother was not.

*Q: What about textiles? Were they an issue or had that pretty well passed Thailand by this time as far as we were concerned?*

DUNCAN: No, there was quite a developed textile industry in Thailand. They were moving more toward electronics, but there were major textile manufacturers, and very good ones, too.

*Q: As far as American policy, had we learned to live with textiles out of the country?*

DUNCAN: There were nitty gritty sort of problems with quota adjustments and things like that. But I would not view it as being... It was an annoyance in the sense that the Thais sometimes felt that we were not being reasonable. The textile regime was designed to restrain imports to the

United States. The Thais' interests was to maximize their exports. So, you have this dynamic of "Why are you violating the quota on this particular type of pants?" We dealt with it, but it tended to be nuts and bolts.

*Q: What about cooperation or congruent interests, particularly with the European powers or with Japan or Thailand? Was everything pretty much on a bilateral basis?*

DUNCAN: I think it was largely on a bilateral basis. We had much more close relations with Thailand than any European power. The Japanese, of course, had a huge involvement there, largely economic. But they had their own arrangements. They had their arrangements. Our role in that country politically and militarily was so big that all of our problems... On the major GATT round, we were closer to the Thais in terms of their objectives than we were to the Europeans, particularly in the agricultural area. So, as a consequence, we were actually allied with the Thais against the European Community.

*Q: The Thais were exporters of rice and we are exporters of rice and other products. So, we wanted to open things rather than close them.*

DUNCAN: To close and control export subsidies.

*Q: Were there any other economic issues before we go on?*

DUNCAN: Just one final one on the rice issue. We had a rice subsidization program in the United States which was a major source of problems with Thailand. The Thais viewed this as being an outrage. I'll be perfectly honest with you. Our own trade people didn't dispute that fact. It was a political dynamic within the United States and where this thing had happened. The solution was "Look, this is why we want to get this thing taken care of in a multilateral framework to give us a basis on which to cut it back." They were really irritated. Speaking perfectly honestly, it was totally justified.

*Q: How did you respond when you were on the wrong side of an issue?*

DUNCAN: The way you respond is "Yes, this is something we have to deal with and this is the way to deal with it." They would like a solution today. It was the load stones. That's the diplomatic (inaudible). You have to drag it around by your neck.

*Q: Your personal albatross.*

DUNCAN: My albatross, right.

*Q: Turning to the regional role, you were doing what?*

DUNCAN: I was the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations Economic Commission for East Asia and the Pacific. The thing that made this job particularly interesting was not the substance of the work that we were doing in the ECA. I don't want to overstate that because that tends to denigrate it. But the issues that we were dealing with tended to be issues

like some of the old Third World type issues, the nasty multinational corporations. Actually, we got a lot of battles between the Pakistanis and the Indians because they were also members. But the thing I wanted to talk about was, yes, we dealt with all of those problems, but the thing that was absolutely fascinating for me during the few years that I served there is, this was the end of the Cold War period. Therefore, in dealing with these daily issues of the UN structure, it was the changing relationship between the Americans and the Russians, and the Americans and the Chinese in this context. For example, when I came onto the job, my predecessor in the embassy had told me that the Russian representative (or, at that time, the Soviet representative) was a NKBD type and totally involved in being obstreperous and disagreeable and very anti-American: tirades against capitalism, this sort of stuff. Sort of a "Nyet" type. So, I was expecting that my tour here was going to be in this job like his: constantly publicly debating the Soviets on one ideological question after another. The first session that I attended (I accompanied him to his last session, which was my first session to be introduced and what not), we got a pristine performance from Boris. That was the Soviet representative's name. Shortly thereafter when I took over the job, Boris disappeared. We had a new Soviet representative. He had been an international civil servant in the UN system and had worked for many years in Geneva. He obviously, in retrospect, had received instructions to cooperate with the Americans. The whole environment completely changed. We would present our position and then he would go to the microphone and say, "We completely agree with your position." It was such a shock, the change (It was obviously apparent to everybody there.), that it took me three months at least before I was prepared to even consider taking this thing at face value. As you well are aware, there are all sorts of rules in dealing with Soviets, the old rules, that you never want to get yourself in a position where you are alone, where you don't have somebody with you. You're supposed to write it up if anything special goes on. The old Cold War rules. He was obviously engaged in a position to cultivate us. The question is, what gives here?

*Q: I might point out that in this '87'90 period, there still was a Soviet Union. This was Cold War Russia. It became the power.*

DUNCAN: Definitely. The other interesting dimension to the thing, which was rather humorous, was that it was obviously apparent to the Chinese that there had been this adjustment. My relations with the Chinese representative were quite good, but the Chinese was getting very aggravated about the fact that the Soviet was, in effect, supporting the American position and the poor Vietnamese representative didn't know what was going on. It was this whole dimension of the situation which was, to me, the most absolutely fascinating part of the job, rather than the nuts and bolts of the United Nations economic and social program for this institution in the Pacific.

I'll give two stories that I think are so fascinating. We were a problem of Lithuania. I'm having difficulty trying to recall the specific details of what was going on in Lithuania. The Soviet Union still existed and Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union. The question was, the Lithuanians were pressing for independence. I don't recall the details, but there was obviously some indication of opposition from the Russians to this Lithuanian drive for independence. So, the thing sort of tended to be heating up. I had been having this era of good feeling with my Soviet counterpart for quite some time. I saw this thing coming up. Not that I had any instructions on the subject at all, but just as a friendly gesture, I said to him, "Alex, I really hope

that we're not going to have bloodshed in Lithuania." To my absolute amazement (I think this was the first time), he came back to me and said, "Oh, absolutely not. You just have to understand that Gorbachev has to have a referendum. The Lithuanians can have their independence. There is enough Lithuanians, they have a sufficient majority that under the existing constitution for withdrawal from the Soviet Union that they can vote under a referendum for independence. There are plenty of votes there. They are a very civilized people. ("Civilized" is a word, incidentally, that the Russians use all the time.) They can go. But Gorbachev's problem is what he's got in the Caucus. He cannot afford to have an independent declaration of independence without a referendum because in the Caucus, if we had people in the Caucus unilaterally declaring their independence, we're going to have a civil war on their hands and it's going to be awful. Gorbachev has to have a referendum in Lithuania." Well, I came away from this discussion saying, "Oh, my God. Is this being reported somewhere else? Is this the official line?" So, I did up a message reporting this conversation and then checked it out with a couple of people in the embassy. I said, "Do you see any reason why I shouldn't send this?" This was going back to Washington. They said, "Well, that's what he said." So, it was sent. I was told a number of years later when I met Paul Wolfowitz that "Bob, I just want to let you know how important that message was. That really solved our problem." Of course, it worked out.

The other one which I think was absolutely fascinating... This was my relationship with this guy who, more and more, whatever we need done on the UN, he is supporting me. I made every effort I could to try to be cooperative, too. But it's obvious that he had instructions to work with the Americans. This one day in a cocktail party, I think, I was meeting with him again. I can't remember exactly how this conversation began. He was starting to speak about the breakup of the Soviet Union. This was before the Soviet Union had broken up, so we're very close here to my departure time somewhere in '90. Gorbachev was still there. I have to give you a little background on this. What was leading up to this conversation is that we were having all these things going on in the Soviet Union. My Soviet colleague would be saying things to me like "Well, they haven't gotten rid of all the problem ones yet." Then he said, "Now, we got rid of the problem ones." It was in that context where he was sort of dropping this type of commentary, he came out and said, "The Soviet Union is going to break up. It is no longer possible for us to maintain control over all of these peripheral republics. It's impossible. So, the Soviet Union is going to break up. What is going to be left is going to be Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Russia." This came completely out of the blue. I said to myself, "Is this new policy?" There was no indication, at least from what I knew, that this was going to happen. So, I decided, "Well, I certainly can't report this thing. Obviously, here I am in Bangkok out at the end of the world and I'm talking to this Soviet guy. I don't know what he stands for." It was not too long afterwards, within a month, I think, that was the head of the Economic Division of the Soviet Foreign Ministry was coming out to a conference in Bangkok. This is at the cocktail party. I had met him because he was sort of the Soviet representative for this conference that I was the U.S. representative for. We were standing in this cocktail party and I said to him, "I was talking with Alex and he was indicating that the Soviet Union was going to break up and that the remnant, what would be left, would be Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Russia. Is that policy? Is that true?" He said, "Oh, yes, absolutely true. Only Kazakhstan will be in. That's almost 50% Russian." On the basis of that conversation, then I sent the cable in to let them know what the Soviets were telling me, that the Soviet Union was going to break up. You can see, this was the part that was so fascinating on this job.

I can give you one other story which is related to this thing. They had this Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) run by a Scot up country in Bangkok, which sort of pretended to be a UN sponsored operation. It was like an MIT, CIT, what not. It was a fine institution, basically training Asian engineers. One of the problems we had was that the Taiwanese were in there as well as Chinese. They had a problem where they were going to have a Taiwan day or a Taiwan flag or something like this. The Mainland Chinese came in on this thing and they went to the Scot guy who was running this thing and, in no uncertain terms, said to him... It was a real strong-arm operation. It was sort of a quasi independent type trusteeship system they had. I think the American ambassador ex-officio was one of the trustees. He had to get out of the job. There was a conflict of interest, not personal, but government. He had to resign the job. This thing was going on. I went to my Chinese colleague and said, "I don't exactly what your objective is, but this Asian Institute of Technology is a very fine institution and doing very fine things in training Asians. I certainly hope that the Chinese government is not in a posture of trying to wreck this institution." He said, "Bob, don't worry a bit. We think this place is absolutely great. The minute we get this little problem taken care of, we're just going to pour money and people into the place" and they did. I only bring this story up because it's another example of how sensitive this Taiwan issue is for the Chinese.

*Q: Were there any other elements we should discuss about this Bangkok time?*

DUNCAN: No, I don't think so.

**KEITH McCORMICK**  
**Deputy Political Counselor**  
**Bangkok (1989-1991)**

*Keith P. McCormick was born in California in 1944. He attended the University of California-Berkeley, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy as well as the University of Geneva. He served in the US Air Force before joining the Foreign Service. Overseas McCormick served in Luxembourg, South Africa, Thailand, and New Zealand. McCormick was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.*

*This is the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 2000. Keith, you were going to Bangkok, so let's talk just a bit about Thai training. How did you find the language? As we get older, sometimes it doesn't get easier.*

MCCORMICK: It doesn't get easier. I disliked it very much. I think it was probably difficult for language teachers to deal with FSOs. The quality of the language training was really quite good. I left there with a competent ability to speak Thai.

*Q: One of the problems I found is that it is very hard as an adult, to put yourself back into being a child and repeat all the time.*

MCCORMICK: It's frustrating, but that's what you have to do.

*Q: Were you picking up anything on Thai culture from your language? Sometimes you get a pretty good idea of what you are up against through the people, with your teacher.*

MCCORMICK: Yes, quite a bit. The organized attempts to convey Thai culture were probably a little too childish to be useful. But just by talking to our instructors, going to lunch with them, yes, absolutely. You gain a great deal of insight into Thai culture. And it would have been quite silly, particularly in Thailand's case, to go there without sufficient preparation in that part of the exercise.

*Q: Well, how about briefings for the political world because of the complex political situation there?*

MCCORMICK: Those were not very good at FSI. They had people who were perfectly capable of giving them, but they weren't allowed to. The level of sophistication had to be kept at what was appropriate for everyone – ambassadors, secretaries, everyone in between. FSI was so afraid of being accused of elitism that it approached things at the lowest common denominator.

*Q: You got there in what - '89?*

MCCORMICK: I got there in '89. I was supposed to head the internal political unit, but some genius realized that I simply wouldn't have been very good at that in Thailand, while I was exactly what they needed as the head of the foreign political section. So they changed my assignment. In theory, we handled all of Thailand's foreign relations, included bilateral relations. In practice, life was dominated by the war going on in Cambodia next door.

*Q: Lets talk about the political situation in Bangkok - what was it at that point?*

MCCORMICK: In Thailand, parties really have the old original sense of the word - a group of people who band together for the purpose of contesting for political power. Ideology was very weak. Throughout Thai culture, ideology is very weak because they just don't take it seriously. They take personality very seriously. What you get is a series of governments that are democratic in form, reasonably benevolent in substance, with close ties to the military and the Chinese-dominated business community. Fragile, depending for majorities in all kinds of parliamentary maneuvering. Inclined to change quickly. Fascinating stuff. The Thais have a history of coups, but at the time I served there they had a relatively stable, conservative government trying to run the country during a time of enormous economic boom. Thailand was growing economically at a tremendous rate; it was very good for the country in one way, but very destructive in many other ways. And they were trying to do this in a very bad neighborhood. Looking out from Thailand, there were nothing but problems in most directions.

*Q: Yes. You have Burma, China, and Vietnam.*

MCCORMICK: Absolutely. With a raging conflict right on the border in Cambodia, which had then caused massive numbers of Cambodians to flee into Thailand. This was taking place against the background of a huge disillusionment with their view of the United State's staying power in

Southeast Asia after the end of the Vietnam War.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

MCCORMICK: Dan O'Donohue.

*Q: I interviewed Dan. How did he operate from your perspective?*

MCCORMICK: As a manager of people, not very well. But as a manager of policy, extremely well. He had a very broad view which included all agencies. He had a good foreign service sense of the strategic situation, which was extremely complicated at the time. The Khmer Rouge had taken over Cambodia and had led to the killing fields, which was an unbelievable holocaust. It had been brought to an end by a Vietnamese communist invasion of Cambodia, which left an unpopular government in Phnom Penh which we opposed. That left the United States in an impossible situation. We didn't support this communist government in Phnom Penh, but a coalition of three opposition forces. One of them was the royalist forces led by Prince Sihanouk and his son Prince Ranariddh, and another was the republican non-communist opposition led by Son Sann. But the third group was the Khmer Rouge. Those three groups, with nothing in common except their opposition to the communists, were in a weird political and military alliance, with their bases along the Thai border.

*Q: During this time, what were the relations of Thailand to Cambodia? Whom were they recognizing and how were they viewing the situation?*

MCCORMICK: They backed the resistance, but were very careful not to do so in a way that would get them into a shooting war with Cambodia and certainly not with their patron, Vietnam. Cambodian forces were no threat to Thailand but the Vietnamese army was. It was a very delicate situation and it also involved Thailand's neighbors in southeast Asia, members of ASEAN, who still believed in the domino theory and were very afraid that Vietnam would threaten all of them.

*Q: This is really 15 years later.*

MCCORMICK: A mere 15 years later, the Thai would have said.

*Q: While you were looking at our relations with Cambodia, were you or any of the officers who were dealing with this concerned about some of the company, like the Khmer Rouge, that we were getting involved with?*

MCCORMICK: Very concerned. That was the fundamental problem. We couldn't actually go inside Cambodia. The U.S. had no embassy there; we didn't recognize Cambodia. We also had no embassy in Vietnam; we didn't recognize Vietnam. We had no way to talk to either of those governments, and we needed to know what was going on in the war. So I spent a lot of time at the border, including giving political guidance to the non-communist rebel forces. On one of my first trips, I was flying out in a helicopter with a group of Thai officers, flying over green rice paddies, and I was struck with a sense of *deja vu*. It was like being back in the middle of the

Vietnam War. That war was over, we were past all that. And yet on the ground in Bangkok, in the U.S. embassy, which was a huge, sprawling complex, there was a sense that we were still fighting the Vietnam war. They were the enemy. I found that disturbing. Officially, the U.S. backed the non-communist resistance, not the Khmer Rouge, but in reality they were all operating together, so we had this very tricky problem, how to support the two non-communist partners and not their Khmer Rouge allies.

*Q: Was there any realistic hope that the incursion forces would prevail during this '89 to '91 phase?*

MCCORMICK: I didn't think so. The station was convinced there was. I arrived just at the beginning of the big push, starting in the northwest corner of Cambodia. I thought all of this with its maps and plans and charts of weapons flows was unrealistic. What I wanted to know was how all this was going to get us to a political end game in Phnom Penh. We began to try to work out more of a political strategy based on how this could somehow end up with the non-communists in power and not the Khmer Rouge.

*Q: You have an extreme, leftist, radical Communist Party fighting a more centrist Communist group.*

MCCORMICK: Yes. A falling out of thieves. We couldn't understand why Cambodians would support the Khmer Rouge. Why would anybody support the Khmer Rouge? I never believed it was a matter of sheer terror. We began to see that it was driven by patriotism, nationalism. The argument of the Khmer Rouge was that this was Vichy France, and they were the Resistance, Communist perhaps but holding out against the German occupiers. At the intellectual levels they actually used that analogy. So if you could somehow cut a deal to get the Vietnamese out of Cambodia, support for the Khmer Rouge would dry up. They would be isolated. There was a risk here, but if we could do that, they would lose their main advantage, and the non-communist friends of ours would be fighting on their best ground, which was the political arena, instead of the military one where they didn't have a chance.

*Q: It would seem that the bull in the china shop was the Vietnamese army. It could go wherever it wanted, do whatever it wanted and nobody was saying a word until it voluntarily left.*

MCCORMICK: Exactly. So it seemed to me that thinking in military terms was heading us into a dead end. The war was being driven largely by the deliveries of arms and war material. Cut that off and it would dry up much faster than a western conflict would. So the question was how do we cut a deal to cut those arms deliveries off and get the Vietnamese out and pen the Khmer Rouge up? We couldn't deliver arms to our side - it was not legal, Congress wouldn't allow it - but the Chinese were delivering arms to the Khmer Rouge in large quantities. The Soviets were delivering arms to the Vietnamese-backed regime in Phnom Penn. The strategy that emerged was to first see if we could get the superpowers to pull back on the grounds that none of us really wanted Cambodia, we just didn't want the other ones to have it, and cut off the arms flows which were driving things, and then get the Thai and Vietnamese out simultaneously and sort of ratchet the war down to a more political struggle our guys had a chance to win.

*Q: We are talking about strategic denial I guess.*

MCCORMICK: Exactly. What we talked about before.

*Q: American arms were getting to the opposition weren't they?*

MCCORMICK: No. We weren't allowed to give lethal arms to anybody, certainly not to the Khmer Rouge, even through the covert program.

*Q: Well, where did they get their arms?*

MCCORMICK: The Khmer Rouge got them from China, the other two from some ASEAN countries.

*Q: Well, what about the Communist government in Phnom Penn? Was that a government?*

MCCORMICK: The human rights groups said no. The humanitarian NGOs (Non- Government Organizations), the ones that give relief aid, thought it was and thought we ought to simply recognize it so that we could deliver humanitarian aid to the people. The same dilemma we were wrestling with about the homelands in South Africa.

*Q: Well, that would be cause to hold up, wouldn't it? Was this played at all through the embassy where you could observe it in Bangkok, or is this on a higher level?*

MCCORMICK: The final diplomacy was done at the Paris peace conferences convened by the French and Indonesians, but a great deal of the strategic thinking was coming from the embassy. Even a diplomatic settlement at that level wasn't going to move us forward unless we also had some kind of a plan on the ground for how to move the conflict into the political arena where the non-communists could win. That meant possibly some day recognizing Vietnam, perhaps establishing an embassy there. In the meantime, Embassy Bangkok was designated as our only point of contact with Vietnam, and it was bigger than it normally would have been because we had to deal with both Cambodia and Vietnam as well as Thailand. We had people who were sort of waiting to be the nucleus of embassies in Phnom Penn and Hanoi if we did establish them.

*Q: Were these groups mostly independent in looking at Phnom Penn and Hanoi, or were they all coming together in the political section?*

MCCORMICK: Mostly part of the political section. It meant we reported to two different offices in Washington.

Q. How did you deal with these exile movements?

MCCORMICK: They were constantly intriguing and maneuvering with each other, us, the Khmer Rouge, probably Phnom Penh. We didn't know which one of the two would be more likely to prevail. We couldn't take Gallup polls inside Cambodia. Washington backed Son Sann, because his group was better armed and because they couldn't stand Prince Sihanouk. But I was

convinced the royalist movement of Sihanouk and Prince Ranariddh would ultimately prove to be the strongest. I found Ranariddh quite an appealing political figure. He had a western education and many western ideas. Sihanouk was a different matter. But what counted was who was going to come out on top, and how we could make sure they would be democratic and pro-Western. Cambodians have a word for a kind of rallying point around which everybody can compromise, that would appeal to everyone, and that's what Sihanouk, if he went back as the King, would offer. So I wanted U.S. policy to back the Royalists. They couldn't win a war – I used to have to give speeches to their troops in the bush and they were a pretty ragtag lot -- but they might win an election. Washington hated that idea. They assumed that royalists and kings were somehow un-American. But they were wrong/ Eventually the U.S., Soviets, and Chinese all did pull back, and then the inner ring of Thailand, Vietnam, and ASEAN all pulled back and there was a four-way, UN-supervised election and of course the royalists won.

*Q: Were you following events in the Soviet Union at this point? It would seem that Eastern Europe had moved into Western Europe, essentially, and the Soviet Union was going through a time of trouble. Was that beginning to be a factor?*

MCCORMICK: That was the key to it all, of course. We told the Russians this was no time for the Soviet Union to be wasting ammunition on a faraway corner of the world. They had more important things to worry about and Southeast Asia wasn't important to them as long as it didn't fall into the hands of China or some crazy Khmer Rouge psychopaths.

*Q: Were we setting out markers saying we really didn't want any bases here or anything else? Let's get this neutralized?*

MCCORMICK: Yes. That policy had to be fought out, but once it was, that part was pretty clear. The U.S. doesn't want this; the U.S. isn't going back into Southeast Asia in a military sense; we are not going to try to put a military presence in Cambodia.

*Q: What about as these things are being thought - I'm sure from a military mission at the embassy, they would be talking obviously about how to win the war on the ground. What about the CIA? Southeast Asia has been a big area of CIA influence. What were you getting from your pals there?*

MCCORMICK: Well, that post is one of the largest in the world. A lot of the people there had come out of the culture of covert assistance to the Afghans to fight the Soviets and they all had AK-47s on their walls. So the CIA saw this as an extension of the same struggle that had taken place in Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Ethiopia. Their focus was very much on the military. It was also a bit revanchist – the possibility of a rollback of the North Vietnamese.

*Q: Well, did you sense that the embassy, since you were in the political section, you were maybe looking for a political solution but back in Washington there were all sorts of currents and eddies of what to do about it, or was Washington of one mind?*

MCCORMICK: There was no consensus. Nobody really knew what to do. They wanted the Vietnamese out but didn't want the Khmer Rouge in. The whole thing was a huge embarrassment

and difficulty, and there was no desire to get sucked into some new conflict in Southeast Asia. More confusion than a hard debate. So when the State Department and the embassy began to piece together a strategy which might just get us out of this, there was a willingness to give it a try. Solarz, on the Hill, was pushing the same idea.

*Q: What about the Thais? I assume their main thing was they didn't want the bloody Vietnamese army too close.*

MCCORMICK: Exactly. They tried to walk a very careful line, but this is Thailand. There was lucrative, illegal logging inside Cambodia could only be done by complicated arrangements along the border between all kinds of people. There were gem mines in the Khmer Rouge territory in the Elephant Mountains. There were at least 300,000 Cambodian refugees along the border, all of them doing deals with everybody else. Bangkok was officially neutral, but was deeply involved on both sides of the border.

*Q: With the Cambodian refugees, did you find that in our policy the nine governmental organizations dealing with refugees had played a role in our policy?*

MCCORMICK: The refugee people were a very big section of the embassy. We relied on them for a lot of information about the mood and situation at the border and in the camps, because of course the refugees would play a big role in the election and the reconstruction if they did go back. I wouldn't say they played a big role in policy.

*Q: The recognition of Vietnam was a very hard pill for Congress to swallow.*

MCCORMICK: Very. It was later my job in H [the Bureau of Legislative Affairs] to gain the Hill's agreement to open an embassy in Vietnam and get our first ambassador confirmed. It was extremely difficult.

*Q: What happened to the Khmer Rouge in the end?*

MCCORMICK: We were all afraid we might have gambled horribly wrong, that the Khmer Rouge might come back and the killing fields might come back if we did succeed in getting the Vietnamese Army out. But they didn't. It all worked out very much the way we said. There was a UN peacekeeping force and a UN-supervised election, reasonably free and fair under the circumstances. The royalists won, but not decisively. So the communists and Prince Ranariddh's group agreed on a power-sharing arrangement. Horribly inefficient and expensive, but much better than the war. It lasted until 1997 and opened the way for the U.S. to open an embassy. The fighting stopped, and we began to pour money into reconstruction. The Khmer Rouge did not move in and take over a weakened country as one feared they might. It turned out we had been right in our analysis. As soon as the Vietnamese army was out, a lot of their support began to fade. It faded very rapidly and eventually the Khmer Rouge leaders were isolated and this fearsome movement just collapsed, deprived of military and political air.

*Q: Did you find that running this section, as you did, was a very tricky thing and that you were having to sit there with insurrection in the ranks with the junior officers? I would imagine this*

*would cause a lot of people to have very strong opinions.*

MCCORMICK: A lot of junior officers were very worried about the gamble. We were worried about the gamble. They thought the Khmer Rouge would hide their arms and come back later. Others were very troubled by concerns that we were secretly supporting the Khmer Rouge, although in fact we weren't and the easiest way to deal with that was to make sure they saw more of the facts. So there was a lot of angst on that score.

*Q: How did you yourself find dealing with the Thai government? Getting information? What was your impression about how responsive they were?*

MCCORMICK: I found it personally very easy, because my job dealt with the foreign ministry and the National Security Council, which was highly focused in the same direction that we were. Those groups were easy to deal with, we shared traditions, cultured people, we were able to talk on a very sophisticated level. I found it harder to deal with the military. I liked them, but I just didn't have that special rapport, that instinctive understanding that lets you really get inside an institution and know what's really going on, the way I did in South Africa. Sometimes you do and sometimes you don't. The Thai military are a hard-drinking, hard-whoring bunch.

*Q: Well, I'm told that in some places one of the major things you have to do is play golf, and drink a lot in the clubhouse.*

MCCORMICK: We played a lot of golf, and we spent a lot of time on the border. I never had any doubts about depending on them for my safety. I liked Thai officers. In fact, I liked all Thais. Like most Americans who served there, I fell in love with the Thai culture and one of my greatest personal concerns was that I could see traditional Thai culture all around me disintegrating under the impact of the economic boom. We could see life becoming harder, not easier, for the poor. At the same time money was floating around in unbelievable amounts at the top.

*Q: It wasn't a part of your particular bailiwick, but were you getting from your officers in the economic section, "hey, this is a boom, this is based on some personal ties." They were real problems because it blew up not too long afterward.*

MCCORMICK: Everybody in the economic section knew the boom couldn't last, but no, we never reported that to Washington. In retrospect, you wonder how we could have missed it, but nobody wanted to hear that kind of thing. The emphasis was all on the commercial potential. Even the economic work was focused on removing barriers to trade. Inside the embassy there was a feeling that this was the way development was supposed to work. The Thais had done it right. They had a good educational system, a very strong value system, they had brought their birth rate down. It turned out their financial system wasn't really sound, or even honest. I don't remember the warning though. I do remember that all of us were troubled by the environmental disaster this was creating. The Thai had long dismissed environmental thinking as a silly Western preoccupation, they didn't believe it, they didn't want to listen to the warnings. But there was a massive mudslide off a deforested mountainside which buried a village and killed a lot of people. Suddenly there were Thai intellectuals and journalists who were saying, "Well,

maybe there is something to this. Maybe there are costs.” That still was kind of an exception to the general attitude that forests were there to be chopped down and sold just as fast as you could.

*Q: Were a lot of American business people coming there to work?*

MCCORMICK: Factories were springing up in rice paddies faster than you could count them. Shopping malls, highways, everything. There was a huge explosion of construction. I hated the boom. I thought it was ruining Thai culture, I thought it was out of control. They were chopping down their trees and filling in the graceful old canals. Eventually the King said it had all been a very bad mistake.

*Q: What sort of effect did that have on the embassy personnel?*

MCCORMICK: Well, it made housing extremely difficult to find. A lot of people at the embassy had come to Bangkok because they liked living in Southeast Asia and they couldn't go back to Saigon or Phnom Penh. They always complained that what they remembered in Asia was a nice house in a quiet, traditional neighborhood, and now Bangkok was much more like Manhattan and we all lived in apartments. World's worst traffic.

*Q: I was going to say, the traffic must have been a real pain in the ass.*

MCCORMICK: Yes, traffic disrupted everything. We spent huge amounts of time in getting to the foreign ministry and other places.

*Q: The fact that Bangkok was sort of the sex capital of the world and brought hordes of, not so much Americans, but Europeans and others there, this could have a very disrupting effect on an embassy, which is essentially a family. Was this a problem?*

MCCORMICK: It was very disruptive and contributed to the reasons why I left and went on to a totally different kind of place. I had teenage sons, and they were at the age where this was not a good place for them to be. It probably was not out of control. In fact, for the family Bangkok had a number of advantages. There was a very good school there, the International School of Bangkok was absolutely first rate, and it had previously had quite a drug problem but they had brought that problem under control and it turned out to be quite a fine school and a magical experience overall to live in Thailand.

*Q: The problem was renowned there.*

MCCORMICK: By the time I got there it had been brought under. The school was excellent. Life was interesting, good, and safe, for the most part. But the problem of the sex market was extremely disruptive.

*Q: Had AIDS begun to hit there?*

MCCORMICK: Most Thai didn't take it very seriously.

*Q: Well, let's turn to Burma. What was the situation while you were in Bangkok, in Burma and what were our concerns and Thai concerns with Burma?*

MCCORMICK: The Thai were afraid they might have another full-scale war and another flood of refugees just as they had on their eastern border with Cambodia. It really is a very difficult neighborhood. They also didn't want to set a precedent for too much Western interference in the internal affairs of an Asian country, even a thugocracy like Burma. Our dilemma was that half of the world's heroin comes from Burma. To fight it, you need to give aid and intelligence to the government. How could we do that if they would probably use it against their own people? How could we not?

*Q: We had an embassy in Rangoon.*

MCCORMICK: We had an embassy in Rangoon, and Burma policy was made in Washington. So our role was minor: gathering information along the border, pushing the Thai to let a few more refugees in. The biggest problem was the dilemma over drugs.

*Q: I understand the Drug Enforcement Agency is made up of basic cops and they wanted to take an active hand so they could get much more involved than they might. As a political officer, I could see you saying, "Oh my God, they have done it again."*

MCCORMICK: Exactly right. Of course, through AID, we had a program of assistance to replace the cultivation of poppies with the cultivation of something else, and crop eradication, but the DEA types didn't think much of that. For them, all of Northern Thailand and Northeast Burma was the wild west. It was a fantastically open place to operate in. So there was a systemic conflict of objectives.

*Q: It certainly was an active time but then you left in 1991. You said partly because of your family.*

MCCORMICK: Very much. I loved Thailand and the Thai culture even though I could see it changing in front of my eyes. It was a great privilege to live among the Thai for a while and learn from them. But if you had teenage boys there, and you pointed out the sex trade, this was a risk I didn't want to take. There was also a huge pollution problem. The embassy didn't pay enough attention to it. The worst was lead pollution, from unleaded gasoline.

*Q: I might point out, because time is moving on, that lead at that point was a standard additive to gasoline to make it more efficient, and came out of the exhaust pipe.*

MCCORMICK: For all these reasons we asked for another posting.

**RICHARD E. THOMPSON**  
**Chief, Regional Courier Office**  
**Bangkok (1991-1994)**

*Mr. Johnson, a Californian, was educated at the University of Southern California, the University of Madrid, Spain and Occidental College. Joining the Department of State as a Diplomatic Courier, his career took him to diplomatic courier centers in Washington DC; Frankfurt, Germany; and Bangkok, from which he serviced US Embassies throughout the world, collecting and delivering diplomatic pouches. His later assignments in Washington were of a senior managerial nature. Mr. Thompson was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2001.*

*Q: Well, where did you go after that? Or did we fully cover the Washington assignment?*

THOMPSON: Yes, I was the chief of the Bangkok regional courier office.

*Q: Okay. And in that capacity you were responsible for all of the operations out of Bangkok.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: This is your fourth assignment to Bangkok.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: And what were the main things that you did in that period?*

THOMPSON: This was my first experience as actually being in charge of an office. Although it was our smallest office, only 14 traveling couriers, I was in charge of all of the operations out of that office. At that time we went all the way up to Japan and all the way to Fiji and India and Pakistan. We also went to Beijing.

*Q: Where did you intersect at that time with the European network?*

THOMPSON: In the beginning, we used the DCS system out of Kadena in Okinawa. They would bring the material down to us and then later we found that this wasn't reliable. So we established a trunk line using Finnair to Helsinki. The material would come from New York and we had a very large secure warehouse in Helsinki that was being used for the Moscow project anyway, so we simply stored our material there and then took a direct flight from Helsinki to Bangkok once a week.

*Q: Was that a nonstop?*

THOMPSON: Yes. And they gave us a very good air cargo rate, which was very important.

*Q: Now, who would negotiate rates like that, that you say is a fair cargo rate? Would somebody in Helsinki do that? Or would you do that in Bangkok?*

THOMPSON: In this case it was done in Washington, but that was one of my responsibilities to negotiate these special rates. With Thai International, which was our main carrier out of

Bangkok, it was a very interesting experience, dealing with these top airline executives and persuading them either to give us a favorable air cargo rate or to give us a break on the prices of tickets and certain support that we would need. It was sort of a package deal that we had to negotiate from time to time.

*Q: Did you usually do it for a one year contract, or longer?*

THOMPSON: Yes, quite often it was informal. When I was in Bangkok, my biggest crisis that I experienced, the Department took away our ability to fly first class. So we had to fly business class, which wasn't bad at all, because we could still get out of the plane first from business class. The problem was, all of our favorable cargo rates and favorable fares from Thai International were based on the use of first class. When we went down to business class, and the senior executives found out about it, they threatened to stop all of this favorable treatment. For example, they squeezed us at the airport and would not allow us to go out on the tarmac any more. All of these things that were involved in this, plus the cultural problems. So I had to negotiate this in this crisis situation. It just happened almost from one day to the next that the Department stopped the first class travel and put us in business class. Thai International said, okay no more deals. It would have ended up costing the U.S. government more than it would have cost us to fly first class if we had done what they wanted us to do. But I was able to deal with it through a combination of enlisting the support of the political officer and the ambassador in the embassy, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) representative and a host of other people to persuade them that it was in their best interest for us to continue to have this favorable treatment. Because I had the ability to change to other airlines. Not on all the trips, but in certain trips, for example down to Australia I could have easily switched to Qantas. And that was my biggest challenge in my time as the chief of the Bangkok office.

*Q: And you were satisfied with the arrangement that you were able to work out to deal with these issues to fly business class?*

THOMPSON: Yes. It worked out very well. By the way, I found out later that my colleagues in Washington had a very difficult time persuading the department to let us fly business class. The department wanted us to fly cabin class, but they were able to persuade them...

*Q: Your traveling couriers at the time, were they upset about having to switch from first class to something less?*

THOMPSON: Very much so, especially some of the senior people. The senior couriers, they felt like we had let them down. They complained bitterly that they couldn't be up in first class any more. Of course, as it turned out, many of the aircraft were configured such that they didn't even have first class anymore. All they had was business and cabin class anyway. Many of the Thai International flights just stopped first class completely.

*Q: Or, there wasn't really much distinction between first class and business class.*

THOMPSON: No, not really.

*Q: Why don't you talk a little bit more about your status within the mission, within the embassy in Bangkok. Who did you report to? You say you got good cooperation and help from the political officer and the ambassador in this problem with Thai International. But how did you relate generally to other parts of the embassy. Did you report to the security officer?*

THOMPSON: No, my efficiency report was written by the deputy director of the courier service back here in Washington and reviewed by staff, by his deputy assistant secretary.

*Q: In the Bureau of Diplomatic Security.*

THOMPSON: Yes. We were semi-independent. I had a very good relationship with all of the people in the embassy, particularly the admin officer. They were very supportive of us. Perhaps it was because at least in those days we had deep pockets, and when we needed more vehicles, for example, we were able to buy them, and of course they used these vehicles for other purposes when they weren't supporting couriers. It was an independent organization like so many of the other organizations that were attached to the embassy there.

*Q: And you were very much a regional office. You just happened to be located there for reasons that you talked about before, but didn't have a lot to do with Thailand as such. That was where you were based, and obviously you had to deal with the Thai customs and the airline, and so on, but otherwise you could have been somewhere else.*

THOMPSON: Yes. I could have. It could have been Manila, it could have been anywhere. We just happened to be there. From time to time, posts of certain admin officers have been uncomfortable having these regional officers within their jurisdiction, but they were very supportive of the courier service there.

*Q: The embassy in Bangkok is very large.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: It certainly was when you were there. Still is.*

THOMPSON: Yes.

*Q: You had rental housing on the market, or did you have embassy housing?*

THOMPSON: It was embassy housing but there were other nationalities in the same building. It wasn't a separate building as such.

*Q: So, one apartment or several or rented or even owned by the embassy.*

THOMPSON: That's right. And some of the apartment buildings were taken by the embassy people. I was there for four tours and every time I went there the housing got better. It was good at the beginning. It was wonderful. That particular tour, I'd never stayed in a nicer place except my own home here.

*Q: Anything else about this first managerial experience? It sounds like it was a good job to have. How long were you in Bangkok this time?*

THOMPSON: Three years. I guess the thing that impressed me the most was my access to some of the higher levels of the embassy. This was the first time that I was actually a diplomat. I was actually on the diplomatic list. I had a diplomatic license plate. As such, I would go to the country team meeting every week, and I'm kind of a current events junkie and I would read in the Bangkok Post all of these things that were happening in Thailand. We had coups and all kinds of things going on. Very interesting. And then I would go into these meetings and listen to the analysis between the political officer and the deputy chief of mission (DCM) and the ambassador. It was just fascinating to me and I wouldn't miss a meeting simply because I enjoyed that so much of what I would read in the paper and then what they would say was happening. That was one of the highlights because it was very intellectually challenging for me to try and understand the machinations of all these little things that were going on in that country.

*Q: Did those things affect your operations directly? It really didn't, did it?*

THOMPSON: No, except a few times when there was a curfew of course, and then we had to arrange certain things when they had a coup d'etat, which they seemed to have every couple of years or every year. When there were riots and things like that, but other than that, no.

*Q: Anything else during your time there in terms of the network that you had, the fourteen couriers. Everything went pretty routinely other than these various things that you talked about?*

THOMPSON: Yes, I think it went very well.

*Q: Did you travel around? Or you had done that before so you really didn't need to do it?*

THOMPSON: No, I made sure that I took every trip. It was important for the regional diplomatic courier officer to take every trip. You can hardly tell someone about something if you hadn't done it yourself.

*Q: And you continued to debrief the couriers after each trip?*

THOMPSON: No, I had a deputy who did all of those things. I didn't do any of that unless he happened to be on vacation.

*Q: Anything else?*

THOMPSON: No.

*Q: Dick, I think we've pretty well finished up with your assignment as the regional diplomatic courier officer in Bangkok.*

THOMPSON: RDCO it's called.

*Q: Okay... where you supervised the office in Bangkok. Fourteen diplomatic couriers, deputy chief. Anything else we ought to say about that assignment? To reiterate, that took place from about 1991 to 1994.*

THOMPSON: Yes. No, I can't think of anything.

*Q: Okay. Where did you go from there?*

THOMPSON: I returned to the States, where I was assigned in the main office as Deputy Director.

**DAVID LAMBERTSON**  
**Ambassador**  
**Thailand (1991-1995)**

*Ambassador David Lambertson was born in Kansas in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Redlands in 1962. He entered the Foreign Service in 1963, and his assignments abroad included Saigon, Medan, Paris, Canberra and Seoul with an ambassadorship to Thailand.*

*Q: I have down in my notes that you presented your credentials on the 24th of September, 1991.*

LAMBERTSON: I guess that's right.

*Q: This is Thailand, a monarchy, that must have been a very interesting ceremony.*

LAMBERTSON: It was very interesting. Sacie and I had just arrived. I had gotten there in advance of Sacie as a matter of fact. We were staying in the guesthouse because the residence was still being repainted. Sacie brought with her a rented morning coat outfit from the States. It did not fit. It required safety pins here and there to tuck it in and make it look decent. So, we did that.

In Thailand credentials are presented to the king at his palace - Chitlada Palace, an unassuming, Victorian-looking building, a long distance from the Grand Palace. The Thai send a car to pick you up to take you there. It's not a carriage, but an old yellow Mercedes, one of the king's Mercedes. So I rode over there, with an escort from the palace, went into the palace, waited a few minutes in a foyer downstairs and then was told that all was in readiness. While I was waiting I was briefed on what to do: you walk into this rather long narrow room, the king is standing at the far end of it, you make a sharp left turn and walk toward him and stop six feet away from him. He greeted me and I greeted him. I read my speech, and he read his speech. We shook hands, as I presented him my credentials. We conversed for a few minutes and then I took my leave which entailed backing up while still facing him for at least a number of paces and then turning around and walking out. There were only one or two other people in the room. Very

simple. Very dignified.

*Q: Now the king has been king since the war.*

LAMBERTSON: Since 1948. He's the world's longest serving monarch. Just ahead of Queen Elizabeth. He's also the only king ever to have been born in the United States, in Boston while his father was studying at Harvard Medical School. He's a very interesting man and I came to admire him a great deal. I think he played and is still playing a very constructive and important role in Thailand.

*Q: Many of us who have dealt with Thai issues have always been very impressed with the king's deft touch and ability to be a mediator from time to time when their society has needed it.*

LAMBERTSON: That was dramatically in evidence in May of 1992 when the king stepped in just in time to prevent what could have been an even greater loss of life than had already occurred.

*Q: Before we get there, could you give us a description of the embassy? When I was there in the early '70s, I think we were told we were the second or third largest embassy, because you had the regional couriers and the regional this and that, because it was a major transportation center, etc.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, and it was still big when I got there in 1991. I was looking at an Inspector's report from my time there and according to the Inspectors, the total number of people was something like 1,800 – 600-some Americans, 1,200 and some Thai, not counting contractor personnel, and not counting Peace Corps volunteers of which we still had almost 200. It was a very big mission. It still reflected a kind of Cold War configuration to some extent. Our intelligence presence was large. JUSMAG seemed awfully big to me. Then there were a great many other offices and agencies there, including, as you said, a number of regional operations, because Bangkok was and still is today something of a transportation hub. And it's also a relatively low cost place to have skilled people working on your finances or what have you - the regional finance center was particularly impressive I thought. I believe I once counted 26 separate government agencies represented in Thailand, and the Inspector's report that I mentioned identified 35 or so "operating units." I'm not sure what that meant, but it was a very large embassy. It got slightly smaller during my time there.

*Q: How many consulates did we have at that time?*

LAMBERTSON: We had three. Songkhla, Udorn and Chiang Mai. During the time that I was there we closed Udorn and Songkhla. I certainly hope we don't ever close Chiang Mai.

*Q: At the embassy's initiative or Washington's initiative?*

LAMBERTSON: It was mutual. Washington wanted to do it and I couldn't justify standing in front of the train. I regretted having to do it. As I mentioned to you before, I like constituent posts and I think there ought to be other ways to save money rather than to close constituent

posts if at all possible.

*Q: That was Washington's interest, to save money?*

LAMBERTSON: Yes.

*Q: They closed my post.*

LAMBERTSON: Your post? Yes.

*Q: We were talking about what the embassy looked like when you first arrived. You're saying it still is a very substantial mission.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, indeed. It was very big, many different agencies represented. It was clearly going to be an interesting managerial challenge in addition to the other aspects of the job.

*Q: Now, Vic Tomseth was your DCM? He'd been there through Dan so he's pretty solid?*

LAMBERTSON: He's an experienced Thai language officer and it was valuable for me to have him there, coming in brand new to the country except for occasional visits. Vic was a very solid officer, very good judgment about the Thai and good insights into the culture, so I was very lucky to have him. The political counselor was Skip Boyce who had been there about three years at that time. Skip I had known slightly back in the Department. He had worked for the Undersecretary for Security Assistance. I think "T" was the acronym. He and Bob Baurlein. Boyce and Baurlein or Baurlein and Boyce had carved out an influential role for themselves in security assistance matters within the Department. I knew him to be an accomplished bureaucrat. He was also a good political counselor. He was extremely enthusiastic about Thailand. He had in three years of self-study gotten quite fluent in Thai, and so he was a strong member of the team. I had a good economic counselor as well, John Medeiros. Smart, very knowledgeable on all the issues. In general I thought the people there were good. We had some excellent junior officers, too.

*Q: You were commenting that the structure of the embassy reminded, still had aspects of the Cold War and the way we'd organized ourselves during the Cold War and yet by this time ASEAN is an important factor, the Thai relationships with their neighbors, it's less of a bilateral, I don't want to say less of a bilateral relationship that the Thai had, but there's more going on in Southeast Asia now and more for us to begin to watch I would suspect.*

LAMBERTSON: I agree. It was a very different Southeast Asia than when JUSMAG was established, for example, and we were fighting a war in Indochina and the Thai were fighting with us in Laos, and there was a bilateral military relationship with real teeth to it. Now we had only a vestige of that kind of relationship, although a valuable one. I must say, those war years in some respects set the tone of the whole relationship, and established a foundation we were still building on, so to speak. Many of the Thai leaders, many of the military leaders who had become prime ministers, had cut their teeth on the U.S.-Thai military relationship many years before during the Indochina wars. We had personal relationships with many members of the

government that dated from those years and yet, yes, in 1991 Southeast Asia was a very different place. One of the newly important aspects of the relationship that we would have to pay much more attention to in the years to come was bilateral economic relations. The Thai were beginning to be a genuinely significant trading partner and U.S. investment was building to impressive levels. Those kinds of issues were bound to become more important in the overall mix.

*Q: In fact that would be underlined by the fact that American investors weren't the only ones there. The Japanese had a high presence and I suspect the Europeans would, too. It's probably a pretty competitive environment.*

LAMBERTSON: On the economic side it was quite competitive. The Japanese in fact were dominant players in the Thai economy. This had begun as a result of the movement offshore of Japanese manufacturing through the '80s, and they had found Thailand a particularly congenial place to relocate. There were hundreds of substantial Japanese manufacturing operations in Thailand. The Japanese also continued to give huge amounts of low interest loans in their quasi-aid program, so the combination of official flows of money and this massive flow of private investment made the Japanese big players in Thailand. Bigger than we were. The Europeans were also quite active.

*Q: In addition to the businessmen's interest out there, the USG was beginning at this time to be very interested in intellectual property rights. I remember I was in Beijing at this time and we were pressing the Chinese on this. An interesting conversation in which the guys, our counterparts basically said, this is fine, we'll go along with it, but you don't get anything more than Taiwan gave you. In fact I think you said that most of your calls on government officials had to deal with economic issues.*

LAMBERTSON: No, a majority of my calls on government officials on economic matters probably had to do with some aspect of intellectual property rights, either copyright issues or pharmaceutical patent issues. In both cases, of course, our emphasis on those issues reflected pressures from industry associations in the United States - the Motion Picture Association and the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association. But they had legitimate reasons to be concerned about what was going on in Thailand. There was a tremendous amount of piracy, of computer software, for example. Experts in the United States estimated that the pirated share of software sold in Thailand was probably above 90%. It was very high elsewhere as well. You could find figures that high even in places in Europe, and certainly other places in Asia. Even in the United States a surprisingly high percentage of software, then at least, was considered to be pirated. We had that issue to deal with, and certainly there were pirated editions of every new American film easily available on the streets of Bangkok shortly after release in the United States. We spent a lot of time trying to get that situation improved and we made some progress, but I'm sure it's an issue on the agenda for the American Embassy in Bangkok today.

*Q: It raises an interesting question, to be successful, doesn't the other government have to have enforcement mechanisms and laws and all that?*

LAMBERTSON: It has to have enforcement mechanisms and laws. But IPR protection is going to continue to be a problem until the country in question begins to develop its own intellectual

property that it wants to protect. Then you see a change in the culture. I think that has happened in a number of developing countries. I think in Thailand it is beginning to happen. There's a change in mindset that comes with growing affluence which I guess makes it easier for people to afford the copyrighted versions of stuff, but also, as an economy develops, it begins to develop its own areas of expertise and its government leaders begin to see the logic of intellectual property rights as property, as something that should be protected. And then with that come more effective enforcement mechanisms. It's kind of a maturation process as economies develop. I doubt that you can rush it much, frankly.

*Q: There's a probably an AMCHAM (American Chamber of Commerce)?*

LAMBERTSON: Oh, indeed, a big, very active AMCHAM. I remember my first meeting with the AMCHAM board. It wasn't entirely successful because the AMCHAM had been, and remained throughout my time there, vigorous advocates of opening up trade with Vietnam. There was still a trade embargo on. I wasn't terribly sympathetic with them in that first meeting. I said that in my view there were two more important issues that had to be resolved before we got around to opening up trade with Vietnam, those being POW/MIA accounting and the situation in Cambodia. Nevertheless, I had good relations with the AMCHAM and I think they saw me as a friend and a pretty effective advocate for their interests. I certainly spent a lot of time, and we as an embassy put a lot of effort into business-related issues, that is to say, insuring that the playing field for American companies was level or even tilted in our direction. We had some nice little victories in that area, American companies getting contracts that they would not otherwise have gotten had it not been for our intervention.

*Q: That intervention itself isn't, "hey, you have to do this for us. We have a great company here that's quite capable of handling this project you've got going."*

LAMBERTSON: Right. You try to always do your advocacy on a high moral plane, but nevertheless, you're making a pitch for your company against what is probably an equally good foreign competitor who might have better financing. The financing package always seemed to be a key issue.

*Q: It's true that you have multiple interests and you're saying, okay, half of my time was on commercial issues, but you're touching bases with the Thai on various kinds of issues. Cambodia, all kinds of other issues and I would suspect that part of your presentation is let's not mix the conflict over there with this enormous opportunity for cooperation over here and try to keep things from bleeding one to the other.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, absolutely. We often had rather contentious talks with the Thai on economic issues and generally we wanted to keep those isolated from other parts of the relationship. I felt I was very lucky to be serving in Thailand as opposed to some of the other ASEAN countries because I had such a very rich menu of issues to deal with. The war in Cambodia - a settlement had just been reached or was being reached by the time I got there - but still there was a tremendous number of Cambodia-related problems to deal with. Refugees on the Burma side. Internal politics. A very active military-to-military relationship. Drug trafficking. A lot to get your teeth into. You know, shortly after I got there, in the spring of '92, I went on the

very first “ASEAN ambassadors tour” of the United States. That meant U.S. ambassadors to ASEAN going back to the United States, traveling around the country, touting Southeast Asia as a great place for American companies to do business. This was prior to the financial meltdown of ‘97 and ‘98 and there seemed to be unrelieved good news out there on the horizon and we were all enthusiastic proponents.

*Q: This was a private thing?*

LAMBERTSON: It was sponsored by the U.S.-ASEAN Council, yes, so they paid the bill. It was something that was advocated very strongly by Paul Cleveland, who was then in Malaysia, and Bob Orr, the former governor of Indiana who was the ambassador in Singapore - a very good one and a very thoughtful and innovative and interesting man. I think it was his idea perhaps first, and then Paul seconded it and eventually it was done. We went to five or six places on that first tour. The group included myself, Paul Cleveland, Robert Orr, Frank Wisner in the Philippines and John Monjo in Indonesia.

In our first group presentation, which was in Portland, actually on the Nike campus near Portland, Paul Cleveland said that he spent 50% of his time dealing with economic and business issues, and John Monjo claimed an even higher percentage. Bob Orr could have as well. All of them, I concluded, had less varied portfolios than mine was at that time. Indonesia was in a stable period, politically. The New Order was not yet shaken, and in fact John was able to spend and needed to spend a great deal of time on economic and business-related matters. The same was certainly true in Malaysia and Singapore. Less true in the Philippines, and I don’t think Frank Wisner claimed any kind of percentage like that and I certainly did not. I thought of that often, that trip with my ambassadorial colleagues. I was sure I had the best job of the bunch.

*Q: A minute ago you gave an exciting list of things that you dealt with. Let’s work on that list. Refugees.*

LAMBERTSON: When I got there we still had a huge number of Cambodian displaced persons in three major camps along the Thai-Cambodia border. The war was winding down and yet the reality was the refugees, displaced persons, were still there and the resettlement process was yet to begin and we were very actively working with the UN, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, the man killed in Baghdad. He was one of the first UN people on the scene as the UN solution for Cambodia began to be implemented. Repatriation of the Cambodian displaced persons was a major project in which our embassy, and the refugee office especially, was very much involved. We still had many thousands of Hmong refugees at the Ban Vinai camp on the Mekong River and their onward journey to the United States was pretty much assured, but they were still our responsibility. There were some sizeable clusters of refugees along the Thai-Burma border. There the issue was the occasional Thai effort to push them back into Burma, which we always vigorously opposed. We kept a close watch on what was happening along the Thai-Burma border to make sure the Thai were treating these people properly.

*Q: You tend to find that countries of first asylum don’t appreciate the honor.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes. And over the years the Thai had a very good record. They have given

asylum to many thousands of refugees from many different directions.

*Q: I would assume since the refugee issue has been with Thailand since the fall of Saigon that things are pretty well organized. The UN is there. All these NGOs. The camps are not ad hoc at all.*

LAMBERTSON: No, the system was in place and it was working.

*Q: Was the refugee section very large at that time?*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it was pretty large. I don't know how it compared to your days. I don't know the numbers. It was certainly a sizeable group of FSOs, both in the Orderly Departure Program and the, what was the other one called? RAU – Refugee Assistance Unit.

*Q: Yes, I was just trying to think of that. Orderly departure was still ongoing? Isn't that the one where they went to Vietnam and they would make regular trips to?*

LAMBERTSON: Yes. To Saigon.

*Q: I think that started in '86 or '87ish period to sort of try to cut down of people coming out and the danger then of first asylum issues that came with that, we cut a deal.*

LAMBERTSON: A system that would enable them to leave in an orderly fashion. Yes, and I was always very impressed with that program. It was, in effect, the Saigon Consulate General-in-waiting.

*Q: There was a contractor attached to the refugee section when I was there in '87 who did the interviewing for potential asylum cases to the U.S. and I can't think of who that was..*

LAMBERTSON: The company you mean? The contracting organization?

*Q: Yes, I don't even remember the company because it had been there for so long, we always knew it by the names of the guys.*

LAMBERTSON: I can't remember the name.

*Q: Because they would have been in a building up Sathorn Road at that time in '87.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes. That's right. You're absolutely right. That was a big operation.

*Q: Yes, okay, so they're still there.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, it was a big operation, and that would have accounted for many of the large number of contractor personnel I was referring to in that Inspectors report. They were these refugee interviewers. I'd forgotten about that.

*Q: That distracts me for a moment because when I left in '87 there was some new construction going on. When I was in Bangkok in '75 we had individual houses we were in. I was actually [out of the area] and then when I came back in '85 people were in apartments and something was going to be done across the street. Was any of that in place? A physical readjustment of the mission I guess.*

LAMBERTSON: What was ultimately done was that the new embassy was built there.

*Q: On your watch?*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, construction was initiated on my watch. I have somewhere back in the basement the chrome plated spade with which the first dirt was turned. It's a big, ugly building and I had nothing to do with the design. Plans were totally in place, and construction was about ready to start when I got there. We used to have a medical office, a medical unit over there, and some townhouses if you remember.

Sacie and I did manage to affect the project in two ways, as I remember. We insisted that footings for the massive perimeter wall be "bridged" over major tree roots, so that some of those lovely old trees could survive. And at the Dutch Ambassador's request, the monolithic wall between his property and ours was scrapped in favor of a reasonably attractive iron fence.

The embassy staff must be virtually 100% in apartment buildings by now; it was almost that way even then, when I was there. Traffic was a terrible problem. There weren't very many people who lived within walking distance. The quality of life undoubtedly declined considerably between your first tour and your second, certainly it had by the time I got there.

To get back to Cambodia. The refugee business was an active one, to be sure. The Cambodia settlement included an initial focus on the repatriation of displaced persons to Cambodia. I might add that was an interesting time, because the UN deployed into Cambodia in considerable part through Thailand and we were also establishing an embassy in Phnom Penh during that period. More or less at the same time. Charlie Twining went in as our first ambassador. That was a well deserved appointment. Charlie was a long-time observer of the Cambodia scene; he was one of the first to figure out what was happening in that country immediately after the KR takeover in 1975. I think Charlie suspected that we looked upon his new embassy as just another constituent post of Bangkok. There were sensitivities that I had to be aware of, but in fact we tried to be helpful to Charlie and his people in using our large administrative infrastructure to help him get started.

Our refugee people and some of our other people were directly helpful to the UN operation as well. Bangkok was not the only avenue of ingress for them, some obviously went directly to Phnom Penh, but for things happening along the border, the logical place for the UN to muster and get organized was in Thailand. I remember driving along the Thai-Cambodia border one time with an officer from the refugee section and we passed convoys of Dutch armored vehicles. They were painted UN white, but it was a Dutch unit in Thailand moving by land across the border to the vicinity of Pailin. Thailand was very much a staging base for the UN, and our embassy was quite involved in some of that as well.

*Q: Your view of the Cambodian situation as Deputy Assistant Secretary is high policy content, now you're ambassador to Thailand and there are some hands-on things. I mean, you're talking to some of the Cambodian personalities I assume.*

LAMBERTSON: I'd met most of them when I was DAS. And in those early months of my time in Bangkok they came through every now and then. When they did I often saw them, particularly Son Sann of the KPNLF and Prince Ranariddh once or twice. That all tailed off as Cambodia became more "normal" and the UNTAC got established and working, as did our embassy. But there was always the issue to deal with of Thai policy and Thai actions along the border, Thai army complicity with the Khmer Rouge - which UNTAC was very quick to identify and point to, sometimes falsely. We had those kinds of issues during that first year. The UNTAC people would say that the Thai were doing something nefarious with the KR down there along the border, and Charlie's sources would say the same thing and I would need to react to it and I would. We would investigate the situation and try to get our own reading of what was going on and then make the necessary representations to the Thai, because sometimes they in fact were doing something they shouldn't have been doing. But fairly often UNTAC's [United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia] info was wrong, and the Thai role was not as negative as everybody in Phnom Penh thought it was.

*Q: But obviously we were interested in the Thai role and did we organize ourselves to have an officer in the political section, perhaps, that sort of had that portfolio and he would do traveling from time to time?*

LAMBERTSON: As I recall we did. We had the office in Aranyaprathet as well, for a long time. We had the refugee people moving around along the border, and I'm sure we did have somebody in the political section whose main responsibility was Cambodia-watching. But we had a variety of people, from several agencies, out there on the border, and if an issue came up we focused on it, tried to ascertain what the truth was, and then we weren't shy in talking to the Thai about it. The Thai role was often questionable; it was also often not quite as unhelpful or negative as it was perceived to be by both UNTAC and our embassy in Phnom Penh.

*Q: Actually how did the Thai organize for the Cambodian situation? Was the army in charge and the ministry of foreign affairs out of the picture? Who were the main characters?*

LAMBERTSON: The army was certainly in charge. The foreign ministry was quite involved, though, in the political settlement and in the administration of the UNTAC program. I remember one thing we did, Asa Sarasin, foreign minister under the Anand government, invited the diplomatic corps to go into Cambodia just to have a look-see at the initial relocation efforts of UNTAC. So, the diplomatic corps from Bangkok was flown over to the border, loaded onto fancy buses and driven into Cambodia by the Thai foreign minister. I'm sure that was not terribly appreciated by the Cambodians, but there wasn't a Cambodian government yet. UNTAC was in charge of the place. We went across the border, to the first major town down the road from Aranyaprathet, I can't remember the name of it. We visited there with the Japanese woman who was the head of UNHCR, Mrs. Ogata, and with Sergio Vieira de Mello, among others, and looked at the operation that was already underway to resettle people coming back across the

border. The foreign ministry was always involved, but in terms of security issues and what really happened on the ground, the military was in charge and the military was responsible, including for any misdeeds.

*Q: Because the key mission of the embassy is to figure out what actor in the host country is doing the policy making...*

LAMBERTSON: Right. There was no doubt that the army was number one where Cambodia was concerned.

*Q: There's a long history of concern with Thailand and the narcotics issue. You surely saw this as DAS. It was a big thing when I was there as late as '87. How does the narcotics issue come to you during your ambassadorship?*

LAMBERTSON: By the time I arrived in Thailand, production of opium poppies within Thailand was a pretty minor part of the problem. Various eradication campaigns and crop substitution schemes and other programs had eliminated most of the significant poppy production within Thailand. A couple of times I went out with the Thai police on highly publicized opium eradication forays and I always enjoyed it. We went by helicopter up into the mountains of the North, landed on mountain ridges and trekked down to the open fields and whacked at poppies while television cameras rolled.

Of course, Thailand remained a major trafficking route for opium production across the border in Burma, to some extent in Laos, but primarily Burma. In particular, those areas of Burma controlled by the Shan United Army and the Wa. They were still doing quite well and we tried various means of disrupting their trafficking operations, and even their actual production. We kept picking at the problem, and devoting considerable resources to it. DEA was a large office in the embassy, and in Chiang Mai. The CIA also contributed to the effort, but there was that now famous "wall" between the CIA and the Justice Department. There was a limited amount that the CIA could do to provide operational intelligence to DEA. Nevertheless, we had a few little victories. There was a series of well coordinated Thai army and police raids against villages along the Thai-Burma border early one Sunday morning that netted some serious, high ranking traffickers along with some of their booty. It probably at least temporarily disrupted trafficking arrangements along the border. We also orchestrated, with the involvement of a number of agencies, a ruse that drew back to Bangkok from, I believe Kuala Lumpur, a very high ranking Sino-Thai trafficker. He was wanted in the United States. He was sufficiently high-ranking that when we nabbed him at the Bangkok airport he was taken across the tarmac, put on an air force plane and flown to New York where he appeared before the Brooklyn Grand Jury. He was said to be the highest ranking Southeast Asian trafficking figure ever "rendered" to justice in the United States. So from time to time we made a small impact on the thriving drug trafficking business, but I'm sure it's still going strong.

*Q: The drug situation also comes to the embassy in a slightly different direction when Americans get involved, young tourists or something like that. Did your consular section keep busy visiting people in jail?*

LAMBERTSON: Indeed they did. There were some tragic situations, particularly involving young American women of very modest means who had been sweet-talked by some guy into going to Thailand and bringing back a suitcase with something in it. They were going to do maybe 25 years in jail in Bangkok as a result, and there was not much we could do to shorten their sentences. We certainly, the consular section, kept track of them, kept in touch with them, made sure that their treatment was no worse than anybody else's in those Thai jails, but there was not much we could do to affect their sentences. There would be an occasional royal amnesty as I recall, around the King's birthday, and sometimes a few Americans benefited from that.

*Q: It's a consistent problem.*

LAMBERTSON: It was a widespread problem, and I think generally anybody caught in that net was simply caught.

*Q: How major was that problem? I've heard other posts, the women at posts having to organize ways to feed, ...that the prison population is so large that it's a sort of community.*

LAMBERTSON: I don't recall, although there may have been community efforts that I wasn't aware of on behalf of the prisoners. I'm sure the number of young Americans incarcerated was way up in double digits.

*Q: One of the main functions of course of the embassy overseas is to watch the host country politics. Who's on top, who's in charge. You were there at a particularly volatile time as I recall.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes. When I got there the Anand government had been in office a number of months. There had been a coup against the previous prime minister less than a year earlier, and, at our urging and that of other friends of Thailand, the perpetrators of that coup chose a respected civilian prime minister, Anand Panyarachun, and allowed him to name his own cabinet, and it was a cabinet of technocrats. In terms of talent and integrity, it was probably one of the best governments Thailand ever had. That government's mandate was to prepare the way for an election the following year.

So in the spring of 1992 an election was held, I believe in March (while I was in the United States on that ambassadors' tour). The conservative, traditionalist parties collectively won a majority of the seats and their first choice as Prime Minister was Narong Wongwan, an upcountry politician, long and unfavorably known to the United States. We were quite sure he was a drug trafficker. I'd seen the evidence and did not doubt that he was guilty. In naming him as a trafficker, we basically made it impossible for him to be prime minister. This was highly publicized in the United States. The State Department spokesman noted that if Narong were appointed prime minister, he wouldn't be able to travel to the United States, so that would have been something of a handicap for him. In any event the coalition dropped him and named General Suchinda - the head of the army and one of the men behind the coup the previous year - as the new prime minister. This sparked widespread opposition in Thailand. It wasn't just young people protesting the military having in effect extended themselves in power. It was an impressively middle class democratic uprising, such as had not happened for a long time, if ever.

*Q: Actually, so what forces are boiling up in Thailand at this time? Who are the main actors?*

LAMBERTSON: A middle class in Thailand emerged as the economy had developed. People who were educated and who had sufficient economic security that they could begin to worry about things like politics. They were intensely interested. They had a more modern outlook, perhaps one could say, and believed that Thailand should no longer simply be ruled by a succession of military figures. At least that's what appeared to be happening. A "civil society" had developed over the previous, say 20 years. It wasn't necessarily represented in the political parties, but there were and are in Thailand some fairly effective non-party organizations - associations of women, and associations of farmers, and in particular in Bangkok, an affluent slice of society that had matured to some extent - to the point that military coups and military government were no longer acceptable to it. So, when Suchinda was seen as turning back the clock once again, a lot of people in Bangkok - it was primarily a Bangkok phenomenon - were ready to hit the street. That's what happened in April and May of that year.

*Q: So, those were very serious demands that the prime minister resign?*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, indeed. As street demonstrations mounted, the army was called in to preserve order and there were confrontations between demonstrators and soldiers. There were ugly scenes of people being beaten with rifle butts and this inflamed passions all the more within the so-called "democracy movement" and tensions rose quickly. Things really came to a head in one night's confrontation near the Democracy Monument when the army fired on demonstrators and killed many of them - perhaps one hundred. It was the bloodiest night in Thai political history, at least since the early '70s. And it was an evolving situation in which we, the United States, had an opinion and an interest. We didn't like the idea of Suchinda naming himself prime minister. We didn't like the idea of the army moving in in a ham-handed way. We were hoping that Thai politics would continue to evolve in a democratic direction. So we had things to say on the subject.

*Q: To whom were we saying them?*

LAMBERTSON: We were talking to just about anybody I could get an appointment with. I made the rounds. I saw all the major players, including Major General Chamlong, a former mayor of Bangkok and a very unmilitary military man who was the leader of the pro-democracy movement. I had him around for lunch at the residence. We had a good talk and I think I left him in no doubt that we supported his aims, but that we hoped unnecessary confrontations could be avoided, and a peaceful solution found. I took that same general line with other politicians.

I saw various military leaders and made pointed representations about avoiding the use of force in dealing with these demonstrations. I don't remember exactly when I finally got my appointment with Suchinda; I believe it was just after the army disgraced itself on Democracy Boulevard, and I made a strong pitch to him.

I wanted to stay ahead of the curve. With the help of Vic and Skip Boyce, I tried to anticipate both what was happening in Bangkok and what was likely being thought about it in Washington. I wanted to keep the initiative and not simply have to react to a series of instructions from the

Department. By and large I did that. We tried to think of things to do to ameliorate the situation and move it along in a positive direction, before the Department thought of the same things and told me to do them. I preferred retaining the lead. There was never any particular point of disagreement with the Department or with anybody in Washington about what needed to be done in the large sense. The discussion was about tactics more than strategy.

We had the Cobra Gold exercise going on at that very time. We had lots of soldiers in country, and I pulled the plug on that exercise. They were redeployed very smoothly and without objection from anybody on the military side.

*Q: To close it down a little more quickly?*

LAMBERTSON: To close it down right then and get them out, yes.

*Q: Okay, actually that's something that generally takes place far to the South.*

LAMBERTSON: It varied from year to year. One year it's "sea oriented" and there are marines involved and sometimes a landing, and the next year it will be more army and it will be further inland, with less navy involvement. The nature of it changes from year to year.

*Q: But it's not that they were in the backyard?*

LAMBERTSON: No, they weren't in the backyard. Nevertheless, it was unseemly for U.S. forces to be exercising with the Thai army at a time when the Thai army was certainly not distinguishing itself on the streets of Bangkok. I thought it was better to break it off, and so we made that recommendation from Bangkok and it was quickly acted upon, and there was no dissent from Honolulu or anywhere else. It was actually more than a recommendation; it was a decision.

*Q: Because you had seen this process unfold in Manila in one sense, opposition to an elected government and the political stability collapsed. Now you can't have F-4s flying over, but you are trying to touch bases with the main actors and to tell them...*

LAMBERTSON: Among other things, I was very interested in what the King might be thinking of doing. I didn't seek an appointment with the King. I did contact his senior advisors, however, to try to have some indication of what the King might be preparing to do. They were noncommittal. It turned out that the King proved to be very much on top of things and at the crucial moment did intervene. The crisis was resolved when the King invited Suchinda and General Chamlong to come to the palace for an audience, which was televised live. General Suchinda and General Chamlong approached His Majesty on their knees, the King declared that the situation had gone on long enough and was displeasing him, and it essentially ended right there.

There were no further demonstrations, no further confrontations between the army and civilians, and within a few days Suchinda stepped down and Anand was appointed yet again to run another government to prepare another election. I was quick to make contact with Anand, to get his

views on what was going on and his thoughts on what we could do to help. I told Anand that we would certainly support him in any way we could in the delicate effort to remove the army leaders most directly responsible for the bloodshed. This wasn't necessarily an easy thing for an interim civilian prime minister to do. But he managed it. They retreated to the golf courses around Bangkok and never again had any kind of political role. Anand was good. He did a great job of reestablishing his authority, and he knew that he could count on our support. I think our embassy, and our government, played its cards pretty well during that whole three month period. We ended up earning a good deal of credit in Thai eyes for having been on the right side of the situation.

I might add that during this period I kept in close touch with the British Ambassador, Christian Adams, a fine man and a good friend. We compared notes and at times tried to coordinate what we said and who we said it to.

*Q: One of the pressures that you were under, one of the instructions from Washington had to do with the fact that congress had stepped into the issue of military coups taking over governments and this automatically cut military aid. Was that law of any help to you?*

LAMBERTSON: That had been in effect since the coup against Chatchai the previous year, and military assistance didn't amount to much in Thailand by 1991 anyway. It was an affluent place and we were selling them stuff, but we were also giving them good financing terms so those credit terms were affected, as you know having been in that business. It was nevertheless an important political symbol - cutting off "military aid." It meant something in Thailand and in that sense it was useful and the restoration of it also was a useful potential carrot. We urged that it be turned back on again as soon as it could be, which was done. I think that law generally has a positive effect. It probably takes the pressure off embassies sometimes, because of its automatic aspect.

*Q: This is a very pressured time for you and the political section. How did you organize yourself?*

LAMBERTSON: This was a good example of Foreign Service officers stepping up to the task and performing very, very well. There was some danger in going out on the street and seeing what was happening and reporting on it. As I remember, we had more volunteers than we really could use for the job. The political section had junior officers from other parts of the mission stepping forward and saying, can I help? Let us have a role in this. People were extremely interested and attracted to the notion of being in on the situation. Officers of other agencies were equally interested in being involved.

I would meet with Vic and Skip – DCM and Pol Counselor - and a few others, each morning and I suppose several times during the day, to compare notes and talk about how to proceed. I especially appreciated Vic and Skip and their experience and good judgment. Other sections were also involved – consular, with its U.S. citizen protective responsibilities, the Defense Attaché, given the nature of the ongoing confrontation, USIS certainly, and no doubt others. We would decide early in the day on reporting or analytical objectives. Skip, I think, made the specific "beat" assignments, with Vic undoubtedly also involved. I think we produced an

excellent product, too. This was more than a dozen years ago, and I don't have any reporting cables squirreled away, but I know at the time I was satisfied that we were doing a very good job of staying on top of a rapidly changing and dangerous situation – and I was a good judge of that.

*Q: This is not 9:00 to 5:00?*

LAMBERTSON: No.

*Q: The crack of dawn to?*

LAMBERTSON: Until late at night and it was potentially hazardous as you got over there in the Democracy Boulevard neighborhood.

*Q: It was important to get the story back to Washington. In the olden days you had communicators who typed up and encrypted the cables. How is this embassy connected to Washington now?*

LAMBERTSON: Well, word processors. There was an e-mail connection by then, unclassified e-mail. But classified stuff still went to the code room. They weren't using IBM Selectrics anymore. It didn't have to be printed out and taken there physically...

*Q: ...which speeds it up. One of your objectives is to keep in advance of advice from Washington and this sounds like this was.*

LAMBERTSON: We drafted press guidance every day; we wanted to get our version of how it ought to be said back there. Generally our version was used, perhaps added to or modified somewhat. And we did an awful lot of situation reporting and a fair amount of analytical stuff.

*Q: I would suspect that knowing "how Washington works" you probably would have put your finger on the USIA guy and say, look, I want.*

LAMBERTSON: We had a good USIA gal at that point, Donna Oglesby. She could write. She was quick. We did try to feed the Washington maw. Keep them happy back there. And also, as I said, try to keep the initiative in terms of what we wanted to do about the situation. I think it worked out very well. As I said, we were widely seen in Thailand as having been on the side of the angels and that helped us in subsequent months and years. The election then took place in the summer of 1992, and produced the Chuan Leekpai government, with which I enjoyed working. I thought Chuan and his people were an awfully good group. They weren't any more talented individually than the Anand government, across the board, but they had the virtue of being elected. They tended to be rather youthful.

*Q: This is the Democratic Party?*

LAMBERTSON: Democratic Party of Thailand.

*Q: It had been in being since the '70s.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes. It was more of a real party in the western sense than most of its competitors. I was fortunate to be able during most of my tour to work either with Prime Minister Anand or Prime Minister Chuan and his cabinet.

*Q: Chuan is an elected democratic politician from the Southern part of Thailand. He's a sophisticated practitioner of Thai politics all these years. He returns to parliament after the October '73 disposition of Thanom-Praphat, so here is a very sophisticated Thai political operator I would assume. I mean he doesn't represent the military. He represents in fact what the military used to hate. The military used to say they would never ever let the Democratic Party come to power and now it has. That must have been very frightening to the military.*

LAMBERTSON: I suppose to some. But the new army leadership, in particular the new commander, General Wimon, genuinely accepted the changed situation – without that, the new civilian government wouldn't have had a chance to succeed.

*Q: The Thai are operating a parliamentary system so the Democratic Party has won the majority or...?*

LAMBERTSON: No, Chuan was the leader of a coalition. I don't recall exactly what other parties were part of it, but the Democrats didn't have an absolute majority. I don't think any party had an absolute majority until Thaksin came along and produced his. Thaksin was just getting interested in politics during this period by the way.

*Q: Do you recall your first meeting with the new Prime Minister Chuan?*

LAMBERTSON: No, I don't. I'd met him previously and I don't remember what my first meeting might have been about or when it took place, but I always found him very comfortable to be around. He knew us, knew Vic Tomseth and Skip Boyce very well and was comfortable with them, and we had a good relationship with the leadership of that party.

*Q: In fact over the years the embassy had been keeping up with opposition politicians and what not.*

LAMBERTSON: Oh, yes.

*Q: We were talking about working with the new civilian government under Prime Minister Chuan.*

LAMBERTSON: I liked Chuan personally. You couldn't help but like his Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuwan. He might have been a bit young for you to have known when you were in Thailand. He was educated in the United States, and for a time was a congressional intern in the office of Geraldine Ferraro. Thoroughly modern in his views, and a Muslim. I think he's bound to have an important role to play in Thailand in the future in some capacity, particularly given the current difficulties that they're having in the South.

*Q: How were the rest of the offices in that government allocated, do you recall? Did they represent the parties? You were mentioning earlier that one of the interim governments was quite technocratic.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, other individuals in the Chuan government beyond Surin. The Finance Minister was outstanding, as was the Commerce Minister, Supachai, who later became head of the WTO. As a group, they were young, but talented – though no more than the Anand government had been.

*Q: In fact Chuan was prime minister most of your tour.*

LAMBERTSON: Yes he was. I think it was in the summer or spring perhaps of '95 that the next election took place and Chuan and the Democrats failed to retain that controlling plurality, and the new Prime Minister was Banharn Silpa-archa, a politician of the old style – an up-country politician. I don't remember much about his cabinet. I left shortly thereafter and eventually, a couple of years later, Chuan came back into office and fortunately for Thailand was in office during the financial crisis of the late '90s. I think the Thai handled that situation rather well.

*Q: Earlier you had mentioned that we were concerned about drug connections with a potential prime minister. Did that issue re-arise then during the change from Chuan to Banharn?*

LAMBERTSON: Only in a minor way--there was one potential cabinet member who had a less than stellar reputation. Somehow it became known that we were suspicious of his background and he sued for libel, me and the PAO – or rather he threatened to. But he was not appointed.

*Q: You were mentioning earlier that one time Thailand and the United States were side by side during the Vietnam War, a very strong security relationship. In the post-Vietnam period what did the security relationship look like?*

LAMBERTSON: It was then, and I think is to this day pretty solid. The Thai can always be counted on to give us over-flight rights and transit privileges when we're moving troops and equipment from the Pacific to the Middle East. We still have that military exercise relationship. I think the Thai are present in small numbers in Iraq right now. They can generally be counted upon to join us in some fashion in efforts that we think are important. One thing did come up while I was in Thailand in which we didn't get the answer we were looking for. I won't go into detail, but we proposed something to the Thai that would have been useful to us, strategically. We discussed it with both military and civilian sides of the government, and at some point I proposed it to the Prime Minister and talked to him more than once about it in the ensuing months. The Thai were reluctant to agree, believing it might be controversial within Thailand and perhaps within the region. But we kept working on it and I was cautiously optimistic that when push came to shove they would agree to it, and I so reported to Washington. Push came to shove during Prime Minister Chuan's visit to the United States later that year, in an Oval Office meeting. We eventually came around to that subject on the agenda and President Clinton noted that it had been under consideration for some time and he wondered if Chuan could give us an answer to our proposal. Chuan said that he could, and in his usual very soft-spoken way said that the answer had to be no. I having been pretty sure the Thai were going to say yes, would rather

have been somewhere else at that particular moment. I really did misjudge that one. I think I did so for kind of classical reasons. I was too inclined to take what was in fact a noncommittal response as a possible positive. I tried to read too much into what I'd been told by Chuan and others. I simply misjudged the situation in a way that I shouldn't have after 30 years of Asian experience. So, it was a mistake. No lasting harm done, I suppose.

*Q: Talking about how the local system works, I'm looking at a cartoon over here by the window. What is the background to that?*

LAMBERTSON: It's me, and I have under my arm a list of names – the “black list.” Chuan is smiling in the background. This was just after the episode in which it had been reported that one of Banharn's potential ministers was on that so-called “black list.”

*Q: Oh, okay.*

LAMBERTSON: A pretty good profile I thought. USIS got me that original of it.

*Q: Sometimes it's too easy to get into the local press.*

LAMBERTSON: Right.

*Q: But often, I remember when Ambassador Brown came in he did a parachute jump at the infantry training center, and everybody just thought that was awesome. That gave him face and entree unmatched in the late '80s. One of, actually looking at this cartoon, one of the old traditions, long term traditions in Bangkok is the foreign correspondents club and the invitations it extends to people to address the correspondent community as well as Thailand at large. How would you say was the embassy's projection of the American image in Thailand these days. I mean USIS is much smaller than it was. There are other trends going on. How does the embassy approach those issues?*

LAMBERTSON: I think the ambassador is still in a position to make a big splash. I am sure it is true today that the American ambassador looms very large in Bangkok and if he wants to make a headline he can, unlike an ambassador of just about any other country. So, if you want to get their attention, you can do it via the press. That certainly was possible in my time there and I'm sure almost ten years later it still is. You can be a newsmaker in Bangkok. American ambassadors in a lot of places can be newsmakers - in most.

*Q: Concerning your term in Thailand, Bangkok, were you honored with any presidential visits?*

LAMBERTSON: No, I was not. I tried, but I just couldn't make it happen, either with George H. W. Bush or Bill Clinton. Clinton visited not too long after I left. We did have George Bush there a year after he left office and enjoyed him very much. He was an easy man to have around. He came out under the auspices of a couple of companies to make speeches and to be seen in their presence. I went with him to a couple of dinners and we had him to the house during his stay and invited the embassy staff. Virtually all the Americans came and many of the Thai, and Bush spoke to them and stood there for a very long time shaking hands with people. He was nice. I

liked him then as I had ever since I first encountered him in that water polo game in Saigon in 1966 or so.

*Q: Probably one of the more delicate aspects of the job of an American ambassador to Thailand is the interaction with the royal family. You presented your credentials under these very exquisite and protocol filled circumstances. The king plays a role in the political events later on. Care to make some other comments?*

LAMBERTSON: I have great admiration for the King. He has played an important and positive role in Thailand's evolution over the last 50 years and more. One of the interesting initial aspects of my interaction with the royal family was the fact that my presentation of credentials took place earlier than it might have. The Foreign Ministry and royal household arranged the presentation promptly because they wanted me to be accredited prior to the visit to Bangkok of the Emperor of Japan, which came just a few days later. It was an interesting courtesy. That was our first experience of a State dinner in Bangkok and it was a magnificent spectacle. The Thai probably put on ceremonies more elegantly than just about any other people in the world. A State dinner at the Grand Palace in Thailand is really something to behold.

In any event, at the beginning of the evening, the diplomatic corps files through in protocol order and shakes hands with His Majesty and with the Emperor standing beside him - so Scacie and I have now shaken hands with two Japanese Emperors. Thereafter the diplomatic corps ends up at the other end of this very long room, and the King and the Emperor are still in their places and people are selected to go over and engage in conversation. The first person chosen was me, the most junior member of the diplomatic corps, and I was asked to cross the room and converse with their Majesties, the King and the Emperor. I did that, and I don't remember at all what we talked about. We talked for five minutes, mostly small talk I suppose. I thought it was most interesting and intriguing that I was the one chosen to do that. I got the same treatment at least one other time, during the visit of Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic. Once again we'd all gone through the receiving line, and I was the one asked to go over and talk with the King and Havel. Being the American Ambassador in Bangkok is special.

I saw the King on such occasions. I saw him on various other ceremonial occasions when he presided. I came to feel that I knew him and that he knew me. I never called on him by myself. Maybe I should have, but I didn't. I saw him in the company of senior, important visitors from the United States, and then frequently on those various ceremonial occasions. I saw much more of the Queen. Scacie and I traveled with her to the United States twice, to Washington, to Boston, Baltimore, New York. She was entertained informally at the White House both times, once by President Bush at a lovely dinner in the family quarters - at the end of which he left by helicopter from the lawn for a Middle East peace conference in Spain - and once by Hillary Clinton at a lunch. She's an outgoing woman. Scacie and I also traveled with her within Thailand, to the royal villas in the Northeast, in Chang Mai and in the South. We did three or four such trips. She enjoys those outings and they were fun to be a part of. There was always sumptuous food and spectacular table settings and a very warm atmosphere.

Scacie and I also got to know quite well Princess Sarandon, the eldest daughter, the Crown Princess. She's a very impressive woman, a student of many things. She is serious about her role

and she tries to perform that role to the best of her ability all the time. I have a great respect for her and so do the Thai people. My own meetings with the Crown Prince were also quite pleasant. Then the other daughter in Thailand, Princess Chulabhorn is interesting, quite energetic despite frail health.

One of the most memorable evenings that Sacie and I had in Thailand was a going away dinner offered by the Queen for us at her villa near Ayutthaya. We were told that we would be guided there by a police escort and that we should wait at the residence. The police escort would swing by and lead us to the villa. We knew that it was going to be a late evening - both the King and the Queen are accustomed to late evenings, and undoubtedly very late risings in the morning. We sat there in formal clothes until about 10:00 PM when the police escort rolled in and we were off to Ayutthaya. We reached the villa I suppose around 11:00 PM. We were entertained by a wonderful display of ceremonial dancing by the side of the river, while candlelit balloons rose up into the evening air. It was modestly spectacular, if I can put those two words together. Mightily nice for an intimate dinner. There were 25 or 30 people invited. The ladies were all wearing black because the mother of the King had recently passed away. There were the usual lavish table decorations and a very lively atmosphere and it was, as the Queen's gatherings generally tended to be, a genuinely enjoyable evening. We got home around 4:00 AM, as I recall. I think that was an unusual gesture on the Queen's part and I appreciated it very much, as did Sacie. So, our experiences overall with the Thai royal family were quite positive. I have a good impression of them and of it as an institution.

*Q: The King has certainly played an extremely important role in Thai politics from time to time; as you have just illustrated during this period, he's the one referee who can say "time out."*

LAMBERTSON: That's right. He has immense influence, and uses it very carefully. He seems to know when to act and when to husband his influence and over the years he's played his cards very skillfully and to good effect.

*Q: We've talked about you as a focal point for U.S. policy to Thailand, bilaterally, multilaterally. Now, let's go back to the embassy and some of, we've talked about who were in some of the positions. I think Matt Daley comes in after Vic as your DCM.*

LAMBERTSON: That's right.

*Q: How does an ambassador pick a DCM? Or do you get to?*

LAMBERTSON: You do up to a point. Vic Tomseth proposed to me when he was leaving that we just let Skip be DCM. I thought, why not? Skip didn't have the rank for it yet, but I thought he was mighty good. I went along with that suggestion and proposed to personnel in the Department, I suppose the DG, that Boyce be elevated. I was told that was absolutely impossible. He was not qualified by rank and moreover it wasn't going to be good for him or the system to leave him in Thailand for that long. That was probably true in retrospect.

Lynn Pascoe was in the pipeline as a possibility. Lynn was in Beijing at the time and was enthusiastic about coming to Bangkok and then something better intervened, I don't recall what

it was.

*Q: I think he went to AIT.*

LAMBERTSON: Did he go to AIT at that point? Yes, distinctly better. I don't recall exactly how Matt Daley came into view as a candidate, but I presume he contacted me. He was a good choice and I'd known him when he was special assistant to Dick Solomon and in other capacities. He did a good job in Thailand. Matt was then poached by Frank Wisner, who desperately wanted him in New Delhi. At that point, Skip Boyce, who in the intervening couple of years had been DCM and Charge in Singapore and was anxious as always to get back to Bangkok, presented himself and was a logical, good choice as my third DCM. Despite that turnover, I really had a good deal of continuity, especially with Skip being there most of the time I was.

*Q: How does the personnel system, your staffing, work as ambassador? I mean do you really get involved in that or is that the DCM's duty to pulse the Department and test their recommendations and what not?*

LAMBERTSON: It was probably both of our jobs. We didn't have many personnel problems within the State contingent of the embassy during my time in Bangkok. We did have one or two officers who I thought were not up to the job, and in one case frankly should have been removed from the Foreign Service. We had one or two issues like that, but by and large the staffing was good on the State side. There were issues from time to time with other agencies, but there too, by and large I didn't have any big battles to fight, with a couple of exceptions. Do you want me to talk about those exceptions?

*Q: Yes, sir.*

LAMBERTSON: Both of those happened to involve the military side of the house and that was a big side of the house in Bangkok. I don't know how many of those 600-plus embassy personnel wore uniforms, but quite a few did. We had an organization called Stony Beach which was a DIA operation having to do with POW/MIA accounting run by a colonel. We had another organization called the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting, which provided administrative and logistical backup for field offices in Hanoi, Vientiane and Phnom Penh. Also staffed in Bangkok by a colonel.

The Joint Task Force-Full Accounting was headquartered in Honolulu, within CINCPAC, and was run by a major general at that time. The major general in Honolulu did not like the colonel who ran the Stony Beach operation in Bangkok. He thought that the latter fellow got involved in things he shouldn't have, refused to take direction, and didn't see himself as a member of the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting team - which he in fact was not. In any event the general convinced the admiral, CINCPAC, to remove the colonel. I wanted to keep him; he was a good officer and was doing a good job. But the Admiral was adamant in wanting him out of the country. The upshot of it was that I lost my colonel - who technically worked for me, not for CINCPAC. He had the same relationship to me as the defense attaches did.

I didn't like it at all, but there just wasn't anything I could do about it. It was kind of instructive.

It demonstrated a fact of life that probably still holds – that if an area commander gets into a “control contest” with an ambassador involving military personnel, he’s probably going to win because he ultimately has more weight, despite the ambassador’s status as the president’s personal representative in a particular country. I suppose if the Department had entered the fray on my side it might have made a difference, but I don’t recall asking for help—it wasn’t that kind of issue.

The second problem involved a triumvirate of other colonels. I’m not going to go into detail. But a situation arose that I judged to be harmful to our interests in Thailand, and that in my opinion also represented a challenge to my authority. I fired two of the colonels. It was not easy to do. It effectively ended their careers. It was traumatic for all of us quite frankly.

The incident colored the last few months of my time in Bangkok in a way. Jesse Helms found out about it, naturally, professed outrage in a letter to the Secretary that a mere ambassador could fire two fine military officers in that fashion, and demanded an investigation. To my knowledge the Department never argued the issue with him and I got no discernible support from that quarter. And indeed, as of the time I retired, I was being investigated by the Inspector Generals of both the State Department and DOD. I don’t know the outcome of those investigations; I never bothered to try to find out. I think it probably had been a while since an ambassador had done that. But in this case I think it was, on reflection - and I’ve reflected upon it a good deal - I think it was warranted.

*Q: That’s hard to top. That’s a very unfortunate circumstance to be put in. You have a couple of more things in your notes. General comments, if you wanted to mention them.*

LAMBERTSON: I wanted to mention one of the best experiences that I can recall from my ambassadorial years – and one of the earliest. It was a Chiefs of Mission Conference, once again in Honolulu, in December of 1991. The 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

Our COM meeting was held in conjunction with that huge commemoration in which the president and others participated. We were at Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, where President Bush gave an excellent speech. There were various other ceremonies during the course of that day, and a reception that evening aboard the USS Missouri. Around midday we retired to Hickam Air Force Base to a conference room for a COM discussion, and we were joined about halfway through it by George Bush. He stayed there for a good long time, I would think an hour at least. We went around the table with people raising issues of concern to them. I was struck by the degree to which the President seemed to be totally at home with the issues, and the setting - the entire context - seemed to be quite familiar to him. He fit in seamlessly, as he should have I guess, as a former Chief of Mission in Beijing and in New York. I was impressed by how quickly he picked up on the issues, how familiar he was with the kinds of things we were talking about. I have thought of that meeting in recent years, and of the contrast between the elder President Bush and his son, and their respective backgrounds and approaches to foreign affairs issues.

Another thing that meant a good deal to me during my time in Bangkok was my association with the aging members of the Free Thai Movement, the people who had been organized in the United

States after the Japanese occupied Thailand in 1941, were trained by the OSS and sent back into Thailand to do a little bit of sabotage and a little bit of harassment. They were young college students in the United States at the time of their recruitment and many of them became leaders of Thailand in subsequent years. There was Sitthi, the former Foreign Minister and a good friend, who suggested to me the idea of a dinner for them at the residence. I readily agreed and we had a wonderful time. The guest of honor was former Prime Minister Seni Pramroj, who was the minister in Washington in 1941, and who declined to deliver a declaration of war on the United States as he had been instructed to do – instead working with the OSS to recruit young people to his country's cause. It was a memorable evening, with these very youthful and spirited elderly people enjoying each other's company. It was great to see them, and to reflect upon what they had been and what they had become since. We had a second evening like that with the Free Thai Movement, but by the time of the second, Seni Pramroj had died. I was very glad that we were able to invite him at least once, and we loved it.

We thoroughly enjoyed Bangkok. We enjoyed the visitors that passed through, by and large, although there of course were some we could have done without. But for the most part our visitors were people we liked having around. Sacie was a terrific ambassador's wife. She ran a wonderful household and was extremely hospitable and very good in her own outreach to the American community and in her interaction with the Thai. Very, very good. The residence never looked better than when we were there, thanks to Sacie. She decorated it with our own art, by the way—we didn't draw on the Art in Embassies program. We did a lot of traveling in Thailand, usually in our own vehicle. We almost never took the official car or driver outside Bangkok on our trips, and we had some memorable overnight train and bus journeys as well—modes of transport that were Sacie's idea. She also thought we ought to stay in places recommended by the Lonely Planet guidebooks, so we often found ourselves in Peace Corps-type abodes in our travels. We saw a lot of Thailand that way, despite our inability to speak Thai. We got around somehow, and enjoyed that aspect of Thailand immensely. Sacie did a lot of traveling on her own as well, to some pretty remote parts of the Kingdom.

Speaking of Peace Corps Volunteers, we enjoyed visiting them from time to time, generally in the company of Ginny Kirkwood, our terrific Country Director. We also hosted every new incoming group of volunteers for an evening at the residence, where I swore them in. I'm a fan of the Peace Corps.

*Q: The Americans have had a long and intense relationship with the Thai and the ambassador's table depending on the incumbent was one in which you could quite properly kick back and meet your contacts or give them some prestige by securing their invitation to a small intimate ambassador's dinner. Did you do some of that?*

LAMBERTSON: Yes, I did. You're quite right. It was probably a fairly high priced ticket in Bangkok in 1991 through '95 and I am sure still is today. You rarely got turned down if you invited somebody to dinner at the residence. We did a lot of that kind of entertaining. Large dinners. Smaller business lunches. Some breakfasts - including once a month for the AmCham board. We used that house very fully during our time there. We also did a huge amount of non-representational entertaining, e.g., with members of the American Embassy staff and community. I'll bet almost everybody at the embassy got to the residence, probably on multiple occasions,

during our time there. I have a nice painting upstairs done by the wife of an embassy officer - a quite talented water colorist - of the residence, showing women and children walking in on a Saturday for some kind of event.

*Q: How did your representation funds hold out?*

LAMBERTSON: We never had a problem. We were undoubtedly out of pocket to some degree because we were honest about not dipping into representation funds for things that were not really representational. But in terms of actual representation money, I don't think we ever were short. I don't think the embassy as a whole was. I don't remember anybody complaining, anyway.

*Q: Again, we've gone, always starting in Vietnam, but you've gone to Washington at the highest levels in the bureaus, the deputy assistant secretary and now to your mission. This is going to be your last assignment. Do you see broader American issues that are illustrated in your own career here, things that we're going to have to watch out for as a Foreign Service and as the United States operating in Asia?*

LAMBERTSON: There's been such a dramatic change in priorities since 9/11 that I'm not even sure I am capable of answering that question now. I am sure that for every embassy, including the embassy in Bangkok, the war on terror is right up there in first place, as the top priority of almost every part of the mission. In Thailand that would mean further strengthening the security relationship, in its broad sense, and working with the Thai to make sure that they're being as effective as possible in our joint effort. But I have to think eventually we'll get past this terror-dominated era. When we do, we'll find that the priority that was beginning to emerge when I was in Thailand will reassert itself once again – economic issues. Traditional security issues of the kind that we used to worry about, wars between states in that part of the world, or externally fueled insurgencies, are unlikely to be as important in the future. I think there is likely to be a stable period ahead in Asia, assuming we can solve, or contain, and move beyond the terrorist problem.

The primacy of economic issues in Bangkok when I was there was to some extent delayed, or obscured, because I still had those other older, traditional things to deal with, like refugees, winding down the Cambodia war, drug problems, a livelier than normal military-to-military relationship, etc. That's why I liked Bangkok. But I think for that embassy in the future, and for all embassies in that part of the world, if you can separate the terrorism issue, or if we can in fact put it behind us someday, economic questions and issues related to trade and investment will be back at the top of their lists of priorities, wouldn't you imagine?

Of course in that part of the world, looming in the background, will be the growing influence of China and the implications of that for the U.S. That will also be on the agenda for Bangkok and our other EAP posts.

*Q: I would assume so, too, yes. You had the Vietnamese experience and you were mentioning people along the way who served with you who like yourself did very well in the Foreign Service. Would you say that there's a relationship between those Vietnam years in either maturing those*

*people more quickly or creating a club of people? Or is it serendipitous?*

LAMBERTSON: I don't know. There were of course a huge number of people who went through that experience ultimately. When I did it there weren't very many of us, relatively speaking, but by the time the whole thing ended numbers of years later a great many Foreign Service Officers had done their Vietnam time, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

*Q: At one time I saw a figure that 10% of the Foreign Service was in Vietnam in the late '60s.*

LAMBERTSON: But perhaps serendipity was involved, too. I certainly thought the quality of the FSOs that got together in August of 1964 to go out there in my group was very high. Among their number were a few who did very well indeed. Steve Ledogar was our senior negotiator on various arms negotiations in Geneva when he retired, in I guess the mid-1990s. Frank Wisner, of course, rose to the very top. Desaix Anderson had an excellent career. He should have been an ambassador somewhere, but was Chargé in Hanoi. Rich Brown was an ambassador in Latin America. I think we were unusually blessed; I'm not going to say unusually talented, although there were some very good people there. But it's true also that being in a place like that can give an impetus to one's career. I'm sure it did to mine. Had my first post been Medan, rather than Saigon, I would not have become the sort of "known quantity" to people in the East Asia bureau as rapidly. So it was good for me from a career standpoint. I don't know that the same could be said for Wisner or someone like Holbrooke who was kind of a shooting star from the very beginning. But for me, being in Saigon undoubtedly helped me get a jump on the system and I'm sure that was true for others.

*Q: It says here all good things must come to an end and so you retire from the Foreign Service. You were showing me earlier a sign here in the house. That sign says, "Home of David F. Lambertson, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand."*

LAMBERTSON: That's right. An official green highway sign. It stood on the outskirts of Fairview. There was one on the east side and one on the west side. Several years after I'd come home, the city fathers figured they ought to take them down since they were no longer strictly true. My mother was chagrined when that happened, but she made sure that she got both of them. I have one in here and the other one out in the garage.

**EDWARD H. WILKINSON**  
**Refugee Coordinator**  
**Bangkok (1992-1995)**

*Edward Wilkinson was born in Indiana in 1936. Mr. Wilkinson received his bachelor's degree at Purdue University and served in the army from 1957-1959. His career included positions in Philippines, Mexico, Costa Rica, Argentina, Taiwan, Ecuador, Korea, Thailand, and Germany. Mr. Wilkinson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 2002.*

WILKINSON: Yes. During the late fall of 1991, I had my eye on what I thought would be the perfect job for me, the Refugee Coordinator in Bangkok, Thailand. By chance, I noticed that my former boss when I was in the Asylum Office, Ambassador Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, was going to stop by Korea on his way to China. I sent a message to Ambassador Schifter to ask that he give me a few minutes during his stopover. He was gracious enough to allow me to come and breakfast with him at his hotel. Essentially, I explained a bit about the job I was seeking and asked him to put in a good word for me at the Bureau of Refugee Affairs.

I'm not sure what he did. He may have made a phone call, he may have sent a note, he may have ignored me – I doubt that somehow – but in any event I got the job.

*Q: So you went to Bangkok from '92 to when?*

WILKINSON: Until 1995. We were there for a three-year assignment.

*Q: Let's talk about what you were doing.*

WILKINSON: Being Refugee Coordinator was a two-part job. The officer dealt, on the one hand, with what the U.S. Government was doing to help Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese refugees in the refugee camps in Thailand. There were a number of refugee camps all along the Thai/Lao and the Thai/Cambodia borders. These were places where people who had left Vietnam and Laos during and after the Vietnam War, and later the Cambodian atrocities perpetrated by Pol Pot, were housed. We had, in the Refugee Bureau, funding available for food and for a variety of other services. In addition, our immigration colleagues went to these camps and interviewed people who had applied for refugee status to go to the U.S. Immigration officers did this in a manner roughly parallel to reviewing an asylum claim within the United States. This is because a person abroad applies for refugee status, while a person inside the U.S. or at a port of entry applies for asylum status. My part of this job had to do with providing appropriate funding for food, shelter and so on.

The other part of the job was overseeing the Orderly Departure Program, or ODP. ODP was effectively an immigration processing operation within Vietnam. A few years before my arrival in Bangkok, the Vietnamese finally agreed that we Americans could go to Vietnam and process applications for people who wished to apply for immigration visas or, in some cases, refugee status within Vietnam. Now that, it seems to me, was an amazing thing.

*Q: It is. A country, at that time, we did not have diplomatic relations with.*

WILKINSON: We had no diplomatic relations with Vietnam at the time, yet there we were, together with our U.S. immigration colleagues, processing visa and refugee applications within the country of Vietnam. Our officers were consular personnel, like any other, looking at immigrant visa applications and immigration officers looking at refugee applications. They traveled to Vietnam in teams. All this had been arranged before I arrived in Bangkok.

The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry dealt with these matters. We, in fact, did our processing in the

old Foreign Ministry building in Ho Chi Minh City, which I might say, virtually everybody, except officials in the government in Vietnam, called – and still call – Saigon. This building was the Foreign Ministry up until 1975. It was near the presidential palace, the main cathedral, not at all far from the National Assembly, the Continental Palace Hotel, and so on.

*Q: I know it well.*

WILKINSON: I had been to Saigon a couple of times during my courier days, and it was very interesting to go back and see it.

The teams would fly into Tan Son Nhut Airport and generally spend two weeks in Saigon. As I indicated, all of this was organized through the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry. There was a team of people within the Foreign Ministry who worked with the non-governmental organization, the NGO, who helped us with the processing. I might add we worked very closely with non-governmental organizations in Bangkok and in Vietnam both in the ODP processing in Vietnam and in providing the refugee services in Thailand.

When I first went to Hanoi in the fall of 1992 in my role as supervisor of the Orderly Departure Program, the only American office that existed there was the POW-MIA operation. They were, of course, coordinating the search for remains of U.S. military personnel lost during the Vietnam War. They were very helpful to us and, in fact, when the State Department first sent three middle-grade officers to essentially be resident in Hanoi prior to recognition, they first set up shop, so to speak, in the building the POW-MIA people occupied.

We had a good working relationship with the Foreign Ministry officials. We also dealt with the Ministry of Interior. The Interior people, like Ministry of Interior people anywhere, were a little tougher to deal with, but by and large, we were well received by all.

Once again, I'll have to admit that one of the reasons why I liked that job was the wonderful opportunity to get to know Vietnamese of all stripes during my time there.

Later during my tour, an office was opened in Hanoi, the precursor to the embassy. When that office opened, our lives became a little bit easier.

*Q: Did you, in a sense, employ Foreign Service Nationals under some other guy's name or something, who were working for you?*

WILKINSON: Yes we did. Actually, what happened is that we had a contract with a non-governmental organization that employed a number of clerical staff and interpreters. These people were, as a practical matter, our FSNs, our Foreign Service Nationals.

*Q: How about working with the Vietnamese officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? Was it a fairly relaxed office?*

WILKINSON: Yes, it was fairly relaxed – at least the people we dealt with. There was a young man, an interpreter, who I believe was on contract to the Foreign Ministry. He had been in the

U.S. as a high school student in an exchange program and his English was very good. Although plenty of people at the Foreign Ministry and elsewhere spoke English and we had our own interpreters, the man from the Foreign Ministry who was in charge of our program did not speak English, so he – and we – depended very much on his interpreter. Of course, our Foreign Service ODP officers were pretty fluent in Vietnamese, as well.

The Vietnamese people with whom we worked – Ministry people, our “FSNs”, etc. – would very often invite us to dine at a restaurant or we would invite them to lunch or dinner. I think our easy relationship might have been something that was very helpful in the opening of relations in that country.

*Q: Now let's talk about the people you would see in Vietnam to be orderly departed. Who were they and what were their stories?*

WILKINSON: Our consular ODP officers interview those individuals who might qualify for an immigrant visa, such as the spouse of an American citizen, the spouse of a resident alien or the mother and father or child of an American citizen in the U.S. If you fit a category of people who could get an immigrant visa, and you could get a passport (generally not a problem), we would issue the visa in the very same way as we did in Bangkok or Tokyo or anywhere else.

We also accepted applications for immigration from “Amerasians,” of course. These were offspring of GIs and Vietnamese women during the time of the war. These children were not at all accepted in the close-knit Vietnamese society, so a special law was passed in the U.S. to give these kids special treatment. Of course, by the time I got there, they weren't “kids” anymore.

And, as I indicated before, our U.S. Immigration colleagues interviewed individuals who might qualify for refugee status. Essentially, these were the same people who, if they had gotten out of Vietnam, might have qualified for refugee status in Thailand or in one of the other refugee camps. Or, they were relatives of some of these people. Effectively, the Orderly Departure Program was a combined visa and refugee operation.

There was also a special program for so-called Montagnards, an ethnic group of people akin to the Hmong in Laos. They could fairly easily make a case that they were being discriminated against within Vietnam.

So this processing was parallel to things going on in other parts of the world. However, I think that the incredible difference was that we were doing these programs in a country with which, nearly twenty years before, we'd been at war.

*Q: Well, I think in a way we still were.*

*I think it would be awkward for somebody to come and say, “You know, I'm being discriminated against by this government when you have a government interpreter taking this down. I mean, how does that work?”*

WILKINSON: Well, technically they weren't government interpreters, although I have no doubt

that they had to report. But people did make these claims, and I'm not aware of endemic problems related to this.

I might add here that we also worked very closely with officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Saigon. They and other international organizations put a lot of pressure on the Vietnamese to say, "Come on, let's be reasonable here. These are, in many cases, old folks who aren't going to do you any harm. Let's help everybody out here." And so, there was a great deal of help given to us by the UNHCR in this regard as well.

*Q: What about Caucasian Americans; were they coming back to visit at all at that point?*

WILKINSON: Yes, they were beginning to come back, some to help the country, some to just be tourists. And I met at least one Vietnamese refugee who came back and established a number of factories to make prosthetic devices rather inexpensively, partly from old rubber tires. In fact, that gentleman lives here in the Washington area and owns a number of restaurants.

*Q: This was true in Korea, too.*

WILKINSON: Yes, in many parts of Asia.

*Q: Throughout Asia. If they were coming back, particularly I'm thinking of American males coming back; Vietnamese are beautiful young ladies and I would imagine there would be a lot of attachments to at least some of them.*

WILKINSON: Oh, there were, without question. You had the usual range of this sort of business going on. There were certainly people who had come back there to find a bride. I mean, they were the usual deals that you see all over the world. All you have to do is look in the back of the Washingtonian magazine, for example. "Come over and get your lovely partner for life."

There was established, before I finished my tour in Bangkok in 1995, a bar in Saigon called Apocalypse Now. It was located near the National Assembly. It was very popular with returnees. Also, there was a Vietnamese-American who opened a first-class restaurant there also near the National Assembly. I'm sorry to say I can't remember the name of it. It was a Vietnamese-style restaurant that was a huge success. As I understand the story, the owner was among the first allowed to come back to Vietnam in the late 1980s. He looked around, saw his possibilities, went back to California, sold some of his assets and came back with cash to open his restaurant. I think he has done very, very well.

Little by little, lots of people came back and the Vietnamese government in that side of their thinking promoted this. They wanted to have it because, like tourism anywhere, it's income for the country.

*Q: Did you get the feeling, being in Vietnam when you were there, that the Communist rule was beginning to get quite a bit softer?*

WILKINSON: Yes, I think so. You would talk to the faceless bureaucrat about something, and

he or she would often give you the company line, “No, we can’t do this. Well, I’ll have to refer this to a higher authority. Well, I’m not so sure, let’s see what we...” But, I got the distinct feeling that the Communists – the people who firmly believed the company line, people who may have even personally known Ho Chi Minh, or people who sat at his feet, as it were – were getting on in years and they therefore were fewer and further between. During my time dealing with the Vietnamese, the younger ones really couldn’t do a great deal about the situation, but I think they were just biding their time. I suspect that’s going on in China as we speak, as well.

My belief in this regard has nothing to do with anything that anybody said to me. No Vietnamese ever gave me a little elbow in the ribs, but I certainly felt it. I don’t mean to imply that Vietnam is going to be an American-style economy tomorrow morning or next Thursday or a year from now. It is likely to be more socialist, I suspect; a little like France perhaps. But, yes, the situation – the thinking of the people – is changing.

*Q: Were you seeing signs of foreign newspapers and magazines and that sort of thing?*

WILKINSON: These sorts of publication were available in certain areas. I’m not sure what would’ve happened if a street sweeper from Cholon regularly went and bought the New York Times in one of the hotels. I suspect if he did so, he might have gotten a knock on the door. But sure, I, as a foreigner, could buy virtually anything I wanted. My experience there was really before the Internet, of course.

*Q: I was going to say the Internet now probably, this is the computer connection has probably changed everything.*

WILKINSON: I would imagine. The Internet existed, of course, but it was not widespread. I personally can’t address that issue.

*Q: Going back to Bangkok itself, I realize you were not directly involved in making the judgments of all this, but I’ve talked to some people who have worked in Thailand at the time and were saying, “You know as we looked at this, the refugees were more and more what we call economic refugees and the NGOs and the others, I mean all of a sudden, if you started denying this or looking too closely, you were essentially breaking their rice bowl.” A bureaucracy had built up which was processing refugees and you had to have refugees by hook or by crook in order to keep it going. Did you see any of that?*

WILKINSON: Interesting observation. Yes, I would say that I would have to agree with that; it did exist. I might throw in here something about the situation in Burma that resulted in another refugee crisis. I refer, of course, to the bloody uprising after the national election of 1988. So you had an entire new refugee business along the Burma border. When I got to Bangkok in ’92, there were camps run by Thai authorities on the west side of the country. We weren’t very involved with those camps, but I did visit a number of them.

*Q: This is when they had the election and the army led it and then they basically slaughtered a number of their own countrymen.*

WILKINSON: Yes, that was what happened.

I think it's instructive to note, in this conversation, that the Thai Ministry of the Interior – the administrative organization that dealt with all refugee issues – handled the Burma refugee situation very differently than they did on the east, the Vietnam War, side. In 1975, refugees began to arrive in Thailand from Vietnam and Laos, and later from Cambodia. The refugees entered along the Lao-Cambodian border with Thailand. In a certain sense, we – the U.S. Government – sort of ran that refugee situation. Now, that statement is a huge oversimplification, but we spent a lot of money and we did a lot of things to manage the Vietnam War refugee situation in Thailand. In post 1988, on the Burma side, however, the Thais essentially ran it. We certainly had an input, but the Burma refugees were – and still are – managed by the Thais.

While I was there, the young officer who was the Interior Ministry's man in refugee issues and his deputy were transferred to different jobs without much warning, at least to us. I think this was a sign that a significant part of the Thai Government had decided that enough was enough, that the Thais should have much greater input into the management of the refugee programs in their own country.

Which leads back to your question. We had processed these applicants for refugee status in the camps since, essentially, 1979, and although other people did come out from Vietnam, Laos and later Cambodia while the processing was going on, by and large, there were very few people left in the camps who likely qualified for refugee status by the time I got there. I guess it's fair to say that while there were a number of Thais and NGOs who saw refugee processing as a job, I think most people saw the handwriting on the wall and prepared to move on.

During my three year tour in Bangkok, there were some very important valued colleagues from the non-governmental side who found other work elsewhere and were gone. During the time I was there, horrible things were going on in Africa and if your interest in life had to do with being good to people who were refugees, there were plenty of other places to go.

In short, I didn't see the refugee "business" as something that would just continue essentially on its own.

**JOHN M. REID**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1992-1995)**

*Mr. Reid, a Virginian, was educated at Virginia Tech, Columbia and Harvard Universities. A specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs, he served in Saigon, Vientiane, Bangkok and Seoul, primarily as Public Affairs Officer. In his Washington assignments, Mr. Reid also dealt with affairs of that region. He was also assigned as Public Affairs Officer at Beirut during the Lebanon Civil War, and was a casualty in the bombing of the US Embassy in Beirut. Mr. Reid was interviewed by Charles R. Beecham in 2002.*

REID: At that point, the senior Foreign Service pay raise came through, and it made a lot of sense to stay in USIA for another three years and qualify for an annuity which would really support me. Then USIA personnel called me and asked how I'd like to go back to Bangkok as PAO. Actually, I was not too keen on this suggestion. Many of the USIS Thai staff were very close personal friends, I sensed that very tough times might be ahead for USIS, and I didn't want to be in a position where I might hurt people I liked. For better or for worse, however, self-interest, perhaps not too enlightened, won the argument.

The not-so-good news was that, for a year before the Thailand job became vacant, I had to go back to my old Washington job—deputy director in the East Asia area office, this time working for David Hitchcock. The less I say about that year, the better. David was a very different kind of guy from Rob Nevitt, my previous boss in the same job. David was a very determined, sometimes tenacious personality, and I do give him credit for getting me a Presidential award for what I did in Korea. That was very decent of him. Our styles were very different, however, and didn't mesh well. There were some difficult issues, one of which destroyed a friendship important to me. After the year in Washington I went back to Thailand, and the rest is history.

*Q: One thing I want to ask you, if you feel like talking about it is, overall, how do you think the Agency was led at the top under recent administrations?*

REID: Well, from what I have told you, you can probably figure what I think of Bruce Gelb. It was all pretty much downhill after Charles Wick, although Henry Catto had some promise, but I don't believe he was around very long. I was at a PAO conference in Hong Kong during my final Thailand tour, and, at a lunch, I was seated on Joe Duffey's left so I could talk about the program. Shortly after I sat down, Duffey's assistant bustled up and sat on his right. She had been out shopping and wanted to talk about that, and that pretty much ended my part of the conversation. Seeing Duffey at this conference was my only contact with the man, but I did not have the sense that he was particularly interested in anything we had to say.

I spent my last three years in the field, and there it was very difficult to get a sense of what the high-and-mighty were doing back at headquarters. People would come through and tell us that morale at USIA was terrible, that there was no direction. I was familiar with one situation where a senior officer was formally disciplined for mishandling resources while overseas and was subsequently appointed to a top position in USIA. I understand that, once the facts of the case became known to people in Congress, the appointment had very negative consequences for USIA's prospects. From where I was sitting in the field, I could not be aware of the considerations leading to the appointment, but I wondered then and still wonder about the agenda of the people who made the decision. Were they focused on what was good for USIA, or was there something else? Surely, they should have known how damaging the appointment might be, and how bad it might be for morale.

Let me tell another little story. A junior officer was assigned to work for one of our section heads in Bangkok. There were all sorts of problems with this officer's performance, and the section chief, the supervisor, tried to deal with them. It was a very difficult situation; the supervisor was trying to play by the book, to counsel and to document, but things became very confrontational.

When the supervisor wrote the annual evaluation, however, it was a model of restraint, although he did make one major criticism. It was something he had discussed with the officer several times and which he documented fully. Since I had also discussed the issue with the officer and had my own independent documentation, I backed the criticism fully when I wrote my review. The officer initiated a grievance procedure, claiming he had been treated unfairly. Sometime later, after I retired, I got a call from USIA personnel, asking whether I was sure about what I said in my review. I was sure. I thought the matter was finished until about a year later, when I happened to encounter the officer, and he told me, somewhat smugly I thought, that he had gone back to Washington and had managed to have all the negative material removed from his evaluation.

The point is that, in the last years of USIA, the whole system was corrupt. Officers were afraid to write candid evaluations and reviews, because they knew they would face grievance actions and the likely deletion of any negative material. Without candid evaluations, incompetence was rewarded. Whose fault was it? Agency leadership certainly had some responsibility.

**GRETA N. MORRIS**  
**Press Attaché, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1993-1996)**

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

MORRIS: I did; I wanted to go to Thailand and the...

*Q: You hadn't served there?*

MORRIS: No, I hadn't served in Thailand. I'd visited Thailand just for a week but I felt that it was a very interesting country and a place where I would like to serve. I probably was naive at the time; I'd always had pretty good luck in learning foreign languages and so I thought I could probably learn Thai. At any rate the press officer job in Thailand opened up and that was what I decided that I wanted to do next, and I was able to get the job. I was assigned to full time Thai language study for a year at the Foreign Service Institute.

*Q: How did you find it, the study?*

MORRIS: It is a very difficult language; it is tonal (five tones) and uses a completely different

writing system than does English. I enjoyed it because I'd always enjoyed studying languages but it was very challenging. It was not like studying French; it was not like studying Indonesian; it was very, very tough.

*Q: We've got two factors. One it is a more complicated language and two age is moving on.*

MORRIS: Yes.

*Q: As you know in your later thing age one doesn't get these languages as well.*

MORRIS: That is very true; the combination made it very challenging, but ultimately I was able to succeed and meet my goal and went off to Thailand.

*Q: You went off to Thailand when?*

MORRIS: In 1993.

*Q: You had a new administration, the Clinton administration. Did you feel that was making any difference in our view of Asia or not? It was sort of business as usual wasn't it?*

MORRIS: I think the big difference as far as Thailand was concerned was that Thailand was able to restore its democratic government. This was really about when I got there; it was not quite a year into the new democratic government of President Chuan Leekpai but people were very hopeful about Thailand and its new democratic government. So U.S. relations with Thailand were at a pretty good place at that time. We had a democratic administration in Washington; we had a new democratic government in Thailand.

*Q: You were there in '93 to when?*

MORRIS: From '93-'96.

*Q: OK and who was our ambassador?*

MORRIS: David Lambertson was the ambassador the first two years I was there and then after he left in '95, there was a hiatus between ambassadors and Will Itoh came out early in '96. There was a long period of time when Skip Boyce who was the DCM was the charge.

*Q: Your job?*

MORRIS: I was the press officer, press attaché. Well, what did that entail? Thailand of course was a very big press center, very big media center. There was a large Thai press corps, two English language newspapers and several Thai newspapers. Bangkok was a huge city, over ten million people, so it was a very large city and these newspapers were very active. There was lots of opportunity to interact with the media, there were television stations there, and one of the television stations was owned and managed by Thaksin Shinawatra who later became the prime minister of Thailand and didn't do perhaps quite so well as prime minister as he was doing as

head of this television station.

In addition to the Thai press there was also a very large foreign press. The foreign correspondents were focused really not so much on Thailand, about which everybody thought: OK Thailand was boring, it's kind of an economic success story and democracy has been restored here so we don't have to worry about Thailand anymore. But there was still a lot of problems with Cambodia and then there was the situation with Vietnam and the fact that the U.S. still did not have diplomatic relations with Vietnam. So there was a lot of interest with both Vietnam and Cambodia; the journalists went back and forth into those countries and then used Bangkok as their headquarters, almost their R&R spot in a sense. But there was a large foreign correspondents club in Bangkok that would have regular meetings, so that was a very interesting place to get to know the journalists, some very colorful figures who were the correspondents there.

The other big issue was over on Thailand's other border and that was with Burma. Of course all of the problems in Burma, the human rights problems there, the continued house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, and then all of these various tribal groups that were on the border between Thailand and Burma, several of which were actively involved in the drug trade, so that was a big issue. We had a very active drug enforcement agency presence at the embassy in Bangkok.

*Q: How did you find the press? Were some papers responsible and others weren't, did they run the spectrum or how?*

MORRIS: Some were certainly more favorable and more responsible than others. The Nation and The Bangkok Post were the two English language newspapers. I would say that of the two The Bangkok Post was more conservative in many ways but I would say The Nation was usually more favorable to us and we were usually able to get things published in The Nation. There were some very good journalists there, including some who had had training overseas. By and large I would say the two English language newspapers were pretty good to deal with; there was more discrepancy in the Thai press.

Probably the best Thai newspaper was one called Matichon and it was quite a good Thai newspaper. There was another one called Thai Rath that was more focused on populist issues. Every day it would have a column that would describe little issues that people were having, perhaps in their neighborhood – the trash department wasn't picking up the garbage and so it was causing an outbreak of flies in the neighborhood – and the efforts of the people to try to get this problem resolved. Then the newspaper would actually try to publicize these issues and try to embarrass the government or the authorities into doing something about this problem. The newspaper served a very good purpose from a populist standpoint, but it wasn't always something that was of interest to us.

*Q: In that part of the world and other parts of the world there are some sort of rags that basically goes to a politician or a businessman we've got this story on you and we're going to publish it unless you give us some money or something like that; it was basically a tool for blackmailing. Was there much of this or any of it?*

MORRIS: I didn't find that in Thailand; no, I did not find that in Thailand.

*Q: Did the Chinese Communists have an active press there?*

MORRIS: The Chinese News agency was there, but I don't recall any other Chinese language press that was affiliated with the Chinese government. The Vietnam news agency was there also.

*Q: What sort of things were the Thai press and media interested in about the United States?*

MORRIS: Certainly our relationship with Thailand; that was the biggest issue for them. They never felt that we were giving them as much assistance as they would like so we had to sustain some criticism for that. The Thai, of course, felt that they had supported us and they did during the Vietnam War in very real ways that weren't always popular with their neighbors and they felt that we owed them a bit more than we were supplying at the time. I think that was certainly the biggest issue. Some of the other issues were things that perhaps we were more concerned about. There were lots of problems, as I mentioned before, along the Thai-Burma border with the drug dealers, so we were constantly trying to get the Thai authorities to work with us to try to capture the main drug dealer, who was called Khun Saa. Eventually we were able to get the Thai authorities – the drug enforcement agency was working very closely with the Thai authorities – and they did work with us in getting this major drug dealer so that was a really very big success. But we had criticized the Thai government, not usually publicly except on rare occasions when we didn't think they were cooperating enough, and they would constantly explain to us how difficult it was; they had to work with their neighbor, Burma, Myanmar, which was right next door.

Another issue was human rights and we were very critical of the Burmese government for its human rights abuses, for the continued house arrest for Aung San Suu Kyi and the Thai again would say, "This is our neighbor, we have to do things in the Asian way, we are not going to criticize the Burmese government." So there were those kinds of issues between our two governments.

*Q: Did the Thais have a pretty good representative of press media in the United States?*

MORRIS: Not too many, no. There were a few Thai journalists who were in Washington at the time, I think there still are, and a few in New York; but that was pretty much it. They depended quite heavily on the various media outlets like the Associated Press and others. They had their own subscriptions to those news services and depended on them for international news and from time to time they would carry things that we gave them as well. They did like to do interviews so they would interview our ambassador and other visiting dignitaries and usually do a pretty good job of covering those kinds of things.

*Q: Did you sort of baby-sit the ambassadors? Was that part of your job when they were being interviewed or not? It's the wrong term but in other words...*

MORRIS: Yes, that's always part of the press officer's job to be there, to record the interview, to make sure that when it's reported that it's reported accurately; that was a big part of the job. I

remember we had the ASEAN, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations, meeting there one year, their annual meeting. There is always the post-ministerial conference, the post ASEAN ministerial meeting, which the United States and other partner nations to ASEAN attend. One year Winston Lord, who was the assistant secretary for East Asia, was there for this meeting. All the Thai newspapers wanted to interview Winston Lord, so how were we going to do this. We worked out an arrangement with which they all agreed and Winston Lord agreed to do two interviews, so we had representatives from two of the newspapers there for the first interview and then two of the other newspapers for the second interview. Of course, I sat in on both of those interviews, but Winston Lord was masterful in dealing with the press and he did a wonderful job on both of these interviews on practically no sleep at all. The media were very, very appreciative of having this opportunity.

*Q: The Royal family how was that treated?*

MORRIS: The royal family was pretty much out of bounds as far as any kind of media criticism. That, of course, made for a very interesting situation because there was a lot going on just below the surface.

*Q: The crown prince remains still, I'm told, not a very loveable person.*

MORRIS: There may be private criticisms, but publicly all members of the royal family have to be treated with the utmost respect in the press. So that was something that was just completely off limits as far as any press criticism was concerned. The royal family, of course, continues to be very, very important in Thailand. During the time that I was there the mother of the king, she was referred to as the princess mother, passed away. She was very old. There was a very long period of mourning and I remember everyone in the country had to wear either black or white or maybe a very light beige for basically almost a year. We all ended up getting a number of black things to wear. The embassy was very lucky in that we had someone on the embassy staff, from the U.S. Information Service, who was related to the royal family in a very distant way. She knew all of the protocol and all of the things that, for example, the ambassador and other people on the embassy staff needed to do in terms of going to pay their respect to the Princess Mother, who had been interred in an urn after her death. The people would go and visit at the temple; this all built up to a tremendous cremation ceremony. The day of the cremation ceremony was a Thai holiday. It was an event that was very, very important to the Thai people. I think that this love of members of the royal family and the royal family as an institution was something that was really very genuine and was very important to the Thai.

*Q: Were there any, I'm looking at the time and maybe we'll at this point and for the next time you left there in '81?*

MORRIS: No, I got there in '93 and left there in '96.

*Q: Were there any coups or anything of that sort?*

MORRIS: No, there was an election, Thailand has a parliamentary system so there were constantly threats of no-confidence votes and finally there was an election and a new party and a

new prime minister came into office. Perhaps not what the United States would have chosen but nonetheless somebody that we continued to work with. Basically it was a pretty peaceful time in Thailand, it was a time when there was really very rapid economic growth. You could see that the Thai people themselves were becoming more affluent all the time, a lot of very fancy cars on the road, a lot of cars period. The traffic in Bangkok was absolutely horrendous at the time, but it was at a period of great prosperity. There was a lot of hope in Thailand because people there really felt that the bad old days of coups in Thailand were over, Thailand was firmly on a path to democracy. Thailand was experiencing tremendous economic growth, the region was basically peaceful, and the United States had reestablished diplomatic relations with Vietnam. Cambodia was still problematic during that period of time, there were still some problems with Burma but basically the situation was better. There were also problems, that would flair up from time to time in the south of Thailand with the Separatists movement there. Basically it was a good time I think for Thailand and the Thais felt that this was a very good time. Later, as we know, the economic crisis hit.

*Q: That was a couple years away?*

MORRIS: That's right; that happened in 1997.

**JOAN PLAISTED**  
**Office Director for Thailand and Burma**  
**Washington, DC (1994-1995)**

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

*Q: Well then you came back to Washington, DC and you came to the Thailand and Burma office. You were there from '94 to when?*

PLAISTED: I was there a rather short time as the Office Director for Thailand and Burma in the State Department from September '94 to July 31, '95.

*Q: You had been through a lot of the trauma in Thailand before. How were relations with Thailand?*

PLAISTED: Thailand is a very important ally of the U.S., but the relationship was frayed a bit at the edges. That was really due to differences on Burma policy, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia at that time, and some trade disputes with the U.S., mainly intellectual property rights. I think also some high level visits that had been scheduled had to be canceled including the Secretary of State's. The Thais were concerned. So we certainly tried - and I think we were successful - to put the relationship back on a very positive path with Thailand. It was mainly through high level

visits during the time I was on the desk with just one series of briefing papers after another after another, preparing for the principal's visits to Thailand. We had several visits during that short period of time. The Secretary of State had a very successful trip to Thailand. This was Warren Christopher in November of '94. The Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai met with President Clinton twice within a very short period of time in October of '94 and then again in November of '94, and they got along quite well. Our economic relationship became a lot stronger because we had our first ever U.S.-Thailand economic consultations.

*Q: You mentioned there was a disagreement over Burma. What was that?*

PLAISTED: It was really the whole approach to take towards Burma. Strobe Talbott represented the U.S. at the post ministerial conference with ASEAN, the Southeast Asian nations meeting, the summer before I came on the desk. He really was very concerned that the U.S. was being isolated on Burma policy. With our emphasis on human rights, we were taking the right approach but we really had to do more to coordinate with our friends and allies in the Southeast Asian countries so they would understand the thrust of our policy and perhaps take a more like-minded view. He was quite concerned when he sat down with the heads of state.

What we did on U.S.-Burma policy was to coordinate much more carefully, not just with our Southeast Asian counterparts, but first within the U.S. government. There were a lot of differences. This was very controversial amongst the U.S. government agencies and even within the State Department. What takes precedence, human rights and the Bureau of Democracy and Human Rights? State's counternarcotics bureau wanted to take certain counternarcotics initiatives which the human rights people just didn't think we could do. So, first, we had to coordinate the policy amongst the U.S. agencies. We were eventually able to take some initial steps on counternarcotics, exchanging information with Burma really for the first time, and organizing some training seminars in Burma. We were able to take those steps on counternarcotics without damaging U.S. human rights interests. It was a very delicate balance. So first we tried to coordinate policy within the Department of State, secondly to coordinate policy more amongst all the U.S. government agencies. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State would chair interagency meetings, bringing together all the interested players in Washington. The meetings were pretty lively. At least we got everyone together in the same room and started to be a little more like-minded towards Burma. Finally, we worked much more closely with the ASEAN governments by going out and making demarches.

Very much at issue with Burma at that point was Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been under house arrest. Her anniversary was coming up, six years of house arrest. We were working very closely with the human rights groups in the U.S., with groups overseas, with her husband, Michael Aries who is a professor in the UK. I talked to him about once a week. There were many groups around the world who were really trying to do everything they could to put some pressure on the Burmese government to seek her release from house arrest. Finally, in July '95, on the sixth anniversary of her house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi was released. That was the good news when I was on the desk. It didn't last forever. She has been put under house arrest twice since, and remains so today.

*Q: Before we move more to Burma, how was Thailand's government at that time? Had they*

*pretty well shucked the military type of government?*

PLAISTED: Yes, they had had an election. The new prime minister was Chuan Leekpai at that time. He was someone who really did believe in democracy and shared many of the same ideals that we had. This came out in his meetings with President Clinton. Thailand really did show a solid improvement and commitment to everything the country should stand for - democracy, human rights, and counternarcotics cooperation with the U.S., too. We moved forward on certain trade issues. Thailand did come forward to sign an intellectual property agreement which certainly helped on the economic side.

*Q: Moving over to Burma, what did we want? One can say, "Free Aung San Suu Kyi," but more than that, she represents a broad political movement. Did we see any prospect of doing anything on that?*

PLAISTED: I think ultimately what the U.S. and democratic nations wanted was a recognition of the election results in Burma from 1989 when Aung San Suu Kyi and the democratic party won the elections and were never allowed to come into power. I think ultimately we wanted a democratic process. Whether it was a return to recognize those election results or to hold future democratic elections, that is ultimately what we were asking for in Burma. Also, we were concerned about the real suppression of the people's human rights, the treatment or mistreatment of so many of the minority tribes in Burma. We were also asking for counternarcotics action. This is an area with the world's highest production of opium, with exports from Burma. We wanted their government to really crack down on the supply side.

*Q: Were there any revolts or this type of thing going on while you were there? I know they had a series of tribal, warlord, and student problems. Were these going on?*

PLAISTED: There were a series of refugee problems with minority tribes in particular fleeing into Thailand and causing some problems on the border as they crossed into Thailand putting economic strains on the neighboring country. This was occurring during my time, and there was a question of how can Thailand cope with these refugees. Sometimes Thailand would forcibly return the refugees across the border, an action that could be endangering their lives. The Burmese army was after them. That was always an issue, too.

*Q: What was your impression of our embassy in Burma? Was it able to do much there or was it just sort of there?*

PLAISTED: Our embassy was very active in pushing the U.S. agenda. We had an excellent Chargé. We don't have an ambassador in Burma because of the problems we had after the '89 killings and the election results not being recognized, so we downgraded from an ambassador to a chargé. In essence we had a mission in Rangoon that was as active as it possibly could be under those circumstances in pushing the U.S. agenda. We also during my time had a high level mission going to Burma to really sit down and talk directly with the Burmese government. It was headed by Tom Hubbard, our deputy assistant secretary of state. It was the first high level U.S. mission sent to Burma since 1988. What I remember was trying to coordinate the U.S. government's position. What was my boss Tom Hubbard, what was he going to be able to say

when he got there because of all the conflicting views, human rights, drugs, counternarcotics? So what we did on the desk is, we insisted, I insisted, that we be able to draft the instructions to him, and then clear these with the National Security Council, get the NSC to chop off to get all the agencies on board. That was the one way we could get cleared interagency instructions.

*Q: Did you get the feeling that the Burmese government gave a damn about what we did?*

PLAISTED: They did to some extent because they really did want more support on the counternarcotics side from the U.S. Also I think they were very concerned economically with the power that we had to prohibit new foreign investment or even to have some impact on the U.S. investment that was already there. They were actively putting in a gas pipeline between Burma and Thailand. So I think to some extent, yes, they were concerned about how they were viewed by the United States. At the same time the Burmese government and others would argue that how they viewed the democratic process or how they treated Aung San Suu Kyi and her followers was an internal affair of their government, and we shouldn't interfere. It is the classic Chinese argument, we shouldn't interfere in their internal affairs and sovereignty.

*Q: How did you find the Burmese embassy? Were they effective?*

PLAISTED: There were restraints on us here in Washington. We weren't able to deal directly with the Burmese ambassador and the Burmese embassy, so we had to play it more cautiously. The Burmese embassy would take a party line in support of their military government, the same thing I ran into up at the United Nations. The Burmese permanent representative, their UN mission there, would spout the official government line. So I felt we weren't going to break through. We are not going to change their official line. At the UN every year there would be a General Assembly resolution on Burma. You have to get the right balance between criticizing the human rights situation and giving the government of Burma credit for anything it may have done correctly. By working very closely with the drafters of the resolution - it is always drafted by the Swedes - the U.S., for the first time, was able to co-sponsor the Burma resolution which was in part due to all of our efforts in getting the U.S. government agencies aboard. We were also able to get a G-7 statement on Burma calling for Aung San Suu Kyi's release and the democratic process to move forward in Burma.

*Q: Was there the feeling that the plight of Aung San Suu Kyi might have been obscuring the real problem? In a way I could see how they could let her go, kick her out of the country. Was this a concern of ours? By being there, she was a real thorn in their side. If you are out of the country, it wouldn't have been as much of a case.*

PLAISTED: We certainly had no intention of encouraging her to leave the country. She was the spokesperson for the democratic movement. She herself always made the point that the larger issue is the return to democracy in Burma, not her own personal house arrest but what it stood for - the need to recognize the election results. She also made it perfectly clear she had no intention of ever leaving Burma. She knew if she left that chances are she would never be allowed back into the country again. I think she was correct, so it was clear that if she were released as she was, she certainly didn't have any intention of hopping on the first plane to join her husband in England and their two sons. In fact, the Burmese authorities, it was so inhumane

in my view, just within the last few years Michael Aries, her husband, developed a cancer that was spreading quite rapidly. He wanted to go to Rangoon to see his wife one last time. The Burmese government would not give him a visa to visit her while he was dying of cancer. He subsequently died not being allowed to see his wife again.

*Q: Who was running Burma? This was as we saw in this '94-'95 period?*

PLAISTED: This is the so-called SLORC, which is a very good acronym. SLORC, it was very much the military who were in charge.

*Q: Was Ne Win still a figure there?*

PLAISTED: He was still alive, but he was behind the scenes. He wasn't active in policy at all. He had been shunted to the sidelines, but occasionally you would hear something about Ne Win speaking from his home. He really didn't have any input into the SLORC policy decisions.

*Q: He wasn't like the man in Singapore sitting on the side calling the shots.*

PLAISTED: Lee Kuan Yew, no, not at all.

*Q: Well, after this time in '95, whither? Is there anything else we can talk about on Burma?*

PLAISTED: There was a lot of congressional interest at that time on Burma. I would brief Senator John McCain and Congressman Bill Richardson on a fairly regular basis on what was happening on Burma. At the very end Thailand's ambassador at the UN whom I knew well was named ambassador to Washington, and we had a new U.S. ambassador going out to Thailand, Will Itoh. I was able to bring them together and really outline for them, here is what we haven't been able to accomplish yet. Here are the two new ambassadors. I really outlined a rather ambitious agenda for the two of them over quite a fine lunch. It was hosted by the Thai ambassador in New York at one of the better restaurants, Daniel. Here is the challenge for you two: to finalize the bilateral tax treaty, the treaty we had been working on for some time, to conclude a civil air agreement, and to make more progress on intellectual property rights. Over the next few years they were able to deliver on these important parts of our bilateral relationship.

**WILLIAM P. KIEHL**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Bangkok (1995-1998)**

*William P. Kiehl was born in Pennsylvania in 1945. He received a BS from the University of Scranton in 1967 and an MA from the University of Virginia in 1970. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1970, he was posted in Belgrade, Zagreb, Colombo, Moscow, Prague, Helsinki, London and Bangkok. Mr. Kiehl was interviewed in 2003 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Well, anyway, Bill, we're moving you on. You went to – what? Thai training, was it?*

KIEHL: Yes, I wanted a change. I was in this office in Washington. I wanted to go back overseas, but I didn't – having spent most of my career in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, I was not in a hurry to go back there. Things had changed. It was not quite as interesting as it once was. There wasn't the combative aspect of the Cold War any longer. It was mostly being almost like a subcontractor to AID, in many ways, and I wanted a change. I wanted something different. I was also approaching 50, and I was thinking seriously of retiring then, at 50, and cashing in and going off and doing something entirely different, but I decided to compromise a little bit and do something entirely different within the Foreign Service. So I lobbied rather aggressively, for me, or for a USIA officer – because in USIA, the worst thing you can do is lobby for a job.

*Q: But how do you – but there has to be some sort of sub-zero (ph) form of lobbying, I mean ...*

KIEHL: Oh, yes – but very subtle. You let it be known that you were interested in a particular job, and you got people to lobby on your behalf, but you never expressed a direct interest in a job by going to someone and saying, “Oh, please give me this job!” or any of that stuff. You would then, in the good pace of time, be given that job, if you were good at the subtle form of lobbying.

Well, of course, that's all changed now that USIA is in State. It's a different world, and people who could adjust to that did pretty well, I think, and those who couldn't maybe didn't do so well, but learned. So, for me, this was fairly aggressive. I went to see the director for East Asia and Pacific and enlisted her help, and I went to see Barry Fulton, who I figured owed me a little bit for having put up with this reorganization. He was, by that time – he had moved over, I believe, as head of the new information bureau. So it was an assistant secretary level, or whatever, in USIA. I enlisted his help, and his help to talk to the East Asia folks about it.

Well, I was not an old East Asia hand. I had never served there. There were probably ten former Thai hands who, their whole lives, had dreamt of going back as PAO to Thailand, from their days as assistant information office there, or branch PAO or whatever, and many of them were at grade (ph), really, about the same background – number of years of service, probably just as many friends in the agency and so on. So I knew this would be an uphill fight, but one thing came into play, which was very convenient. Two PAOs ago, the PAO was, rightly or wrongly, found to have spent \$30,000 of program money in fixing up her house, and so that was a big scandal, and so the inspector general's corps (IG) decided that a new broom was in order.

Nothing notorious – no selling of IV grants, or any of that, but they thought that the place was very inbred, that all the senior officers there had served in Thailand before, that more or less – it was on automatic pilot. Well, they couldn't do much about it, because the PAO who had just come out there was one of those who had served in Thailand, I think twice before. He was on his third tour at USIS Thailand. He was the PAO. But this feeling was reflected in the files, and so the East Asia-Pacific office said, “Who's going to shake that place up? We've got to find somebody who's not an old Thai hand, and somebody who has new ideas, and besides, it's about time we cut the hell out of that post. It's much too big. And we need somebody who doesn't have any emotional attachments to it to get in the way of that.” So I was the perfect candidate, and so I

was sent out there with a mandate to shake things up, come up with some new and better ways to do things, and, oh, by the way, you have to eliminate 38 positions and a little over half a million dollars in budget. And I said, “Well, why can’t the PAO who’s leaving do that, rather than the PAO who’s just about to arrive?” and they said, “Well, he won’t do it. He’s just too emotionally involved in the post – he won’t do it, and he’s retiring, and there’s nothing we can do about it.” So I managed to get it postponed for about three months before I did this, so that at least people would get to know me before I came in and handed out pink slips.

Well, maybe I should go back to – am I still in Thai language training? I sort of blended the two together. The Thai language training – I was studying Thai at age 49, which I don’t recommend to anyone. Having tried to learn Finnish at age 42, which is probably the hardest language in Europe, along with Hungarian or Estonian – it just really doesn’t work. I got a 3/3 after a lot of struggle and really hard work, to the point where I was having not dreams, but nightmares, in Thai. But unless you had a tonal language when you’re younger – I think it’s very hard – or you’re a professional singer or musician. I think it’s very hard to learn a tonal language in your late 40s. All that said, I was able to do it adequately enough to pass the FSI test, and to amuse people in Thailand endlessly by getting the tones wrong and saying absolutely atrocious, filthy things in the middle of a speech of congratulations or something like that. The way I looked at it – well, you know, the Thai have a great attitude about such things, and so I figured I would just laugh it off, too. I decided not to take anything seriously – like that.

*Q: And it shows an effort.*

KIEHL: That’s right – that’s what I figured. There was also – I was pretty much a type A personality, throughout, I think, most of my career, and I was, of course, now hitting age 50, and I was thinking to myself, “You know, in addition to this change of workplace in the world, and this new adventure, I ought to start becoming a little more type B and a little less type A.”

*Q: Type A and B you might explain to somebody who ...*

KIEHL: Well, it actually has to do – the people who are type A tend to have heart attacks. They are more competitive and more stoked up with energy, and type B are more laid back, lotus land, Californian-esque, et cetera. Or Thai, as the case may be, because the worst thing in Thailand you could do is show your emotions in public, become aggressive in public, and as part of that cultural thing, I decided, “I am going to learn to be type B.” One of the best trainings for that was the ride between Sathorn Road and Wireless Road. Between the USIS compound and the embassy, which I had to traverse at least once a day, round trip – usually twice or even three times a day, in my air-conditioned Toyota. It was a matter of about three miles, I suppose, if you walked it, but, of course, if you walked it, you’d have to immediately take a shower, and so you would drive.

Now, the drive in Thailand, in those days, was probably the closest thing to hell on wheels, because it took 45 minutes one way to get those three miles. Endless stop and stop traffic – not stop and go, but just stop and stop traffic, and if you even tried to open your door to see what was going on, the door would be hit by a guy on a motorcycle going down between the cars at about 90 miles and hour. I got a lot of work done in the car. Fortunately, I had a cell phone in the

car, and I brought along a laptop, and I'd get a lot of work done in the car, back and forth. But, of course, in addition to the morning meeting every morning first thing in the morning, with the country team, we had a daily country team meeting – in part, I suppose, because it was one of the more complex embassies in the world. There were 34 government agencies represented, 680 Americans assigned to Bangkok and 1700 FSNs on the staff. It was impossible to manage, as every DCM and ambassador soon found out, and even with the daily country team meeting you couldn't manage it.

But that 45 minutes taught me one thing – the 45 minutes to the embassy, and then a 15 or 20 minute meeting, and then 45 minutes back to the USIS compound, whereupon I'd get a phone call from the ambassador's secretary, asking if I could see the ambassador at 11:00 that morning about something really urgent and so back in the car again – that was the *jai jenn*, or cool heart. *Jai jen* – it was my favorite thought. Because, if you didn't maintain a cool heart, you'd go absolutely bonkers, and, of course, you'd lose respect of you Thai employees and your Thai contacts, because the worst thing in the world is to have someone who is emotionally overwrought. The Thai just find that frightening. Although, of course, they get emotionally overwrought and kill each other and all that sort of thing, too, but if you wanted to maintain their respect as an official, you would never let your guard down that way. So that was a good thing, and I maintained that *jai jen*, I think, ever since. In other jobs, believe me, I've needed it.

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

KIEHL: That would have been from the summer of 1995 to the summer of 1998 – three years.

*Q: What was your wife up to?*

KIEHL: She was a Foreign Service officer, of course, and she was also in Thai language class, and she went out, initially, to the consular section as a consular officer, but with a special responsibility for extraditions of criminals and so on. In fact, that was kind of her sideline. She did the first extradition of a Thai Member of Parliament to the United States to be brought up on drug charges, and road to the airport in the military bus with all these guards with submachine guns to guard him, to turn him over to the U.S. marshals. So she had developed a good relationship, over that initial part of her tour, with the U.S. Marshal's Service, who would come in, and pick them up, and take them out.

*Q: I didn't think there would be that much, between Thai – extraditions between Thailand and the United States.*

KIEHL: Well, you'd be surprised. Part of her consular work, also, was American citizen services. She wasn't so much in the Visa business as the American citizen services and extraditions, and there were 70 Americans in Thai prisons, then – almost all on drug charges – and we also, probably, lost about another 70 citizens a year in Thailand, through either drug overdoses or traffic accidents, or even more unpleasant things, like murders and so on. So that was her initial time, and then in the second part of her tour, she was the GSO in charge of the motor pool, which was a rather large motor pool, you can imagine, for an embassy of that size, and some other ancillary stuff, which I can never quite remember what she – you'd have to ask

her what she did. But I remember that the main thing was the motor pool was very important, because she ran the motor pool for the Clinton presidential visit as well, and had 240 cars under her domain, at that point. So that was pretty much a full time job.

She enjoyed both of those tours, both of those jobs – consular and management. She was an admin or management cone officer, so it made sense to take a management job after that consular work.

*Q: Well, on your thing – first place, how did you find, sort of, relations between the United States and Thailand?*

KIEHL: Well, the U.S.-Thai relations had been generally rather good throughout their history, and I can recommend a book to you on that, called *The Eagle and the Elephant*, which we produced, on U.S.-Thai relations over the years from Andrew Jackson to Bill Clinton. But the Thai-U.S. relationship – or the U.S.-Thai relationship – would be, as the Thai would say, a *pi-non* relationship. That is, an “elder brother, younger brother,” or “senior-junior” kind of relationship, and that’s very common in Thailand, as well, that kind of relationship. But among countries, what it meant was, Thailand listened to the guidance of the United States on matters, and, for that, the United States was supposed to take care of Thailand – to be a protector of Thailand, as an elder brother would a younger brother, you might say. That was the way the Thais saw their relationship with the United States.

Now, it wasn’t always idyllic. During the Vietnam War, and immediately after the Vietnam War, the Thai felt as though that relationship was breaking down. There was also a foreign minister of Thailand, named Thanat Kolman, who sort of dined out on being – how would you say – critical of the United States, at that time, and thereafter. For the entire time thereafter – in fact, even up to my day he was often in the press talking about the nefarious dealings of the Americans, on whatever subject happened to come up. So it wasn’t unanimous. I mean, not everybody saw that relationship as advantageous. Some of them saw it as insulting or just simply wrong. But most Thai had a positive view of the United States, and a very friendly attitude, and we could do things in Thailand that we couldn’t do in many countries in Asia. We had, of course, a treaty relationship with Thailand. It’s one of the five treaty relationships in Asia, the others being Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. So Thailand was the – if you consider South Korea mainland Asia, okay – but Thailand is certainly mainland Asia. So it was one of those five key treaty relationships.

For the most part, the Thai even – they would change governments with some regularity and there was a period, of course, of military dictatorship in Thailand, but throughout that period U.S.-Thai relations remained pretty close. When I got there in ’95, relations were really very good. Of course, that didn’t mean I wasn’t surprised every day by something in the newspaper. The Thai media were, if anything – they would put the British tabloid press to shame. Particularly concerning anything having to do with the United States. If they could misconstrue it, they’d do it.

*Q: Is this done out of – just for selling, or out of bias, or ...*

KIEHL: I think mostly for amusement value and for selling newspapers. Most of the journalists that I met, even the ones who were sharply critical of the United States, in terms of our policies, were basically friendly to the United States as a country. You didn't have very many professional anti-Americans there. Thanat Kolman was, perhaps, the most famous voice that was critical of the United States, and there were a couple of columnists who were regularly finding some fault in the U.S. But by and large, the media were friendly, but they did like to pull our chains a little bit. If they could find someone who could make the U.S. look foolish – particularly the U.S. embassy look foolish – that would be their greatest gain. So the press office in Thailand had a couple of tasks. The press section, for one, was to get U.S. policy into the Thai media, and influence the Thai to write in a positive light about the U.S., and U.S. policies and so on, but another part of the agenda was to make sure that we kept anything really stupid out of the newspapers, having to do with the embassy, and with 680 Americans running around, you can bet there was always some potential for that.

*Q: Well, I would think that running an office in Thailand – what little I've observed – my experience goes back to a consular convention there back in '77, I think. But particularly Thailand being such a freewheeling place for the sex trade and also the drug trade and tourism, that this would cause uncounted problems for somebody like yourself. I mean, running a business.*

KIEHL: Well, oddly enough, it didn't. I mean, obviously, Thailand is still very much known as a place where anything goes, you might say. It has a huge criminal element. The sex trade is a part of everyday life there, to the point where the Thai don't actually consider it anything unusual. Drugs are very readily available. Thailand itself has a big drug problem with, basically, amphetamines, but all manner of drugs are easily available there, and, of course, at one time, it was a major trafficking route. So a big part of the U.S.-Thai relationship has been to stop that drug trade, and to a large extent, Thailand is a success story, if you look at the world, in general, because it's no longer a major transit route, and because it's not a major transit route, all the countries around it have become transit routes. So it hasn't solved the problem, but it has pushed it out of Thailand. And the growing of opium poppies has been pretty much eradicated in Thailand, and the manufacture of drugs in Thailand has been sharply cut back. The king has a real program among the hill tribes, getting them off opium poppies and on to growing asparagus and things like that. So you can walk into Marks and Spencers, in London, and find beautifully, exquisitely-packed asparagus, tiny asparagus spears, made in Thailand, produced in Thailand, and packed in Thailand and flown in. And quite the products are reasonably priced, as well.

So those things have all happened, and, of course, all sorts of handicraft projects and development projects for the hill tribes have done a lot to change their way of life, probably for the better. But what it's done is it's pushed a lot of this into Burma and southern China, and Laos and so on, and so you have lots of drug factories over there in the area inhabited by the Wa and other tribes in Burma. So it hasn't eliminated the problem but simply moved it, but it wasn't a big problem within our office. As far as I could tell, we didn't have any hookers on the staff, and we didn't have any drug-pushers on the staff, and the American officers, in my knowledge of my office, were unaffected by this, and most of the people in the embassy, I think, were unaffected by it. Obviously, there were some people in the embassy probably, who were touched by these blights on the otherwise charming Thai landscape but when I was referring to embassy

peccadilloes, it wasn't so much that. It was the innate stupidity of American officials to say or do things that would be taken the wrong way in a Thai context.

*Q: Well, I would have thought – I don't know, were you there during the time when the peccadilloes of one William Jefferson Clinton were all over the place, with Monica Lewinsky and all that?*

KIEHL: I was there during the period when Bill Clinton paid an official visit to Thailand, so he came off, in Thailand, of course, as one of the great American presidents of all time, because he was the first president to visit there in 28 years. Previous presidents had basically buzzed in there to hold talks about the Vietnam War and buzzed out again, and didn't indicate much show of interest in Thailand. So the Clinton visit was a real high point for U.S.-Thai relations, and that was in – that was actually – that was right after his reelection. So, if you remember, the scenario of the Lewinsky scandal built after that.

*Q: So let's talk a bit – how did you find the Clinton visit? I mean, one – the preparations before. Was it the usual very, very difficult problem of dealing with the advance party and all that or did it go fairly well?*

KIEHL: Well, I think I've mentioned before that I've been involved with presidential visits from Reagan and Bush, as well, and the Clinton team and I noticed, with each succeeding administration, it seemed to be less professionally done. More of a reliance on volunteers and loyalty to the campaign than people who actually knew what they were doing, in part, because in the Clinton administration by that time had gotten rid of the Billy Dales and all these professional White House staffers who ran visits and dealt with the media, you recall. I forget what that scandal was called – that was ...

*Q: That was Travelgate.*

KIEHL: Travelgate, yes. The whole Travelgate thing, and, of course, with them gone, you had really more of an amateurish operation in place. People really didn't know this as well, but, like all Foreign Service officers, we'd grin and bear it, and it worked out OK. Fortunately I had enough experience, and the people who came in knew that I had a lot of experience in handling presidential visits and press arrangements, so I didn't get any of these lectures like, "Here's how you suck an egg – you put a pin in this end," you know, any of that. So the relationship worked OK.

There were two people in the press advance group, one of whom, her main object was to learn how to be a Foreign Service officer, because she wanted to become a Foreign Service officer, having seen how we did things overseas a couple of times. So she was always trying to get tips on how to pass the Foreign Service exam, et cetera. The other was not interested in such things, and she was a little less friendly, but not one of those advance people from hell or anything like that. Her main claim to fame, however, which we didn't learn until after the visit, was that she was bouncing checks all over Thailand, both to the commissary, and to the embassy and to other places, as well. These were just basically bounced checks, and it took months for the embassy to track her down and get the money repaid, which didn't, shall we say, leave a very pleasant taste

in the mouth about the Clinton visit. That people like that would be hired to do advance is absolutely insane. I mean, it showed either total lack of judgment, or lack of any background check.

The visit went quite well, I mean, everything worked fine. We did a few things – because it had been years, nobody on my staff had presidential visit experience, unfortunately, We had, actually, I think, maybe one or two people on the staff had been there during a previous visit but hadn't played much of a role in it – none of the Americans on my staff had had any previous VIP –, no presidential or vice presidential experience. So I basically gave a training course in how to do it before we got the first advance team out there, and also did up a pretty elaborate scenario, and with that – the staff, of course, were very good people. Some of the best FSNs that I've ever had the privilege of supervising were in Bangkok. They put together the visit – nothing is flawless, but close to being flawless, and it was very complicated, because we had journalists in two hotels down on the river, the Oriental and the Shangri-La hotels – and they had docks and we used boats to ferry the press, because of the insane traffic in Bangkok. We used boats to ferry the press up to a dock near the Royal Palace, so that they could change out press pools. So we have trains, planes, and automobiles. We had boats, too, moving the journalists around town, and all these had to be escorted. So it was a logistical feat, and it wouldn't have happened without some very good FSNs, who, while they hadn't had a lot of experience in these kinds of things, had a lot of experience in Bangkok, and knew where everything was, and knew how to get everything done, and they did.

*Q: Who was ambassador when you got there?*

KIEHL: When I got there, there was actually no ambassador. Skip Boyce was the DCM, and he was chargé.

*Q: Who was that?*

KIEHL: Skip Boyce – Ralph L. Boyce, B-O-Y-C-E. He's now in Jakarta as ambassador. Anyway, Skip – otherwise known as Skip – and of course, this was when the old embassy was still functioning as the embassy, and USIS was down Sathorn Road. So we had out meetings in that same office that I alluded to with John Gunther Dean. I think Skip Boyce stayed in the DCM office, he didn't move into the big office, per se, but we always had our staff meetings around the big table, there, and these meetings were five days a week – well, four days a week were country team meetings, and on Wednesdays, you had the expanded country team meeting, and in a town where it's very hard to get back and forth any place, for those of us who were outside that building, it was agony, of course, to do this. I soon learned that the PAO – the first job of the PAO – was, before anything, to tell everybody what occurred, what happened, what was in the press that day, and to put it in some context, and with that scene-setter, then the country team meeting revolved around reaction to it, which, I suppose, in one sense, was not a bad thing, but, again, what it did is it – that everything was in reaction to what was in the media, which is not, perhaps, the best way of doing it. Having mentioned this a few times and gotten strange looks from people, I decided to just continue this as it was, and one thing it did do is it brought the public affairs of the USIS operation into the stream, because everything started with me.

The expanded country teams didn't have that format. It was a yakety-yakety-yak and around the room.

*Q: You weren't moving around each person, say.*

KIEHL: Right, and the expanded country team was a really expanded country team. There must have been 60 people in the room. That one I always went to and I brought the press attaché, usually, although if there was something cultural, the cultural attaché would come, and usually, if we had a new officer or something like that, they would come, at least to be introduced, because they'd need to get their face known, because in that embassy, you could be there for three years and not know everybody, easily. In fact, my last week there, I ran into a couple who said hi – and I said hi – and they seemed to know who I was, but I had never seen them before, and they said that they were just leaving, after three years there, and it didn't shock me as much as it would have anywhere else, because, after all, there were 690 Americans and people moving in and the TDYers that we had, and so on, and the fact that there were – that AFRIMS had its own headquarters, the Armed Forces Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, they had their own research headquarters there, as part of Walter Reed, actually, and the AID, and when I was there at first, until they packed up, they had their own compound, and then even when they had moved out, their auditors were there, and nobody ever saw them. We don't know where – I still don't remember where they were located. Of course, JUSMAGTHAI (Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group, Thailand), the military support mission, had its own compound, and Commerce had its own office in an office building near the embassy, and the foreign agricultural office had its own, and the Library of Congress had its own place, and so it was quite spread out, as well.

Even after the new embassy was built, by the time it was built, they realized it was far too small to hold all the people, of course, and that's why, in addition to USIS taking over the old embassy, we also had the first and second floors of that building, and the third floor we had the RAMC (Regional Administrative Management Center) office, and FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service), up on the third floor of the old embassy building. So we had the first and second floors, and they had the rest, and then Marines had some space in the building, and so did the University of Maryland, the overseas university classes were held in there. And that was just in that building, the old embassy. So it was ...

*Q: Well, what were the issues that particularly involved you, particularly dealing with the Thais?*

KIEHL: Yes. In '95, of course – I got there in the summer of '95. Actually I got there – because I – after language training, I was hospitalized for a ruptured disk, which I'm sure was brought on, in part, by the stresses of learning Thai. So it delayed my arrival for almost two months. I didn't have surgery, but I did have therapy at Georgetown University, and finally I got over there the day before my birthday, which was September 1<sup>st</sup>, in case you ever wanted to send me a card. My first day was quite unusual, in a couple of senses.

Three things happened that day. First of all, there was an impressive Buddhist ceremony at the USIS headquarters, to welcome me, and to bless the building, with Buddhist monks chanting, and all that sort of thing, and this is something that was quite unusual for me, in the Foreign Service, where we generally kept church and state rather distant. But in Thailand, not only did

each of the embassy – and the new embassy building – have a brand new spirit house, for the Thai spirits, but there was all sorts of *puja* ceremonies and religious blessings associated with all sorts of events having to do with the U.S. embassy and the U.S. Information Service and other parts of the outfit. And I always thought, “Well, this is, of course, a nod to the culture of the country and so on,” but it also struck me as a little condescending. Would we have done this in a Christian, or a Muslim, or a Jewish – do we do this in Israel? Do we do this in Spain, or Italy? Do we do this in Amman? I don’t think we have Islamic ceremonies in association with that embassy, so why are we doing it in this Buddhist country, except in this kind of, maybe, overprotective – again, the *pi-non* relationship. It went back to that, in my mind. However, I didn’t want to rock the boat, and I thought it really did seem to generate real loyalty on the part of the Thai staff. They felt very strongly about this, and after years of doing this, I thought it would be a really big mistake to try to withdraw from it. So we never did that. I mean, we always participated ...

*Q: Well, I can recall a couple things. One, when I was an enlisted man in Japan, up in Misawa, in 1952 or '53 or so, we were building a new barracks or something, and we had a Shinto ceremony there, and I know when we dedicated a new consulate general, or consular post, or opened a consulate in Danang, in Vietnam, in the '60s, we had a Buddhist ceremony. I think it's more – I mean, this has been part of almost – the Foreign Service, in other peoples' cultures, in East Asia ...*

KIEHL: In Asia, particularly ...

*Q: Somehow, it hasn't been done as much, I don't know why, but I think it's more there. I mean, we've been doing it for a long time.*

KIEHL: Yes. There was a little element of this in Sri Lanka when I was there. In the sense that, for exhibit openings, we would have an oil lamp, and flowers festooned and everyone would get a flower or lei, and occasionally we’d have a – obviously we’d have close relationships with the Buddhist monks. In fact, when I used to go out in the jungles to show motion pictures, in the jeep, with the generator, and the screen, we’d basically meet with the monk and the monk would gather the crowd for the film, the Apollo capsule film, or whatever it happened to be. So we were more connected to religion, I think, in Asia, than we were in other parts of the world, at least that I’ve been in. Certainly this is the case much more so than in Europe. If anyone had tried to get the local friar to bless the embassy of a new building in Madrid, I think there would probably be howls of protest.

*Q: Well, maybe because you can get away with it. I mean, in the United States, people would get upset if you had something too close to being church and state – well, anyway...*

KIEHL: I think it goes back to the *pi-non* relationship, the elder brother-younger brother. We would take care of you if you follow our guidance, and so we adapted to those ceremonies and so on. So we had this religious ceremony in the embassy, and then we also had a nice birthday cake for me, for my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, which – they had learned that was my birthday, and so a cake was produced. And, in fact, interestingly, my chief press assistant and my secretary’s birthdays were, coincidentally, the same day, so the three of us had a triple birthday, which was considered quite

auspicious.

The inauspicious part was that one of our library staff had committed suicide at the same time, and we learned of this on the same day as my arrival. Not terribly auspicious. I had never met her, obviously, so it's not my fault, and actually she was estranged from her family, and I guess had some emotional problems, and killed herself, and they found out about it because she was supposed to bring some element of food for the party, and she and the food never showed up, so they went in search of her and they found her. So that was a down side of that initial day.

However, interestingly, because I was the head of USIS and her family was estranged from her, we handled her funeral, to the point where there was the washing of the body, and again, numerous ceremonies in connection with that, and the lighting of the funeral pyre, which, as the elder person – I mean, the senior person in the office, the father figure – I had to light her funeral pyre. This was, I think, two days after I arrived. So I got a quick course in Thai cultural matters right then. It was not the last funeral I went to. In fact, other than the ambassador and maybe the DCM, I probably went to as many funerals in Thailand as anybody in the embassy, because these were not only funerals, these were important political and social events, and so I went to many, many funerals and prayer ceremonies and it got to be quite ordinary. I mean, you know, I never gave it a second thought. By the time I left there it was, "Oh, yes, I've got to go to the funeral." Maybe do one or two a day sometimes, but an awful lot, of course, came out of this.

We had an employee of USIS who was one of those very important employees that USIS was lucky enough to get sometime, years ago, and that's not the only place that happened – in Sri Lanka, we had a woman named Diana Captain, who is still alive and in retirement there. She was a close friend and confidant of the Bandaranaike family, and was invited every week to lunch with the prime minister, and so she was a conduit of information for the embassy. She ostensibly was the cultural assistant working for – sorry, I was the IO – the CAO at the time, when I was there, but in fact, she was the conduit between the embassy and the government of Sri Lanka, on an informal basis, and was an extremely important part of the relationship.

Well, we had an employee similar, in that she was raised in the Royal Palace. She was of noble rank, and was extremely well-connected in Thailand, to say the least. She was not so much a political conduit as in the Sri Lanka context, but if we needed something from the Royal Palace, or from the monarchy, we could use her as the means to get this conveyed and get it done. So she was actually very much in charge of these religious ceremonies that we had. We had a yearly blessing of our headquarters. We also, when we moved, from Sathorn Road to the new embassy, we rededicated the spirit house, of course, at the old embassy, and had a blessing of buildings, et cetera, which was very important. We also made sure that we were able to get a visit to the new USIS offices by the princess, and the embassy sort of piggybacked on that, in a sense. The princess came to congratulate us on our new building, and then we took her across to the new embassy, where she saw the new embassy and then had lunch with the ambassador and a few of us.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

KIEHL: By that time it was Will Itoh, and you may have talked with him, or you should.

*Q: No, but I'm planning to.*

KIEHL: Yes, he retired earlier this year. I'll let him tell it as he thinks it happened. But I believe the story is – and I don't know whether it's true or not but it was the story as many of us heard it—the State Department had decided that Stapleton Roy was going to be ambassador to Bangkok, and Will Itoh was then on the staff of the NSC as the executive secretary, and was going to be assigned to Paris as DCM. That was his reward for all the heavy lifting of working on the NSC staff for a couple of years.. And Bill Clinton asked him, “Where would you like to go? Would you like to be an ambassador? Where do you want to go?” and, as the story goes, he blurted out, “Thailand.” And Bill Clinton said, “Make it so,” and he got to be the ambassador to Thailand and Stape Roy had to abandon his retirement post to Thailand to go to Jakarta instead. That's the story that has circulated, and it doesn't strike me as being particularly inaccurate, but you could ask him about that.

Of course, because that happened, probably there were some resentments within the Department about it. In a way, it parallels some of the resentments when I got the Bangkok PAO job, and all these Thai hands got passed over. Several people, I suppose, in their well-meaning way, told me what some of these people said about me when they heard that I was going to get the job that they had dreamt about, and I said, “Well, you know, what can I say? If I were in their position, I'd be pretty pissed off, too.”

*Q: Were there any particular issues that our embassy – particularly from your point of view – was dealing with during these three years?*

KIEHL: Yes. I keep sidetracking you on this. Ninety-five, of course, was my year to effect these changes, and also to move our office from Sathorn Road into the old embassy. That's what my goals were. Ninety-six was the Clinton visit. The early part of '97, of course, we were basking in the afterglow of the Clinton visit, where we had even closer relationships with all the government officials, and the palace and everybody was glad to see the last of all those advance people, but the relationship – Thailand felt it got a lot out of the visit and so on. So the relationship between Thailand and the U.S. was on a really high plane – until July, when the baht imploded.

Now, we knew that Thailand was doing a lot of things in their economy that was somewhat shortsighted, but I don't think there was any accurate prediction on the part of the embassy as to what would happen with the run on the baht.

*Q: Which is B-A-H-T.*

KIEHL: B-A-H-T, the Thai baht, the Thai currency, which was then pegged at 24 or 25 to the dollar. The run began on the baht, but then it soon escalated to other currencies. That alone would not have caused the Asian financial crisis, but the system, the banking system, and the crony capitalism of Thailand and Indonesia and South Korea and Japan and Taiwan – all were shaken because of this, and a cascading series of effects ensued. But it all began with the Thai baht. The Thai-tanic, as they used to call it, or baht-ulism – any of those puns.

*Q: As you were sitting there – and this wouldn't have been your field – and country team meetings, up to them. What were you getting from the economic side prior to that, I mean, all along? Were warning signals coming out?*

KIEHL: In a sense they were coming out, but nobody in the economic section suspected that things were going to come out the way they did. Oh, sure, they would say, “You know, the banking system is over-extended on loans here – this bank seems shaky,” et cetera, but they didn't put it together in the big picture, and of course they had no way – well, they could have, I suppose, looked at the other countries, as well, but they were really so focused on Thailand. They didn't look at it in an Asian context, they were looking at it in a Thai context, and it didn't appear to be earth-shattering, the way it was.

It soon did become my problem, however, because almost immediately after the crash all the blame on this came onto George Soros and the U.S. government, and the United States as global economic power. Somehow, in the view of the Thai media, the United States had allowed this kind of thing to happen. You see the *pi-non* relationship again. Immediately, the younger brother said, “Look, we accepted your guidance, now you have to protect us! And protecting us doesn't mean just keeping the Commies out of Southeast Asia, it means protecting our economy – protecting us.” So the U.S. came in for quite a lot of criticism, some of it reasonably valid and some of it, of course, extreme ...

*Q: You mentioned George Soros. He was ...*

KIEHL: In currency speculation. Well, he did a run on the British pound, as well. He made fortunes in currency speculation, arbitrage, and made, I take it, a formidable amount of money on the fall of the baht. Well, that's his business, you know. Is he responsible for the economic collapse of Asia? I don't think so, but one could debate that, and they surely did in a rather one-sided way in the Thai press.

Things were not great, but they really got worse when the implosion also hit Indonesia, and then the United States announced it would give a bail out to Indonesia. It didn't give a bail-out to Thailand, it gave a bail-out to Indonesia, and the Thais said, “Hey – we have this security agreement with the United States, we're a treaty ally. We have the *pi-non* relationship. We've done everything America wants. We're a democracy – we're a functioning democracy with a free press, all the things that America loves. Indonesia is a dictatorship – no free press – corrupt government, more corrupt than we are, even – no security relationship with the United States. These people rarely listen to America. After all, they are Muslims. And the United States bails them out, and doesn't bail us out? Betrayal! Betrayal!” And the *pi-non* relationship shatters. And I'll pick that up at that next time because it's already time. So it became very much a public relations and public diplomacy issue, as well as an economic issue.

*Q: All right, we'll pick it up then. Great.*

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*Today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2003. Bill, here you're faced with this public relations – really, it's a two-sided thing. One, how to present it nicely, or to get over it, and the other one is really more of the political side, to see what you can do to show certain even-handedness – I mean you, I mean the government between Indonesia and Thailand. So in the first place, how did you sit down and figure out – I mean, what was, sort of, the planning? I mean, was there a meeting, saying, "Hey, we've got a problem?" or how did you about this?*

KIEHL: Well, there was a tremendous amount of hand-wringing in the embassy, I can tell you, because everyone was immediately aware of the bad press we were getting. Not only the bad press – and it was very bad press. The news articles were somewhat slanted to show the U.S. in a bad light, but the editorial comments were really quite vicious, as though the U.S. was really just spitting in Thailand's face. Not only that – because that, of course, came through every morning at the country team meeting – as I mentioned, I would give this litany of what was going on in the media, and there was many a sad face around the table, the ambassador included, and people were getting quite anxious about it, as I was. Not only that, but they were hearing, from all of their contacts – the political section was hearing from their friends at the foreign ministry, "We feel terrible about this. Why are you doing this to us? What have we done to deserve this kind of treatment? Why are you treating the Indonesians and the South Koreans better than you are us?" The economic folks were hearing it from the bankers and from the finance ministry and from the business interests. The Amcham, the American chamber of commerce members, were saying, "This is going to hurt business. People are eventually going to stop buying American goods and we notice our relationship with our Thai business partners is deteriorating. They're really angry about this." And the military guys were saying, "There's a lot of discontent, here."

All this was building up ...

*Q: You were saying sort of that the country team meeting would get together ...*

KIEHL: Not only were there the faces around the country team meeting when I was telling them what was actually being printed in the newspapers, about America, but they were also hearing it from their friends and colleagues and contacts in the various segments of Thai society. So there was quite a lot of hand wringing, a kind of a Leninist, "What is to be done?" How do we solve this problem? This is a problem – what do we do about it. I talked to a number of my Thai staff and some of the American staff, who were there long enough to understand what Thailand was about, and following a couple of these conversations, I sat down and I wrote a memo to the ambassador, proposing a public affairs plan on how to deal with this. It was rather a long memorandum. It was mildly classified, maybe limited official use in those days. It wasn't terribly secret because it was to be a public campaign.

I wish I had a copy of the memo at hand because we followed it almost exactly for the next year, with very little deviation, but there were two points I made in it. First of all, that this was important, that we had to address these issues directly and answer the charges that were being made about the United States, because in Thailand, if you are accused of something, and you remain silent, you are guilty. You have to answer charges. The presumption among most diplomats is, "Oh, we won't dignify that charge with a reply." That's the worst thing you can do in Thailand. You have to reply. You have to kick them back in the teeth just as hard as you were

kicked otherwise it appears that you're guilty. This strikes a lot of people as unusual, but, in fact, there it's quite the correct thing to do.

The second thing was –I don't remember if I used the exact phrase in the memo, but I think I write something like, "If you don't have the steak, then you can't have the sizzle." In other words, you can't put a good face on policy if you don't have one, and we didn't have one. Quite clearly, we didn't have a policy. There was no American economic policy to deal with this. It was purely *ad hoc*.

*Q: Did you have any feel for what went on in Washington, and why Indonesia got the largesse and Thailand didn't?*

KIEHL: , I can't answer that question, but I can say that yes, we did have a feel for what was going on in Washington, but the feeling we got was that, quite frankly, Washington wasn't paying any attention. Again, that is not something that is completely new to the Foreign Service. The U.S. Treasury Department communicated with the Thai ministry of finance almost exclusively by telephone and fax without even going through the embassy, so that the embassy only found out what the U.S. Treasury Department was saying from the Thai ministry of finance. The Thai would be kind enough to share this information with the financial attaché of the econ section. He was a State officer, he wasn't a treasury officer. He called himself the financial attaché – he was the number two in the econ section. His beat was the banks, and so they would clue him in, and that's how we knew what Treasury was up to, or what they were saying to the Thai. It was really quite a very unsatisfactory circumstance, and it was unsatisfactory from my perspective because I knew I couldn't pin a public diplomacy campaign on nothing, but it was really disturbing to my colleagues in the econ section who felt that they were just being run over, and weren't in the loop at all, and the ambassador was miffed – very miffed – in fact, because he felt that he, as the president's representative, ought to be in on what was going on with the Thai, and, of course, he should have been.

So we took a two-track policy here. On the first side, the ambassador and the econ section and the political section, principally, tried to convince Washington that this was important from a policy perspective, that they needed to have a policy, and they needed to get people out there – high-level officials – to talk directly with the Thai and have the ambassador and his team be part of the discussions, and not do everything by telephone and fax. And they embarked on that, in a big way. Now, that also served my interest, because I said, "OK, once we get a policy then we can promote that policy, but we have to initially start and just talk to people and say that it's not the way you portray it, really. We're not the bad people" – to get that out there and get the conversation going with people, and then, hopefully, fill in the blanks." I thought it was very important to get high-level visitors there, because that would provide us the publicity and the platform in order to get the word out to people.

The second part of the public affairs program--aside from the visits – the high-level visits – were regular contacts, as I said, and that meant the ambassador. It also meant the DCM and I and our media section and the econ folks, and we were very lucky, in a sense, because we had a DCM at the time who spoke really fluent Thai.

*Q: Who was that?*

KIEHL: That was Skip Boyce, the guy who's Ambassador to Indonesia now – Ralph Boyce. He had a real gift for languages, and he studied out in the provinces – lived with a family – convinced FSI to allow him to do that, when he was going out there as a political officer. So he'd been there as a political officer, and then came back as DCM. So his Thai was really quite good and quite colloquial, and not “like book,” the way some people speak Thai when they come out of the language class. So his Thai was excellent, and then I had an assistant information officer– the IO was about my age, and when you learn Thai in your 40s or 50s, you don't speak Thai that well. You try, and you make the effort, but you amuse people, the same way, perhaps, people would be amused by a dancing bear. The amazing thing is not how well the bear dances, but that it dances at all. So I was a dancing bear, and my press attaché was a dancing bear, but one of his assistants was a true *wunderkind* with languages, and she spoke extraordinarily good Thai coming out of FSI, and improved it tremendously while she was there.

So I said, “We've got to use these people, because a lot of the most vitriolic stuff is coming out of the Thai language press, not the English language press.” The English language press is very influential, because all the government people – almost all the government people, other than the politicians from the provinces, who may not actually speak English but were mainly there for corrupt payoff purposes – but the bureaucrats, the senior bureaucrats, the civil service that actually runs Thailand, they all know English, and they all read the English-language press as well as the Thai press, so that influences them, but it also influences the foreign public because that's all they can read. So all the embassies there, with very few exceptions, had not a clue what was going on in the Thai press. They only read the *Bangkok Post*, and *The Nation*, the two, leading English-language papers, and there were a couple of other minor ones that would rise and fall with the economy. And the *Post* and *The Nation* were much more westernized and more professional, you might say, in the Western sense of journalism, with how they did their stories. The Thai press just let it all hang out there. They were just unbelievable. You'd read these things and you'd say, “Holy mackerel, how'd they get that so screwed up?” or, “This isn't news, this is vitriol!” But there were really angry commentaries and the stories were completely bent out of shape, too. It was a different style of journalism, not something that's in the Western tradition. Thai TV was multiple channel and cable, as well, so people were very plugged into TV, but radio was very influential, still, particularly outside Bangkok, and in Bangkok, people had the radio on all the time, and the radio had taken a leaf from the American book, in a sense, by call-in radio was very popular, so you had people vocalizing their opinions, and in order to keep an audience, it had to be as controversial and as much *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) as possible. So these talk-radio programs were really vitriolic as well. So, Skip Boyce and the AIO were the two people I wanted to use in the Thai vernacular. We often had lunch with the Thai media, the Thai language media, and meetings with the editorial staff, and they were kind of a business lunch.. You'd have a nice lunch, but then you'd talk about the economic problems, and it would be off the record, but then you could have an on-the-record session thereafter, with the Americans there, and the two excellent Thai speakers, of course, were very good at this, because they had gotten their points down, they knew the party line that we were putting out, and they did it in Thai very well. The rest of us were doing a kind of social conversation in Thai, but I didn't trust my language or the Thai of most of the American staff well enough for us to do a radio interview in one of these high-pressure talk show type formats, because first of all you might come off

badly– it’s so easy, in Thai, to utter an obscenity when you’re saying something perfectly normal, just with the tone. It’s a tonal language, so if your tone is off, you can say something really vile instead of something quite ordinary. That would, of course, amuse people, but it would blow the message. Nobody’s giving you any credibility. So you had to have somebody who’s really got their tones down.

On the English-language press, the ambassador and I were the main interlocutors, but also, we always brought in people from the economic section, because they understood this in a way that made it seem as though they were high priests of finance, and so they had authority because they understood the terminology better than, frankly, the ambassador, the DCM, myself or the assistant information officer.

So we did a whole series of lunches. I mean, not a week went by when at least one of these lunches didn’t take place. Now, in addition to those lunches, I was cultivating, and the press attaché, and the assistant information officer, and our senior Thai FSNs, were cultivating the media, as well. We were having drinks with them, and chatting with them, and having one-on-one lunches with them, to get the point across that, first of all, George Soros did not cause this. He took advantage of a weak situation in Thailand and in Indonesia and in other countries, and we tried to explain to them how this kind of thing can happen, and it could happen, in fact, and did happen to the British pound, and George Soros made a bundle on that. He made over a billion dollars by manipulating the British pound just a year or two prior to that. So it wasn’t an American financier taking advantage of the poor, Asian, struggling democracies. It was business – cold-hearted business, and they took advantage of weakness, a perceived weakness.

In the meantime, the ambassador and his policy team were finally making some headway. We were reporting all this back to Washington – all this vitriol, all these damning statements, and I delighted in making sure that the language of the Thai press was inserted in all of these cables, because it was just unbelievable. I mean, “Oh, our friends the Thai, good guys. They’re our little brothers, you might say.” It was that kind of relationship – it was a very paternalistic view of the Thai, because we had helped them out in times past and they were good, loyal allies and they were fun people – the *sinuk* – “fun” is something in Thailand that is very important. People always smile in “The Land of Smiles.” All these kinds of things – this is part of the mythology that Americans perceive of Thailand and the Thai, that they are kind of uni-dimensional, grinning and friendly, and so on. Well, they saw another side of that, and it was shocking to people in Washington.

That coincided with the fact that this was becoming a serious financial problem, which could, heaven forefend, affect the Japanese, and the Japanese were the ones who had the really big bucks, and they also were very heavily invested in U.S. Treasuries, and if the Japanese had to bail out their banks, they would have to pull all this money out of U.S. Treasuries, and that would hurt the U.S. economy very much, and already it was hurting the U.S. economy because our exports were drying up in East Asia, because they didn’t have the scratch to pay for them. So all these things were coming together, and I don’t say, in any sense, it was the U.S. embassy in Bangkok that twisted the tail of the monkey in Washington and made policy happen, but it was, obviously, another factor. Finally there came to be interest in Thailand, and we had a succession of assistant secretaries of the Treasury and under-secretaries of the Treasury and assistant

secretaries of Commerce and under-secretaries of Commerce and finally, the Treasury secretary and the Commerce secretary visited. We also, by the way, because of the military relationship we had with Thailand, trotted out the secretary of Defense, et cetera, et cetera, and numerous assistant secretaries of Defense, and they were there, they were confronted by the Thai officials, they had meetings with them, they heard how disappointed the Thai were in us,— I always arranged to have some meetings with the press where they were asked some wonderfully vitriolic questions, and they responded pretty well in most cases. This, of course, was good publicity for us because it had statements by officials saying how supportive they were of Thailand and how “your pain is our pain,” blah blah blah.

And that all worked in our interests, and it also worked in the Thai interests, because they got to talk directly with policymakers, because they were out there, and they were on their turf, and they had a chance to present their case to them. Finally, we were asked by Washington, “Well, OK, if we did something for the Thai, what exactly would this include? What are you talking about here? What have you been talking about all these months?” So we had a couple of meetings, and we said, “OK, now, let’s see, what can we do here?” and recognizing that there isn’t an unlimited amount of money back there and they’ve already coughed up, I think it was \$8 billion and \$4 billion for Indonesia. Well, we’ve got to get at least \$4 billion into the pipeline for Thailand, because they’ll compare themselves, maybe not with South Korea, because that’s an enormous economy in comparison to the Thai economy, but they certainly will compare themselves to Indonesia, because they were the ones that precipitated a lot of this.

As it turned out, we did come up with about a \$4 billion program, and we used a device, which I talked about earlier-- videoconferencing. We were getting pretty close to the prime minister’s people, and the foreign ministry people, because they saw that we were on their side and they were quite eager to help us, and we were happy to help them.

So when the prime minister’s visit happened – and he brought a number of his folks along with him to Washington, because this was the time the U.S. aid package announcement was going to be made, and this is kind of a little ahead of the story, but when we did this, we decided to really maximize it to the Thai public, We set up a videoconferencing between Washington and Bangkok, but instead of having an American in Washington talking to Thai journalists in Bangkok, we had the Thai spokesman and the Thai prime minister in Washington, talking to Thai journalists in Bangkok, and it was all thanks to the American technology .

We did two of these. We did one the day before, immediately after the talks, with the spokesman for the prime minister, who did a very professional kind of press conference, and then the next day, we had the prime minister, and for that one, we not only did the same sort of thing that we had done before for Thai journalists, but we also hooked it in to the Thai television networks, live out of our offices on Wireless Road. So we had the Thai prime minister in Washington, through a videoconference, with a couple of his aids on either side, essentially doing a press conference with the Thai press sitting in our office. We had the people doing the conversations in a room about three times this size. It was the old ambassador’s office, with a big table and a TV screen and all that, and a dozen top Thai journalists could ask questions and comments.

Then we had another 120 or so Thai journalists, and TV cameras in our auditorium, focusing on

the big screen, and we had Thai TV correspondents doing stand-ups in front of the screen. So we had, I think there were, at that time, seven terrestrial television networks in Thailand – we had all seven. We had the cable folks there. We had all the radio people. We had lots of print journalists as well, and so this thing was probably the most-covered event in U.S.-Thai relations, in history, and probably still is. We obtained the Thai equivalent of the Niensens on this, and, of urban Thai, 90% of the television audience watched this, which is phenomenal.

*Q: Yes, when you consider an economic conference is not usually the sexiest thing going...*

KIEHL: Right, because – well, you see, this had been built up as the moment when America would come to Thailand's aid, and, in fact, it did. The \$4 billion was a mixed bag. We did some things that were relatively cost-free to the U.S. but were very helpful for the Thai. For example, they had bought a squadron of F-16s from the U.S. They owed a fortune for these F-16s. Well, a fortune for Thailand – a little over a billion dollars. We said, "OK, we can cancel the deal. You don't have to buy those F-16s. So that's a billion dollars back in your bank that isn't going outside. We did some vaccination programs and health programs and AID-type stuff, economic support funds, and so on, and we should have a scholarship program, because one of the consequences of the crash of the currencies in all these countries was that all of the upper-middle class or near-rich Thai, South Koreans, Indonesians, Taiwanese, Malaysians, et cetera, who were spending money to send their kids to college in the U.S., or graduate school in the U.S., could no longer afford it. Suddenly it cost twice as much to send that kid to Ohio Wesleyan. The Thai students were in desperate straits, because the university systems were not set up to do those kinds of fill-in-the-gap type programs for foreign students, and if they couldn't be in school, then they would get expelled from the U.S. because they were in violation of their visa if they couldn't pay their tuition. This is before 9/11, so there weren't terrorist questions here, and we were trying to get as many students to the United States as possible, because at that time it was \$7 billion a year influx of money to the United States economy, from people overseas paying tuitions for their kids.

*Q: It's a mainstay of our educational system.*

KIEHL: It's a mainstay. Half the mathematics departments and probably two-thirds of the engineering departments in the United States universities would close down without foreign students. They just don't have the students, whether they're not smart enough to get in, Americans – I don't know. But I can tell you this, a lot of the math classes, now, at the graduate level, are all taught in Chinese, because no one else there speaks anything but Chinese. We worked with a number of the universities and the alliance for educational exchange, which is an umbrella lobbying group in Washington. The institute for international education had a website specifically for this, how the universities could provide Thai and other Asian students with jobs or short-term bridge loans. However, it was seen as this would be a wonderful thing if we could do that. I came up with a symbol of our interest in Thailand to anchor the program. It was 156 years of U.S.-Thai relations that year, so I said, "Well, why don't we pick 156 scholarships per year for 3 years? And that would give us x amount of money which is how much we could figure we could get out of the government for this purpose." We thought, "Ah, that would have great symbolic value, one scholar per every year of the wonderful, magical U.S.-Thai relationship."

We had just produced a book entitled *The Eagle and the Elephant*, which was a new edition of a book about U.S.-Thai relations, so 156 years was known by everybody in Thailand, because we pushed that book big time. It was just after the presidential visit in '96, so that concluded with the Clinton visit with the king at the end of the book, and it was sold all over Thailand, so it was a common thing, that people knew it was 156 years, 156 scholarships. For three years, because we had that much money and we had that much money thanks to AID funds, because I turned to USIA and USIA turned us down flat. USIA said, "We can't do anything, we don't have any money, because our budget is shrinking so much that if we took it out of there we'd have to take it out of another country in Asia and they're all in bad shape." The most they could do is increase the Fulbright program slightly, but we ballyhooed that as well. So, the White House fact sheet was issued at the time of the prime ministers visit and we maximized the publicity. We had signing ceremonies, handshakes and grinning people signing documents, for several – well, six months thereafter, I believe, at least six months of ballyhoo about this visit and the largesse and so on. We had gradually turned the corner before that, but that really turned the corner.

It was like day and night. After that prime minister's visit and the money was on the table, you might say, although it wasn't really back on the table yet, it was promised, suddenly the Thai media, with very, very few exceptions, just said, "Oh, well, I guess America is our friend after all. They came through when we really needed them," and the picture turned around, but they still needed to find some scapegoat, and the scapegoat, they decided, was Japan, and so Japan got battered by the Thai. Not as badly as we did in the very beginning, but if there's any party guilty here it's – "Well, it's the Japanese! They haven't fixed their banking system for 10, 15 years they've known this was going to happen! We just followed the Japanese model, and the Japanese model is a disaster." We didn't do much to counter that argument, but the Japanese didn't seem to be able to. I mean, they had a very able ambassador there, who made wonderful speeches and was very smooth, and so on, but they just didn't have the public relations juggernaut that we had.

*Q: Well, I mean, this brings up something. In your experience, do you find that the fact that we come from a country where public relations has always been a key factor in business and all, that we have a fairly sensitive and relatively fast-moving machinery, or we did, anyway?*

KIEHL: I'd say we did. I actually don't know whether this would work today, because of the different structure. USIA – we were essentially an independent force there, and so we could experiment in ways that, I think, as a component of the State Department is very hard to do. Also, of course, we don't have the staff that we had then, and we don't have the resources that we had then. So it's hard to say. I don't think it would be as successful, and also, you have to understand another thing. That is, particularly in a place like Thailand – and it's true in many parts of the world. It's not necessarily true in all parts of the world, but in Thailand it was quite obvious that USIS was seen as something separate from the American embassy. It was seen as a U.S.-Thai organization. It was seen almost as a bi-national organization, in a sense. It was not seen as the U.S. embassy.

First of all, we were in a separate building with separate headquarters. We accentuated that difference as much as we could. We were much closer to the Thai; we worked in tandem with our Thai employees, so that a Thai journalists or an academic would have just as equal a relationship with us as they'd have with our Thai employees. In other words, there weren't

Americans and FSNs on two different planes of life. We worked together in the same offices. We didn't work on separate floors. We kept our classified information to an absolute minimum so that there was free movement of people and paperwork and so on. And, of course, there's a long history of this, where there were 18 USIS, branch offices out in the provinces at one time, showing movies and talking to students and all this sort of thing.

*Q: Sort of like the America House pattern that we had during ...*

KIEHL: Very much, very much – even more so, actually, than the America House, but the America House was seen as a German-American institution, because, in fact, it was. The buildings were donated by the German cities, generally, and the libraries, of course, were staffed with Americans and Germans. I think that really made a huge difference in how the Thai perceived us and how our message could get across. When we sat down talking with them, they looked at us as “USIT.” That's how they would say USIS – “USIT,” because the final “s” is a “t” sound, in Thai.

We were not looked upon as embassy officials. We were looked upon as USIS officials, and USIS had its own mythology there – people understood what USIS was, and it wasn't the embassy, it was something else. In a sense, it might have been more similar to AID when AID was big in Thailand, because the AID officials were out in the provinces working and they weren't considered embassy officials, and they had a counterpart organization which AID had created in order to funnel the money into Thailand, which still exists there and is still a very important office. We did something similar. We created, in a sense, an office in Thailand, because we needed to work with a Thai counterpart, particularly on counter insurgency, during the Vietnam War era. So the public relations department, which is under the prime minister, was set up, so that we could interface with somebody in Thailand, and the public relations department is still a component of the Thai prime minister's office, and it runs radio stations – I think they have 56 radio stations throughout the country. And they are the counterpart organization that we dealt with on VOA broadcasts, because we have a VOA relay station. I should say “we” – the U.S. government has. In those days, it was the U.S. Information Agency had. VOA was part of USIA, so our relay station – we had two relay stations. We had a small, medium-wave relay station outside of Bangkok which broadcast in the region in Lao and Burmese and Vietnamese and so on, and then we had a big relay station, which is probably five times the size of this facility [NFATC] with eight gigantic towers broadcasting short-wave, mainly to Central Asia and Russia, but also to China and to other parts of the world, and that would all come in from satellite links and be rebroadcast.

It was a very complex relationship and a very productive one for many years and it still is, as far as I know. The PRD (Public Relations Department), of course, was the counterpart to that, as well. So the Public Relations Department was their overseas USIS, but it also had a huge domestic component. It's as though all of the public affairs offices of the various government ministries or departments in the United States all got together under a single head and that would be the PRD, and it was under the prime minister in Thailand. It would be under the president or the National Security Council in the U.S. context. Of course, this doesn't exist, but it did in Thailand, because we needed it to, and it evolved that way, essentially during the Vietnam War era, mainly because of the counterinsurgency program. We had FSNs ambushed and killed on

the road because they were considered the enemy by the Thai insurgents during that era, and they were the enemy, because we were trying to counter their efforts throughout rural Thailand – to turn Thailand into another Vietnam or Laos, essentially. That was the domino that didn't fall.

*Q: In the first place, were you able to recruit? I mean, up until recently, sort of from the educated upper class for USIS operations? And two, were alumni from our operations seated throughout the media world, including the government?*

KIEHL: Oh, yes, very much so. During my time in Thailand, we still could recruit some of the top people in the country to be FSNs for us, but in years previously, we were really extraordinarily plugged in. We could recruit people. We had an FSN in our cultural section, Khun Poonsang --actually she was an ML (Muang Luang) – that's a noble rank. She grew up in the palace – she was raised in the royal palace, and so she was extraordinarily plugged in to the royal family and to the royal palace bureaucracy and so on, in a way that you couldn't be. You couldn't acquire that. You had to grow up there, and you had to know these people, and you had to go to school with them in the royal school, the elementary school in the palace grounds. So that was the kind of person we would have there.

In other countries, we had FSNs of similar close connection. I remember in Sri Lanka we had Diana Captain, who worked in our cultural section, but, in fact, did almost no cultural work. She was the conduit with the prime minister, because she would have lunch every Tuesday with the prime minister in Temple Trees (the official residence of the PM), just a one on one lunch. She was the conduit for American policy. If you wanted to get something across to the prime minister of Sri Lanka, I can tell you, that's how you did it, and vice versa. That conduit was two ways. It was an invaluable kind of contact for the embassy from a political aspect, but also, because of the USIS connection in a public diplomacy context.

Of course, we could hire really top-flight journalists in our press section, and some top-flight journalists would work there, and then they would move out and they would leave and they would go to be an editor of some newspaper or radio station, or so on. We had an extraordinarily close relations with a lot of these people, because once a USIS alumni, always a USIS alumni. They were still friends and colleagues. A very close friend, and a very good friend of America, was the guy who was in charge, not of the PRD, but a similar organization in the government, (MCOT or the Mass Communications Organization of Thailand) which also ran the licensing of radio stations. It was like the FCC of Thailand, you might say. Not only was he a close and good friends of the U.S. – he had been sent on a scholarship there, had studied in America, had gone back on an IV grant. He actually had worked for us for a time. Even from his job, there, he would write a column in a major Thai newspaper on the good side of America. So he was really a close, close friend, and, unfortunately, while I was there, he was assassinated. A very tragic situation – it had nothing to do with his U.S. sympathies. He actually was going out to dinner – it was his wedding anniversary, and he and his wife were driving to the restaurant in their Mercedes, and- (end of tape)

*Q: You were saying with a motorcycle ...*

KIEHL: Oh, yes, this is a common assassination technique in Thailand. You can have somebody

killed for \$50 there. At least you could in my day. Probably it's more like \$150 today. But in any event, one assassin is driving, the other is sitting in the back with a good quality pistol, and they pull up to you and you pop the guy off – you shoot through the window and kill. Well, it's not too hard. And it can be done in traffic, it can be done almost anywhere, The assassins are on a motor scooter and once they've fired the shot, then they take off, and that's exactly what happened. He was shot right behind the ear and killed instantly. As it turned out, it had nothing to do with his U.S. sympathies. What had happened is, they finally caught these guys, and they rolled on the person who hired them, who was a Member of Parliament – who, was a son-in-law of a woman who owned a chain of radio stations, whose license was rejected for renewal. So she decided to get her son-in-law to hire some assassins to kill the guy who was in charge of the organization that supervised it.

Justice didn't do him any good, of course. He was dead. His wife, was totally wiped-out by that, and his son, who was studying in the States at the time, flew back for the funeral, and vowed to carry on his father's fight for a free press and democracy and all that sort of thing. I have since lost track of him, but I expect he's in Thailand, doing something like that himself, today. But it could happen quite easily, that kind of thing. It was not an unusual thing. Even though this is a Buddhist society and one things of Buddhist as being completely peace-loving and calm and all those wonderful attributes of the Buddhist way of life – I was going to say "faith" but it's really a way of life. People are people, and some of the most disgusting crimes I've ever heard of were committed in Thailand. And, there is some terrible exploitation of people there, whether it's the sex trade or the drug trade or corruption in general. It was common knowledge that to be a police captain, you had to pay a bribe of \$50,000, and then you got to be a police captain, which would give you authority over a precinct, and you could make that \$50,000 back in no time, just on the gambling, skinning off the gambling receipts and so on. So there was a lot of corruption there, of that sort, too, but this happens everywhere in the world.

*Q: After, sort of, the currency crisis – well, you were there until when?*

KIEHL: I left in '98. Actually, all was settled, and it was time for me to leave. Incidentally, speaking of contacts in USIS, there was a young man who used to come into our library, for many years, when we were down on Sathorn Road – the old library – and he would use our facilities, and he still continued to use the library even during my time, but he wouldn't come in anymore, he would have materials delivered to him by a driver or he'd send a driver to pick it up. But a lot of research for him was done through our library. His name – he was the son of a well-known family in the silk trade, the Shinawatras. He later became a police captain and through that police captaincy, he used to buy used IBM computers, and he managed to get the contract for computerizing the Bangkok police department, and amassed a certain amount of money that way and got into the communications business, and owned a cable TV system there. Well, his first name, his most common name, is Thaksin, Thaksin Shinawatra. He's currently the prime minister of Thailand. That's not an unusual situation, but that's, perhaps, the most famous one at the moment.

*Q: There was a school of technology, wasn't there? It was an off-shoot of MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).*

KIEHL: Well, I'm not so sure it was related to MIT, but it was the Asian institute of technology or AIT, and it's still there, of course.

*Q: Were you working with that?*

KIEHL: To some extent, I was. AIT, of course, was originally set up by AID as the university for SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, when SEATO's headquarters were in Bangkok. This was SEATO university, and it was for Asian students, from all over Asia, to come there and get American-style technical training with American and other professors from around the world in the region, and it was one of the smartest things that AID did, in Southeast Asia.

The money eventually dried up. AID went away. In fact, the U.S. government doesn't put any money into AIT, and hadn't even in my day, but there was always an affinity for the U.S. because of the Asian Institute of Technology's history, and many of the buildings were built by AID, and so there's a little plaque there that says that – a handshake kind of thing. A number of the members of the board are Americans, including a former ambassador. John Gunther Dean is a member of that board of directors, and the current U.S. ambassador is often named to that board, as well. And there's also a former foreign minister of Thailand, who was one of the most extreme critics of the U.S. during the time I was there, and I think, still, recalls with less than happy circumstances, the feeling that he was taken advantage of by the Americans in the 1960s and early '70s, having to do with the Vietnam War. In any event, his name was Thanat Kolman. He may be dead by now. I haven't seen an obituary for him, but if he still alive, I'm sure he's quite an elderly person.

There were all these connections there between the U.S. – and AIT was, I thought, an interesting and fascinating place. They were always asking me to come up there and play golf on their golf course. We had a Fulbrighter up there, and I wanted to continue that relationship – I was on the board of the Fulbright foundation there, as part of my job, and I'd try to keep that linkage going with AIT, because I thought it was very valuable for a couple reasons. First of all, it had evolved, AIT. Now, Europeans were giving most of the money, but the Thai government was also contributing a lot of money to it. It was becoming a largely Thai university, because, as the money from AID shrank, people from outside the region had other options. They could go to the U.S. to study technology, as well. I was interested in using the AIT – because they are in Thailand, and they are also a Western-style technology institute – would be an obvious and very good way for the U.S. to have Burmese trained, so when the day came when the SLORC government in Burma fell, you'd have a cadre of people who were trained to Western science and methods, and also have had an exposure to democratic systems.

There was a scholarship program funded by the Congress at the time, and it's still going on, which takes 30 or 40 Burmese out of the refugee camps in Thailand, and sends them to an American university, the University of Indiana where they have a four-year undergraduate program, and then, as many of them as possible go on to graduate school, and not a single one has ever left the United States. It's essentially a free ticket to the U.S.

*Q: There's nowhere to go.*

KIEHL: There's nowhere to go, exactly, and no one's going to force them to go. If they went to AIT, those 30 or 40 Burmese, who got their undergraduate education and graduate engineering degrees, et cetera, the Thai would send them back to Burma, which is really where they belong. I mean, why is the taxpayer paying for scholarships for 30 Burmese to stay in Indiana every year? We wanted them back in Burma, and so I tried to convince in vain, to convince Washington that this would be the ideal way to do it, and I was working on the AIT people in that same vein, to try to get them to sign on to this idea. They were quite sympathetic to it.

It would have also meant that because they were in Thailand, the Thai would say, "Back you go." They couldn't get a free ticket to the U.S. from there because they would be going back, and they would get good quality education, exposure to democratic systems, Western ways of doing things, et cetera. They'd still have their degrees and everybody would be happy and the U.S. taxpayer would get more benefit for it. But it didn't work out. Those scholarships – I can't condemn them, totally, but I think they were basically done to say, "Ah, we're training Burmese in America," rather than to have it actually work. Nobody really cared if it worked or not, it was just the idea of doing it, which is politics as usual.

*Q: Also, Indiana's the home of Senator Lugar, who was a powerhouse when he was the head of the Foreign Relations committee.*

KIEHL: Yes, but I don't think Lugar was actually instrumental in this; this was more out of the House. But nevertheless, it was – there was politics, as there is in everything. But AIT is really a premier university there in technology.

We worked with them somewhat, but our main focus was Chulalongkorn University. Chulalongkorn University is named after Chulalongkorn, the head of the current dynasty, of the Chakri dynasty, currently, and it is the premier – it's like the Harvard-Yale-Columbia-Princeton of Thailand, all rolled into one. There is another university, Thammasat University – its pedigree is not quite as good, but it is also a very good and very solid university, and it's kind of the Berkeley of Thailand. And in fact, in a political sense, it is. An east coast establishment, you might say, for Chulalongkorn and kind of Berkeley and all its attributes for Thammasat.

Thammasat University produced a lot of the journalists in Thailand, and for that reason, we were very involved with them. Chulalongkorn provided the country's leadership, and so, therefore, we were involved with them, as well. And there were other universities – I mean, we spent a lot of time with the universities, because Thailand, like many other countries, has a huge and growing university population. It's not just the same small elites that were running the country 30 or 40 years ago. It's spreading out, and we needed to be in touch with these people and to get ideas across to them. So we did a lot of things. Through cooperation with Voice of America, we donated all sorts of radio equipment to Thammasat University for its radio station. We trained a lot of people there. We jointly trained students in journalism. At Chulalongkorn, we were in constant work with their American studies department and their history department – their international relations folks and their think tank, et cetera, and, of course, we arranged for the president to go there and speak at Chulalongkorn University and get an honorary degree from the university and do a rope line with the students, which was a really huge hit back in '96.

And then, of course, there were provincial universities. Chiang Mai University was another important one. We had Hillary Clinton up there on the same visit. She arrived in Chiang Mai and did her speech up there and got an honorary degree before joining her husband in Bangkok. So we covered the north, as well, with Chiang Mai University. There are a couple of others. Khon Kaen University is very important, as well, out in the Issan region, and there are a number of other universities. I'm not going to slight any of them – there are a lot of good universities like business schools in Bangkok, too, and we worked with them all. The Fulbright program was good and fairly large. My main effort there was to try – and it worked pretty much up through the Asian financial crisis – to get the Thai to put more money into it. When it was set up, originally, the Fulbright program was seen almost as an extension of AID. It was a State Department program administered by USIA people in the field. It was that same kind of notion, that here is America with the center of learning and power and intellectual powerhouse, and here are the Thai, who must be taught how to do things. That was a kind of 1950s, '60s, approach to Thailand, which had a lot of validity then, but time moves on and countries change and grow and so you had a situation where the Americans were all going to Thailand to be professors, to teach, and the Thai were all students, going to the United States, when, in fact, it should be a mix of both to the other country. There's a lot Americans could learn about Thailand from Thai professors, and a lot of American students would benefit from going to Thailand to study and research, et cetera.

So we were changing that mix, slowly and painfully, because the Thai didn't want it, either. They wanted to stay at status quo, because they got all these free professors to teach at their universities, and all their students were going out there, getting knowledge in America, and bringing it back. So they liked that, but we thought that was too much of the old paternalistic role for a modern country, and so we were gradually evolving and changing that, and we were also trying to change their financial mix, because the U.S. traditionally had paid more than 80% of all the costs for both sides, for the Fulbright program, and we wanted it to be closer to 50/50. Obviously, it wasn't going to be 50/50 the next week or the next year, or even in the same decade, perhaps, but we wanted to see some progress in that direction, and we were, actually, beginning to whittle that away and change the mix just slightly.

We also wanted to include business people on the board. The way the board was set up, originally, the ambassador was the honorary chairman, that meant, "Stay away from the meetings. Don't get involved here. Your name is on the letterhead – that's enough," and there was a senior official, usually a former ambassador to Washington, who was named by the foreign ministry as the chairman, and then there were four Americans and four Thai, and the Thai – they were dominated by government. DTEC was on the board – that's the AID counterpart organization, and the foreign ministry was on the board, and ministry of higher education had a person on the board, and there was another government person. It didn't matter where from, but there was another government person. So there were four government officials on the Thai side. On the U.S. side, there was a public affairs officer, of course, and a cultural affairs officer, who worked for me – that's two of us from the embassy. Then there were two private sector people, an American academic resident in Thailand and we usually got someone – for example, a representative from 3M was there, or, a Ford Motors executive, something like that, from the business community. We thought that was a very healthy way to do it. Usually one of those business people was also the treasurer, since he could have his accountant in the local

office keep the books. And then there was a Thai executive director and the Thai staff.

We were pressing the Thai the whole time, saying, “OK, you have all government people here, and we have a mix of government and business people.” We said, “Can’t you be more like us?” In other words, instead of all these government people, can’t you have a business person and somebody from the academic community there? The Thai yielded on the academic community, they had an academic as part of their board, as well, from Chulalongkorn University or someplace – actually, it was Thammasat University – but they never did get around to putting a business person on Board and, of course, I understood why that was, even though it was our policy to keep trying to edge them toward that. It’s because, who are you going to get who’s honest in the business community to put on that board, who isn’t going to be under intense pressure from the whole society in order to get scholarships for people? It would be an impossible situation for a single Thai businessperson to be on that board, but we continued to try that because that was our policy, to do that.

We did make some progress, in the sense that we did move from an all-U.S. teaching and all-Thai students to more of a mix – still dominated that way, but more of a mix. We actually got some more money from the foreign ministry, from the Thai foreign ministry, to kick into the Fulbright program. So much so, in fact, that we were able to buy a condominium office for the Fulbright commission down on Sathorn Road in the Thai Wah Towers. The Commission, for the first time, had a permanent home that they owned, that the foundation owned, and that makes a big difference, of course, and that was through the good offices of the foreign ministry. They gave a grant, a one-time grant, which we matched, I think, to get them into that.

Then there was another organization which I can’t leave Thailand without talking about, and that’s the American University Alumni Association, or the AUAA, and its language center and library--the AUA. There are two components to that. One was the fact that this is an organization that was put together by alumni of American universities, including a crown prince of Thailand back in the 1920s, and it was a private organization, and then, after World War II, when USIS came in there, we formed, with them, a more perfect union. We and the AUAA created the AUA, which was, essentially, a bi-national center that specialized in teaching English to the Thai and had a library and cultural presentations – all the kinds of things that are associated with a bi-national center. They charge tuition for the language classes and the AUA was given a plot of royal land in order to erect their headquarters, and USIS put a lot of money into that in the early days, helping to construct the building and staff it and so on. At one time, I think there were three USIA officers permanently attached to the AUA in Bangkok. And there were branch AUAs around the country as well, not coincidentally near the USIS branch posts around the country.

This was an organization that really flourished for a long time, until USIA started being cut in budgets, and the threat of Communism in Southeast Asia was less, and so therefore, USIA kept peeling away the branch posts and so, at a certain point, it was my happy duty, as the new PAO in Bangkok, to tell the AUA that this year’s \$30,000 grant was the last money they were getting from us, period, and that we wouldn’t be giving them any more money in the future. That was the end of our grant relationship with the organization. Well, this was not a catastrophe, it was more of a symbolic loss for them than it was a real loss. In my position, I was also a member of the AUA board, so I was in on those meetings. And there was also the AUAA board, and that

board, whose meetings and minutes, were all in Thai, usually had the DCM installed as the member of the board. In the case of Skip Boyce, it was, and when the DCM wasn't a Thai speaker, or couldn't handle that, then usually the PAO was a good Thai speaker and could do that, or somebody else from the embassy who was fluent in Thai was appointed to that position.

So we always had a member on the board of the AUAA, which was a Thai organization, but had a close organization with the U.S. They had a social gala every year, with several hundred dollars of couple tickets and the king and the queen and the crown prince and the crown princess and all these people were plugged into that. So it was very important, from a social and symbolic value that we were involved in, and the AUA language and library – language school and library, the BNC board – I made sure I was on that. And that, again, had a couple of American business people, and an American academic and myself and a couple of Thai academics and so on, and then it had a, for the first time, because we were no longer giving money and we cut the slot, it was no longer an American director, who was actually a USIS cultural affairs officer, we got our first Thai director, who was a former board member, a former Thai air force officer who was appointed to that position. The director of courses which used to be a USIS teaching officer – that slot was gone, too, so they hired a retired English teaching officer from USIA who wanted to do it. So it had ratcheted down but it was still very important, and, in fact, the AUA had eight offices in addition to Bangkok, the main one in Bangkok around the country. It taught thousands of Thai students English, from a very simple level, for children, small children, and to English for special purposes. So they would teach legalese English to lawyers, or medical English to doctors. So it was an across the board English language program.

We had given away, those librarians that we could shed, to the AUA when the library closed down for USIS – again, because of budget reasons. We transferred those people to the AUA, and the old American library collection of books– some 25,000 books – were still there in the AUA building complex. We helped to support that by advising them what books to buy every year. So our senior library staff became the information resource center staff which ran our internet programs and our website and our electronic research capabilities – advised this library, which was still shelving books and magazines how to keep that up. And that was really perfect for the students, because they needed that in addition to internet.

The AUA was making real money– they didn't need our \$30,000, because they were making about a million dollars a year, which went into – part of it went into a building fund, part of it went to charitable concerns, and part of it went into new books and materials. But a lot of it did go into the building program because they were under the gun, and when I joined the board, already, eight years previously, they had been notified that they had to vacate the AUA building, and they had been stalling for eight years. This is royal property and the royal purse had plans for that. They wanted to develop that property, which is right next to the Rajdamri compound that was owned by the U.S. embassy, I mean, literally, it was right next. They wanted to build a 50-story skyscraper there. The whole city was full of skyscrapers they were building. Fortunately, for us, the Thai financial crisis basically put that back another 20 years, because they've got skyscrapers that are empty all over town. But that was the deal. The AUA would have to move out into another building, which had already been identified, move all the classroom space, and the library and all this stuff, and there was an auditorium there which was used a lot, I mean, it was a 1200-seat auditorium. This is not small potatoes. They had to move all their facilities to

another building for a minimum of three years and then move it back into the skyscraper, and they would get, according to the deal with the royal purse the equivalent in square footage that they were giving up, because all their buildings would be torn down, and they would be getting like four floors of the 50-story building, and it was right up by a sky train stop.

**MARIE THERESE HUHTALA**  
**Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam Affairs Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1996-1998)**

**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Bangkok (1998-2001)**

*Ambassador Huhtala was born and raised in California and Graduated from Santa Clara University. Joining the Foreign Service in 1972, she studied Thai and Chinese languages and became a specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Her overseas postings include Paris, Quebec, Hong Kong and Chiang Mai (Thailand). In Washington, she dealt primarily with East Asia and Pacific Affairs. From 2001 to 2004 she served as US ambassador to Malaysia and, from 2004 to 2005, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Ambassador Huhtala is a graduate of the National War College and the State Department's Senior Seminar. Ambassador Huhtala was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005*

HUHTALA: Thailand had an elected, democratic government; the Thai Democratic Party came into power in the fall of '97. They were also engaged in a serious process of constitutional revision. A new constitution came into place in the fall of '97 which was very democratic. It guaranteed many civil rights to the people of Thailand as well as a counter-corruption commission and a lot of new rules about how parties could be formed. It was a genuine democratic ("small-d" democratic), pro-human rights effort and a major step forward. Unfortunately, in July 1997 the Thai currency, the baht, fell dramatically. The baht had been heavily overpriced and was a tempting target for international hedge funds. Its sudden fall caused serious problems for Thailand and triggered a massive East Asian financial collapse.

*Q: This hit from Japan down to Burma, I mean down through Thailand.*

HUHTALA: Down through Indonesia too but it hit in Thailand first. The fall of the baht was the catalyst that prompted the whole thing. As I say, this had been predicted; our embassy knew that the baht was unsound and would probably fall pretty soon. What was not predicted was the fact that it spread through the whole region and how quickly it spread. For the first few months of the crisis, for the summer and fall of '97, the U.S. attempted to deal with this through the World Bank and the IMF. The approach was to let the financial institutions proceed as they normally would, and the IMF offered some loans but with very stiff conditionality attached to them. In Thailand meanwhile, the baht continued to sink like a stone. The United States wasn't providing any direct financial assistance even though Thailand was a treaty ally, a country that we'd been

friends with for 40 years. The only thing we did directly was to arrange some bridge financing through the Board of International Settlements, BIS, to help them get through to their first tranche of IMF lending. Our direct assistance was very small.

*Q: Was this, I'm just trying to think here, around sometime in the decade or so during the Clinton administration we came in with a loan guarantee or something for Mexico.*

HUTALA: Yes, that was earlier in the decade.

*Q: But that in a way set up a benchmark. I imagine that was on your mind.*

HUHTALA: It did, it kind of raised expectations because again the Mexican economy crashed in, I want to say, 1993, '94, something like that.

*Q: Something like that. It was quite early on I believe.*

HUHTALA: The U.S. assisted Mexico at that time. This is directly relevant because we came in with a major financial contribution. The Congress didn't like that so they enacted a law that said we could not make a direct financial contribution to a country whose economy was crashing unless Congress approved it. This in fact was one of the reasons we didn't move more directly to help Thailand in the fall of '97. We had this Congressional restriction which was due to expire at the end of that fiscal year, i.e., on September 30, 1997. The Thais didn't understand that very well, they only saw that we'd come to the aid of Mexico but now we were not coming to their aid. Other countries, notably China and Japan, did provide direct financial assistance; I believe China gave them a billion dollars. Of course Japan was affected subsequently, and South Korea was hit very hard by this crisis. The U.S. was seen as way too slow off the mark.

So by the end of the year the Thai baht, which had been trading at 25 to the dollar before the crash, hit 56 to the dollar. People's livelihoods were wiped out. Students in American universities suddenly had their tuition effectively doubled and had to withdraw in the middle of the year. People in Thailand, ordinary people, had to pull their kids out of school. Executives lost their jobs, rich people were selling their furs and their Mercedes at rock bottom prices. It was a drastic hit to the economy there.

I will never forget that fall. I'm no economist, but I kept trying to get the economic bureau involved and get the folks at NSC looking at this. This was a major crisis hitting our friend and ally at the same time as they had a new government in place trying to go further down the road of democracy. This was not a good equation. I remember the week before Christmas, finally, a cable came out from the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs through the EB bureau tasking all the embassies in the region for analysis. It read something like, "We've just come to the realization that there is a serious financial crisis going on in Asia. We want your analysis. How did it happen? What steps should be taken?" This struck me as ridiculous. It was the third week of December, the crisis was six months old, and the due date for this long report was December 24<sup>th</sup>. Unbelievable.

The embassy in Thailand, which had been frantically reporting for months and months, sent in a

one-line response referring the Department to its major reporting and analysis cables. It cited all of its reports through the fall, perhaps ten excellent cables that they had sent in. But fortunately, the exercise caught the attention of Stu Eizenstadt the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs. It was good that people of his calibre, including his counterparts in Treasury who were very senior, had finally focused on what was happening in Thailand.

By January 1998 the President had realized that that were political stakes here too, that we were seen as deserting a friend. He invited Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai for an official visit in March. Mr. Eizenstadt led a big interagency effort to put together an assistance package for Thailand that would show them that we are still their friend and we really did care. The package included things like loan guarantees and OPEC contributions and keeping the Peace Corps in Thailand. There was not a whole lot of direct financial contribution but there was one really interesting part of it. Thailand had signed on to buy a squadron of F-18 aircraft for their Navy. Of course these are very expensive pieces of hardware and now they wanted out of the deal. We'd never allowed a country to back out of a deal after they'd signed the letter of offer and committed to buy it through FMS. But Thailand could not afford, financially or politically, to go forward; they needed to get out of this. I believe it was around a \$25 millions dollars commitment. It had not been a great idea in the first place for them to buy these aircraft; they probably didn't have an operational need for them but there was something of an arms race always going on in Southeast Asia and their Navy wanted this sexy new plane. When they'd signed the contract, several years before, their economy was going strong, and it didn't look like it would be a problem. Now it was.

*Q: Because we have domestic people who, I mean the military wants to sell the plane.*

HUHTALA: Boeing had a production line going in St. Louis so there were a lot of factors at play there. We were pressing the Interagency to agree to this letting Thailand off the hook, but the Pentagon was resisting it. Then one of the F-18s in our Marine inventory went down in the Persian Gulf, shot down or had an accident or something. The Marines were saying, "Well, we'd like to have those F-18s that are about to come off the assembly line. We can use them. They're committed to Thailand but you know we could use them." Eventually a deal was brokered. It took the involvement of the White House to lean on the Pentagon and it took a lot of Congressional work as well because Congress had been notified of the sale so Congress had to approve of the change. And again, no country had been let off the hook before on a purchase of this kind. But it was finally accomplished. This was the major "deliverable" for the Prime Minister's visit to Washington in March of '98.

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*Q: What was your job in Bangkok?*

HUHTALA: I was Deputy Chief of Mission.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

HUHTALA: First it was Will Itoh. He finished his assignment after about three or four months,

and then Richard Hecklinger came in as ambassador. He's a good example of somebody without strong ties to a regional bureau; even though he had been a DAS in EUR, he didn't have the kind of tie that I for instance had to EAP. Yet he was clearly a stellar officer and the Building wanted give him an ambassadorship and this is the one that he ended up with. He did a very good job in Bangkok, and I learned a great deal from him.

*Q: Bangkok, well Thailand, how stood Thailand, what was the situation there, let's say political, economic and then American relations when you arrived?*

HUHTALA: I got there in August of '98, a little over a year after the financial crisis had hit. As I explained last time, the initial U.S. response to that crisis was seen by the Thais as deficient, horribly disappointing to them, even though the visit of their Prime Minister Chuan to Washington in March of that year had helped. As I said we had put together a major assistance package, including forgiveness of the F-18 sale, so that helped a bit. Plus during that year the IMF had progressively adjusted its program in Thailand to take account of the realities on the ground there; for instance setting less stringent conditionality in terms of their fiscal deficit. Thailand was beginning to pull itself together economically although it still had a long way to go. Politically the government of Prime Minister Chuan was completing its first year in office. I was saying that the financial crisis was getting in the way of the government's efforts to enact its reformist pro-human rights agenda. Although they were still very strong on that, particularly the foreign minister, Surin Pitsuwan. He was an unusual leader. He was from the south of Thailand, the far south, and a Muslim.

*Q: Down in that long peninsula?*

HUHTALA: Down in the long peninsula, a place called Nakhon Sri Thammarat. He was a Muslim in a government overwhelmingly composed of Buddhists but he had a great deal of credibility as an intellectual and very charismatic leader. He was working very hard to advance human rights, for instance in Thailand's policy with Burma. The Chuan government took a fairly hard line against the dictators there. During that period there were a lot of border conflicts and political tensions between the two countries. The Thai Government supported what the United States was trying to do in terms of advocating for better human rights in Burma and around the world.

*Q: Were we at all involved in the Burmese Thai conflict or not, either military advice or intelligence?*

HUHTALA: It was a sporadic intermittent kind of conflict between the two countries. It never came to a declared war. A lot of it was police action on the border. Occasionally it erupted into out-and-out shooting across the border. This happened a couple of times while I was there. We were not directly involved in that although we were giving the Thai a lot of advice and support in trying to interdict the drug flow coming out of Burma, which was one of the main causes behind the tension between the two countries. Our DEA office up at Chiang Mai for instance gave a lot of help to the Thai police and to the Thai Third Army, which is based in the northern part of the country. We also had some assistance programs for the refugees in camps along the Burma border. The terrible human rights situation inside Burma had produced floods of refugees,

primarily from the Karen tribe who are actually Christian. A lot of them were settling along the border; we were giving assistance directly and through NGOs.

*Q: Bangkok is one of those huge embassies which not only is a huge embassy because of Thailand but because of its location. You're DCM so essentially you're the chief executive officer. Talk about the embassy and the challenges you faced in running it.*

HUHTALA: Well it was our largest embassy in Asia and by some accounts our third largest in the world at that time, with 500 American employees and around 1,000 locally engaged staff. We had about 30 to 33 different agencies and offices. The way we counted it for instance, there was the Regional Information Management Center, RIMC, which was a State Department organization but it provided support for the IT operations in half the world so that counts as one of the units.

*Q: IT meaning?*

HUHTALA: Information Technology. We had a regional courier office, one of only three in the world (Bangkok, Frankfurt and one in the U.S.). Of course we had DEA and CIA and at the time I went there USIS was still a separate agency. INS had a district office headquartered there. Customs was there, Secret Service. I could go on and on. The FBI was there, and a pretty large military operation too. We had JUSMAG (the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group), which dates back to the Vietnam war. We also had the headquarters for the regional Marine Company C, managing the Marine guards in all of the embassies in Asia. I'm sure I've forgotten more, but anyway as you can see it was a very, very large mission.

*Q: Did we have a naval or a health thing or not?*

HUHTALA: No, no that was in Jakarta, NAMRU. We had an army research organization, AFRIMS, Armed Forces Regional Institute of Medical Science. They were doing some very interesting work on pursuing a human virus for HIV/AIDS as well as and doing anti-malarial work. We also had an office of the CDC in Bangkok and it had a satellite office in the northern city of Chiang Rai.

*Q: CDC being?*

HUHTALA: Centers for Disease Control. They also were working on a separate effort to develop an HIV/AIDS vaccine. Also the CDC in Bangkok had developed, a few years earlier, something called the Bangkok Protocol, which became standard practice around the world for preventing mother-infant transmission of HIV. Thailand had been one of the countries very severely hit by HIV in the late '80s. It just exploded there. By the time I got there in '98 the Thai had cut the rate of new infections drastically. But they still had about a million people with HIV/AIDS, so they were concentrating on things like preventing mother-child transmission, and a very active public awareness campaign with very extensive use of condoms. It was really sort of a model case for a developing country coming to grips with HIV.

*Q: Well this is just one little part of it. Was the fact that Bangkok had become at one point, I*

*don't know if it was at your time, sort of the sex capital. German and Japanese tourists that are males arrived by the plane load and go out and have their fun and come back. This is a real disease problem.*

HUHTALA: That's why HIV exploded so drastically in the late '80s. There was a thriving sex industry. A lot of people traced the development back to the Vietnam war period when a lot of American soldiers went there on leave. But it had grown far beyond that by the '80s. There were different social mores as well. It's a Buddhist culture, very tolerant. For men to go off for recreational sex didn't have the kind of social stigma that it would have in western cultures. Nevertheless, one of the great tragedies of the HIV epidemic was that men were bringing AIDS that they picked up in brothels home to their wives; this was a huge social problem. The revulsion against that caused a sea change of attitudes in Thailand.

*Q: Again, not to draw on the subject, but this plus drugs used to hit pretty hard on American families, embassy and related groups for their kids, teenage kids. You had these sort of flesh pots, both sex and drugs. Was that a problem?*

HUHTALA: It was still a problem by the time I got there but nothing like it had been in the '70s. Remember I'd been in Chiang Mai in the '70s and I'd heard a lot about what was going on in Bangkok. There were a lot of family members living in Bangkok with the father or husband away in Vietnam so there was a lot of unhappiness there. A lot of the kids of that era were turning to drugs. Thank God that was before the time of HIV/AIDS, but there were other diseases they were picking up. By the time of the late '90s things had changed; the active-duty U.S. military presence had been greatly reduced. Although these temptations were out there and we did have some problems among embassy family members, it was much, much less than I had feared it would be.

*Q: Did you have problems running herd or trying, I guess trying to reduce the number of agent people there.*

HUHTALA: There are always efforts to streamline operations. There was a big one that went on while I was there. The problem, in the case of Thailand, was that it made sense to locate a lot of our regional offices there. The cost of living was much lower in Bangkok than in Singapore or almost anywhere else in Asia, especially when you balance it against a very talented, very capable local work force. For instance, we had one of the State Department's three financial management centers there (the others were in Paris and Charleston). The people in this fairly large operation, mostly Thai, did all of the budgeting and vouchering and other financial accounting work for our posts from the Middle East to California. They did it extremely well, and since they were located in that part of the world they were able to interact real time with embassies in the region. So if the embassy cashier in Nepal had a hard time balancing her books, our person in Bangkok would call her up and talk her through it.

It made a lot of sense to have Bangkok as a regional hub. Not just the cost of living, but good living, excellent schools for dependents, a transportation hub, so easy to get flights in and out. We used to argue that to all the green eyeshade types coming through wanting to reduce our staffing. The Ambassador and I took a very hard look at any new requests for staffing under the

NSDD-38 process. We did not just automatically approve anything. There were some requests that we turned down because there was a tendency in some agencies to just say, let's go to Bangkok, it's a nice place. Agencies had to justify why they wanted to have a presence there. We kept a finger on that. Essentially for the operations that were there, it was very logical to have them in Bangkok.

*Q: What was your role there at the embassy?*

HUHTALA: As DCM?

*Q: Yeah. Some ambassador's have different styles of doing this.*

HUHTALA: It was in many ways the biggest job I've ever had. There was a huge amount of coordination to be done. I worked closely with everyone one of those agency heads. We had regular meetings, and I would often be one of the first to figure out if there was a problem brewing and be able to take care of it before it even got to the Ambassador's level. A lot of this inevitably is interpersonal. One of the problems in a post like Bangkok is the presence of many different agencies who are not normally foreign affairs agencies. So we had personnel there who were not necessarily used to working and living overseas reporting in stovepipe fashion back to their agencies in Washington. That made it difficult to ensure proper coordination of our efforts as a whole.

*Q: Explain what stove piping is.*

HUHTALA: By stovepipe I mean, for instance, the FBI attaché would take his orders directly from Washington and report back to Washington and very little of it would be made known to the Ambassador, the DCM or the State Department. The kind of information and instructions that that attaché got could very well conflict with the ones the DEA attaché was receiving through his stove piped channels, or maybe Secret Service. To help address that we used to have regular meetings of what we called the law enforcement committee. At least once a month we got every single law enforcement officer, including the State Department diplomatic security officer, together in the room and just went around the table and had every one of them explain what they were working on. Lo and behold, we'd discover a lot of synergies there and also iron out potential conflicts. By having all of these agency heads on an equal footing around the table it helped very much to reduce interpersonal conflict, jealousies and suspicions. Also they always knew each of them could come and talk to me any time they needed to and they did so, on issues as diverse as their housing situation or hiring local staff. I was there around the time that we had just set up in all of our embassies, a new formula for sharing administrative costs, called ICASS. Do you know what that is?

*Q: No.*

HUHTALA: It's Interagency Costs and Support Services. It replaced the older arrangement called FAS. Essentially what it meant was that all the agencies in an embassy were being billed for their share of the entire cost of running an embassy. In the old days the State Department provided the "platform," we paid the office building rent, we paid for the electricity, the heating,

the cooling, all of that. New agencies would come in and pay a tiny portion of the services they were using. Now all of those costs were prorated across all of the agencies. The other interesting feature of ICASS is there were certain services that every agency had to sign on to. They all had to help pay for the Community Liaison Office and the medical clinic (except for the military, they had their own arrangement). But if they didn't want to take advantage of other services, like human resources or vouchering, they could opt out and find some other way to meet those needs. These were considered service centers or cost centers and we were providing them.

Most agencies took advantage of the services State offered because it was generally much more expensive to get it done on the outside. Now and then an agency would try that because everyone was always under pressure from Washington to cut costs. We would have monthly meetings of the ICASS Council and they could get acrimonious, especially when we were passing out the invoices for the year that agency heads were going to have to send back to their agencies. They would go over them with a fine-tooth comb and wanted to know why it is costing so much, for instance, to do vouchering.

The other problem was that in our Administrative Section, supposing we had ten people working on personnel. If an agency added three people more, okay we could handle that. Then another agency would add two more people and all of a sudden we'd passed the tipping point and needed to hire a new local employee, giving us 11 people doing that service. That would increase everyone's cost, since agencies would be paying their share of 11 salaries, not 10. So we had to explain those things and work through them very carefully. I worked really closely with our Administrative Counselor in that process. Boy, I tell you, you really have to use diplomatic skills when working with your own agencies on money issues!

*Q: Oh yeah, well that's where real diplomacy is. What was your impression, I mean you'd been in Chiang Mai before, what was your impression back to Thailand at basically the turn of the century?*

HUHTALA: First of all I was so impressed with the progress it had made, even given the fact of the financial crisis. The standard of living was much, much higher, incomparably higher. There were beautiful paved roads all over the country now, big shopping centers, a lot of wealth, a lot of affluence. There were much higher levels of education, and politically they'd evolved so much. When I was in Chiang Mai in the '70s we had military coups every year in October when the military promotion list came out. In the intervening period Thailand had put military rule aside and embraced democracy. It was a fractious democracy, to be sure; it had too many parties and a lot of vote buying and other problems but it had made that big transition. That was really exciting and really, really interesting. I just loved it. I really enjoyed dealing with the Thais that we worked with. The professionals in the foreign ministry and the other ministries were very, very good, smart and well educated. They spoke such good English that I didn't really get to use my Thai professionally unless I went out into the countryside. When I was in Bangkok their English was much better than my Thai (which I had brushed up in a year of early-morning classes at FSI before I went to post).

*Q: When you were there before in the '70s there was no Internet and the whole technology thing; how did you find within Thailand, then we'll talk within the embassy, but how did you find*

*Thailand responding to the technical revolution, information revolution basically?*

HUHTALA: In Bangkok and in a few of the larger cities they were making a lot of progress in that area. The Internet was available and widely used. It was a dial-up service, it wasn't really fast, but it was there and it was pretty reliable too. The Thai government wisely took a completely hands-off policy; they didn't try to control access to the Internet like some countries have done. Progress, however, was kind of shallow, due to the low level of both technological penetration and of English. In Bangkok it was easy to find people who could speak English, but if you went out into the countryside, it wasn't there. What that means was it was still not possible to train a work force in the entire Thai economy that could rise above farming, agriculture, and enter the world information society. That became really clear while I was there.

One thing the embassy did every year was to host a big, prestigious economic conference. We invited some of the best thinkers in the country to a beachside resort. This used to be funded by USIS, but now of course it's the State Department. Every year there was a specific theme. One of the years I was there the theme was the e-economy. It became very clear in our discussions that Thailand at that point, it must of have been around the year 2000, they did not yet have any laws allowing for e-commerce. They didn't have the kind of protection in place to allow people to buy things over a website, to make a deal, to use electronic signatures. All of these things, they sound kind of technical but they are really the basic building blocks for moving into an electronic economy. We realized that if Thailand didn't get its act together soon, it just wasn't going to make it. That combined with the very shallow level of English language instruction across the country was a real structural problem that we were calling to the attention of their leaders.

*Q: I was wondering, we're talking now about a period where India was really becoming online as far as being a service country for the world practically because of the English and because of the technical training they were giving their people, so they were getting a very large foot in the door. I would have thought that Thailand would have seen this as a good model or something.*

HUHTALA: They saw it and they were doing it but on a very small scale. There were people fortunate enough to come from the right families and to have graduated from one of their premier universities, like Chulalongkorn or Thammasat; these among the best in the world. People like that could handle all of this. The problem was they represented a very small proportion of the economy and of the country. There hadn't yet been a good solid effort to bring the whole country up to snuff. The education ministry was in a shambles. At that time there were two ministries, the ministry of higher education and the ministry of education in general. They didn't work together, and neither of them got much done. One of the reforms put through by the government was to merge those two ministries together so they would be more coherent. What happened was the bureaucrats in both ministries spent all of their efforts jockeying for place and rivalling each other and trying to make sure that their personal rice bowls didn't get broken. Nobody was thinking about the future of the country. This was very distressing to us, actually. The Ambassador and I embarked on a serious effort to teach the relevant Thai officials about the American community college system, which is an excellent way to train large numbers of people in the technical skills they need. Thailand already had a network of teacher training institutes that could be easily converted into community colleges. We sent a group of school administrators on a tour of the United States to visit community colleges and tried to plant seeds. There were

intellectuals in Bangkok who got it, who understood that and thought they should move that way, but institutional resistance was very, very strong.

*Q: It's interesting because Thailand could be a giant in that area because the people are industrious.*

HUHTALA: Oh they are and they are smart and open to new ideas. Really the lack of English is a huge barrier. The countries that happen to have been British colonies have an educated English speaking population. This even includes Burma, by the way. They have a built-in advantage over countries like Thailand, which was never colonized and was proud of it, but has experienced very little penetration of foreign languages.

*Q: While we're on communications, how did you find, I mean here you are in this huge embassy in an era where communications with everybody, you could call anywhere and any time. How did you find this as far as running things? Was this a pain in the neck?*

HUHTALA: No, it was a huge advantage, it totally was. We had e-mail, both classified and unclass. We had IVG (International Voice Gateway) telephone lines to Washington through which we could access many other places in the U.S. The only problem was the 12 hours' time difference. If I wanted to have a serious discussion with Washington officials it probably was going to be at night time so I could catch people in their office. Ambassador Hecklinger used to do this almost every night. He would be calling in to folks and bouncing ideas off them; this was great, but the man was often really tired during the day.

*Q: As I recall I wasn't down this far but I was in South Viet Nam and during the winter it is very cold there and I don't wear pajamas and standing by the phone at three in the morning with nothing on and somebody is happily talking about personnel problems or something this.*

HUHTALA: The problem is some of these things can only be resolved over the phone. When I think back to my previous tours of duty I remember we didn't even have access to American television. We were so information deprived. When I was in Chiang Mai we had the USIS Wireless File, with which I followed the '76 presidential election. That was it. Now we had the International Herald Tribune everyday. We had Internet, we had CNN on cable television. It was a huge improvement. Of course that means that the news just comes at you real fast and you have to react all the time.

*Q: Did you find yourself doing political reporting much?*

HUHTALA: You know, as a political cone officer I was very careful not to do that. It's really important to let the political section do its job. I did a lot of political work, of course. I would call on ministry officials to discuss issues or make demarches but I would bring along a note taker from the political (or economic) section and they would do the work, they would do the reporting of it. I tried to that with all of the different sections, let them do their job but keep a close eye on what they were doing and try to monitor the quality of our output so that it would be the very best.

*Q: The ambassador had an economic background?*

HUHTALA: Yes he did.

*Q: How did that work?*

HUHTALA: It was ideal because as I say we were in a period of real financial crisis in Thailand and it was wonderful to have his insights. Not just substantively but also the fact that he knew the right people in Washington. He'd worked directly for the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Alan Larson, so he could call him and urge him to come visit, and he did so. Larson came and met with Thai leaders about the basic reforms they needed to put in place as a result of the economic crisis; for instance, they lacked a serious bankruptcy law, which they eventually did put in place. That was great. Ambassador Hecklinger and I kind of complemented each other in many ways. He was an economic specialist, I was political. He was not an Asia specialist, I was. He didn't speak Thai, I did. I think he was actually an outstanding Ambassador, he was very effective dealing with the Thais and he had great instincts.

*Q: How did you, taking the temperature, how were things going America vis-a-vis Thailand after our lukewarm response to their crisis at the beginning? Were we rolling up our sleeves and getting on with it on both sides or not?*

HUHTALA: We were chipping away at that. Remember some of this was a misperception by the Thai. It's not that we truly ignored them during the crisis; it's just that our response wasn't seen to be very fulsome because we chose for the first six months of the crisis to work through the international organizations. It was only in the beginning of 1998, really, when we began doing bilateral assistance that could be highlighted and pointed to. So the U.S. was kind of behind the curve in terms of public and even government perceptions.

Unfortunately in '99 there came another problem that got in the way of better relations. That was the race for the new head of the WTO, the World Trade Organization. Thailand had decided that it was time for it to step up in the world and assume a bigger profile in the international system, and specifically it was time for a Thai official to get one of the big international jobs. Their deputy prime minister, Supachai Panitchpakdi, was nominated by his government to be the next head of the WTO beginning in 1999. He had a doctorate in economics; he had a lot of government experience, spoke great English, knew the trade field and was a very good candidate in their eyes. The other candidate was a former prime minister of New Zealand named Michael Moore who didn't even have a college education but had been a labor negotiator and was a real canny kind of operator. He held views about trade that were closer to America's views than Supachai, who was kind of leftist and kind of out there in terms of income re-distribution and that kind of thing. The U.S. didn't take a public position early, but on that's not how these things are done anyway. The way it works is that candidates start lobbying other countries as soon as they're declared. Most countries kind of hold off and wait until the race develops. Nevertheless, it became increasingly clear that the U.S. was not Supachai, and this was a huge disappointment to Thai leaders, who really felt that they had, for the first time, a very credible candidate and that we should be getting behind this candidate.

Again, Ambassador Hecklinger, knowing all the players in Washington, not only in the State Department, but USTR and Treasury, worked this issue very intensively. Even before Hecklinger got there, when Will Itoh was still the ambassador, we were trying to ascertain Washington views. I remember it all became clear in late January 1999, right before Ambassador Itoh left post. It was a few hours before the President's State of the Union address, the last week of January, in the morning in Bangkok, and we were having an official breakfast for something or other at the residence. The Ambassador got a phone call informing him that the Thai ambassador in Washington had just been told that the U.S. was going to be supporting Michael Moore. It was a huge kick in the gut, not only for the Thai but also for the embassy. We didn't have any advance warning of this. After Ambassador Hecklinger got to post the following week, this issue continued to play out. The eventual result was a compromise actually, the two candidates ended up splitting the term. Michael Moore took the first three years (1999-2002) and Supachai held office from 2002 to 2005. So the Thai got their senior official on the world stage but the way it came about left a very bitter residue in the bilateral relationship.

*Q: It's always a problem isn't it when a country feels it's very close to the United States because we are always going to do something that will step on somebody's toes. Canada, as you know. Other countries can roll with the punch and say, "Americans, we don't owe them anything, but they don't owe us anything."*

HUHTALA: I really think that the combination of those two events, the financial crisis and the WTO contest brought about sort of a loss of innocence on the part of the Thai, the Thai government. Whereas before they had always believed that we had a strong relationship, the kind of alliance and friendship that would carry us through no matter what, suddenly they began to see us as just another country that was not necessarily committed to bilateral friendship. I think this is probably something we're living with to this day.

*Q: Did Thailand, I mean did you see a change in Thailand? You mentioned the WTO.*

HUHTALA: Oh yes. First of all Thailand was pursuing greater involvement internationally. They were a member of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. We lobbied them a lot to join us in voting on various issues but they didn't always vote with us. I think increasingly they were beginning to see their position as kind of independent of the United States. They are one of the founding members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN, and they were playing a leading role there. Again the relationship with Burma was a huge problem for them and a complex one. They were concerned about illegal workers, refugees, and drugs coming across the border and increasingly they were focusing on the problem of human trafficking, which had become a major issue for the United States as well. Many, many hill tribe and Burmese young women were trafficked into Thailand and sold into brothels. This was and is a huge problem.

*Q: Bangkok, particularly Bangkok, but I guess elsewhere had become, Thailand had become sort of the sex capital which brought particularly fairly wealthy, people from Japan and I think of Germans and Japanese flooding the place.*

HUHTALA: It's a complex issue. There were a lot of different things going on there. Many girls from poor families in the northeastern part of Thailand grow up believing that they owe their

parents, they have to pay their parents back for having given birth to them. Young men can go out and get jobs, but what kind of job can a young girl go to? A lot of them would go voluntarily into a brothel for a few years, hoping to make a bunch of money, buy their parents a house, retire at 30, and maybe marry someone nice.

*Q: There was a point of stigma wasn't there?*

HUHTALA: That's what I'm trying to tell you. It was a cultural norm that wasn't the way we would do it, but this had been existing for many, many years. That kind of semi-voluntary prostitution is quite different from recruiters going to a village of uneducated hill tribe people, buying young girls and telling their parents they were going to Bangkok to be a waitress or something but then locking them in a brothel. The latter situation is condemned by Thais as well as by the United States. Thai people are very humane and they're hugely embarrassed when it turns out that things like that are happening. There were some activists who were pressing the government very hard on this issue. There were Thai NGOs pressing the government to do right by these girls and the government was working with them. In many ways they were taking a better approach to the trafficking issue than any other country in the region. They had shelters for women who had been rescued from brothels.

Senator Brownback of Kansas visited Thailand in early 2001, right after the new Trafficking in Persons Act that he sponsored had been enacted. I took him around to a lot of shelters and remote villages in the North and he saw the kind of steps the Thai government was beginning to take to rescue and rehabilitate these victims of trafficking. Now it was not perfect and there was still a huge problem there. Also a lot of Cambodians were being brought in to be professional beggars or to go into brothels. But because Thailand at least was honest enough to admit to the problem and was taking steps to punish the perpetrators and rehabilitate the victims they've never been on what we call Tier Three (which incurs sanctions) in the Trafficking in Persons report. They've always been on Tier Two because at least they are confronting it and trying to do their best.

*Q: What about relations with Cambodia at that time?*

HUHTALA: At that time relations were not as bad as they would get later. The Thais were engaged in trying to help Cambodia succeed. They had an embassy in Phnom Penh. They were concerned about smuggling along the border. I told you before that Ieng Sary and his Khmer Rouge remnant had taken control of a town on the western border of Cambodia. Well this spilled over directly into Thailand. Right before I got to Thailand Pol Pot had been found and had died. So there less of a concern about the Khmer Rouge but Thailand was worried about the lawlessness that was still attached to them. There was also controversy over a venerable old Buddhist temple that was along Cambodia's northern border but was only accessible from the Thai side. There was a lot of controversy back and forth about that. There was also a lot of smuggling of antiquities from Cambodia into Thailand. These were priceless Buddha's and things like that. Angkor Wat itself had been pillaged, and the problem continues to be to this day with a lot of Buddhist antiquities up in antique stores in Bangkok.

*Q: How were Thai Chinese relations?*

HUHTALA: They were very good actually. Thailand, of all the countries of Southeast Asia, has been most successful in integrating its Chinese minority. In fact in many ways it's the Sino-Thai elements of society that control the banking and the commercial sectors.

*Q: I understand that the Chinese made a deliberate effort to improve things.*

HUHTALA: No, this happened before. Because you remember up until the '80s China was supporting insurgencies in the area. It was not viewed as a friendly power during that period. But Chinese migrants to Thailand had been there for several hundred years. They intermarried extensively and they had taken Thai names. You have to be pretty good in Thai to figure out which ones are the ethnic, 100% Thai names and which names refer to people who have a lot of Chinese blood. One quick rule of thumb is if someone is a multimillionaire he's probably got Chinese blood!

*Q: The more money the more likely ...*

HUHTALA: Yes. They had done very well, that minority, and they'd been spared the kind of ethnic resentment, even conflict that you saw in other parts of Southeast Asia.

*Q: Malaysia ...*

HUHTALA: Exactly, and Indonesia. So when China revised its policies in the '80s and adopted a much more friendly approach towards all of Southeast Asia, Thailand was ready. There is a huge conglomerate company called CP Group (Charoen Pokphand) which was one of the first ones to invest massively in China. CP Group has a huge chicken industry and chicken feed and other agriculture kinds of things. They went into China big-time. By the time I was in Bangkok there were very large commercial interests on both sides of China and Thailand. China was beginning to send a lot of produce down the Mekong River, which of course flows out of China through Burma, Thailand and Laos and eventually into Vietnam, so there was trade even between China and northern Thailand. In fact, it was booming.

*Q: Was there any problem while you were there, let's say the Mekong, over the Chinese using the water damming and that sort of thing?*

HUHTALA: It was beginning to be a problem. There is something called the Mekong River Commission which had been in existence since the '60s and had gotten kind of moribund; it was being revived when I was there. There was a lot of interest in bringing all the countries of the Mekong watershed together -- as I said that's about five or six countries -- to discuss equitable sharing of the river and using the resources wisely. There also were efforts to build a road grid that would connect the whole region. Thailand has pretty good roads but they used to just kind of stop at their border. So the east-west road that stops at the Lao border is now being extended all the way through Laos to Vietnam, and the north-south road is being extended through Burma into China.

*Q: Although they don't abut on each other, there's Laos in the way, but what about with*

*Vietnam?*

HUHTALA: The relationship was warming when I was there. The Thais had always feared Vietnam as an aggressive nation and had always regarded Cambodia as a buffer state, which is why when Vietnam invaded Cambodia in '79 it was a huge concern for Bangkok. By the time I got there Vietnam was engaged in its own economic development and its renovation program called "doi moi" and had reaching out in the spirit of friendship to the other countries in the region. Thailand was taking them up on it. Not without some misgivings of course but I think, again, Thai businessmen were beginning to invest in Vietnam and they saw a lot of potential there.

*Q: How did we view ASEAN?*

HUHTALA: By that time we were beginning to take ASEAN seriously. The organization had been formed in 1967, if I'm not mistaken, as an economic grouping, with only five countries at the time. Over the years it had slowly developed a more overtly political orientation. By the late '90s ASEAN represented about half a million people and huge combined GDP, even with some of the countries just beginning to develop. I remember the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN's founding occurred while I was still in Washington. There was a big glittery reception downtown and our Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Tom Pickering, attended. It was sort of a coming out party for ASEAN in the eyes of the United States. The U.S. Secretary of State, has always attended the ASEAN ministerial meeting in the summer (until this past year, that is). In 2000 that meeting was in Bangkok, so Madeline Albright attended. However, if you remember it was at the end of July of that year when President Clinton and the leaders of Israel and Palestine were at Camp David trying to hammer out an agreement. Secretary Albright was involved in that too so she was a couple of days late to the ASEAN meeting. Her deputy, Strobe Talbot arrived for the first day and then she came for the second day.

*Q: I think we initiated it, maybe we didn't, APEC or something like that?*

HUHTALA: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was formed in 1992, '93, I guess. It was formed partly as a counter weight to Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's proposal for an East Asia economic group that would exclude the United States and other countries. APEC is much broader than that. It includes all the countries of the Pacific rim on the Asian side and many in the western hemisphere including Canada, United States, Mexico, Peru, and Chile (others are welcome to join). Yes, we were a big proponent of APEC. I believe the first meeting was in Bangkok in the early '90s.

*Q: This includes heads of state?*

HUHTALA: There is the summit meeting every year but that's at the end of the year, usually in November. The summit is preceded by a whole year of meetings of the ministerial and sub-ministerial level.

*Q: How did the Thais respond?*

HUHTALA: They were pretty happy in APEC. In fact I remember going to the APEC meeting in Vancouver, that would have been November 1997, when the Chuan government had just come into power. I was in the room when Foreign Minister Surin came in to meet with Madeline Albright for the first time, and the vibes were very positive. This was a brand new, dynamic government with a lot of progressive political and economic goals. The two sides kind of bonded immediately.

*Q: How did you find relations with your old bailiwicks, the desk and all this? Did you find that you and the ambassador and Department of State in Washington in pretty close accord?*

HUHTALA: It was great in those years. First of all my previous deputy on the desk, Ravic Huso, had succeeded me as Director, and so he and I are “like lips and teeth.” We had the same approach towards management and a strong friendship. The new Thai desk officer was also an extremely good officer, very responsive to the embassy.

*Q: Who was that?*

HUHTALA: His name was George Kent, and he was followed by Ben Moeling; both were excellent. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Southeast Asia was my predecessor as DCM in Bangkok, Skip Boyce. So there were a lot of people there who knew the issues and whom we could talk to on a regular basis, and we did. It was a good cordial working relationship.

*Q: Did we see Thailand playing a role in the military context?*

HUHTALA: Yes. On several occasions Thailand had granted us access. This is something that’s rather sensitive for the Thai, but when we had been sending military assets for instance from Guam or Japan to go to the Middle East to enforce the no-fly zones in Iraq they gave us access for refuelling basically on a phone call. They did that repeatedly. This is one reason why their disappointment in us later on would be so acute. They saw themselves as very steadfast allies, and indeed the military relationship has been rock solid. It’s been terrific. Every year there is a huge military exercise in Thailand called Cobra Gold which has been the largest exercise we have anywhere in Asia. It’s in May every year and we invite 19 or 20 countries to be observers. (We’ve invited them to participate but only Singapore has agreed to do so far.) We bring in huge numbers of American forces and exercise on the ground with our Thai allies.

*Q: How was India viewed from Thailand because actually it’s easy to forget that Thailand abuts on the Indian Ocean?*

HUHTALA: Thailand was also involved in a couple of organizations that included countries of the Andaman Sea and India. They were very much reaching out in that direction as well. I would characterize that as a relationship that was budding. It was developing.

*Q: Were the Indians seen as a potential problem, aggressors or a benign influence?*

HUHTALA: I think they saw India as a potential partner, as a country that was developing very rapidly and they could offer some advantages to Thailand. Thailand has always tried to take the

middle path. They want to be friendly with China and India, with the United States and with China. They want to balance relations, and this goes back for hundreds of years. That's one way they avoided being colonized by the European powers.

*Q: What about cooperation with Malaysia?*

HUHTALA: Thailand and Malaysia had agreed to joint development of an oil field in the Gulf of Thailand to which they both had claims. The idea was to construct a pipeline from the field that would run through southern Thailand and go down into Malaysia. Under Thailand's new reformist constitution any major infrastructure project like that was supposed to be subject to public hearings in Thailand, and they did so for the pipeline project. The only problem was they had the public hearing *after* they began work on the pipeline. So local fishermen in southern Thailand who didn't like the idea of the pipeline and thought it would really interfere in their fishing were furious and they had riots and demonstrations. It was a very, very tense time, and it came at the same time that a similar scenario was playing out in eastern Thailand over the building of a dam. Again the public hearings were held sort of after the fact and the people went ballistic. These were internal Thai problems that became sort of bumps on the road to a full democracy; they had an effect in terms on their relations with Malaysia because the pipeline was delayed for such a long time that Malaysia started talking about building its own pipeline, bypassing Thailand entirely. It took years for that to be worked out.

*Q: Boat people were no longer around?*

HUHTALA: Oh no, that was long finished under the Orderly Departure Program.

*Q: Had there been any absorption of various refugees who ended up in Thailand?*

HUHTALA: No, almost none. The only thing you can point to really is the Burmese, some of whom had come into Bangkok and were living more or less freely there. This was causing problems. They were resorting to some law breaking and engaging in political activities, protesting the Burmese junta. While I was there a very serious hostage situation occurred at the Burmese Embassy. An angry mob surrounded the embassy with embassy employees trapped inside and Thai police on the scene. The deputy foreign minister, a brave person named Sukhumbhand Paribatra, who was actually a prince of the royal blood, went in to negotiate a resolution to the crisis. What ended up taking place was that a couple of the key protestors plus the deputy foreign minister were flown in a helicopter to a Burmese refugee camp a couple of hundred miles away from Bangkok. Sukhumbhand was a very earnest and respectable minister, and I had my heart in my mouth when I saw him going off with those folks, but they did release him and that diffused that situation. At that point we stepped in to offer the Thais hostage negotiating training because the police had made some key errors, they didn't handle the crisis very professionally. For example, they let the terrorists get the upper hand several times. A few months later there was another hostage situation at a hospital in southern central Thailand and this time the police and the military had a joint operation that stormed the hospital, killed the bad guys, and didn't hurt a single patient so that was a more successful outcome.

*Q: Were there any other sort of developments? First place, I can't remember where things stood*

*with President Clinton?*

HUHTALA: I can tell you. I arrived in Bangkok in August of '98 and at the end of that month the transcript of the Starr Report came out, available online. All of the nasty revelations about his affair with Monica Lewinsky and the blue dress and the cigar and all of that stuff came out. There is one thing that Thais love to do is joke, and so does the diplomatic corps, and as a newly arrived female DCM I found it a little bit embarrassing to have to sit at dinner tables where everyone was making cigar jokes!

*Q: If we think of anything beyond that.*

HUHTALA: Well the other thing that happened near the end of my tenure there was that Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister of Thailand. He was a really interesting politician. He'd been a police colonel, trained in the United States. In the early '90s he left the police force and became a businessman getting his start through some major satellite deals with the military junta that ruled Thailand after the 1991 coup. The origins of Thaksin's incredible wealth are a little bit shady. He went into politics in the mid '90s, and served briefly in one of the revolving door governments of that period as a government minister. The Ambassador and I called on him when he was building his new political party which is called Thais love Thais. His was a very populist sort of appeal. He won massively against the Democrats in the January 2001 election on a platform of three major elements: debt moratoriums for all farmers, a million baht grant (about \$23,000) for every village in Thailand and guaranteed health care at a cost of only 30 baht (75 cents) a visits. Any Thai could go into a public hospital and have anything done for 30 baht, whether it's a routine visit or an operation. These were breathtakingly expansive proposals for a country that was still pulling itself out of the financial crisis. He won overwhelmingly. He is still prime minister and he is one of the most controversial figures, I think, in Thai history.

*Q: How did we see it at the time?*

HUHTALA: I don't know how everybody saw it but I was disappointed to see the Democratic government which had been very earnest and was very serious about the democratic reforms it was advocating, get swamped by the economic realities and by their inability to bring the country around financially. To be honest I don't think any party could have brought the country around financially only two years after the crash. Nevertheless they were kind of inept in meeting the challenge that Thaksin presented, which represented a whole new approach to the Thais at a time when they were desperate for a new approach.

*Q: Did we see the platform as viable?*

HUHTALA: No, we didn't think it was. The odd thing is he has managed to deliver in some fashion on all of those promises. I don't know if the quality of the 75 cent medical care is any better than it was before but people are able to go in and get medical care. They have to wait a long time in over-crowded public hospitals but it's sort of working. The part about the million-baht fund for each village was a bit of a shell game; he made it sound like it was going to be a grant but in reality it was a loan. During the campaign people in these rural villages were sitting around saying, "Okay, a million baht, let's see, you'll get a 1,000, baht, he'll get 5,000," etc.

They were dividing it up in advance, thinking it was going to be a huge handout, and instead it was a loan from the government that was repackaged from existing sources. The money would only be granted upon presentation of a proposal by the village elders showing how they would use it in an appropriate way to promote development, to build a well or a school, for instance. So it was nothing like it had been made out to be. The debt moratorium for farmers was only a two-year moratorium; at the end of two years they still had the same amount of debt plus interest. So that wasn't nearly the good deal that it sounded like. Nevertheless the voters bought it.

We in the U.S. government were concerned about the economic viability of these proposals. We viewed Thaksin, indeed we still do, as a populist demagogue in many ways. He has since undertaken some pretty questionable actions, for instance the campaign against the drug trade in 2002 that resulted in the extrajudicial killings of thousands of suspects by provincial and police authorities. It was sort of akin to the old Thomas Becket story, "Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?" Thaksin called in his provincial governors and made it clear they should eliminate drug dealers without establishing any guidelines.

*Q: Were these killings designed to... who were they?*

HUHTALA: What he said to his governors and provincial police officials was, I want to see a huge reduction in the number of drug dealers out there on the street and I'm putting the burden on you to make sure it happens.

*Q: This is a former police officer.*

HUHTALA: Exactly. You make sure they are not out there and don't tell me how you did this sort of thing. This was appalling, especially in a country that had tried so hard to promote a more democratic human rights-based government. He also clamped down drastically on freedom of the press, stacked various independent commissions with his cronies and continued to buy politicians right and left.

*Q: Well anyway, did we see a change in his way of approaching the U.S. from the prior administration?*

HUHTALA: Yes. Through his corporate connections he already was friendly with Bush family, especially with George H.W. Bush, so he very much tried to play on these personal ties. Nevertheless I think relations have been kind of troubled because of some of the excesses that he has allowed to go forward.

*Q: What about, while you were there how did you view the role of corruption and Thai politics in society?*

HUHTALA: Well corruption was known to be very extensive and it always had been. One of the fundamental measures laid out in the new constitution of 1997 was that politicians could not change parties within six months of an election. This was supposed to end the practice of politicians selling themselves to the highest bidder in a system that had ten or more parties. But Thaksin managed to get around that. He bought himself a party by just doing it at an earlier

period; right up until the deadline members of parliament were flocking to join his party. Then once he came into office his Thai Rak Thai, or Thais love Thais party had a majority of seats in the parliament; he formed a big coalition with a few other parties and then eventually gobbled them up. They merged with Thai Rak Thai. The parliamentary opposition now is very tiny. I think he's got close to a four-fifths majority. Under the new constitution he has reached the point where he himself cannot be the subject of a censure motion, although individual ministers can. But with those kinds of numbers, it's kind of like the Republicans in today's Congress. He's kind of veto proof. When he came into office too there was a huge scandal about his financial disclosure forms which had not been accurate. He had huge assets, many homes, golf courses, that kind of things. He put many of his assets in the name of his minor children and his wife, and even his servants, and got away with that partly because he just sort of stared down the nascent judiciary in Thailand; there surely was money changing hands there too. It looked very suspicious when the Constitutional Court ruled on the matter and found that he was not guilty.

*Q: What about American businesses and problem of corruption? Did you have to deal with that?*

HUHTALA: Of course. We had a very active Chamber of Commerce. Corruption is always a concern. It came out particularly in large arm sales when U.S. companies were offering planes or tanks or other large items to the Thai military. Their competitors from France and Britain were obviously putting money under the table and it was very tough for us. I remember at one point Ambassador Hecklinger was just livid when the Thai Navy Commander went for a British or a French helicopter system, clearly not as good a deal as what we were offering overtly, clearly money going into his pocket. It was hard for him to even look the man in the eye again he was so furious. That's a problem. Also the U.S. and Thailand had a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation that went back a long way that gave our businesses certain advantages in the Thai market, like national treatment. That was due to expire in a couple of years unless the Thai government were to pass a law institutionalizing it. That was one of the things that we were working very hard on. In the end, I think it did lapse but perhaps under the WTO we found a way to preserve the advantage for our businessmen. I think what has happened now is that other businessmen have the same advantage.

*Q: What was the role of the royal family?*

HUHTALA: Good question. The present King of Thailand is perhaps the most revered monarch they've ever had. He had passed his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the throne right before I got there; a beloved monarch, known for taking good care of the people. He stayed out of politics most of the time until things got really bad, for instance after the military coup of '91. When he needs to do it he intervenes and he has great moral suasion when he does that. By the time I was there he was in his late 70s, living in a palace in southern Thailand (Hua Hin) for most of the time. His wife Queen Sirikit quite openly was no longer living with him; she spent much of her time in Chiang Mai. The real concern was his son (there were had three royal daughters and one son). This is a system where the crown passes to the male and the Crown Prince is a disaster, a very abusive personality. He divorced his first wife and then took up with an actress and had a bunch of kids by her and finally married her, and then she ran away with a chief marshal of the Air Force and he disinherited all the kids except for his daughter whom he brought back to Thailand. He has two daughters by these two different wives. Now he is married again. The problem is there is no

son to follow him and he is seen as a completely unworthy successor to his father. His sister, the one princess who never married, is seen as very like her father. She also is devoted to the people and has a lot of charitable activities and is a teacher. In the late '70s she was elevated to a rank that is sometimes translated as crown princess, but it's not quite the same. It would make her technically eligible to succeed but only if he didn't contest it and everyone thinks that he would. While a lot of Thai people would prefer to see her ascend to the throne, it's not going to happen. Thaksin, by the way, has done a lot to ingratiate himself with the Crown Prince. He's given him money and has worked his way into his good favour.

*End of Reader*