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

HARRY A. CAHILL

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is July 29, 1993. This is an interview with Harry Cahill on behalf of the Association for diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. I might add that Harry and I are old friends from Yugoslav days and we haven't seen each other for a long time. Harry, just to put the reader in the picture, could you give an idea of when and where you were born and a little about your family background and education before we get going?

CAHILL: Yes, Stu. I was born on an island off the east coast called Manhattan. My father's family was from Massachusetts, its origins in Ireland, England and Scotland. My mother's family was from New York, her ancestors coming from France, Switzerland, and Ireland. My paternal grandfather was a wool buyer for a Boston department store, a trade he learned growing up in Inverness, Scotland. My maternal great-grandparents owned a dry cleaning business in mid-19th century New York City, a business that repeatedly burned down. My father and mother met in New York and I was born there and lived there till we moved to New England when I was 12. Graduating from the Boston Latin School, I wanted to return to New York for college.

Q: Where did you go to college?

CAHILL: Manhattan College. Today's New York Mayor Giuliani is another alumnus. I was a liberal arts man with a major in English. But a large chunk of my education came in working at night for three years in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and alternately as a youth counselor in the Police Department. Saw revealing aspects of the big city. I was accepted at Columbia for an MA in comparative literature. The Korean War was now with us, but the draft board insisted that I keep my deferment because of my rank in class. Graduate school tuition loomed very high, however, and I figured it was not cost-effective to pay first and be killed later. Thus came a colorful special draft board meeting where I argued for revocation of my deferment status. The board seemed to be made up of loving, caring parents who argued against me. But I "won".

Q: What time are we talking about?

CAHILL: October, 1951.

Q: Oh, so the Korean War was in full swing.

CAHILL: It was. I went on to your old alma mater, the Army Language School in Monterey, and there I studied Bulgarian. This helped to firm up a direction in life. I had always been interested in international things and people. When I was a child my father had his concert management company in New York's Rockefeller Center. He managed opera singers, musicians, and such "performing artists". Most of them were from abroad. They spoke in foreign accents. They had different exotic personalities. I grew up thinking that the world beyond the seas was where the action was. The year at Monterey and the ensuing duty in Washington kept me on the this track.

Q: Were you with the Army Security Agency?

CAHILL: Yes, assigned to the National Security Agency, working on Bulgarian affairs.

Q: Which basically monitored what the Bulgarians were up to, I guess.

CAHILL: Monitoring is the right word. During this time I began to think seriously about the Foreign Service. When I left the Army, I came back to New York and started on Madison Avenue with the Johns Manville Corporation. I was assigned to western New York as regional sales executive. And the thought of the Foreign Service went with me.

Q: Johns Manville does what?

CAHILL: Today it is known as the Manville Corporation. It was the asbestos king. Before its cancer link was known, asbestos was used in many products as a non-destructible material. "JM" dominated the field. I worked with wholesalers, construction firms, architects, city planners and others. But the Foreign Service kept ticking in my mind. I was offered a big promotion in business, the management of a large territory, and I knew that if I did not change career soon I probably never would. I took the Foreign Service exams and passed.

Q: When did you come in?

CAHILL: My class met in August, 1956. While I was en route to Washington the Foreign Service structure was changed. We tumbled from FSO-6 to FSO-8 status. If only we had come on board a month earlier. It was a demoralizing way to begin.

Q: Could you characterize your class a bit?

CAHILL: There were twenty of us, all men. From all over America.

Q: Any minorities?

CAHILL: One person.

Q: What about the spirit of your group? Was this considered just a job or was this a career during which you were going to sell America? How did you view what you were going to be doing?

CAHILL: This was a serious career. Almost all of the group were idealists who believed they could do some real good. We all strongly wanted to serve abroad. The worst fate was to be assigned to Washington. The challenge and achievement and adventure were overseas. None of the wives spoke of the need to stay in the US to further their own careers. Both spouses seemed to feel that the most rewarding task or career was to concentrate jointly on the official job at the foreign post.

Q: Did you have any feel for where you wanted to go or what you wanted to do as you came out?

CAHILL: I was ready to go anywhere. My strongest interest was in eastern Europe. My travels had been in western Europe. Asia was always intriguing. I was engaged to a wonderful lady named Angelica, also known as Nicky, who was from Argentina. My only dread was a border post in Canada or Mexico.

Q: How did you meet Nicky?

CAHILL: We met in New York City while she was on a visit in 1954.

Q: Where were you assigned?

CAHILL: To the Department - to my great sadness. Because of my Army intelligence work I was sent to the office of "BI", into Soviet biographic information. It was a poorly directed and organized place, known for "search not research". Morale was terrible. There was no analysis, no real thinking. One would look for strings of names in a Russian newspaper and type up cards with the names on them and file them. Endlessly the same routine. Later this operation was shifted to another agency where I hope it was properly developed. I moved to another part of INR, known as "DRS". This unit restored my faith in the State Department.

Q: DRS being?

CAHILL: The R stood for research and the S for Soviet. D probably stood for some exciting word like division. It was a small unit in which we analyzed and wrote on key topics. My first task was to do a study on Boris Pasternak, then very much in the public eye because of his book "Doctor Zhivago". I served just over two years in INR.

Q: And then?

CAHILL: Orders to Oslo, Norway as vice consul. Eastern Europe still ranked tops on my wish list, but Norway was very attractive in its own right and it was on the Soviet border. In January, 1959, we set forth. There were four in the family now: Nicky, now my wife, and our little sons, Alan of 16 months and Daniel of 6 weeks. It was a memorable trip. On an icy, snowswept day we arrived at Idlewild Airport, later to be called Kennedy. Nicky went to the nursery to change Dan's diapers and found four policemen in the room. Police and stern-faced men emerged everywhere. We soon found out why. Mikoyan, the durable Soviet power-broker, was to be our fellow passenger on the SAS flight. He had just completed a goodwill tour, the first post-war mission of its kind.

The plane was a DC-7G, the last of the big prop-driven aircraft, a model so revved up and complicated to get the last ounce of mileage from its engines. It was small in comparison to today's intercontinental planes. The airline was SAS. We four Cahills sat in the forward seats, two on each side of the aisle. Little Alan sat with me. We flew far out over the Atlantic with January snow squalls beating on the plane in the very dark night. I recall Nicky saying "Look at the lovely colors brightening the sky." Then we realized it was an engine on fire. Then another engine failed. We four were calmly led back into the sealed-off compartment where Mikoyan and six assistants sat. Supposedly we had a better chance of survival in the rear. Mikoyan made a fuss over the children, wanting to hold them and help in any way he could. Otherwise he was quiet, reflective. The others kept talking about the political ramifications of the flight. We were told that the plane would land in Argentina, Newfoundland, a US Navy base in Canada. The Soviets argued among themselves as to who had jurisdiction there. Mikoyan ignored the others, but when we landed between solid rows of white-hatted American sailors on the snow-covered landing strip he said with authority: "Amerikanski shlapke". American hats. This settled the long debate. I saw how unwise is babble and how wise is one who speaks after learning the facts. Mikoyan was a genuine leader-survivor. He was also fast on his feet. The commander of the base raced up in his limousine, and Mikoyan, Nicky and baby Danny went off arm-in-arm into the Arctic night. The rest of us passengers stumbled into buses. Our family was reunited at the base's BOQ-hotel. I think the commander thought Nicky was Mikoyan's daughter and Danny his grandson. Each of us was assigned a spacious room, but we of course huddled in one, glad to be alive and together. Baby Danny slept in a chest drawer. The next morning brought rare sunshine. We saw how badly burned the plane was. A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation team interviewed us and Mikoyan. Another SAS plane flew in to take us on to Copenhagen, and there we and the Soviets said goodbye. The news media was waiting for us at Oslo Airport. Already the local press carried headlines about us. One displayed a large photo of Alan captioned "Mikoyan's little friend". Thus began our first posting early in 1959.

Q: Who was the ambassador then?

CAHILL: Frances Willis, our first woman career ambassador. I served as her protocol officer in addition to my regular consular duties. Protocol is challenging when the chief of mission is a single woman, when there is a monarchy with a widower king, when the government is socialist-labor, and when there is abundant aquavit and cold weather.

Q: How did Ambassador Willis operate? This is a question I ask about our ambassadors just to get the impressions of those who work with them.

CAHILL: She moved with strength. I think she liked to see herself as fair and tough. She slipped on the ice on the way to a speaking event in western Norway and broke her leg, refused to go for medical treatment until the speech was done. She bravely stood at the podium and went through the whole program without flinching. She was slightly crippled from this for the rest of her life. In all her work she was firm and decisive, showing to the world that being a woman was not a disadvantage in any way.

Q: I assume it was a pretty small embassy, wasn't it?

CAHILL: In those days embassies were far larger than now. The sections had generous staffing, perhaps too generous.

Q: Did you get any feel for what were our major concerns with Norway at that time?

CAHILL: Norway was the northern flank of NATO bordering on the USSR. There was a strong labor and neutralist peace movement. We wanted to keep this a strong bulwark against all that Communism represented. There were economic concerns such as fishing rights and expanded trade. We cared about how Norway would align itself in Europe's emerging regional blocs. My own consular work was very varied. I also did protocol and helped out in the economic section. The visa load was high as each seaman was issued two visas, C and D. Being a sailor in Norway was a rite of passage. Most young men went to sea for awhile and then took up other careers. We had many visiting American tourists. One of my first tasks was to assist the survivors of a terrible mountain hotel fire. Many fine Norwegians ranging from UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie to Miss Universe runner-up patiently underwent my visa interviews. There were political refugees from the Soviet bloc and a varied assortment of characters in jail who falsely claimed to be Americans. My favorite was an Indonesian who had memorized dialogues from American cowboy movies to prove he was a native son.

Q: What was the feeling that you got from within the embassy about how they felt about the Socialist government? Were they making noises about neutrality, etc.?

CAHILL: Some journalists argued fervently for neutrality and not being vassals of America. The Ambassador sometimes showed irritation. On a reception line she would deliberately turn her back on a particularly offensive pundit. As protocol officer standing first in line, I would be left dangling with unwanted guests. The Norwegians were an upright, noble people. They were reserved. In my years there I never heard someone singing or whistling a song outside the confines of a home or theater. I regretted that. They still hated the Germans for being Teutonic betrayers. This strong feeling flared when cars with German license plates were pelted with rocks on country roads. One American opera singer told me sadly how she rented a car in Hamburg and then traveled to Norway to the home of her beloved Grieg. All through the western fjord country her car was stoned. The commercial-econ side of my work revealed how arrogant and ineffective was the usual American business approach in those days. I can still see the moneyed American sales exec renting a hotel ballroom, slapping guests on the back, and then leaving town the next morn. He did not make sales, not discuss his products, not gain for his company. In contrast, the European businessmen, especially the Germans, were serious, humble and knowledgeable, carefully expanding contacts and convincingly presenting their wares.

Q: I saw the same thing as economic-commercial officer in the Persian Gulf. Americans would come in to overnight on Friday, which in a Muslim country is not the best time. And then they would take off. Their home office would be some place like Zurich and they would come back every six months or so and achieve nothing, whereas the English and the Germans would come and spend some time. Well, Harry, you left Norway when, in 1961 or so?

CAHILL: Yes, in April, 1961. I might mention that I would interrupt the time in Norway by doing annual reserve duty as an Army officer in Heidelberg. A welcome break. NATO would stage exciting exercises. Alarms would sound and commanders would yell: "The whole Soviet army is coming down the road!" So we would retreat from Germany to France. On paper we always won. When not in field exercises the Army's higher staff echelons seemed frustrated in not having enough to do. Writing first paragraphs of think papers over and over again to kill a day.

Spring came in mid-April in Norway. Our driveway was frozen during eight months of the year. No car could climb and we pulled up a sled with our supplies on it. April thaws brought a true thrill. In April, 1961, my orders said political officer in Ottawa. Heartbreak. I wanted Eastern Europe, not Canada.

Q: Yes, it isn't very exciting.

CAHILL: I talked to others from various embassies who had been there and they said, "Well, there are some good things about Ottawa - it's only three hours from Montreal." Then close to my departure communications officer Jimmy Kelly swept into my office shouting: "Harry, Harry, here's the cable. You're going to Warsaw!" I hugged and kissed him.

There were three children now, Sylvia born in Oslo by the customary Norwegian natural childbirth method. Our ocean voyage home took ten days at sea because of storms. The kids made a colorful trio in their Norwegian sweaters and hats on landing in New York. UPI and AP photographed them, and news photos appeared all over America. For months we received clippings from people.

One evening as I walked from my motel in Virginia to the laundromat with one little son in tow, I saw the headline of an evening paper. It was in color. An American Embassy officer was a spy for the Reds in Warsaw. He had occupied the GSO slot I was going to. The report said he had been seduced by a gorgeous woman agent. I thought I might have been chosen as a replacement because I still had a crewcut and maybe looked innocent.

Q: What was the spy's name?

CAHILL: Scarbeck.

Q: Yes, Scarbeck. At least at that time he was the only Foreign Service officer who had done this.

CAHILL: I always felt he wasn't a real Foreign Service officer. He transferred in from a Defense Department civilian admin job in Germany. In those years we had many such transfers as "lateral entry" into admin and consular positions. The results were uneven. Taking command spots, some of these people were insecure and made life miserable for lower-ranking career FSOs.

Q: Because these people, quite frankly, were of a different class. I am not talking about socially, I am talking about intellectually.

CAHILL: Their thinking process was often different. Their values too.

Q: Like "What's in it for me?" Many of them had been in the military service and hung around. Essentially, you are not talking about retired master sergeants, you are talking about retired staff sergeants.

CAHILL: Or overweight ex-corporals. Scarbeck fitted this category.

Q: He got involved with a Polish woman who was a set up and he gave out some papers. It wasn't that earth shaking, it is just that people remember it.

CAHILL: Yes, he first had an American wife, then a German wife. Then he formed a relationship with a Pole after coming to Poland. Emphasis on local cultural penetration. His Polish friend came to see me to claim luggage confiscated in Frankfurt. Poor Ursula was not an attractive person. The GSO staff smiled and shook their heads, saying "Boss, we never understood this either." Thus I started as GSO.

Q: This was General Services Officer.

CAHILL: Yes, a job often looked down upon but one in which an officer could do much to raise the quality of life and could also observe the local scene. It proved to be a very creative job. The first half of my 3-year tour was in this position and the second half was as political officer.

Our embassy chancery was in a 16th century inn, a temporary home till our new super modern and microphone-infested chancery was built a mile away. We were totally dependent on ourselves for supply and maintenance. The GSO crew was huge. We did everything from operate a commissary to build houses to repair cars to upholster furniture. I saw we needed to take initiatives in several areas. For example, we were buying petrol from our British colleagues for our private and official cars. Its octane rating was very low, price very high. We should buy quality American gasoline. So I negotiated with ESSO refinery in Hamburg and the West and East German railways and soon we began to sell gas to the entire diplomatic community at bargain prices. Cars no longer hiccuped. The British realized their people were also gaining, but they still wondered about my Irish name.

Our furniture was dreadful, used castoffs from the military occupation of Germany. It probably came with Scarbeck. New regulations said we could exchange old furniture for new, selling and then buying with the proceeds. So I negotiated with the Air Force which needed practice flying over Poland. They carried tons of old surplus furniture from German warehouses to Warsaw. We took possession and then sold the stuff to needy Poles and needy foreign diplomats. I used the large profits to buy the latest fashion rugs and furniture from Denmark. We staged a series of outdoor auctions, often in the snow and cold, with me yelling in Polish as auctioneer. People came from all over. They were jolly times. We sold off all the old, used military items. Our homes became bright and cheerful with beautiful Scandinavian furnishings at no cost to the Government. Morale soared.

We expanded the Commissary and installed a large frozen food section. We cut prices and greatly increased inventory. To subsidize this the commissary started a "travel agency division". After buying old embassy cars at auction, we would rent them out to official and other visitors for trips to such places as Chopin's birthplace. I organized a 3-day ski trip to the Carpathian Mountains over Lincoln's Birthday weekend. Virtually the whole mission went. The British Embassy doctor who looked after the health of the diplomatic community also went. His name was Sheehan. Again the UK wondered about Irish influence. These are a few examples of GSO activity.

The only occupational hazard was the "name day party". In Poland you don't celebrate your birthday but the day of the saint whose name you carry. You never get older that way. As the GSO/Admin staff was enormous, we seemed to be celebrating every other night. We would all gather in the carpentry shop as Michael or Stanislaw or Wladislaw or Kristina hosted a wonderful party. Vodka supplemented by industrial alcohol and smuggled tomatoes and pickles and dark bread and butter. And we would sing, sing, sing. Polish songs still ring through my head. First came the rousing, happy songs. Then late at night, soaked with vodka, came the tearful renditions of World War II songs like the "Red Mother of Monte Cassino". A number of my working comrades in Warsaw had fought there.

The Poles had the greatest zestful spirit of any people I have known. They do not use the word for "tired". They use the word for "burned out". They go forward until they drop. They possess great talents. My admiration for them is very deep.

Q: There is a large graveyard in Monte Cassino and a Polish memorial. Many are buried there.

CAHILL: And when one goes there it breaks your heart. One reads the ages on those crosses and sees how old the soldiers were. They were not boys. These were men with families who had given so many years of their lives to war and combat and suffering. On each cross was a rosary and beneath the beads were the name and birth date.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

CAHILL: My first ambassador was Jake Beam who was serious and able. Soon came John Moors Cabot of the Boston Cabots who was a hearty, patrician, colorful, old line veteran, a grand gentleman of the Foreign Service. He had a wonderful wife, Elizabeth, who was a loving, caring mother to all of us. A truly lovable lady. There was a sense of joy and camaraderie with them. We worked hard in difficult political times in the early 1960's, but there was fun. I remember the costume balls and Marine Balls in the old inn's lobby. One time the Ambassador came as Robin Hood, tall and dignified, striding in through the ancient front door. Snow fell from his Sherwood Forest boots.

Contrasting with those events were the security precautions against riots. International issues like Cuba had the Polish commissars often brewing a new riot or attack on the chancery. Another key factor in making the mission a happy, productive place was Admin officer Pat Kelly, another great man of the Service. Gracious, giving, bright, with a colossal spirit. Pat and I had a favorite plan of defense. We mobilized all the mission's baseball bats and planned to smash each hostile skull as it came through the lobby entrance. We waited and waited but never got the opportunity.

Q: Oh, yes, there would be demonstrations. What were your security problems at the time? You were in a hostile country.

CAHILL: The government was very hostile. A great bureaucracy of government workers depended on this state of hostility and suspicion. Politicians stayed in power by drawing on it. But the people liked us. I can remember that even Army officers we met on the road somewhere as we went through checkpoints would quietly say, "God bless the American Army, just tell them what we really think." I think the Poles genuinely loved the United States. They had cousins, uncles, children in America. Some countries do genuinely like us and the Poles did then. But the leader did not.

Q: Who was this?

CAHILL: Gomulka. Poor old Gomulka with his ascetic, grim face. His men watched us closely. They cleverly slipped microphones into the hollow metal reinforcing bars of our new chancery as it was being built. Everything we said was recorded to our detriment. The whole place was effectively bugged. My chair in the political section sat on one busy microphone. This reflects poorly on our own security people as the construction operation was supposed to have been monitored carefully.

When we moved in I reverted to political officer in a two-man section. One extremely good aspect of our East European posts was their small size. The host government limited personnel. Thus responsibility and scope of work were large and varied.

My main areas were German-Polish relations and Church-State affairs. The former brought me into contact with outstanding German officials. I must say that throughout my career the German Foreign Service has always shown top quality. Church-State affairs were important and exciting. Much of my time was spent gathering information. The regime did not like this. I ran a clandestine network that featured many people in strange places. The information flowed in. The secret police bounded after me. In one example, word came that the Organ School, the last musical school of the Church, was going to be raided and closed down. That was supposed to be top secret. The militia would do the task before anyone could defend or cry out, and then silence would descend. The info was relayed to Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Within hours the word came back over the public airwaves: "The Polish government is about to forcibly close the last music school of the Catholic Church in Poland. There will be no more organists trained, no more sacred music published." The authorities backed off and were furious. Our very good DCM Bud Sherer kept a running betting book giving odds on how soon I would be PNGed.

Our children were patient about being exploited. I would say, "Kids, we're going on a picnic to explore Lublin today." They would have to get up early. Their sleepy little heads would nod as we bounced over the roads to some grim destination chosen because papa wanted to scout. But children lent a protective covering.

I remember another trip with our Chinese expert Al Harding, one more great guy who made the post what it was. A black Mercedes with glowering crew was behind us as we exited a church near the Soviet border. We drove into a national park primeval forest which once served as Goering's hunting preserve, and the gatekeeper slammed the gates behind us. We had a permit, the others did not. We camped in the back of my station wagon. Late at night the tail returned searching the woods with flashlights. We stayed warm. They stood and froze in the cold autumn night. We waved at the wretched pair as we drove out the next morning.

Q: But you were followed everywhere?

CAHILL: Yes. It became a game. Endless chases. Various ruses. Once I switched coats and cars with the Air Attachï¿½. Quickly I learned how tightly he and his foreign military attachï¿½ pals worked. They would park in strategic points around the city. When they saw our attachï¿½'s car approaching they would pull out as I passed and block the road, nearly causing wrecks.

Q: How did we see the Poles and the Party at that particular time? We are talking about the early '60s.

CAHILL: Grim years-1962, 1963, 1964. We faced an impasse bilaterally. The Party slavishly followed the Soviet lead. Party membership was used to gain perks, not to help the people. Someone walking with an orange in a string bag would cause a food riot. All things were in short supply except political sloganeering. Greyness and more grayness and the smell of old cabbage were the hallmarks of Warsaw. This and mud.

I think the average political hack hated us. The police bosses would have cut our throats. But I have serious doubts about the will of the armed forces. I had no collisions with them, even in the darkest times. In the Cuban crisis the rail line across Poland was a crucial supply link. It was the only East-West line to the ports which sent missiles and other materials to Cuba. We had to monitor that line and the roads that led to Czechoslovakia and East Germany. The birth of our fourth child Irene in Frankfurt provided a good reason to follow the key road and rail bed westward. A very competent Marine and I headed west in an embassy station wagon carrying items for delivery in Frankfurt, our main support base. Hugging the railroad we scanned everything that moved. Late at night in Czechoslovakia near the West German border we saw masses of soldiers moving forward along the road heading west. We put on our full lights, eased the car around to see wide angle. Not assault troops. Many were holding hands with girls. A big dance had just ended and the soldiers were streaming back to camp. Soon thereafter we crossed the border at Waidhaus. The sleepy old German border guard yawned and shuffled to raise the fence across the road. The moment could not have been more peaceful. Not so in Nï¿½rnberg where I was later debriefed by the US Seventh Army. They were ready to fight.

Q: Did you have any contact as political officer with the Communist Party of Poland? What were you seeing and reporting?

CAHILL: My ties with the government were limited. I avoided the Party. I wanted a low profile. My work was mainly focused on church matters and building an info-contact network. Beyond this I knew journalists and people from different professions who provided feedback on popular feelings. People connected with the church - lawyers, teachers, janitors as well as clergy - were amazing in their absolute faith that the Church would triumph. I saw it being beaten into the ground by ingenious means, but they were right. Many memories stand out. One event was the annual feast of St. Mary at the fortified monastery of Jasna Gora. Hundreds of thousands of Poles made the pilgrimage on foot. I was the only diplomat to enter those walls and mix with the bishops. Most of them seemed fearless, totally dedicated, men of granite. In 1963 I met the Bishop of Krakow and a young lawyer from South Africa named Anthony. Anthony became a close friend. In 1992, the same trio came together again in St. Peter's in Rome. Anthony, having given up his law practice to enter the seminary, was ordained by the former Krakow bishop who was now Pope. Impressive each week was the scene at virtually every Catholic church in Poland. Over-capacity congregations flowed out into the street and literally blocked the trolley tracks in cities. The people sang through the entire Mass. The Church provided the principal means to express resistance to a despised regime.

In addition to church-state, our political reporting focused on the ebb and flow of leaders, human rights violations, trends in national feelings, cooperation with the USSR, building of relationships with other countries. Often the Poles acted as middlemen and stalking horses for the Soviets. Very important was the development of German relations, especially the finalization of the borders. The embassy was also the contact place where the United States conferred with the People's Republic of China. Bit by bit, we were working toward the US-Sino dï¿½tente of 1972.

Another responsibility for me was running a translation service with a British embassy partner. Each morning in an ancient house in the Old Town our Polish national staff would screen the press for key news, translate the articles, and publish a fairly fat compilation by early afternoon. This joint service provided most of the material for diplomatic community pondering and reporting. I would do the editing. I also supervised the travel office, the unit which issued visas for visits to West Germany. In a sense, I acted as FRG consul.

Q: Had Poland at that time become part of the Vietnam peace movement? There was India, Poland, and Canada, I think.

CAHILL: Our participation in Vietnam war officially began in 1964, just after I left Warsaw. Poland became more and more active in the peace movement from that point.

Q: What was your viewpoint of the Soviet Union at this time?

CAHILL: The USSR was pressing hard on several fronts. Difficult years with pressure and crises. Problems in Africa, in Indochina, political infiltration pushed on every continent, Soviet space program leaping ahead - and then Cuba about to explode. At the same time, we felt the Soviets thought we were on the verge of attacking them. At the height of the Cuban confrontation we joked that we'd be very safe. The missiles would fly over us on way toward targets. Gallows humor. On personal matters, the Soviets allowed me to visit Moscow but not Leningrad. The Polish people's view of Russia was bitterly negative. This was the traditional enemy. Strangely enough there was respect for the Germans. Embassy employees with German blood were held in esteem by their peers, their good work attributed to their German genes.

Q: You left there when?

CAHILL: June, 1964.

Q: And where did you go?

CAHILL: I went home to SAIS, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies to do graduate work in economics. One day in Warsaw a message had come congratulating me on being chosen for Yugoslav language and area study. But the next pouch announced that I had been selected for econ study at university of my choice. I took the latter offer and thus changed my direction in the service. Thinking of our children, I thought best to stay at our Virginia home and commute to SAIS. The year was invigorating, the teaching good. Then in the summer of 1965 we sailed to Yugoslavia. You have heard of that place?

Q: Yes.

CAHILL: There was a consular chief there by the name of Kennedy. A very good mentor you were. Wise advice on many counts. I was in the econ section.

Q: Let's stop here and pick up the next time we get together.

CAHILL: Beautiful.

Q: Today is November 5, 1993. Harry, what was the economic section like when you were in Belgrade?

CAHILL: The section was amply staffed. Abilities varied. Hopes were high for an economy that would grow and link itself more and more with the west for mutual gain. My duties ranged all over the place, reporting and working in many economic areas. One large task, however, was to manage the AID program which at one time had been our biggest.

America had poured in tremendous assistance after Tito broke from the USSR's yoke in 1949. We financed many huge and small projects. My job gave me the freedom and authority to travel anywhere, visit any factory, any industrial plant, any complex where AID money had gone. The money went everywhere from school lunch programs to armaments factories to huge power plants. Repayment was in dinars. I figured out a way to reprogram the dinars, and we launched into new programs. The Yugoslavs were generous in allowing me to recommend projects which they actually implemented. I greatly enjoyed visits to the Economic Ministry. After warm greetings a waiter would appear, a man who looked like a punch-drunk boxer. He wore a tuxedo and offered a silver tray with orange juice, wonderful slivovitz and sweets. We would munch happily, and then my hosts would say: "Dobro, tell us now where should we put the money?" One early call was the Belgrade-Bar railroad, once proposed by Emperor Franz Joseph around 1904.

Q: Bar is in Montenegro...

CAHILL: On the southern coast next to Albania. Further north up the coast is Ploce where we recommended building a port with the AID funds. Today it is the main seaport for the new state of Bosnia, vital in the war.

Q: We are talking about the present war between the Serbs and the Bosnians and Croats.

CAHILL: Yes, conflict on vicious terrain. In winter snow or summer heat I would pass through Yugoslavia's rugged hills and mountain passes on the way to check assistance programs, another new dam, emergency food deliveries after an earthquake, CARE feeding units, steel mills. Every bend in the road was a perfect ambush site. The Yugoslav army trained for small unit operations of this type.

Q: In the embassy there was always a good sense of morale. It was the best place that I have served for spirit and the caliber of the officers.

CAHILL: Yugoslavia was a world within itself. Full of contrasts and natural riches and potential. We had great hope for the future in the econ section. A solid base would be built by 1970. CEOs and academicians flowed in to ask us about worker-ownership of factories and future investment. But the gilded tomorrow never came. The death of Tito and his strong unifying hand hurt deeply. Another key element was the failure of the financial system. It did not work on economic principles but on cronyism and political greed. It dished out credits to terrible projects and shady operators, to friends and ethnic comrades. Childish leaders ran amuck with the nation's wealth. Politics became thuggery. Break up the nation and alienate communities for short-term political gain. I saw the same disease in Nigeria, Sri Lanka and India.

Q: What was your impression of Tito and his rule at that time?

CAHILL: Tito was a very strong man. No one knew who would succeed him. He went on, and on, and on and on. He was the unifier.

Q: Tito was considered at that point a good thing?

CAHILL: A stable thing, a good thing, a man who held the country together. He believed he was Mr. Yugoslavia, the man who had the best interests of Yugoslavia at heart. He dwarfed everybody else. He was the banyan tree in whose shade no other trees grew.

Q: Because we are speaking from the perspective of 1993 and this horrible falling apart of Yugoslavia, what was your feeling and maybe of your colleagues, about the ethnic divisiveness at that time?

CAHILL: We thought, I suspect just about everyone in the mission thought, that ethnic divisiveness was in check, even fading. The evidence said so. I probably traveled as much if not more than any embassy person and I would constantly find people saying "we Yugoslavs." There was pride in this. They were Macedonians or Croats or Serbs first but they were also Yugoslavs and saw personal gain by being so. Government moved its officers around. Big companies moved managers around. Slovenians headed factories in the south. The army was totally integrated. I did not hear calls for the end of the union or serious backbiting about other ethnic groups.

Q: And it wasn't as though people were living in absolute terror of the secret police. You couldn't say these things in public, but at the same time we had very frank discussions at that time.

CAHILL: There was no strong, palpable fear. The official theme "Oneness in Brotherhood" seemed accepted. Our view was that it was national suicide to break apart. Most people would lose, not win in any sense. We thought that most of the population thought as we did.

Q: This may be one of our problems. As a practical people it is hard to envision the passions of nationality.

CAHILL: Well said. I suspect that incitement of passions to rip a nation apart largely came at first from outside. From political thinkers in Central Europe and overseas clubs of ethnic groups who cannot get hurt themselves but can cheer on the warriors from the safety of a distant armchair. The money and the hate words are pumped "home".

Q: It is like the IRA.

CAHILL: Go to the north Bronx to see IRA funds collected.

Q: People who leave a country tend to want to preserve the old hatreds more often than the people in the country.

CAHILL: They glory and find virility in it. They are snugly safe from negative consequences.

Q: How did you evaluate Ambassador Elbrick in running the embassy when you were there?

CAHILL: He gave the appearance of a veteran skipper who smoothly sailed over the seas. Dignified, confident, aware, outwardly relaxed. Thoroughly professional.

Q: Yes, I had exactly the same feeling. When did you leave Yugoslavia?

CAHILL: I left on the Fourth of July, 1968 and said, "Oh, how nice to escape a long July Fourth reception." We went in a red Volkswagen bus which I had bought in Germany some months before and driven to Belgrade. We now had six children, Steven almost born on a Belgrade-Munich plane in August, 1966. We headed north on a sentimental journey to historical sites like the battlefield of Caporetto, once in Hemingway's Italy but now in Yugoslavia. As we drove from Belgrade to Genoa we crossed much land that had changed hands at various times between Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia. So much of the north is vulnerable to irredentist claims. Back in America on home leave, the same VW bus took us on a tour of 36 states over six weeks. Time for the children to learn about their own country.

In November, 1968 we arrived in Uruguay. A year before, Nicky had said: "Do think of myself and the children. Are we always to stay in Eastern Europe, near the Iron Curtain? I am from South America, and children need to know their grandparents. Can we not go for one tour?" Henry Kissinger thought similarly with his Glopism doctrine against over-specialization in one area. Thus Personnel graciously sent me to Uruguay, just across the river from Nicky's native Buenos Aires. Some of my former bosses in the Service were aghast: "You have a great career ahead in East Europe. How can you throw everything away to go to that damned white shoe service?!". I became commercial attachï¿½ in Montevideo.

Q: You were there for how long?

CAHILL: Three years. A time colored dark by the Tupamaros, the first urban guerrilla-terrorist movement.

Q: Can you talk about the Tupamaros?

CAHILL: Uruguay was a democracy with a pervasive, excessive welfare system. One could retire at age 37 with full pension. There was too much protection for industry, too many subsidies for special interests, a stagnant economy, no growth for jobs. Almost the entire university student body took either medicine or law, and then found little career opportunity. No one studied science, engineering or agriculture. There was no constructive investment. Workers were frustrated as were intellectuals and students. Society was increasingly polarized, and from this malaise came some twisted youths bent on shattering the establishment.

Their terrorist movement began with attempts at humor. They would dress up in costumes, rent a hearse and with loud laughter would hold up a bank. Then the killings started and the fun and high jinks disappeared. Police were the first targets, then anyone. Venom was aimed at the Americans for "backing the regime and oppressing South America." Two kidnappings of our people were botched but USAID officer Dan Mitrione was seized, tortured and murdered. He was a very gentle, friendly man with nine children. A police officer from Pennsylvania, he had been brought in to coach the local police on setting up mobile communications. Just about then the East Germans published their notorious book listing "CIA agents" based in each country. Four were listed in our embassy. The other three left within months but I stayed on for years, innocent of all charges. Lyndon B. Johnson was also listed as a CIA operative. As a farewell gesture, the Tupamaros dynamited our house hours after we finally left for America at the end of our 3-year tour.

Q: I'm in that book too along with George McGovern and countless others.

CAHILL: A noble group. But my real job was to promote trade and international economic relations. We had success somehow. It was a pleasure to work with the Uruguayans. They were a genuinely giving, gracious people. Level of education and culture was high and the populace appreciated the finer things in life despite the unrest and pressure we lived with.

Q: It must have been very, very difficult with kidnappings going on, etc. Who was the ambassador and how did the embassy work under these conditions? And there you were with six kids. How did it all fit together?

CAHILL: One did one's work and thought: "If I do my work really well it will help the overall situation." So one worked harder. Guard cars followed us wherever we went. Our own cars had sirens in them. We often moved in convoys. Each residence has a full-time guard. The ambassador was Chuck Adair, a very able career officer. An outgoing, buoyant person, he replaced the more introverted Bob Sayre early in my tour. He and his extremely kind and supportive wife Carolyn were just right to lead us through those grim years. We did live under siege. My family lived very near the American School and the kids walked to class. We had hoped to use the adjacent golf course but the buildings were torched by the Tups. Overall, morale was steady and good. At least we had gorgeous sunsets. The sun sank over Argentina beyond the Rio de la Plata. It picked up the dust of the pampas and produced the most amazing mix of bright and soft colors.

On the issue of leadership, the Uruguayans and Argentines often said to me that our ambassadors should "look and act like ambassadors". They should have good physical presence and outgoing personalities as well as keen minds. The Latins did not appreciate small, mousy men. Exteriors were important.

Q: This was early Nixon period. What was our "mission" to do about the Tupamaros?

CAHILL: A key mission was to spur economic progress in Latin America and stop communist subversion. With economic growth political dissent would decline. Stronger links would be forged with the north. My commercial work had meaning. One task was to help Uruguay export. We even lent them our trade center in Frankfurt to do so. I remember helping put Uruguayan trade missions together as if they were American delegations.

Q: How did you find Uruguayan banking and financial systems? You were saying that there was much economic paternalism.

CAHILL: They too suffered from over regulation and protection. The "good families" controlled them. Favoritism was high and efficiency low. There were far too many lawyers. They profited from making murk and producing arcane laws which only they could interpret. One saving grace in banking and business was education in the US for young people. They returned and if they were not playboys they could effect some change. I particularly admired MIT alumni. A circle of them controlled almost all the well-run enterprises. Also good were banks like Citibank which served as models.

Q: You left there when, in 1971?

CAHILL: In July, 1971. During our years at post we used our leave time to travel. To Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. To Bolivia and Paraguay and Chile. Through much of Brazil by car. To Peru and Machu Picchu and Ecuador and the Andes. I wanted to know South America as best I could. Our children traveled on some of the trips with us. At home our sons profited by learning soccer skills. They had started in Belgrade but really advanced in Montevideo.

Q: Where did you go after Uruguay?

CAHILL: To ICAF, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at Fort McNair.

Q: Being from the State Department, did you take much flak from our participation in Vietnam War from the military?

CAHILL: No. The size of the class was over one hundred and included three State Department officers. A senior artillery officer welcomed us and said wisely: "Be glad you State people are here because here we teach you what you don't get anywhere else: Management. You've had enough geopolitics. You don't need more of it from our neighbor, the War College."

It was good to be with so many people, so many varied shadings of military and cultural background. There were excellent management and simulation exercises. A good annual field trip was part of the program and I figured out a way for my group to go around the world in one direction at less cost than stopping in Asia and returning. First stop was Tokyo. By the time we visited Jerusalem and stumbled through Paris we were badly creaking. Despite this caper, ICAF cited me on graduation as top-ranking civilian student. The course also gave me the opportunity to obtain a master's degree in management from George Washington University. This required several months of additional study at the Fort campus. GWU worked us hard, especially since econometrics was in fashion in the early '70's. I had to learn differential and integral calculus. Thanks to a generous Marine colonel classmate who tutored me and others in the evening, I got through. I came so much to appreciate many outstanding men from the other services. This awareness was the top reward of the "war college" experience. The military uses a quantitative approach to life. We use a qualitative approach. We can learn from each other.

And I got into serious jogging. That was before it became popular. The McNair roads were my first track. Too, my master's thesis developed into a book published by Praeger. It focused on China's industry and trade potential and argued for granting Most Favored Nation status to China. Published in 1973, it was timely. The Christian Science Monitor wrote: "Whether you are a trader, an economist or a congressman, you would do well to read this book. It is the first well-documented analysis of US-China trade and the prospects for its future."

Q: After that where did you go? You got out in 1972?

CAHILL: The Department of Commerce. They liked my work in and promised great things if I would do a hitch with them.

Q: How did you find the Department Commerce when you were there?

CAHILL: My job was to direct "policy planning" - put that in quotes - for expanding exports. Worthy cause. But a fundamental problem in going to Commerce is that once one is seconded to another agency, one might as well be on the planet Saturn. You're out of sight and mind. Commerce had many kind and friendly people but a general mentality that was bureaucratic, mired in office minutiae. Massive effort went into administrative gimmickry. There was constant redesigning of office organization charts depicting who would report to whom. Commerce, however, did allow me room for initiative because few there ever bothered to take initiative. I was free to do what I wanted, one aim being to bring other organs of government into the export effort. Export thrust and globalism were not in the fore of American thinking in those days.

One idea was to enlist the powers of USIA. I called on its chief Jim Keogh and suggested forms of cooperation. He kindly agreed. For example, the hallowed Voice of America could aid exporters. With Keogh's blessing I went to VOA and asked: "Can we have a program about new, exciting American products?" The reply was, "It's a good idea, but we don't have anyone to write it." I said I'd write it in my spare time. But the counter was that there was no one to voice it. Staffing was too thin. Again I volunteered. Thus began the second most popular show in VOA. The Breakfast Show was first. Our Commerce field offices around the US took in all kinds of product applications. Each Sunday morning on my home dining room table I'd sort through piles, selecting some items for our international written newsletter and some for radio. Then I'd write the week's script. On Tuesday lunch hour I would walk across the Mall from Commerce to USIA and broadcast. The show was translated into 26 languages. I did 86 shows. It cost the USG nothing but had good impact. American companies wrote in reporting how new orders from overseas, directly tracked to the show, had saved their companies. Everybody won. There were other initiatives and other programs, and after two years I returned to State to head EB's Business Division. The emphasis there was on outreach, reaching out to CEOs and holding workshops at State to forge understanding and joint tactics.

I was in that position less than a year. It was time to go overseas. Nigeria had risen large as a leading trade partner. It sold us $6 billion annually in oil but bought little from us. Ambassador Don Easum chose me as his econ counselor, a job that would be in charge of economic affairs, commerce and the residual AID program. He smiled and said that it was the second most important job in Nigeria, his job being the first. In August 1975, we flew to Lagos. I insisted we go via Nigerian Airlines to become acquainted with the nation. The kids thought it was a wacky decision. They were right, but we did get an inkling of the future.

Q: What was the situation in Nigeria when you got there in 1975?

CAHILL: The country was awash in oil riches, hellbent on spending them and siphoning off as much as possible for those in power. Chaos on all fronts. A total of 420 ships were stuck in Lagos Harbor, most of them carrying moldering cement. European contractors collided with each other in doing infrastructure projects. Newly installed telephone lines were ripped up by other contractors who had different projects in the same area. There was non-stop gridlock on all roads. Agriculture was abandoned as everyone flocked to the cities where the big money was. Essentials like electricity and food were in short supply. Inflation rocketed up.

Within the embassy we were blessed with Don Easum, the most genuine, lovable, unpretentious and generous guy you could imagine. He was extremely intelligent and hardworking, but was a gentle, relaxed leader. I wore three hats and loved my work. For Don, people would do their best. There were ten people in my section. Almost all of them extended their time in Nigeria despite its difficult conditions. I take pride in this. A highlight for me was being charge of the mission for a month. The diplomatic corps had been confined to the city of Lagos for weeks because of the assassination of Head of State Muhammed, and my first act was to call a meeting of heads of mission to demand lifting of the ban on travel. Our united front won.

Q: What was the political situation at that time?

CAHILL: One week before our arrival, Head of State Jack Gowon was deposed. He had brought the country together after the end of the civil war a few years before. A Muslim general from the north, Murtala Muhammed and his army clique took over. Business as usual.

Once the coup was over, the real action in Nigeria was economic. It was a fascinating experience for me. The challenge was to make Nigeria think in terms of American goods and services. Nothing was easy. With traffic totally stalled, I would sprint from chancery to my meetings at Defense, Economic and other ministries. Then, as in the Defense building, I would climb 12 flights of stairs. Eight days after arrival at post I met with the Army chief of staff. I had seen no American trucks anywhere. I told him that his army was almost immobile, but that we could solve the problem by bringing in execs from America's largest auto motor firms and allowing him to choose the most powerful trucks in the world. Back in my office I sent off cables to Detroit, etc. and orchestrated an incoming parade of sales chiefs. The result was the largest truck/vehicle export deal in the history of the United States, hundreds of millions of dollars. Nigeria wanted to buy everything on wheels and paint it army green.

Building on the base of trust that ensued, I would recommend that the government buy other marvelous American products. It happily bought in huge amounts from boots for soldiers to prisons for criminals. Boot volume was astronomical. I suspect the Nigerians were supplying our footwear to every liberation movement in Africa. We sold more and more. Government officials told me that I had become their Crown Agent and they expected me to tell them what to buy and from whom. This honor I ducked.

Q: I have heard stories that the port of Lagos was so blocked up that nothing was getting in. We might sell, but how about absorption and real use of what they were getting?

CAHILL: In December 1975, an American company was hired and solved the port impasse by quickly dredging a creek and opening auxiliary ports. The supplies rolled in. New major berthing facilities were built in mid-harbor. Jimmy Carter, the first American President to visit Africa officially, came in April, 1978. We wanted him to see the progress in the port and the American input. I asked Delta Lines to race a ship into Lagos, and they sent one at war speed to greet the President. The President was a big hit in Nigeria. His warm humanity was much appreciated. He and current head of state Obasanjo became great pals and agreed to go into chicken farming after retirement from public office. Obasanjo did so - with American-supplied technology.

Q: Was the money during the time you were there getting spent well?

CAHILL: There was incredible waste and corruption. Ridiculous prices were paid for imports to cover the bribe portion for middlemen. Large projects were poorly designed. An enormous concrete stadium was built in the city center. I kept thinking, "We are going to see great sports events!" But there was a cement floor, no grass. Not good for football. Then we learned that the whole damned thing was for military parades, not sports or anything else. A crazy boom time mood was everywhere.

Q: How did the problem of corruption play on your operation? We were just beginning to be aware that the United States wasn't going to put up with this as far as American firms and all, or had that started?

CAHILL: The Carter administration out down clear guidelines. Our foreign competitors thought we were hopelessly naive with our anti-corruption legislation. What saved us was that the Nigerians really believed in American quality and were set on buying. Too, as we have seen in these past 20 years, much of the negotiations and arrangements are done through foreign partners or agents. The American supplier is not always aware of all details of sale.

In December 1976, Forbes magazine had a cover story on booming Nigeria and was very kind to us. We were the "hardest working embassy" the magazine had ever seen and I was billed as "America's non-stop salesman". A quote from me was printed to the effect that a most effective way to build bilateral relations was through commerce and the recognition of American skills and quality. Nigeria was a delightful commercial testing ground. I used the empty embassy parking lot on weekends to display various American equipment, oil drilling machinery to autos. We even used the econ section's corridors for clothing exhibits. It was wild, was fun, got great results.

Q: There was also analysis. What was the impression with the ambassador and you and others about whither Nigeria?

CAHILL: We had faith in the future. Americans usually do. Roads, universities, ports, phone systems were going up, costs notwithstanding. Student exchange programs were expanding. We brought in the Corps of Engineers to survey the new inland capital and the River Niger. Maybe even nature could be tamed. We had no indication that the oil wealth would ever ebb. We had not quite fathomed the depth of the corruption, but we knew that real sustained progress depended on the integrity of political leaders and the awareness and involvement of the people. We believed that they were working steadily towards a civilian government which would be balanced, informed, sane and favoring free enterprise. When I left in 1978, a date for transition had been set. But we were to see later how endemic were greed, self-indulgence and childish irresponsibility. The civilian government proved hopelessly inept and corrupt and was soon replaced by a more corrupt, brutal military regime. Steady deterioration has followed.

Q: What about your impression of the Nigerian? I realize it is a very mixed society with many tribes and all, but as entrepreneurs and their education, what was happening?

CAHILL: The Nigerian, if I can generalize, tends to be aggressive, quite full of passion, hearty. He can laugh uproariously, but he can be difficult and obstinate with a tendency towards violence. There is a history of violence, a country brutalized by slavery before the white slaver came. The many tribes often were in conflict.

Q: Slavery was done by Nigerians...?

CAHILL: By different tribes to other tribes. And then the whites arrived. Nigeria was known as the Slave Coast. They would park their ships off the coast and the blacks on shore would bring and sell human cargo to the ships. The leading square in Lagos is named Tinubu Square after Madame Tinubu, a prominent local woman slaver. The best entrepreneurs in Nigeria have often been women. Contrast the Nigerian personality with the gentler Ghanaians. Trace back the history and topography of Ghana. The coast line was rocky and hard to penetrate. Slavery was less. There were many little kingdoms in Ghana. The Portuguese and others made treaties with the rulers and were more intent on gold than on slaves. Ghana was called the Gold Coast.

Q: What about Nigeria's civil servants?

CAHILL: Some were good - honest, capable, dedicated. Usually these came from the east and south, parts of the country that had formed Biafra. Their education was emphasized. They had been trained in Catholic mission schools. Another aspect to watch among civil servants was the emerging group trained in the US During my tour of duty the number of states increased from 12 to 19. I visited the state governments and found a big difference between young UK-educated and US-educated administrators. The latter were far more positive, organized, results-oriented. The former were negative, supercilious, more interested in posturing. But all civilian officials suffered from the military regime. Not matter how able and high-ranking they were, they could be cowed by a brash second lieutenant who would walk into the room and intimidate them, flash his uniform and tell them they were all fools. Long ago I thought military government had advantages. But it is deep flaws and can be just as corrupt as any civilian group.

Q: We will stop now and pick up when you leave Nigeria at our next meeting.

CAHILL: Fine.

Q: Today is January 7, 1994. Harry, you left Nigeria in 1978 and you then came back and went on to more training. You went to the Senior Seminar.

CAHILL: Yes. There were twenty of us, all male. The great majority of us were State Department. I remember Pat Derian coming, Carter's forceful spokeswoman for human rights. She sat and kept looking at us, nodded her head and intoned: "Twenty of you and not a woman in the group." She gave one of the better presentations, incidentally. That was an enjoyable year, but I should have instead taken an assignment in the Department. What we did in the seminar year, visit cities and companies and civic officials, I had done before on my own. It was deja vu. Working in State would have been far more useful. Having been promoted to FSO-1, the then equivalent of today's minister-counselor, I presumably could have filled a responsible State slot. But I thought one had to have his DCM ticket punched, and Asia, especially Sri Lanka, had long attracted me. Ambassador Wriggins was a political appointee, a Columbia professor who knew Lanka better than any American. A key attraction was the country's recent switch from suffocating, stifling socialism under Mrs. Bandaranaike to a free enterprise market economy. It was an exciting new model for the developing world.

I spent two years there. Being DCM under a fair-minded and supportive political ambassador is good. One manages. One is a reporting officer. One counsels the boss as well as the staff. Because I had worked before in every embassy section I could see what was going on. My earlier two rounds as an AID officer were particularly helpful. This helped cut through the aid jargon, the hodge podge of disparate projects lacking a central theme, and the blandishments of local officials.

Q: Was there corruption?

CAHILL: Sure. Politicians amaze me with their greed. In the developing world the same cadre of politicos seems to stay forever. They're in office, they're out, they turn up again. New boys don't get into the club. The most soulfully posturing, praying minister was one man who always dressed in Buddhist white robes and seemed to be conducting a religious seance whenever in public. But he was known to be "stealing enough to take care of the fourth future generation of his family". Our AID program financed the huge Mahaweli River reclamation project which was rife with graft and waste and ecological damage. This prayerful minister and others benefitted greatly.

Another issue was the growing menace of civil war between Tamils and Sinhalese. It was sad to see educated business leaders become racists: "Let's get these Tamils and treat them like dogs and shoot them down." In the early 1800's American missionaries had started schools for the minority Tamils who lived on sandy, poor land in the far north. The tradition of education stayed and the better schooled Tamils got government and other good jobs out of proportion to their share of population. Envy festered. Sinhalese politicians exploited this to discriminate against the Tamils, and extremist Tamils struck back. Widespread violence erupted two months after I left Lanka in late summer 1981. It rages on.

My task was to become acquainted with, become friends with, have some influence with all segments of the population. I think I succeeded with the Tamils, the Sinhalese, the Communists. My farewell party brought the worst enemies together and at least they talked. I worked hard to patch quarrels.

Q: How did the ambassador work with the population?

CAHILL: He worked well because of his vast knowledge. Towards the end of my tour he was replaced by a career officer, Don Toussaint, the best all-around ambassador I have known. I will always admire him tremendously for his ability, gentleness and strength, character and integrity, sense of humor. A top, top human being. After Lanka he died of a heart attack. This was a terrible loss to our Service.

Q: How did you find dealing with the government?

CAHILL: Officials were professional and cooperative.

Q: These were Sinhalese for the most part?

CAHILL: In a slight majority. Sinhalese or Tamil, they did their job well. The Foreign Minister was a Muslim, representing the swing vote. He swaggered with pride when Iran defied us. A Catholic was chosen to be Minister of Fisheries. President Jayawardene was a Sinhalese Buddhist but the epitome of an educated British gentleman. In my first month in Colombo a 17-person American congressional delegation arrived. Jayawardene, who was then in his seventies, shook their hands, posed for individual photos with them, chatted with each in turn. Then he quietly turned to me and said: "What a gang!" The Lankan cabinet was an Old Boys club, same old people, same old families, same old crony ties. Interestingly the politicos were known by their first names. The newspapers would say, "Ronnie" says this, "Gamini" does that.

A key issue was the increased activity of the American Navy in response to the Iran situation. Ships were at sea 72 days without landing. Colombo was a well placed port, and they began coming there. My job was to see that all went smoothly. The sailors and marines were wonderfully well behaved, so well that the police commissioner asked me whether the fleet had turned into sissies, "they are so good." My wife Nicky worked hard in relief work for the poor in the slums. When our warships began to arrive she wondered if the men would be interested in doing constructive welfare work. It was a stroke of genius. The men poured forth enthusiastically. Carpenters, plumbers, corpsmen, general laborers, they volunteered by the hundreds, directing most of their effort to improving the 36-acre Colombo general hospital. They fixed roofs, repainted whole wards, helped in the operating rooms. It was heartwarming. Crews competed for the work. We interviewed many of them. Uniformly they said it was the best and most memorable experience of their service because they were "helping others - that's what it's all about." A great AID officer named Jim Meenan organized a series of beer parties for the volunteers. Nicky organized dinner dances for 400 officers and local ladies.

The aircraft carrier "Ranger" was too big to enter the enclosed harbor. It anchored at sea and tragically its cranes to lower boats failed to work. The crew of 5000 men was marooned within sight of land. The captain of the "Ranger" and the air fleet admiral called on the ambassador and me. It was doomsday. I ran across the street and asked my friend the Fisheries Minister to help. He ordered the training schooner into action and mobilized the fishing fleet. Virtually all fishing boats in Lanka were subsidized by the government, all built to the same specs, and all in debt to the Ministry. They would ferry in the American sailors. I and various cars carrying Ministry officials raced down the coast waking up sleepy villages, their people groggy after being all night at sea. They stumbled forth and soon the sea was swarming with convoys of little fishing boats heading for the "Ranger". The non-stop ferrying went on for three days.

Arthur C. Clarke, the British science fiction writer was a friend and neighbor. He often played ping pong with us and shared star-watching evenings through his telescope. He visited us via bicycle as he did not drive. Much fame had come to him from his book and film "2000 AD, a Space Odyssey". I remember him sitting on our couch and saying, "I am going forward. I am going to return to writing. I will do 2010." One night Nicky and I were hosting a party of sailors and marines. Arthur asked me to come by to greet Walter Cronkite who was staying with him. I went briefly and asked Walter to write some words for the sailors. He gladly penned autographs to give out, saying "anchors aweigh" and "semper fi". In turn he asked me to help arrange visas for visiting China with my friends at PRC embassy. Win-win situation.

As civil strife came nearer in Lanka, we did all we could to urge patience and understanding and awareness of each side's needs. I came to know and admire the Tamil parliamentarians from the north, the Tamil police officials, the Catholic Bishop who was a Tamil, and tried to explain their views to our Sinhalese contacts. Some of my closest friends were the old line communists of the LSSP. The aim was to get them to confer honestly. Without communication there is little hope of understanding.

Q: You left in 1981 and came back to Washington. What did you do?

CAHILL: A sweeping overhaul of the personnel system had assignments in disarray. I first wrote a long study for the Econ-Business Bureau on how we could deliver effective aid to needy nations outside formal USAID programs. It showed that many types of projects, activities, formats and initiatives could be done. USAID people thought it was great. So did I.

Then I was asked to be the first State Department officer to head Commerce's US Commercial Service. This is the field office network of Commerce, the domestic arm of 48 Commerce district offices which extend from Anchorage to Kansas City to San Juan. My job was to make these offices more geared to international work. My second Commerce tour drew on my first. It provided a superb means to reach into the heartland and know America.

Q: So this was trying to encourage at a state level to think in terms of the international level. What was your impression of the Commercial Service while you were there?

CAHILL: I referred to the US Commercial Service. We also had a Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) which sent Commerce people to commercial sections of our overseas posts. Under the Carter regime State surrendered this function to Commerce, unfortunately so as the new occupants varied widely in competence and often did not mesh effectively with the rest of the embassy. Too many were glib talkers with little achievement behind them, and they found Commerce's personnel office an easy place to penetrate. There were no exams and apparently little background checking. One of the people we got in Bombay supplied a falsified past and his behavior was sufficiently neurotic and criminal to nearly land him in jail. During my 1982-83 tour in Commerce I was shocked to hear the briefings the FCS director gave to businessmen. They mainly consisted of badmouthing State Department commercial officers while saying little about FCS services.

In the USCS we had some innovative activists who really cared about America's role in the world and in international commerce. We also had dullards who cared about feathering their nests and comfortably waiting out retirement. I was impressed as I made my rounds around the country by the positive, upbeat outlook of industrialists, by the pride management and labor took in their products. I was also impressed, sadly, by the pervasive political meddling of the Washington administration.

Q: The Reagan administration.

CAHILL: In Commerce, political considerations influenced decisions right down to office boy level. "Why is this person doing that?" "Well, he was in the trenches for Reagan," or "His wife was in the trenches for Reagan." Commerce has traditionally been a dumping ground for political hacks. But I gave my best shot in working to motivate the field to think globally and reach out. Most of the people in the field were very fine persons, very good to work with. And it was fun to be in Alaska in February, in Oklahoma in the spring, in California any time.

Q: You left there in 1983?

CAHILL: In December, 1983, I arrived in Bombay, India as Consul General.

Q: When you got the job how did you see your job from talking with people and getting ready to go out? What were our interests in Bombay when you were there 1983-87?

CAHILL: Principal areas of interest were economic and commercial. India's industrial might, huge population, resources of talented people and tremendous market size were very visible. Since mid-1991, liberalizing economic reforms have greatly spurred foreign business interest in India, but in my time activity was already strong. As time passed I got more and more into the political scene, observing internal and international trends. I will always admire Bombay for being independent and outspoken. The city powers the rest of India as the real business, artistic, press capital. Unlike Delhi where yes-men abound, Bombay can be vehemently critical. It also appreciates Western culture. The New York Philharmonic was greeted languidly in Delhi but with a roar in Bombay. Some of the most vicious politics in India played in Bombay along with some of the best thinking in literature, arts, medicine and nuclear physics.

Q: Was this a Bombay area nationality trait or was this just a center where a lot of things were happening and a lot of people were mixing together?

CAHILL: There are a number of nationalities in India. Maybe I could say there are several Indias, each with different traits. Bombay was the historic gateway to the West. All kinds of doers come together there. The driving cultural and economic forces are there. One observes the eclectic architecture, "Bollywood" where 900 feature films are completed each year, and the sizable news media complex. The great mix of elements gives off heat and generates forward motion.

Q: As consul general there what were your main duties at that time?

CAHILL: Doing all I could to improve economic/commercial ties with India, feeling the pulse of the political scene in the west of India, winning the people's friendship for America.

Q: Talking about commercial ties, how did you find India as a market? What were the problems and what were the opportunities and how did we meet these?

CAHILL: Market opportunities were good. Consumer goods imports were tightly regulated but other sectors were open and hungry. Especially sought by India were joint investment-technology ventures. In one week, for example, I inaugurated Indo-US ventures in pharmaceuticals, computers and Barbie doll manufacture. The middle class of India has a buying power that equals the average American. This market segment numbers over 300 million people. India is the twelfth largest industrial power in the world. Its pool of capable engineers, designers, accountants, doctors is enormous. American producers find excellent partners. Through their Indian branches, US firms sold very profitably to the Soviet bloc, companies like Xerox, Eli Lilly, Helena Rubenstein et al.

Problems included overwhelming government bureaucracy, a growing thirst for bribes, a protectionist mind-set that produced myriad regulations, poor infrastructure, volatile labor unions, and demagogic politicians who could interfere at any time. Our message: liberalize the economy and all India gains.

Our political concern focused on over-reliance on the Soviets and on internal ethnic friction. Abetted by political leaders including Mrs. Gandhi, the latter problem steadily worsened. We saw riots in Bombay which had never happened before. I worked with government officials, party people and police. When street fighting erupted they would call for prayers for rain to keep the mobs out of the streets. Terrible heat and humidity incite tempers. Needed are jobs and economic opportunities. Here American investment helps. Bombay was and is a fascinating laboratory. The most crowded city, it has very little crime.

Q: How did you find your dealings with the government people there on the economic/commercial side? Obviously some things were done in Delhi like tariffs and things of this nature.

CAHILL: Parliament consists of representatives from all over India. Reps from Bombay and western India have a lot to say. Powerful ministers and other leaders come from the western regions. Many of the largest firms are headquartered in Bombay and other western cities. All this means clout at the top. The consulate worked to build rapport with the power brokers and technocrats in western India. They were usually accessible, they listened.

Q: How did you find the embassy support of your efforts to increase American commerce in the Bombay area?

CAHILL: They did their thing and we did ours. When support was asked it was given in both directions as needed.

Q: Who were your ambassadors?

CAHILL: Harry Barnes was the first, a solid career officer who cared about his people. He was interested in non-government organizations. He transferred the rupee fund from the old AID days to a trust fund whose funds support continuing activities. Commerce was not a top priority. He was replaced by John Gunther Dean midway in my tour.

Q: I always think of him as being a very hard nosed operator, very active person. How did you find him?

CAHILL: I did not work closely with him. His style was different from most of the professional ambassadors I have known.

Q: Were there any major problems that you had to deal with while you were in Bombay?

CAHILL: Certain international incidents caused stress. One was the bombing of Libya in retaliation for terrorist acts. A large crowd of protesters came to the consulate. I met this group and explained why we had to act as we did. We had to protect innocent women and children from being blown out of airplanes. Such a scene was repeated after various events. I always met the demonstration leaders head on in the consulate courtyard. The Polish auction days helped me pitch my voice.

Q: How did the leaders of the demonstrators respond?

CAHILL: They backed away. News of events came early and gave time to prepare. The news of Libya came at sunset, always around 6:30 in Bombay because of latitude. I worried about the press reaction and realized I could blunt popular reaction if I could steer newspaper reporting. On entering a new country I always put priority on making friends with the news media and police. I definitely include the indigenous language press in this. That evening I walked fast through some streets and alleys to the home of India's top newspaper cartoonist. A smiling, small man with a twinkle in his eye answered my knock. Laxman's humorous, cutting cartoons normally straddled five columns on the front page of the Times of India which in turn straddled all of India. People absorbed his cartoon each day before they looked at the headlines. "Laxman, my friend, let's talk." We sat down and I explained what a menace this slimy, megalomanic rat was to the world. That night Laxman went to work with pen and paper, and the next morning his big cartoon was devastating. Reagan looked like a mature, cautioning uncle on the left. Across and down the page was a swaggering, stunted, wild-eyed midget wearing an enormous general's hat. He waved weapons in both hands. India chuckled at this silly scene and much of the Libyan tension was defused.

Q: That shows you what can be done. You know the person and you know the impact and you save up for the big things.

CAHILL: You don't sit and hide in your residence shuffling paper. You work constantly to build up key contacts, build a wide and alert operational base. Problems appear at any moment. I remember one elderly American couple who sailed into the harbor in a small yacht. They were going around the world by themselves. They took photos of the harbor and were promptly nabbed as Pakistani spies. One phone call to Bombay's police chief freed them. I still get Xmas cards from the couple, now safely moored in San Diego, expressing thanks for the "miracle" that delivered them.

There are little and big things. In all, we received full, rapid support from the right people. And we always tried to move fast. For example, a large public relations disaster was averted when the New York Philharmonic visited India for the first time, led by Bombay's own son Zubin Mehta. The public and the press soured on the group when they complained of cockroaches in Delhi's leading state-owned hotel. Then when they arrived in Bombay there was a bomb plot scare. The theater was to be bombed. The total group of 171 persons met in their hotel ballroom and announced they were not going to sacrifice their lives. No concert. I could visualize the lasting image of spoiled Americans whining and running home, braggart America collapsing again. I brought in the police chief and his top officers to assure that all would be well. They spoke to no avail. Then from the ballroom stage I listened and dialogued for three hours. It was like the scenario from "Twelve Angry Men". One by one they crossed over, agreed to play. That night the performance started 104 minutes late but was the best, most inspired and rousing concert of the tour. The news media gave them a tremendous ovation for art and for courage.

Theater was important in Bombay. Another setback almost came with the Minnesota Opera Company who were to do "Once Upon a Mattress".

Q: A musical comedy based on the story of the princess and the pea.

CAHILL: Right. I found the cast in despair at the PAO's house shortly after arrival. "We changed planes in Frankfurt and all our equipment, costumes, musical instruments, props, everything, stayed on the plane and was lost. We have nothing." Our USIS people advised them to cancel and go home, an attitude that still saddens me. I told the group that giving up was a terrible mistake. I waxed on about the greatest theater thrill in my life being at Washington's old Arena stage where there were no props and the audience's imagination soared. "We'll improvise. You will be the greatest!" So we did. The next night the knights all wore white shirts and ties. The Queen wore somebody's big bathrobe. The king wore a bandanna round his head. The cast waited behind the curtain as the audience also waited and grew restless. Then I balanced on the lip of the stage, looked up into the darkness and extolled: "We are so very fortunate because tonight we are going to have one of the great experiences of our lives. We are so lucky, you and I, to be here because tonight we are going to see something marvelous in the theater. There are no props but we are going to rise above that and be with these great performers." Etc, etc. All schmalz. It worked. We had a warmed-up audience, totally sympathetic. And an inspired performance. Fantastic reviews praised the very talented and brave Americans.

Overall, our relations with the news media turned very positive. So much of this depends on personal relations, friendships, better communication between "us and them". One tabloid in Bombay had a long history of playing to the Soviets and bashing America. Behind this was a gifted, brilliantly witty publisher-editor who was a charming rogue. His biting humor demolished us. I soon made it my business to know him and found him quite likeable. I came to know his family. We became friends and the tone of his paper changed. He started praising our projects. But the worst blow to the Russians came when he put me in the seat of honor at his granddaughter's coming of age party and placed our Soviet counterparts in the back of the hall.

Q: Well, that is great. It shows what consuls general, or somebody in our business, can do. These things do have an impact and you act as a bridge to get them to understand the local milieu.

CAHILL: Take bad scenes and turn them around. Keep thinking, take new initiatives, seek ways to expand our influence. Listen to others, respect others. Reach out. Get the American view across. Become part of meaningful organizations. They can use you for their and your mutual benefit. In Sri Lanka the Buddhists invited me to speak in Sinhalese at temples and hand out graduation certificates to the children who completed religious training courses. Later, Buddhist leaders helped us greatly when we initiated the 100th anniversary celebrations of Colonel Olcott's landing in Ceylon. He was the American Civil War officer who did much to save Buddhism in Asia. For three days in 1980, the country spent its energy in parades, poster contests, speeches, etc. commemorating the great help America had given Lanka. Lanka's President led the main march as massed bands played Union army tunes. I scoured the USIS library and forwarded the scores. Young and old got the message that America was an old and faithful friend. The Communist Party leader came to me and said: "This is gold, absolute gold, for America." In India there were so many organizations. I tried to be active in important ones whether purely Indian or a blend of foreign and Indian. Many speeches made at many Rotary and Lions Clubs, prize giving at sports clubs and race tracks, judging the Miss India and Miss Diamond Queen and Miss Secretary contests, serving as trustee-director on hospital and school boards, being the first non-Japanese chief guest at the Bonsai festival and the first non-Brit to lead the annual Scots Caledonian Ball. I wrote articles for leading Indian newspapers, my favorite being a feature story on India's aid program to the United States. True. India gave us many things from money for our Revolution to Vivien Leigh for our movies. There were long days. I remember one Friday night attending four receptions and three dinners, then heading to airport for a pre-dawn plane to Gujarat for a big wedding weekend involving industrial and political chiefs. After the wedding ceremony one tycoon said: "Do come with us in our airplane. We'll inspect our main complex in Madhya Pradesh." So I landed somewhere in middle India, explored an industrial city in a jungle, and hopped aboard the Frontier Mail train at midnight, arriving back in Bombay just in time to begin a business Monday.

For official travel I changed the traditional "entourage" approach. One used to take a big American vehicle with driver, interpreter and various post personnel and go off into the countryside. This used up many resources, lost much time bouncing over rural highways, and often seemed pretentious. I would go alone, flying to points and being met by local hosts. This was very much appreciated and respected, and we saved enough money and other resources to get many of our staff out into the field.

A crucial part of our work was visas. As my all-time favorite consular officer, Stu, you know this well. America's image was shaped very much in by the way we handled visas. Bombay posed challenges. Every day the visa waiting line outside the consulate stretched for blocks up the main street. We were vulnerable to criticism for having people stand in rain or sun for many hours. This was a sad spectacle for passing traffic. America was cruel.

I opened the gates at 6 a.m. and completely absorbed the long line by circling it around our large courtyard out of sight of the street. In heavy pressure seasons as in late summer when students poured in prior to going off to college in the US, I would enter the courtyard around 7 a.m. and issue visas myself, doing the interviews as I walked along the column. Young students were important clients. Their families worried about them being alone and at the mercy of the western barbarians in the big consulate. I also learned that students, both poor and rich, would camp outside the gates on Sunday nights to beat the crunch on Monday mornings. This made me start my Sunday night visa sessions. I would bring these kids from the street into the lobby, interview and sign approval. The word got around. The consulate's reputation as a caring bunch of humans soared.

Q: Well then Harry, you left there in 1987.

CAHILL: In August I flew home for four days with my family in Virginia and then reported for duty at the US Mission to the UN in New York. That was in early September, just in time for the annual big General Assembly.

Q: You were there till December, 1989. What were you doing?

CAHILL: I was minister-counselor for economic affairs, developmental affairs, human rights, etc. My other title was deputy representative to the Economic and Social Council or "ECOSOC".

Q: ECOSOC?

CAHILL: It was one of the six main bodies of the United Nations. It dealt with international economic issues. This was a Presidential appointment. President Reagan appointed me and thus made me an "Honorable".

Q: Now this is the last years of the Reagan administration.

CAHILL: Yes. My time was split there between Reagan and Bush.

Q: What was your impression of the UN staff under the Reagan administration?

CAHILL: Our mission staff?

Q: Yes.

CAHILL: There was a fundamental problem with the Republican administration: distrust of the UN. This unease was stronger in the Reagan years and somewhat less pronounced under Bush. On the firing line in New York and Geneva we wondered how much real headquarters support we had. General Walters, our Permanent Representative or chief of mission, would often say that we were "fighting a two-front war, and the northern front across the street is a lot easier than the southern front in Washington". There were discouraging problems in my UN days.

Q: Can you give an example?

CAHILL: American criticism of the UN was correct in pointing to its inefficiency, waste, perks, obfuscation, style over substance, lack of accountability. The organization badly needs reform. Selection of top officials is done in back rooms by trading influence. There is no measurement or rating of senior persons once in a job.

My first boss General Walters was a kind man who excelled in languages. As interpreter to US Presidents he had had close contact with the inner circle of leadership. He spoke volubly and well. I wish he listened more. In diplomacy, in relations between people, one needs to listen and absorb what the other side is saying. We as a mission could have done less monologues and more careful listening.

A tendency that I have found at most posts is to stay within our walls and not reach out. Too much focus on burrowing through the paper traffic describing life at other posts, too much time commiserating with each other. The UN was the one place where we could easily reach out and commune with the whole world. One cold night in front of the Assembly Building a tall African ambassador said to me: "Cahill, where are your people? I never see your people. Where are they?" They were ensconced in our 12-story office building just across the street, often pinned down by admin and reporting requirements. In contrast, officers of the other missions were usually working the lounges, hallways and chambers of the UN complex when not in official sessions. More than the Americans, they met, conversed, pushed their views, gathered info, traded influence, made key friends.

Q: And I suppose there were demands for reports back to Washington.

CAHILL: Yes, and much reading of marginal material. One had to break away from desk and paper clutter. Peace in Afghanistan was a prime issue when I first came to the UN. One October morning I asked for an informal meeting with the Soviet ambassador who later became a close friend. Typically he asked to bring a colleague, the usual witness-monitor, and we three walked the length of the Assembly Building to the North Lounge where coffee was served on upper level and alcoholic drinks on lower level. It was 11:00 a.m. The two Russians assumed we were bound for coffee, but I said vodka. East Europe's life style was part of us. We were alone in the bar area and we drank and discussed six points concerning the neutralization of Afghanistan. OKAY on first five but not on the sixth. I remember saying: "Viktor, if you refuse number 6, I will break your leg." There was agreement and amiability. Henceforth we could honestly dialogue at any time. As dï¿½tente under Gorbachev loomed we cooperated closely. We would work out scenarios. We would walk together into general sessions shoulder-to-shoulder talking. We made other delegations believe that the two superpowers really wanted peace and were working together to achieve it. Some UN officials today like to say that we were ahead of our time, forming a spearhead to advance dï¿½tente.

Q: What sort of issues were you particularly involved with?

CAHILL: Mostly economic issues. At first, world debt. Developing nations, particularly in Latin America and Africa, had amassed enormous debts in the late '80's which they could not pay. World poverty. More efficient economic assistance and development. Structural adjustment as a means to salvage comatose economies. International investment and free market privatization. Drug traffic. Opening up of trade with the Soviet Bloc. Increasingly, environment and ecology. On the human rights front, key focus was on the rights of women and abuses in Cuba and China.

I learned that multilateral diplomacy is very different from bilateral. One has a very short time span to work in. Windows of opportunity are briefly open as delegates' attention is diverted to many issues. Powers of communication are crucial. One must give speeches with impact. Warmth, humanity and humor are valuable ingredients. Some of my speeches were remembered as the groundhog speech, the garbage barge speech and the marching band speech because they led off with humorous teasers. One should be people-oriented and geared to seize the moment. High cultural sensitivity, energy and language fluency help greatly. Don't send a shy introvert. Too, one has to stay current on topical issues and have broad general knowledge. Other delegates tend to test you constantly on your range of knowledge.

Q: Harry, talk a little about your impression of some of the political appointees because the UN is always used as a place to reward people.

CAHILL: Some who came as alternate delegates for the 3-month general assemblies were jewels. Pearl Bailey was a marvelous force for good. So were people like Rabbi Arthur Schneier whose life is dedicated to international religious tolerance and understanding. But some of the longer term political appointees, those given ambassador titles and kept around for a year or more, did us serious damage. The performance of one in my first year was particularly derided by other delegations, foreign diplomats shaking their heads and questioning how the US could allow such pathetic people to be visible.

The career staff was uneven. We had a mix of civil servants recruited locally from New York and an array of FSOs. Some good, a number mediocre, some terrible. One younger FSO in the economic section was the weakest, most dishonest and poisonous officer I have ever met in the Service. His obsession was to ingratiate himself with the political appointees, scurrying about doing personal errands for them in turn for their protection and favors. Instead of working on the team, this chap would be constantly intriguing and spending much of his time ghostwriting honor awards for the politicos and himself. Afterwards in the Service he has kept to the same track, trying to swing or crawl from one aide assignment to another. It works. He appears to be getting promotions. Certain nations, usually small one-party fiefdoms, sent reps to the UN to get rid of them. But the great majority of member nations sent their best people. It was an enriching experience to work with them. At the UN every move we make is seen and evaluated by much of the world. We should insist on qualified people who are aware, able and articulate. We did not always hold to that rule.

Q: I suppose too, particularly under the Reagan administration, it was somewhat worse...

CAHILL: Possibly so.

Q: ...because he came in on an anti-UN, basically do-nothing platform.

CAHILL: There was a tendency not to listen to others, particularly those of opposing views. Rapport with developing countries was often held suspect, the work of a "liberal", countries. A frequent tactic was to seal off disliked nations and never speak to them. Our embargo on Nicaragua, declared illegal by the Hague court, vexed virtually every UN member, but the situation worsened even further when we set out to punish friends who disagreed with us.

General Walters genuinely cared about other peoples and did his best to support his staff. He was a strong spokesman for the American cause. Then Tom Pickering arrived in my last months and brought excellent organization, communication and vision. An example was his mobilizing support for action against Iraq. He was a career FSO doing a thoroughly professional job and ably managing his troops. Soft voice, gracious personality, will of steel.

Q: This is the debate about the Gulf War.

CAHILL: Yes. The UN took decisive action thanks to the leadership of the US mission at the UN. Pickering superbly orchestrated the action, drawing the Security Council to support us. But one can only do so much. Note who opposed us on the Council. Cuba and Yemen voted no as they are rabidly against whatever we do or say. Colombia voted no because of our troubled drug policy. They could say "You have destroyed our country with your self-indulgent appetite for drugs and then you promised us help to fight the forces in our country but this help never came." Malaysia voted no, probably reasoning that Malaysia is a Muslim country which will not desert its brother Muslims.

In my time there were other victories for the UN. Advertising signs in city buses announced "Come to the United Nations and see peace being made". The signs didn't mention the $4 admission fee. Peace came to Angola, Namibia, Nicaragua, Cambodia, and the Iran-Iraq war ended. Now the image is beginning to tarnish again as peacekeeping missions flounder.

Q: Then in 1989 you retired?

CAHILL: I left the UN and the Foreign Service in Christmas week, 1989. But I have come back to the State Department almost every year. Since then I have returned to State each year for 4-6 months to work on a particular project. In 1991, it was Congressional relations. In 1992, management policy for overseas housing. In 1993, settling of Kuwait claims in the Legal Office. Beyond State I am president of two foundations, run my international consulting firm, direct the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, make documentary video programs for PBS and teach at two colleges. This is not good. It's wrong. Nicky warns me that I spend more time at desk now than I did in the Service.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. It was great.

End of interview