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

AMBASSADOR LEO G. CYR

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Interview with Leo G. Cyr concerning his career in the Department of State and overseas. This is being done on behalf of the Foreign Service History Center and the Association for Diplomatic Studies project with senior officers.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you get into the Department of State?

CYR: I graduated from Holy Cross, where I got my AB in 1930. I came out of there with a very classical education.

Q: What was your degree in, by the way?

CYR: A bachelor of arts.

Q: In any particular study?

Q: You'd heard of this through Holy Cross?

CYR: Through Holy Cross and through Jesuit publications.And so the next September I found myself, in 1931, enrolled at Georgetown in a two-year course for a master of science degree in foreign service and I graduated in June 1933. And, as you know, at that time, in the days of Cordell Hull, no foreign service exams were being given by the department.

Q: The depths of the depression.

CYR: Absolutely. So, I went up on the Hill, and Maine had a Democrat in the House of Representatives, at that time a rarity, John G. Utterback. I told him my predicament. I said, "I have a master's degree in foreign service. I'd like to be in foreign service. No exams are being given. What can I do?"And as, of course, you know, June 1933 was the month in which the NRA started.

Q: That's the National Recovery Act.

CYR: The National Recovery Administration, yes. And he said, "Here, take this letter to the Democratic National Committee." And to make a long story short, on July 18, 1933 I went to work for the NRA. I was one of its first 100 employees.

Q: May I ask a question here? At Georgetown they have the school of foreign service, but in those days we didn't have as many international operations overseas. The depression was on. Who was taking the course and what were they pointed towards?

CYR: Well, "hope springs eternal". They were taking the course, I suppose, first for business careers in import-export. And secondly, in the diplomatic service. My interest was the diplomatic service. I didn't even think of going into import-export when the diplomatic door was still closed. But I believe most of them were subsequently went into the diplomatic service or other business fields.

Q: You went to the NRA and then?

CYR: I went with the NRA, and I stayed there until the decision, the Supreme Court decision and almost a year beyond.

Q: Ah yes. The chicken case.

CYR: Yes. That was in May of '35.

Q: We're talking about the Supreme Court decision that nullified the NRA.

CYR: That's right. One bright morning in May 1935 one of my cohorts in the office answered the phone and after listening a while, yelled: "My God, unconstitutional." Those words still ring in my ears. That was the end of the Blue Eagle, and the end of a job for most of the people there. But I stayed on until February 1936 in a revised division set up by the NRA, writing up the history of what NRA had done for sheltered workshops.From there I went to the Rural Resettlement Administration where I stayed until November of 1936, when "as Maine goes so goes Vermont", put me in the ranks of the unemployed. I wasn't really concerned, however, because I was going to night school.

Q: This job loss was because Utterback was defeated despite the Roosevelt sweep in the election of 1936?

CYR: I'm not sure that Utterback ran again. In any event, it was more probably due to a shortage of funds to pay temporary employees.

While at NRA I had worked not only in Washington but also in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where we had offices in La Fortaleza, from July to December 26, 1934. While there, I decided that I wanted to go to law school, so I had managed to get back to Washington in time to enroll in the February semester.

Q: At Georgetown.

Q: Well, what type of work were you doing there, with the black listing of firms dealing with the Axis?

Q:I don't understand. How could a firm be pro-Nazi in its actions? I can understand that they'd have sympathies, but, you know, from Colombia or Venezuela the Atlantic Ocean was pretty much an allied lake, as was the Pacific. So, what could they do that would make any difference?

CYR: Well, as you know, the German population of countries like Colombia and Venezuela is substantial, and they traded with Nazi Germany. The law that we were operating under made it illegal for American firms to trade with Latin American firms who in turn were trading with the Axis. So when the Committee approved our recommendation, the firm's name was on a list, which proclaimed to all American firms, don't trade with this firm anymore. It is supporting the Axis cause. The effect of discontinued trade with US firms was devastating for the Latin American firms. In most cases, they were wiped out.

Q: And after the war?

CYR: Well, I stayed until July '45 in blacklisting work. Then I decided that maybe I ought to move on to something else. The Economic (E) area had a Division (LP) handling lend-lease and surplus property matters. I transferred to LP to implement US policy for the disposal of surplus facilities and mountains of movable property acquired abroad during the war. Under this policy, the War Department would declare property surplus to its needs, and it would then be disposed of in a manner consistent with the best interests of the United States. I did this until January '46. I learned a great deal about military installations abroad, air fields, communications facilities, etc..

About this time the E area had set up an Aviation Division (AV) to negotiate international agreements for post-war commercial air routes, as well as agreements concerning the post-war use of air facilities abroad. Well, I went to see Joe Walstrom, Assistant Chief of AV and told him of my LP experience and said, "Can you use me?" And he said yes. So I transferred to AV in January '46 and was put in charge of its facilities section. I spent until August '48 disposing of facilities in every conceivable corner of the world where our military had had reason to install a facility.

I enjoyed other aspects of this job also, such as working with the Interdepartmental Air Coordinating Committee and with UN's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). I attended ICAO's South Pacific Regional Air Navigation Meeting at Melbourne in '47; and its 2nd Assembly and its Icelandic Joint Support Meeting, both held in Geneva in '48. I also had a hand in the negotiation of a US-UK agreement governing the use of the 99-year leased bases by commercial aircraft, which was signed by Secretary Marshall.

Q: You remained in the economic side of international affairs after the war then?

CYR: From the beginning I was on the surplus property side in LB, getting rid of all this war time property buildup that had been taking place overseas. For example, one project that might intrigue you was the disposition of the Burma Road. Millions of dollars had been spent on it, and now its continued maintenance would have cost millions more. Obviously the military no longer had reason to keep it going. So, the War Department wrote to us and declared the road surplus to its needs. Our job was to terminate our connection with the Road, in accordance with the provisions of our surplus property disposal policy.

Q: You're really talking about the equipment that was used to keep the road going?

CYR: Well, yes, we would salvage movables where the cost of salvage did not exceed their value. In the case of real estate, arrangements had to me made with the host government for its return and release with fixtures. There were cases of abandonment, but with the knowledge of the host government.

You will note that my three assignments in State from '41 to '48 were in the E area under such men as Acheson, Will Clayton, Livingston Merchant, and Garrison Norton. Blacklisting was purely economic warfare. Surplus property work was more in the nature of a post-war mopping-up operation. My aviation work looked to the future of the US air transport industry.

Early in '48, one of the boys working with me in AV started his campaign to go to the National War College. The E area could send one officer. The first thing I knew, I got a call from Norton's office saying, "Are you interested in going to the National War College?"And I said, "Who isn't?" And so they said, "Well, you're in."

Q: I might say at this point, and for a period of time before you were with the Civil Service.

CYR: That's right. I was still Civil Service. It had been while I was at the National Archives that I was blanketed into Civil Service, getting credit for all my previous service. My service in the federal government totaled 37 years. Secretary Rogers wrote me a letter when I retired, citing my 37 years of service.So, I went into the National War College during the school year of '48-49. I will always consider it one of the greatest privileges that the US Government offers its employees. We graduated in June of '49, President Truman handed us our certificates, and at that point I had a decision to make. I was going back to State, and I had up to this point worked in functional offices of the E area. I was intrigued by the possibility of now getting into a geographic area of the Department. And because the Near East was really active, I opted for the Near East area. But it turned out that the opportunities at that moment were in Africa. So in 1949 I found myself talking to George McGhee about doing African work in the division of African Affairs (AF) which he was creating in his Near Eastern and African Affairs area (ANE). McGhee was a Rhodes scholar who had come to the Department during the war from Texas, with Will Clayton I believe, and he had several years of high level experience to his credit. And now he was assuming a major role in beefing up the Department's organization to handle US relations with the Third World.

Q: It was Near East and African Affairs?

CYR: Yes, Near East and African Affairs. I had become familiar with this very busy area as early as '46 as AV's representative at Loy Henderson's NEA staff meetings. Africa was then handled there by one man, Henry Villard. McGhee offered me the job as the first Officer-in-Charge of Southern African Affairs. I held this job from October '49 until September 14, 1950, first under Jimmy Moose and soon thereafter under Elmer Bourgerie. Sam Kopper became the first Officer-in-Charge of Northern African Affairs. McGhee's NEA area would eventually include not only NE and AF but also GTI (Greek, Turkish and Iranian affairs) and SOA (Southeast Asian affairs).

Q: What did Southern Africa consist of in those days?

CYR: It consisted of all dependent Africa plus Liberia. It did not have the independent nations of the Union of South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt, nor what you would now think of as the Arab tier in Northern Africa.

Q: Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco?

CYR: Right, everything else that was dependent or colonial was in Southern African Affairs. And Liberia was an important part of this job. Firestone representatives were often in AF about their rubber plantation. Lansdell Christie also came often about his iron mine concession at Bomi Hills. Juan Trippe came in about Roberts Field or PAMAM's African route in general.

Ex-President King of Liberia was his country's ambassador to Washington at that time. I got immense satisfaction out of helping him set up a course in his Embassy for the training of Liberian diplomats. We were able to locate and retain Leland Morris, US Ambassador to Iran (Ret.), to conduct the course, out of which came a number of future Liberian ambassadors.

Q: So, you had all the colonies?

CYR: All the colonies.

Q: We're talking about 1949-50?

CYR: Yes. October '49 to September '50. Sam Kopper was my counterpart in Northern African Affairs.

Q: Now, because things have changed so much, in those days it was basically on the political side in the department, there were civil servants who spent a good tour, a long tour, in charge of these offices, is that correct?

CYR: That's right.

Q: Kopper was also a civil servant?

CYR: Yes.

Q: Did you have Foreign Service officers assigned to you, or was your staff pretty much Civil Service?

CYR: They were pretty much Civil Service, so was I, and a few Foreign Service officers came and went on assignment, but we stayed there in Washington.

Q: To get a little idea of how the Department worked, how did you bring yourself up to knowing about Africa. I mean this was a large area, we didn't have many posts in the area, and how did you train yourself in the area?

CYR: Through in-service training. To be perfectly frank, there were no African experts in the Department at this time, except Henry Villard. I first came in contact with Africa while I was in the Aviation Division. Henry Villard was then Mr. Africa. He sat at a desk in the Near East Division in old State in a space that was literally the width of his desk. Our then interest in Africa could not have been more graphically portrayed. If you want to discuss Roberts Field in Liberia, you went to see Henry Villard. He was very competent at the job, as Wallace Murray had been before him. The next Mr. Africa was Joe Palmer, with whom I discussed AF matters after Villard left to become our minister to Libya. I had aviation contacts with every one of the geographic bureaus, but our Airport Development Program (ADP) drew me particularly to Africa and Latin America.

Q: We had a rather extensive shuttle of airplanes going from Brazil to Dakar.

CYR: Exactly.

Q: And up throughout Africa.

CYR: Yes. Roberts Field, right across. One of the first projects I had as Officer-in-Charge of Southern African Affairs, was to set up the first Consular Conference in Africa, which took place in Lourenco Marques in 1950. I went out there, traveled down the PANAM route from Dakar to Johannesburg and over to Lourenco Marques, and up each side of Africa. So I had a good look at my parish. Believe it or not, Juan Trippe, president of PANAM, had just been in my office on business, and he alerted the PANAM system of my trip. Needless to say, I got the royal treatment.

Q: I don't need a listing of all, but approximately where were our posts? Were they all consular posts in those days. Where were they located?

CYR: I entered Africa at Dakar, where we had a consulate general. The next stop was Monrovia, a legation. The Accra, Lagos, Leopoldville, Luanda, Johannesburg, all consulates general. Pretoria, an embassy. I went to Johannesburg and Pretoria, though I had no responsibility for South Africa. Then via East African Airways to Lourenco Marques, a consulate general with Gordon Minnegerode as consul general. Then to Dar es Salaam, a consulate. Then Nairobi, a consulate general. Then Addis Ababa, an embassy. Traveling with Assistant Secretary McGhee from Lourenco Marques to Addis Ababa after the consular conference, our delegation was received by Haile Selassie in his throne room, and we attended a banquet in the Palace. We were also treated to an air flight over the Nile River, swooping down over the Danakil plain and landing on the shores of Lake Tana for lunch and a swim.

Q: Somalia, was there anything there at that time? Nothing in Mogadishu?

CYR: No. Next stop was the Cairo, embassy. Then Benghazi, Tripoli, Tunis, all consulates general. Then I skipped Algeria because it was with the Department's West European Office (WE).

Q: Under France.

CYR: Under France.

Q: It was considered part of Metropolitan France?

CYR: Right. Then over to Tangier, which was a legation/diplomatic agency, under a minister. It was an international zone in the Sherifian Empire of Morocco. And finally, Rabat, a consulate general.

Q: Well now, what was your impression of the staffing of our posts in Africa in those days? In other words, was this a matter of some priority, or is this where people went who were not, you might say, of the top flight; or people, were they enthusiasts for the area? How would you describe it?

CYR: Africa had certainly not been a matter of priority in the past. On the contrary, during the colonial era the United States accepted tacitly the pre-eminence that history had accorded the colonial powers in Africa, while enjoying the long-standing reputation that history had earned it as being anti-colonial and as favoring the right of self-determination for all people.

I am aware of an opinion often voiced that Africa had been a "dumping ground" for mediocre Foreign Service Officers. Be that as it may, the Department had recognized by 1949 that its own greater stake in Africa could no longer tolerate such a practice. On my tour of Africa in 1950, I met many officers with worldwide experience. I would say that for the most part they were a credit to the Foreign Service. And there were some bright young officers. Dean Hinton, now a Career Ambassador, was cutting his diplomatic teeth as a vice consul in charge of our Consulate when I visited Dar es Salaam. That some may have had problems, might have been jaded, or have just been waiting for retirement, these were not problems peculiar to African posts. In my earlier experience in State, I had run into the same phenomena in European and Australian posts.

Yes, in 1949 the African posts were too meagerly staffed to handle the upcoming situation, and this is precisely what the Department had begun to remedy at this point. Nationalism was obviously on the rise in Africa, and had to be taken seriously by the US Government. Africa's strategic and economic importance to the United States rose dramatically with this tide and the United States, as a new superpower, recognized and adjusted to the new situation. Its preeminent role in Africa grew as that of the European metropoles, our allies, diminished. This metamorphosis would require more than second class officer in AF and WE to assure that US relations with these allies would not be overly bruised while we gave more voice to our approval of the independence movement.

Q: Well, this was a time when the colonial powers were still trying to hang on as much as possible, when you did this. Were our people in the post finding themselves either having difficulty or weren't interested in making contact with the new forces that were going to be emerging within the native population, or not? Did you find that there were inhibitions, either personal or from outside?

CYR: This was indeed a time when the colonial powers were sensitive to the surge of nationalism in their colonies, and when the Department began to strengthen its complements in AF posts. An adversary relationship blossomed between a well-entrenched but defensive WE and a newly-created AF. African nationalists began to surface in Washington and were received by AF as often as not through the backdoor.

As you know, it has always been the practice of the Department to brief officers on their way to an overseas post. WE shared responsibility with AF for AF colonies and took part in briefing officers assigned there. I never attended one of WE's briefings during this period, but outgoing officers undoubtedly received the type of briefing that we in the Department also got when we came on the scene, and that was "keep your heads down, boys, we're in with you on this one." Some AF officers took umbrage at WE's inhibitive advice, which sometimes appeared patronizing. Other AF officers took it with an understanding grain of salt.

I would say that AF's ability to cope with nationalism, in the Department and in the field, evolved gradually in a responsible manner. WE, more experienced and influential, could choose to drag its feet on many a colonial development on the grounds that it might adversely affect US relations with our European allies. AF officers, perhaps intimidated at first, soon learned to cope with WE's inhibitive stratagem. I would say that WE realized as well as AF that the independence movement would not be denied. But to keep European metropoles happy, they dragged their feet. By the same token, AF realized how important and sensitive these metropoles were, and took a common-sense view of letting them down as easily as possible. Both WE and AF knew in their heart of hearts that the tide of nationalism would not be denied. They just looked at it from different optics, dictated by their respective responsibilities.

I must say that AF list of visitors during this period was impressive, containing the names of many prominent African nationalists and future heads of state: Nkrumah, Azikiwe, Awolowo, Houphouet-Boigny, Tubman, Prince (later King) Hassan, Mobutu, Nyerere, Mongi Slim, Bourguiba, Bouhafa, Balafrej, Allal al-Fassi, Tafawa Balewa, Welensky and Ahmadu, the Sardana of Sokoto.

Q: Did you get a crack at FSOs who would deal with African affairs in the metropoles before they went out to Western Europe?

CYR: Oh, yes.

Q: Well, did you find yourself giving them a different picture of saying, "Here it comes, let's get ready for it" ?

CYR: I didn't find myself dwelling on it with them. In other words, I felt that they were sufficiently gifted that they knew as well as I that there might be reason for the Western European Office to worry about what was happening in Africa, and how it would affect their own relations with their clients. And so I didn't try to build up the adversary situation. I just told them what I thought was coming, and what the Department thought was coming, and what they themselves knew was coming, namely the rise of nationalism, and that in AF we had to look out for the independence movement and salvage as many newly independent friends as possible. Time was on our side, but we had to realize that, in the US's interest, the metropoles had to be let down as easily as possible.

Q: Well, how about at the top? Were you getting any direction from the Secretary of State or from the Bureau or something?

CYR: When I went in George McGhee was Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs.

Q: I think it was called Near Eastern and African Affairs in those days.

CYR: Yes, and Ray Hare, an Arabist, was his deputy. Well, neither of them pretended to be an Africanist. Nor did any of the Secretaries of State in my early days: Hull, Stettinius, Byrnes, Marshall, Dulles, Acheson. Nor did any of McGhee's successors as NEA Assistant Secretary: George Allen, Henry Byroade, Bill Rountree. But Africa was one of their responsibilities during this crucial period of history. Our own history had made us anti-colonial and believers in the right of all peoples to self-determination. The time had come to give our beliefs more meaning and expression, and that is what the top did in giving us our direction. I am sure that much of this direction came from Loy Henderson, who by then was an Under Secretary.

McGhee and Hare had their hands full with the Near East, an area of prime importance. They gave us our African guidelines but, there being only so many hours in a day, gave Jimmy Moose, an experienced Arabist, and later Elmer Bourgerie, who had been a commercial attachï¿½ in Accra, wide latitude for their development and implementation. Sam Kopper and I, as Officers-in-Charge, had a rare opportunity to immerse ourselves in African problems as action officers. I did not stay long in Southern African Affairs, because Sam Kopper moved to NE and I replaced him in Northern African Affairs, on September 14, 1950. So I was now in the Arab world.

Q: You were really dealing with the Arab problem. Well, let's go back to the Southern African business. Where did the officers who were at these Consulates report? After all, they were part of a colonial empire. So were people in Leopoldville reporting straight to Brussels, and so forth for the rest of them?

CYR: I would describe it as reporting to Washington copy to Brussels.

Q: I see. Now, did you have any battles within the State Department with Western Europe on the colonial issues? Can you think of any?

CYR: Well, picture an entrenched WE sharing responsibility for EUR colonies in Africa with a newly created AF. It was a new situation, but it just had to be that way because each had an important stake. I think it is remarkable that this scenario did not produce more friction than it did. WE officers were experienced in the art of promoting US relations with its EUR clients. But they were not accustomed to having another geographic area exercise equal jurisdiction over EUR colonies. So they gave ground grudgingly over a period of time in the new situation created in Africa by the rise of nationalism, which had give AF its reason for being. Yes, there were battles, but they were resolved on the AF/WE level in most cases. But AF and WE really were more like two china closets. From time to time, a bull enlivened the premises of either or both with a display of frustration. All in all, I am convinced that mature in-house diplomacy prevailed most of the time.

Q: What were some of the issues that might have come up on this colonization pitch at this particular time?

CYR: Well, the formulation of US positions on proposed UN resolutions on colonial issues provided frequent occasions for argument at this particular time. WE was under constant pressure from the embassies of European metropoles and sought to put the best face it could on their position, in furtherance of US friendship with them. AF saw such proposed resolutions from a different optic. After 1949 the Third World found its voice in the United Nations, and the United States came under pressure to put its money where its mouth was in favor of self-determination and against colonialism. Our best allies were colonial powers. AF sought to placate the legion of prospective independent nations and to assure their friendship, while WE tried to ease the European metropoles into the post colonial era. It was not easy to formulate a balanced US position on a UN resolution that would satisfy these mutually exclusive goals.

Q: Who knocked heads together? Or did it come to that farther up the line?

CYR: Well, as I have said, arguments were settled nine times out of ten on the office level, and occasionally went up as high as the Assistant Secretary of State. I remember only one case that was taken to Dean Acheson for settlement. It concerned a UN resolution on Morocco. After listening to arguments from AF and WE, the Secretary rendered his decision, reluctantly acceding to the French view, stating "Oh, those God damned French!"

Q: Well, you moved to the Northern Tier, I guess one could call it, of Africa, where you were really part of Arab interests. When did you move there?

CYR: September 14, 1950, but I was still in the Office of African Affairs. In fact, June 22, 1952, I became Deputy Director of that Office, so I had one foot in that Office's Black Africa and one in its Arab tier. About that time John E. Utter came in from Embassy Paris as Director of the Office, which was good for our relations with EUR. He was an excellent officer, one of "Murphy's Boys" who had worked so successfully under Bob Murphy in North Africa prior to the Allied landings in 1942. In 1955 John left the Foreign Service to become Wally Simpson's private secretary in Paris, and I replaced him as Director of the Office.

Q: So Israel was already a fact in 1950. Did Israel play much of a role in your area of competence?

CYR: Not really. Tunisia had a large Jewish population. In Morocco we had several thousand Sephardic Jews. Jacques Pinto used to come to Washington often and make it a point to know AF officers in charge of Morocco. He was a very fine man.

Q: He was more or less a private person, a representative of the Sephardic Jewish element in the United States?

CYR: Well, Jacques Pinto was a private person, but a Moroccan Jew of Sephardic origin, who had his home and business interests in Morocco. But, in addition to his visits to the Department, members of the Jewish lobby in the United States did come down from New York to see the NEA Assistant Secretary. I remember George Allen used to receive them quite often. He would ask me to join them when they were discussing Jewish problems in Morocco or Tunisia to promote positions in various cases. I don't remember the names of those individuals, but they were all high officers of prominent Jewish organizations.

Q: Well, your area of competence now, did that include Egypt, or was Egypt part of NEA?

CYR: Egypt was in NEA, but not in AF. It was in NE.

Q: And actually Algeria was not part of yours. This was the time of the great battle of Algeria in the Department, which continued after you left.

CYR: Right.

Q: Where does Algeria fit? All rational thought says it belongs to Northern Africa, but the French Desk, and also the French themselves would have been up in arms if we had made the unilateral decision to put it into Northern Africa.

CYR: Right. This would have been considered by France a decision on the part of the United States that Algeria was not an integral part of France. Such a decision would have been anathema to France.

Q: Well now, by the time you came in, you had Libya, which was independent at the time under a king. Tunisia, was that independent at that time?

CYR: I took over Northern African Affairs September 14, 1950 and Libya became independent December 24, 1950. Tunisia was still a French protectorate but in the process towards independence. And I remember receiving Habib Bourguiba at Union Station as a nationalist leader, coming in to talk to us in the State Department. I recall that as we were walking out of the station he was talking about his inability to speak English, and certainly he was not going to let that happen to his son, Habib Bourguiba, Junior. He was going to teach him French and English, which he certainly did.

Q: At that time he was not yet president for life, but he was the representative of the peaceful transition?

CYR: Yes. The leader of the Neo-Destour Party which he founded.

Q: And then, Algeria, of course, was very much part of France. Then Morocco was under a king, but were its ties to France?

CYR: It was under a king but still a protectorate. AF handled it unlike Algeria which WE handled as an integral part of metropolitan France.

Q: And then Tangier?

CYR: Tangier was an International Zone.

Q: And then there was the Spanish North Africa.

CYR: Yes. In addition to the Spanish Zone of Morocco, there was the Spanish enclave of Ifni in French Morocco on the Atlantic coast, and Spanish Sahara, divided into two zones, Rio de Oro and Sakiat el Hamra.

Q: And that was it, I think, wasn't it?

CYR: That's right.

Q: Well now, what was our policy towards these places at that time?

CYR: I would say it was one of general recognition on all levels that a new era was in the offing, which would spawn many newly independent nations whose friendship we would need, particularly in the United Nations. But it had to be dealt with in a manner which took into consideration the sensibilities of the metropolitan powers. This policy had clashing parts, and this was the interplay which went on between EUR's metropolitan desks and the African desks. This was the essence of the problem. WE and AF each had its side of US interest to protect. Day by day, WE and AF monitored developments in this light. WE often tried to stall decolonization, but they realized that time was on the side of the independence movement.

Q: You were dealing with what I would assume to be somewhat different breed of cat as far as the Foreign Service officers assigned there. Rather than Africanists you were dealing really with Arabists, weren't you? I'm talking about the officers. Or not?

CYR: Different from the ones in the colonies?

Q: Yes. Was there a difference would you say?

CYR: I assume you are referring to Foreign Service officers assigned to North African posts. Earlier I said that officers in AF handling North African affairs were Civil Service employees who happened to be in the right place at the right time and did a remarkable job developing skills through in-service training. Much the same may be said of the Foreign Service officers you refer to. They happened to be up for re-assignment. My guess is that about a third of them came from posts in the Near East. But they came from posts all over the world and learned about North Africa on the job. Our first Ambassador to Morocco, Cavendish Cannon, had been chief of mission in Yugoslavia, but was neither an Arabist nor an Africanist. Our first Ambassador to Tunisia, Lewis Jones, was an Arabist. Our minister to Libya, Henry Villard, might be termed the Department's one and only Africanist at that time.

This situation would change, as US interests in Africa became more important. A new crop of officers began to emerge who had taken courses in African studies under men like Dr. Melkowitz at the University of Chicago, Dr. William Brown at Boston University or Dr. Vernon McKay at Johns-Hopkins. They served in AF and in African posts. Bill Brown had accompanied me on my trip around Africa in 1950 as a member of the Department's Research Bureau. McKay was an African scholar working in the Department's UN Bureau. Both Bill and Vernon had attended the Consular Conference at Lourenco Marques in 1950.

Q: Did military considerations play a role while you were still dealing with this? I'm thinking about bases in both Libya and Morocco and all?

CYR: Yes, indeed. Wheelus Field in Tripoli, our military base near Casablanca and our naval base at Port Lyautey had served us well during the war and were still of strategic interest to us. I can't go into a lot of detail, but both in Libya and Morocco the situation was fluid after the war, and the US had considerable say in developments. The disposition of the ex-Italian colonies of Cyrenaica, Somalia and Eritrea, where we had an important communications station, was high on our agenda in Northern African Affairs. We had good relations with King Idris. An heir to the Libyan throne was born, but our efforts to save his life by despatching specialists to Libya proved futile. While in Casablanca President Roosevelt had raised Moroccan hopes for liberation. To put it mildly, France did not want to give up her protectorate. Four more bases were under construction under an earlier agreement.

While we're on the subject of bases, let me repeat here that in the Aviation Division I had helped Assistant Secretary Norton negotiate an agreement with the British to assure that the 99-year-leased bases would be available to our commercial aircraft in the post-war period. He was the principal negotiator but often used to leave me in his place.

Q: Where were those bases located?

CYR: They were located between Trinidad and Newfoundland.

Q: I see. Oh yes, this was part of the destroyers for bases deal.

CYR: Right.

Q: Well now, before we move to your assignment overseas, when you were in Washington how did you interact with both the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency? Did you find them to have great interest? Were they supportive?

CYR: I found that the Defense Department was very cooperative, and I had a great deal of opportunity to deal with them, because of the base situation. And I always found them to be very cooperative.

Q: There was no particular strain between the State and Defense in those days?

CYR: No, no. And I recall that John Bell was our Chief in the Aviation Division at one point when there were a lot of contacts on military bases. And he did an excellent job from our point of view, and the military officers were very cooperative.

Q: Did you find the CIA paid much attention to Africa during your time dealing with Africa?

CYR: On the first trip that I took around Africa in 1950, when I was going down to Lourenco Marques, CIA provided me with a camera, and asked me to take pictures of whatever I thought might be of interest; which I did. I delivered them the pictures. I got so sick of a camera on that trip that I have never used one again.

Q: This is obviously an unclassified interview, but were you feeling that there was much knowledge coming out of the CIA that was useful to you, or were things pretty much overt?

CYR: I don't remember. Your mention of CIA doesn't bring to mind any particular incidents in the '50s.

Q: I think that answers my question.

CYR: Yes.

Q: Well, how did you move from the Civil Service into the Foreign Service and on to your first overseas assignment?

CYR: Well, in the Office of African Affairs I went through the whole gamut of jobs. Officer in Charge of Southern African Affairs, 1950-51, Officer in Charge of Northern African Affairs, 1951-52, Deputy Director of the Office, 1952-54.

Q: Of African Affairs?

CYR: Of African Affairs. And then Director of the Office of African Affairs, 1954-57. While I was Deputy Director, John Gunther spent a morning with me discussing Africa. He was on his way to Africa in preparation for writing his book, Inside Africa. While I was Director the Wriston Program came up, and I opted to go into the Foreign Service.

Q: This is a program for the integration of the Civil Service officers into the Foreign Service?

CYR: That's right.

Q: In the State Department.

CYR: That's correct. I was integrated in 1954.

Q: What rank did you come in at?

CYR: FSO-1. I had been in the Department then long enough that I thought if I do go into this as a career officer, I do want to go abroad soon. I recall that when Ambassador Jacob Beam interviewed me, he asked, "With your degree in Foreign Service how come you haven't come into the Foreign Service before this?"And I said, "I've just been engrossed in what I was doing, and now this integration program really brings the thing up, and I do want to make the move. And I am ready to go into the field at any time."

Q: May I ask, how did many of your colleagues feel about this, because you obviously had been pointed towards this, but many of your colleagues in the Civil Service had risen rather high in department ranks, were Washington based and, perhaps, preferred it. Was there a problem there?

Q: It was a picked assignment, using your expertise rather than just a regular assignment?

CYR: Right. So I went out there in '57, and I stayed there until '60.

Q: Well, what were your major duties as Consul General in this unique post?

CYR: With the independence of Morocco in 1956, Embassy Rabat replaced our legation in Tangier. As Director of the Office of African Affairs, I had been handling Moroccan affairs in the Department. I was assigned to Tangier as Consul General to help facilitate the transition. In addition to the usual functions of a consul general, I was a member of the Committee of Control of the International Zone of Tangier which, together with the Spanish Zone and the French Protectorate, would be dismantled in the process of re-integrating the Sherifian Empire of Morocco. I believe Tangier was one of the last havens of extraterritoriality in the world. Decades of complex international arrangements were unraveled. As US member of the International Commission of Cape Spartel, I signed an international agreement whereby the several signatories returned to the Sultan of Morocco the responsibilities they had assumed in 1865 for the direction and expenses of the Cape Spartel lighthouse.

World War II had brought about a huge increase in the US investment in Morocco. In Tangier, RCA and Mackay Radio had large investments in facilities, and VOA had an important relay station. Americans became sufficiently numerous to justify an American School of Tangier, and American library and an American Club.

Q: Were you trying court cases in those days?

CYR: No. I never sat on a court case. With independence, that was a thing of the past before I arrived.

Q: Well, beyond that, I'm just wondering. Tangier had a reputation of being one of the most dissolute cities for dissolute Europeans and Americans and all. This was the place where people of various persuasions went to enjoy themselves, often what were called remittance men or women. Did this reflect on your work there?

CYR: Not at all. We certainly were aware of the situation and ran into it frequently. There were many gifted and intelligent people among them. They came particularly from England, sent to Tangier by their prominent families who said "Go out there and live, and we will support you." As a matter of fact, we had many good friends among them, such as Jamie Caffery, the ambassador's nephew, and his friend, David Herbert. We still have an ashtray given to us by Herbert, bearing his coat-of-arms and a picture of his beautiful home, Wilton House, in Salisbury, England.

As you know, Barbara Hutton owned a beautiful home in Tangier. She was seldom there. I recall a party she threw one evening. She was most gracious and my wife had an interesting conversation with her. When my wife pleaded that she was keeping her from her guests, her reply was, "No, I'd rather stay in the garden. I know you don't want anything from me."

Q: How about the sharp operators who must have been attracted to the city?

CYR: Among others. But they didn't affect us in any way. Oh, we ran into cases of American businessmen who tried to pull fast ones. One came into the Consulate General and demanded our support of one of his schemes as representatives of the American government, and we had to set him straight.

Q: Who was in charge, say the police? Who had the police authority in those days?

CYR: I'm fuzzy about the role of the police in my old age!

Q: It was a period of transition. I was just wondering if there was a Tangerian type of police, or was it under Morocco in those days?

CYR: Well, there was a governor of Tangier.

Q: Who was appointed by . . ?

CYR: By the Sultan of Morocco. Now I remember. The police were Moroccans. I got stopped one day for a traffic violation!

Q: How was the staffing of your post in Tangier?

CYR: It was reasonable. My method of operation was to be rather strict on numbers of people. And I kept it as it was. I felt that the people who were there were needed. Our office was located in the Casbah, a quaint, lovely place-like a rabbit warren, with rooms seldom opened. While preparing for an inspection, we found papers of one of the first consuls in Tangier, under a pile of rubbish. The building was given to the United States by the Sultan about 1820, the first piece of real estate acquired by the United States abroad. During my tour we reluctantly built a new office building and a new residence. I deplore the recent closing of Tangier.

Q: You next assignment was then to . . ?

CYR: I recall that one day I got a telegram in Tangier from the Department, "Front and center to Yaounde, Cameroon. The Chargï¿½ d'Affaires being evacuated for medical reasons. You are to replace him until further notice." And within a few days I was in Yaounde. And the morning after I arrived there I had an appointment, pre-arranged by the staff with an ex-prime minister of Cameroon, a bit wacky I learned later, who had many demands to make on the United States. What I do recall principally is his saying, "I could just snap my fingers and this embassy would be blown up." So I just blandly reported this to the Department, saying, "Will keep you advised."

Q: What was the political situation in Cameroon? You went there, this was in ...?

CYR: This was in '60.

Q: Yes, 1960 to 1961. What was the situation? First the post. Was there an ambassador while you were there?

CYR: No. Bolard More had been the Consul General when it became independent, and so he became Chargï¿½ d'Affaires. He'd been there just a few months thereafter when he became sick. So I went down as Chargï¿½ d'Affaires. And in the meantime, while I was holding the fort, it became known that Leland Barrows would become the first ambassador.At that particular time a Consular Conference was scheduled for Tangier in the spring of '61. I attended the conference as the representative of the embassy in Cameroon. Leland Barrows was at the conference, and I met him there. I later returned to Yaounde as DCM under him.

Q: Well, the period you were there, what was the political situation in Cameroon.

CYR: The political situation . . .

Q: Quite confused?

CYR: Yes, confused. The Bamileke tribe was in an uproar. They were opposing Ahidjo's government. And a good part of that time there were night curfews in Yaounde and when traveling at night you were supposed to leave your car lights on. This always left me in a dilemma, because if you didn't turn your lights on they might shoot into the car. And if you had your lights on, they could get better aim.

Q: Yes. I know the feeling.

CYR: The actual fighting was primarily in the Western part of Cameroon.

Q: Cameroon, we're talking about this period what had been the French Cameroon.

CYR: Yes, that's right. And after I left the Federation took place.

Q: Including part of what was the old German Cameroon . . .

CYR: Yes, but the British had since been trustees under a UN trusteeship.

Q: The British?

CYR: Right.

Q: Part of it went to Nigeria, and part, was that right?

CYR: I may be wrong. My impression is that the British Cameroon was federated with the new republic, and it became the Federated Republic of Cameroon.

Q: You were there at the time of the Federation?

CYR: That took place after I left.

Q: Well now, did you deal with the government? Was there a government of the Cameroons?

CYR: Yes.

Q: Was it French, were they still there?

CYR: No. Ahidjo was President.

Q: How was he to deal with?

CYR: Very good. He's a very reserved person, not talkative, not outgoing at all, a dour Moslem from the north. But capable, fair, shrewd, friendly enough.

Q: Did we have much interest in Cameroons other than wish them well in those days?

CYR: There was a railroad that we had an interest in. No, I don't know that we were very interested in Cameroon. I recall that G. Mennen Williams, the first Assistant Secretary of the new Bureau of African Affairs, visited us in Yaounde. Africa finally had its own bureau, and he was familiarizing himself with his parish.

Q: No great issues.

CYR: No.

Q: You were there for a relatively short time, basically as a fill in. Then you received what was a more substantive post, going as DCM to Tunisia.

CYR: Yes. I got a telegram from the Department saying, "You have been transferred to Tunis as DCM."

Q: Had you asked for this assignment?

CYR: Over the years I may have listed it on one of those "where-would-you-like-to-be-assigned" forms, but I wasn't working for it. And I had stayed with Barrows long enough for him to get his feet on the ground.

Q: He was a career officer?

CYR: He was a career officer. He was an AID man at one point, and he had been integrated. And I was sent to Tunis, where I was under Ambassador Walmsley. The situation was fairly normal.

Q: At that point Tunisia was completely independent of France. But what was our policy towards Tunisia at that time?

CYR: One of very close cooperation, and one of feeling that Tunisia was very important to us. One of their feeling that they were most anxious to be very close to us. I can recall going with Ambassador Russell to see Bourguiba one day. And in the course of the conversation Bourguiba made the statement, "You can rest assured that when the chips are down we are with the United States."

Q: Was Bourguiba using the United States as sort of a counter-force to the French do you think? Concerned that the French might have undue influence there?

CYR: Possibly. If so, not unduly. He may have had thoughts of that kind, but I would say that it was not a blatant situation in that regard.

Q: I think when you were there was a period that there was a sort of a confrontation with the French over the naval base at Bizerte?

CYR: Bizerte. Yes.

Q: What was the situation at that time?

CYR: As a matter of fact, within days after I arrived there was gunfire at that base during Ambassador Walmsley's reception to introduce my wife and me to the local community. I remember that diplomats and Tunisian officials began to slip out of the reception when the news broke. I am not quite sure how to describe our position. It was one of concern over the Franco-Tunisian controversy that was going on, and trying to cope with it as best we could. We weren't trying to push any particular bill of goods, as I remember, we were just hoping that the whole thing would settle down.

Q: And sort of keep our heads down. Were the Tunisians trying to get us involved in this?

CYR: Not to my recollection, no.

Q: How would you describe Bourguiba's method of government?

CYR: Well, it was certainly a strict, paternal, hands-on sort of approach. He felt very much that he was in charge. That his was almost a divine right of kings. I can understand his staying on the way he did, because he could never conceive of anyone else being president of Tunisia. And so, what happened because of that.

Q: We're speaking of Bourguiba's staying way beyond the time of his competency.

CYR: That's right. He should have left earlier because of his physical condition.

Q: Well, did we have much to do with the Tunisian government, or was it pretty much just to be there?

CYR: No, we had quite a bit to do with the Tunisian government. We had a substantial AID program under Lavergne, who was a very good AID man. And we didn't take them lightly. We thought they were important, and we acted that way.

Q: Well now, there was pressure, and there continues to be pressure, on the Tunisians from Algeria. Were there problems at the time you were there?

CYR: During my time there were Algerian Nationalists hovering around in Tunisia seeking its help and support in obtaining Algerian independence. One of our jobs was to keep in contact with them. Bill Stokes was our political officer at the time, and he was our specialist on that. He was an excellent political officer and kept track of these people. We did this to keep informed, not because we had any special fear, that I know of that this or that was going to happen.

Q: Let me ask, how about the CIA, were they overly involved, or not, or how did you feel about them?

CYR: They were well represented. And I do not feel that they were excessive in any way, but I feel that they were competent and did a good job, and were in there, really in there.

Q: Did they keep you informed?

CYR: Yes.

Q: How about AID? How was this run? Was this a problem?

CYR: No. This was very well run, and under both ambassadors. I was there under two ambassadors, Newbold Walmsley and then Ambassador Francis Russell. In both cases Lavergne, the AID Director, kept the ambassador very well informed. And they were very close.

Q: Well now, you went back to Washington in 1965 to '66 as a Diplomat in Residence.

CYR: Yes.

Q: Where did you go?

CYR: Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

Q: Was this of your choice?

CYR: I didn't initiate anything, but I had to agree that I had been in Tunis a good length of time. It was '61 to '65. And it was put to me that it was a re-Americanization program, and I was completely agreeable to that.

Q: Well, I'd like to return once again to Tunis, because we hope to use this for young officers who are coming in to read about this. How did your ambassadors use you as a DCM?

CYR: The first ambassador was a little difficult to get along with, and I didn't know what was going on at the time. Do you want me to go into personnel details?

Q: I would just as soon, yes. Because we can edit this later, but I think it's very important to understand how personality affects operations.

CYR: Well, this ambassador, a career minister in rank, had been in the Foreign Service for a long, long, time. He had a very definite opinion as to whom he wanted as DCM, and the department suggested candidates one after another, one after another. And no go. I later learned that he had turned down candidate after candidate, saying "this man has had no experience with Africa, but I think my man is the man for the job". So eventually the Department came up with my name.

Q: And he couldn't say that at all about you.

CYR: He knew that I was one of a long line of Mr. Africas, so to speak.

Q: Yes.

CYR: And so I went to Tunis and then he started taking it out on me.

Q: Do you think that this was a little bit of a ploy, where you were the unwitting shuttlecock between the people in personnel and the ambassador?

CYR: It's possible, or he may have thought it was not so "unwitting" on my part. I can assure you that if the Department was indulging in any such ploy, which I seriously doubt, I for one knew nothing about it. His attitude towards me was baffling, to say the least. If he was having problems with AF, my long association with AF may have troubled him. But I had no way of knowing what was on his mind. I had no idea that I was the last of a long list of candidates. I was just happy to be assigned to Tunis out of the blue.

Q: It made perfect sense.

CYR: In other words, it had never occurred to me that the Department might be party to some ploy. I got off the plane in Tunis and the Ambassador met me at the airport. My predecessor had been living in a leased house - I'm not sure whether he or our Government had taken the lease. To remedy a dearth of conversation, I asked the Ambassador "Can you tell me if David McKillop's house was furnished by the Government?"

He said, "What house? We've let that go."

Well, this struck me as rather strange, even a bit abrupt. So I thought "Well, I'll just have to think this over a little bit." Actually, it turned out that the house was still available, still within reach, but if things were left to go the way they were, I'd have to start from scratch.

As tired as we were after our night flight from Yaounde, my wife and I were whisked to the Ambassador's residence for an intimate luncheon with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. and his wife. Mrs. Walmsley couldn't wait to question my wife about her previous experience with supervising wives. Her reaction was "Oh, so you've had experience. Well I'll need your help, but don't try to take them away from me." In spite of the low profile that my wife adopted, wives soon began to come to see her more often than my wife considered wise and, for some reason, they would never park in front of our residence. We learned eventually that Mrs. Walmsley had requested the wives to bring their problems to her.

I had received home leave orders before leaving Yaounde. So, after a good night's rest, I informed the Ambassador that since we had no place to stay - we were parked in the Hotel St. Louis in Carthage, which was quaint but we were cramped - I had decided to send my family ahead on home leave, and that I would follow as soon as convenient. It developed that the Ambassador had to make a quick trip to Washington. At a reception in Washington, a Department officer asked my wife if she knew that the Ambassador was spreading the story that the DCM's wife had left his wife all alone in Tunis?

Eventually I came on home leave, and arranged that my predecessor's villa would be Government-leased and -furnished, as I had told the Ambassador I would do. Also, the Department received a letter from the Ambassador, either asking that I not return or hinting at it. I don't recall that I ever knew which. In any event, Assistant Secretary G. Mennen Williams, of late memory, called me into the Department and said, "What's going on out there?"And I in effect said, "Well, you tell me. I don't know what's going on, but let me say to you, sir, that is his post, and if he doesn't want me there, please reassign me.""On the other hand, if you want me to go back, I will go back and I'll take whatever he dishes out." And in a few days I got the word "go back", which we did, arriving there on New Years Eve. There was a party at the Ambassador's residence. I'd have given a hundred bucks if I hadn't had to go, but we just had to show. We were coolly received, and the Ambassador's wife started working on my wife. We got through that evening, but were not so lucky at a subsequent reception that took place at the Ambassador's residence. The Spanish Ambassador was dean of the Diplomatic Corps and his mother, a Contessa, lived with him. She was a wonderful Spanish lady of the old school, a close friend of Mrs. Walmsley and of my wife. At some point in the party, Mrs. Walmsley asked my wife to sit with the Contessa, a fairly elderly lady, and Kitty was happy to do so. They were entertaining each other as usual, when someone beckoned to Kitty. She hesitated, but the Contessa said, "Go ahead, Kitty, go see what they want." Kitty had no sooner left her side than Mrs. Walmsley stormed up and said, "How dare you leave the Contessa alone after I told you to stay with her?" All this and more in the presence of many guests. So now le tout Tunis would hear of the feud in the American Embassy. As the Contessa was leaving, Kitty apologized to her. With Mrs. Walmsley standing nearby, the Contessa squeezed Kitty's hand and said, "You don't have to apologize, Kitty, I know that you would never do anything to hurt anyone's feelings."

I reported nothing to the Department, but for some reason Deputy Assistant Secretary Wayne Fredericks decided to visit Tunis. He got a cold shoulder from the Ambassador, who was obvious in his determination to be cavalier with Fredericks. It wasn't too long thereafter that the Ambassador was recalled and named Consul General to Montreal.

To avoid imbalance in my comments on this subject of petty tyrants, let me say that during my years in the Department and the Foreign Service, I had contact with men whose stature I will revere for the rest of my life. To them, pettiness was a foreign substance. My role models were Averell Harriman, Dean Rusk, Livingston Merchant, G. Mennen W "Soapy" Williams, George Allen, Charles Yost, Garrison Norton, Joseph Satterthwaite, John Dickey, Jack Jernegan.

Q: How was he as a political reporter, and dealing with Bourguiba and all? Was this affecting him there too?

CYR: I thought he was an excellent reporting officer, perceptive and professional. How he was with Tunisian officials when I was not around, I do not know. I can't judge his normal personality, because from the day we met, he was under the influence of that DCM-picking bee in his bonnet. It didn't help my case when President Bourguiba turned to me and recalled when he as a nationalist had been received by me as a Department officer at Union Station some ten years earlier. Nor when Foreign Minister Mongi Slim would turn to me or my wife during a dinner party and recall the good old days in Washington when we worked together on Tunisian affairs.

Q: Apparently you weren't being used. How about your next ambassador?

CYR: The next ambassador, Francis Russell, was my Assistant Chief in the World Trade Intelligence Division when I first came into State. I was from Maine and he was from Maine, and he was a Godsend to me. Well, it was just like night and day.

Q: Well, how did he use you?

CYR: I would say he made very good use of me. He had been ambassador to Accra, so he was familiar with Africa, but I was more familiar with Northern Africa. I've never had any feeling that he didn't use me properly. I feel that we were very good friends, and we remain so to this day.

Q: I'm thinking more of the role of the DCM. It varies between ambassador. Were you basically his alter ego, or the Chief Executive Officer, or what?

CYR: Well, I would say that Ambassador Russell was a hands-on ambassador, who would want to be in charge himself. He was a dedicated officer and less likely than most to go off and leave you in charge, but I felt I was alter ego and I don't think he underused me. He was away once when I signed an AID agreement with Tunisia. In other words, I think he was just right.

Q: Well then, how did you become ambassador to Rwanda? You were at Ohio University.

CYR: I left Tunis and went to Ohio University for the school year, and in June of '66 I went back to the Department, and I was given a temporary assignment in the Under Secretary's office. And eventually in August I learned that my next assignment was going to be as ambassador to Rwanda.

Q: As things stood in those days, there was really no political competition was there for such a post? Today, of course, this has changed, and almost any ambassadorship is up for political appointees as well as career officers, but this was a normal assignment?

CYR: To my knowledge there was absolutely no competition, no one shedding tears because they didn't get it. I was 57 at the time, and would have not been surprised had I been passed over for age. We were still feeling the influence of the Kennedy youth movement. Kigali was one of the few capitals in Africa that I had never been to. I was a little taken aback at the thought of this isolated post, but I told Joe Palmer, "Let me think about this." At that point, Joe was back in African work as Deputy Assistant Secretary and was the one who informed me about my proposed assignment to Rwanda.And within a few days I said, "Okay, let's go."

Q: Before moving on to your time in Kigali, we were talking in our break here about the problem you had with Ambassador Walmsley and his wife. I wonder if you would, one, repeat the problem you had of the furniture, just in brief. Just to give an idea of what can happen. Then we were talking about types of senior officers, and I wonder if we might discuss this a little more.

CYR: I was indicating during the break that Ambassador Walmsley had probably chosen to dislike me, because of my assignment to Tunis as DCM over his own choice. And as an illustration of the type of things that my wife and I put up with, I mentioned the fact that a neighboring American ambassador, a very close friend of the Walmsleys, came to visit them in Tunis. While there Mrs. Walmsley brought the wife of the visiting ambassador to our DCM residence. And after having a cup of coffee and exchanging a few pleasantries, they rather flippantly decided, "Oh, wouldn't it be nice to change the furniture around in this room." And so they called the servants in, and my wife watched in disbelief as they decided where they wanted to put this piece of furniture and that piece of furniture. My wife managed not to laugh, but she gave me an emotional description later. We said nothing, leaving them to grapple with their own self-esteem. What had possessed them? Had one of them suffered from similar treatment?

Q: As we move on in this project interviewing officers, something we might take a look at, and that is the personality trait that seems to crop up more often than not, and that is this use of power by people who become ambassadors or principal officers.

CYR: Yes. During our break, we agreed that all organizations have them, but that the Foreign Service seemed to have more than its share of petty tyrants. And that often they chose wives who proved to be able assistants in this regard. I said that, during my association with Ambassador Walmsley, I was daily reminded of Cicero's opening remarks in Pro Archias: "How long will you abuse our patience, O Cataline." I saw him as a prime example of a type of officer who often develops in the Foreign Service. He makes a name for himself, and then his true colors begin to surface. He abuses his staff and his wife does likewise with staff wives. He - and so she - shows himself petty, mean, immature, childish, pompous, inconsiderate, arbitrary, or any one or all of these.

I put the rhetorical questions to you: a) does the frequency of such cases suggest that a certain type of person is attracted to a career in the Foreign Service; or b) is it the Foreign Service experience that molds good men and their wives the wrong way? c) Would a study in depth of this question be justified? There was the pre-Rogers Act [of 1924] crowd. Then the post-Rogers Act. Then the pre-Wriston [reorganization of the early 1950s] crowd. Then the post-Wriston crowd. It could be that each crowd thought its members were the cream of the crop and lorded over its successors, inflicting indignities that festered until one reached the top. Perhaps there were role models in each crowd whose insufferable attitudes became regarded as status symbols to be imitated?

Q: Coming to your time, now how did you act as ambassador? You were ambassador to Rwanda from 1966 to 1971. Did you rearrange furniture?

CYR: There you go! Now that's a very good question. I guess I asked for it! No, I didn't. However, I would describe myself as a hands-on ambassador, one who because of the size of the post had time to take care of a lot of details, which I did until the mercenaries came along. And I think that any of my subordinates commenting on my approach might mention that I got into details.As a matter of fact, as the second Ambassador in Rwanda, I inherited from my predecessor and friend Dudley Withers a situation which he had built up in a hurry. Dudley and I had blacklisted together in WT. I was amazed when I arrived to find the number of people on the staff. This personnel build-up was not all Dudley's doing, but a lot of it happened between our tours. In addition to that, changes made in the embassy in Bujumbura resulted in the transfer . . .

Q: Bujumbura, in Burundi?

CYR: Burundi. Resulted in the transfer to Kigali of a military attachï¿½ and his staff. It didn't take long to realize that we were overstaffed. As a result the lonely life in this isolated post bred problems, particularly among wives with time on their hands. One had to be busy and I had to do something about the size of the staff.I recommended against the continuance of the military attachï¿½, much to the distress of the incumbent. A problem in Bujumbura had been solved by creating a problem in Kigali. I indicated that we didn't really need a CIA man in Kigali. The net result was that I eliminated many positions, many leased houses, sold a great deal of U. S. furniture, and returned a considerable amount of money to the Treasury of the United States. Frankly, I'm not sure that the budget people in the Department particularly appreciated this. It was not the type of management that they were accustomed to. Build-up is more the rule. I'm not sure what has been done since then. I do know that the ambassador's residence has been added to. In our particular case it was adequate, but ambassadors with children might well need more room than we had, but we were comfortable.

Q: What was our policy towards Rwanda?

CYR: Our policy toward Rwanda . . .

Q: We're talking about 1966 right now.

CYR: 1966.

Q: To '71.

CYR: I think it can be said that underlying my instructions when I went out there was a general acceptance of the fact that we don't have so much very much to do with Rwanda. It's not very important, but it is a traditional function of an embassy to promote friendship. And Rwanda does have a vote in the United Nations, and they do sell an awful lot of coffee to Folger's. You should be able to take care of almost everything locally, and that would be a big help. Go out there and keep them friendly, and that is what I did. The Government was just feeling its way in its fifth year of independence.

President Kayibanda was the George Washington of his country. Diminutive in stature, it was hard to believe that he had wrested control of his Hutu country from the haughty Tutsis, who had invaded the country and become overlords some 400 years ago. Kayibanda was very shy, so much so that he would never look you in the eye. Yet he had years of seminary education and, as I think back, must have had a very dogged character. He was proud and naive. He didn't ask for anything, and he didn't seem to expect anything. Ambassador Withers had initiated a few AID projects which were implemented during my tour. I had an excellent AID officer in the person of John Nulle, who did his best to acquaint the Rwandans with AID procedures. They knew how to ask for money, but did not conceive projects readily. We had an excellent USIS operation with an excellent staff.I was visited by the Assistant Secretary, Dave Newsom in 1970.

Q: Assistant Secretary for African Affairs.

CYR: For African Affairs, Dave Newsom. And he asked, "What is the prospect here?" There's a despatch in the Department's files which I was in the midst of writing at the time. Dave read it in rough draft, which gave him my estimate of the situation at that time. It could be incorporated here by reference, if that is your practice. You don't do that?

Q: Well, we'll assume a researcher would do it.

CYR: Newsom asked, "Who's going to follow Kayibanda?"Now, Kayibanda was drinking a lot, and wasn't providing leadership as he should. And I said, "If and when there is a change, the present minister of defense will be the next president. Juvenal Habyarimana." And that's what happened after I left. He is the present president. And so there have been just two presidents of Rwanda since it became an independent country.

Q: What was the role of the Belgians when you were there?

CYR: The Belgians acted like the trustee that they had been before independence. Like people who had more power in the past and who still had definite economic interests there. They still considered themselves, the Belgian ambassador, as the first among equals, and the Rwandans, I think, welcomed this role, and the Belgians did a very good job.

Q: Did you have close contact with the Belgians?

CYR: Very close and friendly with the Belgian, the Israeli, and the French ambassadors. Hermann Dehennin, the present Belgian ambassador to the United States, was my Belgian counterpart in Kigali.

Q: Well now, while you were there, there were some rather serious disturbances between the Hutus and the Tutsis, as I recall. What was happening? Did we have anything to do to ameliorate the situation?

CYR: You're thinking of the insurrection in which the Hutus overthrew the Tutsi ruling class and declared a Hutu republic in 1962. But there were serious disturbances of a different nature while we were there. On July 4, 1967 my wife and I had the usual Fourth of July reception. After our guests left we congratulated ourselves on how things had gone. And we said, "Well, it's going to be a quiet summer."The next morning we were awakened to the news on Radio Rwanda that European mercenaries in Mobutu's army had invaded Bukavu in the Eastern Congo on the Rwandan border. We were much closer to it than Kinshasa was. We immediately sought more information and tried to abreast of developments. The foreign mercenaries had revolted against Mobutu, demanding more pay, and they were joined by Katangese troops in Bukavu. Then they marched northwest up to Kisangani. They overextended their lines of communication and eventually had to return to Bukavu. They held out for months in Bukavu, but eventually they had to realize that their demand for more pay had become a fight for survival. The stalemate lasted for quite some time with the Congolese army playing a waiting game. Eventually the International Red Cross became an intermediary. Instead of going to Kinshasa, the capital of the Congo, they came to Kigali. Dean Rusk ordered me to make available our communications to these people for any messages they wanted to send to their headquarters. All messages were repeated to Washington, to Kinshasa and Brussels.

Q: These were of the mercenaries, or of the Red Cross?

CYR: These were of the Red Cross, who were serving as intermediaries and needed communications facilities. The papal nuncio, who was a Frenchman at the time, and I flew down to the town opposite Bukavu on the Rwandan side, and looked the place over.Anyway, our embassy became very much involved because it had the best communications, and I received from the Red Cross drafts of messages which they wanted to send, and on which they wanted my input. And so, we drafted and redrafted, often into the wee hours of the morning. Eventually, an agreement was reached. It was agreed that the Katangese would filter back to Katanga, their province of origin. The European mercenaries would be loaded on trucks and brought to Kigali and transferred to two C-130s. That was done, and the whole plan went off without a hitch. They came across country to Kigali, they were loaded on the C-130s, and they were flown to European airports and out of our jurisdiction.

In between there were all sorts of episodes and interludes.

Q: Were there problems between the two tribes, the Hutus and Tutsis when you were there?

CYR: No, that was before my time. The Hutus were very much in charge by then, and that was no problem.

Q: I talked to your successor in a former interview, Robert Corrigan, and he said that the major interest of Washington was trying to get Rwanda's vote in the UN, and that he spent a great deal of time going up and talking about UN votes. Did you feel the same?

CYR: I did that too. Every UN member nation assumed importance because of its UN vote. I dealt with them also on AID projects.

Q: Because Corrigan was saying that every time that he came up asking for a UN vote, he would find he would be asked for more AID money, but he had a very limited program. And that he found that Tanzania, which almost invariably voted against us in the UN, had a far greater AID allotment than did Rwanda. Did you try to increase your AID package?

CYR: Nyerere of Tanzania was more worldly wise and more on the ball than Kayibanda. Perhaps by the time Bob arrived, Nyerere had briefed Kayibanda that you have to keep pushing for US aid. Seriously though, it is likely that the Rwandans had been perfectly happy during my tour as we tarred three streets and installed waterworks in Kigali.

I was always ready and willing to entertain Rwandan requests for aid, but never pressed them to make requests. In my opinion, my implementation of projects initiated during Ambassador Withers' tour served to promote friendship and acknowledged Rwanda's importance to us. Granted, it was less than the Belgians did but, if the truth were known, this was the way both the Rwandans and the Belgians thought it should be. Belgium had a special interest and status there. But I don't believe that our aid was matched by any other country. I turned down no requests and heard no complaints. And I was fair to the US taxpayer, seldom thought of in this context.

I did, however, have to think of the US taxpayer very seriously in connection with one of our AID project which provided jeeps to the Kigali police. It came to my attention that the jeeps were being used to transport the children of police to and from school. Byron Engle, Director of AID's Office of Public Safety, happened to be visiting me. I told him that I intended to cut off the remaining $200,000, in the pipeline for this project. He agreed 100%, saying that better use could be made of such funds. I never heard a peep out of the Rwandas after the cutoff.

When I left Kigali, our projects had been largely implemented, and there wasn't much in the pipeline. Unlike Bob, I had no requests on my plate, or I'd have done something about them. I'd have taken a constructive approach, using their requests for money as an occasion to coach them how to submit will conceived projects in lieu of requests for money. In the spirit of friendship, I would have urged these inexperienced people to abandon their traditional notions of baksheesh and to get to work conceiving legitimate projects. And I wouldn't have worried about Tanzania.

Q: I was asked by Ambassador Corrigan to ask you about how you dealt with the problem of the moon rock. Does this ring a bell with you?

CYR: Oh, yes.

Q: He was saying that they were having trouble delivering a piece of the moon which had been sent up with the Rwandan flag, and that you had tried to deliver it, and nobody was interested in this.

CYR: So, apparently nothing happened after my departure? It was weird, absolutely weird. My hunch is that they viewed the rock with superstition, particularly Kayibanda. It was the type of thing that could happen only in Rwanda.

Q: Corrigan said that we had taken on one of our voyages to the moon some flags and delivered them back to all the countries, each with a little piece of moon rock, which was usually put on exhibit in the countries. But Rwanda just had absolutely no interest in this, you couldn't deliver it.

CYR: Yes, we received a circular instruction for the Department on what Bob described, asking that we deliver the flag and the moon rock to the Rwandans. I don't recall the scenario very exactly, only that it unfolded over a period of time. As I remember what happened, I probably spoke to Kayibanda first, saying I would like to deliver the flag and moon rock to him. He suggested I contact the Foreign Minister. I spoke to the Foreign Minister, who was evasive. He would be in touch. Time went by and the Department may have asked for a report. I checked with the Foreign Minister several times and continued to get the run-around. My tour of duty came to an end. Some ambassadors leave their successors aid projects to finish. In Rwanda we leave them moon rocks! I must ask Bob what he ever did with the moon rock.Oh, the gorilla woman. Do you want to know about the gorilla woman?

Q: Yes, I'd like to know about the gorilla woman.

CYR: Dian Fossey preceded me to Central Africa when she went to the Congo. She was in the mountains of the eastern part of the Congo for several months before I arrived. There were troubles in the area where she was and Congolese soldiers required her to move on the grounds that she was in danger. She moved her operation to Mount Visoke in Rwanda.

Q: This is the woman who had international renown for her observations of the life of gorillas.

Q: She was murdered, yes. They think maybe by poachers.

CYR: Yes. I have no insights into that at all.

Q: Well now, I notice that you spent about five years in Rwanda, which is a very long time. I take it then that you found it an interesting and satisfying post?

CYR: I can assure you that during the first two weeks, I wondered whether I would be able to take it. It was isolated. The weather was fine, but the lack of amenities and diversion was something. That's why I got into details, I guess. I took up ham radio and often talked to King Hussein of Jordan. It boosted my morale to hear his voice say, "Oh, hello Leo, my good friend in Kigali."

But, after that July 4th reception and the invasion of Bukavu, we had more than we could handle. For a solid year, we worked day and night on the mercenary problem and on our housing project for refugees, American Protestant missionaries from Eastern Congo, who came pell mell into Rwanda.

Q: Was this during the Stanleyville time?

CYR: Yes. There were French and Belgian Catholic missionaries who also crossed into Rwanda. My French and Belgian counterparts took care of the Catholics. The Protestants were Americans, so we took care of them.We set up a sort of a dormitory with some surplus cots, etc. that we had. Even newspaper men stayed there. Refugees would come in waves and stay there until they could get a flight out. So, we had a really busy time for about a year. And after the evacuation of the mercenaries in C-130s, I came on home leave. As you know, any ambassador from a post the size of Rwanda would normally be received by the Secretary of State about four or five minutes. Dean Rusk kept me almost an hour, and he was just bubbling over about Rwanda, and the way we had handled the communications problem. He was very flattering. I was most pleased.He indicated that he'd worried about what might happen throughout Africa if the insurrection prevailed and the Katangese were able to separate from the Congo. It could have been the beginning of a fragmentation of Africa, of a throwing over of the artificial European boundaries that had been set up during the colonial era. He was not an advocate of the existing boundaries except for the fact that they were in being and he didn't want to see them disrupted. It would open Pandora's box.

Q: Particularly with the European interference that was coming because of the commercial interests which were helping the rebel forces and all this.

CYR: Exactly. And so Secretary Rusk just made my day. After I went back after home leave and never again had any feelings of wasting my time. I thought, well we had our day in the spotlight, and now I'll just see what happens. And I was completely geared to it by then.

Q: You're talking about what is a phenomenon within the Foreign Service, and I'm sure other organizations, that we respond better in case of an emergency. Otherwise you get the feeling of marking time. What am I doing?

CYR: Exactly. Oh, I may have exaggerated our lack of things to do. If I went back and looked at my files, I could refresh my memory about things that did keep us busy and were good, and worthwhile. In the fall of 1970 Assistant Secretary for Africa, Dave Newsom was there, and he said, "We think you're doing a fine job, and you can stay as long as you want to. You have been here five years though. Almost five years." I said, "I would like to stay until I've been at the highest level of my grade for five years for pension reasons."

Q: A pension is calculated on the average salary over the last five years of service.

CYR: Yes. And he said, "Fine. Stay until February 22, 1972." Come Christmas '70 we got a card from a friend of ours who owned this in Bethesda house saying "I am thinking of selling my house."We knew the house. We wrote back quickly and said, "We would like to buy it." We owned a house on Hampden Lane but we wanted to buy this one on Randall Lane.She wrote back and said "okay, I will sell it to no one but you."In July of '71 we bought it. But once we had bought it and it was sitting here empty, we began to wonder whether we wanted to stay until February '72. And by the time September came around, we had decided and notified Washington that we would like to resign in September. So that was when we resigned, in September 1971.

Q: A question I ask all the people that we interview. What would you say was your great satisfaction in your Foreign Service career, and conversely maybe greatest frustration, disappointment?

CYR: The greatest accomplishment was the successful resolution of that mercenary affair. I'll always treasure Secretary Rusk's kind reception and reaction.Also, I was pleased to be able to have a part in the re-integration of Tangier into the Sherifian Empire.

I was glad to be able to report on the Bamileke Rebellion in Cameroon.I was pleased to be able to survive what ended up as a very pleasant tour in Tunis, which had started out so unpleasantly. That was, in its way, a test.

Q: Absolutely.

CYR: I was pleased to have been on a US campus at the height of the Vietnam war, and to receive from the president of the university a very high commendation, which made me wonder whether that had had anything to do with my being named as ambassador. Being on a campus in those times, one could very easily have gotten into a mess.

Q: Oh, yes. Anybody representing the State Department on campuses during-we're talking about 1965, '66. It was a time of great testing for government officials.

CYR: And while what I did was negative in the sense that I'd failed to get into trouble.

Q: It was remarkable.

CYR: I felt that it was. Finally there was another unique event that I thought was remarkable as a tribute to my wife. During a reception at the Libyan Embassy, the first Libyan Ambassador, Mahmoud Muntasser, asked my wife and me if Kitty would consider helping his wife in her emergence from purdah on the Washington scene. Kitty was glad to do it.

Q: How about any disappointment or frustration let's say, other than the ambassadorial problem in Tunis?

CYR: There were family problems, or a family problem. I have often wondered about its long term impact on my younger daughter Nancy. I am only now beginning to feel that she is the stronger for it.When we knew we were going to Kigali we had sent her ahead to Rome to attend her second year of high school in Marymount. Her sister Kitty had graduated from there and loved it. On our way to Kigali we stopped in Rome, and she was very distressed. Very unhappy. Pleaded with us to bring her along to Kigali. Well, the prospect of her finding a suitable school in Kigali was just nonexistent. In spite of her pleading, we told her to stay there and everything would work out. It didn't. We didn't have time to reach Kigali. We had a good friend in Embassy, Rome, Allen Holmes, who had served with us in Cameroon. He sent us a wire from the embassy saying that Nancy is on her way to Nairobi, meet her in Nairobi.She had been unable to cope with Marymount. She just did not like it. She had even taken a lot of aspirin. She arrived in Nairobi and, of course, we were relieved to see her well and healthy. From then on, it was whatever she wanted. She enrolled in the Nebraska School from Kigali.

Q: A correspondence school?

CYR: Yes. She finished her high school course by correspondence. Was not at all interested in going to college, which she could well have done. She's of the caliber. She is doing very well now.

Q: This is one of the stresses on the Foreign Service life. Well, Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you very much for this conversation, and we may be coming back and talking some more.

CYR: Very good. Very good.

End of interview