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

AMBASSADOR LANGE SCHERMERHORN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Schermerhorn]

Q: I might say that Lange and I are old friends. Lange, starting at the beginning, can you tell me when and where you were born, and something about your family?

SCHERMERHORN: I was born in September, 1939, a war baby, as it were, in northern New Jersey. My parents at that point were living in a town called Florham Park, which is near Morristown, the county seat of Morris County, New Jerseabout thirty-five miles from New York City on a railroad line. In those days it was basically country, ex-urban; now it's very much suburban and built up. When my parents moved there in the early '30s, you could walk out your back door and flush pheasants and things like that. My father was a stockbroker, my mother did not have a job outside the home, a paying job, but she was very active in community affairs, local politics, etc. She had a lot of executive ability and had to find an outlet for it. I had one older brother, twelve-and-a-half years older.

Q: The name Schermerhorn I have?it's Schermerhorn.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, you have to guard it like a good Dutchman. Schermerhorn. [laughs]

Q: It's a name that one sees quite a bit in New York society type things or Philadelphil'm not sure. But it's a name that's been around for a long time, or has it?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I wouldn't say New York society, but it goes back to when New York was New Amsterdam. I'm twelfth generation, so my paternal ancestor came in 1642 and he had three sons. The old horse thief, he must've been. [laughs] One who went up to SchenectadFort Orange as it was in those days. And that's the prolific branch from which most people with that name are descended. One stayed in Manhattan and that branch has pretty much died out now, and then another one is in the mid-Hudson Valley and that branch has pretty much died out too. But my grandfather came to New Jersey. He was born in 1860. He went to Union College in Schenectady and then began to work with someone who was an inventor and had a laboratory there and had a number of backers in that area. The inventor had been somewhat of a gadfly; he had moved around from Ohio to Bridgeport, Connecticut to outside of Boston, and then to Schenectady. But then he made what turned out to be the last move to New Jersey and my father went with him on the business side and that fellow's name was Thomas Edison. And his backers with whom he had quarreled in Schenectady stayed behind and that became General Electric.

Q: Where did your father go to college?

SCHERMERHORN: He went to Lafayette.

Q: What was your mother's family's background?

SCHERMERHORN: She was fourth generation. Her mother was French descenactually I have two French grandmotherand her father was German.

Q: Did she go to college?

SCHERMERHORN: No, she went to a secretarial, finishing school. Whatever you'd call it.

Q: Katy Gibbs type thing.

SCHERMERHORN: In the '20s. But she had worked in the '20s in New York in an advertising agency. She had an interesting career. As I said, she had a lot of executive ability.

Q: The ad business was a great place for young women in New York to show their stuff at that time.

SCHERMERHORN: Actually the most interesting woman in my family was my grandmother, my father's mother. She was from a town in upstate New York, three miles from the Canadian border. A town with a French name, Chateaugay, and she was French. In 1837 when Victoria came to the throne in England that was a time when the French in Quebec decided they could make a little mischief and maybe try to secede. There was something called the Papineau Rebellion. It was actually put down by the crown and the people who were involved in it, the participants, were proscribed. And so my grandmother's grandfather fled across the border into New York, as did a number of them. But of course there are a lot of French Canadians in that part of the world too.

But she was a very intelligent and ambitious woman. She went to what in those days they called normal schools, and then taught school. But she graduated at fifteen or something like that and then she somehow found her way to New York and she worked for a magazine called Frank Leslie's Weekly and she got into that.

Q: Oh yes.

SCHERMERHORN: And I don't know how she met my grandfather, but they did and he was a bachelor until he was in his late thirties and she was about ten years younger.

Q: Did your family live in New Jersey more or less from the time you were born, on?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: How about elementary school?

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs] I went to elementary school in my little town of Florham Park. It was a beautiful, beautiful building built in the 1930s by the WPA (Work Projects Administration). It was one of these wonderful?it was quite an imposing building actually. I remember distinctly each one of my teachers from kindergarten through eighth grade. I mean I still remember their names and I can picture them. I think it's something we've lost in the states today. We don't have those dedicated. Most of them were women but there were a couple of men teachers, too.

Q: I always like to immortalize a few names. You know, I mean it's only fair. What the hell? [laughs] Can you name any that were particularly influential as far as you were concerned?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I remember the kindergarten teacher, Katherine Martinay. I remember that because in our rest period she used to read to us from Kipling from the Just So stories. And Mrs. Adamson, the first grade teacher. But the one I remember the most was the third grade teacher, Gladys Stanton. I remember her because she had us embark on a project. What she did all year long was talk to the third graders and have us do little projects about the age of discovery. In third grade. Now this is Magellan and round the world, and Talbot and all these things. I think my interest in geography, foreign affairs, the world outside America, really was piqued by her. And this was quite ambitious; I don't think in third grade maybe now they do that as much.

Q: How about as a small child growing up, what was life like at home? Were affairs talked about over the dinner table? Was this a political family? How would you characterize it?

SCHERMERHORN: I wouldn't say political in a sense of foreign policy, but as I said, my mother was interested in local politics and my father was on the Board of Health and the Planning Board and did that kind of thing. This was a very small town, but you know, not everybody contributed. We always had newspapers in the house. I started reading when I was very young. I think the other thing that made a great impression on me was we got National Geographic and Life magazine, and of course having been born in 1939, I began to look at those when I was four- and five-years-old and there were all the stories about the war. Particularly in Life you had all the things. So it was always knowing; talking about it and being interested in that kind of thing was part of my first impressions.

Q: You mentioned your teacher in third grade and the age of discovery. Did maps and this sort of thing have a fascination?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh yes, because the National Geographic always came with maps. My mother finally said we had to get rid of the magazines, but I still have the maps. [laughs]

Q: Well they now come on a CD with all the National Geographic. It's not quite as good but I have it with all six or seven CDs.

How about reading, were you a reader?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, I was a reader. My father is a reader, my mother somewhat but not as much. All my father's family were readers. You know, we went to the library every week or a couple of times a week.

Q: Was it a Carnegie Library?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it was in the town called Madison, which is three miles away. Our town didn't have one. It was a wonderful library in one of these buildings built, Carnegie, and the librarians were these very erudite women. I remember one summer later, when I was ten or eleven, deciding?I had read The Count of Monte Cristo and then I discovered in the library that Dumas had actually written a whole bookshelf of things which actually details French history if you read them all. The popular ones were The Count of Monte Cristo and The Three Musketeers. But I remember trying to get through a lot of those. We read, we listened to the radio because this was before most people had television anyway, and we played outdoors all the time.

Q: Were there any particular sports that you were interested in?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, everybody played sandlot baseball, or whatever you want to call it, and in the winter we went ice skating because we had a pond not too far away. Actually, we were situated between two golf courses, one was a private golf course and one was publieach about two miles away. Well, one was closer and one was about a mile away. But one in particular was very flat because we were in a part of New Jersey which is verging on marsh actually, the Passaic River, and so along the golf course it was very shallow. It would flood and then freeze and we could skate for a long, long time, and toboggan and things like that. My brother was always very athletic and I was always tagging along after. I was the little pain in the neck who tagged after. [laughs] There weren't that many children my age; there were some who were older. I was a little tomboy because most of them were little boys.

Q: By the time you got to high school, where did you go to high school?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, grade school. We didn't have a high school, the town wasn't big enough. We were sending district to the high school in Madison which is a suburb of Morris. If you know the geography of northern New Jersey, you go out from New York and you go to the Oranges and then you have Summit which is a fairly large town and Short Hills is one of its satellites. And Chatham and then Madison and then Condit Station and Morristown and Bernardsville and you go on. So we went to Madison High School.

Q: You were at the high school from when to when?

SCHERMERHORN: 1953 to '57.

Q: How was the high school?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it was considered a good high school but it was an interesting mix of people because there was another town slightly further away called Hanover which was also a sending district. And this was still, forty or fifty years ago, a lot of small farms. I mean that's all gone now. And so there were sort of farm people and people who weren't probably college material. On the other hand, in my brother's high school class was Alison Shockley, the daughter of William Shockley, Nobel Prize winner. And the reason you had that, you had the Bell Laboratories in that part of New Jersey and you had a lot of people from there. And Drew University is in Madison. So you had quite a mix of people. I mean we had a chapter of the Future Farmers of America.

Q: Did farming ever attract you? [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: No, this wasn't my?but, you know, we used to have turkey shoots and go skeet shooting too. It was an interesting mix. But they sent people to very good colleges. In my time only about half the student body was doing the college preparatory thing.

Q: What type of courses were you taking and which ones appealed to you the most?

SCHERMERHORN: They still offered Latin in those days and I took Latin. The prescribed things: algebra, Latin, English, history. Then I took two years of Latin and three years of French.

Q: Were you picking up any French from your family?

SCHERMERHORN: No. My grandmother spoke very good French, not French Canadian. And my grandparents, a few months after my father was born in 1905, they went and lived in London for five years but went often to the continent because my grandfather was the European representative of Edison Industries there.

Q: How about in high school, any extra-curricular activities?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh yes, I did sports. We played field hockey, and basketball and volleyball in the winter, and we did archery in the spring. Now most of the people in the class had started out in kindergarten together. Since we were from a different place, you know, there were like twenty people in my grade school class that went there. And of course my brother had been there before me and he was a very prominent athletbut he was already out of high school by the time I got there. I became, or maybe what I guess are my natural inclinations emerged, because at the end of our freshman year when we had our election for the class president, I was elected for the next two years and then I was the student body president among other things, which was unusual because I was a girl and this was the 1950s and this was a co-ed high school.

Q: And also you weren't part of the clique.

SCHERMERHORN: Well no, but that was why one could?

Q: Let them split their votes or something.

SCHERMERHORN: I actually was a bit of an entrepreneur; when I ran for student body president I decided I would run on a platform that we needed a foreign student in the school. Now this was 1956 and the American Field Service and these other groups were beginning to do this and I used to go into New York with a friend who was interested. There was something called the Herald-Tribune Forum, the newspaper which is now of course defunct in New York, and only in Europe. But they used to have sort of foreign affairs seminars and things with young people. I wasn't a participant; you could go and listen.

I thought we should be internationally-minded. So I ran on this thing and we won but then we had to do it and we had to raise the money, which in those days in the school I think you had to come up with $600 which doesn't sound like much now. So trying to figure out how to do this and one thing I decided to do, we always had a traditional Thanksgiving day football game with one of the nearby towns and it's also an area of New Jersey that in those days had a lot of commercial florists. It used to be the rose city, the rose garden now. I went to one of these florists and we figured out how much we could get these chrysanthemums for and we made corsages and sold them at the Thanksgiving game and made some money and we did some other things like that. And then one of the teachers, the adviser to the student counciit was actually the biology teacher, but she got interested in this idea toshe carried on the discussion or whatever you needed to do with the American Field Service. Anyway, the year after I left we did have a student and they've had one ever since and I heard when this student council adviser retired about fifteen years ago, you know, my mother was laughing because it was in the local newspaper that she was honored for instituting this prograwhich she did in the sense that she carried it forward, but it was originally something that I had thought we ought to do.

Q: There wasn't a great deal of traffic to Europe at this time. Did you ever get any trips to Europe or anything like that?

SCHERMERHORN: Not then, not until I left college.

Q: In 1957 you were getting ready to graduate. Was anybody pointing you towards anything?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, the college adviser who was also the history teacher, was a terrific woman and she had gone in the early '50s and done an exchange year teaching in Japan not too long after the war. She was more worldly perhaps and more interested in this, so you know in those days they didn't have a full-time college adviser; it was the history teacher doing this on the side. You know, they told you, well, you apply to not more than three or four colleges; one you're pretty sure you're going to get into, and one you definitely get into, and not like, again, today. Her comment was, "You should aim high." So I looked at the seven sisters in those days and I decided that there were two of them that I would look at to decide. Mount Holyoke was one of them for a couple of reasons; one was that there was a girl a year ahead of me in school whose mother was a teacher in the school system, in the junior high school, and her mother was an alumna of Mount Holyoke and Gretchen was going to go there, which she did. Gretchen had been my campaign manager when I went in for student body president [laughs] and her mother was encouraging, "You should look at it," and so on.

And then when we were talking at home my father said, "Well you know, I think Mount Holyoke would be a good idea because your grandmother would be very pleased with that." What he was referring to was the fact that his mother, when she married my grandfather, lived in New Jersey; again, a woman with a lot of executive ability but turned her attention to politics and she was very interested in getting women the vote. And she was active in the New Jersey Federation of Women's Clubs which was in those days kind of a vehicle for women to do a community action. She had held high office in the New Jersey Federation from time to time. In fact, when women finally did get the vote in 1921, she then ran for the New Jersey State Assembly in 1922 because she said, "Now that we have the vote, we have to participate." She was elected and she served one two-year term and then she said, "Alright, now I've done my turn and this is supposed to be group participation," so she didn't run again but she still remained very active in the League of Women Voters and that kind of thing. In the course of her work with those groups, she had come across a woman by the name of Mary Woolley who was the president of Mount Holyoke from 1900 to 1936. She was actually on the delegation to Versailles and she was a national figure and active. My grandmother didn't know her well but she knew of her. So I said that sounds like a good idea.

Q: So you went off to Mount Holyoke?

SCHERMERHORN: I went off to Mount Holyoke.

Q: You were there from, I guess '57 to?

SCHERMERHORN: '61. I will have to interject here. Here's this small high schoothere were about 110 in our graduating class and about half of them were going to collegwe had in that class three National Merit Scholars and six commended, or whatever the next one down is. National Merit wasn't that old; it was only two or three years old at that point.

Q: Well, you know, these high schools were kicking out somdepending on the mix and all tharemarkable students, which reflected the fact that there were remarkable teachers.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: You mentioned your history teacher was the college adviser. What type of history were you getting?

SCHERMERHORN: Well she taught modern European history. It was a very interactive class; she made you talk. We didn't just read.

Q: How about writing? Were people pounding away on you to get you to write?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I can remember my sophomore year in English there was a man; he was only there for a year or two, but in his class he liked my writing and he was encouraging and so forth. We wrote a lot. Actually I feel, even though it was a good high school, that it wasn't as rigorous maybe as it could've been. I never spent much time doing my homework; I used to do all these other extra-curricular things. [laughs] You know, I'd be sitting in the algebra class writing the English essay and stuff like that, or having my student council meeting in study periods. It could've been a little more disciplined or I could've been a little more disciplined.

Q: What was Mount Holyoke like when you arrived? How would you characterize it?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, looking back, and I say this to younger people, that the college, when I left in 1961, was more like it was in 1925 than it was by 1968. It was just on the cusp; the old-style before all the social upheaval of the '60s. We had compulsory chapecompulsory in that it was interdenominational, but you were supposed to go six times a year. It was the honor system. You could go whenever you want but the honor system was very much a part of what you did. We had house mothers and we had what they called "gracious living," which meant on Wednesday and Sunday you had to wear a skirt to dinner and you had coffee afterward. There was no smoking in the dorm but that was more for fire insurance. Well there was one room that was designated as smoker so that's where the Bridge tables were. I already knew how to play Bridge because my parents liked to play and taught us. Fortunately, I didn't smoke and I didn't want to, so I didn't get into that trap of being in the smoker playing Bridge all day long. And you pretty much didn't have cars. I remember one of my good friends flaunted this. She used to drive up every quarter and park it. No one ever figured it out. Of course in those days they just assumed that nobody would dare do that. She lived outside of Boston, so she wouldn't drive it during the week, but she'd go home on the weekends. [laughs]

Q: How about the social life therAmherst and?

SCHERMERHORN: Well there were these mixers and so forth that you did. There wasn't a lot of social life, I must say. It depended. Sometimes people who knew people, you went on blind dates, or if you knew somebody that?two of my classmates were at Radcliffe and one was at Harvard and I used to go over there and visit them and meet people.

Q: I went to Mount Holyoke several times; I had a cousin who went there and a next door neighbor who went there. We used to get along. We didn't have cars, we would hitchhike.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, we used to hitchhike or you'd take the bus. You'd go into Springfield or Holyoke. You'd get the bus to New Haven or Hanover or wherever you were going to go. But I mean pretty much you sat there and studied.

Q: What did you major in there?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I majored in History and minored in International Relations, and took some Economics, not a lot but some. Mount Holyoke wastill ivery well-known for its sciencpre-med people and so forth. It also had a very good History Department and Political Science Department, but I decided I wanted the history. The political science, you know, I thought I needed the foundation of history. But we had two professors in the Political Science Department; one was International Relations and the other was American Politics. They were great rivals and always at each other, but it made for a very lively department and a very innovative one. The International Relations person used to laugh and call her the mother of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization); in the post-war period she had known and been very involved with Spaak, and Schumann and all the names and was very involved in that in the UN and so forth, and had contacts all over. The Politics woman, again, was very well wired into Washington and she and a professor at Amherst, in about 1930 or '40, are credited with being the first to start a Washington intern program for their students. And now of course every college does that, but they were instrumental in creating that concept. And she continued to?you know, she placed her students. They used to alternate the chairmanship at the departments and each one would try to outdo the others, but as I said, it made for a very vibrant place.

Q: Were you pointed towards anything at this point?

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, Life magazine tuned me into the world. [laughs] I thought of the Foreign Service, and in fact a few years ago when I was packing up one place I had found my high school yearbook and I was just looking in it and under my picture someone had written the caption "will be the vice-consul in Nice." And I don't even remember in high school thinking that or knowing that. I did think about it in college but I got very intimidated because the people I knew in college, or heard of, hadn't passed the exam. You asked what was the climate at Mount Holyoke; it was very demanding, I think. But also they kept telling you how fortunate you were to be there. It was a variation on that you look around a law school and the professor says, "Look to either side of you because one of you won't be here," or something like that. And they marked on the curve in those days; grade inflation was not something they knew about. And of course here were a whole bunch of people who were accustomed to all doing well, and you're not. Only ten percent of them are going to get As, and so on, and so on. So it was a bit intimidating.

One of the people who hadn't passed the exam was a woman in the class ahead of me who was really a protï¿½gï¿½ of this International Relations professor and went on to get a Marshall Scholarship and is now a very well-known, respected professor still. [laughs] And I'm thinking, well, if she didn't pass?And my roommate's brother from Princeton who certainly looked like what people used to say diplomats should look like, and I'm thinking there's no way I would ever pass this. So I didn't take the exam, which is again stupid.

Q: It was something that was out of the ordinary. I took the exam when I was in the military in '54 and I really?later I heard I would've been intimidated probably, but I just sat and took it. I was an enlisted man in Germany and I just thought what the hell, it's something to do.

Was Mount Holyoke preparing you for a career, or as they used to say, for the MRS degree?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, they never said they were preparing for the MRS. Mount Holyoke has always had this tradition of service; it was the oldest women's college, 1837, and it had strong religious ties. Christian service ties, I guess would be a better description. The founder was doing congregational, but in the nineteenth century many of the women either married missionaries and then went out or became missionaries themselves. In the United States there are about three colleges that are considered daughter colleges of Mount Holyoke, including Mills in California and Western College for Women in Ohio. There are about five colleges around the worlone in India, and then something called a college in the British lexicon in Iran; it's not a university but a college, and places like that. So there was a strong connection there with, again, looking out in the world, and service. I would say Mount Holyoke, maybe more than some of the others, was predicated on the idea that women would do something constructivwhether that involved with a husband or not.

Q: It's a very good thing, particularly in those days, to lay upon you, I think.

SCHERMERHORN: Well it made a burden on you though, too. Even if it may have been an ideal in those days as a practical matter, and certainly in the Foreign Service, it was always a matter of choice. You could have either/or; you can't do everything. Even though they'd like to tell you?when my class entered Mount Holyoke, the then-president in his welcoming speech used a phrase which is now kind of the catchword for the college, "uncommon women."

Q: Wasn't there a play with Wendy?

SCHERMERHORN: She's an alumna and she's used that phrase.

Q: Was that the title of a play she put out?

SCHERMERHORN: Well that's I think one of them; she's written several. In fact, we have the second Pulitzer Prize winning playwright this year; a woman called Susan Laurie Parks has just won class of '82, or '83, whatever it is.

Q: How did you do coming out of Mount Holyoke; did you graduate well?

SCHERMERHORN: No. [laughs] As I said, "oh and ten percent?" I was down in that whatever; a good C+ or this. I remember one thing that wouldn't happen today; my junior year I took an Art History course which I hadn't taken before, and I had a certain affinity for. I did very well; I got As on all the exams. But at the end the professor called me and said, "I would like to give you an A in the course, but this is ten percent and you're not an Art major." I didn't complain; in those days, you didn't complain. I think that's unfair, [laughs] but then life is unfair. But in the end, as they told you, well, it didn't matter. Some of the girls used to get very concerned because they wanted to go to graduate school, medical school, or whatever and they said never mind, people understand that Mount Holyoke is [blah, blah, blah].

Q: You hear these things but I'm not quite sure that it always plays that way.

SCHERMERHORN: Now I'm sure they've had to relax that policy. I remember these two classmates who were at Radcliffe; one of them was brilliant, she was junior Phi Beta Kappshe was first in her clasand the other one also was Phi Beta Kappa and graduated Cum Laude. They were saying, oh yeah, about half of the Radcliffe class graduated Cum Laude. And see Harvard's take on this even thirty-five years ago or forty years ago, was well, if it's Harvard, of course they're better. That's coming home to roost a little bit now.

Q: By the way, in 1960 did the campus get caught up in the Kennedy candidacy and all that?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. You know you didn't have televisions in your own room; there was one television in the living room and one in each dorm and I remember people sitting around following this and watching it very closely. And also watching the landing on the moon, the astronauts and?

Q: Well the landing on the moon came much later.

SCHERMERHORN: Not moon, I'm sorry. Space, Glenn.

Q: Because the landing on the moon happened when we were in Saigon.

SCHERMERHORN: That's right. I had gone from Saigon back to Colombo and I watched it in Colombo.

But again, television wasn't such a big thing; you had one television and you couldn't sit in the department.

Q: Were you picking up politics at that poinbecoming a committed Democrat, Republican, Marxist, or what-have-you?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I had my political views, yes. I wasn't actively campaigning for anybody or anything like that. I don't think anybody on the campus did that very much. I did have one classmate who was a history major who was a dedicated Goldwater supporter in college. [laughs] Very articulate.

Q: Well what did you plan to do when you graduated in '61?

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, I had thought about the Foreign Service but was a little intimidated. I don't know why I felt intimidated, but I did, so I didn't apply. I thought about going to law school but I wasn't too inclined to do that. Anyway, I decided until I could figure out what I would do I would go to Boston. So I did that and I worked at Harvard Business School.

Q: What were you doing there?

SCHERMERHORN: People who know about Harvard Business School in that era, when I say that, they say, "Oh, you were one of those readers," because they used to hire women to read the case studies that the class had to prepare in that method, and grade them. Of course there were no womel think one or twin the business school itself. People always thought it was kind of an irony that they hired these women that they wouldn't let in to grade the cases. But I didn't do that. In those days to work at the university they had a recruitment office and you just went in and then they sent you to different places or whatever. And so they sent me over to the business school to talk to the woman over there and she said, "Well we have a visiting professor who needs a research assistant. He's only here for six months [and so on and so forth]." That sounded fine to me because I knew it wasn't something I wanted; I just needed to get into the job market.

This professor turned out to be a cultural anthropologist named Edward Hall, who has published something called The Silent Language. He had published it at that point and he was now working on another book and so he had me?and I don't exactly know why he was on the business school. They were beginning to look at the idea of introducing cultural norms and so forth into how you do business.

Q: Not ethics, but ...

SCHERMERHORN: No, not ethics. [laughs] I think he was on the faculty of the University of Illinois or someplace like that, so only popped up every once in a while. But anyway I did these abstracts of articles and worked up stuff. It wasn't very interesting. And then that was over with and this employment woman said, "Well now, we have another professor who is here on a project and we'd like you?his current research associate is leaving. Would you like to do this?" Well anyway, I did. It turned out to be a professor who was an econometrician and he was doing a study of consumer buying patterns for white goods and appliances and whatnot. He had gotten his data from a study he had conducted with the subscribers to Consumer Reports and he was from Reed College and he was there. Anyway I went and did this and it turned out that this man was a screamer, one who does management by screaming and he'd be yelling at everybody all the time. I found out later that he'd been through about three or four people and none of them would stay with him. [laughs]

He had this huge chart and he had in black ink or something his figures, his data from the study, and then he had the figures in red that he's extrapolated, and then in blue the extrapolations from the extrapolations, and it went out to?And I'm looking at this and I wasn't an econometrician, and I'm thinking boy, I think this is pretty flimsy. But I remember one time he told me to go to the library and find something and I came back and I said, "It's not there." So he started screaming, "You're stupid! Of course it's there!" and he marched me over to the library and then he found out that what he wanted didn't exist. I think he was actually a psychotic case. I later found out that they desperately wanted to get rid of him but he hadn't produced anything from this study in the appointed timwhatever it was, a year or somethinso they extended him in the hopes that maybe something would come out of this. Then I had enough of that and I left. So I don't know whatever happened to Professor Coleman and his project, and I decided there was nothing there for me.

And then I had some friends who were going to San Francisco, some people I shared this wonderful apartment with in Cambridge, and in those days you only shared with girls if you were a girl. [laughs]

Q: Oh yes.

SCHERMERHORN: Anyway, one of them was going out there so I decided I had always wanted to see California and why shouldn't I go out theand I knew some other people out there from college and so forth. So I went to California and I gave myself about three weeks to get a job and I got one in an advertising agency, which again is something I vaguely thought about doing. It was on the business side; it was the media buying side of it, not the creative side, as they call it. And that was another kind of zany place.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I was the media assistant and they had more industrial clients; it wasn't a glamorous- (end of tape)

-placement of the ads and the billing for it and all kinds of?And the media director was a woman who was very interesting, very competent, and the men who had started iit was a fairly new agency, it was a couple had started iagain, the president was a screamer; he'd come out into the lobby and start yelling at everybody. [laughs] I also worked?they had somebody who was a public?one man office space?but it was a public relations company and I worked for him. He had the California Bar Association. I can still recite the names of most of the law firms in California of course. [laughs] And he had the California Wine Growers Association and you did print releases on the old mimeographs and that kind of thing. I had been hired the same week as a young man who was going to be a copyrighter. The place wasn't that big and we had cubicles there. Tom was an interesting fellow and he knew some JapanesI don't know how he knew thaand he used to get yelled at regularly. [laughs]

Then one evening I was there and some people I knew were going to go to a World Affairs Council meeting and I went along because it was the meeting where they were going to talk about international careers or something like that. There was someone talking about the Foreign Service there and I was listening to this and I'm saying, you know, you always wanted to do that. How stupid? How do you know you wouldn't pass it if you don't take the exam? I had been there about a year and I had had about enough of this stuff anyway, so I took the exam and I took the law boards, again, and I decided that if I didn't take the Foreign Service Exam I was going to go to law school then. So I took it and I passed the written, so then I had to organize the interview. I decided I would do the interview in New York; I would leave.

By that time I would've been there a year and a half. So one morning I said to this young man, the copyrighter, "You know, I've had it and I'm going to go in and give my notice to the president this week. He looked at me and he said, "I am, too." [laughs] And I said, "What are you doing?" and he said, "Well, I've been hired by Dentsu Advertising in Tokyo, and I'm going to go." So we got laughing and we said, "We've got to do it together." So we walked in and he said, "What do you two want?" and I said, "Well I'm telling you I want to give my two [or three] week notice [or whatever it was]," "You ungrateful. Why are you leaving?" I felt like saying, "Because you're such a horse's ass," but I didn't. [laughs] Then he said, "What do you want?" to Tom. Tom said the same thing. He went through one of his rages out in the lobby. [laughs]

The only interesting thing about this agency was that one of the people who was not yet a partner, he was obviously angling to kick out the other guy who was a partner and move in, and he did, and he somehohe had worked for one of the Kaiser companiehad latched onto the idea of a National Football League franchise and they had this account in the beginninthis was 1963 or somethinand then it's of course gone big time. I don't know how that all happened.

Q: It's interesting. In a way you were following a tried and true course, graduating from one of the better colleges, male or female, and ending up in the advertising side. So many did, as opposed to manufacturing or something. I suppose the people with good education that's one of the places where they could use you for a while and then I guess spit you out or something like that.

SCHERMERHORN: At one point I might've been interested in an academic career, but I thought I was more, I wouldn't say entrepreneurial, but?There's still a part of me that likes very much to research. I like very much doing the research and my papers were always very interesting, very innovative, or whatever. But I realized that probably a lot of what went along with that wasn't really my temperament either so I didn't pursue that, and then I thought also I probably didn't do well enough to?again, I think that was a wrong conclusion. But when you're that age you don't know.

When I was in California at this point this was Mario Savio at Berkley, and as I said I'm on the cusp between what went before and this was?And I had met a group of people who were Berkley graduatel met them in Cambridgand one of them was in San Francisco and he'd been very active in student politics at Berkley, so that was interesting. And then I found out when I said to some people that I was going to take the Foreign Service exam, they said, "Oh, we know a professor at Berkley who advises them. Why don't you go and talk to him?" So I dil forget his name now. And then they said, "There's a fellow over there doing his Ph.D. who has already been accepted but he's deferred until he finishes his Ph.D.; he and his wife. So why don't you meet them?" I did and it was John Stempel. Do you know John at all?

Q: No, I just know the name.

SCHERMERHORN: So he and Nancy were actually the only people when I got in the Foreign Service that I had met before who were in there. He actually entered in 1965. He was finishing up his Ph.D.

Q: When did you take the Foreign Service exam?

SCHERMERHORN: In 1965, in the spring.

Q: You went to New York to take the?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I took the written in California and then they came back in five or six months or whatever it was, and so I left California in October so that I could take the oral in New York in November.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions asked on the oral?

SCHERMERHORN: A little bit. I went into New York from New Jersey on the train and the address was someplace downtown and it was a GSA warehouse or something. It was some awful place. And you went in and it looked like a warehouse; it looked like, [laughs] you know, the bare bulb over?no rugs, no furniture except one desk for a receptionist and then another one with a table with three men seated behind it and then a chair in the middle under a bulb. I mean it really was?

Q: Oh boy.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. All the men were very well-tailored and looked very forbidding, I guess I would say. They asked me a question about De Gaulle. I sort of wandered my way through that. I don't know, they asked those questions they used to ask about if you were a consular officer and somebody wants you to ask for a bottle of liquor, stuff like that. There were some other general questions. There were some cultural questions; I don't remember exactly what ones. I do remember thiat one point I was looking at the person to one side and I had just finished, and the person over here kind of barked out, "Do you drink?" and this was Al Capone. You know, nothing like that when we were talking. And I said, "Well I take a drink. I believe there is a distinction," and they all laughed. And I realized immediately that that was the key. I mean I had made them laugh. Up to that point they had been completely deadpan, no sense of humor. Anyway, so they continued. I mean, do I drink? [laughs] And then they said, "Okay, you're finished. Leave the room and please wait outside until we're ready to call you in again. So I went out and the girl said, "There's one chair. Go sit over there," and I hadn't even gotten across to the chair when the door opened and they came back and they said, "You've passed." So I figured that it was making them laugh because I didn't know all the questions, but I've since told people who take the exam, it's not whether you know a specific answer, it's how you handle the fact that you don't know, if you don't know. But I also think I was a beneficiary. Lyndon Johnson had just made some great pronouncement that year about there shall be more women in government and I thought that they probably had some mandate to pass. Any woman who walked in who could still stand up after. [laughs]

Q: I came in when they wanted a massive infusion of main streeters in the Foreign Service. I had been an enlisted man and my address was California although I had this Williams thing which put me into the other camp, but I think I was part of the main street. They get these things periodically of minorities or women or geographic distribution or more economists or something like that.

SCHERMERHORN: Well you and I know that statistics lie. They draw inferences from some of this data, which is totally wrong. I would consider myself main street in terms of, as I said, I went to a public high school that was not as homogenous as it is now, a diverse kind of thing. You had blacks in this town who went to high school with us, which was suburbia but a little different.

Q: So was this '66 when you got?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, it was funny. It was the day in New York wheremember there was the great blackout in New York.

Q: Oh yes. [laughs] Less than nine months afterward they had a big boom in children being born.

SCHERMERHORN: Well I came out of this interview, and it was, as I said, in some god forsaken part of Lower Manhattan, and I plotted my way across to the subway and it was about five-thirty and I was just walking down from the street, stepping down in the subway, when this went on. So fortunately I wasn't in the subway. I did get home that night finally; I think I took the bus or something. But anyway, that was the day, the great blackout.

Q: There's usually a hiatus before they bring you in, when they do their security and all that sort of stuff. What did you do then?

SCHERMERHORN: Let's see, that was November and then they said, "You've passed," and then I got the papers to fill out for the security clearance. I had my interview for that in Boston actually because in February I was up there. And then I went home to New Jersey and you have to have the medical exam. So they said the nearest government facility was the Veterans Administration Hospital in East Orange, New Jersey. So I called and I went down there and I had a doctor who I think must've been a veteran of the Spanish-American War, himself, and I thought, I don't know. [laughs] So I sent that in and then the security stuff and they said could they interview me and I was going to be in Boston for a week because one of my friends was getting married up there, so I had the interview up there which was sort of a non-interview. It was done by February. I was just waiting; I wasn't going to do anything until I heard. If I didn't pass all the rest of it then I would have to go and do something else, but if I did I just?So they called and it was a Tuesday and they said, "Can you be in Washington Thursday morning?" and I actually could have, but I said, "Well no." I thought that was a little abrupt. It turned out they were trying to fill the March class and they said, "Well that's alright, the next class is June and you can come in June," so that's what I did. But I went to Washington very soon after that and I went to the Hill (Capitol Hill) and I worked in a congressman's office for about eight weeks.

Q: Which congressman was that?

SCHERMERHORN: His name was Don Clausen and he was frol think it was then the fifth district of California; it was Marin County all the way up to the Oregon border. It's now been redistricted. He was a very nice man, nice office staff. In those days before word processors and computers, they had something called the robotypewriter and you punched a tape like the teletype thing and then you could run the tape through and fill in. So my job was to run the tapes. We had boxes for all the letters and they had a form letter type thing. You'd sort the mail and according to what issue was being addressed you'd put it in the box and then when you got about twenty in the box you'd run the tape and answer them. That's what I did for six or eight weeks. [laughs] But it was fun; I enjoyed that.

Q: Were you running into more people and saying what's this Foreign Service all about?

SCHERMERHORN: Well yes. My parents sort of wondered about it, but they said, "Alright, if you want to do it, yes." [laughs] Because at that point the reality of actually being sent somewhere wasn't there yet; you know, it was just go to Washington. Some people who knew me said, "Yes, you should've done that."

Q: Your class started in June of '67?

SCHERMERHORN: No, '66. So see I had been out of college for five years at that point, by the time we went through all the?But I mean I think I was probably about the average age of the class because in those days the age limit was still thirty-one.

Q: You're A-100 class started in June, '66. What number was it, do you remember?

SCHERMERHORN: What was it? Seventy-three, I think. There's a new numbering system now. They told us that it was the biggest class that they'd ever had. I don't know if that's true. I think there were eighty-seven people in it. But that included fifteen USIA (United States Information Agency) people. We've come full-circle. They used to do it with us, then they didn't, and now they certainly do it again. And the reason was, again, nothing changes in the bureaucracy. Apparently they had not been able to process everything and then they had a limit for that fiscal year still ended in June at that time and they wanted to cram a lot of people in. That's why they were trying to get me earlier and so on. Normally I guess they had two counselors, or whatever they called them, who were kind of advisers and they had to bring in some additional people to do that because there were just so many of us. It was very intimidating; again, because you walk in and find out that two of the eighty-seven are Rhodes Scholars, and I'm thinking I'm in the wrong place. [laughs]

Q: [laughs] I certainly felt this because I had been an enlisted man for four years and it hadn't rubbed off yet, and everybody is getting up and talking about being an officer here and there and I thought, my god.

How about the composition of women, minorities, and that sort of thing?

SCHERMERHORN: Well there were actually nine women of this eighty-seven, and I think three of them were USIA, which again fits the profile even more. And minoritiel don't know what you consider a minority; there were no obvious minorities in it. Whether there were people who classified themselves as some of that?

Q: How did you find the course after you adjusted to the fact that you were a member of this group?

SCHERMERHORN: There were some interesting things about it. I didn't think the course was intimidating. But I remember at one point one of these advisers who had been co-opted to come in, took the women over and he said, "You know, we don't like to take women in the Foreign Service because you all leave," and of course none of us had wit enough to say it's because you make us leave. Then we did the consular thing. But you know, there were a lot of interesting people. When you say the composition, again, it certainly is a canard that the Foreign Service is only Ivy League; I mean there were peoplout of the eighty-seven, there were probably eighty different institutions. There might've been a few who came from the same place. Everything from A to Z; I mean yes, we had a Brown and Harvard or something, but we also had one person who did not have a college degree in this class. So we had everything across the board. In was not homogenous in that sense at all. I think the element of homogeneity was an interest in the foreign environment.

Q: And also bright people.

SCHERMERHORN: Starting from that moment I realized that these people who did so cavalierly say, "Well of course the elite Foreign Service is only Ivy League," it was not true of the '60s, it's not true now, and it was never true. One of the most interesting autobiographies is Robert Murphy's, and he recounts how he had no college education; he happened to have a facility for languages and was bilingual in German because he grew up in Milwaukee. I guess his mother was German. Look at that career. And Phil Habib. It's never been true.

Q: Lebanese immigrants.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: Well, another one too is even if you were looking at this, I've gone pretty much through that generation, that the ones that came out from World War II, many of them ended up going to Harvard and Yale and all but this is because 1) they had the GI Bill, and 2) those schools were wide-open in those days and if you were smart. This was the first time getting off the farm or something and so you had people really from quite modest backgrounds, but with the GI Bill and the fact that they could get into these prestigious schools without much trouble, meant that if you looked at it you would think well this is part of the standard routine. It wasn't at all.

SCHERMERHORN: It wasn't at all. And if you go back through those logs owell of course in the nineteenth century it was the Consular Service and that was a little differenbut it just wasn't that way. Certainly there were people from moneyed backgrounds, but not necessarily a preponderance. But I think some of the image comes from World War II and after; you know, people think of diplomacy and they think of Sumner Welles and Dean Atchison and the Dulleses and they look at that. But that's a different level that we're talking about.

Q: Was Vietnam playing a role in your class? Was our commitment in Vietnam important?

SCHERMERHORN: It was just beginning to be and there were some people in the class who were sent to Vietnam, but out of this eighty-seven I would think there were three or four. I mean it was not this wholesale sending off. It was just beginning to be. Now of course people are accustomed to bidding on what they?In those days you had the little interview with these advisers. Supposedly they wanted a little chance to talk to you to see where they might plug you into the open slot, but you didn't bid; you didn't know what was available. I remember going in to this man, J. Willard Devlin. Do you know him?

Q: Oh I know Bill very well. He's a very good friend of mine.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I'll tell you this. So I go in and I say good morning, or whatever, and he says, "Oh hello," and continues right on and says, "and of course you want to go to Paris," and I kind of looked at him and I said, "Well, no, actually, I don't even want to go to Europe." And he looks at me askance and says, "But all women join the Foreign Service to go to Paris."

Q: I guess. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: And that's when I said, "Well no, actually I would like to go to Indonesia or East Africa," and then I'm sure he looked at me as if he had a real screwball on his hands. Again, that sets the attitude, the mindsets. [laughs]

Q: Yes. Were you feeling this in other things? Would the speakers get up and say, "Of course you ladies make the exception," or not?

SCHERMERHORN: I don't remember any of that from the speakers; I do remember a few of these things from the staff. The head of the course was Alex Dabbit. Do you know Alex?

Q: I don't think so.

SCHERMERHORN: A very urbane character. I'm pretty sure he wasn't too happy to see all these women around here. Nine out of eighty-seven is about ten percent and I think that was probably a bigger percentage then. We didn't feel it so much because we had a critical mass. If I had been in a class of fifty and there were one or two of us we probably would've felt more threatened, or whatever you want to say, by it. I do remember though at one point at the end of this, one of the young men who was a rather brash young man, came up to me and he said, "Well Lange, you're the only woman in the class that when you ask her a question she isn't stuck for an answer," and I kind of looked at him and I said, "What a jerk you are," because that wasn't true. But again that's an indication of how some of the classmates were. On the other hand there were people, and this is where maybe the education thing does make a difference, one who had been at Brown who became a good friend, he and his wife, and others who did have the same background as I in terms of education were much more accepting maybe.

Q: Did you find that having been out, trying various things, but you had been out of college five years, made a difference in approach that say some of the people who came right out of the academic world?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: You know, there's that certain pride in earning your own living and that sort of thing.

SCHERMERHORN: But that was an interesting thing. I remember that summer everybody remarked that on the DC buses there was a big placard saying "Join the DC transit and be a bus driver, starting salary $7200 a year," which was more than the starting salary with only a BA (Bachelor of Arts Degree) and just out of college. I think the spectrum went up to having an advanced degree and whatever. And I didn't have the advanced degree but they gave me some credit for my work experience. We started in those days as 8s or 7s and if you had the advanced degree you could start as a 7. Well they didn't give me the 7 because I didn't have that, but they gave me a high step of the 8 because I had the work experience of sorts. [laughs] But you know, that was kind of a wry comment people were saying bus drivers?

Q: I recall that, too, at the times when you were kind of relating yourself to the DC bus driver. Usually we weren't coming out that ahead on that.

SCHERMERHORN: One of the funny things I remember, too, our course was in the building in Rosslyn that had an apartment building upstairs, but the bottom was the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) or whatever it was. And they pointed out to us that the building across the couple of streets there was going to be the new FSI. It was almost ready to move in. Well after we'd been in the course two or three weeks, one day we came back from lunch and they said, "Everybody pick up your chair"  you had those chairs with the little writing thing on the"and walk across the street to the new building." And we did that. It became apparent almost from day one in that new building that it was not going to work well because they had the language classes in it and they all stopped at ten minutes of the hour to take the break and then everybody wanted to go down and get their mail and make their telephone calls on the ground floor. This was eleven or twelve stories and the elevators didn't worand didn't work for thirty years. [laughs] But it was fun.

Q: Were you picking up any sort of corridor wisdom that you wanted to do this field, you wanted to go to that area, avoid administrative, don't do consular, become a political officer? What were you picking up?

SCHERMERHORN: They didn't have the formal cone systems yet but obviously there were the categories that you mentioned. I said I was interested in being an economic officer and I had learned enough about that to think that well, women to compete as political officers was probably going to be very difficult and that I might be better off?And since I had some background in that; I'd worked at the business school and I had some economics. And even then they were saying they needed more people to do that. So I thought I didn't want to get pigeonholed into consular?Well I didn't really know. It was very formalized then. You were told that you were going to have two two-year tours overseas and then you'd be back in Washington for a two-year tour. And one of those first two-year tours would be a consular tour. And they also had something then which was a very good idea, which has I think gone by the board, and that is they had the rotational program, what they called Central Complement. Anyway, one would be a Central Complement and one would be a consular tour supposedly.

But I think I expressed even then when I had this little thing with J. Willard Devman, I felt well, I might as well make a virtue out of this instead of?so then I went to one of these Central Complement jobs. Not everybody got those because they didn't have enough of them with the eighty-seven minus fifty. There were fifteen USIA and I forget however many, but more than five, less than ten, of a category that we really don't have anymore called FSSO, Foreign Service Staff Officer. Remember there was a period when they had that. And supposedly they were people who would be administrative and counselor officers only, and they were later just rolled over into the regular FSO (Foreign Service Officer) chord but one woman was in that category. So I went to one of these Central Complement jobs and then I went to a consular job.

Q: You were asking for East Africa or Indonesia, so where did you go?

SCHERMERHORN: I said I don't know whether they threw the dart or pulled the thing out of the fishbowl, but I went to Colombo, which was sort of halfway between. One of the great things that allowed the Foreign Service to open up a little more after the '50s, was they apparently used to require you to have a language at fluency level to even take the exam.

Q: That pushed it off to sort of the eastern establishmenpeople who had French nannies or something.

SCHERMERHORN: Or people like Murphy who had grown up in an ethnic household, or whatever you want to call it.

I had French in high school and some in college, but of course in those days they didn't teach it very well. They didn't teach you to speak it. So I didn't have the 3/3 in French. So then they made these assignments and they said not everybody who needs to do the language will be able to go to a post where?But everybody will stay in Washington and get a world language to the 3 level before they go out if they don't already have it. So I did French even though I knew I was going to Colombo.

Q: So when did you go out to Colombo?

SCHERMERHORN: Let's see, that was January of '67.

Q: And you were there until '69?

SCHERMERHORN: Until January of '69.

Q: While you were there it was called Ceylon, is that right? It later became Sri Lanka.

Lange, before we move to Ceylon, you said you had a couple of things you wanted to talk about, about the A-100 course and all, Dick Holbrooke, and then how women were treated at the time.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, there's something I recalled after we had stopped the tape before. You had asked how did Vietnam figure at this stage in the thoughts of the A-100 course and its directors. As I said, they were beginning to talk about it and two of our classmates were assigned but they were in regular embassy jobs, not in the CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support) thing that developed later. Steve Haukness was one of the people who was killed in the Tet (Tet Offensive) uprising. But at one point they had on a bulletin board a little sign that said, "Anyone interested in Vietnam should call this number in the old Executive Office Building," so I thought okay, I'll see what they are talking about and I called the number and whoever answered said, "Oh yes, you can come for an appointment. We'll tell you what it's about when you get here." So I went over at the appointed time and the receptionist said, "This way. You're going to see Mr. Holbrooke." Well I didn't know who he was, but anyway.

They escorted me down a corridor and into this room that looked like a broom closet; the desk in it filled the whole space and there was no window, and behind it was this very young looking man who was Dick Holbrooke. And he explained that he was a Foreign Service officer who had just returned from a tour in Vietnam probably a year before thal think he was there from 1963 to 196and that he was now working in the old Executive Office Building. In the White House he and some other people were working on developing programs for Vietnam. And what he was talking about was what later they dubbed CORDS, Civil Organization and Rural Development. But at that point I don't think it had that name. But anyway at the end of this he said, "Well it was very pleasant talking with you, but you know, we're not taking any women in this program." [laughs] And I think what had happened, since my first name is not immediately identifiable, whoever took it, they thought they were talking to a man. But he was very polite and so forth. I thought, well, alright, and I left. [laughs] And that's why I said the two people in my class who did go to Vietnam went in regular jobs, one vice-consul in Hue, and whatever the other one was.

And then the day that we got our assignments, we had two people in the class whose names began with W and they did this alphabetically, so we went all through this and then the first one said, "Miss Willow," and he had this very funny expression on his face and he said, "Well Miss Willow was going to go to Bangkok," and then he gave a big smile and he said, "but now Miss Willow and [the next man] Mr. Winstanley are both going to Baghdad because they're getting married." But the point was obviously it was the woman who had to give up what she was doing, and of course proving the assertion that they had made to us earlier, "Well we don't like to take you women because you get married."

Q: Yes.

SCHERMERHORN: As a footnote I would say that they went off together and then when women could be reappointed she did get reappointed and they subsequently divorced and then each had their own careers.

Also one of my classmates who was even then identifiable as someone quite, I think, interesting and unique, was Arnie Raphel. In fact he was the only person in the class, out of this huge class, who got to take a hard language first. This of course made people wonder who he really worked for. [laughs] Because in those days everybody did the world languages and Arnie got to take Persian and went off to Isfahan. He also did something which they said you didn't do, that is you'd have two beginning tours in different places, different functions and so on, but Arnie got to do his second tour also in Iran, but at the embassy because he had the Farsi.

Q: While you were in Washington in this very large class, did you have a woman's mafia? Sort of getting together and talking about the role of women and what are we going to do about it? You know, that sort of thing.

SCHERMERHORN: I was sharing a house in Georgetown and one evening I asked, since we had nine women, them all to my house for dessert or whatever it was; not because I was particularly taken up with talking about the role of women or anything, just as a solidarity, I guess, if you will. But not in any complaining way or anything like that. But with eighty-seven people we did things in committees; you were all over the place.

Q: Now was there any organizesay Tuesday morning breakfast group or somethinany support group for women or anything of that nature? Was there anything going around at that time?

SCHERMERHORN: Not that I was aware of.

Q: Was there any feeling that, gee, it would've been nice, or did it really make a difference?

SCHERMERHORN: No, I didn't think I was missing something. I think what the women thought, which is of course what you were supposed to think, is that you had inserted yourself into this male environment and you did that, you didn't do something else.

Q: I have to say when I came in, I think, like almost everybody else who came in, I felt out of place and maybe they took me in and I was in the wrong club. I've interviewed many people who've felt the same way because it's supposed to be such a fancy outfit and you're just you.

SCHERMERHORN: But then you look around and you realize everybody's in the same boat. Almost everybody is in the same boat.

Q: Yes. There are always a few who really?Dick Murphy was in my thing and he obviously was a couple cuts above most of us.

Well anyway, you were off to Ceylon in 1967. Talk about what you saw and what was sort of the situation there at that time.

SCHERMERHORN: Well Ceylon had the reputation, justified, of having been the British colony that was left in the best state at independence. The highest literacy rate, the highest number of foreign exchange reserves, whatever measures you wanted. And then I think the population was about twelve to fifteen million, but it hadn't taken them very long to diminish all of these assets at a great rate because they had had a socialist government, Prime Minister Bandaranaike came in in 1958, I think. Independence had been in 1948 and the Ceylonese used to say in the '60s and '70s that they thought they were lucky when they got independence at the time that India did. Basically the British just said, okay, we're going to wash our hands of the sub-continent so we'll do it wholesale. They had a little nationalist movement, but they never really had to fight for it in any real way. It was a gift. They used to say afterward, you know, it should've been harder for us. Maybe we would've done a better job afterward.

Then 1958 was when Bandaranaike was assassinatel think he'd been in office since 195and then his widow became prime minister. There was an electoral process. In a country like that there are a half a dozen families and their connections to manage everything. So she had been in office, and it was only in I think 1965 or so that she had finally been voted out. But ten years or so of this rather drastic socialism had really ruined the economy of the country. They had exchange controls, export controls, import controls, every kind of control you could think of, and they had great shortages and people were hurting. That is really the period that I think gave some momentum to the Tamil problem, because as long as the pie was big enough, but once everybody got squeezed, then of course the Tamils got even shorter stripped. They were on their way. So that's when I think they began to organize and to become more interested in being a political force that would gain them something at whatever cost that might be. Although the violent part of their political activism wasn't manifesting itself at that point.

Q: When you arrived was Madame Bandaranaike in or out?

SCHERMERHORN: She was out; she had been out for about a year. This new government called the UNP, the United National Party, was more to the center right and they were trying to undo a lot of these exchange controls and revive the economy. But of course what they managed to do was drive the investment out. In fact what they did was they made it so inhospitable for the British businessmen who were there.

Q: This was the Socialists beforehand.

SCHERMERHORN: Before, right. The British population had gone down from something like fifteen or twenty thousand to like five thousand in this time. But a lot of these people who left were the professionals in the tea business and they went to places like New Guinea, which was beginning to develop a tea industry, and to Kenya. I remember much later reading one of the London papers in the '70s when there was a little headline that for the first time the price of Kenyan tea had exceeded the price of tea of Ceylon on the London tea market where the auctions are. Meaning they had exported their quality control and everything, so they really did a bad number on the economy by this. Basically why the foreigners left is they were not permitted to repatriate earnings and profits.

Q: I often have the feeling that the London School of Economics and all of that involved, was more pernicious to the colonial world than Marxism ever was. This whole idea of socialism was you didn't increase the pie, you just changed the slices around.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, and when you have a static pie in a growing population you have no place to go.

Tape 2, Side A

Q: Had you done any reading about Ceylon before you went there or did you sort of arrive there wide-eyed and bushy-tailed?

SCHERMERHORN: I had done a little reading about South Asia, but mostly India. I didn't know a lot about Ceylon, but you know, you did an area studies course before you wentwo weeks on South Asia. I spent also, two weeks before I left, on the desk and talked to the desk officer and did some things. One of the things I did which was kind of curious, because I didn't think this kind of activity was what the Foreign Service did: but at that point the Maldive Islands had become independent in the previous year and the ambassador to Ceylon was accredited to the Maldives. Their Maldivian representative also to the UN was looking for real estate in Washington for a go at the chancery and of course they had no clue how to proceed with any of this so the desk officer was helping. I remember one day we went off and looked at buildings for the Maldivian Embassy when it was going to be opened. [laughs]

I remember also one of my classmates had been assigned to Calcutta and he was assigned for the same two week period to the India Desk, which was all in the same space, and the country director was a fellow by the name of Doug Heck.

Q: Oh yes.

SCHERMERHORN: Doug Heck took Jim Nock, my colleague, and I to lunch over at Fort McNair at the officer's club as a little farewell to bid us on our way. That was very kind and he was obviously a very superior Foreign Service officer.

Q: When you arrived there what was your job?

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, in those days the Department had a program that they called central complement, an office where you went to an embassy and where, in theory at any ratit didn't always work out exactly this wayou spent six months in each of the four sections: political, economic, admin, and consular. Colombo at that time had two central complement positions but it was a very small embassy. At that point they didn't have a consular officer, they had these rotational officers, as we were called, doing this. Actually it was a very good program. You talk about the Foreign Service and you sit through six months of training courses, but you really don't have any idea what you're going to do because the training course is kind of a combination of some high falutin' lectures about foreign policy and some very basic administrative details. At that point there really wasn't anything in the middle about what is it you actually do when you get therother than the consular course, then you got into it a bit. But still, that meant you studied the regulations and so forth but you didn't actually know what you did. So that was a very good concept and one that was abandoned later on, I think to the detriment of the Foreign Service.

I think most other countries' diplomatic services have a more structured training program than we do. Longer, or they require certain things in order to enter that we don't require, so that everybody has a commonality. We've taken the approach until quite recently of kind of throw you in the swimming pool and if you have a good swimming coach maybe you'll get to the end of the pool, and if you don't, you might sink. [laughs]

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

SCHERMERHORN: The ambassador was a wonderful man called Cecil Lyon, and Cecil was definitely what people used to refer to as the "old school." He had already been an ambassador in Chile and then from that post he'd gone to be DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) in Paris and then to ambassador to Ceylon. People always noted that he had been a protï¿½gï¿½ of Joseph Grew, and even I in those days had heard of Joseph Grew. He had been in Japan on one of his early assignments when Grew was the ambassador there and he'd married one of Joseph Grew's daughters, Elsie, who is a charming lady. She used to play the violin and she used to have chamber music concerts all the time. Everywhere she went she always found people to play with. He was delightful, very nice.

The DCM was a man called Garrett Solan, who had been a director of this A-100, this introductory officers' course, and had left just before my class. He'd been in there about a year and a half. And then my immediate boss, because they assigned me for my first six months to the economic section, and there was one economic officer who again was a wonderful man, Michael Calingaert. Because Colombo was halfway around, you could go either across the Atlantic or the Pacific. It made no difference. So I decided I would go across the Pacific because I had a friend in Hawaii and I had never been there, so I did that. I worked my way across to Hong Kong and then Ceylon. Michael came to meet me at the airport and the plane arrived at eleven o'clock in the morning or something, and he said, "Now, we're going home to lunch," and so we went to his house for lunch and I met his wife who was originally Italian. But anyway this wonderful lunch appeared served by the barefoot boy in his sarong and because she was Italian it was Italian cuisine. She was a wonderful cook. People used to say that the Calingaert's house was the best restaurant in Colombo because she managed to create these wonderful meals. She spent a lot of time doing this.

I remember, too, it was kind of my eye-opener here, she said, "Do you have a long dress?" and I said, "Yes, but not with me." And she said, "Oh, well that's alright. After lunch we'll go downtown and we'll get this seamstress to line you up something." [laughs] She said, "There's a reception tonight [or something]." Well that was a reception that night and I looked at my calendar when I left after two years and there were only about three nights in the whole two years when I either didn't go to something or have something in my own house, because this was a very social place like those small posts before television and all of that. You went to dinner parties and you did charades and you did this. But it was a very nice atmosphere because the diplomatic community and the Ceylonese all mixed together. So all of this entertaining wasn't separate, it was together. I had only been there about a week and someone called me up and said, "Do you play Bridge?" and I said, "Well, sort of." It was some Ceylonese people and I realized when I got to this place they were going to be playing for money and I sort of plundered my way through that, but I never did that again. [laughs]

Q: I guess. One time I got invited with some Italians and the Italian Embassy and the Italians take this very seriously. That was the last time of that.

SCHERMERHORN: I thought they probably thought they had a little someone for the picking here and I wasn't going to be? [laughs]

We swam and we played tennis, but the American Embassy, again, we don't adapt very well to our foreign environment. I should say the bureaucracy does not allow us to become native. Our office hours were eight until five, with an hour for lunch. There was no cafeteria or anything; you went home or you went to the swimming club or whatever had a sandwich. But everybody else of course did the thing you do in the tropics; you start at seven and stop at noon or whatever. You don't go back all day. Maybe you work six days a week or whatever it was. So if you wanted to play tennis it was difficult because you're on the tropics, so at six o'clock it's like somebody pulled the window shade down; there's about ten minutes of intense sunset and then boom, it's dark. So, to leave at five o'clock, get yourself to the tennis court and get your tennis clothes on, you'd have about twenty minutes before it got too dark to play. So I took up squash there because that you could play under the lights. And all the other embassies of course said, "What are you people doing in there? What do you do all day long?" Of course the first among equals was the British high commissioner and there was a French embassy and a German embassy, Italian embassy, and then various odd things: a Panamanian consulatthat was difficult to figure out, and a Brazilian, and a few things that were a little strange in those days.

Q: How about the Indians? They must've had a?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, they had something there.

Q: The Indians didn't seem to play much of a role?

SCHERMERHORN: No.

Q: It's interesting, isn't it?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. At that stage. I think they didn't want to get into the politics of Tamil Nadu because if they got into the domestic too much with the Tamils, then they have their own Tamils agitating. That's speculation. I don't know what they really thought. They were not a feature so much. But the educated Ceylonese were very impressive, like so many South Asianeducated in their Oxbridge manner. In fact, one of them at that point who was the minister of finance, he left in the period I was there and went to Washington in the World Bank, Dominique Duran. As far as I know he's still there. He was quite young when he did that. But so many South Asians did do that, at World Bank or the UN or whatever.

Q: When you were there was Cecil Lyon explaining things to you at all or did you all understand? What were American interests in the place?

SCHERMERHORN: I'm not so sure I really had a clear idea of that. Everybody went to the staff meeting because it was a small place: the ambassador, the DCM, a political officer, political counselor with a labor officer, and another political officer, and the one economic officer. Not the consular officer when they had the junior peopland you know, the admin officer and the B&F (Budget & Fiscal Section) and the GSO (General Services Officer). They needed a GSO because the embassy was an old house right on the sea coast and of course when you convert old houses it needed constant work. The USIA people were across the street in a little building that was there. And of course we had two political sections.

Q: One being an agency.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: The Vietnam War was obviously going full gun. Were we considering using Ceylon as a possible base, or was that out of the question? It's got that wonderful harbor.

SCHERMERHORN: If so, it was not something I knew about. But I remember there was a great public relations effort. We got some massive instructions about how to go out and talk about Vietnam to the public there, and so forth, which of course they weren't terribly interested in at this point. But this clearly was heating up because as I said we had two junior officer slots and the other rotational slot was taken by someone who was in the class behind me. I came in in June, he came in in August. Lionel Rosenblatt had gotten off language probation in a language so he didn't have to spend time doing that. He did the consular course and so forth, and a few other things, but he actually got to Colombo before I did because I did the French, as I explained before.

We had met while we were both at FSI because people said, "Oh, there's somebody in the next class going there," and the desk officer invited us out to a party that he had where there were a lot of South Asian people in the room. So I met a lot of the people who were working in that part of the world early on too. But Lionel had gotten there about six weeks before I got there and he was there for eight or nine months and then that was when they actually set up the CORDS program for volunteers to go to Vietnam and so he volunteered and he was accepted. So he left after eight or nine months.

There was a young woman in the embassy who was the secretary for the chief of the other political section. Ann was delightful and there were some other young people so we all had a nice time. And Lionel was one of these quite amazing peoplvery charismatic, very able to move things, very dynamic, and he wanted to go off and do this, so he did. Also we had had, by that point, the Six-Day War.

Q: Yes. This is the Israeli against Egypt.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. A number of my classmates had been assigned to posts in the Middle East, including one young man who most people thought was not Foreign Service material. That's how you'd say it now; I don't know what they thought then. He went off tI think it was Amman. But all these people got evacuated, so when Lionel left I remember the DCM saying, "Gee, well they're going to send us somebody," and I had this flash of intuition and I realized that these people were sitting and needed to be reassigned and I said, "Oh god, I bet we're going to get this young man." He's long gone, but I won't reveal his name anyway. And sure enough about two days later the cable comes that this person is coming to the embassy and I knewell, by this time we had a different DCM alsfrom the personality that this guy would not go over well here. Anyway, so he appeared and didn't go over very well.

Q: Let me just get a feel. What was the problem? Was it just personality or performance or what?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, performance; he didn't seem to know why he was there or what he was doing. But then they also sent shortly after that another persoa new officebut he was going to be a political officer, not one of the central complement programs because he had been studying Sinhalese. This was a very impressive young man who had been in the Peace Corps in Nepal, so spoke Nepali, then gone and got a Masters in South Asian studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and then went back to Nepal on a Fulbright and then came in the Foreign Service. And because Sinhalese, like Bengali and Nepali and so forth, is a pol/e-based language, he was doing that. That was Peter Burleigh, who's been a friend since then. He's had a very distinguished career. So because he was a language officer he was not going to run around doing all that other stuff. So we had a very interesting group of people. The person who came as DCM had been consul general in Bombay and then came down there. His name was Jack Miklos. He was interesting. He knew South Asia well because he had been in a number of posts there. I think Garrett Solan left. He probably retired not too long after that.

We had a woman admin officer who had an interesting background. Her father was German and her mother was British and they had met in China just before World War I. Her mother was a missionary and her father was a businessman. Their children were born in China and they lived there, but after they were ready to leave, but because of the war they didn't want to go to the country of either one so they immigrated to the United States. But Ingaborg spoke perfect German, of course, and was a very cultivated, nice woman. She had gotten into the government because right after the war when we had UNRA and the DP, she was a translator; she had worked in that and then she stayed in the State Department. She was an admin officer. I guess the upper management didn't like henot because she couldn't do her job, she did an excellent jojust the idea of, I guess, having this woman.

One of the things they did to me [laughs], which wouldn't happen now probably either, was when I got there I was told that I was going to be put in this house with Ingaborg until my place was ready. The story was that the embassy had bought two smaller houses which were adjacent, part of the same property, but they had to be renovated and when they did that they were going to be the junior officer houses or something like that, but it would be awhile. And meanwhile Ingaborg had succeeded a male admin officer who had had a family, so he had rented a large house and she said, "I don't need this. It's much too big," which was fine. We didn't see each other; we went off and did our own things. I don't think that's something they would even suggest today. [laughs]

Q: What were you doing there?

SCHERMERHORN: The first rotation was with the economic section and we did things like World Trade Directory reportthese little reports where you go out and interview companies and write up various stufand trade complaints that you got in the mail. It didn't seem to me to be terribly interesting. The economic officer talked about financial economics to some people, but there really wasn't a lot. But it was learning what it was about.

Q: Did you learn anything about the tea business?

SCHERMERHORN: Well yes, because we used to go and visit the tea factories and as I said I learned a little bit, and enough to know that they had given themselves a body blow by throwing out the people who knew something about it. The tea business was still a big part of the economy; it was tea and copra, coconuts and its various products, and some tropical fruiwonderful tropical fruit therand the other thing were the Ceylon gem stoneCeylon sapphires and so forth. They have other stuff too, but that's important. They had a bazaar full of jewelers who would do all this stuff. That was really the economy.

They'd also had a great success in the '50s when the World Health Organization (WHO) had actually managed to eradicate malaria. But it required a great maintenance program of spraying and cutting, and of course once the World Health people left, and left it up to the government to do, it didn't get done as much. They were beginning to get some cases of malaria back by the end of the '60s and now it's all over there. I think it's probably the only place where they actually were able to do it, for a period of time anyway. But they had bankrupted the country and they didn't have money for these kinds of things.

Q: How did you find the bureaucracy and dealing with it?

SCHERMERHORN: Well you know the old stories about red tape. You learn that the origin of that phrase is in South Asia because you go in all of the offices in India and they have these manila folders that are drying out and they're peeling, but they're tied with red ribbon. You went in and you saw that. Of course, they're always hospitable so the first thing they'd offer you was tea and you always said yes. And the boy would bring you the tea and it looked like light coffee because they put about half a cup of tea and half a cup of condensed milk in it, which is sickly sweet. It made me gag; I could barely get it down, it was so sweet. But that was how they liked their tea. [laughs]

Q: [laughs] All this thing about the correct flavor of the tea and all that and then they just dump this condensed milk in it.

SCHERMERHORN: Exactly. Well that's for those people who drink it out there somewhere. [laughs] When they harvest the leaves from the tea plant they call it tea plucking, and the people who do it are tea pluckers. And those are usually the Tamil community. They're two communities of Tamils in the country. The ones who came between the 7th- and 11th-centuries migrated from India and settled mostly along the coast and they were long term; and then the ones who were imported in the 1890 to 1920 period to pluck tea, from India. The people along the coast, it's interesting the colonial dynamic there which happens in so many places, the Sinhalese were the majority and the rulers, but when the colonials came and landed on the coast they retreated to the highlands to regroup and get away from this. The Tamils were the people there who became the allies of the colonial people. That's happened in so many colonial places; the minorities are the ones that ally with the colonial power. The proportion of Tamils who had the education and were in the bureaucracy was higher than their proportion in the population because of these historical visits. And again, that became an issue for the future.

Q: Were there issues that you wanted to get done, and did they get done when you were dealing with the bureaucracy?

SCHERMERHORN: I don't remember any hugely significant issue. There were little things that happened. In the economic side I don't remember that.

Q: With banks maybe, trying to find out whether in the trade report is this a reputable firm or not.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, that kind of thing. That was actually not so difficult there at that period because the British had that pretty well taped.

Q: So you'd go to the British manager.

SCHERMERHORN: You'd know what it was. I didn't do a lot of these. This was six months of whatever.

Lionel had been doing the consular; he had been the consular [inaudible] experience. Then when he left I remember the planes out of Colombo left at like three o'clock in the morning so they would get to Europe at whatever. So when people left, you just kind of stayed up all night; you had a party and then took them to the airport. I remember Lionel goes off and I come back and I'm in the embassy. It's six o'clock and there's a telephone call and they want the consular officer because there's a body. [laughs] So my first consular case an American who lived up-country, as they called it, who had been there for ages, had died. It wasn't anything. But then another case there was a wire from a ship, not planning to call in Colombo but they said we're going to call because we have a body in the refrigerator; well, somebody had done somebody else in on this ship and they had to come in and we had to take care of that. I think, as many Foreign Service officers will tell you, when they have their first consular tour, that's interesting.

And we had a wonderful Ceylonese man who was the consular assistant, Anthony Vasilva, and he'd been therI think we had his twenty-fifth anniversary in our office when I was there. He knew everything, but he never threw anything away either and we were running out of space because we had all this stuff and so I found it a little, I mean there wasn't really enough to do after you got rid of the bodies and so forth. And so I said, "Anthony, why don't we clean out some of this?" and it was like he went into a catatonic state, he was so anxious about this. He didn't want to do it. But we started looking through this and we found in there a passport signed by Frank Kellognow this is what, 1927 or something like thaand we sent it back to the Department. It was somebody's travel document that somehow had ended up in there. And there were some interesting little historical things like that which would've stayed buried there at the end probably. But fortunately we had enough time to actually look at it rather than throw it out. Once we did that, Anthony kind of agreed that, well, yes, it had been interesting, but you know he was so anxious about this. [laughs]

We had some adoption cases there. One of the big issues in Ceylon at that period, Madame Montessori, the Italian woman who developed this system of preschool education, she had actually gone to Ceylon and started a training school there. She was well-known and they had a bunch of teachers. This type of schooling was just coming into vogue in the United States and there was a great demand for Montessori-trained teachers and so there were a number of Ceylonese girls who went off on these visas, ostensibly having been traineat that point it was secondhand because Madame Montessori was back in the '30s or whatever it wabut the link was there, which was a little interesting.

Q: Was there a Ceylonese community anywhere in the United States or not, or there just weren't enough?

SCHERMERHORN: There weren't enough at that time except in Washington and New York. As I said, the educated ones had migrated to the international institutions, but not any sizeable, no.

Q: I take it the war in Vietnam was way past the radar in Ceylon.

SCHERMERHORN: No, it wasn't way past because we got these instructions about public diplomacy and we got this volunteered thing and Lionel went off. At that point I didn't volunteer even though I had expressed an interest before. And actually the people who volunteerethis was 196were going to go back and study Vietnamese for forty-four weeks; they were not immediately going. But this was the program for which Holbrooke had been working on the prototype a year earlier.

Q: But I was wondering in Ceylon itself.

SCHERMERHORN: No, I don't think in the Ceylon establishment. If there was, it was not something that I heard voiced by anyone. Probably the ambassador and the DCM talked to the prime minister or something about it, and what he might've said I don't know.

Q: On your social occasions did you get any feeling from the Ceylonese what they were interested in?

SCHERMERHORN: Their problem then was they were very concerned about how they were going to keep from being isolated because of these exchange controls. They didn't have access to money, they couldn't travel that easily, and the British even then were beginning to ratchet down very slightly their level of assistance. And, you know, there was a great interest in getting out because they didn't see?The same kind of thing when you close off the possible avenues of development in place, people want to leave because they fear if they can't get out again, then they stay away. The psychology is totally as you said. The result of this application of socialism has the exact opposite result of what anyone would hope for. The money was a real problem, and jobthe rate of population growth was high and they weren't going to be able to pay for an extensive education system that was as good as?They weren't going to be able to maintain that level. As I said, they were the colony that most people seemed to think had been in the best situation at independence. And they did have a very strong educational system and very great concern for that. So I think they were concerned about how they were going to maintain their role in the world and not be totally marginalized by being out of things.

Q: By this time the Indians and the Soviet Union had reached this almost unholy alliance. It really struck me as how the two could really find true romance together. But at least they were pretty closely tied, part of the non-aligned business and all that. Did you get any feel for how Ceylon saw the Indians and the Soviets?

SCHERMERHORN: Well of course they'd been one of the prime movers in the non-aligned movement under the Bandaranaike regime. So they had a lot of sympathy with that, but they also knew in their geographic and economic situation that they needed the British and the Americans, too, to have an interest in what was going on. Again, I don't really remember any specifics about this, but I do know that was the period when we negotiated, however that was worked out, with the British access to Diego Garcia. And of course the reason for that was, again, countering the Soviet Navy to have a launching point. And it's interesting now, only a year or two ago we had this problem with the people who were displaced from Diego Garcia wanting to go back, and suing the United States for reparations, so to speak. [laughs]

We had a naval visit because in those days the command was called COMIDEASTFOR in Bahrain and it was a very small operation. We joked after we saw it. We said the admiral came with his barge. It was not a large ship.

Q: In my day, when I was in Dhahran, it consisted of a seaplane tender and they exchanged in there with Greenwich Bay and one other bay. They took turns going out there. But it was something of that nature.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. So the admiral came for a great show of whatever, and that of course had to do with the dynamics. I mentioned the Maldives had become independent and Cecil Lyon had made a trip to the Maldivethis was before I got therto present his credentials. And he and the Russian ambassador had gone on a boat, they both had gone on this because that was apparently the only way and they needed to do this, so here were the two of them, sort of with daggers, on this boat and there's a classic piece of Foreign Service writing by Cecil that is an air-graremember thosabout this trip, and he did it in a very humorous way. I don't have a copy of it, but it's somewhere in the archives. It was very funny.

We had a new ambassador come toward the end of my time there and he needed to pay his respects and he was aware of this previous trip on the boat with the Russian in this smelly kind of? And he said, "I am not going by boat; I will not go unless I have an airplane." Well, the military attachï¿½ in New Delhi had an airplane at his disposal so it was arranged that he would fly the airplane down and take the ambassador. So they're sitting in a staff meeting and the ambassador and the DCM are talking about this, the airplane coming, and somebody said, "How big is it?" We had a DAT there. It's fourteen seats or something, and the pilot and their four people coming or whatever. And they said, "Who's going to be the official party?" and it was going to be the ambassador and the DCM and the economic officer. And they're talking and the DAT was going to go, and I'm sitting there and saying, fourteen seats. Well I only add up to twelve people or something. So I didn't say anything then but I went out and after I asked if I could see the DCM and I said, "May I go?" and he said, "Well, what do you mean?" I said, "Well, unless there were some people they didn't mention, there are a couple of spare seats there." So he kind of looked at me and said, "All right, but you have to get the visas." Well I laughed because I would've had to get them anyway. [laughs] We had to get the visas from the Foreign Ministry.

So I get ready to go out and this woman admin officer was talking about iand I didn't say anything to anybodand she asked the same thing, because she did the same thing, independently of each other. So we go and we do this and of course when we came back everybody says to me, "Well how did you get to go?" and I said, "Well, I asked." [laughs] I learned something then, early on; that you have to add things up and act on what your intention is. [laughs] And again I learned something, that the attitude of these kind of people, well, you were granted a privilege; there was a little bit of one-upmanship in the Foreign Service in the sense that people feel that they should get something without asking, even if they don't ask.

Q: Without asking for it, yes.

SCHERMERHORN: So that was interesting.

We went to the Maldives. We didn't go with the official party; we went off. There was a British architect in Ceylon who was doing a hotel project in the Maldives and he was out there, so he had a Jeep and he took us around. He was also the architect who had renovated these houses that the embassy had bought and he was a very interesting fellow because he had gotten to Southeast Asia and to Ceylon; he was with Wingate in Burma.

Q: Yes. Orde Wingate.

SCHERMERHORN: He was an interesting person. There were lots of interesting people who had washed up on the beach there.

Q: Well what were the Maldives like?

SCHERMERHORN: There's probably less of it now, because if we have any more global warming there won't be any more Maldives; they'll be underwater. It's extremely flat. Just atolls and quite a lot of them, and palm trees, and excruciating sun. Well that was one thing; we did a lot of swimming and whatnot. There was a CARE office; at that point we didn't have a big aid program in Ceylon. Ceylon was one of the first places that had a Peace Corps. It was the second or third country to get it in 1961 and then Madame Bandaranaike took exception to this and threw them out at some point, or did something that forced them to say they had to leave. I don't know exactly what the sequence of events was. So there was no Peace Corps and when things deteriorated even further in 1963 and '64, they pulled out whatever aid mission they had. We had one aid person who was doing PL480, the flour shipments. So that was all. We didn't have a lot of that at that point.

You spent a lot of time outdoors doing things like snorkeling and whatnot. CARE had an office there and a very dynamic young man also who was doing it, and he used to organize everybody around the island and take us snorkeling and skin diving and we'd have whole groups of people who would do thivery international. [laughs] It was a lot of fun, too, in a nice way.

Q: I take it that particularly after Madame Bandaranaike and company had sort of taken away whatever clout we might've had, so we just weren't much of a player.

SCHERMERHORN: We didn't expend a lot of toys playing foreign policy there at that stage. There were beginning to be glimmers. What this new center right government wanted to do was attract foreign investment, but of course we said you've got to make a lot more changes before that's going to happen. And they were beginning to do things. You know, it's very difficult to dismantle those socialist economic structures.

Q: Look at France today. I mean they can't get out from under it.

SCHERMERHORN: The problem is there's a lag time and when you take something apart you're laying the groundwork for improving the economy but it doesn't happen overnight and then that becomes a political problem.

Q: What about the Tamil problem when you were there? Did it raise much of a head?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, as I said, no. The shades of it were there, as I was explaining, but they didn't have the violence. The way it was manifesting itself was the Tamils were beginning to agitate for the vernacular languages in the university, and of course the university had been teaching English. Well, that was maybe a great idea to the Tamils, but once they went to giving the university and Tamilens in halise, I mean there's no place these people can go for graduate work or anything. This was a great nationalist thing about, you know, let's exert our own will and display our own culture and all this, but as a practical matter it's a disaster for people, the students.

Q: Were there many Ceylonese or Tamil going to the United States to study?

SCHERMERHORN: It was too expensive. They went almost exclusively to the UK, because they did have some scholarships, too, for people who couldn't afford it, the UK or Canada. There actually is a bit of a community in Canada, but again it's the education system.

Q: Then 1969 comes around and you're due to get out. What happens?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, a little anecdote about Ambassador Lyon; he made a second trip to the Maldives; the first one where he presented his credentials on the boat had been before I got there. He made another trip on one of these U.S. vessels they're called, out to the Maldives. While he was on the ship he got a cable in the clear saying, "You've been relieved." And he had been there, I guess, a couple of years already, but he was hoping to do three years and then he knew he would be retiring after that. But they said basically, retire early. I don't think he was happy with that decision, although he was a good professional. But I don't think he was very pleased with the way it was done either. It was very abrupt and whatnot. His successor was a fellow by the name of Andrew Corey. Andrew Corey was then consul general in Lahore, I believe. He was not a career diplomat; he was a mining engineer from Montana and his patron was Mike Mansfield. The story that I heard from somebodI don't know if it's true or they were teasinwas that Mansfield was in some receiving line in Washington and Andrew Corey came through and they were chit-chatting and Mansfield probably said, "Well, what are you doing?" and he said, "Well I'm consul general but I'd really like to have something a little more." And anyway that was how it happened, that Mansfield saiand of course he had great influence at that point. So poor Cecil Lyon, they said, well, he's almost out to pasture, we'll just hurry it up a little bit.

Tape 2, Side B

This woman admin officer was taking home leave or some trip to Washington in November of 1968 and I hadn't had any word yet about where I was supposed to go come December or January when my two years were up, and she said, "Well, I will try to find out what's going on." I don't know how she did it because we didn't, there wasn't a telephone. But anyway, she said, "Oh, well, I've asked and they don't know yet, except it won't be Vietnam." I thought, okay, I guess I'm destined not to go there. I tried, you know. [laughs] And at that point, of course, Vietnam was getting very? But it won't be Vietnam. So she still doesn't come back from her trip and I do get a cable and it says "you're assigned to Vietnam". So I think that when she asked, they thought about it and then they thought, oh, well, maybe that's not such a bad idea. [laughs] But I was assigned to a regular job in the consular section as a vice consul, not to this CORDS operation or anything else, which was in accord with what they told us. You'd have a central complement tour and then you'd probably have a consular tour, although some people might have another type of tour. The reason for that is most of the junior positions that had been slated as econ or consular had actually been converted to the central complement, so there weren't that many at that point, except the vice consul position.

I thought, okay, that's fine. So I'd leave in early January and I wind my way back through Europe in January and it's very cold. I hadn't been in the cold for two years [laughs] except to take a trip to Nepal and India to see something. So I go back to Washington and I think I had the area studies for Vietnam. My position was language-designated as French, not Vietnamese, so I went off and I went out through California again and I went to Hong Kong and I called there on the Newsweek magazine bureau because I had a friend who was a journalist. He and one of his associates had been at UPI (United Press International) in California and then they got recruited by Life magazine. In the period before I joined the Foreign Service I used to go in in New York and see the Life magazine office. And then this other fellow, whose name was Maynard Parker, had been recruited by Newsweek and he was at that point the Hong Kong chief. I just went in to say hello to Maynard and he said, "Where are you going?" and I said, "Well, I'm on my way to Saigon." He said, "Oh my god. I'm leaving this office in about two weeks because I've been assigned to the Vietnam bureau," and Judy, his wife, and I were going to be there.

So I proceed and I arrive in Saigon and I'm met by my friend Lionel Rosenblatt who had been in Colombo and had done his forty-four weeks of Vietnamese and was now set up there. He met me and I reported to the consular section and met my boss. The first night I was in a hotel. I remember in the morning I went down to breakfast and somebody at the table said, "Did you hear all the commotion last night?" and I said, "No." They said, "A bomb landed in the courtyard of the hotel." [laughs] But that was the last bomb to land right in the center of Saigon until a long time later.

Q: A rocket hit I think the first night I was there and I didn't recall any others.

SCHERMERHORN: This wasn't a rocket. It was?

Of course when I said I was going to Vietnam my parents weren't too happy about that. But at this point, of course, in 1968 we had all these riots in the United States and I said I'll be safer there than I would've been in Newark or Washington, probably.

Q: We're talking about essentially racial based riots.

SCHERMERHORN: Well yes, but?

Q: There were other riots, but you had Newark and Chicago and Pittsburg.

SCHERMERHORN: And of course that merged into anti-Vietnam.

Q: But they started out kind of racial.

SCHERMERHORN: That was a period of great turmoil.

Q: Yes, it really was.

SCHERMERHORN: You didn't take a lot of stuff; you had three hundred pounds of air freight and that was it, which was fine. But I had taken a little radio and I turned it on. We had AFVN, the military radio station; the news was talking about President Nixon having been in Honolulu and made a speech announcing that as of that first week of March, the United States was going to begin to draw down the number of troops. They had gotten up to something like 555,000. So that was the moment when I arrived. But what that meant to the consular section was the business just took off. There were a lot of GIs (soldierGeneral Issue) in Vietnam who had an interest in getting some Vietnamese to the United States for various reasons, but a lot of them hadn't done anything about it because they thought they were going to be there for awhile. That was like a catalyst. The lines became two or three times as long and went on like that.

Q: For the record, I was your boss. I was the consulate general there during this time. In the first place, what was your perception of how things were going after you got there and were looking around? You were kind of the new girl on the block. What were sort of your initial impressions?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I was amazed at the American presence. Just the vast numbers of people and the kinds of things that people were doing, it was quite incredible. And by American presence I mean not only official, but the business, the contractors. Because up to that time the biggest construction consortium that had ever been put together was operating there. It was PA&E, Pacific Architects and Engineers, Brown & Root, and J.R. Jones.

I had been taken to the PX (military store) to get some things to start and looking around and being absolutely flabbergasted to see whole counters full of diamond jewelry and fur coats and all of these things in the PX. I had never been in a military store so I didn't know what PXs had anyway, but to see all this stuff. I'm saying, "fur coats in Vietnam?" Well, as it turned out this was one of the aid economist's possessive ideas of howe had all these troops, we paid them and they had a lot of money, so rather than have them flood the market, we were going to sop up this exchange by having goods to buy. But of course what they forgot was it just meant instead of having a black market in money, which you had anyway, we had a black market in goods too. So the whole thing was insane.

Q: Your generation of Foreign Service officers was also the generation of people who were demonstrating in the streets all over the country against the war. What were you picking up at the junior officer level?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I think there were a lot of people there who were not that enthusiastic about it but were enthusiastic about starting their careers and felt that if this was what they had to do, that's what they would do. Again, I remember the first day or second day I was there, I think it was a weekend, there were so many young people and they were very hospitable. They said, "You've got to go over to the political compound." Well the political counselor and something, there was a compound with a number of embassy houses on it and there was a swimming pool there and there were all these young men playing water polo. [laughs] So people were enjoying it a bit, too. There were young men who were in the political section, young men who were in CORDS, young men who were something which was a little different called the Provincial Reporting Unit, which was part of the political section but supposedly they went out in pairs in the countryside and talked to people, and they'd all studied Vietnamese. This was the thing, we'd had I don't know how many Foreign Service officerI think it was over 1,200 who actually had had the forty-four weeks of Vietnamese. It was quite a significant proportion. Maybe it was even more than that, I don't know.

There were a lot of them, especially the ones who were working in CORDS with Vietnamese counterparts. The Americans realized that they were pretty weak reeds to rely on some of these Vietnamese counterparts. Either they didn't have the level of competence for the kinds of things we thought we were trying to do with these programs, or simply because they had a different agenda than what we had and they weren't going to give too much to this. So I think that was where a number of them began to question whether we could succeed in what we were trying to do, if it was indeed clear. It wasn't entirely clear, maybe, what we were trying to do. The catch phrase was "build the hearts and minds." And there were a number of people who worked at the MACV, the military headquarters, that had a briefing unit there that was composed of some young FSOs that were in CORDS, but were assigned to this, and some military people. One of the military people I guess had been an ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps); his name was Chuck Meissner, and he was a captain and he had a Ph.D. in economics. I don't know why he was doing this, but anyway he became a good friend of people and subsequently at a later stage came to Washington and became well-known in the bureaucracy and died in the plane crash with Ronald Brown.

Q: His wife Doris was director of the Immigration and Naturalization Agency.

SCHERMERHORN: They were from Milwaukee; at that point Doris was back in Milwaukee with their two young children. I think he thought he was going to be an academic but when he met a lot of people there and he got into this, he kind of liked the idea of government service and he came to Washington.

I think there was quite a bit of cynicism among people, but it was kind of as if we'd been caught up in this great maw of doing all this stuff here, ordering our lives around. I think the thing that people thought was maybe we can make a difference. There were people who thought that. I used to think that after I was in Vietnam; that the people there who went through that and went back to the Department had a different view and were somewhat skeptical of the way the bureaucracy had worked there and sort of that things would change. Of course things have changed, but not because of those people; because of the social pressures otherwise. It's pretty hard to change the bureaucracy.

Q: It is. Did you get any feel for how the war was going while you were there?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, you know, I had a very interesting perspective on things. In some ways I knew more about it, in a very broad brush thing, than some of my colleagues who were working in specific provinces because in the consular section I was the visa officer and what that meant was visas for war brides and adoption cases. With the Vietnamese government, you couldn't travel on a Vietnamese travel document unless you obtained an exit visa, and the government didn't give exit visas because they didn't want people to leave unless you had some specific reason like you were married. And the other category that got visas were the military who were going to training programs, pilot training and whatnot, but those were handled not by personal interview; those were handled in bulk. So most of my clients were Vietnamese young women who were the girlfriends of GIs or a civilian who was there.

It was interesting that this was designated as a French language job, which might've once made sense, but most of the Vietnamese girls who came in were not from the milieu of Vietnam where they spoke French, so they spoke only Vietnamesbut we had consular assistants who could do all of the translating. The GIs usually came in with them so I had a big map of Vietnam with the four regions listed on it and the provinces and stuff and they'd come in and I'd chat a little and ask them where they were and they'd say, "Oh, I'm in Buon Me Thuot," or "I'm in Can Tho," or "I'm up in Pleiku," or whatever, so I quickly learned all the places and what they were doing and so forth. They'd talk about it. "Well, it was pretty bad," or "I'm getting out now. Thank god."

But of course the whole business of the marriage of these people was a problem because the military had a system; before you could get married, you had to go through an approval process in the military. And what they did was they made them go through everything that you had to do to get an exit visa from the Vietnamese government, and to get the entry visa from us. But they strung it out so that these certificates and so forth usually had a time limit, so they would string it out so that if they actually got through all of this great obstacle course and then were ready to get married, by the time they actually came back to get the exit visas, they'd have to go through this all again and a lot of them were only on a year's rotation. The military was hoping that they'd never get through this process. But some of them were extremely diligent about it and against all odds managed to do all this.

You heard a lot of bad stories and one of the things you rapidly realized there, what they called the tooth to tail ratio, and people used to say that in World War I it was like five soldiers to one or something, and in World War II it was one to three, and in Korea it was one soldier to five, and there it was like one to ten; so there were a lot of people who weren't actually out there on the front line, but were hanging around. Those are the people who had more time on their hands to meet the girls. I mean here they were ithey used to call it the land of the great PX. So we had a lot of cases and some of the stories were very sad and some of them were things you'd look at it and you'd say to yourself, "Well, now if I were a social worker, I'd be doing my utmost to try to discourage this young man from doing this." But of course that was not your role, your function. But the military certainly didn't mind exercising that role. But then there were also civilians who met Vietnamese girls.

Q: Well also there were GIs who got discharged and returned to get their girlfriends too, weren't they?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: In fact they were part of a real problem.

SCHERMERHORN: Well actually one of the things that I feel good about there, and because of my wonderful boss, we did have a problem with?if you weren't actually married according to the Vietnamese law that was recognized by the U.S., you couldn't get the immigration visa because you weren't an immediate relative, and there was no provision for someone going as a fiancï¿½ to get married there because the definition of visitor is someone who is going to leave. If you say you're a fiancï¿½ and you're marrying an American who's living there, then you're not a visitor. So it was a catch-22 kind of thing. The only way you could go if you weren't married was to get a non-preference immigrant visa. The visa categories had six grades of preferences and all the visa numbers, the allotmenwhich was a limited amounwould go to those categories. Only if they weren't filled would there be some other ones left. Basically it was a catch-22 again; as a fiancï¿½ you really couldn't meet the qualifications, even if there was a number available. So we had some very unhappy people who didn't want to come all the way back to Vietnam, but wanted Miss Susie to go.

Q: And also on the other hand, we didn't want these young guys coming back to a war zone.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. And most of them, if they didn't get the marriage completed, a lot of them did give up. But some of them didn't and I can remember there was one young man who was this blonde, blue-eyed, baby-faced little boy from Mississippi, and he wanted to marry this girl. When I saw her, this was one of the times when I wanted to be a social worker. [laughs] He had a letter from his senator, Senator Stennis, saying we had to see that this all happened, and he was still in-country. So we actually found this guy and called him in and said, "This is what you have to do. If you want to get it done, you're going to have to start now," and we went over and over and "Do you understand?" and he went off and he claimed, "Yes." He came bacthis is a several step process and so fortand we said, "Okay, the last step is you have to go down with her family book," this is like the French registration system; you must be registered in the district you live in and have a document, but you're not married until you actually get these stickers and stamps and whatnot on it. So we don't see the guy again [laughs] and he leaves, I guess, for the United States and she comes in and she doesn't have this stuff so we can't do it. So we come back and we said, "You didn't do what we told you to do." Everybody else who got to that stage, who was told, got it right. So this guy was really not with it.

Then I get this call from the head of the visa office in Washington and he says, "I know, but we want you to issue a visitor's visa." I can't remember his name noGeorge somethinbut anyway he was a civil servant; he'd been in that job for a million years. He asked for the vice consul; he asked for me and he gets me on the phone and he says, "Well in this case I want you to give a visitor's visa to this girl because it's a congressional interest," and all that. I don't know where I thought I was coming from, but I said, "Okay, and I will take this as your permission to give visitors visas to the seventy-five other fiancï¿½s who are in the same situation that we can't help," and he said, "No, no. I didn't say that," and I said, "I'm not going to do it for one if I can't do it for all. That's not fair." It wasn't fair because there were a lot of other people in this situation. And he said, "Well, get your boss on the phone," or something, and you were there and you took his call and I don't know what transpirel couldn't hear that part of ibut at the end of it you said, no, the guy will have to come back and get married here. That was the most wonderful moment of my life because my boss actually backed me up and I thought that was terrific of you. We did a good thing, Stu, because that was when they started saying, okay, this is a problem. We have to have a way to fix this catch-22 business. And that's when they put the legislation for what's called the K visa.

Q: Yes, we were pushing very hard and of course we were the biggest problem, but it was also true in other places.

SCHERMERHORN: In Korea and in [inaudible].

Q: But we had a war on, so we were saying, you know, we've got a real problem here. We got something done.

SCHERMERHORN: I just think, you know, we're a society that's based on fairness and equity and that wouldn't have been right.

Q: No, it wouldn't have been right.

In the first place, could you give a little bit of the ambiance of the consular section?

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs]

Q: [laughs] I think it has to be?

SCHERMERHORN: The embassy was in a big compound with a wall around it, but to one side of the main building, which is six stories or whatever it was, was a sort of Quonset hut type of affair. I don't know, temporary.

Q: It was a tenit wasn't Quonset, but it was one of these prefab?

SCHERMERHORN: It had a waiting room but by the time I was there the waiting room really wasn't big enough to handle the people. We did squeeze people in, but they were cheek by jowl. And it was actually a rather small consular section given the number of Americans and everything else that went with the consular general. And I remember, Stu, after I met you and learned your name, and looking at the diplomatic list, and you as the consul general, you had your own car and driver?

Q: I had a car, no driver.

SCHERMERHORN: You were more than halfway down the diplomatic list?

Q: Actually, I was just in the upper half.

SCHERMERHORN: You were right at the cutoff. [laughs] I was thinking, but this man has a car. Because all of the various military bigwigs were on the diplomatic list; we had five ambassadors and we had?I don't think we've ever done that before and I hope we don't ever do it again.

Q: I went to a cocktail party with Ambassador Bunker and I knew the British ambassador and he was talking to me and Bunker came up and obviously didn't know who I was and the British ambassador sort of said, "This is your consul general." [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: I remember your predecessor was still there when I arrived; there was an overlap.

Q: Yes, a fairly long overlap.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, because you had been there for a while. But there were some farewell parties for him and all of the consular sections were invited. I remember the first week it seemed every meal I went to it was with chopsticks and I thought I'm going to starve in this country if I don't learn to use these, [laughs] and somebody said practice with peas. That was funny.

Q: You got involved with the adoption business, too, didn't you?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: Do you want to talk a little about that, because that was different?

SCHERMERHORN: There had been an interest but I think it began to get very big. There were people coming from the United States to adopt. They would come and the scope for fraud and misunderstanding in this was quite high. In this society that had been torn by war for so long, there were a lot of children that were placed in what were called orphanages, but they weren't really orphans; perhaps the father was off with the military, the mother had died and sister couldn't take care of them. They meant to come and take them back; it was not meant to be a permanent thing. So there were a lot of children who actually were maybe not orphans who ended up in some of these places, and then there were people who just wanted to get their own children out of there and if they had six or seven maybe they'd put one in hoping it would be adopted. So there was a lot of scope for problems and there was a lot of document fraud. You had this French system of registration of family, but all you had to do was go in and have two people swear that this was the child of so-and-so to the authorities in the districand who knew whether it was true or not.

There were also some nuns wanting things there and there was one Australian woman, Rosemarl can't remember her last name?

Q: Oh yes.

SCHERMERHORN: But she was working with a couple of recognized, established orphanages which were legitimate.

Q: She was really a remarkable person, really remarkable.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, and she was the one who helped facilitate a lot of this. I mean toward the end of my time there when she was talking about?I know that some of them maybe she helped facilitate the documents which weren't, you know. But their view was we can't have this system constipated; there are people who want these children and there are children who need these families. She was quite extraordinary. There was quite a bit of that. But again, it was this same business; you had to get all of the documentation that the U.S. government required for an immigration visa and you had to get the exit visa which they wouldn't give until you could show that you had an immigration visa. As my time there went on, there began to be more and more cases of that, and also more cases of these people coming out of the woodwork and saying, "Well, I re-upped," as the GIs used to say, "I've been here for five years," because some of them did actually keep extending and extending. You know, "I had this girlfriend, but now it looks like I'm going to have to go. What can I do?" and so on.

I left before that famous thing where the plane with all the babies on it crashed.

Q: That happened in a C-5; that was just awful.

If I recall, and please correct me, but wasn't there something in the Vietnamese law which was based on the French law which almost said that if you went to adopt a child you had to be over the age of childbirth and it was very restrictive. The only way you could get around it was to get the president of the republic to waive it. And I'd sort of send notes up to the ambassador, "Could you please get the president to move on this?" because he had a little pile of them on his hands anyway, being a war.

SCHERMERHORN: I think what's so fascinating when people are looking at a war from afar is that they don't appreciate all the ancillary activities that the war generates, the social impact.

Q: Yes.

SCHERMERHORN: And you know, when you think that in Vietnal mean we even had a few people there in the '50but say from 1966 to 1975, we probably had three million Americans, at least, go through that country and a population of eighteen million or so. That's a tremendous social impact.

Q: One of the things that I've noticed in other countries where I've served, such as Greece and Korea, particularly Korea we had GIs, and even in Germany when I was there during the occupation or just after, that you could be assured we had people leaving on regular immigration to the United States who you were reasonably sure they would make a success out of it. In Vietnam we had no feeling. Of course they have made a tremendous success out of it, but there's no particular feeling for that because there wasn't any of this mom and dad going off to?

SCHERMERHORN: No, but that was totally excluded at that point. It was only with the fall of Saigon. Only we had people marrying, and as I said, from a social work point of view you could look at some of the pairings and say, "I don't know if that's going to work." [laughs]

Q: I recall a casmaybe you got involved with iof a woman who married a GI and he took her to Great Falls, Montana and she spent one winter in Montana and headed home for Tet and he tried to get her to come home and she was saying, well, the embassy won't let us get?And Senator Mansfield, again, said, "Why won't you let her go?" [laughs] She was not going to go back to Great Falls, Montana.

SCHERMERHORN: That's right. She had never come in. She was just using that as an excuse. I do remember that one. There were so many stories like that. [laughs]

Q: Did you ever get out and sort of do some of the orphanages? I've talked to people who dil never diand saying there were children who had never been picked up or held or anything like that.

SCHERMERHORN: I went to one with Rosemary and it was a pretty awful placovercrowded and not enough people to look after them.

Q: Did you get around much? What sort of things were you picking up, both from what you were seeing and from your friends? I was at mid-level there, but you were at the junior level which is always the more interesting one because these are the people who get out and get around.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, we were busy, as you know. We worked from eight until six and then you did a lot of the paperwork.

Q: Five, six days a week.

SCHERMERHORN: One nice thing was we had two hours for lunch there. You could gl lived not very far from the embassand one of the things that turned out to be nice there, one day you, Stu, asked me to go somewhere and pick up something. We used to have to call for a car or whatever it was in the embassy and I said, "They don't have any cars right now," and you said, "Well, why don't you take the Jeep?" Well, the Jeep was?The Vietnamese government had a half a dozen or so Jeeps left from about 1954, those Kaiser Jeeps that were very high, and we had given them some kind of a point for an aid program back then, but they had nicely given them back to the embassy because they were too old for them. So they had parceled them out and the consular section had one and it was for the fellow to deliver these military passports or anything else that had to be taken around. The driver or the messenger wasn't there, so I said, "Take the Jeep? Me?" and you said, "Yes, go ahead," and you threw me the keys. So I go out to this thing and I'm looking at it and I had learned how to drive on a stick shift so that was not a problem. I inch my way out of the compound and I look and I go out on the street and I'm off. [laughs] I thought it was wonderful and you were kind enough to say I could take it in the evening then because the Vietnamese driver wasn't going to use it then. So I did and I took it home at lunch. So thereafter I had my Jeep. [laughs]

Also, one thing; the consular people had what they called "blanket travel orders," so you could go out to Ton Son Nhut Airport and get on an Air-America flighyou'd just flash this piece of mimeographed paper with your name on ithe theory being that you might urgently need to go some other place on consular business. There were two places in Vietnam, cities, that I wanted to go to, that I didn't get to, and that was Phu Quoc Islanand I wanted to go there because of the snorkelinand to Dalat. The reason I didn't get to Dalat is the province senior adviser, the American, had decreed that you couldn't come unless you had official business there. The reason was not because it was dangerous or anything, but because it was the hill station of Vietnam and it was very attractive and there were too many people going up there. So I never did that. But I did go to?mostly with some of these young men who were in CORDS or whatever.

Q: There were no women in CORDS, or at least?

SCHERMERHORN: There weren't when I got there, but it was interesting. When I arrived my friend Lionel met me and he saieverybody shared apartments there, at least at the junior leve"I share an apartment with someone in this building and the apartment just below us is vacant right now," but he said, "You have to have somebody to go with you. It's not for a single person," and he said, "There's another female vice consul here," this woman Sandy Keith. She was a vice consul then but she was going to movl think she moved to the political section.

Q: I think she did.

SCHERMERHORN: "And if you don't mind, you and she should put in a bid for this thing." So right away we met and we agreed and we did. So we got this apartment. And there were always lots of people coming to visit in this building and so on. So I went off to Nha Trang with a group; I went to Vung Tau, which is the little resort on the sea coast that we drove to; and we went to Can Tho. We had a consulate in Da Nang and I remember talking to the vice consul about some case up there.

Q: Don Westmore.

SCHERMERHORN: I remember speaking to him, it was very close to the fourth of July and I said, "If I can get up there, may I come to the Fourth of July reception?" No, he had said on the phone, "Oh, and the consul general," whose name was Terry McNamara, "is going to Hue." Hue was the former capital city and the place that had been hit during the Tet Offensive the year before. But again, I didn't have any reason to go there unless I was with?I said, "If I get up to Da Nang, could I go with him?" and there was this long pause [laughs] and he said, "I'll ask," and he came back and he said, "Yes, okay, but if you can get here." You were kind enough to let me go off and I went to the Fourth of July reception and then I went around Da Nang and saw it and it was fascinating. It was fascinating because they had the former dynasty culture, the pre-Indo-Chinese culture, that had a little museum with Cham statuary there; but it was open air because the statues were kind of big. You could walk through it, but you saw Vietnamese Army people were bivouacked in this museum. It was strange. So the next morning, here we are in Da Nang, and I present myself at the appointed time and Terry is there with his 4x4 and he's in his blue jeans, cowboy boots with spurl don't know where the horse was [laughs]  cowboy hat, holsters, the whole thing.

Q: Oh, yes, and probably several M-16 type guns.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. Well, I'm in my little dress and sandals and he says, "Okay, I'm going to sit in front with the driver and you sit back there," and I looked over my shoulder at the back and it was loaded with machine guns. So he outlined the program. He said, "I have to go and call on four or five people. We're going to be there about five hours and I'm going to drop you off and you do whatever you want to do and don't worry about it." So that's what happened. I walked around and I saw the old imperial palace and I did all this stuff. And it was a very charming place. I actually have a chard of blue and white pottery that I picked up from the terrace of the imperial palace. [laughs]

Quite soon after I got there, Sandy Keith and I?some Army major came in and he wanted some kind of consular thing up in Pleiku and Can Tho and said we'll take a little expedition. So the two of us went up there and went to both places. I remember in Pleiku they had a ceremony with the head man, because these are the Montagnards, not the ethnic Chinese, Indo-Chinese people, and Vietnamese. They looked like bushmen, or people from the Kalahari or something. They had a ceremony and they had this big platform and these big vats with something in it, and the reeds coming out of the vats, and these drums that are kind of like the Indonesian gamelan or something. So we go up on the platform and there was a lot of chit-chat and stuff and then they look at the major who is the head of our delegation, if you will, and they want him to sip through this strawhat they said was rice winand he refused to do this. I said, "Well that's protocol. We have to do it." So, stupid here [laughs], goes and does that, and I'm probably going to die on the spot, and it was vile, vile stuff. I don't know what it was. But anyway we go through all this stuff and I don't pass out.

Majol don't remember his last name, his first name was TodSandy knew him and she said, "Todd, you have to play the game," and he said, "Not me. Better you than me." [laughs] But we went off and because I did this they gave me the seven bracelets that you put on that are supposed to ward off the evil spirits or something and I still have those somewhere.

Q: You left there in '71 or '70?

SCHERMERHORN: I left there in October '70, but I have a few other little anecdotes. [laughs]

Q: Oh, absolutely, I want to grab these.

SCHERMERHORN: One of the interesting thingthey passed a regulation that there would be no dependents in Vietnam and the contractors had to abide by that, too. One day this American came in who worked with AID, a very nice guy, and he said, "Here are all the papers. My wife and I want to get married again," and I said, "What do you mean 'married again'?" He said, "No, no. Let me explain. I'm here with AID. My wife came with me and she was working as this- (end of tape)

Tape 3, Side A

And he said, "So we got a Mexican divorce so we could still be here." Now this was toward the end of 1970. They had said there were some dispensations, so he put in for a dispensation. He said, "Now we're going to get married again," so we went through all that and they got married again in Vietnam. They had abided by the letter, but not the spirit. So that was interesting.

One thing you have to realize about Vietnam is in that period I think they had the best food of anything in the world because you had three or four styles of Chinese food; you had Vietnamese, which is similar but more delicate probably than any one of the regional Chinese cuisines; you had the dim sum, you had the barbequed type of thing which they dpork and chicken, and it's sort of like we know. Remember there was a restaurant that had only the barbequed chicken. And then there were probably half a dozen excellent French restaurants: the Provincial, the Normandnobody could figure out where Madame, who was the patron, got her eggs and butter and cream, but she had those wonderful disheand of course the seafood was wonderful. I used to go and eat the raw clams and people used to say, "Don't do that," and I'd say, "I haven't gotten sick yet," and I never did get sick there. Then there were Senegalese that was sort of a history of a little vestige of French colonialism; there were some Senegalese troops and you had a restaurant that had Senegalese gumbo. The first time I ever had couscous was in Saigon. Behind my apartment building there was a place that a retired French soldier was there with his Vietnamese wifhe had been in Algierand he had couscous. It was really terrific food.

But the best meal I think I ever had in Vietnam was a couple of these?well, it turned out that one of my high school classmates had joined the Foreign Service after he'd been in the Navy, and in fact, when I was in San Francisco and had just passed the exam, his ship came in and we got together. He said, "What are you doing?" and I said, "I'm going to go in the Foreign Service," and he had been accepted at law school and he was going to go, but then he took the exam and passed it and so by the time I had finished my time in Colombo, he had finished law school. He was on his first tour there. Anyway, half a dozen of us went out to Nab Dai, which was sort of the port area along the estuary there, the river. But we went out beyond that and we parked this fleet of vehicles. I said, "Where are we going? There's nothing here." Well, he said, "Over there," and across the marsit looked like you'd have to walk on water to get therit was this tiny little hut and you walked for what seemed like miles across there and you went in. It was just a thatched roof, all open at the sides, with floorboards with wide spaces between them, and what they gave you were crabs that were cracked open, sautï¿½ed in the shell but cracked with pepperthat wonderful Vietnamese peppeand some lemon juice, and you ate it and then you dropped all the shells and everything right down to the floorboards and you could see things swimming. It was wonderful food.

There's one story, too, that I think might illustrate the family issues in Vietnam about immigration and adoption and whatnot. There was a very nice Vietnamese woman, a very respectable looking woman, probably in her late thirties, and an older American who was not in the militarhe was in AID or something. They came in and were going through all the business to get married and she had two daughters, like five- and seven-years-old, and the birth certificates said everything. We're ready to do this and we're very happy because they're really a nice little family and everything, and we're waiting for them to come in so we can sign it and do the formal thing, and then one of the consular assistants comes in and says, "Miss Schermerhorn, you have to look at this," and she points out to me on the medical exam of the woman and down there the doctor had written, "Patient had total hysterectomy [like ten years before or something]" and I'm doing the math and I'm saying, "No, no, this doesn't compute." [laughs] So I called the husband in, and I mean this is delicate, right? What do you say? And I said, "You know, we have a little problem here. This is what the medical exam says, but of course you have the little girls," and he said right away, "No, that's right, they're not." He said, "They're her nieces but their mother has died and their father is in the military and we haven't seen him. We don't know whether he's dead or alive." And she went and got these birth certificates.

We got her immigration and the immigration inspector says, "Who is this darn vice consul?" [laughs] Can't figure out that. Because in those days the form was right on top of the thing where they had all this?but, by some miracll had mentioned non-preference visawe had just gotten some sort of end of the month, extra, special thing; we had just gotten two non-preference visas and because we always told people we never had any, we didn't have a queue anymore. That was the one time in my whole twenty months there that I could actually do that legitimately and we did so they could go as they planned. But that's a very good illustration; here she said, "I am responsible. I am going to take care of these children," and never mind these legalisms about this is my extended family.

Q: When you left there, what of Vietnam in your impression?

SCHERMERHORN: I don't know. By the time I left, having arrived the day of our maximum presence, we were down I think 200,000; we were down to about 350,000 at that time and it seemed like half of them had walked into the consular section. The public face of it was we were winning their hearts and minds. This thing was successful.

Q: I felt that way when I left. I thought, well, you know, it's not the greatest democracy, but compared to a lot of other places it seemed to be going and the Viet Cong was no longer much of a problem. It was the mainline North Vietnamese.

SCHERMERHORN: Oh, you had asked where I'd been. Barbara Watson, who was then the assistant secretary for consular affairs, came. Remember that? We planned a trip for her and one of the things to do was to go to Tay Ninh, which was the parrot's beak in Cambodia, but by helicopter, and to see the Cao Dai temple there. I remember that. We showed her everything and we talked about these issues of social problems and whatnot, and the kind of clientele we had, but I had the impression that it didn't make a lot of impression on her. Here, in this country, we were doing with fewer people as much, on a prorated basis, activity as they were doing in Germany and those other places with a big military presence.

But I did go to Cambodia and this was something that was very interesting. I went in the first week of May 1970 and we hadn't been able to go there. From the time I was in Colombo I wanted to take my little two week trip that you could take and go there but they said if you have a diplomatic passport you shouldn't do that. When I got to Vietnam it wasn't open, but then there was a window starting in about October or November of '69 when they said it was okay. And a lot of these various young men who I worked with were going off and they said, "Hey Lange, you better come with us if you want to see it," and I'd always wanted to see Angkor Wat, but you know, Stu, you kept me very busy. [laughs]

Q: I apologize. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs] So I didn't do it and finally it was becoming clear that it was getting a little dicey there in military terms and that the insurgents were getting closer. Finally, sometime in April there was a fellow called Terry Lombacher who was with AID and somehow we were talking and I said, "Gee, I guess I've made a mistake. I didn't get to do this and it may be too late," and he said, "Well I haven't done it either and I really want to do it, but neither one of us should go alone, so why don't we plan to do it together?" and I said, "Okay." So he went off and he was working for Ambassador Colby then and he said what he wanted to do and then he said, "Oh no, you can't do that." Meanwhile, I had gone and gotten a visa from the Australian vice consul, because Australia was issuing the visas for Cambodia. He even said, "Well, you know, you probably shouldn't do this, but I'll give it to you." And I told you I was going to Bangkok, which I was going to do, but I didn't say I was going to stop over in Cambodia. [laughs] I realized that if the instructions came out that Americans couldn't go, of course the first desk it would be landing on would be ours, so I had to do it very quickly.

I got the ticket and I went to the airport and the plane couldn't take off right away and I thought maybe they're telling me something. By this time it's like May third. I got on the plane and it landed in Phnom Penh. I got off and I was supposed to connect with another one and it was supposed to be like five hours difference, but it was two hours difference because of the delay coming. I went over and they said, "Oh Madame, we are so sorry; the plane is not going from Phnom Penh up to Siam We," (where the temples are), and I said, "What do you mean it's not going?" "It will go in the morning. We will put you up in a hotel tonight and we will send a car for you tomorrow morning." And actually I thought, that's fine, because I had intended to walk around Phnom Penh but I was squeezed on the time. So now I'm going to have time to do that so I did all that that day. The next morning, sure enough, they come with the car and we toodle out to the airport. The mechanics had their jumpsuits on and they used to have Royal Air Cambodia on the back of it and they had picked off all those things so it was no longer "Royal." So I get there and they say, "Well, we don't know if the plane is leaving now." But finally, two hours later it did leave and took me over to the thing. A little DC-?what are those things?

Q: DC-3, I'm sure it was.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. I get on it and the passenger seats are filled with mailbags and me. But I'm the only passenger and I'm thinking, gee, I really wonder if I should be doing this. [laughs] But anyway, I get there in midday by then and I'm staying out by the temples and there's nobody in this hotel. And then they say, "Well if you want to rent a Jeep?" two people appeared in a Jeep and they were about to go out and look at things and they had actually been in the hotel in Siam We and so I got in with them. One of them was Indian or something, and Canadian and there was a fourth person. But we were the only people looking at all of this stuff. So it was that afternoon and the next morning.

That night they said, "Why don't you come and have dinner with us in the hotel in town because there's nobody in your place?" so I did that. Then I had to go back through the jungle in the rickshaw at night and I'm listening and this is nerve racking because I realize there are people in the jungle and I know that. [laughs] That evening they also had the temple dancers, the Khmer ballet; it was beautiful. This was the most exquisite, wonderful thinthe whole place.

The next day I go out and there's one temple and it's Angkor Thom, the huge one, and I'm walking by myself down this long corridor and there's this little figure; you can tell there's somebody at the top of this thing, closer and closer, and it's somebody with his back to me because he's looking out with a camera, and he's got shorts on. I thought, this has to be a German, and it was. The Germans had a sort of Peace Corps type thing in Vietnam and this was a young man who had finished and he was leaving. I'm really getting nervous though; there's nobody else there. I do leave and I go to the airport and I said at the desk, "Are we going to have a plane?" and he said, "Well, we don't know," [laughs] and I go to the airport and fortunately there was one there. I think it was May seventh when they overran the place, so it was very, very close.

Q: Yes, oh boy.

SCHERMERHORN: Did I ever tell you that when I came back?

Q: I don't know.

SCHERMERHORN: Maybe not, because I realized I'd?But it was worth it. It was the most beautiful thing. And it was fascinating because they had so much damage done after 1970 because during the war when the Japanese occupied Cambodia and whatnot, even then the French archaeologists did not leave the site and they maintained it. It's not only to prevent looting, but they have to keep cutting the vegetation back and all this kind of stuff. But they did leave during this period and of course there was tremendous looting and bomb strafing from some airplanes. So I'm glad I saw it when I did.

Q: Lange, 1970, you were where?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I left Vietnam and we could still take American ships if there were any to be found, and we had the American President liners, which were basically cargo ships but had some passenger [compartments]. So I flew to Saigon to Hong Kong, and then from Hong Kong, Manila, Yokohama, I took an American President liner, then I flew because it would've been too long. I knew it would be the last chance to do that and so I did it.

But anyway then I came back and I had been very fortunate in my boss in Saigon, Stu, who apparently, although I did not know it at the time, when Secretary Rogers came to visit with his staff in the secretariat, Stu knew the executive director of SS and they went out and apparently the executive director said, "Do you have any cannon fodder for the secretariat?" and you were kind enough to suggest me. So when it came time for the transfer, I remember I was getting very close to leaving and I hadn't heard anything and then finally I got a call and it was from somebody in the personnel business who said, "Well there were two possibilities; one was to go to the visa section in Embassy Paris," and I'm thinking, they have a fixation about Embassy Paris [laughs] and I'm not interested, and the other was to go to the operations center, which was part of the secretariat. That seemed like a no-brainer to me so I said yes, I'd like to go to the op center. So that's what I did beginning in January of '71.

Q: I wonder if you could explain, before we move on to what you were doing there, about how the op center at that timit may still bkind of fit into the training process and the movement up and all that? I mean your perception of it at that time.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, we had had a brief introduction to it in the entry course and I think we actually toured the premises. Anyway, the secretariat was the information manager and conduit from the building to the Secretary of State and the other principal officials on the Seventh Floor. The secretariat consisted of the main secretariat right outside the secretary's office, which was the executive secretary of the Department, and his two deputies. Then three divisions of the staff secretariat that reported to him. One was called SSO, "O" for operations center, and that was a twenty-four hour operation, the nerve center of the Department. The twenty-four hours had been established, I believe, in Kennedy's time with the Cuban missile crisis because the Department didn't have that constant surveillance operation before that. It was operated on normal business days or whatever. And then the other part was called SSS, the staff secretariat, which was the paper conduit, and the third one was called SSI, which had just been created shortly before this as a separate entity and that was information management; that was supposed to be introducing and managing and updating the technologies that were beginning to come on screen, and to keep the recordkeeping, a logging operation of documents and so forth, archival things. So the operations center, in those days, again, they were very structured with the junior officers. You went for two two-year tours overseas and then you came back. The operations center was a one-year assignment and there were five slots in what they called watch officers, so they had people come in January and July, five each.

For the first six months you were an operations watch assistant under the direction of a middle grade officer who was called the senior watch officer, and you worked on a shift. In those days it was eight to four, four to midnight, and midnight to eight, and you had to be there a half an hour before and you changed every two days. Some people of course didn't like the shift work of it, but we used to joke and say, you know, any job in the Department on a desk or something is going to be a lot more than eight hours; at least with the op center you only had eight hours a day. They might not be the eight that you preferred, but there were only eight of them [laughs] because you had to hand the baton over.

So you were in a class of five and then when the new class came in in July, you moved to the second part of the operation which was preparation of two daily summaries, the morning summary and the afternoon summary. Now I think there's only one. It was a little digest of the most pertinent cables and this was prepared for the opening of business for the secretary and the principals so they had a quick view of what the editor in the op center and the senior watch officer considered to be the most important messages that had come in in that preceding period.

After you did your watch assistant, which meant that you manned the telephones and you did everything, then the second six months you were the editor of this little summary and I considered that one of the most valuable experiences I had because you were limited. You could only have a summary that had no more than eight lines within the parameters of the typing and this was really an art form to get a one line headline and give the gist with accuracy and getting the right flavor of these messages with not more than eight lines. And this was a period when, for example, there were the quadripartite talks going on in Berlin and I think our delegate to this was John Gunther Dean. He was the ambassador and a formidable figure and a legend in the Foreign Service. Apparently he would come out of these meetings which would go on for hours and hours?

Q: I think it was Jock Dean. I've interviewed both, actually.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, right. Excuse me.

And he would go into these meetings which went on for hours, days, and he could come out and dictate practically verbatim what went on, and he would do this immediately. Those were the days when you still had the secretaries who took dictation. So these cables would come in that were like ten part cables of five pages in each part and this only got eight lines too. [laughs] In fact I think that was the period, one of them, when the dictum came down from high that all cables must have summaries. That was the period when they began to do that. Air-grams were definitely phasing out at that point.

When I was still an operations assistant you got to know a lot of people because they came running into the op center to pick up their messages because you got what were called "scat copies," advance copies of the cables before they were actually reproduced in hard copy down in the message centers of the various bureaus, and distributed. The people who were working on arms control and German issues and so forth were anxiously waiting; they wanted to be called the minute this scat copy became available, and there was one fellow in particular who we used to joke and say he must've had roller skates on. He would be absolutely incensed if he was not the first one to be called, and you wrote down on the copy who you were sending it to, so he would run down and grab this thing and rush off with it. [laughs]

The other thing that was a very good training part of this was the attention to detail that you had to maintain in terms of you had to record all of the telephone calls that came in and this had become very important in the wake of the incident off Iceland with the Russian fisherman who wanted to defect, and then they did it and it went back and forth and?

Q: The Coast Guard turned him back.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. So I guess it wasn't entirely clear as people wanted it to be in order to know what had actually happened, and to set up an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for the future. You had a log and the operations assistant's job was to keep the log; write every telephone call, every principal who came into the center. Bill Macomber was the undersecretary for management at that point and he used to come in quite frequently and use the telephones because you could patch telephones to other people and so forth. He was a very profane fellow [laughs] and he used to sit in the middle of this and screayou know, the decibel level risinand go on to people around the world. And you know, you've got to sit there and, alright, we can hear you and I'm sure they can, too, without the telephone. [laughs] So that was your day, or afternoon, or evening, or night, as the case may be. But there was a lot of camaraderie and it was fun.

Q: Did you have the feeling that you were a chosen group? In other words, that you had somehow or another attracted attention and in your experience later on, that this sort of put you on a more prominent track or not?

SCHERMERHORN: We were told that this was a selective office and not everybody would be invited to go there, and then I subsequently found out, as I said, that you had to be more or less recommended. I should say, actually, there were four parts of the SS operation; the fourth part was called SS/EX, which was the administration arm, and the executive director of that was always a senior person. When they went on trips they would try to recruit, or ask, for cannon fodder, as I said. So yes, they did tell you that after you got there, that it was selective and you should be grateful; well, they didn't actually say you should be grateful, but that was certainly the intimation. And I was grateful because it was very, very interesting and I think the most useful to me in really hands-on skills.

Q: I never had it and I never was a Washington operator, but I think from people I've talked to it seems like a particularly good place to understand how things work within the foreign policy apparatus, which you just don't get anywhere else.

SCHERMERHORN: That's true. I mean you learned about the structure of the Department and how the different parts interacted. You learned it by osmosis because you're sitting there and it's coming to you, and by you. And those were the days when we had a very dynamic executive secretary who was relatively young. Ted Elliott was his name. Those were the days in the Nixon administration when I subsequently have heard foreigners say when dealing with past administrations, they always cite that as being one of the most organized and methodical and so forth, and they were. They hadn't created the National Security Council (NSC), because it existed, but they had really revitalized it and made it the center of an operation that was the analog, really, of the secretariat. Those were the days, in that administration, when the interagency process was beginning to develop and work. It was becoming clear that there were going to be many more other agency players in the international arena than we had admitted to, from the State Department's point of view before. It was an interesting period. And also, as I said, the technological part of it, we were still using the scat machines, and we didn't have computers, we had electric typewriters. So it was a period of transition, from a sleepier, quieter time to something a little more?

Q: When you were there did you have any sort of stories that you tell of events that you got involved with, or people and that?

SCHERMERHORN: We didn't have any incident like the defecting seaman or some kind of thing that didn't work out properly. Let me see, that would've been the first half of '71. Vietnam was still of course an issue and that was when we were really focusing on Vietnamization; we had begun to draw down and were well into that. Vietnamization was the wave of the future and it was going to work, and we had prepared the South Vietnamese and they were going to be able to carry on and make it work for them. So there was of course a lot of traffic and interest in that still.

Q: Did you get any feel for the relations between the National Security Council, which was Henry Kissinger, and the State Department under William Rogers, at all?

SCHERMERHORN: I didn't get that in the year in the op center very much; I did in my assignment in another part of the secretariat after that.

Q: Okay, well why don't we move to the other part then? Then you moved out of that area to what?

SCHERMERHORN: You had ten junior officers each year sitting in the operations center and then the other part of this, the paper factory part of it, SSS, had ten line officers and those were a-year-and-a-half assignments. The idea was that you would not go to the staff secretariat, the "line" as it was called, if you had not been in the op center. Again, a very clear-cut, methodical way of you have to have that exposure to the overall, overarching structure of the Department before you can go in and start telling people, who in some cases are your seniors, how things need to be done. [laughs] So not everybody who was in the op center was invited to go to the line and some people didn't want to; they had other things on their agendlanguage training or whatever. For example, there was only one other woman with me at that point. Women had not been very thick on the ground in the op center, mainly because there weren't that many around anyway. April Glaspie, who had done her first two tours, one in Scandinavia somewhere and one in Kuwait, and always wanted to do Arabiand there was of course some hesitancy about having her do that, but she prevailed and so she went off to Arabic training and a couple of others went to other things.

At one point they asked me would I like to do that and I said yes because by this time I knew that was a compliment, so I did move over there along with some of my other colleagues.

Q: What were your impressions of this time? This would be '72. What were your impressions of the Rogers' regime?

SCHERMERHORN: Once I went in to the line and you had somebody help you acclimatize yourself, and the person who did that for me was Ray Seitz, who was about to leave the line. The staff assistants for the principals, they were tapped from this pool of people in the line and he had been tapped to go and be a staff assistant in the secretary's office. He had another three or four weeks and so he introduced me.

Q: I might add Ray Seitz is the only professional Foreign Service officer to be ambassador to Great Britain.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. And he was my contemporary; he had come in six or eight months before I had?And then I got over there and I found most of the people there were people I had been in Vietnam with because that was the pool of people that?I think, again, that was a good experience because it made them more visible because there were many more people there to see you, but it also gave them a certain confidence and so on.

Q: And Vietnam did, more than any other experience, have quite a bit of responsibility. I mean it was long hours and as a professional experience it was very worthwhile.

SCHERMERHORN: And so Parker Borg, David Passage, who had been there with me in Vietnam, and David was my classmate, and Kim Pendletowell, he hadn't been in Vietnam, but anyway. At one point, after I had been there a few weeks, one of them said to me, "Well you know, Lange, before they invited you to come over here they took all of us who were in SSS now and said, 'Would you mind having a woman?" [laughs] and this is irrepressible David, he said, "No, no. We told them Lange was one of the guys. She had been in Vietnam, you know." [laughs] The irony of that was that the director of the staff secretariat, up until about two years before that, had been a Civil Service job inhabited by a woman. But anyway, as part of this rehabilitation or revitalizing of the NSC, the White House had taken her over to run the NSC operation over there, at which point I guess the Department converted it to a Foreign Service job. So the director of it when I went there was a fellow by the name of Jim Carson; I was only there five or six months before he went off to Haiti and was medevaced three or four months after that with Diverticulitis and died in Bethesda in the naval hospital.

Q: Yes, it was very sad. I knew Jim. We were junior officers together in Frankfurt, our first post. Jim was quite a pistol.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, he was good to work for.

This was a whole new area and the function of the "line officers," there were five teams with geographic bureaus assigned to each team and some functional bureaus. I wanted to do East Asia so the team that did East Asia also did Latin America and some other things like population and narcotics and the economic bureau. And you had a teammate because you got there early; you know, you went like sevein theorto four, and ten to seven, or something like that. But usually the person who was on the early shift stayed later and the person who was on the late shift stayed later. And the reason for this was you took all of the kinds of papers that were written to convey information of one sort or another to the principals, or requesting them to take some sort of action. It could be as simple as a covering memo saying "please sign this letter to so-and-so" or "please agree to meet with so-and-so for an appointment," or it could be a very complex document laying out options for some policy or whatever it might've been. So there was a whole range of activity, some of it quite simple.

And there were rules and instructions about how to prepare these documents which were codified in a big memoranda. So the interface for the line officers was with the staff assistants in each of the bureaus and the principal's office. And there was also interface in the other direction on content with the drafting officers in the various bureaus. We were only FSO-5s and -6s in those days and usually you had to deal with the office director; you had to deal with people more senior, and sometimes you had to send the memo back, as we said, because it wasn't prepared in exactly the right format. And this used to of course enrage the drafting officers who would say, "What does it matter?" I remember one fellow in EAP (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs), "I could write it on toilet paper; it's what's in there that's important!" and you'd have to say, "Well yes, that's true, but you understand that you want to get out the clutter and if it's prepared in a certain way people can get to the substance that is important to you." So this was a constant bargain.

Q: You had to have an awful lot of diplomacy, I take it. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. As I said, we were just getting the first sort of automatic type of thing, not an electric typewriter with the whiteout, but I forget the name of the thing.

Q: Mag card?

SCHERMERHORN: No, it was beyond a mag card; it was a primitive form of word processor. Actually, for one moment, the secretariat under Ted Elliott was in all of Washington ahead of the technology curve because we had this first word processor thing in our secretariat that nobody else had, but we rapidly were overtaken and have never come back. [laughs]

But this is very important because, for example, if someone had to prepare a letter for a signature by a principal, it had to be letter perfecno erasures, no strikeovers, nothing. When you're doing this it meant you would get down to, it's a letter and you get down to the bottom of the page, you make it, you've got to keep doing it over and over and over again. And telegrams, you did them triple-spaced on the typewriter so if you had to make insertions or something, because they all got retyped again in the communications center. So the functions of the secretariat were numerous; one was the daily flow of paper information recommendations, policy decisions, whatever; and the other was staffing when the principals went on trips because it was a moveable feast. Again, this was something that got codified in, I think in this period in the secretariat, pretty well.

Usually two of the line officers went on trips, depending on how long the trip. I mean if it was a day trip to New York, of course that didn't matter. And this was quite a responsibility because you were the reflection of the executive secretary on this trip and you were responsible for making sure the principals and the other people on the airplane had what they needed, and this entailed organizing a briefing book before the trip; sending out the memoranda, tasking people with what to do. You came up with what you thought needed to be in it and this was vetted by the director and the executive secretary and everybody.

But also we had a wonderful executive secretary; as you can tell from my previous remarks I think very highly of Ted Elliott. He really knew how to use his staff. Here he had these little junior line officers and whenever we were talking about trips he used to ask us who we thought would be good for certain jobs; it didn't mean that that was going to happen, but he knew that we, in our peregrinations around the Department, met many people and had a lot of views about how they worked and how they operated and so on. Anyway, he was a master at handling people because he'd call us in for a meeting and he'd present an issue and then he'd ask us to think about it for awhile and then he'd say, "Now how can we handle this? How should we deal with this issue?" or "What should we do? What should be our operating procedure?" He'd ask people and we'd throw it around together and you'd leave and then when he'd made a decision he'd call you in again and he'd say, "Now this is what I've decided to do. We talked about it and this is how I've come out." And he'd say, "Now, [so-and-so], that was a good idea but we can't do it that way because of [something or other]," or "[So-and-so, that was a very good point you made." He gave you feedback about it. It didn't mean he used your idea, but you knew that he'd thought about it and you knew where your thinking was right from his point of view. He really made you feel a part of the team; he had a great instinct for that. Some of the people who were his deputy executive secretaries were not as good at that, but he was very, very good.

Q: Did you make any trips?

SCHERMERHORN: Usually they wanted you to be there at least four or five months before you made a trip so you would understand. I made my first trip in June and July of '72 and it was a marathon because we went around the world. The ostensible reason for the timing that was decided on was because of a SEATO meetinremember SEATO, long gone, almost forgotten, I guess- (end of tape)

So we went west, stopped in San Francisco so Secretary Rogers could have lunch with one of his children who lived therwe had to stop anyway; this was the day of 707and then the next stop was Honolulu in the afternoon where the secretary went and had a meeting with the CINCPAC; the rest of us tooled out to see the Arizona memorial, and then we continued on, the same day, to American Samoa. Now this was like an eighteen hour day, and then the next day we landed in Australia. Of course this was Canberra, so we didn't really see anything of Australia but it was interesting. I was able to see my colleague from Sri Lanka, from Ceylon, the Australian third secretary, who then was back in Canberra.

What you're doing, you're madly putting these briefing books together and making sure they're all ready. You and the officers and the secretaries are preparing a trunk full of supplies: pads, pencils, steno pad - you know, all the stuff you might need. On the airplane we had a mimeograph machine and the reason for that was to do the press releases because you had press on the airplane. On the 707 you had the press and everybody crammed together. When you wanted to collate the press releases you did it in the aisle and told people they couldn't walk for ten minutes while you were doing this. [laughs] So a lot of it was scut work, but you know, you're there listening to this, and then of course the other important part of it was as soon as the meetings were over, the note takers had to prepare their memoranda and you had to get it sent in cable form and all of that. So anyway, we did SEATO and then the next stop was going to be in Perth and that was one of the funnier times.

The last meeting of the morning there was a motorcade and the people from the secretariat were already positioned out at the airplane. We were waiting for the motorcade with the secretary and the other participants in the meeting and the note taker. Well, the note taker was in the last car and so the engines are all revved up, the secretary, you know they go ahead and close the tarmac, he gets on the plane, they close the door and there's a car that somehow missed the motorcade and this guit was like slow motiohe's running across and the plane takes off. [laughs] Well it turns out it was Bob Meyers, who was the note taker, and we had his passport on the airplane. [laughs] But that was the only time on the whole trip when the next stop was in the same country, Perth. If it had been any other place, you know. So they got him there the next morning or whatever it was. [laughs] Then we went on to Jakarta.

When you're in the secretariat, you set up a room as an office either in the hotel or the embassy, depending on the location of various things and what seems?And you're staffing this because the principals, usually the press spokesman or the secretary or the office directors or whatever from the area, all want their cable take. So you're getting the cables through the embassy communications center and they set up a special numerical series for that, you know, SEC2 and 2SEC, etc. and the distribution of that is restricted and so forth. But part of the function of the line officers, with the help of a secretary, is to sort all of this and hand it out to the right people. And they're all screaming, of course; they want their cable take. You're constantly being assaulted by everybody for something or other, so you have to keep your cool and tell them?

I can remember once I was on a later trip and a fellow by the name of George Springsteeyou know Georgwell, George was a wonderful guy but his management style was management by screaming. [laughs] I remember he was on the airplane once and he was screaming at me for something or other and I'm looking at this and so I yelled right back and then he was a pussycat. "Oh no, don't yell. Yes, it's alright." [laughs] But I learned something there too, that people, just because they're senior, you can't allow them to put upon you because they will if they will.

But anyway we continued on this trip after Jakarta and there it was just to press the flesh, so to speak, and the next stop we made an airport stop in CeyloSri Lankwhere I had been. And this was fun because I had cooked up with Lionel Rosenblatt, who wasn't involved with this trip, our consular assistant, this fellow Anthony DeSilva, was celebrating something and we were going to give him a Superior Honor Award and have the secretary present it at the airport; we had arranged this. And that happened then. It was very nice. Literally, we set on the tarmac and the secretary went off for two hours. So that was nice.

And then we continued ol mean these were long days and long nightfrom Sri Lanka to an airstrip in Yemen called Hudaydah, which is on the coasbecause in those days Sanaa didn't even have a strip that could take a 707. They had orchestrated having a military smaller plane fly down from Germany, and be in Hudaydah, which would take the secretary and two others up to Sanaa to meet with the Yemenis at that point. And then the 707 took off and continued on right away to Kuwait and they stayed overnight in Sanaa. And this was again an area in the gulf, the countries of the gulf had become independent and Yemen was really just beginning to open at all to anybody. So this was quite historic, the first time the secretary was there. Actually, Jerry Bremer was in the line when I got there, also to move up like Ray Seitz, and he at that point was in the secretary's office too, who later became well-known. Have you heard from Jerry?

Q: No I haven't.

SCHERMERHORN: He's in New York. He's still down here. He's between here and New York.

Then the next day the 707 had to go back to Hudaydah and I was designated to go back on the plane with all the little packages of stuff and whatever they needed to know. And you had to do daily schedules for people and there was a lot of typing and making sure it was accurate and getting information right. Doing a schedule involves not just the schedule but who the participants are in each event, how long it takes, and where they have to be to position themselves for the next thing; so it's a detailed administrative operation, too. I went back by myself on the plane with all my little bundles of stuff and everything and then we picked them up and went back to Kuwait, did a day in Kuwait, went to Bahrain also because this is now summer of '72 and both of those countries had just become independent in '71 or so. Secretary Rogers was the highest level dignitary to visit since their independence ceremonies when people from the UK had been there. So this was a big event for the host countries, as well as for us.

When we went back to Hudaydah they came down and then they unloaded from this smaller plane about twenty burlap sacks [laughs] and I'm looking at this. What is this? It turned out the gift of the Yemenis to the secretary had been sacks of Yemeni coffee beans, these huge sacks, and they put them in the airplane and I thinl probably shouldn't say this because I'm not absolutely surin the end they got jettisoned over blue water somewhere because how would you explain to the Agricultural Department that you had untreated coffee beans. In Bahrain and Kuwait, of course, the sheiks gave these beautiful jeweled swords and things and they set up a little display in the airplane so everybody could look at this, but of course those were things that had to go through the archives, but it couldn't be kept. That signified to the Kuwaitis and the Bahrainis that this was important recognition that the U.S. was sending somebody so soon after.

We were still on this trip and it's approaching July fourth and so our next stop after that was Athens, and in fact we?

Q: That's where we met. I was consul general there, I think.

SCHERMERHORN: And Lynn was there at that point. And we did the Fourth of July reception there, I think. And again that was the time of Papandreou.

Q: No, not Papandreou, Papadopoulos.

SCHERMERHORN: Oh yes, Papadopoulos. That was after, yes. Anyway, there were issues, I guess. And then we continuethis was going to be the Balkan segment of the triand we went to Belgrade and Bucharest. This was a little bit of loosening up because here it is the early '70s and we haven't spent much time, on Budapest also. Belgrade looked like socialist modern architecture. But we did have a rest day, finally, in Dubrovnik, which was nice. The 707 could actually land in Dubrovnik Airport, so that was one day when there was nothing scheduled. And so the secretary again was I think received very well because again there hadn't been anybody of that level there for quite a while and things had been cool and it was, I guess, a little better.

When we went to Budapest, of course one of the things they showed us in the embassy was the room where Cardinal Mindszenty had been holed up for so long, and he'd only been out of there for a short time; it was still a fresh thing in everybody's minds. And then we finished our Balkan interlude and went to Rome. There was an audience with the pope for those who wanted it. And then we left there and had to stop in Shannon, again to refuel. So that was just a brief stop and then that was the end. But it was a three week odyssey, as I said.

Q: What was your impression, and what were you getting from your colleagues, about Secretary Rogerthis was towards the end of his time therhow he operated and all?

SCHERMERHORN: I think people were very respectful of him and they thought he was workmanlike and worked hard at his job and so forth. He wasn't a flashy person. We were beginning to get the Kissingethis was the China, and of course the Vietnam talks were beginning to heat up; the idea of having the conference in Paris and all the preparatory work that went into that and so on. But I think that it was kind of ignorance is bliss; I don't think a lot of people really understood what Kissinger was up to because so much of it was, as it turned out, kept from the people in the Department, including the secretary. I think, again, this is something where Ted Elliott was quite adroit in trying to handle and keep the Department a player by? I think it's ironical in a way that it's letting the camel's nose in the tent; he realized that the secretary had had to be responsive, we had to liaise with the NSC and there was a lot of what they called the "crosshatch" where every night they sent a memo, a "night note" we called iagain, that was edited in the line. You had to get from the bureaus things that went on.

Also, this was a time when David Kennedy was secretary of the treasury and he was going to take a trip to Asia, the textile negotiations or something; now why he was involved in that, I'm not sure.

Q: The textiles were extremely important for Nixon because of his political base in North Carolina, South Carolina, which in those days were big textile places.

SCHERMERHORN: But I mean I don't know why the secretary of the treasury particularly was?but anyway, he was going to Hong Kong and Taiwan. I guess he'd seen this secretariat operation somewhere or knew about it, so he wanted people from the State Department to staff his trip; he had a plane, an Air Force whatever, and so I remember Ted Elliott senl can't remember who went now, but it was funny because they went off on this trip and it actually was supposed to be like two weeks or three, and it lasted about ten weeks because the negotiations he was involved in were broken off and then he went and sort of flitted around somewhere in the Pacific for a while and then went back, and this went on for about ten weeks. [laughs]

And then another person in that period who was very interested in it was John Connally.

Q: Oh yes. Treasury Secretary.

SCHERMERHORN: And Parker Borg was detail. And that was going to be an around the world thing; he was going to some meeting in Argentina and then they were going across the Pacific and Pakistan and whatever it was. So we had this operation where the secretariat was kind of a, we were mercenaries if you were; we were sent out to staff these other operations. Well, by that time I'd been there two years and they wanted me to stay and do special projects or something, finish a book that they were doing, an operational manual. So one day Ted Elliott called me in and he said, "Now you know our young man, David Liss," well, this was a young man who had political connections and he had been somehow offered to Secretary Rogers as an executive assistant or whatever it was. He then had gotten himself moved over to HEW, I think it was, and he was one of the people who used to complain to everybody, "Oh, this place is so disorganized and I can't get something when I want it right away." And this is somebody who is like our contemporary.

So he said, "I want you to put together some kind of manual for David about how the secretariat is organized," and then I went and talked to him and he said, "You know, I'm really sorry. I used to badmouth everything over there and complain. I got over here and we have nothing; nobody knows how to manage paper at all." So the success, if you will, was being duplicated around town. But, you know, it sort of reminds you of that saying, "You may not like the State Department, but it's the only one we've got." [laughs] It's not so bad when you think about it. In those days, as I said, there was a real attempt to be very organized, which is now impossible because of the plethora of information channels and e-mail; you can't keep it organized in the way that you used to. So that was one of the things I did.

But also we had another very interesting experience here. After Jim Carson left, we had Nick Platt, who again was the preeminent sort of China hand in the State Department. He obviously had never served in China, but he had studied Chinese and so forth and he was a very personable, attractive fellow, and he was a good director, too. He had a great sense of humor. But one of the things that happened, which was absolutely fascinating, first of all, we get the bombshell: Kissinger is coming over and he's going to be the?No, I'm sorry, I'm a little ahead of myself. Rogers is still the secretary and they do the China trip, the opening to China. The president goes and he takes Kissinger, of course, whose been, as we later found out, involved in all these negotiations. I think there probably was some question about whether he should even take Rogers, but anyway, I wasn't aware of that at the time. In retrospect it seems likely. But apparently Rogers insisted that he go and Kissinger, who was the mastermind of all of this, apparently said, "Okay, but there's only one other seat on the airplane for a State Department person." Well, this was a conundrum then because the secretary needed somebody who knew something about China, but he also needed this secretariat operation because Kissinger didn't understand how all this worked; all he wanted was to have the stuff available. So this was a real problem.

The Secretary decides Nick Platt is the perfect person; he's the China hand. So Nick does go off and they, I guess, more or less hold their own. Nick was certainly able to deal very well with whatever the NSC people had in mind. Because the NSC was there, apparently he didn't have to get too deeply into the secretariat kind of stuff, so that was fine. And he came back and he had taken a movie camera, a home movie, and he brought each of us a little memento from where he'd been in the souk or the bazaar, or whatever you call it in China, and he'd taken these photos of the Great Wall and everything and he came in with a movie projector and showed us everything. But that was a great coincidence that Nick was in the right place at the right time because it worked that way.

Q: During this time, was there the feeling of rivalry, enmity, or something about the NSC and Kissinger from the secretariat, or not?

SCHERMERHORN: I think once the Vietnam peace conference came in where he played?I was on that trip to Paris; it was very interesting because that was January of '73, I guess, and we got to Paris and in those days they put up people in the Creon Hotel, which they don't do now because it's too expensive, but it was convenient because it was right across the street from the embassy. I'm there in the room and I get a call at midnight, "Come and get a cable," so I go over to the embassy. And my teammate on that trip was Bob Blackwill, of fame and fortune, yes.

Q: Oh yes.

SCHERMERHORN: You see, there were all these really interesting people in the secretariat; I mean I'm the only one who kind of got left in the dust [laughs] but they all went on and did great things. I managed to survivnot only survive, but I got asked to stay a little longer, so I guess I did okay.

Bob Blackwill and I go tooling over at midnight and we get this cable and it's coming from Khartoum and it's telling us about the assassination of Cleo Noel and Curt Moore. And of course we had to wake up the Secretary and show him that because the press would've been all over it the next day. That was sort of a cloud hanging over the signing ceremony.

I left for the econ course in January of '74; it wasn't too long after the signing thing. I think it must've been in the spring, April or May, when Kissinger came.

Q: I want to go back to that question. What was the feeling about Kissinger and the NSyou know sort of the corridor feeling about it before he came?

SCHERMERHORN: I was beginning to sense from my EA Bureau, because of course Vietnam was still very much on the agenda, so they had more interface, maybe, with the NSC than some of the other people. And they were beginning to feel, I think, that they were excluded and that the secretary was?As I said, I think this came about in part because of the signing of Vietnam and the publicity that went around that and Kissinger obviously taking front and center stage on that and so on. As I said, it was like the secretary knowing, it was like kind of an afterthought. Although I must say in seeing the secretary, which we didn't see him all that often but we saw him more than other people in the building, he was always calm; he never looked frustrated or anything, very calm, quiet, and did his thing. I think, though, people said that he actually had a temper and he could sound off, but he never showed that in public. But it must've been somewhat difficult.

Q: Difficult, I mean when one thinks about it, he wasn't a nonentity at all because he had been a major figure in both legal matters and in government before.

When Henry Kissinger came in, what happened with the secretariat?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, his was fascinating because just about that time of early '73, Ted Elliott moved on; I think he went to be ambassador to Afghanistan then. His place was taken by Tom Pickering, who again was a very juniol mean he was a senior Foreign Service officer, in years of service, but he was recognized as being sui generous, I guess, even at that point. I can remember one of my colleagues in SSS who worked with Tom before, one of our very witty fellows, he said, "Well, this is going to be interesting because Tom Pickering has risen so fast that he's never managed anything bigger than the motorpool in Zanzibar," which was his first post when we had a consulate there. And, you know, everybody is laughing, ha, ha, David. [laughs]

So he's installed and he's barely there a month or something when it's announced that Rogers is leaving and Kissinger is coming over. So Kissinger comes over and brings an entourage with him from the White House, the NSC, and Jerry Bremer is still in the secretary's office. So he stays there; nothing happens. But it turns out that for about three months Kissinger totally ignores this young man. You know, he's got his own people there. So Jerry is sitting there and one day apparently it was the lunch hour and everybody else was out of the office and Jerry was the only one there and Kissinger is on the phone with somebody and he gets off and he yells, "Hey you! Come here!" and he asked him to do something, which apparently Jerry is able to do very effectively. And from that moment on, I mean. But it was serendipity; as Jerry was about to ask to go somewhere else because he was being totally ignored, and of course that was very important for Jerry because he became the right hand and left hand man for Kissinger.

There was another person who was in the secretariat with me who was up there for a while and who just didn't like being yelled at and everything, and more or less told him he didn't like it and he was leaving. It didn't hurt his career at all because he became an ambassador two times.

Q: Who was that?

SCHERMERHORN: I'm not going to say. [laughs] It's one of those names you'll pick up. Oh, I'll tell you. It's Parker.

Q: Parker Borg?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: Fair enough. George Vest had enough. He was Kissinger's spokesperson and he couldn't take it. He just didn'Kissinger wasn't his style.

SCHERMERHORN: The first trip that Kissinger was going to takl forget where it was, but it was going to be five or six countrieand Tom Pickering has just gotten into this job and so he hasn't been through this drill yet; this is going to be the first trip for him as well as for Kissinger. So he calls us and we're explaining how we've done it in the past, so he takes all this on board and then he comes back from talking to Kissinger and he said, "Well, you know, Kissinger has all these people and there's only going to be one seat [again] for the secretariat, so I'm going to go," and we said, "You mean no flunkies, no one like us?" and he says, "That's right. I need to be there because this is the first trip." So I go bacand at this point I had been there almost as long as everybody elsto my office and I say, "I don't think Tom understands this. They're going to be screaming at him for papers and books and schedules and he's not going to have a secretary even. How is this going to happen?" So I write this little memo and I say this is what the secretariat is expected to provide on these trips and I said even though Kissinger may not know this, the people from the Department who are going to go with him, the muckety-mucks, will expect this and you're going to find it very difficult to do this. So he said thank-you for the memo and this is the way it has to be.

So he goes off on this trip and by all accounts it's a disaster. I don't know what it was in policy terms because I don't remember exactly, but the daily take and all those things, people are saying, "Where is it? Where is it? Where is it?" and nothing is organized because there is nobody there to do it. I think that's the shortest assignment in Tom Pickering's career; he was there about six months. He was there six weeks or two months before Kissinger came and this trip went on and then he got kicked upstairs, in a sense, but he got ambassador to Jordan and of course he's gone on to continue his brilliant career. That was a little blip along the way and it was just unfortunate that he got into that before he had time to scope it out himself.

Q: Well what had Kissinger done? Overloaded the plane with everyone?

SCHERMERHORN: He had Peter Rodman and all those people he brought over. I don't know.

Q: So speechwriters, but who don't?

SCHERMERHORN: Well he had people who could do things but he didn't have the overarching coordination that the secretariat provides.

Q: Or the suppliers of information.

SCHERMERHORN: He could find it but they weren't willing to work in this structure that had been carefully worked out. I used to say, after I'd been there awhile, when people in the Department would complain, "Why is the secretary so concerned with format when it's in the substance?" and my response to that was, "Look, we want to put most of the information into a structure that everybody recognizes so the minute they get it, you know what it is and how to deal with it. You don't have to sort through it and figure it out. You routinize eighty percent of what you do so you can spend your time on the twenty percent that requires some kind of creative thinking." People didn't like that, but I think that's really true. That's the basis of SOPs and so forth.

Q: Did you get any feel while you were there from your colleagues, because there's always within an organization people talking to each other, sort of, if not rank ordering, characterizing the different bureaus?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh, yes.

Q: Can you give me what you were picking up?

SCHERMERHORN: Well as I said, EAP really thought it was the center of the universe at that point because of Vietnam, and in one sense it was. EUR (Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs) is always the center of the universe. And they were very dismissive of format; they could write brilliant things but you'd have to sort of read through the lines to get to it. [laughs] We used to laugh because ARA always had everything letter perfect and perfect format and everybody would laugh and say, "Yes, but they have nothing to say." [laughs] So it was kind of an inverse ratio of what people thought was the relative importance of the subject matter. I think nothing has much changed about Latin America; we always pay lip service tthen it was the alliance for progress and all of that, but we don't?

Q: In the'70s when I was with the Board of Examiners, we used to give questions and we could make up our own and one of the favorite ones was a supposed quote from Henry Kissinger that "Latin America is the dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica." 'Would you please explain?' [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: In those days NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs) was the smallest bureau. That was a period in the early '70s and it was just before I got to the secretariat thing, they actually changed the orientation. Africa used to be all of Africa and with the breakup of CENTO, or the irrelevance of it, if you will, they reorganized it and gave North Africa, the Maghreb, and Egypt to the NEA bureau, thinking that the Islamic connection was overriding, and took away Iran and Turkey and gave them to EUR because Turkey was in NATO.

Q: Well they gave Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus to EUR just in time, '74, for Turkey and Greece to go to war. Of course EUR had been used to the stately halls of the European capitals and all of a sudden they had two of their people almost at war with each other. Sort of, who let those hooligans into our tent? [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: Well I think it made some sense from the Islamic connection, but of course Mauritania and Sudan and Mali which are basically still in the Africa Bureau. So you can't make a clean distinction.

Q: But there was more of a unity there.

SCHERMERHORN: The NEA bureau had the reputation then of being really tops, and until recently; I don't know now what people are saying. ARA was kind of, well, it's there and we have to deal with it, but it's not really that important.

There was one trip to Latin America which it wasn't my turn to take a trip but whoever was didn't want to go or something, and I decided I would like to go because I knew I wasn't a Spanish speaker and I knew I wasn't interested in being assigned anywhere in Latin America and it would be an opportunity to see it. So that trip we did and the timing for it was the inauguration of someone called Hector Cï¿½mpora as president of Argentina. He only lasted for about five months or something and then Isabel Peron came in, I think, after that. So anyway, we stopped in eleven countries: Mexico, Costa Ricjust a day in each, I have very little memory of any of this, except four days in Argentina. And we stayed, after the inauguration ceremony was over, for two days. Everybody was wondering why they were hanging around, but the reason, which was not expressed, was that there was the possibility of the secretary meeting with Salvador Allende and this was being negotiated, whether he was going to meet with him, and then it did happen.

Q: While you were there, did Chile cross your?

SCHERMERHORN: We didn't go to Chile on this trip. No, those were the days when what the Friedman economists were beginning to do their thing or something. Allende didn't last too much after that, I think. That was '73.

Q: A country you haven't named at all during this time is the Soviet Union, which had a certain prominence in our foreign policy.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I was going to get to that. Vietnam was the center of the universe, as I said, other than EUR, and of course the overarching thing in all of this is the cold war is going on. That just seemed to be a constant. And arms control was an important issue and always on the burner. That was kind of the constant noise. And these other things would have their peaks and valleythe Vietnam signing of the things.

One interesting consequence of the peace treaty with Vietnam is we sent back about a hundred Foreign Service officers who spoke Vietnamese to monitor what was going on afterward, for six month assignments. We took them out of whatever their current job was and just told the offices that they left that they had to take this job for six months.

Of course the dress code was somewhat different in those days; all the men wore dark suits and white or blue shirts. And you had the sense of this heaviness. I mean this was the Soviet Union. One nice element about the secretariat is, at least when I was there, all of these people had very zany senses of humor and you really needed that in order to survive this because it was a heavy atmosphere on one level. Some of the people in the building, particularly the people who dealt with the Soviet Union and arms controls, were somewhat lacking in senses of humor. I think there was a feeling that we have the weight of the world on our shoulders and we can't crack a joke. Most of the younger people thought, well everybody has the weight of the world on their shoulders and you better crack a joke because otherwise it's too heavy. [laughs] I used to think that when I saw these young meand I use that word advisedlfrom Vietnam who were so bright and so funny and so really, in some cases, brilliant, that as this group worked its way through the system it would change the system. I realize twenty years on that it didn't quite work that way although the system has changed tremendously, but it's more reflective of changes in society in general than of specific groups of people in the building, I think.

We always had this backdrop of EUR but they had a reputation for what I used to call the "high density factor." Some of these memos were so dense and so turgid, but this was reflective of the complexity of the issues they're dealing with. But sometimes you wished that you could distill some of this into a more lucid and readable kind of text. Kissinger, when he came in, did have a great impact on this because he used to say he wouldn't read things if you can't distill it into something else, and then he had everybody in his thing take the summaries and summarize the summaries. So the secretariat point of view you'd try to tell people, "Look, if you don't express it the way you want, somebody else is going to do it for you and it may not be reflective of what you want." People, especially in the European bureau, were very much slaves of their own routine and their own methodology. I think that's one of the reasons that Kissingel mean he used to say those kinds of things, apparently, before he got in the Department. But he got in and after six or eight months of this, he just decided he didn't need all this because it wasn't necessarily always readable and intelligible.

Q: When did you leave the secretariat?

SCHERMERHORN: I'm going to tell you a little anecdote about U. Alexis Johnsowell not an anecdote, because it's not directly, but he was undersecretary for political affairs, the senior Foreign Service job, and a very consummate diplomat, Japan hand. I remember his executive assistant saying, "U. Alexis has a wonderful way of going to a meeting. He goes into a meeting and he takes a little card out of his pocket and it's got an agenda on it and he has his agenda for the meeting set and he directs it and moves it along those lines when everybody else is still sitting there deciding what are we going to talk about. That's how he gets things done." That was the period also when Bangladesh split off from Pakistan. As I said, the European bureau was a constant heavy presence and then there were these peaks and valleys and one of them was South Asia, the India-Pakistan, or in this sense Bangladesh. When you look back and you think about all these issues, nothing much has changed, in a way; these issueyou were mentioning Cypruwhich were issues then are still issues.

Q: Oh absolutely.

SCHERMERHORN: And it makes you wonder whether diplomacy has had any successes. [laughs]

Q: Well it stops some of the excesses, I think.

SCHERMERHORN: But you're still talking. What was it Churchill said? "Better to jaw-jaw than war-war?"

Q: When did you leave the secretariat?

SCHERMERHORN: I left in the end of December, '73.

One of the personnel innovations during this period I was in the secretariat, there was a decision to codify formally what they were going to designate as the "cone system." Informally, people had specialized in political or economic work, or administrative or consular or whatever, but now there was going to be a formal designation with a numerical prefix and so forth with your primary designation and your secondary. You had to have an interview and a committee from personnel. You would express what cones you preferred and then they would decide whether that was appropriate or not and place you in one of these.

Tape 4, Side A

I had indicated early on that I was interested in the economic cone. I think I mentioned that. I thought that was a more reasonable thing than competing with these Rhodes Scholars or whoever they were [laughs] in the political cone. I went and had my interview; I remember it was when I was in the op center and I came off the midnight shift at eight o'clock in the morning when I had this interview and I thought, oh, and I said economic and because I had consular experience, I put consular also. They had a scoring system and the higher you would score and whatever the criteria were, you got your choice or something like that. I was pretty sure I would get the economic cone because I didn't think there would be that much competition. For some of the people who wanted political, of course that was not going to be possible.

The numbers of people allocated to each of the cones was supposedly based on looking at the jobs and which jobs were also being designated for those cones. I was in the economic cone. I knew although I'd had some economics I really didn't have enough. So I needed to go to this course that the Department had established about four or five years before that, I guess, which was six months full-time at the Foreign Service Institute. Supposedly if you completed the course satisfactorily you would have the equivalent of a Bachelor's in economics and some additional courses toward a Masters. So, again, when you left the secretariayou know, you had mentioned that it was considered a little bit of a hothouse or somethinthey ask you what you wanted to do and some people went on to be staff aides and so on, but I knew if I was going to be in the economic cone I needed to do this and I said, no, no, that's what I wanted to do and that wasn't a problem.

Q: What was your impression of the staff aides? You had to deal with them quite a bit, I imagine. What was your impression of how they operated? Was there a type or not?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I think there was probably a type, in the sense that they all had to be very street savvy people and yet very presentabland they were. They could be difficult, but again, since they came from our ranks you could say, "Oh Jerry, that's ridiculous," or whatever. It was easy for us to deal with them because they'd come out of the same mold that we had and so we made those friendships. Some people might have been a little pompous, but I think they were actually pretty good choices. There were a couple of people who came to the secretariat after me; one who became my teammate when Gibb Lanthreau moved on, and he was miscast; and there was another one who came, he was a very attractive, nice young man, but he couldn't get up in the morning and on those trips you had to get up and as I said, people were always after you for something. You couldn't kind of look around and say, "Oh, I guess it's not ready." There were a lot of people who were very bright and able in terms of their intellectual capacity but they didn't have the temperament and the worl won't say work ethic, because I don't mean they didn't have a work ethic, but I mean it wasn't quite the same kind of thing. So they weren't very successful at that. The people who were the best staff aides had to be in command and control with not too heavy a hand.

Q: Well one of the things I've noticed as I've done these interviewand it's certainly not a route that I ever followed and I really wasn't very much aware of it because I was an overseas persois that being a staff aide was often the road to success. In other words, you became well-known to the principals, the assistant secretary, or something like that, and this often led to other jobs and the problem was that many of the staff aides went on and got quite responsible positions and as ambassadors without really having any depth of knowledge. It's a problem. It was one based on personality and I'm using personality in a good sense; I mean ability to serve and all of that, but it's not a very good way to understand the ins-ands-outs of Indian dynamics or the Balkans or something like that.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, you know, it's a difficult thing. Foreign Service officers like to say that they're quick studies and you don't need to know in great detail, but what staff aides need to be able to do is be responsive to their principal. By that I mean not only just taking direction, but anticipating and getting to know their management style and what they need and they don't need and so on. Sometimes people think that this is a more superficial kind of thing, but it actually requires quite an acute reading of interpersonal dynamics too. What is important is being responsive. When people want things, they want it now or they wanted it yesterday and they want to know what the bottom line is. Give me an instant analysis. Of course this requirement leads to a tremendous margin of error in foreign policy, too, because crystallizing that bit in a way that is accurate is virtually impossible. You have to know where to get the information and I think one of the worst aspects of this is you really do need to be willing to say, "Sir, I don't know." But there's a tendency if you don't know to make up an answer. Not make it up, but I mean to give an answer that may not be fully thought through because you don't have the time or the information. And given the breadth of the foreign policy issues that we've just been talking about, there's no one person who can do all that. So you have to be willing to go where you're wanted.

The problem in the State Department has been for people like Kissinger and so forth who are such quick studies themselves, and so opinionated themselves, is the greater the depth of information, the more detail you want to give to people, and they don't have time for that. So to be a good staff aide is really the ability to summarize and crystallize information, and that's why this training of writing that summary, for example, was very good. What is it you're trying to say and what is your audience's level of knowledge and ability. This is something that you need to learn and it becomes almost an instantaneous, instinctive kind of calculation. It's thinking on your feet, too, and that's what you learn in all of these jobs because if you don't learn it you don't last in them.

Q: Yes. Of course it's exactly the sort of thing that is supposedly tested in the Foreign Service oral exam. I mean in a very superficial way.

SCHERMERHORN: I think maybe I alluded to this in one of our earlier sessions, but I remember someone telling me at some point that actually the people with the Ph.D.s or whatever who score highest on the written exam do not do as well in the Foreign Service. But it's this reason, the ability to move an issue, to make something happen. So I think the type of personality that is really an academic has certainly an itch, and there's a need in the Foreign Service, but they're not going to necessarily do as well unless they also have that ability to focus on what's important at that moment to the people. But again this begs the question of do you end up being someone who tells people what you think they want to hear or? So you have to balance that.

Q: It's always been a dilemma and it's bothered me and you're making a good point that so often the path to what passes for success in the Foreign Service is being an ambassador or assistant secretary of state often has run through the staff aide, almost career category, or the assistant to, or something like this. The military tries to avoid some of this, that you really have to command a battalion or something like that, and we don't?

SCHERMERHORN: We've tried over the years to set up some kind of schematic like that, that you have to have certain benchmarks to do certain things, but in the end it doesn't work that way. But you're right; it is an old-boy network to the degree, that visibility. And visibility, you started me on that step. If I hadn't had that experience in the secretariat I would've gone to be a vice consul in Paris probably and I probably would've quit because I didn't want to do more consular work after that very intense experience in Vietnam.

Q: As you get older, and both of us have got a lot of experience, you realize that there are all sorts of decisions and places where you go where you're really controlling your career and other people, but you're controlling your own career to a certain extent and there are pluses and negatives the whole time.

You took a six month course in '74?

SCHERMERHORN: January to June of '74.

Q: How did you find it?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it's pretty rigorous. There were people who had no economics and some who had quite a lot and I fell closer to the not any; I had about twelve hours or something and I had worked for this research professor at Harvard Business School and so on. We had about four women in the class; one was Genta Hawkins, whom I knew.

Q: Later became Director General, of course.

SCHERMERHORN: Director General and ambassador to several places. And another one was Elinor Constable, a very interesting case. Elinor had come in the Foreign Service in the '50s in a class and had married one of her classmates and had to resign, as was the custom in those days. Actually it may have been an unwritten rule that you had to resign. I don't know.

Q: I've interviewed Elinor and I was told it was actually more by custom than?You had to say, "Well show me where it says this."

SCHERMERHORN: So in 1971 the Department agreed that was not really consonant with the customs of the times now and they also tried to make some restitution by offering to the women going back ten or fifteen years who might've had to do that and there were quite a number who took advantage of that and Elinor was one of them. Elinor is a very aggressivl mean she came back and she negotiated. They wanted to bring people back at the grade they left, which usually meant FSO-7 or -8 in those days. She had things in various locations overseas and in Washington and she negotiated a 5 or something and said she wanted a promotion within one year. Anyway, whatever it was, she got it.

I have another friend from the same era who came back and was living overseas in France and didn't negotiate that and came back as a 7. She had left after two years in Washington and she said in her exit interview they said, "Well we were going to promote you from an 8 to a 7, but since you're going to leave we're not going to do it,'" and of course it didn't mean anything then, but when she came back she didn't get the extra grade.

So Elinor was there, and Genta, who is a very interesting personality and extremely bright. She was Phi Beta Kappa at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) although I never knew that until after the course because [laughs] Elinor was very competitive too. It turned out in the beginning Elinor and Genta were tied for first in the class after the first set of tests or whatever it was. This clearly drove Elinor crazy because Genta was this 5'10" tall blonde from Southern California who I'm sure from Elinor's point of view looked like a nitwit, and when she found out that her competition was Genta I think she nearly went berserk. [laughs] I think in the end they tied for first in the finals or whatever it was.

This was a very obstreperous class, I guess. [laughs] We were seated alphabetically so I was seated in the back near somebody called Roger Marek and next to somebody called Dennis Sandberg. We were seated in two sections and we happened to be in the back in the last row. Dennis would be making these comments the whole time. Well, there was a fellow on the faculty who had actually developed the course. At the end of this course he got up and he said, "You know, I wasn't scheduled to retire for two years, but this class has been so difficult for me I'm going to retire this year." [laughs] It was really funny. The poor man. But there were some very able people in the class and it was very interesting.

We had a lecturer from Georgetown who I guess I don't know whether he was a tenured associate or assistant professor, Bruce Duncan, but anyway, shortly after that he left Georgetown and he came in the Foreign Service as an economic officer, which was interesting. And John Sprott had developed the curriculum and was in its structure. I subsequently got to know him a lot better in my assignment in personnel. So they were quite proud of this course, and I think with justice. The idea had been that one of the many studies that had been commissioned on the Foreign ServicI mean there's a whole room in the basement there filled with these studies over the yearone of them, after the Wristonization period, at some point in the '60s, there had been a commission saying we don't have enough economic expertise. And again, as had been decided with foreign languages, we're not going to get it by demanding that people have it to come in so we'll bring them out to Mohammed instead and we'll train people who are already in the Service. And so that was the genesis of the course and it was quite successful. They had two sections a year and I think there were about thirty-five people in each section. They looked at your background to make sure that they thought you could do it. It worked very well.

In those days there were those who had the math to do regression analysis; you could do a project on that, but it wasn't that heavily mathematic. It is more so now. Computers were beginning to be used then. And there was the standard economic micro, macro, and then there was a marketing section which was good because a lot of what you do overseas in the Foreign Service, if the truth be known, even though we say we need economists in the Foreign Service, we don't really need economists. And I use that word very specifically; even though I have what is now the equivalent, I don't consider myself an economist. I mean that's a very specialized field. But you need people who are economically literate who can talk to businessmen and can talk to officials in ministries of finance and commerce, but don't need to actually be sitting doing micro and macro economic analysis. We probably needed it more twenty years ago than we do now. Anyway, the whole background is good and the purpose was to make you economically literate and, as I said, to be able to talk with businessmen and people and be credible in doing that.

Q: So by the summer of '74 you're out of that and you're now stamped as an economic cone person. Whither?

SCHERMERHORN: During the course of this, you had to bid, and again this bidding system was just beginning to be refined there. There weren't that many jobs at my grade that were economic jobs. One of them was in Iran and the country director at that point was the man who had been my second DCM in Colombo, Jack Miklos. I went to talk to him because in those days they had a lot to say that mattered, apparently, and I guess he decidel don't think they had too many other people looking at the job [laughs] that was okay, I could do that. But before we went off, after the course we did a couple of short-term things: an export trade seminar with the Department of Commercall of this was at the Foreign Service Institutand this took July and August. I remember every day everybody was listening to the news because this was when Watergate was coming to its culmination and the president was resigning. I remember I was sitting in one of these seminars and that was when?

Even during the days in the secretariat I remember there was a fellow called Stanton Anderson who was a Nixon political appointment. He had come into the Department as something in the Bureau of Congressional Relations. He used to send the staff assistant in H (Bureau of Legislative Affairs) for the afternoon newspaper because in those days I think the Star was still just about over with.

Q: Yes, I think the Star was still alive. This was a conservative counterpart to the Washington Post.

SCHERMERHORN: He looked to see if he was mentioned in it. [laughs] Obviously he was just kind of hunkering down over there. So that was kind of traumatic. Here we were all getting ready to go overseas, these people sitting around and were thinking the world is looking at our democratic system and what's happening.

Q: I was still in Greece at the time and I came back just as President Nixon resigned; as so many people have mentioned in these oral histories, overseas nobody could quite comprehend what the hell this Watergate thing was all about because they say, gosh, our governments eavesdrop and they do all of these things all the time, and what's the big deal? Was there any sort of feeling about Nixon at that time, because for many people Nixon was felt to be one of the savviest of the foreign? He hated the Foreign Service, or apparently he did, but at the same time there was quite a bit of respect for Nixon because he knew the terrain and knew how to use it, and Kissinger, as opposed to other presidentincluding the one, I might say, today. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: Overseas I heard that kind of reaction but of course there I was back in Washington when this happened, so I don't know. And really for the key six months I was holed up at FSI so I didn't really have a sense of what foreigners were thinking then. The press didn't really carry much opinion about what foreigners were saying, either, at that point.

You know you were saying Nixon's sort of detestation of the Foreign Service, and of course he and Kissinger fed on that; it was a symbiotic kind of thing. Kissinger was a very clever fellow.

Q: So you're off to Iran in the fall of '74?

SCHERMERHORN: In September of '74.

Q: What were you picking up about Iran at that point before you went out there?

SCHERMERHORN: That it was a great, staunch ally and it was a keystone in our containment policy, if you will. I mean we knew all that. The shah was this young, dynamic, modern bent on modernizing the country and you didn't really think of it as?

Years ago when I was in Cambridge, there was another girl working at the business school from the west and she had an aunt and uncle by marriage who had been missionaries in Iran but were then living in Princeton. He was on the faculty or something down there at that point, and I lived in New Jersey. She was going to be visiting them and it was in the summer so she said, "If you're in New Jersey, why don't you come down for lunch and meet them?" So I did and I had this session about Iran, but the Iran of the late nineteenth century and prewar, the country of missionaries.

And I also had a little knowledge of it, as I mentioned earlier, at Mount Holyoke. In the nineteenth century there were missionaries who went out and one of them had gone to the place called Domovan College, which wasn't university; it was college in the British sense. So there was a little bit of background and I had read a little bit about it, but what I knew about it seemed totally divorced from this modern kind of presentation of foreign policy. And then of course I knew about it in World War II and how we had used Iran to funnel supplies through to Stalin, and what happened in 1946 in Azerbaijan. I knew a little bit about that kind of politics but that didn't seem to have a lot of relation to right now and what was going on.

Q: You went out there as what?

SCHERMERHORN: I went as an economic/commercial officer to a section headed by an economic counselor, and had a financial economist and two of these economic/commercial slots and a commercial attachï¿½. We had five FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals); we had one who was kind of the senior Mr. Fix-It and we had one who worked with the financial economist with the bank and we had three who were commercial FSNs. Two of them were Armenian women who ran the commercial library and the other one was supposed to be doing WTDRs and stuff like that.

Q: The World Trade Directory Reports.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. We also had an aviation attachï¿½ who didn't spend a lot of time in the section, but we did have that. It turned out when I got there that the other economic/commercial slot was occupied by a woman and she had only been there three or four months but her position had been language-designated as Farsi. She was a tandem. Again this was one of the first of what we called tandetwo officers. Her husband was a USIA officer and they met in Athens which was her first post and his second or third. They had been assigned to do this together and had studied Farsi. USIA always trained people in languagein this case Farsand the Department designated her job so they could do the language together.

At the time that Jack Miklos agreed I could go, he must've known that the other job was going to be filled by a woman and I still look back in surprise that the Department did that, but I think what happened is because of the tandem issues that had been done and then people kind of forgot about it. So anyway here we are and people were saying, "Irawomen?" but it turns out that there had been women assigned to the embassy in Iran before. There was a wonderful woman I met who divided her career between Iran and Turkey.

The ambassador was Richard Helms who had been out there for a year or more at that point, former director of thwho had gone there because of a variety of reasons. One, he knew Iran; he had been in the Agency at the?The famous story that the Agency has dined out on for forty-five years about the overthrow of Mossadegh and so on, and because he'd been at the same school in Switzerland with the shah. I don't think at the same time; Helms was there earlier and he knew the shah.

Q: There was also the story that they kind of wanted him out of town because of Watergate.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. The idea was he was going to go somewhere and what made sense, what would be sufficient stature; they weren't going to send him to Barbados or something. It had to be something sufficiently weighty, which at that time it certainly was. But again it did make sense. He had the connections.

I didn't get there until September, so at one point after I got there Helms said rather testily in a meeting, "Well, when is this woman getting there?" Because at that point we realized we had this cataclysmic economic event of December 1973 when OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) got together and decided to collectively agree to raise the price of oil and that had caused tremendous upheavals in the economy. It took at least six months for that tremendous transfer of capital to begin to be reflected in the actual ability in Iran to spend money. And this was just about the time when the business community in the United States, and indeed in Europe, woke up to the fact that, oh, they've got money in Iran now; let's go see what's going on.

We hadn't gotten a great influx but I was about one plane load ahead of this monumental mean it was like sitting under Niagara Falls; there were people, businessmen, hot and cold and?everyday. In the economic/commercial office our function was to counsel the businessmen and help them, and I don't think anyone ever dreamed in the United States what was going to happen in that part of the world. It was just like, as I said, being under Niagara Falls and it happened so quickly that the Department isn't equipped to shift jobs, shift functions, quickly. We have assignment cycles, we have limitations on the numbers of positions we can have; meaning if we create more here, we have to take them away from some other place and all of this requires negotiation and study within the Department and so on.

I get off this plane and we're suddenly inundated. We had two excellent secretaries there. Most of these people want to see a commercial officer. I'm sorry, we had another position; we had a petroleum attachï¿½ and that position was also language-designated. Very few positions in the embassy were because, again, Farsi is a minimum of six to nine months to study and we don't have this float. But anyway, the petroleum which was a little bit ironic because the people in the National Iranian Oil Company, NIOC as it was referred to, generally spoke English because they had the engineering and training and so forth, but the attachï¿½, David Patterson, said it was useful because they didn't realize he understood Farsi so when they were having their asides to each other, he could understand what was going on.

We had a trade fair going on and my colleague, Mrs. Lambert, who had been there three or four months?

Q: This is Lynne Lambert, whom I've interviewed.

SCHERMERHORN: She had been working with the commercial attachï¿½ whose name was George Ellsworth; he was a Foreign Service officeand I say that because his successor was not; his successor was on loan from the Department of Commerce. Actually George was about to leave as soon as this trade fair wound down. In order to get a structure we had gotten a company to send one of these inflatable geodesic domes that was going to be our structure, and this had all taken place of course before I got there, but I think I got there on the closing day or something. I remember we had an important moment because George Ellsworth decided that when we closed we shoulthe Russians also had an exhibiinvite them to a party in our tent, and he did this and you know it was people kind of edging edgily around each other but talking. The Russians very stiff and proper and a little surprised that they were being asked to this. But they came and it worked and so on.

I had been there about a week [laughs] when we got this telegram from the Department of Commerce that said, "Trade mission, forty-five people now coming." This is a horizontal trade mission. Now what that means is the people are all representing different products and services. A vertical is when they're all in the same seat. They're going to be there two days and they want these appointments and they're coming in six days or something. So I look at this and I send a cable back which?I really loved Ambassador Helms; he was wonderful to work with. I wrote this thing saying what you want is not possible to do. I had only been there a week and I know it must've surprised them. The telephone systems didn't work, there were no mailboxes; you couldn't rely on the mail so you had to deliver everything with a car and there were street addresses. It took all day to do ten letters or something. So we can't program forty-five people in two days; we don't have the capability of doing this.

What came back was, "Thank you very much. Yes, we understand that but they're coming anyway," because this had become very political in the States. Suddenly there was money there and everybody was pushing the businessmen to go out and do it even though in many cases the businessmen were people who had never marketed anywhere overseaand they tell them to start in Iran. I mean, come on. [laughs] So it went on like this.

As I said, I spent three-and-a-half years and it seemed like seven years because the weekend in Iran was Thursday, Friday. The classic Telex would be a businessman sending, like five days before, he'd say, "I'm coming and I'm arriving Wednesday morning and I'm leaving Saturday and I want to do [dah dah dah dah dah]." And sometimes he'd say, "And I've sent a Telex to the minister of [whatever area he was interested in, say, housing] and I haven't had a reply." [laughs] So it went on like this and we'd tell them, "Well, you know, the reason you haven't had a reply to your Telex is [now, for example, the Ministry of Housing] now the minister has told me [a very nice Armenian man who came to grief in the revolution] He said, "You know Ms. Schermerhorn, I only have one other person who reads or speaks English in my ministry. I have a roomful," and he pointed at sort of the size of the room we're in now, "stacked with mailbags and papers of people writing to me in French, German, English, Italian, Spanish. There's nothing I can do with any of this." He said, "If they actually get here maybe we can see them, but I can't answer this. It's impossible."

It shows the depth of ignorance in America about how other cultures were organized to deal with the world. Finally I used to say to some of these people, "You know, if they could do all of these things here and they had the telephone, they wouldn't need you. They're not there yet." But this is something that didn't penetrate very well. It was absolutely fascinating and Mrs. Lambert and I kind of divided up the work. Basically what most companies were interested in was the vague category called "major projects," meaning engineering, construction; you know, large scale things with contractors. And so I did the sectors from sort of pure architecture through construction management and construction and whatnot. That may sound like something strange for a woman liberal arts major [laughs], but actually it wasn't at all.

I found that my interests and my background were very well-suited to this because I understood financing. As I said, my brother and my father were on Wall Street. I knew the vocabulary and I understood a little bit about this. My vocational interest was architecture and I was thrilled when Wesley Peters came, Frank Lloyd Wright's son-in-law and first apprentice. I mean I knew who he was and there were other people like that; a disciple of Louis Khan came, a famous architect and city planner. So I mean that was for me a little bonus. But I knew and I could get enthused about what they were doing. Mrs. Lambert took in the chemical and petroleum and some of that and we split whatever was left. We had our calendars full every day.

Q: Who was the economic counselor?

SCHERMERHORN: Roger Bruin. He was there the whole time I was there because he had just gotten there shortly before I did. By that time Jack Miklos was the DCM, the fellow who six months earlier had said I could go there. That was funny because his secretary was a rather proper woman and so when I got there I went up to call on him and I went up to her and I said, "I've arrived and I'd like to call on the DCM. I'd like to see Jack." And she said, "Jack? You mean Mr. Miklos?" and I said, "Well, yes, but I mean 'Jack' because he's asked me to call him Jack. You know I've worked for him before," and she kind of looked at me. [laughs]

He was very happy and actually so was Ambassador Helms, or he said he was, because we really did handle this very well. I wasn't prepared for the volume of business but we had it down to a science and we made some handouts, to the degree that you could do that. It was an interesting enterprise, again, because you had to assess the level of knowledge, level of interest, level of ability of each businessman and tailor what you were saying because of course one of the things that they were all understanding of, "Do I have to bribe people? What about 'corruption'?" and of course this is a difficult issue because, yes, there is a certain way of doing business there that we don't condone [laughs] but we couldn't say, "Yes, of course you have to do that." So dealing with that question and being useful enough to them.

One day we'd been there three or four months and the secretary who was a wonderful woman called Freddie, Winifred Broccoli, and her husband was the GSO, she was a super, super secretary, and she came into my office and she said, "Lange, you won't believe this!" and I said, "What?" She said, "I had a man call up," and she said, "you know, when they call and I ask them what sector they want to talk about and depending which one I say 'Mrs. Lambert or Miss Schermerhorn,'" and she said, "Usually they say, 'Well isn't there a man to talk to?'" and these are Americans now, right in the beginning, and they say, "Well, you can talk to the attachï¿½, but if you really want to know about that, those are the people you need to talk to," and they would do it. [laughs] She said, "You and Lynn were so booked up that someone called today and I said, "Well, you'll have to see the attachï¿½ and he said, 'No, no, I don't want to see that man; I want to see those women because they tell me?'"

See, all the businessmen had to sit around in the lobbies of the Hilton and the Intercon (Intercontinental hotel) waiting for these appointments which sometimes never materialized and they were talking to each other then and saying, "No, no. If you really want to know what's going on, talk to one of those women," which was true because our boss was a wonderful man but he had a rather low-key, rather tentative manner and the businessmen didn't relate very well to this. I just decided I was dealing in a sector that I was interested in and I knew something about and so you could sound authoritative and they responded to that. I mean I think they were in the beginning thinking, well, what do these women know? But we did know what we were talking about and they used to say they got the best briefing at our embassy of any place in town.

Q: How did you bring yourself up to speed, because normally you've got all these people lined up but you really have to learn something about the ground and if you've got a line waiting for you, how did you do it? Did you have a chance to go out and meet the Iranian counterparts and all that?

SCHERMERHORN: We didn't have a lot of ability to do that but we went to events and there was a Chamber of Commerce there. It was interesting. The previous economic counselor there, Bill Lehfeldt, had left in '73 and had gone to Barcelona for a year as consul general. Then I think he hit fifty and he decided to retire and take an offer from General Electric to go back to Iran and represent General Electric. Then he had become president of the Chamber of Commerce. So he was there, which maybe was a little difficult for his successor, I don't know, but he knew a lot. I don't know, you just put your ear to the ground and listen and read the papers and talk to the FSNs. I just seem to have a natural affinity for the subject matter; I don't really know how, but whatever I learned it seemed to sound authoritative enough.

Q: How did you find the American businessman who for the most part, particularly in this era was probably not too familiar with the country, coming up against a suddenly wealthy country but full of people who by chromosomes are bargainers and dealers and all of this?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh it was ships passing in the night. There was a broad range of American businessmen. There were some very sophisticatethe city banker, the whateveand then there were people like J.A. Johns Constructiothe big conglomerateand then there was the little guy from nowhere who would come in some trade mission or come by himself. I used to try to establish before we got into the briefing what their objective was in coming here so I could tailor what it was. I remember saying that a couple of times to people, "Now what do you hope to achieve in this limited time?" and I can remember one of them sitting there and he said, "Well I just heard there was money in Iran." And I would tell some of these people, "I don't think this is the place for you," and they'd say, "Well, I'm just as good as?" and I'd say, "No, no. Can you do?" and we'd go through this. I mean I thought that I was there to encourage business but it was more important to not get, you know.

Tape 4, Side B

My specialty focused more and more on the housing market because in the paper in Iran all the time they said they wanted to build modern housing. There were precast systems, prefab systems, and various permutations of those things. Precut for wood. And almost all of the housing manufacturers in the northwest with wood systems came there and we would say, "Look, they don't do wood here. This is not a medium they're familiar with, they want, that they like. If you have a precast system, poured concrete in some form, yes." Of course the northern Europeans and Scandinavians had the same problem; everybody was coming trying to sell them these wood houses and they didn't want that. But there was one. They had a partner and that was another issue. They were going to put up a factory down in Ahwaz, which is down on the Persian Gulthe gulf; we can't call it either Persian or Arabian, it is the gulf because if you call it one or the other the other side gets annoyed. So Ahwaz was a town down in the gulf; you know 120 in the shade and all of that.

So he goes down there and we have a long briefing and I said, "Look, whatever you?" and he said, "Well, no, no, no. We've done a lot of research and we know what we're doing. This is our plan." And I said, "Look, whatever your plan is," and I'm looking at this, "it's going to take you at least three times as long, three times as many people, and three times as much money as you think," and he said, "No, no. We know what we're doing." Okay. So he goes off and one day six or eight months later I see this name on my daily calendar again and he comes in and he's got this really grim look on his face and he slams his fist down on my desk and he says, "You! You didn't know what you were talking about!" And I said, "What do you mean?" and he said, "You told me three times; it's not three, it's six." [laughs] And then he started laughing and he said, "I wish I had listened a little more." It was funny.

You asked, "How do you get your information?" Once you were there it didn't take a lot of brains to know that it wasn't going to work the way?In the summer of '75 there was a Newsweek cover story on the shah. It was a long article and in it he was quoted as saying, "I'm going to make Iran the Japan of the Middle East in five years," and I'm sitting there and I'm looking at this and I'm saying, "No, I don't think so." [laughs] I said, you know, Japan didn't make Japan the Japan of the Far East in four years; it took forty years of Mejii restoration.

Q: There was an awful lot of backup prior to this. It took a major dynasty to get it going.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. Two generations of schooling. Well it was the schooling. And this is the thing that in Iran people didn't understand; you could come in and invest in a factory, but you weren't going to get a workforce because you didn't have a middle class in Iran. What we would call a middle management class would be the sons who had gone off to study in Europe or America. When they went back to Iran they weren't going to be middle management in a factory; they wanted to sit behind the desk.So you didn't have people to translate the vision of what you wanted to create down to a workforce that was able to carry it out. It was purely education. This is the problem in so many other countries. So I was very skeptical already that the shah was going to succeed at what he was doing.

Meanwhile, on the political side, SAVAK is there and one of the very interesting things in?

Q: "SAVAK" being the?

SCHERMERHORN: The secret police. Well, not so secret, but the police who were considered to be quite repressive and so forth, and were. And what wasn't probably very well-known then, but is now, I think, is the SAVAK had established a relationship with the Mossad and the Israelis had people there advising them and they had a lot of liaison and exchange, which was very interesting. The shah recognized the Mossad as experts in their field and he wanted?So anyway, we had these wall to wall businessmen and it really was quite fascinating but it was very exhausting.

Q: How did you deal with the problem oyou can call it by a number of names: corruption, bribery, grease, baksheesh, whatever you want to call it. If it's therI mean we have strict structurein fact, was there the Foreign Corruption Act; had that passed?

SCHERMERHORN: It was '72. It had been enacted already, but?

Q: So you had this, yet we weren't the only people there. I mean you had German businessmen, English, French, and some of these there were no holds on what they could do. How could we help our people to be competitive yet follow our guidelines?

SCHERMERHORN: That was difficult and I think at the very top-end of the market, when you're talking about very big projects like petrol-chemical plants or oil refineries or something, that's where the ambassadors and the governments got into it and that was probably pretty difficult for us to be competitive. I don't know.

Q: Well you could always have a partner.

SCHERMERHORN: I was going to go into that issue. They had laws about joint ventures but they wanted at least fifty-one percent to be Iranian. Of course most American investors were not anxious to do it on those terms. And so you'd say, "Look, this is the way it is and if you can't handle that you're not going to be able to do a joint venture." But I said there are a lot of ways that soften that. I mean you may not have fiftyou'll have forty-nine or lesbut what you do is structure it with a management contract for you that allows you to get as much out up front as you can out of the venture so if things go wrong you have control. The answer is the fifty-one percent is not because they really want hands-on management, it's because they wanted something to come out of this. You can bring your lawyers in and do all of this."

I don't know. Obviously if people were going to offer bribes they weren't going to tell me. And I would say, "Well, yes, in some cases people may expect things but you have to negotiate around that. I can't help you do that." I think, again, where a lot of this could be dealt with is in these cultures any kind of business enterprise is looked at as a vehicle to support the extended family. So maybe you didn't give them a bribe but you hired eighteen second-cousins or something like that. You probably had to do that anyway [laughs] but you had made a virtue out of it by saying?

People couldn't get used to this; Americans would come in and I think the Europeans were a little more sophisticated, but they would come in and they were very used to going into a negotiation and you start at point A and you go to point B and C and D, and I'd come in and they'd say, "Well I thought we agreed to that and then they came back and we're back where we?" and I'd say, "Look," and I got to put this in my briefing up front, "you're used to a very linear progression but you have to understand it's not going to be like that here. You may both start at point A but then he's going to go to D instead of B, and Q and X and back to F." But this is a concept that Americans really couldn't assimilate very well; they had great trouble. They said, "But you know, we agreed," and I said, "Well that was yesterday, but this is today." It's a very different cultural thing and it's very hard.

Q: Were you able to point them towards Iranian, if not partners, consultants who could take them through this?

SCHERMERHORN: But again, Stu, this was a problem where the numbers of functioning entities who had the level of sophistication or expertise and just the size, the volume, of business to be an effective partner were not that great and everybody was banging on the same people's doors.

Q: Did you find yourself looking at particularly the Germans, the British, and especially the French? What sort of games were they playing?

SCHERMERHORN: Well the British had longstanding relations there and there were a lot of British. Interestingly enough, there were a lot of Italians and one of the reasons for that is that in the '50s the heir to Umberto, Victorio Emmanuel, I mean they got turfed out of Italy but the prince got involved in business ventures in Iran with the shah's family. And the Italians, in terms of engineering and everything, they're superb. Where the U.S. had the expertise was logistics management and large-scale logistics and movement. I mean like petrol-chemical plants and that kind of thing. But of course the Italians had the engineering expertise. So they had inroads there and there was a certain Italian community there. Again, Italians, after the war when things were so bad in Italy, some of them went there. So that was one element.

And then I would say after that there were Germans, because a number of Iranians had done their education in Germany. Before the war, in the '30s, Germany was one of the primary places and a lot of Iranians in the older generation if they spoke a western language it would be German. And French was spoken because it was the language at one point. There were Dutch, there were everybody. At the highest level, I'd say the French always dance to their own tune. [laughs] So, yes, that was a problem. But what Americans had is products that people wanted. Irrespective of the bribery issue, on merit, often they wanted American products and then it would depend on how well you could negotiate a package.

Q: How did you feel the money was spent on the[inaudible]?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, what became apparenagain, by the middle of '75 I had been there a yeawas here you have, and this was especially true of these big urban planning projects and so on, architects coming in and urban planners and they're talking to ministers. The shah has told the ministers, "Spend the money. Make it green. Make it modern." So they'd talk in general terms, "We want to do [such and such and such and such]." The architect would go away and think, god, here I am; I'm in heaven. Finally money is no object because money they wouldn't discuss. So they'd go away and draw up their plans and come back and this was happening and the minister would say, "Oh god, it's terrific. It's wonderful. Just what we want," and then he'd say, "How much?" and the architect would say, "Oh, well, twenty million," or whatever, and he'd say, "I didn't say you could spend that much." So there was a real miscommunication here about that. And this was just at the time in '75 when they began to realize that, yes, they had a lot more money than they'd ever had before, but it was not an infinite supply and they had to plan. And of course a lot of it was miss [inaudible] and so on. That was beginning to be a problem between reality and nirvana.

And again, this minister of housing was Armenian and was a wonderful guy and I had a lot to do with that because of all these housing people who wanted to come in, and we actually had Mr. Levitt of Levittown. That was another thrill. So as I said I got to meet all these great people. But that was a measure of the kind of people who were thinking they were interested. In the end Mr. Levitt did not do anything. The Styrid Construction Company, a very well-known, big firm in New York, people like that.

But anyway, this housing minister, at one point he said to me, "Well you know, Miss Schermerhorn, people ask me about corruption. They're really very rude, you know. What I really would like to say to them is, 'Well yes, we have people who take a fee for certain services that they perform,'" but he said, "You know, when an American company walks into a negotiation there's the principal and he's got his lawyer and he's got his accountant and he's got his public relations advisor. This is the same thing; you just label it differently. It's structured into you." And I thought that was a very interesting insight; a commentary, too.

Q: I mean much of what we call corruption has been expeditors and all this and we call them lawyers. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: Exactly. We can't even file our income taxes now without somebody.

Q: Yes, I know it. I pay somebody to do my income taxes.

SCHERMERHORN: Again, this shows cultural semantics, if you will. I always cite that when people say, "Was there corruption in Iran?" and I say, "Well, it's a question of semantics and interpretation."

Q: How about the hand of the royal family?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. [laughs] That was supposedly in everything you did but I didn't see it directly. I'm sure that many of these companies that were prospective partners probably had the invisible hand of somebody behind them and who knows what went into the treasury and what got dispensed without further ado to various people.

But the question of corruption, I remember at one point there was a contractor from St. Louis who came to the office and he was saying, "What about this corruption?" and I just looked at him and I said, "Excuse me, where did you say you were from?" and he said, "St. Louis," and I said, "I'm sorry, where?" and he said, "St. Louis," and I said, "Oh. St. Louis and I didn't say anything further; I just looked at him and finally the penny dropped. I mean this in American construction is probably the most corrupt city, and he finally had the grace to kind of blush and he said, "Oh." I did take a lot of license there. As I said, I really did tailor my presentation to the people and I had to be very careful, but if I thought people were able to deal with that, I said so.

Q: It's much better than to come up against somebody who gives just an absolute bureaucratic answer. There's nothing worse because it's not real helpful. You can't establish a dialogue.

SCHERMERHORN: I've tried never to do that in any of my jobs and I think I've been pretty successful because as I said, they started saying, "We want to talk to these women." [laughs] Of course many people would come in and then say, "Well of course I've seen you but I want to see the ambassador," and I'd say, "Well I can't take you now," or sometimes I'd just say, "No. I'm sorry. There are so many people he can't see you." But I would use my judgment; if I thought it was somebody he should see for whatever the reason might beither their product or service had merit or whatevel would do that. I would just write a little memo and say?And finally, after I had been there awhilhe was so good to me, reallhe said, "You know, I really respect your judgment. You don't bother me with people and when you do, you're right. They're the people I should see."

Q: It sounds like he knew he could manage a good [inaudible].

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. And he realized that we had this inundation. There were complaints from people about they couldn't always get in to see us as soon as they would like and all, but they weren't getting complaints that the embassy is no help or anything like that, which I thought was pretty much of a triumph considering the environment and the situation.

Q: Did you get any feel for what other embassies were doing?

SCHERMERHORN: The financial economist for most of the time was Clyde Taylor. Clyde had been mostly in Latin America but Clyde is a very fine economist and a very, very fine officer and person. Very straight. He was responsible for preparing something called the Foreign Economic Trends Report that we were supposed to do every six months and it was a compendium of information on the economy with a section on areas for possible interest for American business and so on. We did it every six months and it got printed and sent back.

He started offering what we call the OECD meeting, which was just a euphemism; but what it was is the economic people from the different embassies, and they used to come and they would love this because they were all inundated too and they were all supposed to be providing some kind of economic analysis, so they would take it and they would go back. [laughs] And it was the same thing that used to get me very annoyed. You know, the businessmen who would be most critical of the government would say, "Well, we don't need big government," and all of this, and then these people would be coming in and they'd say, "Well I'm a consultant and I write newsletters and so on," and they'd take all your handouts and they would recycle it and charge a thousand dollars in retainer or something for this stuff but then they'd be badmouthing the embassies at the same time they'd be living off it. So I'm always interested when the Congress starts in on that too, if they really think through that a lot of their constituents benefit from government whether they admit it or not.

Q: Did you get letters, telegrams, from congressmen saying be sure to treat my constituent very well, and all that?

SCHERMERHORN: We did, but the pace at the time was such that people often came on such short notice that they didn't?The Department of Commerce was packaging people in these trade missions and after a few attempts with these horizontal ones which were impossible to do in the timeframe they allowed, various field offices would be marketing their constituents, "We'll take you to the Middle East where all this money is floating around. We'll do Iran; we'll do Saudi Arabia; we'll do Bahrain; or Egypt," they didn't have the money, but they'd throw that in for good measure. And they'd say, "We'll do a week," and it would be impossible to do the pace of getting information and meeting and the press of all these people. It was very difficult to do anything. But at one point I started saying to people, "I don't think you need to be here," and at one point I started saying to people that would be complaining, "Well, we're not making progress as fast on this joint venture," and I said, "Well, maybe you're the lucky ones." [laughs] It was clear that it was not taking off the way people had thought it was going to in '74 and '75, by '76.

Q: Was the problem one of inability to absorb?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. The absorptive capacity, as I said. They didn't have the personnel; they didn't have the know-how. Just impossible to do things in the timeframe that Americans?And again, what we have to understand, and it's showing up even more now, is Americans' business frame of reference is totally short-term, whether it's what to report to the shareholders, whether it's what to?We're very goal-oriented and if they can't get there from here in the timeframe they want, it's frustrating. And the whole financial picture is based on completing these things and then of course it doesn't look good in terms of earnings if they haven't done it. Anyway, as I said, that was twenty-five years ago.

Q: I'm thinking maybe this would be a good place to stop, Lange, because we obviously want to pick up about Iran. You were there from when to when, by the way?

SCHERMERHORN: I arrived in September of '74 and left in December of '78 just as Jimmy Carter was making that infamous visit. There are some political comments I'd like to make.

Q: Yes, we want to talk about the politics. We've talked a lot about the commercial side and there may be more you want to talk about, but then we want to pick up sort of the politics as you were observing the developments there, and also the social life and how this affected us. And the other thing was that were you picking up any reflections, though it wouldn't have been in your particular parish, the ability to report accurately on what was happening in Iran, because there were restrictions and problems there?

SCHERMERHORN: Absolutely.

Q: So why don't we pick that up next time.

Lange, we talked about your economic work, along with Lynn Lambert, in Tehran. What sort of observations were you picking up or views of the political situation in Iran?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, we had a big MAG group there so we knew we had a big military presence and obviously we were giving a lot of military assistance to Iran and Ambassador Helms there clearly had great access with the shah; there was a good working relationship. Some of the people in the embassy felt a little miffed; they said he doesn't pay any attention to what goes on in the rest of the embassy and I used to reply to that, "Well that doesn't bother me. I think he's doing what he's being paid to do." And to go around being touchy-feely in the GSO or something isn't really? [laughs] But maybe my view was colored by the fact that I dealt with businessmen who would want to see him and I would be very selective about?you know, I'd usually tell them that that wasn't necessary or wasn't possible, but if I thought it was somebody who should see him I would write a little memo and he would do it. And one time he said to me, "Oh no, any time you recommend someone I will see them because I trust your judgment." He was very kind to me and I admired him very much. During '76 and '77 that was when he was being called back to testify and he was gone for very extended periods.

On the local political scene there was a lot of wry, sort of bad humor about SAVAK, the secret police, and again I guess the embassy wasn't so focused on human rights in those daythat was before the Carter administratioso even though people heard allegations that SAVAK was doing things that wouldn't survive the light of day, I don't think that the embassy got into that very much. There may have been some individual cases that I didn't know about that we made representations about, but basically that was an internal affair. But again, something I learned from the economic side, you're looking at this country and you're seeing that there's no middle class to speak of and then there are these great illiterate, impoverished masses of people. So the ability to create this modern society that the shah wanted clearly was not going to be easy or quick, and of course this meant that there was a large illiterate, impoverished mass out there that were available to be manipulated if there were people to manipulate them.

There was a political officer who spoke very good Farsi and in fact could go out in the bazaahe had dark brown curly hair?

Q: Who was this?

SCHERMERHORN: Stan Escudero. So he could fit in very well and he went out and he did a lot of field work. We also had a consul in Tabriz who also spoke very good Farsi and several other regional languages.

Q: I had a long interview with Mike Metrinko.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, Mike. He certainly was getting glimmers of things, I believe, and certainly Stan was. And Stan sort of got into a bidding match; he would draft things and then they wouldn't be cleared or they would be so edited that the point of what he was trying to say, which is there are some problems looming up and they're looming up quickly, but at the time if we weren't in the political section, we didn't hear the bi-play about all of this. I knew this later a little bit. He didn't come around and scream to everybody else, "I'm not getting my cables cleared." I mean this was some back and forth. But I do know that at one point I believe he sent a dissent channel cable because he couldn't get?And there was even a lot of, "You can't send this," and of course the rules for the dissent channel were supposed to be?I don't know how he played it, whether he was only dealing with the deputy and the political counselor and the DCM, or whether he actually ever went directly to the ambassador on this. Like I said, this was a negotiation and a problem with him. It was, I think, a great problem in his career for a while because after he left Irahe was an FSO-5 or somethinhe did not get promoted for a very long, long time; then he made up for it eventually.

Q: Where is he now?

SCHERMERHORN: I think he's just retired, I'm not sure. But he's been ambassador in two of the "stans;" Uzbekistan, I think, and Turkmenistan.

Q: Did you get any of the feeling, having been a junior officer in Saigol mean you became sort of an expert before the delugthat there was a split between the upper and lower ranks within the embassy about how things were viewed or not?

SCHERMERHORN: For all that it was a large embassy we didn't actually have that many substantive officers. I don't know. In the economic section we were just so inundated with this daily work of these American businessmeLooney tune businessmen sometimes [laughs]. I think probably Stan and a few others were, but again the political counselor of the moment had been in Vietnam toHawand was party line and he was doing quite well because he was hewing the party line, so to speak, I think.

Q: Hawk Mills.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. It's very hard when you're down below this and you're thinking, well here's Ambassador Helms and the Nixon doctrine and all of this, and Kissinger and they have a plan. Kissinger was the kind of person all the pundits were writing, "Here's a man with a vision. We haven't had anybody in foreign policy who actually has a strategy," and so forth. The implicit assumption there being that he had a plan and that it was good to have a plan and therefore the plan was good.

Q: Yes.

SCHERMERHORN: Of course in hindsight you look back and a lot of the problems of the late '80s and '90s now derived from this great face-off between?I mean whether you're talking about Africa or Indo-China or whatever where we used these developing countries as surrogates, as pawns, and gave them tools and thingmilitary toythat were much too sophisticated for them and they went and used them in various places. So whether they'd still be at each other's throats without those sophisticated toys, I don't know. The cynics would say, yes, it didn't matter how sophisticated the toys were that we gave them.

You were talking about East Africa and you were in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) in the '60s and you saw what happened there.

Q: Yes, where Kagnew Station was the complete focus of our time. It was a radio communications center.

SCHERMERHORN: The demise of Lumumba and Mobutthat was based on geo-power politics. But again, Kissinger had a plan and the threat of nuclear war was still a pretty big thing in people's minds; maybe not quite as much as it was in the '50s when we learned to live with it for a while, but still, it colored everything. And again it was the idea the shah is the shah and he's our man and if he's not there, who is there? No one could imagine who else could take his place because the unthinkable was that he would be overthrown. And again I think that in a way now the Agency has dined out for fifty years on Mossadegh in 1953 and Iran, and that was still a thing well, see, we were successful at averting the problem and therefore we've averted the problem for all time. He's a fixed star, the shah, and it's not going to happen again.

Q: When you were dealing with businesspeople, did you run across the man whose name I can't forget, and he was a candidate for president from TexaRoss Perot?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh, yes. Not Ross Perot personally, although I think he did come. He sent his minions from EDS (Electronic Data Systems Corporation). I remember dealing with them when they wanted to set up an office and helping them do that. [laughs]

Q: Were they a difficult crew or not?

SCHERMERHORN: Not particularly, no. They had a lot of money to spend but they knew what they wanted, which as I mentioned earlier was more than a lot of the people who came; they had no idea what they should be doing there, if anything. They were putting in a bid to create for the Ministry of Social Welfare a computer system so they could start a social security function for everybody and keep records. One of the things in developing countries, that people always say as well, is sometimes you have corruption that can contribute corruption to this, there isn't a governmentally-funded welfare system that keeps people so they have to depend on their families, like America pre-1930 social security or something.

This was a great idea in theory, but again they underestimated the difficulties of installing computer systems in a country where none of this existed. But it wasn't even the problem of whether the hardware and the infrastructure existed to support such an electronic system; it was the mentality and the data that you needed that didn't exist to support such a thing. So they fell behind and I think finally it was overtaken by events.The whole money phenomenon in the Middle East in the '70s was kind of a triumph of hope over reality because people said, "Okay, these are the modern techniques and we've done it here beautifully and we can do it there," but they didn't fully appreciate enough that the underlying fundamentals were so different that you didn't have anything to build on.

Q: Although this wasn't in your work, did you get involved with Iranian students going to the United States?

SCHERMERHORN: I didn't personally because I wasn't doing consular work.

Q: But I was just wondering whether you were hit by Iranian business contacts who would say, "Can you get my son a visa?" or that sort of thing?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, but you know, when you go into a country and you have that problem, you have to deal with it very sharply right in the beginning because if you get a reputation for being receptive to saying, "I'll see if I can do anything," then it never ends. So you just say, "I'm sorry, that's not my department. You'll have to go?" and you'd be very helpful and say, "This is what you need to do. You need to go here and get this piece of paper," and everything. Businessmen who were of sufficiently high degree, they were probably going to talk to the ambassador, the DCM, anyway. I didn't get the visa issue there; I did get it in my subsequent posts, however, which we'll get to at some point.

The thing is I was often asked after I left when things had fallen apart, "Why didn't anyone know what was going on?" and I'd say, "It's not true that no one knew. There were people who knew that things were not right." But I said, "What I think took people by surprise was not that by early 1978 it was clear the shah was in trouble," I think it was clear, "but the pace and the speed of what happened unraveled so quickly." Because, again, the commotion and this underground group, the technology now, twenty years later, is e-mail and voice and cell phone, and then it was cassettes. But there was now horizontal communication around the world around like-minded whatever. I think SAVAK was certainly looking at dissident Iranians or even Iranians who had not publicly dissented but were outside the country. But they were really focused more on people insidand that, as it turned out, really wasn't where it was going to come froor in conjunction with something else.

Q: While you were there what was the social life like? Particularly, was there much contact with high society or how did this work out?

SCHERMERHORN: There was a certain elite in Iran, which in the days before 1973 when it was a kind of sleepy kind of place and there wasn't a lot of money sloshing around, there was a very nice social life apparently. But by the time we got there it was so busy that at our level we didn't get into this. I'm sure the ambassador and the DCM got invited to things, but people didn't pay much attention. Also there were some very canny Iranians at that point who increasingly probably had their fingers to the wind there and a lot of the wives would go for extended periods to Europe and shop or whatever it was, but the periods got longer and the frequency got greater. Part of it was they were literally awash in money so they could do it more often, but also it was some people hedging their bets more and that was, I think, a sign that we didn't pick up on very much.

Q: You left there in '78.

SCHERMERHORN: Well my tour was three years. There was back and forth because at some point between the time I got assigned and the time I got there, the tour changed from three to four years or something and it wasn't clear which one I was under. By that time we really knew we were dealing with so many people, they were happy to have me stay. I don't remember exactly now but I guess whatever I thought I wanted to do next hadn't materialized or anything. So anyway I stayed and it was January and they said okay, so it was actually three-and-a-half years that I was there.

Q: You left there when?

SCHERMERHORN: In early January, just as Carter came on that trip.

Q: You weren't there during the Cartethis was the five thousandth year of the Persian state?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh, Persepolis. No, that was in 1973 when he gave that huge extravaganza. When you say "society," there was quite an active Italian community there; a lot of European businessmen, but particularly Italians. I think I may have mentioned this earlier, it was in part because the son of Victor Emmanuel, the Savoy Prince; he had gone and done business and he was roughly a contemporary.

I think in terms of the embassy it was probably the happiesin the sense that people got along well and we had a lot of fun and probably my closest friends in the Foreign Service come from that period because it was a challenge to be there in this very busy, busy period. We got there and the housing market had gone crazy so people had to live in temporary housing; there were a lot of little pressures but everybody dealt with it very well and it was fun.

Q: Was there any concern that you were picking up about the large number of American technicians? We were bringing a lot of helicopter mechanics and all of this in and they're trying to live the life of Waco, Texas or something like that?

SCHERMERHORN: Well that was mostly the Bell helicopter contract which was centered in the city of Isfahan, which is a very beautiful Persian city some distance from Tehran. I had a kind of strange outlook on that [laughs]. I actually came across some people to whom I had issued immigrant visas for their alien wives in Saigon but when I met them in Tehran they were there with a different alien wife via the Mexican divorce. I got to calling it the Southeast Asian floating crop game because the people who were doing contract work for one of the big contractors or whatever it might be often they had started in the Korean War and they had a Korean wife and then they went to Okinawa and there was an Okinawan wife and then it was a Vietnamese wife and then it was something else. I think, though, they lived in a pretty compartmentalized way there; I mean they weren't in Tehran. Isfahan is not the holiest city but it's sort of a cultural icon and a conservative city so they may have been a bit of a problem.

Q: Had any of the incidents later that became so important, like the fire at the theater and that sort of thing, happened while you were there?

SCHERMERHORN: No, but I think it was just before I got there we'd had a couple of military people killed; their car was ambushed and so on. And of course early in the '70s the ambassador?

Q: Douglas MacArthur.

SCHERMERHORN: MacArthur. His chauffeur had been trained in defensive driving and they tried to ambush the ambassador's car but the driver was able to foil the attempt and got some great award for it. So security was always on people's minds, but again that's why I said people knew there were some problems but I don't think they realized the depth. And there were kind of two sets of problems; there were the dissidents in the country and the Khomeini faction outside that was organized- (end of tape)

Tape 5, Side A

The Tudeh party, again, that goes back to the Mossadegh times and the post-war period. But as you said, those were the bad guys. I don't think actually, as it turned out, that the Khomeini faction and the fundamentalists had any real dealings; that was incidental. But, yes, there was a lot of confusion about what was happening.

Q: As with most revolutions; you look at the French and the Russian revolutions and both then, if you look at how the thing started and how it ended, the revolution was essentially a fight within the revolutionary movement and you never know who's going to come out on top.

SCHERMERHORN: It starts with the moderates and then the extremists take over and the moderates fight each other.

Q: And the extremists fight each other. It's '78 in January and the time had gone, whither, Lange?

SCHERMERHORN: I knew then that I was getting an assignment but it wasn't going to start until the summer so I went back to the Department and my colleague, Lionel Rosenblatt, who I mentioned earlier here who had been in Sri Lanka and then in Vietnam, at that point he had gotten very? Oh, I should mention, while I was in Iran I'm listening to the radio on May 1st, 1975 as they detail the fall of Saigon and the lifting off of the embassy staff from the roof with the helicopters and all of this. Lionel had distinguished himself along with another young FSO, Craig Johnstone, by going back to Vietnam on their own to try to rescue the Vietnamese who had worked for them in something called the Phoenix Program which was very controversial.

Those were Vietnamese people who if the connection with that program were known definitely would have been executed, so they did go back and manage to save quite a few. From that experience Lionel got very involved in the issue of Vietnamese refugees and the boat people. So anyway, he was at that point working with a fellow called Shep Loman and Hank Cushing, an AID officer, and they were working on the boat people. When I say "working on," I mean trying to lobby the upper echelons of the State Department and the Congress to admit these people as refugees and to get countries of what they call first asylum so that they weren't floating around in the China Sea in boats forever and ever. So he said he wanted me to come and work with them, which I did from February to July.

Q: What was the situation in '78 January to July with the boat people? What did you find how things were working and not working?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it was very chaotic at that point. There had been some emergency legislation to admit refugees above the quota but there were many more refugees in various places in Southeast Asia than we were going to admit; and so a great part of their action was to work on the countries of first asylum: Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, etcetera. This was a very hard sell because these countries didn't want to be inundated with these people and they felt if they gave first asylum it would only have a magnet affect and attract more and more. And of course the Thai, that was the most important because they?

Lionel is truly a brilliant operator. They didn't just work with tunnel vision on one issue. He had tentacles out everywhere. One of the things they did was there was a journalist writing for the New York Times called Henry Cam and he was working out of Bangkok or Hong Kong and he did a series on the boat people. So this office started a campaign to get him nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for this series, and they did. It was lobbying important people and he won the prize. But the idea was to raise the consciousness of people on the importance of the issue as they saw that as a humanitarian responsibility of the United States as an unanticipated consequence of what had happened.

Q: You were there about five months. How did you find the system was responding to this?

SCHERMERHORN: This was now the Carter administration so there was an interest and an emphasis on humanitarian affairs and in fact this refugee office was under this newly created bureau with Patt Derian and people. So yes, there was an interest in the administration and they were supportive of Shep and Lionel working on this issue and trying to make something happen, but as I said it was not easy because we're talking about masses of people and trying to get the Congress to agree to let in almost as many Indo-Chinesmostly Vietnamese and a few otheras our total immigration quota for the year. You may know more about that.

Q: I didn't really get involved with that. Was there much response at the Department?

SCHERMERHORN: You know, you didn't have a lot of dealings other than the East Asian Bureau because the memos were trying to lobby upper management to make some kind of?I mean it wasn't a Department issue per se.

Q: You did this for?

SCHERMERHORN: Five months or whatever. We wrote memos and we wrote letters to people. I mean there was a lot of autonomy in the sense that they were making this their mission to deal with it, but people weren't really directing how they were doing it. As I said, Lionel and Shep are both very creative people and they were leaving no stone unturned, but some of it was a little unorthodox by usual Department standards. It was much more making something happen, which again is kind of a theme that I've warmed to in my Foreign Service career.

The early view, thirty-five years ago, was you're a diplomat; you're there to record, to be a liaison sharing opinions back and forth, or whatever, factual exchanges in your government. But when I first came in I didn't conceive of any of this as being an active advocate for things. What I call making things happen. But I became converted to that idea that it's more important we do that because you can have a policy or not, whatever it may be, but sometimes, especially when you're working in the developing world or with bureaucracies, you've got to move and take the first step because if you don't, nobody else is going to do it either to make something happen. And this is a good case here where I think with the refugee issue we began to move much more from the traditional view of diplomacy into advocating issues that were again not in the traditional sphere of diplomacy as we thought of it pre-World War II and in the '50s.

Q: In July of '78 whither?

SCHERMERHORN: I went to London as a commercial officer. London is a wonderful city and I knew a lot of people thercollege friends and some other friends and whatnobut I consider it my least interesting job.

Q: When you think about it, sometimes on some issues it is the center, but as a commercial officer, I mean America has been dealing with the British for a few years. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: Actually what turned out as kind of interesting because in those days, again, still the follow-on from all this oil money sloshing around and of course London is host to people of every possible nationality, but a lot of African and Middle East businessmen would come in and want to talk about how they could do business. My favorite line iwe used to joke about thil think every second African who came in, he wanted to come in and he'd say, "I have a very confidential?I want to get the Carrier air conditioner franchise for my country," [laughs] and I'd say, "Well you were a little late." It was sort of a joke. It actually turned out to be a little niche because I knew how to talk to these people. There wasn't much we could do for them but at least I could?

My two bosses therCalvin Berlin was the commercial counselor and Stan Harris was the deputy, the commercial attachï¿½, and Stan was completely flummoxed; one day I was out at a lunch or something and I came in and the secretary said, "Mr. Harris wants you to go into his office right away," and he had some Iraqi or somebody in there and he looked totally flummoxed and he said, "Oh, yes, Miss Schermerhorn will take care of you." [laughs] And afterward he said to me, "I don't understand any of that." So even though it wasn't very productive in the sense that we had any great business dealings, they had to be dealt with because they appeared. So that kind of ended up as my specialty.

It was a fascinating place though. You know it shows you have funny turns in the Foreign Service because Cal Berlin had a Ph.D. and one day we were talking and it turned out that his Ph.D. was in eighteenth century British politics and he knew more about the workings of the British parliament than anybody in the political section. [laughs] He said, "I used to be a professor and I taught all that, but now my job is something else here." It was kind of interesting.

Q: Sometimes these large posts, unless you really have another life, it can be pretty awful.

SCHERMERHORN: I knew a lot of people there but I think for new, junior people, and often for the secretaries or the communicators who didn't have as much opportunity to meet British people; British people are very difficult to meet on a social level even if you'rit sounds funny, but anybody who's been there can confirm that. I could amuse myself very easily.

I must say, I was taken aback because the first week I was there I went arounand it's a big buildinto introduce myself. First of all, I'm walking down these corridors and everybody has got their door closed. Well I'd never been in an embassy where people had their door closed all the time. So I'm knocking on the door and one of them is the agricultural attachï¿½ and he's got about six people in his office there so I knock on the door and I go in and I say, "I'm so-and-so. I'm the new commercial officer," and blah, and he comes and the attachï¿½ kind of looks at me and he says, "Oh. Well what do you want?" [laughs] And I said, "I don't want anything. I just, I'm in the embassy now and I want to introduce myself," and then he smiled and he said, "Oh, that's nice. Nobody ever does that." The culture there was completely different. And he said, "But you don't have anything to do with what I do," and I said, "Well maybe I won't have anything to do with it here, but I certainly did in Iran and I knew your colleague there very well and we worked together." [laughs] I mean it was very bizarre.

Q: Often the places pick up the coloration of where they are sometimes.

SCHERMERHORN: I made a point after that of always leaving my door open, which I like to do anyway. My office was in a corridor at the end of which was the office of a British woman who was legendary; her name was Joan Auten?

Q: Oh, yes.

SCHERMERHORN: And she had been the visitors control, and of course London had so many visitors she had a whole office of VIP (Very Important Person) and so a lot of people came back and forth in that corridor. And I had friends in the political section, a couple of people who had been in SS with me. I am fascinated by British politics; I was before I went, so I had fun following that. They used to get tickets to the parliament; you could go in. Sometimes nobody would use them and I'd ask if I could go. It wasn't very interesting.

The whole British thing was very fascinating because I got there in December of '78 and then they had what they called the winter of discontent, when the Labour Party was still in power but there were strikes all over and so forth, and then in May of '79 they had the election in which Mrs. Thatcher won. I remember people would say to me, "And where have you been, dear?" (in a British accent) and I'd say, "Sri Lanka," which by that time was having some internal problems itself, "Vietnam, Iran" and they'd kind of look at me as if I were Typhoid Mary, you know, what was coming. Then of course when Mrs. Thatcher won some of them thought that was my fault. [laughs]

But that was very interesting to watch her first couple of years because she really waded in full bore with this economic reform and it wasn't going very well in the beginning because of course there's a time lag with all economic?that I learned in my economic course. You could institute changes but seeing the results takes time, and the ordering which you do them is important, how they interact with each other. So she was having some heavy weather. I think, and I think it's now come to be a pretty well accepted view, that she may well not have been reelected in 1983 if she hadn't had the Falklands factor, because the subsequent benefits of the economic reform were not yet sufficiently apparent to persuade people that she was on the right track.

But you know, in the period when I was there you almost felt that the U.K. was threatening to become one big theme park. I mean it was kind of not moving in the right direction. And she changed that. Now of course there are people that have subsequently criticized a lot of what she's done but I think that the Labour Party today certainly owes her a lot too. It really wouldn't exist in any [inaudible].

Q: By hurting the unions which would really just be obstructive; these were not a positive factor from as far as I could see, but this was from a distance. That whole class system is?

SCHERMERHORN: People ask me, "Wasn't it difficult being in a Muslim country?" meaning Iran, and finally I got a little exasperatethis was in Londoand I said, "Well actually, it's not quite as difficult as it is here." Because the attitude both toward women and Americans, and put that together with American women? I can remember going to a lunch in a chamber of commerce or something and I was sitting at a table with a couple of British businessmen and I'm chatting to one and I forget what we were talking abousomething turned on a literary thinand so the lunch is over and he says to me, "That was very interesting," and one of his friends comes over and he looks at me and he says to the other fellow, "How did you enjoy yourself?" and he says, "Well, very much, surprisingly." They can be so rude but they don't think of it. And I'm thinking, well, okay. [laughs]

I can remember going to a dinner party with a very charming set of English people, or charming I thought, and one of the wives was not saying very much but at one point in the conversation over the dinner table she started to venture a little comment and her husband who's sitting diagonally, he doesn't look at her but he did say, "Shut up, darling." I mean these are upper echelon.

Q: Did you find something that I've noticed a little in my visits there, but I've never served there, you have the feeling they're trying to figure out how to place you in American standards?

SCHERMERHORN: We don't get placed then.

Q: We exalted coming from a log cabin if we happened to, whereas they tried to duck it. Who are we and where are we and we want to know what you do, who are you?

SCHERMERHORN: That's changed a lot now fortunately, but you're right.

The ambassador when I arrived was Kingman Brewster, and of course the British adored him because he had been president of Yale and he was a wonderful, witty public speaker in this country where the after dinner toast is an art form. He could do that beautifully as well or better than any of his? Ed Streeter was the DCM and he was very kind to me. When I got there, April Glaspiwhom I mentioned earlier when we were in the Ops Center togetheby that time was a full-fledged Arabist and she was assigned and arrived virtually at the same time as I did to be what we call the "NEA watcher" there. She was there but then at some point somebody back in Washington looked at her assignment record and found that she was approaching fifteen years in the Foreign Service and she hadn't been back the requisite three years out of fifteen, so they curtailed her to go to the UN and do the same. So after a year she left. So I was really the senior woman and I got promoted the first year, so I was a 1. I noticed as a senior woman, other than some vice consuls, I was about the only one.

I went to a reception that Halliburton Corporation gave and Ann Armstrong, who had been ambassador in the U.K., was on the board and she was in the receiving line and I introduced myself and she said, "Oh, I'm so glad. When I was the ambassador there, there were no women at all except?" It was funny. But Brewster had a very good idea. He invited for the weekly staff meetings a prominent Brit to come and address the staff; it could be a politician, like we had Shirley Williams comthat was the point when they were starting the new party, the Social Democratand Robin Day, who is now Sir Robin Day, the journalist/broadcaster; David Frost and various other public figures that were pretty high-powered people. So to get them to come and talk to twenty people in the embassy was pretty good.

Brewster was wonderful and then he left at the change of administration in 1980. When he left, of course there were a series of farewell dinners for cabinet members and whatnot. I got invited to many of them, because a lot of the British parliamentarians' families may not be in London so they always need extra women because you can't have the table not sit right. [laughs] That was fun. I sat next to Callahan one time and you know. So it was very interesting. Then the new ambassador came and there were a set of dinners to introduce him so the same thing happened.

Q: Who was the new ambassador?

SCHERMERHORN: The new ambassador was a fellow called John Louis, whose money supposedly came from the Johnson-Wax family.

Q: He was a graduate of Williams about the time I was there. I never knew him, but?

SCHERMERHORN: Well he was a very nice, sweet man and I can remember going to one of his first dinners or something and I went the requisite ten minutes early and nobody else was there yet and he was down and we chatted; and as I mentioned in Iran I had sort of an a vocational interest in architecture and the Johnson-Wax building is a famous architectural icon, so we talked about that and so on. Then the moment came after dinner to get up and do the toasts and it was so painful; it became immediately clear that he was not accustomed to public speaking and he found it extremely painful to do this. The DCM, Ed Streeter, was a master at this; he was almost as good as Brewster. He was very witty and urbane and whatsoever. And at these successive occasions it became more painful each time and it makes you wonder what did people tell him that this job entailed, because of all ambassadorships, the one in London is where the public speaking, they grade you on it. That's how they look at you. As I said, unfortunately he had a very difficult act to follow because Brewster was a master.

He'd only been there about a year and a half when the Falklands happenel had left by that poinand he was back on leave and he got pilloried in a way; they said, oh, he didn't go back, or something, but that's a little bit of a canard because clearly if they wanted him to go back, they'd get on the phone and say, "Go back." So I don't know. I think maybe everybody decided it was a good thing to move on to something else. I mean he wasn't comfortable with it and what a terrible burden if you're not.

Q: I was interviewing Roger Harrison about this. He was there during the Louis period. Do you know Roger?

SCHERMERHORN: Roger came just as I was leaving.

Q: Well Roger was saying that Louis really didn't like dinners.

SCHERMERHORN: No, because he had to do the chit-chat.

Q: And he said that you learned very quickly to eat up because he would have a buzzer by his seat to tell them to clear the table and it was not a leisurely time; he wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible.

SCHERMERHORN: And you know that communicates itself to people. So people who I'm sure used to love to come to the American embassy with Brewster and feel it was an honor and they had this relaxed, important exchange, that this was just a duty that clearly he didn't enjoy.

Q: And also he was really cut off at the knees as far as the British, particularly Margaret Thatcher was concerned, by the Grenada thing because he was told to consult with her and he went there and she called a cabinet meeting on this and then was told that we'd already invaded and he didn't know that.

SCHERMERHORN: Oh god.

Q: She dismissed him after that because?

SCHERMERHORN: She felt he wasn't clued in.

Q: He wasn't clued in and he put her in a very embarrassing position.

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, that was early '8I'd gone. I left in '81 but I went back through London in July of '82 and when I got there they were just announcing the Falklands was going on. I left in July about two days after the great royal wedding, so that was kind of the sendoff. But professionally, as I said, it wasn't very interesting for me. I had gotten promoted there but I got promoted on what I had done in Iran, not on anything I did there. But I enjoyed very much working with Stan and with Cal Berlin.

There was another very important thing going on there which was a reorganization issue for the U.S. government, and that was there had been a groundswell ever since the oil price increasa groundswell of opinion that the Department of Commerce should be the agency that actually did the commercial work overseas because the businessmen and the Commerce people said, "Read whatever you want. Those pinko, lefty, they don't know how to talk to businessmen," and yakkety-yak-yak, and "Look at this; our trade balance has gone to hell while their?" and so on. Then when Bob Strauss got in the White House as whatever he was therhe was secretary of Commerce at one point, tohe made a big push for this, so there was in 1980 as part of the Foreign Service Act; I don't think it's actually in the Foreign Service Act, but there was this agreement that the commercial function would be taken over by Commerce overseas. The devil was in those details and it turned out that it wasn't going to be everywhere overseas, it was going to be in the twenty most important markets based on the trade statistics at that time, which of course meant mostly in the Middle East and places like London where they wanted to go and so on.

So when the Foreign Commercial Service was created they said they would take some Foreign Service officers; basically they made it sound as if they really didn't want to take anybody, but they'd take a few. It turned out they took a lot and they needed to because they didn't know how to do it, but that's another thing. [laughs] And I'm sitting there talking to Cal and I had said, "Look, I was in Iran and I certainly knew how to talk to those businessmen," and I said, "A lot of people in the Foreign Service maybe don't because it's not their interest, but it's not true that nobody knows how to do this." And I said that in fact they used to even ask and come to us rather than the commercial person who was there. [laughs] I told you that. He counseled me. He said, "If you want to apply, I think you would get in and I would certainly recommend that you get in." But he said, "On a personal level I don't think you should do it. You've done a lot of other things, not only commercial work, and you can and you should." And I thought about it, but then I decided no. I joined the Foreign Service as a diplomat and that's what I wanted to do. That didn't preclude me from working with business, but I didn't want to do it exclusively.

Q: Also, in a way it narrows your opportunities as far as interesting work; as you move up you want to be able to broaden out and not to stick in.

SCHERMERHORN: Well my problem is I've always been too broad. It's more of a problem sometimes later on, but mostly it's stood me in good stead. But I mean I appreciated his confidence in me and he himself went oveand so did Stan Harribut they had more time in the Service and they had different perspectives on this. He said, "I wouldn't do it if I were you."

Q: I think it was probably good advice.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. I thought about it in passing, but not very long.

Q: Then in '81 whither?

SCHERMERHORN: While I was bidding on my assignment, by that time the bidding process had become fairly well refined and you had all these things to bid on, but at the one level they also, as I didn't understand the process at the time but later when I was in personnel myself, I did, the war college, what they call "senior training," which means one year training opportunities for people at the -01 grade. The Foreign Service Act of 1980 had rejiggered these grades and created a Senior Foreign Service which was the promotion up from -01, and so as an -01 you were supposed to be trained by going to some form of course for the Senior Foreign Service; the theory being that it was selective and everybody wasn't going to go to the Senior Foreign Service. But you didn't bid for that, they automatically looked at all the -01s.

So my counselor calls me and says, "Well you're on the list for senior training." And that was because, as I said, Stan was very happy that he could give me things to deal with that he didn't have to deal with so he was very nice in his evaluation, although I don't feel that I did anything there to merit much of anything; it wasn't that great a job. So the counselor calls and he says, "Well you're on the senior training schedule," and I said, "Well I don't want to do that. I'd much prefer one of these things that I bid." He said, "Never mind. You're going to do it," and I said, "Well, why do I have to?" They have to fill the? And he said, "You're high enough on the list that you were supposed to put down three choices in rank order from among the various opportunities for training. And he said, "You're high enough on the list," because we go down numerically to assign people to their preferences, "that whatever you put first on your list you will probably get. So send us the three and do it right now." Some of them were out of Washington and that's a problem because you move for a year and then you have to move again. So I put down as a first choice the national war college which is right here in Washington, but I said at one point to him, "If I'm high enough for that I should be able to get one of those jobs I bid," anthis is my counselohe said, "Well you're not the first choice for any of them." I said, "Well if I'm not the first choice for any of those, I probably shouldn't be high?" [laughs] It was one of these rhetorical?They were going to sell their quota to go to the training regardless.

Although it's true because I had moved around in bureaus, I mean I had several jobs in NEA, but one was South Asia, one was Iran and so forth, so there wasn't really a lot of cohesion; I couldn't call myself an area specialist so that does become a problem. But anyway I was going off to the National War College.

Q: So you went to the National War College from when to when?

SCHERMERHORN: August, 198it's an academic yeauntil June, '82.

Q: How did you find that year?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I was not too enthused. I hadn't been that excited, as I said, about the job in London so I was beginning to think maybe I should look for something else I should do. So I was a little resistant to this idea really, I guess. This was starting in 1947 when General Marshall was secretary of state and the idea was they would provide an environment in which civilians and military could train together on national security issues to better position us to work together and so on. So the format of the college, of the student element, was 160 students each year; 130 were military, mostly at the Army and Marine level they were colonel level and Navy equivalent.

Q: Captain.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. And the Air Force did lieutenant colonels more, somehow, and thirty civilians and fifteen of the thirty were from the State Department each year and the other fifteen ranged around a variety of other agencies. I mean DOD (Department of Defense) civilian, CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) overt people, Congressional Research Service had one the year I was there, Coast Guard. It was a mix. In my year there were only five women out of this 160; there had been women there before, but I think five was the most they'd ever had in a class beforone State Department, one NSA (National Security Agency) woman, and three military women. AID had, Commerce had, everybody had?I got into it after being initially a little annoyed at going there. [laughs]

They had a lot of emphasis on athletics; you had to run around and do your 10K and all of this stuff. They set it up in coursework and you had what I called a homeroom; you had a committee room of about fifteen or sixteen people that you went in and sat with every morning. That's where you had your little desk and everything. You had seminars and they scheduled them so that by the end of the year you probably would've beeyou changed every two or three week segment of the coursin a seminar with everybody else. So you did get to interact. And then you had writing exercises or stuff where either they appointed one or you self-selected a group and you had regular professors and courses. You didn't have exams really.

The first part of it was interesting though because the military was way ahead of the State Department. They gave you something called the Meyers-Briggs test which in 1981 the State Department had never heard of. This is an examination to help you understand how you interact with other personality types and what your personality type is. The idea is it's supposed to improve the dynamics of the group and so on. They find that most of the military are these hard-charging, what we would call "Type A" personalities, and most of the State Department people are not that and are something else, but there are occasionally exceptions. And they also gave you an economic and a math and a verbanot an SAT (Scholastic Assessment Tests), but like a little analysito see where you are; and of course the State Department people always do pretty well on that. What was so fascinating, and I felt comfortable because I had been in a lot of places with military; there had been military in Iran and certainly in Vietnam. For some of the State Department people it's totally new, although in that period not so much because I think most everybody had some acquaintance with?

They had very good faculty. In fact the fellow who does the Middle East is still therBard O'Neill. He publishes and he's a Ph.D. and everything. But I think the most interesting part of that was?They did extracurricular things like tour Civil War battlefields on the weekend and that was fun. I liked that. There weren't many State Department people who did that. [laughs] Then you had a class trip in the spring, but in good bureaucratic fashion they were always hovering on the edge of whether they were going to get the funding to do it so you'd do all the planning for the trip and then you wouldn't know until about five days before whether you were actually going to go. I should say trips because they didn't have any more than about fifteen on any trip and there were a whole range of trips and you put down your order of preference. Everybody got their first choice except the women and the reason we didn't get our first choice is in order to save money they wanted to put them in a double room, so they had to have at least two and two; so I got my fourth choice which was to go back to the Middle East. I actually went to places that I hadn't been, but still. I went on the trip that went to Egypt and the UAE (United Arab Emirates) and Saudi Arabia; and one of the other women was on that.

The most interesting thing, I think, in the whole year was after the Christmas break we came back and the dean of students who was an army colonel got up and talked about?they handed out the curriculum for the next several segments and then he said, "You know, we've had a very difficult discussion with the faculty here. There are some people who believe it's time for us to have Vietnam on the agenda," this is now January, '82 and since 1975 they have not addressed this subject at all; it's been verbote"and there are others who feel that it's still too soon. But those of us," and he put himself in the category, "who believe we should talk about it have prevailed, so when you come back from your trip, the first two-week segment in April will be on Vietnam." So we all go on the trips and that's fine.

We went to the Middle East in '82 and that was when the bomb went off in Beirut that?Our group that was going to the Middle East had gone to the Agency for a briefing and Bob Ames had given us the briefing and then he was on a TDY (temporary duty) to Beirut and he was killed in that bombing of the embassy shortly after that. We all go up, we have a good time on our trip, we come back and the first morning we're in a new study group now with people we haven't been in the group together with. There was one other State Department person in this group, but someone who had not been in Vietnam.

We had long, trestle-type tables that we were seated at and the instructor is at one end and that morning I happened to sit to the left of the instructor. He gives this little preamble and then he opens it for discussion and I thought this is going to be difficult so I better get my oar in here quick. So I raise my hand and since it's right in front of my face he says, "Yes?" and I say, "When I was in Vietnam," and I'm about to continue, a disembodied voice I can't see down on the same side of the table says in this hostile voice, "You! When were you in Vietnam?" It went on like that but actually that was the opening I wanted because I'd said, "Well actually, you know, on a percentage basis there are probably more Foreign Service officers who had been in Vietnam in the period 1962 to 1975 than any other government agency. And he said, "What were they doing there?" and it turned out this was an air force pilot. So we had the people who were bombing from 35,000 feet and we had the people who were lobbing the shells in from the boat, and we had the JAG lawyer in the group. So I explained that as Foreign Service officers we did CORDS and I said I had a traditional embassy job. So I had a little time to set the stage for that because I knew if we didn't assert ourselves?As I said, my colleague wasn't any help because he hadn't been there.

So then they're off and running and I mean the hostility was so palpable and they're screaming, "We should have been allowed to [this and that]" and some who didn't agree. You had every service there. But it was like the story in India, you know, you're asked to describe the elephant and depending on what part of it you've?

Q: The three blind men.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. I actually had a broader view of what was going on than almost anybody else for this reason; when I was sitting in the consular section I had a map of Vietnam and I used to ask people when they came in, "Where are you from? What are you doing?" and I'd actually been to a lot of those places, whereas a lot of the military had gone to one place and that was it. Obviously the people on the faculty who said it was too soon were right; this was replicated in the other groups too. It dissipated all this carefully built up camaraderie that they strive for over time.

The last six weeks, May and the two weeks of June, were supposed to be an exercise. A consultant was coming in and that was a shambles, not because of the hostility but because they hadn't tested the model. We did group exercises where you had a problem and then you had to distill it into a little page of what you'd do and so on. In those days we didn't have computers and we didn't have access to typewriters or anything but I used to watch when the secretary went to lunch and so I said one day, "May I sit at your typewriter while you're at lunch?" I would go in and type up this. But they'd all be sitting around yak, yak, yakking, and nothing would?and I'd say, "Well we have to hand in something pretty soon." [laughs] They were good military people with good ideas so I'd just go sit down and say, "da, da, da, da, da, da," and actually our group was second in this series of exercises because the others were handwriting theirs. [laughs] But now they all get computers and it's very [inaudible].

Q: Something I've noticed is that you can take the normal Foreign Service officer and say, "Produce something," and we can sit down and we deal with words. I find I can sort of whip out thingit might not be the greatest, but?

SCHERMERHORN: It's a starting point anyway for people to begin.

Q: Often we're the writers, the scribes.

SCHERMERHORN: The other thing I want to mention here which is fascinating. Sometimes we civilians have a sort of monolithic idea of the military, but in this group of 130 people, the range was from a fighter pilot who literally had gotten out of the airplane for the first time and was still kind of walking around like?had never done any of this reading, these papers, any of this kind of stuff.

Tape 5, Side B

It was a fascinating mix. The Marines were the most fun and interesting part of it. They were all shorter than anybody else; I think it's something about the Marine Corps. One of them was Chuck Krulak, whose father was Victor Krulak, and Chuck later became commandant of the Marine Corps himself a couple of years ago and has just retired. They're very thoughtful people and of course physical fitness oriented. One of my Foreign Service classmates was the star of the baseball team and this raised the State Department element in the eyes of the military that we actually had a world-class athlete there in that group. [laughs] It was John Finney. The traditional rivalry is with the Army War College in Carlisle and you have a sports day.

Since four or five years ago they've finally done something that people had talked about for a long time, which was to get accreditation for the course so you could get a Master's degree when you finish it. Up until think that was in '96 or '9you just finished. It was very interesting.

Q: Something that's interesting that you said that is replicated with a great number of people, Foreign Service officers that have gone to the National War College, is that when they're looking at it they usually rate the Marine Corps officers who get there as being the broadest, the most thoughtful ones, unlike one thinks of the Marines, you point and say, "Take that hill." And then the army comes after that and then it's sort of a toss-up between the air force and the navy for not being terribly interested in anything outside of driving a ship or flying a plane.

SCHERMERHORN: Again, the army is the biggest contingent. It's roughly prorated according to the size of the?So I think there were only about twenty Marines out of that 130. The greatest variation is in the army contingent because you've got everything from tank drivers to this junior Henry Kissinger over here. But the air force, by virtue of what it does, it's a lot of?And I think they look at the war college as a way to give the pilots a change of pace rather than having them contribute something to it or learn as much. It's a little different philosophy about it, I think.

John Jumper, who's a muckety-muck and who's still on active duty, along with Chuck Krulak, Tom Drowdy, who was on my committee while he was a Marinvery thoughtful, interesting, solid guhe became a general. A lot of them don't, but many do.

Q: You were there '81, '82?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: The Soviet Union, I take it, was the enemy. Or were they talking beyond that?

SCHERMERHORN: No, they were talking beyond that because they were very involved?they were using the phrase "Southwest Asia," which was just coming into currency. The nature of the problem was lift and transportation, either shipping or airlift to that part of the world. So a lot of the exercise was basically logistics and that was interesting because as an economic officer I felt very good because sometimes the military would be talking about it and I'd say, "Yes, but you've got a logistics problem here." I mean there were some logistics military people but they were more concerned with you've got twenty tanks and how much can you put in the tank to get?

Q: The logistics people were at the Armed Forces Industrial College.

SCHERMERHORN: Sometimes you could get down to the practical aspects of the problem. What are we really talking about? What do you really need to achieve what it is that you think you're trying to do here?

Q: While you were going to the Middle East did you look at Diego Garcia? Was that something that came up?

SCHERMERHORN: I think it did.

Q: And the Trucial States because were they in a place to stockpile or was that early daywe weren't doing that then?

SCHERMERHORN: No, we weren't. The Trucial States were?all those gulf things had become independent.

Q: Yes. Well, the United Arab Emirates... We had later a series of treaties, but we didn't?

SCHERMERHORN: We had COMIDEASTFOR in Bahrain; we've had that since the 1950s. But it wasn't a big thing.

Q: But later, particularly with Muscat, Oman, we were able to start a stockpile. I think that came in the later '80s.

SCHERMERHORN: That came just pre-Gulf War. Mid-'80s, I think. We were beginning to talk and I don't know exactly the dates for when the command structure that we now havCentral Command, South Com and all thaCentral Command we called something else, but that was basically the same thing.

Q: Were we looking hard at the Soviet Union at this time?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh yes. It was all based on protecting the oil fields, but because the Soviet Union might stimulate the activity that would take them out of our reach, or whatever. When we talked about Africa, it was as I said; it was always there; you didn't really think about it because that was it.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop Lange. To set it up for next time, 1982 you were out of the National War College. Whither?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, that was interesting because I'm sitting in the war college and I'm putting in my bid list and I was an -01 and you're supposed to put in fifteen bids so I put in fourteen bids for -01 jobs and only one what we call "stretch" for a senior job, which I thought was one that wasn't outrageously?econ counselor in Lagos, Nigeria, which was an OPEC country and it had some of the same issues of all this business.

So the counselor, a fellow by the name of Dick Scissors, calls me quite early on, like in March, and he says, "We don't have any senior bidders for Lagos so you're the candidate. But of course we can't actually make the assignment until May because it's not the stretch season," meaning they wait to assign the jobs that are going to be a "stretch" for people until after they've gotten rid of all the others. So I'm sitting there and I don't hear anything and I call up and ask and he said, "It's not time yet." Finally it's May and I said, "Look, I need to have some orders. What's going on?" and he said, "Well you better come and see me." [laughs] I'm thinking, hmm. So I go over and it's now like the middle of May and he said, "Well, you know, you're not going to go to Lagos because we found somebody," meaning a senior. And I said, "Well, when did you find him? Because you haven't told me," and he shuffled around on that one. I said, "What do I do now? I think all these other jobs that I bid on have already gone," and he said, "Yes." I was really very annoyed at this because I didn't think he dealt well with it. And I said, "What do I do?" and he said, "Well I don't know what you're going to do, but I'm leaving in early June for my assignment." I said, "Well, who do I deal with?" and he said, "My replacement isn't arriving until the end of August," and he gave me the name of somebody else in the assignment office.

The person they had found had been the economic officer in Jeddah and wanted something else which they told him he was going to get and then he didn't get it, so he as a fullback said, "Well, I'll look at other senior jobs. I didn't want to go to Lagos but I'll do that." The rules are that if there's the right level for the job?I didn't object to that; what I objected to is that they didn't see that one coming. And I said, "Well it doesn't look good to have someone go to the war college and then you leave it without an assignment." So he went off. I've seen Dick since I remember that, which he prefers to forget. [laughs] But anyway, I duly call on this person who he referred me to in this office who was very aggressive, "Oh no, I don't deal with you," and I said, "Oh come on." I set at the U.K. Desk for a little bit and then I'm sitting around.

I said, "There's nothing on the list that's available," and they said, "Oh yes, there is." And I said, "Not the list I'm looking at." Well it turned out there was something that had just come up and it was deputy director of North African Affairs, which was then called NEA/MGB, Maghreit's not called that any longeand it was the four countries in North Africa. The reason it became available, this was around October, is that the fellow who was assigned to it, called Ed Abington, had come in but then they sort of had a Saturday night massacre of sorts. Charlie Hill had been director of the Arab-Israeli Desk and Charlie Hill had been tapped to go up and work in the secretariat, to be the executive secretary. And of course when a job of that nature calls, they just pluck you out immediately. So then whoever else was in that office moved up so there was a vacancy there and Abington really wanted to do thahe had been in Jerusalem or somethinso they broke his assignment and moved him over to that. Then they had this vacancy. When Abington went, it had been advertised at the -02 level. I don't know what shenanigans they went through; I don't know whether they elevated it for Abington and then he left so it was an -01, or whether they did that so they could put me?I don't know. At that point it was embarrassing that I didn't?

So I went to meet the director, Peter Sebastian, and of course I knew nothing about North Africa and I don't think he was too thrilled with that. But anyway we got along fine.

Q: Alright. So in '82 you're to North African Affairs.

Lange, we're in 1982 and you finished the war college and you're going to North African Affairs?

SCHERMERHORN: Well that's not where I thought I was going when I finished the war college, but that's where I went.

Q: You did North African Affairs from when to when?

SCHERMERHORN: From October, '82 until March, '85.

Q: It was called the Office of North African?

SCHERMERHORN: Actually the designation was NEA/MGB, Maghreb; actually it was called Maghrebian Affairs then. It consisted of the four countries of North Africa, without Egypt. More recently Egypt has been decommissioned as a separate country desk.

Q: Do you want to name the four countries?

SCHERMERHORN: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. And of course in those days Libya was our great nemesis.

Q: Mauritania didn't?

SCHERMERHORN: No. Mauritania was in the African Bureau, not the Middle Eastern Bureau, because in the days when they had carved out North Africa and added it to NEA, they had to draw the line somewhere and even though a case could well have been made for putting Mauritania with North Africa, they didn't.

Q: Let's sort of walk our way around it. Who was the head of NEA at the time and whom did you report to?

SCHERMERHORN: The office director was Peter Sebastian who was really an expert on that. Prior to coming to the office directorship, he had been the DCM in Morocco and was a great linguisspoke beautiful French; I think French was the language he had before English eveand was a very fastidious and precise person and a workaholic. Poor man; he got this person who knew nothing about this area. Anyway, the first thing he said to me when I was presentehe wanted somebody in the job and this was now October and he wanted somebody else and so he had to swallow thi"Well, you know, if there's any staying after six o'clock to be done, you're the one that does it. I don't do that anymore." And of course NEA being NEA, in those days there was a lot of staying after six o'clock to be done, even for one of the peripheral offices, not the centerpiece office. But that was fine. So we understood each other right from the beginning.

When I got to know him better he explained a little bit more about this and he'd had some grave family problems which he attributed to the fact that he was a workaholic; he hadn't paid enough attention to certain issues in his family.

Q: Well good for him. At least he was acknowledging that.

SCHERMERHORN: It was very warm and nice. Also at that point we had just taken on an ambassador in Morocco who was a political appointee and it became better known later on but his name was Joseph Verner Reed, whom I remembered from my days in Iran because Joseph had been first Eugene Black's special assistant and then had been working with the Rockefellers at Chase Bank. When David Rockefeller came to Iran in the '70s when I was there Joseph was his bagman always. Although I didn't have any dealings with him then, I knew who he was. Through the Kissinger-Rockefeller connection he got this ambassadorship.

His DCM was a person who had been in SSS when I was in the secretariat so I knew who he was too, Ted Curran. After I got there in October he'd not been there all that long. Joseph already had a reputation they said. There's a funny board in the Operations Center; when the cables came in that were really amusing, they would be put up on what they called the funny board and there were quite a few, apparently, from Rabat at that point. This was unfortunate because it made a laughingstock out of him very early on and he got a reputation in the Department of being kind of a dilettante political appointee who was pretty silly, which was unfair because when I got to know him bettel mean he had a certain style that probably didn't accord with many Foreign Service officers' views of how ambassadorships should be conducted, but he was very effective and I think that's the bottom line.

Q: Well that's interesting because just in the corridors I had heard that he was a captive of the king and when he would refer to Morocco, he would say "we" more or less?

SCHERMERHORN: The royal "we." [laughs]

Q: The royal we, but he reflected the Moroccans' view and didn't seem to take the American view. But you didn't find that?

SCHERMERHORN: Well you could argue whether what he was espousing, which was helping the king and being closer to the king, was in our interests or not. This was a period when we were having some difficulties doing the kinds of military, particularly air force, exercises in Europe because of population pressures and so on, and in Morocco they had a lot of room to do that kind of thing so that was one. And it was kind of the Southeastern anchor, if you will, where Turkey was in this grand strategy of Kissinger's. So as long as that seemed to be the policy that people were espousing or accepting when Kissinger saithe grand strategthen it did make some sense. On the other hand, it was a very repressive regime; human rights abuses abounded and all those things that you come to know and love about this kind of environment. [laughs] On the other hand, it was probably not as repressive or as difficult as some of the Arab and Muslim regimes further east. There was more of an educatel wouldn't say there was a big middle class, but there were certainly more gradations of education and vibrant commercial environment than maybe Saudi Arabia or so on where everything was very nice. So it had some things going for it too. But there was this nexus. The shah of Iran was given sanctuary, basically, in Morocco. And partly this was Joseph having?he actually had, I believe, or so I was told, negotiated that in 1979 when the shah left and made that his way station. Joseph had pictures of the shah and the baby shah in the house and so on. So there was the Rockefeller, Kissinger, all this nexus of connections.

But the other kind of wild card, except it wasn't a wild card, was also that Vernon, General Walters, had been given a job in the administration and he was sort of adviser-at-large or something. He had an office in the State Department. But he was really the one who had the ear of the king and that goes back to 1943 when Walters went in with the American landings. There's a great photo with the old king, then Hassan, with his father in 1943 when he was about fifteen, and Vernon Walters in a Jeep with them being the translator and so forth. So we used to have this game we played; when every once in a while Vernon Walters would make a trip to see the king and whatever elsand he never really said what the agenda waPeter Sebastian and I would make an appointment to brief Walters which was always a joke because we went down to his office in some corridor in the building and we'd sit down and he'd greet us and then we'd say, "We're here to brief you," and then he'd say, "Yes, but just let me tell you?" and then he'd start off with, "When I was in Casablanca in 1943?" and then he'd tell you some anecdote and this would go on for thirty minutes and then he'd look at his watch and he'd say, "Thank you." [laughs]

Q: Yes. This was very Reaganesque, too.

SCHERMERHORN: The idea was he wasn't going to listen to anything we had to say, but we had to do the protocol of actually doing that. So we'd get up and say, "Thank you," and this was, I think, frustrating to Peter because he did know a lot about it and he had some very pronounced views of his own. But this was also the period when the Polisario was a big issue, and oddly enough twenty-something years later it still is and hasn't been solved.

Q: Tell me, how did we view the Polisario movement in Morocco? Well, I mean two of your countries. You've got?

SCHERMERHORN: Right. And this was a problem.

Q: How did we see it at that time?

SCHERMERHORN: The Department, I think in part because of Walters and the ambassador, didn't want to press the king to allow elections and give them a chance to voice their opinions, but of course a lot of other people, including the Foreign Relations Committee and staff there and so on, were very pro-Polisario so there was always this tension and they weren't too happy with [inaudible]. It's interesting when you find when you work in the Department and you work with a country with an issue, if it's of congressional interest, you find that in most cases the deep interest is at the staff level, not at the principal level. The staff uses that vehicle but they get very passionate about certain issues.

There was this young staffer who worked for Congressman Solarz who then was involved in African affairs.

Q: Were they taking the Polisario's side essentially?

SCHERMERHORN: Well this guy was very pro-Polisario, yes. He kept asking questions and writing letters and so forth. We had a lot of letters to answer about that. The king actually just made enough noises that sounded okay so you could live with this; yes, they would have elections and so on. I'm laughing because of course it's like present day Egypt; Mubarak saying let's free up the economy and so forth and he says, yes, yes, but he's actually not going to do anything because if he does he won't be around. [laughs]

Q: Were you there when the United States sent troops into Grenada, the island?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, that was wha'83? I was in Washington.

Q: I was just wondering because somebody told me the story of really being told at three o'clock in the morning or something to inform the Moroccan government that we were going to do this. Did you hear that story?

SCHERMERHORN: I don't remember that. If there was any message it was "x this" or "o this" or something, but I don't know.

Q: Well, supposedly, he went to the prime minister, woke him up, and looked at the prime minister and said, "Monsieur le Ministre," pardon my French on this, "C'est la guerre. Avec Grenada, avec Espana?" I don't know, but it makes a wonderful story.

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs] That one I didn't hear. But Joseph used to come back about every six weeks on his bat and he would alternate between going through Paris and London and he'd be here for two days and he always wanted appointments with the cabinet level and the first time this happened I thought, oh my god, this is going to be difficult. Here I am the desk officer. We didn't have secretaries who did those things even then. We certainly don't have it now, but we didn't have it even then. So here you're calling these people and of course no voice mail so you end up with all those stacks of yellow telephone message things back and it's a difficult process.

But I got the ones he said he wanted and we went around and the second time it wasn't a problem but he asked for the same cabinet people. I thought, well, what does he need to say again, six or eight weeks later? But this was his thing. He went around with his message, "Greetings from the kingdom," and blah, blah, blah, but he had a great technique because he never sat down; he went in and he said, "I don't want to take much of your time, Mr. Secretary [or whoever it was]; I just want to tell you the king and I want to encourage you to come and visit and to see the marvelous things that are going on there." Then he'd say, "Thank you for your time," and leave, in five or ten minutes. And they liked this because it didn't take long. He had a good technique for that.

In fact he did get almost every member of the cabinet in the time I was there to go because you can imagine the life of a desk officer. [laughs] I was the desk officer and the deputy. This didn't make any sense; this had been a construct from some previous period but at this point Morocco was taking up most of the time and Tunisia waeverybody was waiting for Bourguiba to pass from the scene but he didn't show any signs of doing it at that point. And of course Libya, the other thing, we didn't have an embassy to deal with but we had the NSC and in the first flush of the Reagan administration they kept asking for these National Security studies and then decisions. So we would do this and everybody in the office would work and Peter would coordinate it. I think we did four in the time I was there, which was a lot. We did Libya twice and we did one for the whole Maghreb and we did one for some issumilitary assistance or something. They kept sending it back because they didn't like the answer basically. So Libya was always on the radar screen but it was difficult. It was a different way of dealing with it.

The desk officer for Libya basically had a circular discussion with people mostly from the Agency and from a few other places. There weren't a lot of external peoplLibyans and so fortcalling us either.

Q: There simply wasn't a Libyan lobby.

SCHERMERHORN: No. [laughs]

Q: On Libya did you find yourself at all tangling with the Italian or the French Desk? Because they were getting Libyan oil and that. But that was not your level?

SCHERMERHORN: One of the things that in retrospect strikes me about thiand you were asking me before about Grenadyou really were stove-piped, you know; if you were in the NEA dealing in that, you're not going out horizontally. Even that much within NEA, let alone?I think there's more cross-fertilization, if you will, now than there was at that point. You really didn't know what was happening.

Q: What about the bombing of Libya? That must've been on your watch.

SCHERMERHORN: When I was in the war college we had the two airplanes that went in. When was thaApril?

Q: Yes, but then there was a bombing at a disco in Berlin and we sent planes from England to bomb Libya.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, that went on. There was probably a lot of brouhaha about that at the UN, but it didn't really impact that much on the desk because this was a decision that wasn't made [inaudible].

Q: You really weren't worried about the political?Were we getting any reports of what was going on in Libya?

SCHERMERHORN: Well there were the Agency things which have the headline, you know, "This is unverified information," or something. Of course the higher-ups would read it and read it for gospel without taking the caveat. There was one thing that I found out more about when I was later in Belgium and that is that the Belgians represented us for consular activities in Libya. When their persoambassador or whatever level they had at that poincame back to Brussels periodically, we would try to talk to them there and they would tell us. But a lot of that depended on the personality of the Belgian consul at the moment. When I was there later on in the '90s we had someone who was very interested in telling us. What we did find out, the diplomatic corps was pretty isolated so they didn't have a lot of access to information either.

Q: Were we trying to predict who was going to succeed Qadhafi? We're talking about twenty years later and he's still there, but the beginning of the game is always?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, that was part of this whole MSD exercise. You had regimes that had been in place for a long period, for whatever reason, so if you were trying to analyze the situation and say, "What's next?" you had all these situations with poor gava who was very old, that was clearly something that was going to happen. Qadhafi, who we were hoping there were going to be internal reasons for him to disappear, and the king who we were afraid there were going to be internal reasons. So you had a mix of?

Algeria at that point was going through one of its difficult periods and being very adversarial toward the Moroccans. And then there was this great kind of rapprochement, I guess you'd call it, when the king and the president met at a border town. That was a surprise. Actually, Joseph didn't know about that and he was taken by surprise, which chagrined him a lot. [laughs] Not that it turned out to signify anything much.

Q: Weren't they actually calling her a unified state or something?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, they had talked about?Yes, they projected that they would call?but that never got as far as the United Arab Republic got in. It was a bit of a rapprochement; rapprochement is probably not quite the right word. They both agreed to stand in place for a while.

There were issues with the king because his nephew was studying at Princeton. The other big connection was Malcolm Forbes who had a?

Q: He was a wealthy publisher and other things.

SCHERMERHORN: Right, and had connections in New York with Kissinger. But he owned a villa in Tangier and used to go there and talk to the king. And he also owned an estate in Northern New Jersey and he helped the king identify what place was for sale that the king bought for the use of his family when they were in the United States, including this nephew who was at Princeton. The nephew everybody said was very attractive, supposedly bright, and they always compared the crown prince to the nephew, to his cousin, invidiously and saying that the crown prince is not going to make it and he's not with it and all of this. There was some concern maybe that the brother and the nephew might make a move or something, but in any event that didn't happen and hasn't happened yet. I think the brother has died, the uncle of the present king, and the nephew/cousin I don't think he's living in Morocco now.

Q: As we looked at Morocco, were we uncomfortable with the possible succession at that time?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, we were afraid like always there was a very great interest in the medical condition; anything people could find out from French doctors or whatever. [laughs] The Agency presumably was watching that where every time they breathed or went off to Paris that they'd go to a clinic or whatever. Because the king at that point where either you're going to live to a ripe old age or maybe you have intimations of more deadly? And at that point the crown prince was in his teens.

Q: Where we having any trouble with young Americans and hashish and getting involved there?

SCHERMERHORN: I don't remember much of that in Morocco or in any of those countries. There probably may have been but not of a level that got to our?Why we were concerned about the succession is because there had been two coup attempts, one in 1971 and one in 1972.

Q: One was the birthday and the other was the airplane.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. The earlier one on the ground they were celebrating the birthday of the Royal [whatever it was] Golf Course and the diplomatic corps was present. The next year was the one with the airplane and actually the king, who had trained as a pilot, that was quite a story because he actually took over the controls of the plane and landed. But there was a great sort of consular drama because one of the Moroccan Air Force people who had been the duty officer when the planes took off from whatever the air force base was accused of being complicit in this although he claimed he was innocent and he knew nothing about it, and he was put in jail. He was married to an American whom he had met while he was doing his pilot training in Texas. That had happened in 1972 and here it was eleven, twelve years later, and this woman never stopped making representations and advocating on his behalf. He was in solitary confinement under some awful conditions and at first apparently they wouldn't even admit that they had him in solitary. One of the things that Joseph was very good about is that every time a high-level dignitary went, he had that on the agenda for them to ask about this guy. I learned later, because I asked somebody who had been working on the desk after I had gone, that finally this fellow was released by the old king; he was amnestied or whatever it was. His wife collected him and they had a son. It really was due to her efforts entirely. She had a great deal of strength.

Q: In dealing with Morocco, the king had made a great point of having guests and bringing people over and all. Did he have a clique within Congress "be nice to our boy," and all that?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. In fact, Senator Percy, who then was chair of Foreign Relations was a good friend of Joseph's and whatnoor Joseph made him a good friend [laughs] they managed to get an earmark for 75 million of ESF.

Q: "ESF" being?

SCHERMERHORN: Economic Support Funds. They also had an earmark for some certain times in the military. They had an earmark which the State Department hates the Congress to do because when they get the lump sum the Department wants to be able to divvy it up as it sees fit, and the more earmarks there are, the less they can manipulate what we've gothe little that we do have for this. Somehow Joseph and Percy did this.

But it was a great talking point from there on in because every time you wrote a paper you would say it was earmarked and it enabled us to build on that; which if we'd been going in and asking for assistance and starting from scratch each time, it would be very difficult. But of course, as I said, the Department didn't like that, but Senator Percy was a powerful figure at that point and you weren't going to go against that. And that lasted for quite a while and then at some point I think the king thought they needed a lobbyist. You know, this is what they say in Washington.

The role of the embassy is to advocate what we're interested in seeing happen to the member states that are going to be voting on these issues. The commission members propose but it's the member states and council that dispose. So there's a rule for everybody here. In fact, the people at our mission to the EU didn't have a mandate to lobby individual member states, at least at that point.

Q: So you would go down to the finance ministry or the equivalent and say, "We understand [such and such] is coming up and we'd appreciate?Here's our take on this."

SCHERMERHORN: It depends on who you went to. Sometimes you went to those ministries, sometimes you went to the chef de cabinet in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even if it was an economic issue, but depending on what it was. And we went to the regional government sometimes to talk about the environmental, the nuclear, and those kinds of issues. Actually that's what was making it more interesting. That was really where I got the first taste that the role of the diplomat was expanding and it wasn't this classical kind of limited thing; that the issues were really the lifestyle, the bread and butter, whatever you want to call it. What we needed to pay attention to are things like environmental issues and impact on people. These are not the traditional issues but this is where we first got into this because they were important in the most developed economiethat's where you first got things like what is the real function of nuclear energy and what are the pros and cons of it; and what is the potential for cooperation with the United States, or what are the problems if there isn't cooperation, and that kind of thing. So these were not traditional economic issues as we understood them in the past. Either the trade issues, or as you said, the commercial sales activities and so on. So it was really a whole new dimension opening up as far as I was concerned, but I assume that was true for everybody.

Q: Did you have a feeling that your reports back to Washington, that our EB (Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs) bureau was changing or using it? How did you feel about that?

SCHERMERHORN: We got very little feedback, as I said. Like the tax treaty you dealt with somebody in the Treasury Department and then we did something, which I don't know if it's still being done, called an economic trends report twice a year and we had an FSN who put this together and it went back and got printed by the Department of Commerce and they sell it to people or whatever they do anymore. There was a traditional format for that and that talked a lot about the economy of the country, the GNP (Gross National Product), the budget issues, the debt situation and that kind of stuff. We did that kind of traditional thing. But in terms of advocacy we were getting into, as I said, very specific issues like export controls, which of course had a security dimension. This was really a security issue but we were talking about products, dual use products as it was. This was still a function because the entities that dealt with this were in economic format or structure.

Another very interesting area, which again was in the economic section but makes it seem like kind of a hash, we had a regional organization called Euro Control, which was the air controllers for Europe, and their headquarters were in Brussels. So when we had aviation policy issues we'd talk to them. And we did that as the bilateral embassy because it was a regional organization in our host country; it was not at that time part of the EU structure. It may be folded into that now.

Q: From an economic perspective, were you or others of your ilk concerned about the development of the European Union? Did we see this as a good thing or a potential real problem for us as a trade rival and all of that?

SCHERMERHORN: I think no. The policy seemed to me to be we were in favor and I think that we thought that it would be easier to deal with people. I think at that point it was still so new we weren't sure where it was going. You could see that it had moved off the dime that it had been on for a long time. Where it was going to go, I don't know. But there were some voices who were talking very favorably about it, I think, and one of them was Mike Calingaert, whom I've mentioned earlier, who had just retired. He wrote a monograph on this whole question of the European Union and where it was going and he came to Brussels and we set up some appointments for him. He did it for something called the National Policy Association, I think it is. He had just retired at that point.

Q: We were watching the development from an American perspective of overregulation coming out of the European community.

SCHERMERHORN: At that point the perception wasn't that it was overregulation. Of course what was so interesting about this, and still is, is at one point we were saying harmonization, but we have a very low level of harmonization in the U.S. [laughs] We're not a centralized community at all in this regard. What we were finding, interestingly enough, which reflects on Belgium as the classical north south fusion of?They did a studthis is when I was there the second time, so it's jumping ahead a little biwhen they are talking about harmonization they found that they did a league table and there were some states that had a high ratio of bringing their legislation into conformance with these EU guidelines. And then there was another table of the countries that actually were enforcing what you were doing; and of course Belgium was very high on bringing it into conformance and they were almost at the bottom with implementing this and making it stick. And this is very classical because people describe Belgium as a country that legislates with Teutonic precision and enforces with blatant laissez faire. [laughs]

Another great way which describes it perfectly is Belgium is a country with French cuisine and German portions. [laughs] There were three that if you were giving a little briefing on Belgium these were some of the anecdotes that you would bring home. The other one that is all too true was that a couple of Belgians were sitting around and one of them says, "Well, you know, you're a Walloon," and the other guy says, "Yes, and I'm a Flemant," and he says, "Is there anybody who's really a Belgian?" and they kind of scratch their heads and they say, "Well, maybe the king." And then one of them says, "No, he's actually a German." [laughs] That kind of encapsulates the place.

Q: [laughs] How did you find the social life there, including the beer drinking and all of that?

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, it's probably for Americans more like living in America than any place can be. There's this sufficiently large American community and an international school which is largely run along American lines. And then because we have military there, there's also a DODDS school, Department of Defense school, and that became an issue because they used to say they would only pay the education allowance to go to that school. But because it wasn't a very big school it didn't offer as many things for the high school level so people wanted to use the international school. That became quite a cause celebre apparently. That was before I got there.

We have military there not because we any longer have line troops stationed there, but we have so many staff people at NATO and we have a defense attachï¿½ in the embassy and so forth. When I was there, there was a base called Floren which is where these INF missile things were and we had a unit there but that's all gone now.

Q: You left there when?

SCHERMERHORN: In the summer of '88.

Q: You were to come back later on, but did you see Belgium going any way?

SCHERMERHORN: When I was there the minister of plan was a thirty-three year old from the right wing party, Guy Verhofstada becoming maand there was increasing agitation from the Flemish region for more autonomy. In fact, there was a very hard right minority that wouldn't say they were Nazi at that point but some people have accused it of being a lunatic fringe minority, which has grown as it has in all of the countries of Northern Europe; it's gotten larger since then. But there was increasing agitation for autonomy, decentralization, devolutiowhatever they were calling ialthough there hadn't been any measures yet.

And part of it was economic because the Flemish said, "Okay, we were downtrodden for years; now we're on the upswing. We have the skills [and whatever]. Why should we put into a central treasury and transfer money to those lazy Walloons down there?" [laughs] So it gets down to finances. But you know in Belgium they always used to complain about the confiscatory tax structure, but you have to laugh at that. It would have been confiscatory if they had paid them [laughs]; tax avoidance was a great art form and a sport, as it is in most of these countries in Europe. They complain about it, but in fact?I used to say after a while, "Yes, you don't have as much discretionary income, but on the other hand I don't hear you talking about what every middle class person in the United States talks about: how to pay to educate their children and how to pay for their healthcare. So you have a choice."

Q: When you left there in '88 where did you go?

SCHERMERHORN: Back to Washington.

Q: To do what?

SCHERMERHORN: I worked in the economic bureau for a while.

Q: What piece of the action here were you getting?

SCHERMERHORN: This was a difficult time because remember with the Foreign Service Act of 1980 the management had established something called the "six year window." They had actually segregated out the Senior Foreign Service of the two top grades and renamed them and then you had to actually jump through a hoop or jump through a windothe promotion windoto get into the Senior Foreign Service and it was supposed to be more?You had six years, six consecutive promotion panels in which to achieve this or you would be out but you could elect when you wanted the six years to run. I, as many -01s, as we were then called, elected to do it in the first year it was available to do that, which was '81, I guess. They said think about it and a lot of us did and I had been promoted quite fast to -01 and I had in my head other?I had been to the war college and all that, so I thought, all right. But what management didn't tell us was that was just at the point when the accordion was going to be squeezed and become very small, so the promotion numbers were not high and so a lot of people were sweating this, and I was sweating it. So when I left Brussels I didn't know whether I was long for this bureaucratic world or not; in fact, I wouldn't have been long for it if I hadn't filed a grievance.

Q: Could you explain about this, about the grievance process and how it worked in your case?

SCHERMERHORN: Basically what management did, as I said, but they didn't explain it, that once you opted to open your window, you couldn't change and postpone it or drop out and drop back in; you had to pursue it to its end, whatever it was. But management had the discretion to change in terms of the numbers if anybody could be promoted and so on; they could change the terms and conditions, but the employee really couldn't. So this was an experiment; 1987 I guess would've been the first year that the first crop of people would've been subject to "selection out," or as they prefer to say, "You weren't selected in." [laughs] So this was very trying and there was a group grievance filed on the basis of this, but I had an individual grievance which was a valid one and anyway I did get a reconstituted promotion board and I was promoted but it wasn't clear when I left Belgium what was going to happen exactly.

So anyway, I went to the economic bureau to an office called Special Trade Activities, and they did things like seal negotiations at that point. I worked with a young man there; we wrote memos for Robert Zoellick who was then the counselor at the Department that was very interested in economic matters on the European Union and what our posture should be toward it and so on in terms of trade and whatnot. So that was fairly interesting. But what I really got involved iwhen I arrived in the fall of '88 they were madly trying to design how to collect and compile something that was going to be called the Trade Act report. This had been mandated in a piece of legislation from the Congress and the first year it was to be presented in January and this was going to be something on the order of the human rights report. It was supposed to cover most of the countries of the world; and it was how they complied with various trade requirements in the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade).

There was one person in this office who had been given this mandate to do this and obviously that was a big project; the human rights report has masses of people working on it. So I got into doing that and that meant sending instructions to the field on what they should collect and what they should report and then putting it in some semblance of order with everybody following the same format and so on. It's a big editing job. And negotiation, because if you knew something about a country and it hadn't been covered by the post you had to go back and talk about it; and you had to work with the U.S. Trade Representatives office because actually many of the questions were things that they were more interested in, I guess.

But this was a very strange piece of legislation because as we found out when we finally got this first report together with some great effort and delivered it on time to the Hill, it went to a committee and we said, "Who wants to see this?" and so forth, and everybody looked blank. It turned out that this had been the brainchild of two staffers of a congressman who had not been reelected in 1988 and the staffers were gone and he was gone. I thought this was a perfect opportunity to scotch this; I mean if nobody really is interested, this is a massive resource user. Of course nobody wanted to do that. But we did actually, in going up, we got to negotiate out some of the countries so that we didn't have to do some of the countries the next year because some of them clearly didn't even have a trade profile that fit any of these rather complicated issues.

So I did it a second year, but it's practically a year round thing because you're preparing for the next one. After the second year we said, "Look, nobody is really?can't we sunset this?" and actually one of the great things I remember, and I wish I had achieved it but I felt great about getting as far as I did, was somebody else in the office and I went up to the Hill and we talked to the staff and we said, "You know, this doesn't make much sense. It's a lot of paper, a lot of trees down the tubes," and they actually agreed to put in a piece of legislation that it could be sunset.

Q: You'll have to say what a "sunset" is.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, that it could die. We wouldn't have to do this in perpetuity once it was in the legislation.

We waited and waited but actually it was added to a bill that got vetoed in the White House. It had nothing to do with trade, so that cause died and the thing, as far as I know, still existtaking up a lot of time and paper and attention.

The second year I didn't really have much help doing it either. We had an assistant secretary in the economic bureau then who wawell, he would get apoplectic; literally you would think he was about to have a stroke; he would scream and yell and carry on; he was very volatile. He was a political appointee, which isn't always the case in the economic bureau, but it was then. I can remember going into a meeting with this young man and we were writing on the EU and with a deputy assistant secretary, a woman who had been brought over from the CIA, and he started screaming at her; so she got up and she looked at us and she said, "Alright, we're going. When you can calm down and talk sensibly we'll come back," [laughs] which was really very good. She didn't last long. I think she left of her own volition. She may even have gone to USTR. But that was kind of the climate.

Q: Let's talk first about steel and then we'll go back to this. In the European Union was steel seen as almost next to agriculture as a real problem? The nice thing about steel is if you're a politician it employs a hell of a lot of people, even if nobody buys your produce. Was this seen as sort of a closed market or something? Did we see it as a problem?

SCHERMERHORN: It wasn't an economic issue; it was a political issue. You're right. This was a period, at the end of the '80s, when both Europe and American steel producers were being challenged by the Koreans and a lot of factorieIndiand a lot of the oil money from the '70s had gone from toward building some steel mills in various locations that had never had them before. Both of these big dogs fighting over a little bone and trying to get it from the other one I think is maybe a good way to look at it. I didn't get too involved in the actual negotiations but it was an issue and it was a question of retaliation and so forth too. And this was a period when the GATT was winding down and the Uruguay round had been planned and put in place and they were looking at what is going to replace the GATT, too, and what role should some of these commodities and so forth play. The point was the GATT was moving more from commodities to services. The WTO now is mostly organized around services and agriculture, not specific commodities.

Q: Going back to these reports on foreign trade or how countries dealt with that, was the original idea, as you surmised, were we trying to catch people out; was it just another statistical gathering of stuff or was there a purpose behind it?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I think the people in the Congress who were interesteyou're right, the operative phrase was catching them ouwe were saying were other countries violating either existing GATT regulations or things we would perceive as problems and would like to negotiate on in the future. And there was retaliation of 401 cases and so forth; so if you reported that your host country was doing something that seemed to be against the norms, then yes, you could ask the Congress to pass legislation that would retaliate or so forth.

Q: Did you find the enemy look at them?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I suppose people did. I don't know. I suppose the host countries looked. No, I shouldn't suppose that. [laughs] I don't know. The English speaking host countries maybe looked at it; I don't know about any of the others. Although we did it on everybody it was supposed to be equal access. Obviously there were a few major countries and it depended on the commodity that was involved; Argentina and wheat, and the EU was the major. Intellectual property was just beginning to achieve the role that it is now. We were beginning to worry about that.

Q: Then we were moving into services.

SCHERMERHORN: It was becoming clear that that was where the focus should be and would be.

Q: You were in the economic bureau from 1988 until when?

SCHERMERHORN: Until 1990; not quite two years.

Q: While you were there was there a growing unease about whither the European Union vis-ï¿½-vis trade the United States, or had it always been there, or was it a feeling, what the hell? We can live with this.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I think, as I said before, yes, clearly there were areas of competition and there were areas of convergence too; maybe vis-ï¿½-vis the group of '77 or something. There were probably more areas of competition than convergence, but still there were different formulas depending on what you were talking about. And I think at that point, as I said, we had this great surge of kind of great move forward in the European Union from 1985 in terms of looking more serious about actually working together more closely. I think at that point we realized that the benefits of their cooperating were greater than the possible negative aspects that we needed to deal with, the potential negative aspects, but we needed to do that through negotiation and discourse.

Q: We used to have, particularly in the European bureau, in the early years under George Ball and others, a strong cadre of Europeanists. Was there a cadre of anti-Europeans growing up or not? At least on the economic side did you sense that?

SCHERMERHORN: I didn't sense that although there may have been. Of course the difference between say the '50s and '60s when the Europeanists were really the stewards of the Marshall Plan, if you will, in looking was the Japan factor which was quite different at that point. Of course around 1990 was when Japan looked to be invincible just before things fell apart for them. I think if there's a cadre of anti-Europeanists it wasn't so much anti-European as saying, that's important, but we can't forget that there are other things that are very important also. In other words, all our attention shouldn't be there.

Q: Was there anything else that you got involved in or were you just sort of left off in your corner doing this thing?

SCHERMERHORN: Doing this silly report. I mean it made some sense to evaluate what people were doing, but to do it in this very formulaic way that took a lot of time and was?Again, the document was like twenty or thirty pages a country because you had to do every issue for every country even if there wasn't a lot to say about it. The Congress when they mandated it gave certain instructions about what should be covered but they didn't actually set up a format. So the Labor people wanted workers' rights in this and we pointed out that they already did a section on workers' rights in the human rights report. And that was interesting. So the first year people sent in things from the post and I think they said you could use what you did there.

The second year I did achieve something too; I said, "Look, they already do it and the human rights report comes out a little before or at the same time. Why don't we just say we will just take what's cleared for the human rights report and use that?" So you don't have to write something else or whatever. So we did that and we just did it on a diskette or whatever. Those were the days when we were just beginning to use the word processors and we had the printers which were not working very well. You couldn't send e-mail in the Department so every time you wanted somebody to clear you had to print out these double-spaced things; it was a lot of paper. Now it's easier because you have these facilities where you can do documents and do track changes in them and so forth. But this was twelve years ago or whatever and it wasn't quite as advanced, and certainly not in the State Department. [laughs]

We tried, but bureaucrats can't simplify things. There are too many people who have an interest who insist that you, as our British friends say, over-egg the pudding, or whatever.

Q: This I guess wasn't overly inspiring, was it?

SCHERMERHORN: No, it wasn't overly inspiring at all. As I said I didn't know what was happening at that point.

Q: Were you then casting about and what happened?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I didn't have to cast very far because one of my previous bosses called up and said, "You know, I have a vacancy as my deputy and I'd like you to come and talk to me about it. I'd be interested to have you." So I went to talk to him and it was Clyde Taylor. I shouldn't say "former boss;" we had been colleagues. When I was in Iran he was the financial officer, and as I explained earlier, he reported to the economic counselor and I was working for the commercial attachï¿½ and then the counselor on the economic/commercial side. So we were dotted lines.

He, by that time, was the director of the Office of Career Development and Assignments, which is the office in the Bureau of Personnel which assigns people to their jobs; runs the whole system of assignment and bidding and so on. It was one of the biggest officeit may have been the biggest officin the Department; at that point it had about ninety-something people and eleven different offices under it. It's a big operation.

Q: I served in personnel myself. I really think that unlike a lot of businesses where personnel is something that's off to one sidit's like the janitorial service or somethinin our system personnel is almost at the guts of the business because we change so often. I sometimes wonder whether they almost have too many people in it. What were you doing and what was your impression of the personnel system at that time?

SCHERMERHORN: Well when I went in to talk about it I said, "Clyde, I don't know anything about this. The only memory I have is when I had that terrible experience after the war college when that person went off and said, 'Well, I'm leaving now and you can hang around for four months until somebody comes and fixes up my mistake.'" And I said, "I did this grievance. Are you sure you want me in the personnel?" and he said, "No, that's exactly why I want you there; because you've been through the system and seen the problems too." Anyway it turned out to be a very felicitous assignment for me and very interesting.

Clyde's background was as an economic officer also and he had been prior to that ambassador to Paraguay. Traditionally, unwritten, but traditionally the head of that office, even though it's not an assistant secretary, is someone who has been an ambassador; the theory being that they need to be able to tell people this is the way it is and don't bug me kind of thing. By the same theory, under the director general, the deputies to the director general are equivalent to deputy assistant secretaries who were also people who had been ambassadors. Again, the theory being they would be more insulated from pressure and so forth. And in some cases that was absolutely accurate; in a few cases all it meant was they played the old boy network even more than otherwise. In Clyde's case he's someone of the highest personal and ethical standards. He was absolutely concerned with the fairness of the system and the perception that people had that it wasn't fair. But he told me, "Yes, I want you."

After we'd been there a while I said to him, "Clyde, you know, we're the perfect people for this job," people from the economic cone, "because what we're talking about here is supply and demand." And it's absolutely true. You have a system, the system under which they were operating of bidding had been set up in the early '70s and hadn't been changed that much but that's because it worked very well. And what it was is a panel; when you heard the phrase "go to panel" it meant you were being voted on. The panel consisted of twelve people, heads of these different offices plus one or two others that had special functions, and chaired by the director, Clyde. The deputy was not a voting member but participated in the discussion. It was set up to have inherent balance.

There was something called the career development officers (CDA). They have as clients the employee and each of the four cones, economic, political, admin, and consular, had a head of the office for that with some people who helped them. There were four of them and then there were five assignment divisions and their clients were the bureaus who wanted the bodies. They were the five regional bureaus plus each one of those regional bureaus had some of the functional bureaus attached to them to service as it were. And they worked with the bureau executive offices and so forth but they all came together at this panel. So there were nine of them and then the senior officer division and the junior officer division was eleven. And then there was something called the continuity counselor; a job that had been created to help mid-level entries and minorities and people who came into the system and needed maybe some better or more intense mentoring than they would get from their counselorbecause each of the CDAs had four or five hundred clients but at any given assignment year they wouldn't all be up for reassignment.

So this is how it worked. You had discussion and you had to send out the bidding instructions and these were worked over and cleared with the labor lawyer in the Department and with AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) and with each bureau. They were tinkered with each year a little bit but the basic premises were the same. The bureaus listed the jobs that were vacant. The CDOs assembled the list of their clients who were up for reassignment in that cycland then the fun began. [laughs]

But Clyde was very concerned, as I said, with the fairness. Of course there are perceptions that people were cooking the books and so forth and some of that did happen a little bit but he did his utmost to ensure that there was transparency. And I think he achieved it. I think everybody who worked for him, with him, at that period, including the bureaus who didn't like it in some cases because they wanted to?But where the deputy's job fit in was at the panel discussion. Basically the client had his advocate, the bureaus had their advocates, and I took my role to be someone who was an advocate for the system because in some cases the system's interests were not the interest of either of those groups.

One example would be language training. Now this was always a problem. But there was one case where an -01 who had already had three hard languages was put on the agenda to be paneled into a job via two years of Korean to go as the political counselor or something like that. The bureau says, yes, we don't have any other bidders; that's fine. And they said the client wants it. So I spoke for the system and I said, "Well, that may be true but it is not in the interest of the system to teach an -01 a fourth hard language." It would look pretty silly, in fact, in the Washington Post how cavalier we are with our limited resources. And they said, "Well he wants to do it," and I said, "Well, a lot of us want to do a lot of things in the Foreign Service that we don't get to do. So those were the kinds of issues.

I never participated in this before. The panels are closed to the people in personnel so if you're not, you've never participated in one. After a month or two I said to Clyde, "You know, I'm speaking up a lot here. I don't know. Is this what you want me to do?" and he said, "Yes. This is good." I had very good recall too; people would say, "Well we're going to do this," and I'd say, "Well we did that once before and it didn't work," because I could remember issues back in the past. So I think Clyde and I worked together well in that respect in terms of trying to keep things at an equilibrium that was transparent and so forth. It was hard work and there were always a lot of issues. And you found the people who took those jobs there were two kinds. Some who were always conscientious whatever their job, and a lot of it, especially for the assignments officers, the AOs as they were called, the computer system that personnel had was inadequate and didn't work very well. One of the problems with it was the programming was so old that when you typed you couldn't see on the screen what you had typed; so you didn't know if you'd made a mistake. They'd type in things for the orders and put them in what they call the sleep queue and then they'd pop up when the person was ready to actually move. It had some elements that were very good but it was a problem because there were too many mistakes and you couldn't figure it out until it was too late in the process.

But there are so many issues that people don't think about: when you get home leave, how long you have to stay for that; whether you get transferred back when you're going to FSI or whether you're in transit because how you get paid and what your allowances are are different depending on what that is. What you rapidly found out is that about twenty percent of the clients took up eighty percent of the time with issues. What was emerging then was something of great interest, and certainly a problem for the Foreign Service; a problem in the sense that we hadn't developed ways to accommodate it yeand that was the growth of the tandem assignment.

Q: This is when two Foreign Service officers, essentially are married and want to be together.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. We had a few cases where either someone who had been in the Foreign Service for quite a whilusually a man married someone who was a good bit younger so they weren't competing at the same level in assignmentor you had women who had married and had had to resign but then could be reappointed; and even though they were the same age as their male spouse, when they came back in the Foreign Service they were way behind. So up until the end of the '80s you weren't getting a lot of people really directly competing at the same level.

I can remember somebody coming in to me saying, "I'm a tandem and we really need to go to that assignment [and so and so]," and I said, "Well yes, that's true, but you have to realize there are three tandem couples who want that assignment." They weren't beginning to realize?Well, it should be me. Here we have some others. So this was just beginning to be a problem. Then of course initially people went to the larger posts and then what we used to call in CDA, the panel, the "singles police" would complain that London and Paris and Brussels and Vienna, especially places with multiple posts, would get the people.

Another issue that began to loom quite large in personnel considerations then was learning disabilities. This had not really been an issue, but now more and more children were being diagnosed with some form of?that would require some kind of special schooling. In some cases it was quite severe and then there were truly few limited places you could go. More often it was not severe but you just needed a good international school that offered the special education. Again, those are in limited places like Brussels, Paris, London, Tokyo, and so forth. People used to joke at that point, "The best insurance you could have of not ever going to the third world is to have a learning disabled child," which is kind of a sick joke. But this is one of the things that began to raise issues because for every person you accommodated for one of those issues, you were discommoding somebody else, or so they thought. You find out it's not easy to run this system.

Q: I've talked to people who've been inspectors, old hands that came out of retirement and inspected, and say they'd go to Africa, for example, and they would find a significant number of positions held by quite junior people who were essentially over their heads because people weren't bidding on them or there were ways of getting out of going there. So a place like Africa was getting very shortchanged.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. I didn't realize the extent of it until I got there myself. That's true. I can remember there were two brothers in the African Bureau who are well-known, the Nolan brothers, Rob and?They grew up in Africa I think their father was with AID or maybe with the State Departmenand their mother did the Calvert System and all that kind of stuff and they went to perfectly good colleges and even liked it so much they- (End of tape)

Tape 7, Side A

There was a real shift in people?Another issue that was beginning to emerge and one of our cases, somebody who was fairly junior in terms of rank, not in age, was being assigned to Madrid and he wanted to take his mother-in-law because she was getting to the point where she really couldn't be alone. One of the things that had been done in the late '80s was to put fairly strict limits on the size of housing you could have and it was based on dependents. So if you were a married couple without children you got a one bedroom place or something. And they said, "Well we don't care about any of that other stuff. We just want to be able to take her with us," but then they said, "Well she has to be your dependent to?and the only legal test for dependency is if you're fifty-one percent financially dependent." There were a lot of issues to discuss. They said, "Well, you know, they can't be on the health insurance but you have to have health insurance."

We even set up a study group for this but I think it disbanded after Clyde and I were gone and they now have it back on track. But it was a problem. It was beginning to be seen as a problem because many, many people?there was a confluence of demographic factors: people living longer; Foreign Service families maybe not having come from quite as many siblings; and so on. We were getting into this, "How are we going to be a family friendly Foreign Service and still staff our jobs with equity and not with favoritism?" It's on ongoing discussion because it's a problem. And the issues that people used not to worry about or think that they didn't have a call on the system for are now things that people do expect.

Q: I come from the old system when along with my colleagues we humped and said, "Well that's not the way we did it in the good ole days. We saluted and went." I'm not sure that always happened. Most of us did. Did you find that a mid-career or even junior officer showed up with their lawyer practically?

SCHERMERHORN: Practically.

Q: Challenging or trying to make the best deal possible?

SCHERMERHORN: I remember one case; someone who had passed everything and then when his family went for the medical one of the young children had asthma or something that the medical division said disqualified them from having a worldwide clearance. He contested this and got a lawyer. And this was another issue. Med was becoming much more involved in these things. I don't remember what happened. I think he actually sued or something.

And another issue that was mind-boggling; this was the era when we had two blind entrants into the Foreign Service. One who used a dog and one who did not use a dog. We had to find assignments for them and this took place?because I was there for two years with Clyde and he had been there one year already and he was going to stay for a third. I said, "Clyde, I would be interested in extending but I don't know how it will be received [in the upstairs or whatever]," and he said, "I think that's a great idea because I'll be leaving and you'll be there for the new director for a year of overlap." Because there's so much arcane information here that if everybody leaves at once it's a problem. So I did put in for the extension.

It was funny. I put in the memo, up to the supervisory desk, and time went by, a couple of weeks, and I finally said, "Clyde, I thought you said that it wasn't a problem, but I never had an answer. Are they telling me something here?" [laughs] And he said, "What?" So he called upstairs and he said, "They can't find it. Do it again." But I know the person involved so I think that's what did it.

So we had these two blind people that had to be accommodated and of course the first bureau that people look at is EUR [laughs] and the assignments officer at the European Bureau says, "Look, I'm as humanitarian as the next person but on behalf of my bureau I have to lodge a complaint. Are we going to have to be the bureau?" And of course you didn't want to say, "Yes, you're always going to be the bureau," but realistically speaking to accommodate something like that, yes. They both used Braille readers, but the one without the dog also had a reader. So this meant the State Department had to I guess pay for the reader. Anyway, the first assignment was to London and the one with the dog went to some post in Canada. You know Canada was, for people who had difficulties, whether it was aging parents or medical problems or schooling?

Q: When I was in personnel the Mexican and Canadian borders were staffed with particularly mid-career women officers with aging mothers.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. Well this was more of that. That was an issue. So the blind people got accommodated and I think the one with the dog is no longer in the Foreign Service. The one without the dog went to at least two other posts and I don't know if he's still in the Foreign Service. But that person had sued when he was denied and that's how it opened up for both of them. You want to be accommodating but the mind does kind of boggle at how can people function?

Q: What sort of work were they doing?

SCHERMERHORN: Consular work because when you go to London as a JO you went?Interviewing depends on eye contact so I don't know how this works. I'm not going to get into that because I don't really know. But when you said, "Do people bring their lawyers?" Yes, this was the result of a lawsuit.

Q: What about a development that certainly has happened now, but were you seeing more and more senior people do everything they could to stay in Washington because of Washington differential? In other words, you had quite a bigger retirement.

SCHERMERHORN: That hadn't happened yet because the locality pay issue wasn't really?When did the locality pay start? That happened when I was in Brussels the second time, wasn't it? You saw senior people who wanted to stay in Washington. I think it was the principle that "out of sight, out of mind." If they didn't have the kind of assignment that they thought they should have overseas as a DCM or if they were going to be an MC and go as a political counselor they'd rather be in Washington in the hopes that they could trip somebody in the hall that would remember who they were. And in some cases I think it wasn't so much the locality pay; that's become a much bigger issue now, but at that point it wasn't big enough to?

A lot of people just had spouses who said, "Look, I've done twenty-five years and if you want to do the next five years before you retire I'm not going with you. I'll stay here and you do whatever it is." In that situation many of them? But I think with the Foreign Service Act there were a lot of people who didn't get through this window and who were fairly senior and got left. Actually some of them had spouses who were more irritated by it. The spouses said, "Here I've been the good Foreign Service wife. I've worked hard and done everything I was told, in those days long ago, that I was supposed to do to help you, and what did they do to you?" And then people who were already in the Senior Foreign Service said if they weren't getting the kind of thing that they thought they should have. Whatever. I don't even mean that. That they thought the kind of thing that they would like to end their career with.

And also you have to understand that there had been a tremendous shift in the Foreign Service. We had something like four thousand Foreign Service officers, and at one point over 950 of them were Senior Foreign Service. That's one-quarter. And that's when the Congress began to say that's too many, cut it back. And that's mostly by attrition but that means that this accordion of promotion just went so people weren't getting?And there were what turned out to be some structural flaws in the design of the Senior Foreign Service, which exacerbated the problems too of getting rid of some people too early and others around too long maybe. That hasn't changed too much.

There was another great thing. [laughs] The Foreign Service grievance board took at case from a?I started to say there were some very good people who, the kind who whatever job they do, even if they're political officers or economic officers, and it's not substantive, they will be conscientious; and we have some of those who did a superb job. I used to tell the people that you're here and we're driving the Model T and you've got to keep the car running but you've got to be designing the improved version while you're doing this. You've got to juggle all of this. Some people didn't take any interest in that and others were very creative and innovative. And the ones who said, "Oh this is beneath my notice because I'm [whatever I aofficer] and this is _____um," and I'd say, "Look, this is a chance to be as creative as you want and to really work a problem, do some problem solving here, and do some anticipation." And some of them were much better at it than others, as I said. What the ones who were dismissive of it didn't realize is that they really weren't doing themselves any service because it was much more difficult to write them a good EER because they weren't doing anything to speak of.

This was one of the great problems of this job though; as a deputy I wrote twelve full reports and about fourteen reviews because there were so many people in this office; and the director wrote about as many of these. And that's a big chore if you want to make them each different. I remember one of my predecessors, three or four times back, came in at one point in the season when we were doing this and he said, "I want to chat," and I said, "Well I'm really under the gun here. I've got all these?" And he said, "Oh. I used to do three paragraphs, but two were the same for everyone and I just made?" and that really shocked me in a way because I thought that's not the way somebody in personnel should do that even though it was "efficient." But anyway, people were happy with their reportthe ones who got the good ones. In a way it was easier to write them than it is in some other places although it might not seem like that on the face of it.

Q: What about that catch-phrase "service discipline?" You know, I've heard people say, and usually this is a higher rank or something, "The chief of the political section in Manila is begging and nobody will go." I mean there must be somebody who says, "You go."

SCHERMERHORN: That's why this grievance was great. We had this system with a timeline for the bidding and we put ithis was for the second year I was therand this was my idea with one of the AOs, a date. Under the rules you couldn't be assigned if you hadn't bid something. But we put into the timeline a date after which if you hadn't bid and you hadn't been assigned, you could be assigned anywhere. This was new and it got cleared with everybody. It was sufficiently well along in the process that you weren't? But the idea was that a lot of people strategized and would bid things that they knew they wouldn't get or they weren't really qualified. They had met the bidding criteria "just" but in the hopes that something would fall out. And unfortunately sometimes that would happen; people would get sick, people curtail for one reason or another and then something opens up that wasn't available in the beginning of the cycle. But you try to avoid as much of that as possible. We had this drop dead date, whatever it was, and if all your bids went away then you were supposed to continue looking at the bid list and bid from things that were there.

We had this one fellow who refused to bid at all. He wasn't playing. So the drop dead date came and we had this assignment someplace in Africa, which shall go nameless, and it was not a great place, that's for sure, but it was his cone and his grade and everything else and I said, "Okay, put him on the agenda but tell him about it." He said, "Oh no. I can't go there," and we said, "Well you have to bid something," and he wouldn't play. So he got assigned and of course he filed a grievance. The grievance was based on it was a place that didn't have a religious establishment of his choice. And we said, "But you had a chance to bid and you didn't do it." So he went to the grievance board and they took the case. The Department, in its wisdom, assigned a lawyer who had come to the legal bureau about a week before he was given this case; he'd come from some other government department. But he knew nothing about the personnel system. So they say, "Okay Lange, you're going to explain to him." Well, explain to him this thing where the standard operating procedure is about three hundred pages of details, and the panel system. So we started on this process and of course the poor man is totally lost for quite a long while but he soldiers on and we go through all this.

What had happened is somehow the employee had gotten hold of the annotated agendas where the annotations show what the vote was in the panel. These are not supposed to be released outside of personnel. All the employee knows is whether he or she got paneled, not whether it was eleven to one or whatever it was. One of the secretaries in one of the divisions he had known at some post, she unfortunately gave it to him. The grievance board is calling people so the lawyer sends over the DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) and I said to him, "Well, you know, he doesn't really understand the arcana of how he got to this job," and he sent a reply and that was okay but finally I said to him, "Look, if you want somebody to explain all of this to them why don't you send me because you've heard me now. I know more about it than anybody." This was the third year I'd been there. And so he did.

I remember going over to wherever it was in VirginiRosslyn or somethinsupposedly for the afternoon but it went on and I didn't get called until about eight at night. So I'm there for almost three hours and they have all these agendas for the whole year and they started with, "Well why did [so and so] get to do this one?" Well fortunately I have very good recall and I said, "Well because?" and I could cite the reasons. I used to say in the panel of peoplwe had several, one large panel called inter-functional, and then at the height of the season smaller panels for each cone and I'd chair those. I used to say to them when we had had a discussion, "Now does everybody agree on why you've done this?" You know, what's the format, the regulations? Because you don't want people gointhey're not supposed to talk about it but they dout and saying, "You got assigned because of (blah, blah, blah)." So I'd always sit down and say, "The reason we did this is?Right? Is that your understanding?" and so on. And this had actually helped me fix in my mind. I wasn't doing it at the time for that reason but I could go through all this. Apparently they were totally awestruck that somebody could actually explain it on its legal merits.

This was finally over with and apparently in the staff meeting the next day the lawyer made a report and said, "She did a wonderful job," and I felt like saying, "If you just sent me over there to begin with it would've been better." It turned out that this was the only case up until that time, the only grievance that the Department ever won when it was challenged. I don't know if he ever went; he may have quit for all I know.

Q: This is the reputation that I've heard; that if you file a grievance you can hang around for twenty years.

SCHERMERHORN: Well you remember a case from Saigon. [laughs]

Q: Yes.

SCHERMERHORN: It depends on what the grievance is. This was a procedural grievance on the assignment process. Most of the people who grieve, what it is is something that has not been placed in their file that would be of interest to a promotion board, positive interest. If their file is vetted and everything is in it that should be then it would be a stronger file and then they might get promoted. So that's a technical grievance, not a procedural grievance. The technical grievances don't usually get as far as the grievance board because it's resolved in the State Department.

Q: Did you find that you all had to pussyfoot around minorities and women who were making grievances sort of based on their gender or on their race or something like this knowing that you couldn't win these things?

SCHERMERHORN: No. This was a very interesting time in personnel. Another big segment of time was taken up with the continued fallout from the Alison Palmer grievance of the 1970s. This was a class action suit on behalf of women Foreign Service officers, except you had an opportunity to opt out of it if you wanted to which I and a number of other people did because at the time when the opportunity for opting out came up I really couldn't see that I had been disadvantaged in any way. Of course that was a mistake because at that point I was only a new -01 and I didn't realize?[laughs] And actually for solidarity, but anyway. A lot of women, including a woman who later became director general of the Foreign Service after that.

There was a group of women who were, because they had "won" the suit had been won, were given remedies, I guess is the legal term, under the suit. And the remedies differed in each case depending on what grade they were and what?In some cases they were given a promotion and in some cases it was an assignment to a different cone. So there were a variety of things depending on who they were and what kind of work they did. The system had to accommodate these.

Another issue that was very important at this time that created a special activity there: the Congress had put in some piece of legislation without consultation with the State Department requiring that in order for the Senate to vote on promotions of people into the Senior Foreign Service, the people would have to have a 3/3 in one language. In theory this shouldn't have been a problem because we were supposed to have that anyway, but there were about forty FSO-1s who were competing for promotion who did not meet that criteria. So we made it our business to put them in what we called the early season; these were special cases of assignment where we had to be sure they got a certain kind of assignment, meaning in these cases an assignment that language training with it, a language-designated job so they wouldn't be disadvantaged. They could compete in an even field for promotion into the Senior Foreign Service.

Unfortunately about thirty-five of these people were in the admin cone and that's understandable because the admin cone jobs don't often have the language-designation. We also had a number of people in the admin cone who had come from military or something. There were one or two people in the consular cone, one or two people in the political cone and the economic cone, but in one case he had three hard languages at the two plus level but he didn't have a 3. He was a linguist. So anyway it was our business in the two cycles to manage?and this was not easy in the admin cone to do that for that many people at the one level but we worked very hard to make that happen and we did. A number of those people now are still ambassadors and so on. And there were always complications. There were tandem issues and tandems not only in the State Department but other agencies, with USIA or the Foreign Commercial Service or whatever. These were the kind of, I guess, social engineering issues, or whatever you want to call them. If it were just straight forward putting people in jobs that would have certain attendant problems, but then there were these special circumstances that were arising.

Another one was that with the women's class action suit we had to place all these people. There had also been a mid-level entry program in the end of the '70s and '80s which was designed to bring in women and minorities. This program had varied success. Almost all of the women who had come in did quite well. Many of the minorities were not doing well and were being referred to performance standard. And it was very interesting when you began to look at their profiles because the minorities for the most part had the same educational background. The ones who were really foundering in this program were the male Hispanic entrants. And we tried to do a study on why was this happening and how could it be fixed. In fact, the women were successful; they dropped them out of the program.

Mainly the reason the women were doing well is for the most part they'd come from other U.S. government agencies. They had already worked in the bureaucracy, often in agencies that dealt with the State Department, so they knew the system. The Hispanics generally came from totally out of this context so they had a problem in terms of becoming comfortable in the bureaucracy and many of them had a language problem. They had excellent Spanish but making it work in English wasn't as easy. The black females were doing fine too; that was not a problem. The black males were not. They had the education background. We couldn't figure out, and I still don't know to what to attribute that; it was something about the acculturation that?I think also people didn't like being in the minority program and being designated as that. When you come in at the mid-level, if you come from a different business culture it's very hard. As I said, the white women who had been in some Washington system were okay. So despite all of the best efforts to get recruits and good quality in terms of their preparation and background one would think, what really became clear is that in our system it's the acculturation you get at the entry level that makes it work or not.

Q: I remember in one interview I did some years ago, and I'm not sure it happened during your time, there was a man, a white male, who was appointed I think to be DCM in Finland. I'm not sure if that's it. His ambassador who was a Foreign Service officer said, "Actually what I'd really like would to be to have a woman as my DCM," and that was it. No particular person or something. So I think he was bounced out and she was nominated. She was African-American. So he launched a suit which was reverse discrimination, which of course it is. You must've been on the cutting edge of that particular problem.

SCHERMERHORN: There was a concerted effort. The lists for ambassador were done "upstairs." There's something called the D committee which was chaired by the deputy secretary and they passed on the ambassadorial list. Of course this was done by the senior officer division office, the list put together. But when you're in the director and deputy's ear sometimes you're consulted. And then there was the DCM committee which picks DCMs and consul generals.

We were talking about this women's lawsuit; one of the findings of the lawsuit was that women got much fewer commendationSuperior Honor Awards and so oand I remember Clyde saying to me, "You know, I wonder why that is," and I had to say, "Clyde," and he said, "No, no. What do you mean?" I said, "There are two reasons men get the Superior Honor Awards. One, they write them for themselves which the women don't do," [laughs] "and they tend to be in areas like arms control and POL/MIL work," which again still at the '80s and this is the period when the Soviet Union has just fallen apart and all of that. And I said, "You know, men are much more self-promotincertain members of our profession arso that's not surprising. Women are more or less excluded from POL/MIL work." Now that's not so true but then it was.

I remember one of the assignments we did want to make. A woman senior officer had bid on an office directorship in POL/MIL and the assistant secretary then was a political appointee and he was not going to have this. But you talked about discipline. Well we persisted. She bid and she was qualified and got the job and it was fine once she was there. But it was a big to-do and he was complaining to the hierarchy upstairs that he didn't want this and all that. There was enough sensitivity to say, "Well, this isn't something to fall on your sword for." And this was often the case; sometimes the bureaus or the individuals who would be most opposed, once the people got there they were perfectly happy with it.

Another big issue going on was with the fall of the Soviet Union and this began to unravel just as we got there. This was a big issue because the then-secretary James Baker had apparently gone up the Hill to testify and members of the Congress said, "We want embassies in all those places to show the former Soviets that we recognize there's no going back on this." So get with the program and do this. "What kind of resources are you going to need?" Apparently he said, "No, we will do it with what we have, both money and personnel," and of course this turned out to be a tremendous problem. This set the stage for our terrible personnel problems of the mid '90s and up until now and so on. To me it would've seemed that instead of trying to show the Congress how good you are and how carefully you're shepherding the resources, you say, "If you guys want this, pony up." [laughs] But this is hearsay; I don't know that for a fact.

Q: I've heard that, too.

SCHERMERHORN: Certainly we didn't get any more resources. Whether it was because the secretary actually declined them I don't know. We certainly didn't make a fight for it either. So this was another sort of big issue. How are we going to staff these additional posts with no new people? We had to designate some jobs that we would fill last and of course none of the bureaus wanted to do that. And then we had these TDYs of six to eight weeks to the new posts. I let someone go from our office, not only that, I encouraged him to go. He was hoping to get promoted and he had Russian. So we sent John Ford. I said, "John, I don't want you to go because it's going to be difficult for us, but it's good for you," and he did it. He went to the Ukraine; I think Kiev. So when they were starting up all these posts we sent people off. And then there was a discussion about? That's when also we had finally after years of trying certain elements in Congress who wanted South Asia to be its own separate bureau not part of the Near East Bureau.

Q: South Asia being essentially?

SCHERMERHORN: India, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Ceylon, and Bangladesh. That had been a unit with the Near Eastern/South Asian Bureau but they wanted a separate bureau. But this was fairly small in bureaucratic terms and I remember them saying, "Well then we have to get more positions for an EX," and all of thiexecutive office, the administrative parand I remember saying, "Clyde, we don't need to do that. The two bureaus can have the same EX and there aren't any more people involved that they'd have to administer. It's just that they'd have a different label on the door." And he said, "Oh yes, I guess that's alright." So they did that and they're still doing that. You can see the bureaucratic mindset; the minute you get something in separate you've got to get all the foot soldiers around and increase their numbers and so on.

The business of the Soviet Union and trying to staff that, how to do it, was a real problem. So we had all these issues about intake.

Q: Were you involved in the use of retired people? I had a friend, Mike Weygand, who had retired from the Foreign Service and he kept going around and opening posts all in the former Soviet Union as a retired officer. Were you getting into this sort of thing?

SCHERMERHORN: Again, because so many people were retiring because of the new Foreign Service Acl mean retiring before maybe they were actually ready to do thathere was beginning to be a buildup of people who were young enough and interested enough not to want to retire. I think they were talking about something called the Foreign Service Reserve Corps. It was supposed to be a central register in the building for people that you could call on. But that was just beginning to gear up a bit. These events that I'm talking about, these various issues, were what precipitated the need for a lot more of these people in the mid '90s and up until this moment. What they've done actually now apparently they abandoned the central register saying they didn't have enough resources in personnel because in the mid '90s after I had left they had to cut a lot of jobs, and of course they can't do some of the things.

There was always a tension there betweeyou talked about service disciplinthe idea of is there a systemic discipline. That was something that Clyde? There's a pendulum; you try to bring together in the personnel system some semblance of discipline and whatever; and then the bureaus are always with centrifugal force trying to be independent. But you know you'd say to the bureaus, "Well if you get your way, somebody?" The bureaus need to have a level playing field and there are various reasons for which if you left them to their own devices they wouldn't have a level playing field. It used to be that the European bureau had?but ever since they've acquired all of these posts in what they call the "stans" the Kazakhstans, Uzbekistans, Tajikistanthey have some of the same staffing problems that the African bureau has, so they've had to learn a little humility now.

Q: Did you find a problem of on bureaus, for example, ARA has had the reputation of once somebody learns Spanish they disappear into a black hole and for the rest of us are never seen again. This happened to some of my colleagues who came into the Foreign Service with me and I had been to Tijuana once and I was ten years old and I didn't like it so I stayed out of Latin America religiously not to learn Spanish. And they had the European mafia and the African one. Did you find yourself running across these empires?

SCHERMERHORN: Well yes. In the European bureau there was a hierarchy; there was the German club, and of course that's something that since 1946?It's pretty much now not functioning in the way it did, since the mid '90s. But still in 1990 it was an important force and people in Europe thought you weren't really with it if you weren't part of the German club. It's like in the Middle East bureau if you don't do Arab-Israeli affairs. There are other kinds of things. And there's the Japan club, the chrysanthemum club [laughs]. And the China club. And of course China club for years was pretty small after the deprivations of the early '50s and so forth because while we did have relations we only had one post in Hong Kong and now we have a lot more consulates and a lot more need.

Kissinger did something about that. He railed against the Foreign Service officers who got entrenched in their own particular geographic areas. He said he wanted GLOP, global?

Q: Outlook programs.

SCHERMERHORN: Or whatever it was. And he did that basically because he wanted to get rid of the people surrounding him who claimed to know something about any of the things that he wanted to deal with. That's a little cynical but that was more or less what it was. And this bid system was refined so you had to bid in areas you hadn't served in and the idea again was that there were certain bureaus that were going to be handicapped because even though some of their posts were interesting and nice they were never going to be anybody's first choice; and then these issues of schooling and the grandmother's tennis elbow or whatever it was. You don't have as much attention to that. But the downside of it is you don't have as many people with the regional and linguistic expertise as you used to, as deeply grounded in it as maybe you would like to see.

Q: Were you finding training a problem?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh yes. Training was a great problem because of the numbers problem. It was estimated that if we were to give everybody the language training, and this isn't talking about professional training now, this is talking about language training and orientation training before they went to a post in an area that they had not been in. We would have to have a float; we'd have to have about one-third more employees. And this is why the military can be so effective and in fact that's why they do so much training. They have to keep everybody busy.

Q: Yes. Instead of going out and killing people they have to keep them busy.

SCHERMERHORN: And the Agency does what it needs to do. But we were never going to get the authorization, the money, the appropriation, to have enough money to hire enough people that have that kind of float.

Another big thing we did in this periothere was really a tremendous amount of activitwhen George Shultz was secretary they had negotiated with the military for this facility right here that we're sitting in.

Q: The National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

SCHERMERHORN: So plans were underway about what to build, how to make it work and so forth. It was going to be expensive and basically the Department took a little leaf out of the contracting out of the privatization. We said we're going to make a big push to get more agencies into the training mode, and of course they all liked that because they want to be players; they want to have a bigger role to play. So now we have all sorts of agencies doing training here and the State Department too. But we couldn't support the size of this institution without the tuitions and the presence of a lot of other people which is why it's called what it is now; it's not the Foreign Service Institute, it's the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. So in a way it was an attempt to run it a little like a business. Now hopefully we'll be able to have more State Department here than we have in the past but I don't know.

Q: As you were looking at it, did you feel you were up against the problem of placing people? It comes across as service discipline, but what you might say as the me generation which was people coming from the '60s on who were much more interested in their personal space and their personal development. When I came in it wasn't that I was any different than anyone else but we just sort of thought well you did this and you just sort of went along with the thing and what's good for me is good for them and vice versa.

SCHERMERHORN: Oh yes. There were some people that had stories that it was hard to keep a straight face listening to it really. And there were people who just wanted to curtail and move on to a different job and you'd say, "Well we have to have a reason according to the regs." Something medical or personal. And they'd say, "Oh no. It's not career enhancing," or, "It's not going to help me get promoted," and you'd say, "Well there are a lot of jobs maybe like that but you have to remember it's how you do the job." But people don't accept that. They think it has to be a high profile thing and unfortunately enough of that is true.

Q: Hasn't either the act itself or sort of the rules that have grown up around the act said that you have to have supervisory experience; hasn't this meant that say being a political counselor in Manila, which to me is as a non political officer sounds like a pretty good job, is far more important than being the deputy chief of mission in Tunisia.

SCHERMERHORN: But it doesn't work that way unfortunately.

Q: Did you find yourself coming up against this? People saying, "If you push me into that job you're telling me that I won't get promoted."

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. I used to get that and I'd say, "First of all you can't prejudge the promotion boards," which is true. I've sat on two of them and if you are serious about it you can draw conclusions and you'll be wrong because they do things that you can't see. And one promotion board may look at the files and come up with a very different outcome than another one although that's not something you like to talk about either. [laughs] That's why there's such fierce infighting during the assignment process and why to be fair you have to keep control of it. There has to be a central system that keeps control of it, otherwise people are going to get disadvantaged. Fortunately also there are fads in these things. As I said, if you were in the German club and in POL/MIL ten years ago that was really?because it was ACDA, it was arms control, it was SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks), it was all those mind boggling issues that the fate of the world hung on them, or so we thought. But, you know, now certain issues in the trade front, certain other areas?what goes around comes around, eventually. But it's hard to make people understand that.

Q: I was in for five years in Yugoslavia. You were considered sort of a little elite. Of course one of our guys became secretary of state which is very unusual. But the fact that you were involved either in Soviet or Eastern European affairs was considered pretty hot stuff. And I suspect today it's not at all.

Tape 7, Side B

SCHERMERHORN: Something I forgot to mention when we were talking about Brussels and when I left there in 1988 people were sayinGorbachev and Glasnost was on the radar screen and people were beginning to say, "Well I guess Germany will be reunited someday." Before that it was, "it's never going to happen." It will happen someday. And this is 1988. I mean a year later boom! Events move so fast and I think in this period in personnel, as I said, we were still with the same personnel system dealing with these somewhat cataclysmic things that were actually changing our own requirements in the Department and the issues that we thought were of premier importance and a whole lot of sea changes.

Q: Did the find the head office intruded much? I'm talking about at the secretary of state level and the Seventh Floor and all of people using their influence to get?How did this work?

SCHERMERHORN: They tried to and that was one of the reasons they wanted ambassadors here so when some ambassador or assistant secretary called it wouldn't be, "I'm giving you an order," or that kind of thing. As I said, Clyde was so meticulous about this. It used to be a problem because there were some people in our personnel front office who unfortunately liked to shoot the breeze with the boys. And they'd get a call and they'd say, "Oh yes. I'll take care of it," without ever finding out what the issue is. And then they'd say to Clyde, "Well, (blah, blah, blah)," and he'd say, "Well, you know, we really can't do that because here's what the real issues are according to the (whatever)," and then there would be a little problem. And Clyde would stick to his guns; that's why he was so terrific. I mean what a wonderful person. Then it would cause a problem for him with his superiors. But, you know, you couldn't just cavalierly throw this away because then everybody comes in and says, "Well, (Joe Blow) got to do this. Why can't I?" and you'd have to have a good reason or they'd go to the lawyers. So you had to be able to cite what we called the SOPS, the standard operating procedures. This was this arcana that had been built up to try to equalize the playing field and ensure some equity and so forth. It was a constant problem and I think in the Front Office they thought he should cave mornot "more," he barely caved. Sometimes they just presented it with a "fait accompli"; they didn't use this system they had in place. They were somewhat cavalier about it. But then that was only one person. Then there were others who would say, "Well I'll have to look into it," and then they'd call in and say, "Look, what's really going on here? Is this something we can do logically and correctly or not?" Does it make sense, and so on. So that's what I meant by sometimes you see your seniors sort of the emperor was wearing no clothes; you'd look at a person and say, "Gee, I had some respect but I don't now because this is the way they're operating and it's not right to undercut your own staff and so on.

Q: Who was the director general when you were there?

SCHERMERHORN: Ed Perkins.

Q: How did you find the role of the director general at that time?

SCHERMERHORN: At least he didn't want to get into the nitty-gritty, which is right because there's too much of it, too much minutia, and it was more policy direction. As I said, there were ten or eleven offices in this. The assignments office was just one of them. There was the employee relations office; there was the office that dealt with the number crunching, the intake and the statistics and so forth; there was the EX; there was the retirement division. All these were part of the far-flung personnel empire. The assignments thing was the thing that most employees had to deal with at one point or another; at least every second or third year, if not more often. But the other offices were equally important in this sort orecently in the last couple of years they've renamed it human resources in line with what most corporations do now. But that's really what it was; it wasn't just assignments. So he had a lot of other issues to deal with. And there was a policy planning office. The National Foreign Affairs Training Center was nominally under this; it has its own dean and so forth.

So the policy issues were things like treatment of minorities like the numbers for promotion and intake. We had a great problem, as I said. The money began to dry up. We had a terrible budgetary problem in the mid '90s. When the Congress of '92 came in - and the new administration - the appropriations process took a real hitch. I'm not making any linkagI am with the new Congresbut it was a whole?for not only the State Department but for a lot of government agencies.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the secretary of state, who was Warren Christopher?You were there with both Christopher and before that with Baker.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. I left in summer of '93 so Christopher?

Q: So you only got a little of Christopher.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: Did you have the feeling that Baker paid any attention to the running of the Foreign Service?

SCHERMERHORN: Not really, no. Because I assume if he had he wouldn't have done what he allegedly did as far as staffing the countries from the former Soviet Union. That was more to show the Congress that the administration was on board, but it showed no understanding of budget and personnel.

Q: Baker was known to have a coterie around him, a very small one, a very effective one as a matter of fact. Was there anybody there who would from time to time get involved in the personnel process sorting making sure that favorites got what they wanted?

SCHERMERHORN: There may have been but if so they would've communicated that up at the Front Office level and if it came down to us we wouldn't have known necessarily.

Q: Would there be assignments where they said, "This assignment here we've made," or saying, "Larry Eagleburger wants this," or something?

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, there was a little bit of that. I don't know that it necessarily emanated from there. But you'd say, "Well they have to go through the bidding process just like everybody else." Clyde managed to claw back some of the autonomy of the bureaus in this regard. And I said for the European bureau which was accustomed to being first among the equals, they were now having their own problem staffings. So they were kind of in disarray. As an example I can remember one of my friends coming in and said, "You know, I understand the DCM committee they've assigned," it was a consulate in Europe that he wanted, and he said, "Tom Niles," who was then assistant secretary for European Affairs "promised me I could have that." I said, "Look, Tom Niles can promise you anything he likes but he cannot guarantee to deliver it because it's the DCM." And they didn't deliver it.

But you were asking before, and I didn't finish the sequence of thought here about women and so forth. We had this suit and we had to take care of certain people but then kind of growing out of that whole idea that women get fewer Superior Honor Awards, women get fewer DCM-ships. They wanted to preserve the tradition that an ambassador could select his DCM. He was given a short list but he?So they couldn't deal with it. But the area they could deal with, in terms of selecting assignments, was consul generals and consuls heading independent offices. So that's the period when they began to put a lot of women on these short lists and to choose women. That was a positive thing done with forethought. That was the area that without challenging the ambassador's traditional "right" to choose his or her DCM.

Q: Did you get involved in the DCM business at all?

SCHERMERHORN: No. As I said, the D committee, the head of the senior officer division and the director, Clyde, would go to that. The DCM committee Clyde was the executive secretary. They put together lists in consultation with the CDOs in the senior division. I didn't actually do that but I was aware of what they were doing and I could sometimes?sometimes I'd see a list and I'd say, "You know, [so-and-so] is really the preeminent [whatever] on this. Why isn't that person on the list?" and sometimes they'd say, "Oh really?" Again, I had great recall and from my time in the secretariat I knew a lot of people so sometimes I could inject something that I hoped would add some balance or somebody who had been forgotten. But again, that illustrates to you the random quality oit wasn't totally random but there was a lot of serendipity about this process unfortunately.

Q: Well I can remember being what was then known as a career management officer in personnel, and somebody was saying, "Oh my god. We've got a problem [in some place]," and I'd say, "I just was talking to somebody and I think they'd be splendid for that. And it might be one of these marriages made in heaven but the point being that this was not going back to the?it was going to my memory bank.

SCHERMERHORN: I have a good memory so I did function in that, but again it's sort of, as you say, a hell of a way to run a railroad. And this is supporting the theory I mentioned about why senior officers it's better to be walking the corridor in Washington and tripping over somebody who will then say, "Oh yes. I just saw [so-and-so]; he'd be a great [whatever]," than to be out in Bangladesh as the DCM or something.

Q: Well I've talked to a number of people who were ambassadors back in the good 'ole days, way back in the '50s or so, and many of the things were they happened to be in the urinal next to Loy Henderson and say, "Where are you going?" and he said, "You don't want to go there." [laughs] It didn't help the ladies, but there was quite a bit of that sort of thing.

SCHERMERHORN: You can have computers and you can generate feedback. I can remember somebody calling down from upstairs after five-thirty and wanting a list of a certain category of officer immediately and the CDOs had gone home so Clyde said come up with something and I did but I annotated it and I said this is by no means comprehensive; you'll have to ask people tomorrow and so on. But I mean that I could even do that was simply?as I said earlier in my career I happened to be in a series of assignments where I met a lot of people slightly ahead of me and my immediate contemporary. But again this is not the way a system ideally should work.

Q: We've really hit the personnel side. I think people should really understand how the personnel system works because if they're looking at this, personnel is so important in our process. In fact, it's the key.

SCHERMERHORN: And as I pointed out, everybody thinks they're unique; why can't they do something. They have to understand that if they do it and everybody does it the system doesn't work. So you can't have it that way. But of course people are looking after their own interests.

Q: You left there when?

SCHERMERHORN: I left in the summer of '93.

Q: Where did you go?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, as I said, I extended for the third year so that meant in the fall of '92 I was bidding. I had been promoted via this process before so I was an OC. I was bidding jobs and I bid some DCM-ships including the one in Brussels which I put down because I knew I'd been there recently but on the other hand it meant I had knowledge. So they put the short list together and I was on the short list and I interviewed with the ambassador who had been designated by the new administration.

Q: Lange, before we move on, you want to add some things.

SCHERMERHORN: Just a few things I recalled about the career development and assignments office. We were talking earlier about how many factors come into play in the assignment process and increasingly as time goes on there are more and more issues that are central to people's ideas about where they should go and how long they should stay. Actually one of the things we tried to do there with the career development officers whose clients are the employees; I said at the beginning of the assignments cycle, "Make a chart with all your people, a grid, and list these eight or ten factors," like language deficient, medical problem, school, whatever, "and if you have more than one of those in anybody's box you've got to start looking at those people early on because if you wait the options are fewer and fewer and then they end up, especially the six-year people who had to go overseas." So what we wanted to try to do was make this a more systematic process. Of course people say well you can't favor someone over the other and I said, "No, I'm not asking you to favor people; I'm asking you to look at your total clientele and work on the people whose options are more limited than others to make sure that they can, if it is in fact an overseas requirement, get there." That seemed to work well but I understand they're not doing it quite as systematically now as we once tried to make it.

There was another issue that I found mind boggling actually. In the course of three years there I think we had three different consultancy contracts: one for the computer system; one for intake numbers and so on. Now it seemed whenever there was a thorny issue, people threw a consultant at it. But it always turned oul figured out after the third one of thesthat the consultants would come in and make a very good proposal that earned them the contract and then they would come in to start and they'd say, "Well, tell us about the place." That seemed to fall mostly to me and then the other assignments officers who got more involved in the technical aspects, particularly with the computer. We spent hours and hours of our time explaining all of these things to people. At the time if we had it maybe we could've turned ourselves to helping solve the problem. And then they would complete their study. Well in one case they never completed it because they couldn't be made to understand. We spent hours and hours about the process, what is involved. It seems to me this was just money that was being thrown away because either they never grasped the nettle at all or they only got half of it and the result wasn't very useful. Or it took so long or whatever. One of the Civil Service employees kind of laughed at this and they said, "Oh yes, there's a whole room down in the basemen[laughs] I don't know if this is apocryphal or not, but a whole room full of studies. I didn't actually see that but it certainly has the ring of some truth.

Q: I was in personnel, my god, back in the '60s and I remember there were studies and ways of dealing with things and all. This was before we had too many consultants but they kept hauling in consultants too. They went through all sorts of permutations and it always seems to be a place you can note for consulting money.

SCHERMERHORN: I think now that there are more retired people available for consulting maybe some of these contracts do have people who are doing them who actually have some prior knowledge. But at that stage in the early '90s these were all young people. It was somewhat analogous to what I was talking about; the new lawyer who got assigned to this case who needed all the hand holding because it is very arcane.

There's another issue. You were asking a little bit about discipline and so on. There was a concept in personnel called loss of confidence, which meant that an ambassador if he judged that an employee at a mission would be better off elsewhere, for whatever reason, he could send in a cable saying he's lost confidence in this employee and therefore requests that his assignment be curtailed and moved. This is something that was not to be used lightly and ambassadors didn't like to do it. So you got into this dance with people; someone would suggest to the person that they ask to curtail and maybe they'd go into an explanation or nothe threat being, "I'll have to ask for loss of confidence in you and that would be detrimental to your career" and sometimes the employee would see the handwriting on the wall and do that. Then, of course, if the panel didn't actually know why they were doing that and the reason that he gave for wanting to curtail wasn't one that fit into the standard operating procedure, they might deny it. Say, "Well, he's got another year to go. Why?"

So then you'd get into one of these discussions and there would be a dance back and forth. It never really worked very well is what happened. Usually the employee did?But then you'd get the people who were constantly moving because they went from one of these situations to another. Then of course you'd say, "You have a tool. You have the efficiency report to say so-and-so." Sometimes you'd see the loss of confidence, the panel would go through that, and then of course the person would be looking for another assignment and then they'd be up at panel and you'd say, "Well what about this?" and they'd say, "Oh I got a wonderful efficiency report from the post." It was kind of kicking you, in this case not upstairs, but laterally out the door. That illustrates why we have a lot of problems in the Foreign Service. People keep saying, "Well how did [so-and-so] get to be as high ranking as he or she is when clearly they've got these problems?" And that's how it happens. Because the board?whatever else people think about the promotions system, the promotion boards are very insulated. The only material they have available to look at is that file consisting of the reports and any reprimands or laudatory awards or something that might be. It's very limited and you can't admit corridor "gossip" into it. The chair is supposed to be very rigorous about that. If you are a member of a board and you know something about the person, either praiseworthy or detrimental, that isn't reflected in this you may submit it in writing, but you're not supposed to sit at the panel and say, "Well that person is?" And as I said, if the chair is doing the job, that's what happens. That's an employee protection but it also allows a lot of latitude not to get people at an early stage.

Q: This is a problem I've noted again and again. You have people who are known for one reason or another as not very good performers and there's always a problem; yet they keep moving around and never seem to be asked to leave.

SCHERMERHORN: Well that's one of the reasons whthis is going back to an earlier period but we haven't mentioned that I did sit on a couple of promotion boards earlier on and one year one of the recommendations?what came out of that was they would have a required low ranking with a referral to a performance standards board. But even that wasn't automatic. The board low ranked but then they had to write a memo about why the person should go and sometimes the consensus was it didn't merit that. So, in fact, even though all those procedures are in place they don't actually operate very well. What Foreign Service personnel say is avoidance, avoidance. We're trying to get along and we don't have adversarial relationships.

Q: In this lack-of-confidence issue, did you note while you were there any correlation between political and career type ambassadors? In other words, did you find non career ambassadors willing to use this more than say career ambassadors or vice versa?

SCHERMERHORN: I can't remember enough specifics about who or what. I would say that generally though you sometimes ran into the political ambassadors who said, "Well I came from private industry and when I want to get rid of somebody I fire them," and you had to say, "Well it doesn't work that way exactly here." But I can't speak to a correlation. There weren't enough cases that I can recall who or what they were.

Then there was another very interesting one of our colleagues who Clyde Taylor, the director, had recruited to head the training division. This job was not something that everybody thought was interesting but it had to do a lot with other agencies because it had to deal with the training assignments to the military staff colleges and to the professorships and so forth. Well he recruited this colleague of ours who is sui generis. [laughs] To my knowledge he's the only Foreign Service officer who was also a general officer in the military reserves before he was a senior officer in the Foreign Service; and he had kept up his reserves and had a lot of political military background and several assignments over in DOD. So he came in the second year I was there, and I knew him but not well. He said, "You know, Lange, the last promotion board at the end of it they sent me a letter and said I'd spent so much time over in DOD maybe I ought to think of going over there." [laughs]

I think he was exaggerating slightly but the point had been made that he was going to have great difficulty getting promoted from -01 into the Senior Foreign Service based on the promotion precepts and so forth. And I said, and I don't know why I said it with such confidence, "Never mind. We'll make that work for you in this job," because you're dealing with the military and so on. But anyway, the first year he said, "No. After this assignment it's over with." He was such an engaging and quite unique character that it was actually very easy to write a very colorful but relevant report. And he did get promoted. [laughs] But the point is you have to look in these jobs, however unappealing they may seem and so forth, there's some kernel in the job that you can relate to what the person is doing and how they're doing it.

You know, we're talking about more and more issues that people require, but I think I could say that the more services and perquisites that the State Department provides that make our living overseas more like living in the U.S., the more people want to be like the U.S. It's a self reinforcing activity. You have movies; now you have CDs; you have the computers with the e-mail you can e home. People want less and less to have the foreign experience, as you say. I used to say, and I'm not sure I really mean this, when I came it was a profession and at some point it became a career and now it's just a job for people. It's a different attitude.

Q: Going back to Belgium as DCM, who was going to be your ambassador? Did you have any sort of meeting there before hand?

SCHERMERHORN: I was, as I said, on the short list so I had to be interviewed by the ambassador. And when I saw his resume before my meeting I understood the milieu from which he came because he was an investment banker in New York. This was a part of the world that I had some connection with and knew something about. So I felt comfortable with that. He was in Washington and we met. He was very easy to talk to, nice, and he said at one point, "Well, you know, I'm not a detail person," and I said, "That's alright Mr. Ambassador; that's why you have the rest of us," and he kind of looked at me and he said, "Oh. Okay." [laughs] He didn't say anything right then but his wife was in town also so the next day he asked me to go and meet his wife; so I went and talked to her and she said, "You know, Allen isn't a detail person," and I thought well, there's really something to this. [laughs] That was fine and I guess he called after that and he said he'd like to have me. When he said that I said, "Well I actually know something about the firm you work with in New York because my brother works there." He worked in a different part of it because it was very large and he hadn't made the connection even the name isn't that?I was not certain whether I should say it and then I realized, no, I shouldn't say it before he talks to me; and he said, "That was very nice that you didn't say that beforehand."

So this was the spring of '93 and I was going out there in the summer. The previous ambassador had left sometime in July so there was a chargï¿½ and the DCM had left, obviously, because I was going. There was a chargï¿½ who was the public affairs officer, the USIS (United States Information Service) chief. I'm driving down from New Hampshire to Boston to the airport getting readthis was in Augusand I hear on the radio that the king of the Belgians has died. I think, uh oh, I'm not there and there's no ambassador either and a new political counselor also who had just gotten there a week before that. So they had to deal with this immediately and did quite well apparently. And it was one of those usual fire drills where you decide who is going to go to the funerais it the vice president or what is it. So they had to go through a whole routine for all of that.

I got out there in August and of course it was a very nice introduction in the embassy because I had only left in '88 so I knew all the staff.

Q: Before we get there, did you take the DCM course?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. That's why I couldn't go earlier.

Q: Could you talk about that, and particularly before you went were there precautions on dealing with ambassadorany DCM, but particularly if you're going to deal with a political ambassador? I'm talking a generic problem. It doesn't always work well. It's considered one of the traps. I'm just wondering how the course work would be.

SCHERMERHORN: Actually that's why I couldn't go. The DCM course that I was enrolled in was in late July or early August. There had been an earlier one but other people who needed to get out sooner were in that. They take you out to one of those places in West Virginia, out in the country, and you have a group grope. I don't remember anything?There were a series of guest lecturers on different topics and there was a little discussion of that but not, as I recall, as much as you might think. This was quite a large group. It was thirty or something. Sometimes they're smaller depending on the timing of it. I can't remember that there was anything terribly specific about that. There was reference to "some of you will be working for political ambassadors and that's different" but without any great explanation or discussion of how or why.

Q: All of us who have been in the profession, trade, career, work, have watched DCMs operate or heard stories and all. What sort of lessons were you carrying around in your mental portfolio?

SCHERMERHORN: I think, harking back to my discussion with the ambassador when he said, "I'm not a detail person," and we had talked again after that and he said, "Well, you know, I understand that your role is to run the embassy and do all those things the State Department wants to have done," and he said, "I have an agenda," and he told me what it was, which again fit in with my background. He said, "I'm a businessman and I think my role and what the president wants me to do is to go and promote U.S. business in Brussels." Well it's a good place to do that. So I knew what he wanted to do and I knew what he thought my role should be, which happened to accord with?

I agree. I think the problems often come in when both the ambassador and the DCM think they have the same role instead of complimentary ones. Some ambassadors aren't as outgoing and going out the way this man did, so I was the inside person. But I had a little advantage because I knew everybody in the community and I knew the people in the business community too, both American and Belgian, because I'd been there as the economic counselor. I could kind of explain to him who people were and so forth when he first got there. He didn't get there until November because he didn't have his hearing; it was being held up by one of our friends on the Hill.

I guess I approached it with the idea that I could have an idea of what I thought I'd be doing but if it didn't accord with his I would be the one to make the adjustments and to be a complement. To make him look good is what it amounts to, right? Instead of trying to be a competitor in some respects which I think does happen sometimes.

Q: You haven't mentioned who the ambassador is, whom, by the way, I've interviewed. I had a very nice interview and he was extremely complimentary of you. Could you give the name and his background?

SCHERMERHORN: His name is Allen BlinkeAllen and Melindand he was an investment banker in New York with Wertheim Schroder, a big firm which shortly after he left was bought out by Schroders and then it became Schroder-Wertheim and now the Wertheim name is gone completely. [laughs] It's only five years later. My brother retired, too.

He was what they used to call a "suit." He was the person who went out and raised money. He wasn't a technical person under the bond market or whatever.

Q: Not a detail person. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: Not a detail person. He was [laughs] one of the youngest of three brothers, all of whom had gone to Harvard. His oldest brother was fifteen years older, Donald Blinken, who was also appointed an ambassador by Clinton?

Q: To?

SCHERMERHORN: Hungary.

So Allen at this point wahe was born in 1937 so he was fifty-six or something like thawas tired of the New York scene, I think. But what actually propelled him into the administration?I used to say he's not an FOB (friend of Bill [Clinton]), he's an FOA (friend of Al [Gore]); he's a friend of Al Gore, not Clinton. This had come about in 1987 when Gore was one of the seven dwarfs and all the Democrats were looking for money and so forth. He had some connections in the New York financial world and he came and made a presentation and he and Allen became good friends and their wives became good friends. They're very close personal friends. So that was his connection.

I don't know how his brother arrived at the embassy; not by that route, but anyway. The reason for Hungary is his brother's wife was born in Hungary and so that was the interest in that. His brother was also some kind of banker, not with Wertheim-Schroder, but was also on the New York State Educational Board of Regents. It was kind a philanthropic?I don't know exactly how they made their money but Allen used to say that his father came as a child to the States from the Ukraine or whatever.

Q: It was a Jewish family, wasn't it?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. He said, "We're of Jewish origin," but he was not a practicing Jew at this point. But his father went to college and law school and apparently did very well because the older brother who was seventy at that point was well educated, and they had money in real estate, I think, and the middle brother was the one who managed whatever the family holdings were. He wasn't interested in public service in the same way. Allen was a very interesting person. Very interested in modern art and had a nice collection; was a sportsmahunted and fisheand this was very popular with the Belgians because they have shooting parties all the time. He was the first ambassador to Belgium who went shooting since Ann Cox Chambers who was from Atlanta and I guess used to go quail shooting there. So he fit into this bigger scene quite easily and was a very socially outgoing person, and this was well received in Belgium. Sometimes they've had more reclusive people or people who didn't share any of the interests of the well-to-do business clients. So Allen had gone to Harvard, the class of '59 I think he said. He was fun, had a good sense of humor, a very attractive looking man.

Q: He did quite a good job, too.

SCHERMERHORN: He did an excellent job. I can't say he's the only, but he received an honor from the kina medawhen he left. Not when he was there, he went back sometime later to get it in a ceremony. Whatever it was it was one that had not been awarded readily to people; because he did do a tremendous amount. This partnership, if you will, really worked very well because we did the things that we're supposed to do. He was a very quick study. He didn't know a lot about the issues but he could get to the bottom line; but by the same token he got bored easily. He didn't like people to ramble on. You'd go in and he'd say, "What's the bottom line?" He'd want to know and you'd have to be able to articulate that.

What was interesting, he always asked me, "Should I do this," or whatever, so I'd say what I thoughyes, no, not right now, neve[laughs] whatever the issue might be. He valued that, that you didn't pussyfoot around and say, "Well, maybe," or "on one hand, or on the other." But I always made those judgments. Again, I was fortunate that I had been there before because it allowed me to make that kind of judgment more easily than if everything we new to me too.

Q: You were there from when to when?

SCHERMERHORN: From the end of August '93 until the end of August '97.

Q: What was sort of the political situation? Because Belgium looks like one of these nice tranquil little places, but it ain't. [laughs] And we've talked about it before but let's talk about it again during this period when you arrived particularly. The king died. What was happening?

SCHERMERHORN: The king had died and he had no heirs so the heir was his younger brother by a couple of years, Albert. He was named after the grandfather who was king in World War I. The Belgians liked Baudouin; they were very fond of him and so forth, but they liked the fact that this man had a family and the monarchy would carry on; because Belgians, as I may have said before, despite their many differences between the Walloons and the Flemish, I think they were canny enough to understand that for that very reason they need a monarchy. They need a unifying institution at the top and that's what they had.

Q: Why hadn't Baudouin married?

SCHERMERHORN: He did marry but they had no children. His wife, Fabiola, was Spanish and from one of the noble families.

Q: Yes. Not from the duke of albad_____? [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs] No. She's still living in Belgium. Baudouin was young when he died; he was sixty-three or four or something like that.

Q: Yes. When he came his father had sort of blotted his copy book in World War II and so he was named early.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. The father abdicated or whatever constitutional issue was. After the German occupation, when they reestablished everything in Belgium, he was?He lived somewhere else too. He had married again. The mother was the Swedish princess, Astrid, who was very, very popular with the Belgians and died in an automobile accident; and actually the king was driving the car. That was in 1930 something.

As I said, when I arrived in Belgium in the '80s they were on the brink. They had just voted to accept the INF and that was a very pivotal moment in the fall of the Soviet Union and so forth and how we presented ourselves and how they responded to it. In '93 again we were seeing the fruits of what we talked about before: the European Union's great leap forward and this process of the white paper that had laid out the roadmap for all of the economic harmonization that was moving very well. NATO was at a crossroads at that point too because here they had been confronted suddenly with the fall of the Soviet Union. Who was out there if we didn't have the Soviet Union? There was really quite a lot of angst going on. How did we reposition NATO to account for what's happened and still keep this unity and cohesion of the alliance? And they were beginning to talk about NATO expansion and formulate the first ideas about this.

In Brussels it was an interesting period from the U.S. presence because we had three new ambassadors: our representative to the European Union, our representative to NATO and the bilateral embassy, and three new DCMs. So there was a whole new team and traditionally there, especially in the immediate recent past before '93 there had been some problems, if you will. Some of the political appointees in the other two missions had not always perhaps been quite as effective as one might've hoped in that period at the end of the '80s and early '90s.

Tape 8, Side A

Bruce Gelb had been a political appointee and he'd only been there about eighteen months and he was having a good time. He was out and about and people liked him. So he wasn't too happy to have to leave so soon. He had left on January 20th; and because of the hearing process Ambassador Blinken didn't get there until November. But anyway we had a complete turnover. Bruce Gelb had only been there a year and a half; his predecessor was a career person. Occasionally there's a career person in Embassy Brussels, mostly not. Mike Glitman, whose great career had been focused on arms control mostly and political and military affairs, he got the embassy the bilateral embassy when really what his whole career focus was was NATO. It's too bad that he wasn't the ambassador to NATO. There was somebody who came out from the NSC who was not very well known. So, I understanthis is hearsay of coursthere was some tension and people didn't get along all that well in the three missions.

As I said, this was a mission where the administration for all three is done in a single administrative unit in the embassy; and that harks back to when NATO was kicked out of France and came to Brussels. It was much more effective than anybody having these things. The other two missions, of course the ambassadors, each one of them, felt that he or she was the most important; but of course it was really the bilateral embassy that had the whole picture because they did a classical embassy whereas the other two missions were limited in their scope because they were focusing on one institution.

So this was going to be an interesting moment. We had new ambassadors; my ambassador somebody had already told him this; I guess he had talked to Bruce Gelb. He talked to Jeffrey Swaebe who had been the ambassador under the Republicans when I was there. He went and met everybody. When he came to me he said, "Well I understand they've had some issues. I'm not a problem. I'm easy. So we're not going to be part of the problem if there is one." So that's the way we played it. I knew the other two DCMs; they're both very estimable men who of course were working for quite high profile political ambassadors, Bob Hunter at NATO and Stu Eisenstadt who went to the Ea really quite remarkable man, Stu. And of course they were more focused on upstaging each other in one way; and this came to a head very early on. President Clinton was making his very first visit to NATO for a summit in January of '94. We had several advance teams come; we had the pre-pre advance, the pre-advance, the advance, and the regular team starting in early November; this was like ten weeks before. They were quite concerned; it was Clinton's first major trip to Europe and he was making a major speech.

I had had some experience with organizing these kinds of visits in my secretariat days. The ambassador and I had talked and he said, "You know, we don't need a lot of time but we absolutely have to have ten percent of the time." There are certain things that with it came and the prime minister of Belgium, and it's going to be hard because it was like two days. So we sort of seeded everything except we got a [inaudible] back, but that was better than trying to fight and get a lot. This was simplified in one sense because it was a NATO summit and it was the heads of state of all of the countries; and the king offered them a lunch. But we did carve out just enough time for the Belgian government. The head of the pre-advance team was a Washington lawyer, a woman who had been an advance person and had some experience with this. But what we found, they just had hordes and hordes of these twenty-something people coming to do the advance and it was totally undisciplined. They'd get on the phone and they had all the WHACA, White House communications. I had seen this before, but never to this extent. It was just exponential. They'd get on the phone and they had these conference calls for three or four hours every night with Washingtoeverybody chiming in.

At that point we hadn't heard so many tales of the Clinton White House being like the fraternity house; you know, gab sessions and whatever; then I saw that actually working that way. It was really somewhat irritating because you'd say, "Okay, well we've got to make these decisions because these decisions predict what happens down the road. We've got to set it up. They'd go in one morning and agree on thus and so and then the next day, "Well we changed our minds." It went on like that for these kinds of things.

One of the things we wanted was to have a session with the chamber of commerce, and explained before that the chamber of commerce was probably the most professional and active in Europe. It has this dual constituency that American companies that our resident investors and whatnot, joint ventures in Belgium plus all the service people who had come to work on EU issues would man their EU committee. So it was really quite a large group. They said no, he doesn't want to do that. So finally, like December 22nd they decide, "Okay, I guess we can do that," after swearing up and down it wasn't going to happen. So I call the chamber and I said, "Well they'd like to do it now." They could do it; they had set up their fax machine. But this was over the Christmas holiday weekend. It was supposed to be on January 3rd. But they put it together. It could've been so much easier on everybody if they had just said to me, "Okay, this is when we're going to do this." And it went on like that. [laughs] Much more chaos and time consumption of people than there needed to be to make it happen.

Q: Well one of the things that?I've talked to people who've been involved in various presidential visits, and what you really want to do is avoid the first one or two when a new administration comes in because all the kids get on board and they're having a wonderful time. On some administrations what you really have are a bunch of arrogant young people; other ones this doesn't sound like they were overly arrogant?You're making faces, so I guess? It goes with the turf but you sure as hell want to avoid the first one because everybody is trying to make their point and they have no idea what they're doing. It gets more professional as time goes on.

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs] One hopes.

Q: One hopes.

SCHERMERHORN: Actually it was funny because then of course this was not just one missiothey had this triumvirate herand at one point this woman who was the advance, she had these meetings and she had me sit next to her and she said to me at the end of one of these, "Now I need to talk to you because you may be sensible. We can't pay attention?" The other people were being?I said right out, "Look, we need this absolutely? That's the bottom line and the ambassador will fight for that and win." [laughs] The rest of it the other two can duke it out about. All these children were running around and she said, "Oh, I don't even try to keep it? We have to let them do their thing." And they're sons and daughters of contributors or whatever.

One fellow was about twenty-three and apparently his father was a movie producer or something. The centerpiece, apart from the summit meeting itself, was the speech Clinton was going to make. We had much debate as to the locale of the speech and various things. Finally it was decided that the town hall in Brussels, a beautiful gothic building; wonderful with tapestries and beautiful. [laughs] I was detailed, when we went to look at the place, to take them to meet the chief of protocol or whatever it was who had to do thia long-suffering man [laughs] and this young movie producer type goes in and he says, "Well, we'll take the tapestries down and we'll put the bleachers up here," [laughs] and I'm rolling my eyes and saying, "No I don't think so," and hoping that they weren't listening to this. We said to the advance, "Look, knock it off. This is their place and we're not taking anything down." So we got through all this. Our hosts, they're long-suffering in Brussels because they've seen a lot of this, but this was above and beyond. But they just act graciously and let us get on with it like that.

Well it finally happened, but one of the many things that was funny about it was that the saxophone was invented by a Belgian called Adolph Sax, who was from a little town, from Dinant, I think. So the mayor of Dinant paid a call to the ambassador and he said, "The president is coming and we, the town of Dinant, would like to present the president with a saxophone," because he's known to play this and so on. So we said alright and we put it up to the advance team. They said, "Oh no, no, no. We can't do that." We said, "Why not?" So finally they very begrudgingly said okay, but it won't be in public; it'll be a private presentation. Well one of the other events was, because there are so many Americans resident in Brussels, an American community event. And again we had to figure out where to do this. The Conrad hotel which at that point had only been open about a year was built like a baseball stadium with an atrium in the middle. So we covered the atrium and we paid for it out of the American chamber event. They did that because they had their breakfast it was. There had to be a breakfast on top of all that because of the late decision about doing it. We didn't know where to do the American event and the night before the atrium was covered temporarily so we had the American event there and the president was staying in the Conrad. So they said, "Okay, just before he comes down to the American event the mayor can go up to his room and present this in private." Well the American event meant there was no press there; it was an American community event. So the ambassador takes him upstairs and Clinton comes out of the sitting room or whatever and he says, "This is President Clinton," and he says, "Oh, this is terrific!" and he says to the mayor, "Well, this is great. I want to go downstairs and show this to everybody downstairs." [laughs] So they take him downstairs, and of course because of the nature of the event there was no Belgian press there or anything. My point is that these people who purported to speak for the president didn't really know anything about what he wanted to do and they never apparently asked him about this. It could've been such a nice little event for the Belgian press and everything. And then to add insult to injury, they leave and the next stop on this visit is Prague. Brussels to Prague is like an hour flight. So we're watching the television in Brussels to see the plane; they open the plane and show the president getting in a car and then going to the Charles Bridge in Prague and then I don't know whether it was the mayor in Prague or some functionary presents him in full public, world television, with a saxophone. [laughs] and it would've been nice, Adolph Sax.

But this is the kind of thing you get. And then they went, "Well, the president never jogs here," and then he said, "Oh, I want to jog?" Everything they spent hours and weeks deciding turned out not to really reflect what he wanted to do anyway.

Q: This is the time when you throw all the kids who are of wealthy supporters and have no idea, probably have nothing to do with the president.

SCHERMERHORN: And they have no understanding of the staff function. That's alright, you give them a little leeway, but the adults who were part of this declined to supervise them.

Q: This took a while. They had some real problems with the military because some of the staff were denigrating the military in uniform and this immediately got picked up. It's a bad show and unfortunately it happens relatively frequently with a brand-new administration. They get too eager.

SCHERMERHORN: The other thing that was really bad for a White House that was interested in public relations. You said this was kind of growing pains I think in the beginning. One of the things, because there were all these heads of state, the king was going to go to the airport to greet each one of them when they came. The advance team said, "Oh no, he doesn't want to be greeted. He doesn't want to do that," and we said, "Well it's not really your choice." The idea was the king would be at the bottom of the stairs, which is quite a nice thing and so forth, and they said, "Well you can't." Okay, but he'll go over and meet him in the lounge. I guess the idea was that nobody should detract from the president getting off the steps. I don't know what the idea was but it was very rude, and trying to explain this, we had to smooth it over. We said, "Alright, the king will be here and then the president will get out and go in the car and then go across the tarmac." Could you imagine dealing with the chief of protocol and having to explain?

They didn't want to do it at all and we said, "You have to do it," and so the compromise was?Of course then we saw Clinton was not the first one to arrive, nor the last, but on television they showed the others coming down and being received by the king. What they got for that was absolutely hysterical because the president came down the steps, got in a limousine and then they showed the car driving across and it showed the president with a bottle of something, water or whatever it was, swigging out of the bottle, and this was a beautiful profile shot of the car. So that's what world television saw instead of being greeted by the king. But we got over that.

At one point after that I went over to the chief of protocol and I said, "Thank you for all your good offices," and blah, blah, and I said, "This was a little different," and he said, "You know, we're used to this now." So I laughed and I said, "Which administration was the easiest to deal with?" and he said, "Oh, there's no question about it. That's easy by far," and I said, "Who?" He said, "The Nixon administration," which was very interesting. He said, "They came in, they said what they needed, we agreed what it was and nobody changed their mind. We just went ahead and did it and they were very reasonable."

I mean the Belgians have seen it all.

Q: Did you see any difference in the Belgian situation while you were there?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, I saw that there was increasing fragmentation and in the '80s you heard a little bit about the far right, especially in Flanders mostly. You heard more about the far right being a biggeforce is not the right word because it's not, it still isn'the blands bloc is what it was called; the people's party of the right. You heard more in the press all the time about what the French thought and about Flemish nationalism basically is what it was; and what they were calling devolution to the regions; in other words, devolution of political power from the central government. Of course this was about political institutions and functions and responsibilities, but it was also, underneath it all, about money, as I said before.

The issues of the '80s where Wallonia was on the ropes, that used to be the flesh part of Belgium, the creator of the industrial revolution, the second country to have railroads after the U.K. from 1837 and all of that, and that whole Rust Belt continuing to rust; and more and more the services side of it and the Flemish with their wonderful command of English and doing well and so on; and not wanting to support those lazy sods down in Wallonia is how it came out. [laughs] Which again you have to take with a grain of salt because of course the great sport in Belgium is tax avoidance. [laughs] As I said, there are great complaints about the confiscatory tax structure, which would be real complaints if in fact people had actually paid the full rate, but they don't. There are many jokes about the Belgian dentist going on the morning train to get to the bank in Luxembourg before?

And the other issue that was concerning a large part of the press, particularly the Flemish press, was the Africa policy. This was when Mobutu was still in power in that year. There was a lot of digging up of things, circumstances, situations, incidents from the past being uncovered. And then of course in '94 we had the problems in Rwanda and this all began to fester and so forth.

Q: Was there a growing need for labor that has...it's hitting the United States, it's hit other placein Europe very much. In other words, was there an African migration there and if so how was this happening?

SCHERMERHORN: There's always a Zairian/Congolese community there and Mobutu was reputed to own three or four villas in and around Brussels. One I'm certain he didn't, but others?And then there was quite a Muslim Moroccan, much bigger community in Holland, but still a sizeable community. Tunisian, Moroccan. In fact, at one point I remember asking about the number of mosques and I remember the figure fifty-four mosques in Belgium. But fifty-four mosques in Belgium and Belgium is ten million people. And I think they estimate nol saw some figures this yeait's something like one in ten is an immigrant; most of them are Muslim. There's a Congolese community from the past; there isn't very much migration now that I'm aware of. And then of course what you began to get just about that time in '93 were the Eastern Europeans coming in, too.

Prior to the admission of Spain and Portugal in 1985 to the EU, you had a lot of migrants from Spain and Portugal coming to be basically domestic workers. But that had ceased even by '85. You had a Filipino community too. An illustration of this: in the ambassador's residence the cook was Italian, the major domthe butlewas Belgian, the under butler was Filipino and the sous chef was a Filipino woman and the maids were Filipino because you couldn't find people. In the DCM house we had a major domo who was Spanish because he'd been there?when I came back to live in the house he remembered me and every time somebody came for a function he knew who they were. He knew everybody for thirty years back. In fact he was over sixty-five and he was supposed to retire but they said he could stay until?he stayed until I left. The maid was Portuguese and she had come in 1981 or something and we had several different cooks. I had a Filipino. So that's an illustration of where things were going. The butler in the ambassador's residence retired, the Belgian, and it's a Filipino now because Belgians don't do that anymore and neither do other people from the EU. So there's that change.

Q: Were you seeinit's become quite apparent noa real discomfort showing itself politically about having so many Muslims or people who really aren't fitting in as well as before?

SCHERMERHORN: It was interesting. The Congolese community you were aware of because they're visible; and actually in the part of Brussels that I lived in the first time was quite near the area where there were a lot of African stores and so forth. You didn't see the Moroccan Islamic community so much; down near the railroad station was one area behind?but you didn't see it as much then. I wasn't as aware. You could go for a long time and not see a lot of people in that category. Now, I don't know.

But this was also at the time when harmonization was not only for trade policy in the European Union but one of the issues that they were focusing on was how to harmonize immigration policy and open borders. Something called the Schengen Agreement had been passed in 1988; and Schengen is the name of the town in Holland. Some of the EU members, not all of them, had agreed that they would have basically open borders. But one of the ones who did agree was Italy and of course their borders are not only open, they are porous. [laughs] The U.K. didn't enter into that. But the idea was that once you got a Schengen visa to enter any one of the countries then you had freedom of movement within it. This was taking effect already. I could see the difference from mid '80s when I drove to Luxembourg or you went to France you had to pass through and show your document or they looked at you. By 1994 and '95 you went to France and you just zipped right down the highway and nothing.

So we had this movement toward integration at the same time that exogenous forces were bringing more people in, whether it was the fall of the Soviet Union or turmoil in Africa or whatever it might be. So you had these two competing forces but they hadn't yet gotten to the point where the problems seemed to be greater than the desire to open things up and integrate it and so forth. Now in the summer of 2002 we're seeing some changes in that. People are reconsidering. I don't think they can possibly go back to closing the borders within the European Union, to national identity. It's possible to do it, but politically and psychologically and so forth I don't know if it's possible. What they are looking at now is asylum policy. I think Belgium, next to the U.K., had the most liberal asylum policy.

Q: But when you were there that wasn't a particular issue?

SCHERMERHORN: There were a lot of immigrants but people didn't perceive that it was a problem at that point. The usual crime statistics and things, or interviews with police, they would sort of point in the direction of immigrant communities as potentially greater perpetrators than others, but they have enough home-grown crime in Belgium for that.

Q: How was the solidifying of the European as an entity? Was this in a way helping to relieve Walloon/Flemish things? In other words, they could look towards Europe and sort of forget Belgium?

SCHERMERHORN: Whether you're talking about?You probably couldn't have had in the U.K. a vote for a Scottish parliament as you did a while ago if you didn't have this umbrella that was reaching over. There were people who used to postulate that you pick a timten, twenty, thirty yearthe national identities as we now describe them and know them may not exist in that form. You have all these irredentist movements, whether it's Catalonia or Wales and Scotland or various parts of Germany or whatever. You even have it in France; you have, I guess, the Bretons, the Celtic fringe or whatever. [laughs] So I think, yes, the kind of surety, if you will, of this umbrella, much as some people don't like specific aspects of it, there are people that keep saying "this could never happen" as they're marching down that road. They're saying that this provides some kind of security.

The NATO issues were very interesting too because this is in the period when we had what's ex-Yugoslavia now disintegrating and what's happening and talking to the Germans and the Germans for the first time since the war voting to send troops outside. I thought that was quite fascinating actually and the place that they should choose was one where they had such a negative image from the past. Again, that wouldn't have happened without the fall of the Soviet Union. What that triggered was a whole lot of things that?you push the button somewhere and you're not sure how the new pattern is going to fall out and you find these things that people didn't anticipate.

Q: You came there after you'd been away and the Soviet Union had gone and Germany was united, I think. Did you find any disquiet on the part of the Belgians about having a greater Germany?

SCHERMERHORN: I think in Belgium and Holland you always have a residual there, certainly with the older generation. I mean they've accepted that this is what grew out of the ashes, what we've got now; and people say it's good and so far it's good, but there's always this little?And one of the most interesting parts of my timing of being there from '93 to '97 was almost nonstop celebratory, if you will, events for various parts of World War II. And this went on and on and on. I mean '93 and '94 and '95. That's when you really know if you're an American, you knew that Belgium was the most American-friendly country in Europe because they had the most vivid memory still of our presence and our physical contribution to throwing off the Nazi yoke, or whatever you want to call it. And they honor that. But this is an older generation too.

Q: I was going to say I represent an older generation, too, and I've always felt that even looking towards the future one of the big things about NATO, one was keeping the Soviet Union out, but the other one was keeping essentially France and Germany tied into something so that the French weren't looking at the Germans and the Germans weren't looking at the French and saying, "Gee, they've got more tanks than we do," and I think for the far future it makes good sense. Was this at all part of the thinking there?

SCHERMERHORN: Belgium is sort of like the deer caught in the headlights always. I think that there is probably in some corners but they didn't articulate this. In some corners there is some unease about this, and you're right; Germany, up until '89, West Germany was the bulwark or whatever and then suddenly you had this unification and people thought, okay, they're going to be busy unifying themselves for a while so we don't have to worry about that yet. But then this business of making military contribution out of country to NATO came up. That was a function, again, of our NAThere I'm getting into an area that I'm not very expert awe were very concerned that we find a way to continue to forge these strong links to the alliance but we were not so interested in maintaining?we were very clear that we didn't want to maintain the level of troops, particularly with the budgetary problems of the early '90s and so forth. So we went down frol think in the 1980s we had 300,000 troops still in Germany. Even when I left Belgium the first time we had had a serious drawdown and then were down to about 100,000; and now I guess it's even less.

We were beginning to turn back facilities in Germany that we had occupied since the war and so on. It was expediency in a way; we want the Europeans to assume more of the burden, both the financial burden and the actual military personnel burden, of maintaining this alliance which we want to maintain because we think it's important to have this link and so on. And of course Germany being the economy it is and so forth is going to be one of the areas we were going to look at for this. They were able to contribute, or so people thought. So again after?as I said, what was so surprising, having been in Europe in the mid '80s, to find the speed?When I left Belgium in the late 1980s people were saying, "Well, you know, I guess Germany will be united now, but not for thirty years," and you turn around a year and a half later and it's done. So once the momentum gains some speed, it's very hard to slow it down. But I think people were concerned that Germany's somewhat precipitate action in Bosnia was what set things off a bit there.

Q: Yes. This was the fact that Germany recognized Croatia so soon. You've got arguments on that but it does look like this was done by Genscher, I guess almost on his own.

SCHERMERHORN: Right. It was one of those things where it was sort of done when people weren't looking and then it was done and you couldn't undo it.

Q: Then of course the pope did the same thing, too. The two groups that could set the Serbs off were the Germans and the Papacy.

SCHERMERHORN: Who of course had?

Q: Had horrible records during World War II. It helped; it flamed the situation.

How did you find, when you were in Belgium, relations between its neighbors: the Netherlands, Germany, and France particularly? By having bilateral relations with Belgium we were looking at its neighbors. Did this come up? Any problems there?

SCHERMERHORN: No, not really. I would say that in this period about forty percent of our dialogue with the Belgians on the political side was on Africa, primarily the Congo, and Burundi too. We had trilateral meetings with the French. When George Moose was assistant secretary he came over and we had a meeting in Brussels and then they went to Paris. They had close correspondence on that. They had differences of opinion probably within the EU on issues, but not in ways that really set us off in a different path than any one of them.

Q: Often when we were trying to find out what the EU was doing we often talked to members of the EU into place, but having an EU ambassador right there did you find that you were at all talking to the Belgians saying, "Hey, what's going on in some of these EU meetings?" or was that kind of left to the?

SCHERMERHORN: We didn't do it quite that way. The political section would have conversations and we'd report what they said at the working level. They had their own missions to the EU which at least theoretically reported to the foreign ministry but sometimes they didn't always know what the right hand and the left hand was doing. [laughs] We had a benefit in the bilateral embassy because we had a joint communications section; so we saw all the EU traffic and they saw all ours.

The Belgian foreign ministry was very professional and very good to deal with. The foreign minister then was Flemish which has been the case since World War II, except for one or two. In the '50s we had some people but basically?Which meant the foreign minister was Flemish and therefore his chef de cabinet was Flemish. Some of the director generals were Walloon. Supposedly they had equivalency, but again they were finding it more difficult to recruit Walloons with the requirement that you have Flemish, French and English. As I said, all the Flemish had the French and the English but the Walloons didn't always have the Flemish; and if you didn't learn it at your mother's knee it was hard. But anyway they're very professional and accessible, very good to deal with.

One of the issues we worked on? I mentioned my colleague who had come to work in CDA, in the personnel thing, with me who had had a lot of military experience and was a general officer in the reserves before he was a general officer equivalent in the Foreign Service. By this time Jacques Klein is his name had gotten himself seconded to the UN mission in Eastern Slovenia, which is a part of ex-Yugoslavia; part of Croatia adjacent to the Hungarian border. He was the TA, the transitional administrator, working with the UN contingent which was a Belgian contingent; they had taken the UN mandate which was peacekeeping and then the transitional administration, the civilians who were going to help reestablish the institutions and make things happen.

Jacques was a unique person and a wonderful choice for this job, terrific. Because the Belgians were the mandated force, when he first got this job, which was shortly after I got there anyway, I heard about it and he came to Brussels and so we started talking and we maintained contact. And that was good because the UN mandate came to an end for Belgium in the end of '94 and by this time they were starting to put together what was going to be a NATO force, S-4 for the rest of the area. We wanted the Belgians to re-up and take on a new two year mandate for Eastern Slovenia. Well they were a little hesitant. The military were not hesitant; they very much wanted to do it. As I said, the military knows they need a mission outside of Belgium to generate all of this national institution business and to keep themselves busand they're good at it. They've done a lot of it. But the political masters were a little hesitant because in this period they just had this tragedy in Rwanda where eleven of their peacekeepers were hacked to death. So they felt that the public would not really be too interested in this. They said, "Well, you know, we'll join the NATO mission but we don't want to do this too." So Jacques came down and he went to make the case; and the ambassador and the political counselor and I had a big meeting and we talked about all this. They put out their reservations about it and so forth. At the end of the meeting I asked the chef de cabinet, "Who in the ministry is going to be the point person for this?" and he said Terry De Gruben who was sitting across the table, and he was someone I had known from my previous assignment. He had been their ambassador in Moscow and he was then back sort of without portfolio in the ministry but he was going to do this. So we get in the car when we leave this thing and I say immediately to the political counselor, "As soon as we get back to the embassy call Terry De Gruben and set up an appointment. Let's keep pushing on this." That happenethe political counselor was wonderful, Judy Johnson; very bright and conscientious; just kept all those balls in the air all the time. So this started and we?Jacques used to come from Vukovar in Eastern Slovenia periodically because Belgians had a military plane and he'd come and he used to stay actually in the guest house in at my residence. The DCM house had a guest house- (end of tape)

Tape 8, Side B

Q: You were saying that Klein would come.

SCHERMERHORN: So we knew what was going on. We kept the pressure on; we kept the dialogue going about once you roll over your UN mandate in Eastern Slovenia. They agreed finally. At the end the political director said to me, "You know, this was a very good result. We've never worked more closely with an embassy on an issue than this." I felt very gratified that we hadn't done a lot of high pressure stuff but we just kept in there talking and talking. I'm not saying they made that decision because of us, but if we hadn't been good advocates for it and kept the dialogue going, it might've been more difficult for them to do and whatnot. Again, that was something that was gratifying.

The political director is a very astute fellow who is actually going to be coming to Washington now as the ambassador this year. I don't think he would've said something like that off the top of his head, and obviously Belgium works closely with a lot of different people.

Q: Did you find that instructions for Washington on the events in Yugoslavia were sort of mixed? How were we dealing with this breakup? I can't remember exactly when things started to happen there but at first the Europeans said they were going to take care of this and then it fell apart. What was happening from your perspective?

SCHERMERHORN: We didn't get a lot of instructions, no. In administrative terms we're coming into the period now where we have a real differential, real spread in technology in embassies from zippo to the highest tech and the Department was beginning to use e-mail. The embassy in Belgium was in a funny situation because in the '80s when I was there we were one of the two or three embassies, because, again, we had this joint communications thing so we actually had more traffic than an embassy the size of Belgium you'd normally think of. We had been in the forefront; we had been one of the two or three that had had the then state-of-the-art things. But then we lagged behind because then they spent money to bring everybody else up to date and ahead of us. So we were not as advanced as maybe we could have been. And people were increasingly using e-mail. We didn't have classified e-mail at first; it came while I was there. People were using the telephone a lot, in fact, using the telephone too much. When you think about it, the only thing you could think of was there was so much out there in the ether that if people wanted to listen they'd have a very difficult time figuring out what to listen to, but certainly people used the telephone more than most security say is wise.

Q: But were you also finding a problem with the telephone, because the thing about cables is a cable goes through a clearance process and people say, yes, this is it and you know there's thought behind it. If you're sitting around a table saying, "Well, we have to do something. Well I got a telephone call from George." Well, who is George speaking for?

SCHERMERHORN: I know. Exactly. We had a couple of issues and I remember one of these issues in the economic section saying or I'd get an e-mail saying "do this" and I'd go back in and say, "If that's a formal request please put it in a cable," and ten years ago you could do that. Now people say, "Oh. Well, nobody even reads cables." WE were beginning to get into this area which is a problem for the State Department. How do you maintain lines of communication, maintain archival records, maintain the discipline of the clearance process when people are undercutting that all the time and crosscutting it. We're beginning to see what now is a full-blown problem, I think. A lot of technology experts don't consider it a problem. They just say, "Well, we're here to provide you with the means; how you organize it and work with it is another issue." But it is an issue which we haven't addressed, I think.

Q: There is a very definite problewhat is policand at some point somebody has to decide and it's not like the Clinton advance team with everybody thinking, gee, this is a good idea. Somebody has to sort it out and say, well okay, what's the line?

SCHERMERHORN: Something like the mandate for Eastern Slovenia, that we knew was something we were supposed to be doing, but I can't recall exactly how. I'm sure there must've been a cable. This was beginning to be a problem.

Another issue that came up was Haiti in 1994; and that was fascinating because, again, we did get a cable saying, "Please go to your governments and ask them to contribute." This thing came in sort of at the end of the afternoon, just before?the ambassador was going that evening to a concert and he and the foreign minister were the guests of honor. They were sitting in the same box. Oh no. It was some American symphony or something that was coming and he had asked the foreign minister. So he goes off with this thing and he's got the foreign minister and he saithis was Willy Claes who later fell to the floor, came to griehe said, "Will, we want you to contribute to this force in Haiti," and Willy said sure without even?So the ambassador was able to go back in just a few words and say it's done and he was the first one to go back, the first people to say yes. But the Belgians always say yes; the Belgians are there for us. So that was something that?But again, the ambassador had a very good personal relationship with these people. They liked to talk to him and he didn't ask for unreasonable things. He did what he was supposed to do but?He had a very good personality.

Q: Did you ever find that because the Belgians were cooperative with this that you had to restrain Washington from over asking?

SCHERMERHORN: Well yes. There was a tendency to always say, "Well we know they're with us." [laughs] We used to have fun. In the UN of course it was the classievery year it was the Cuba resolution [laughs] and we'd have to go and everybody had to beat up on them. This would be a round robin instruction. And they would just laugh at this. We had a lot of good consultation on UN issues, and in fact the deputy assistant secretaries for the International Organizations Bureau used to come out to Belgium every year in the fall, or before the fall, before the UNGA (United Nations General Assembly), and talk about the issues with the Belgians because they were always pretty supportive; and I can remember one time when they did thal used to have lunches a lot, business, in the DCM dining room and we would do it that way, which the Belgians enjoyed, I think, and I remember one time we had this discussion and one of the visitors said, "Well yes, now you voted with us [x number of times]," and the IO (Bureau of International Organization Affairs) director for Belgium said, "Oh, you mean you voted with us?" [laughs] That's an illustration sort of sometimes we are a little too egocentric. But it was all said in good humor.

They did appreciate being consulted; as a small country sometimes they weren't always. They always play a bigger role, as the Dutch do. They play a more important role in these international fora because they're responsible, they have very professional people who are pretty evenhanded and pretty rational in their approach and so on.

Q: I keep coming back again to the developments in Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia in this period. Did you find they were sort of eager to get involved to show sort of the European side to taking over? And then of course things went bad and eventually we ended up in there.

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, the militarthis was something on their turf and they were good at this and they had this horrible experience in Africa. As it turned out they did agree finally through all over the Eastern Slovenia UN mandate, but they also insisted on contributing to the NATO operation in Bosnia; and they were the only country to have two mandates. People said, "Well, you don't have to do the UN because you're doing the other thing," and they said, "No, no. We're part of this." They had a smaller contribution; it was a communications unit or something. But because their main concentration?At a political level it was more complicated. Again, I think what you were harking back to beforrelations with Germany and how did they look at thil think now that Germany was playing a bigger part in this in terms of participation out of area with personnel. I think they wanted to be certainly part of this too.

Q: At one time we were rather blithe; we used to talk about the Benelux Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. These were small but extremely savvy states. Was there such a thing as a Benelux thing?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. There was still a Benelux secretariat building in Brussels. I remember when I was there in the '80s as the economic counselor calling on them and writing something about it. But a lot of this was pretty well subsumed now under the greater EU. You see the Benelux is really the kernel. The kernel of it is something called the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union of 1923, which they have a common currency. It's sort of the precursor of the euro now because it was the same coin, same denominations, but with different pictures. Then that grew into other things. So the Benelux still existed in that; now eight years later I don't know.

Belgium and Luxembourg pretty well have to operate in agreement. They're not always exactly in accord with the Dutch; the Dutch have their own agenda, too, and they have a higher profile probably in the humanitarian issues around the world because the Dutch now don't have the burden, if you will, of a very recent colonial past. They have Indonesia and that's a pretty well attenuated thing; not too many people even associate the Dutch with Indonesia anymore. The Belgians have this Congolese, this necklace of Africa burdening them down around the neck. And because, as I said, especially the Dutch press was very vigorous about digging into what had gone on in the Congo back before and bringing up all of this kind of thing and some Belgian politicians from the '50s and so forth had written about the pre independence part, what went on thersort of like people writing about the CIA things here. So they had a little baggage that the Dutch didn't have so much of any longer, I think.

Q: Before we turn to Africa which is another story, were there any economic issues that came up before economic counselor? I mean bilateral things between the United States and Belgium.

SCHERMERHORN: We didn't really have very much at this point. As I said, in the '80s we had these export control issues, but again the gap had folded and the Uruguayan round was over with and now what we were working with was creating the WTO (World Trade Organization), rolling over the GATT into something different. So those were issues. We had nuclear issues in the '80s; we didn't have much of that. What we did have were a lot of environmental issues that we were trying to lobby the EU on, interestingly enough. There was even less interest, if you will, in Belgian industry and that kind of thing. So it was what I would call the global issues in a wathe environment and that kind of issue.

The one thing we did have was the tripartite commission for the restitution of monetary gold. I think I talked about that when I was there the first time; how it existed and I hadn't known about it and I was the commissioner ex-officio and so on. But when I came back in '93 I went to the then economic counselor and I asked him what was going on with the commission and he said, "Well nothing. I don't know," and I said, "Well find out." It turned out that the executive secretary had died, this retired British diplomat who was in his high eighties when I was there before, and that they hadn't had a meeting for a while and whatever. And I said, "Well you've got to resuscitate this because we still have these files and it's still an issue because the Albanian claim will be settled soon." That was the one remaining claim, as you may recall from before. "It could become front burner any moment, so get it." So he did that and he did what I said. "There are a lot of other issues but I consider that the most important thing right now, to get this on the road again." So he called a meeting and they hired somebody and they got the files caught up and whatnot; and sure enough the Albanian claim was settled.

Anyway, Terry was doing this by e-mail back to Washington and there was one lawyer in L (Office of the Legal Advisor) who had a big portfolio for many years but he was now in his eighties also and this is the one thing he had left to him and he'd been moved out to some building on K Street. But anyway, Eli, this was his baby and I said, "You know, Eli is eighty-something now and we have to get this [laughs] over with." I said, "When he goes nobody in the Department is going to know anything about this." So he got it on track and he was doing it by e-mail. I said, "No, no. Send it by cable. E-mail doesn't help. It goes on to somebody who moves on to another job and nobody knows anything about it." So he did and of course one of these cables was seen over in our mission to the European Union where Ambassador Eisenstadt was. He had a lawyer working for him over them and the lawyer called Terry and said, "What is this thing?" and so we explained all that and I said, "Fine. That's good. He needs to know."

He was beginning to make some noises, this Holocaust issue and the Swiss banking problems and so forth. Anyway, the whole thing did materialize into this huge thing but we had this all in order so they could wind up the commission and disperse the remaining assets and so forth. This lawyer in the State Department did actually die at his desk at some point. But fortunately the dialogue was going on and enough people then knew what it was. That gave me heart palpitations when I got there and found that after all the hard work we put in to keep it rolling over they just let it lapse. And it was funny because the person who was then the economic counselor had been back in the '80s when I recommended that somebody be assigned in Washington to focus on this. He had been actually working in the RPE, the regional political/economic office of the European bureau, which was the one. So he actually before he got there knew a little bit about it but he hadn't focused on it until I said we've got to do this. So that took a lot of his time but it was worthwhile.

Q: What was the issue? Was it that there were assets to be distributed?

SCHERMERHORN: There were assets. The three allieBritain, France and the U.S. in 1946 had created a commission as custodian of the gold bars which had been retrieved from the salt mine outside of Frankfurt that we found with all the Nazi loot and everything in it in 1945. Because the Nazis had looted the central banks of thirteen European countries there were assets from?They weren't all from this one location; other things came in. And of course they didn't ever retrieve all of the assets so it had to be distributed on a prorated basis. But what was interesting about it was that the Germans kept such good recordof course, typicallthat they could trace a lot of this. They could say, "Okay, this serial number belonged to the bank in Holland," or whatever it was. There was this enormous bureaucracy in the late '40s and '50s in Brussela whole building full of lawyers doing thibut they had finally, as I said, settled most of the claims but they had a few remaining ones which were political problems: Czechoslovakia and Albania and whatever. I think I talked earlier about some of that so I won't go into it more. It's one of those vestiges of World War II.

Q: Lange, we want to pick this up next time. You're in Belgium from '93 to '97 and we now want to talk about African matters and what else do we want to talk about?

SCHERMERHORN: Well I have a few more things to say about Belgium. I'd like to talk a little bit about those commemorative events of World War II because I think it's very interesting and useful for us. And maybe a little bit about our missions to the European Union and NATO in relation to us a little more. And then we'll talk about Africa and Africa policy.

Q: Lange, we're still in Brussels '93 to '97. There are a couple of things you wanted to talk about: Africa, commemorative events, and relations with the European Union mission and all of that. So I'll let you start from there.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, as I said, in the fall of '93 November 11th was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of World War I and there was a parade in the town of Ghent and the king of the Belgians presided in his military uniform and so on. There were still a lot of veterans, many of them in wheelchairs or with canes and walkers and so forth; they were all basically in their nineties at that point. Obviously it was going to be the last time that there was any significant number of veterans. But it was a very moving thing and Belgian military music is very good and they always have the bands and so forth. Then we began right with the events of World War II and Belgium is really the most American-friendly country in Europe and they remember, although they're getting older too. But every town and village had their commemoration, and of course as the allied invasion moved along there were different dates and different towns portraying the pace of the invasion and so forth.

We got everybody in the embassy involved in this because our attachï¿½s' office really didn't have enough people to do all of this by themselves and the ambassador couldn't be everywhere either, although he did a lot of them. I did a lot of them and I said at a staff meeting we want people to volunteer because it's something everybody should experience at least once; so a lot of other people in the embassy did volunteer. And every time you went to one the townspeople were so hospitable and so forth.

But the thing that was most striking for me about this; they had never had any commemoration by, with, in the German cemeteries; but there is a German cemetery, a very large one, basically the Battle of the Bulge, and it's very close to the Dutch border. But anyway first the first time, since it was the fiftieth anniversary, they were going to do this and the German number two was going to go and my ambassador said he wasn't going to do that but I went; and the German ambassador didn't do it either; maybe he realized that we weren't going to do it, I don't know. This cemetery is quite different in character from the American cemeteries because ours are open fields, white crosses on green grass; this was with a lot of trees, black iron crosses, very dark, very hard looking; not that nice sort of feeling of elation in a way that you get looking at ours. They put on a ceremony with the little girls and the dirndl singing German folk songs. So I'm sitting there and through the trees we see these German soldiers cominthey had come from the NATO base just over the border in Schusterburg, I think it iand they were in their grey uniforms with the silver medallion on the?they haven't changed the uniform that much; I thought I was in the movie The Young Lions, here they're all coming across. But it was really eerie. I'm glad my ambassador didn't go, in a way, because I think he would've been quite astonished by it all. This was very eerie and you think, oh gosh. But the significance of it was it was the first time they had even acknowledged or had any kind of commemoration; and then the Belgians participated and so on. So that was part of the reconciliation and of course we had the to-do about D-Day and whether NATO representation, and whether the Germans should be there when President Clinton went. That was an interesting sidelight. But it shows some attempts at reconciliation after a long time and the whole point of this was of course to remind people so it doesn't happen again and so on.

The Belgians put on an exhibition which was probably the best exhibition in a museum I've ever seen anywhere. It was supposed to be two months long from November of '94 to March of '95 and they kept extending it because the demand was so great. Finally they closed it up in August. You entered and you entered through a doorway that was like the entrance to a World War I trench, and you went through that; and then finally, after some artifacts, you came out into the sunlight of 1920 or something. It was a multimedia exhibition with pictures, photographs, video, audio, room-sized diorama basically. So everything was different and it was interesting. They had about six or seven room-sized things and one of them was showing Hitler youth in the school room and another was the inside of an underground station in London in 19__. So you started in 1918 and you went all the way through. It was trying to depict how did we come out of this horror of World War I and how did we get ourselves into the next horror. And it was extremely well done, as I said, and it had great resonance. It was in the army museum in Brussels which is not all that big. They constructed it with catwalks up and down; they went all around the building in a very interesting way too. It was too bad it couldn't be shown elsewhere. It was in French and Dutch, no English. They had speeches; you heard Hitler's voice. And the schoolchildren, it was done basically for them but as I said it was basically one of the best things I've ever seen of that sort. It's too bad it didn't have a wider distribution. The whole experience, going on, as I said, until the end of '95, basically two and a half years of? Especially poignant in the Ardennes because of course they remember it very well. Bastogne. And there's a museum there.

And there's a wonderful Belgian woman who had been in the resistance and gotten awards from all the governments, Collette Stass, and she ran something called the Belgian-American Association. She's one of these dynamos that organizes everything and she was really the moving spirit behind a lot of these commemorations involving Americans. And we do have the three cemeteries there: one World War I and two World War II; and we always have a memorial day. The two in the Ardennes are done in the same day and the one in Flanders is done the day before or the day after. From 1995 they had about 25,000 people attend. Every year there aren't that many but there are always thousands of people who fly past. The most beautiful American military cemetery I think I've seen is the one in Tunisia, but they're all splendid and I think you should go and look at them.

Q: Did you find the Belgians talking at all while you were there about NATO? I belong to a generatiol was born in 1928, so I was a kid; I wasn't in World War II, but almost and I got involved later in Korel've always felt that one of the great importances of NATO was keeping essentially the French and Germans from going at each other, and countries like Belgium get in between these two elephants; and by having everybody tethered together it keeps them from looking over their shoulder and rearming. You can always get some crazy nationalistic leaders and things can build up. Did you find the Belgians looking upon NATO, because NATO was under a lot of debate at the time? What the hell do we need NATO for? The Soviet Union is gone and all. Did you find this a theme by Belgians?

SCHERMERHORN: No. Not so much in the public discourse that I heard. There was nationalism but it wasn't expressed through the prism of regional nationalism means we abdicate from the rest of it. It was a purely domestic consideration. Thoughtful Belgians, as I said, for the military NATO was really something they wanted. That was the way in which to preserve the Belgian military as a career profession really because if it devolves too far into these regions nobody is going to want to sustain a military. It's too expensive and what would be the point of a Wallonia and a Flanders with this. And as I said, for Belgium they really don't have that much glue for their national identity; the monarchy and the military and the church used to be, but the church doesn't have much sway these days. So the military is an important thing for Belgian national identity and therefore NATO which utilizes this military is a good thing.

I think also from purely economic?Belgians realize that they have their headquarters and it was kind of an accident of history, if you will. But now that they have it it's an important economic input for Belgium and a thing that makes them a key player whether you think of it that way or not. They are because you've got to come to Belgium; it's in the interests of the international community then to keep Belgium as a viable entity too unless you created a Canberra or a Washington that was sort of an autonomous state. [laughs] Some people have suggested that. Of course what all the member states were challenging is their contributions to the famous three percent rule, and how were they meeting that or not meeting that as the case may have been.

The window of that debatwhat's the importance of NATwasn't really very wide because we're talking about the breakup of the Soviet Union and then people began to say, well, who's the enemy? But then you almost immediately got into the former Yugoslavia and you got Bosnia where then NATO put in military.

Q: Did the Belgians while you were there get involved in the Bosnia thing?

SCHERMERHORN: As I mentioned before, they had the UN mandate for the Eastern Slovenia portion of Croatia, the portion that abuts on Hungary. That was a two-year mandate; I think '93 to '95. Again, the military anxious to take on these tasks. Then when they put together the UN operation for Bosnia we had this intense dialogue to get them to rollover the UN mandate and they agreed to do that, but they also contributed a small communications company or something to the UN operation because they said, "We haven't participated. We're going to do this even though our major contribution is in the other UN." And there was some discussion about whether the UN mandate should be incorporated into the NATO [inaudible], but in any event it wasn't. So they were very proud of the fact that they were actually fulfilling more than their requirements in this regard.

They were also the first country to respond when we asked for troops for the force for Haiti. That was again serendipitous because when the cable came in the ambassador was in a couple of hours seeing the foreign minister and he asked him directly. But they were very useful because of course they had Francophone troops.

Q: Let's talk about Africa.

SCHERMERHORN: Well as I said, a lot of our dialogue in the political section, when it wasn't talking about NATO expansion and related issues, was discussing Africa with the Belgians. There was actually a trilateral dialogue that went on in different capitols periodically with the French, the Belgians and the U.S. Our assistant secretary for African affairs at that time, George Moose, came a couple of times and discussed that. But one of our officers in the political section had the portfolio and was a very hard worker, very prolific, and did a lot of reporting on it; and this was important because this was '94 when the crisis broke out in Rwanda.

Q: Who was the officer?

SCHERMERHORN: Her name was Jeanette Debros. She speaks six or seven languages. Her first tongue was Spanish. You should interview her when she retires, which will be soon. And then because she had Serbo-Croatian she went and interviewed women in Croatia who were subject to rape. Remember we had?

Q: Taking of those camps.

SCHERMERHORN: Jeanette did wonderfully well with this portfolio and had good contacts and they liked her and were very responsive. And of course I think the Belgians at this point were on a mission. For years they had taken so much criticism about?the conventional wisdom was that they had left the Congo in a shambles and they hadn't done anything to build up the infrastructure or the educational resources and so forth; all of which has some validity. Actually Africa was a subject of pretty sharp controversy within Belgium too. This often split on Walloon and Flemish?actually, the Flemish had more to do, the business with it, in the later period. I think earlier when Leopold first acquired the Congo it was more the Walloons who were involved, but especially the missionaries tended to be more Flemish I think. I shouldn't really say that because that's not something I'm absolutely certain about.

At that point, in the early '90s, more people were concerned about Burundi because they had another one of these bloodbaths. But actually it erupted again in Rwanda and it's the classic Hutu-Tutsi conflict. People used to joke, but there's some amount of truth to it: Look, you've got these two countries and there are Hutus and Tutsis in each one; why don't we just give one to the Hutus and the other to the Tutsis and let them live happily together? But of course, as we know, things don't work that way.

When it got to the point where clearly things were falling apart and there was some need to go in and rescue people, our military were talking and the Belgians didn't have enough transport, that was a problem. But anyway, we talked. But for the U.S. military it's very hard to get a decision; you go back and forth in the chain of command in the U.S. into the operative command in the United States which would be somewhere inside of Washington and so on. And ultimately, you know, the Belgians did go in and the UN force was under a Canadian general, General Dallaire, and they had a very limited mandate. It was very carefully delineated. Basically it didn't allow them to do anything offensive and so forth. We at one point had to call on the Belgians because we had some American journalists who got themselves trapped in this?there was this radio station, De Colleen, up in some place and they got themselves up there, so the Belgians went in and got them out. These were people who had been told not to go there. [laughs] But anyway, at the end of this of course the Belgians lost eleven peacekeepers and they were hacked to death basically with machetes or something; they were not allowed to fire upon and so on. Actually this whole thing became the subject of a Canadian investigation and so on. This was one of the crises for peacekeeping because a lot of the countries said, "Look, we can't go in and do this with such a limited mandate because we're too long and bullet free." Then they came out with this Chapter Seven versus Chapter Eight type of peacekeeping under UN regulations. This, along with the Somalia incident, which had happened in '9not too long before thaof course put a crimp into peacekeeping. The concept isn't bad, but obviously the UN and the participating countries hadn't gotten the details down right.

Actually, sitting in '93, I had just gotten into Belgium and this Somalia thing happened in October but it didn't make too much of a?I don't remember that it made too much of a ripple there. Yes, we knew it had happened, but?So then we had in '94 this problem with the Belgians and that was a great national trauma. I mean they're coming in and saying why are we doing this and so on, and we can't protect ourselves.

Q: This is somewhat akin to the United States and the Somali thing the year before. It depends whose troops are getting killed.

SCHERMERHORN: Meanwhile Rwanda was more of a crisis, but then of course the Congo was the permanent, the never-ending crisis and the refugee movements became, when things fell apart in Rwanda, then of course there were a lot of refugees over into Goma, that little part of the Congo adjacent to Rwanda. Then we got involved in the refugee businesan airlift to help that. And of course Belgians had a lot of contact with different Zairians and, as I said, Mobutu had a lot of assets in Belgium supposedlreal property and so forth.

The Belgians in this dialogue with the French, it was interesting. I think it would be fair to say that the Belgians actually got disenchanted with Mobutu either before we or the French did. But they didn't see an exit strategy, basically, and I think we were disenchanted but nobody saw an exit strategy from this. But the Belgians began to push more about doing something about it. But it's the classical dilemma: you have a Mobutu, a strong man, and then when he goes what takes his place? It can be worse or it can be chaos? Or do you try to hand pick somebody and support them and then you end up in the place that you had been in before anyway because somebody has a new patron and it may not turn out to be?

Q: Did you get involved in talking to the Belgians about whither the Congo and all of that?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I didn't personally but our political section did that, yes. They were very cautious about how they?because they had some economic interests of course that were tied into this too. But as I said, I think they became disenchanted. They realized that it couldn't go on that way and everybody needed an exit strategy that would leave people with the least damage at the end of it. In the end it was partly achieved in that Mobutu left and died without creating an immediate uproar, but of course what was left behind hasn't turned out to be very?[laughs] And the other thing is of course all the states? I mean Mugabe got involved and everybody on the borders of the Congo was playing- (end of tape)

Tape 9, Side A

It would be fair to say that Africa was a big part of Belgium's?and part of it was a feeling of responsibility that I think that they hadn't?a lot of the current problems maybe they bear some responsibility for in the past and they needed to continue to play a role. I think mixed motives; some of it was clearly their economic interest but I think there was some element of personal responsibility and we need to stand up and be counted.

Q: Was there a strong missionary influence in the Belgian population?

SCHERMERHORN: There had been. That had been a very important part of it. Like the church everywhere, they're not getting recruits into the monastery; I mean they're not getting new nuns and new priests at the level they were before. So it's an aging interest. I'd say it was more humanitarian - some of it attached to the church and some not - that motivated people to take an interest. I think there was also, as I said, a desire maybe a little to vindicate themselves from their past sins in a way by having something come out right. And lots of press, particularly the Flemish press, was very interested in uncovering "the scandals of Zaire," at least the ones they could attribute to Walloon ministers. [laughs] The investigative press in Belgium is very active, especially on the Flemish side. There are a couple of Flemish newspapers that have a lot of grist for this mill. And the society operating the way it does, if you start looking there's a lot to uncover too.

Q: How do you mean the way the society operates?

SCHERMERHORN: I think that a lot of it was the old boy network and that there were things that happened that okay, they weren't maybe good things, but you didn't air your dirty linen; but this was a new generation. Especially in the Congo there was a lot to?

Q: Were you observing sort of a new political class taking over?

SCHERMERHORN: That's an interesting term because we don't use the term in America: political class.

Q: We sure as hell have one. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: I know, we have one but we don't?I've only heard it heard very recently in use. The first time I went to Belgium they kept talking about the political class and I knew what they meant but it was funny to hear it because it's not a terminology that we use. I think more of the population is in the political class. There's more of a dialogue, more of a discussion, across a broader spectrum of people than we would see in the United States, but maybe that's just because the population is small.

As I said, there was some interest in investigative reporting but we've seen that all over the world since Woodward and Bernstein. [laughs] I don't think there's a lot of change except there's more visibility, if that's a change.

Q: I can't remember if I've asked you this question. If you remember that I have then we'll skip it. Immigrant groups coming from particularly Rwanda, Burundi, the Congwas this a significant problem then?

SCHERMERHORN: We did talk about that a little and I said there were quarters, quarters, of Belgium, of Brussels, that had different groups. One of the interesting sidelights of the problem in Rwanda, when our embassy was evacuated and their were the killings, we got a message from someplace in Africa where there was a Rwandese woman who had a Belgian passport because she had been married to a Belgian and she had worked in the embassy as the protocol officer. Her familher father, mother, various siblings; I guess the husband was gonwere killed and she managed to save herself somewhere but she was in Brussels with no money or anything. So there was a question: could she work in the embassy? Typical, this was a period, as I said before, mid '90s budget crunch; we couldn't hire people, we were supposed to be getting rid of them and everything but we had a Fourth of July project that required a lot of work so I said, "Well can't she work on that?" and we got her a contract. She was excellent. She spoke beautiful French and she spoke beautiful English and she was great help to the protocol officer. So we were able to help her for a little bit.

I guess they still had a payroll for the embassy in Rwanda and so she worked there but they paid her out of her own salary base for a while or something. I'd better not say; it's probably something we weren't supposed to do. [laughs] Anyway, it seemed to be alright. Washington said it was alright. But that's just a little human sidelight of what goes on in these things. And then I guess she got on a [inaudible], but she probably could've gotten a job ultimately in Belgium. She was excellent, a lovely woman. Jean Nevabondi, I think was her name. Africa is a continuing preoccupation.

Q: And then you mentioned relations with, I guess, our mission in the European Union?

SCHERMERHORN: Right. As I mentioned when we talked about the president's first trip, they're not full service embassies because they're missions for a specific operation and they don't represent the U.S. government to everybody there. But they had two very proactive, high profile representatives, Bob Hunter at NATO and Stu Eisenstadt at the European Union. Bob Hunter's mission was NATO expansion. He was really one of the architects of how?and that was his agenda. He was pushing it. As you mentioned, the political class did a lot of talking about the pros and cons of this. Initially more of the commentary was con than pro, I think. They plugged away at it and now we've got it.

Q: How did it work? Okay, our ambassador to NATO is in Belgium and we had to get the Belgians on the side. You had to carry the water, didn't you?

SCHERMERHORN: Right. As I said before, some people said, "We don't need European Union embassies," and we had to point out, even to the people who worked at?that that wasn't really true because they were lobbying and interfacing, if you will, their interlocutors who were the bureaucrats, who were the employees of the member states and the commission. The member states actually voted and had input at a political level but it wasn't the level they were dealing with. So there are these two avenues and they're parallel; they're not duplicative or whatever. So, yes, we're lobbying government to government and our government is in the mission to the Union lobbying the bureaucrats who are the employees of the commission or of the parliament. That's a different kind of issue. In NATO of course the structure is different but there were a number of the organization so what our mission there is representing within and to the membership the U.S. views on these issues, but there's a parallel that Belgium is a member so we're talking to the foreign ministry about the same kinds of issues and trying to find out?

Obviously these are not identical situations because of the difference in membership versus being an observer basically, which is what we are in the European Union. There is certainly room for the dual approach, and not only room for it, it's essential because neither one nor the other gets the job done.

Q: You were looking sort of on the sidelines but what was your impression of the structure and what was going on at the European Union headquarters? The reason I ask is I've talked to people in Strasbourg and I've seen pictures of this where guys in tail coats and opening doors for?it looked like a pretty plush organization and just by looking at it I could say we'll run rings around them because they spend too much time on their protocol and all of that. What was your impression of the bureaucracy?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, you know, there's a problem of centrifugal force here. For efficiency a lot of the members really would've preferred to have all the institutions of the Union together in Brussels but because it means jobs for locals, and for other political reasons, member states wanted to have different operations; so the parliament was in Strasbourg and the court was in Luxembourg and as they started putting together some kind of institutions which would monitor the different elements of agricultural standards and stuff like that they talked about going further out into Greece or Spain or whatsoever. There was always this battle between efficiency and ease. Do you really want to get on the train and go to Strasbourg for parliament?

In fact, they had to renovate the Berlemont which is the major office building of the Union in Brussels because they found asbestos in it. And this was one of these buildings built in the end of the '70s and it was huge. They had to disperse people around. But then they decided they would build something that basically could have the parliament sit there and they would alternate sessions. So slowly they're trying to gather this into a?but they still have to placate.

Q: Well, they're up against the French, for one thing; and when you're up against the French, placation is not much of an operative word. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs] They do have some redundancies and some problems that are very expensive. They demand that publications be printed in the official languages; well as you expand the EU your languages get more and more and more esoteric. They deal basically in French in English. All of the Nordic countries and Germany do the English. The French are a bit beleaguered in a way; the days when French was the lingua franca are no longer true, but they've got their finger in that dyke. [laughs] I think you used to take it as a given that all the Scandinavians and the Dutch all spoke French, too, and that's no longer absolutely true.

Q: Henry Kissinger was reported to have saiwe were going to do something and said, "Well if we check with Europe," and he said, "What is their telephone number?" Do you feel that when you were there, there was a telephone number developed that one could call?

SCHERMERHORN: I think yes. I think there was a lot of growth and cohesion, if you will. As I said, this white paper of 1985 really triggered a new round of closer cohesion for a lot of different reasons. A lot of it, of course, depends on the personality of individual commissioners and so forth and where they wanted to take the thing.

This isn't the European Union, this is NATO now, but when Lord Carrington was the secretary general of NATO he was, I think, very activist and straightforward; and of course we felt more comfortable with that and a lot happened. But he left just as these issues of expansion and so forth became important. Yes, who do you call? Well, one thing that we've seen, and which troubles a lot of the European Union members is the growth of the bureaucracy. They find that the non-elected bureaucrats as the opposition politicians, or the political class outside when they're writing about something. Like the debate going on now in the U.S. about civil liberties post 9/11; are we trying to proscribe too many activities and is this an assault on civil liberties? Well there is an assault on our national sovereignties, out various ones. There is a continuing discussion. The more you harmonize your standards then you need people to evaluate whether people are complying with the regulations and so forth and you build up more of a bureaucracy and then you find that in theory the bureaucrats may propose and the parliamentarians and the commissioners then work out what actually gets implemented; but, in fact, you see a lot of things happening that are not exactly transparent. Not necessarily because the bureaucrats are trying to hide it, but just the pace of the activity and the complexity of the issue and the volume of activity now that they're undertaking. They're expanding their empires.

Q: I'm just trying to capture the feeling at the time because we'll be taking the temperature of this over the years. If there was an issue of getting supporright now we're talking about support for going into Iraq, but let's say something of this naturwas the European Union something we would turn to or would we turn to each country?

SCHERMERHORN: Well you had to work both. Again, if it were a political issue like Iraq then you definitely had to work the governments because that often meant some kind of military?If it was a trade issue, then you were working more?you were discussing it but then the people in our mission to the Union worked with the people in whatever directorate it was that was going to draw up the regulations or whatever they were talking about, or design the sanctions if sanctions were involved in some fashion. So that was a more technical issue. When you're talking about a more political thing like Iraq, that becomes a different kind of?

Q: Well my impression iand please correct mthat the European Union has gotten to be a very solid customs union in a way, a monetary union; but as far as a real political union, each country has its own interest. It just doesn't sound like there's much developing in that regard.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. I mean the progress has been made. That was the whole point of the white paper in 1985. You could move forward. On the political side, I think the European parliament has become a more prominent voice; it was just kind of a sleepy little thing there for a while. And this is partly because politicians in the countries have found that if they're out of power in their own country and fairly young they have an alternative parliament to go to now, like Neal Kinnock. Gladys Kinnock, his wife, went as an NEP. So they've kind of discovered it, where, say ten or fifteen years ago that was kind of a wasteland. Nobody bothered too much with that. If you were in the political arena in your own country and you were out for a while, you didn't think of going there because you thought it was better to stay at home. But now the newspapers are covering the European parliament more. So, yes, in that sense it's part of the evolution. It's hard to say.

Bosnia, or former Yugoslavia, did concentrate people a lot on these political issues. It was a NATO decision to go in, but of course there's a lot of correspondence. So I think that in a way I guess they haven't really found a test yet for European political unity. There hasn't been an issue yet.

Q: While you were in Belgium did any issues come up and say we need the Belgians support on this and that and we would automatically look over to see what the European Union was doing, or did we just go right in to the Belgian government?

SCHERMERHORN: We'd get our instruction and we'd make our demarche to whatever at the same time. You didn't wait to?The reason I think you don't wait, if you wait to see, you're immediately foreclosing an option of convincing them because you're saying?

Q: Would the European Union's stance affect how we approached or dealt with it?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it might, depending on the issue I guess. Again, when you're talking about the political issues here and if you're talking about the Middle East or you're talking about something about where to effect change you're probably going to require some kind of either economic sanctions or military operation, that's very hard to convince people but there are a few major players. So there are two ways to do that. You can either attack the major players; there's France, of course Britain and depending on the locale, Italif you're talking about Central Africa, you want to get the Belgian voice if you can; the Dutch are very influential in a lot of ways when you're talking about third countries because they do very high order of humanitarian and other assistance and they're very outspoken about what they think and feel. But then of course you find sometimes unexpected things like the Norwegians playing a role in the Middle East. So, again, the good offices of the smaller countries are not to be sneezed at in certain places.

The Norwegians, the Danes, the Swedes, have that traditional role. The Norwegians are very interested in Sudan, for example, which you might not realize, and they've played a role in some of the goings-on there. When we're talking about Sudan policy we talk to the French and so forth because we're interested in getting a consensus, and we think, again, you're right, if you can't get the French on board it's hard for the rest of the?the rest of the EU isn't going to break ranks on something unless it's really whatever. And we have this problem on Iraq; the French are very opposed to?So far, the sanctions, we've managed to carry that basically by saying if you won't do anything more, the minimum you have to do is sanctions. And we tried to demonstrate that they've worked and of course people who are opposed to them say yes, they've worked to the detriment of the Iraqi people because the health and welfare of the population is at the lowest ebb ever. That's both a plus and a minus when you're making your arguments. It's very complicated.

The British have always been forthcoming for us but there are voices in the U.K. that are not entirely happy with all of this.

Q: Speaking of which, how did you find the other embassies in Brussels? Did you find you worked with some better than others or did you kind of work together quite often or not?

SCHERMERHORN: Actually, Belgium was the first place where I didn't have a lot of reason to work with other embassies and I was a little surprised by that. I had basically been in the developing world where you do work with the other embassies because it's hard to get information because you feel if you go in together you have a greater impact or whatever it is. But there it was a little sad. The Turks used to call; they were very proper in the Turkish embassy, but everybody was so busy there and we were the 800 pound gorilla in a way because we had so many people in NATO and so many people in the EU and this embassy to the government. Our interlocutors were the Belgian foreign office and other ministries as appropriate and then talking to our compatriots.

The people I felt sorry for in a way were some of the smaller African?they all had to be represented there because it was the EU and NATO, but they didn't get much of a look. It's sort of like Washington for some of the small embassies here; it's hard for them to get a foothold in anything because there's so much competition. The ambassador used to go to the National Days and I would go to the ones we got invited to but he didn't want to go to some of these. I can remember going to one which was out in Plancenoit somewhere and they were so happy that somebody from the American embassy came and it meant a lot to them. As far as having much working activity, no.

Q: One of the questions I often ask about people who are desk officers is how did that embassy work within the Washington context; in other words, were they able to play Congress, the press, and the White House and all? In Belgium where was the seat of power or where were your contacts?

SCHERMERHORN: Our contacts were mostly in the foreign ministry. They were very effective. Journalistthe political section talked to a lot of journalists. We had a very effective USIS there so we had a lot of contacts with the journalists. A lot with the business community because that was another whole element. As I said, our ambassador was very business-minded; and we had a very strong chamber of commerce. What I was trying to get us to do was have more contact with the regional governments in Belgium because clearly things were devolving there. But it's very hard. We didn't actually have a lot of people and these dialogues on Africa and NATO expansion took up a lot of time. We had three people in the economic section and they wanted to take it down to two; we had a political counselor.

We had a job that did labor because labor officer was a traditional job there and the Labor Department wanted to keep it, but in fact there wasn't enough. The labor unions had been a very important part of the dialogue, especially after the war; this was when we got very interested in this. But by 1995 the labor unions were there but it was pretty predictable and what motivated the U.S. government to be interested in the labor movements in the '50s with their threat of Communist infiltration and so forth, that was no longer an issue here. So we really didn't have enough for a labor officer to do so they took on the Africa portfolio. When this woman I mentioned, Jeanette Debro, left, we gave the Africa portfolio to the labor officer and he loved it and he did a great job too. That was something where you could see some results and you could move a dialogue and so forth, whereas the labor thing was pretty sterile at this point.

And then we had a POL/MIL officer who did most of the NATO issues; and we had a junior rotational officer. That's all. You had three and a half people. But for the issues and the technicality of them and so forth, that really wasn't a lot. The Belgians were very good and talked and like to move issues themselves. It was a rich dialogue so it was more time consuming; and I wanted us to spend a little more time working in these regional governments and seeing?But you know Washington really wasn't that interested in the details of devolution in Belgium; just like they weren't that interested in any details about the economy because these were issues that were important in the '50s and '60 because you really didn't know where Europe was and where it was going at that point maybe, quite to the degree. But now these interlocking, European Union, NATO, other issues. I still think that the future of thesit would be too strong to call them an irredentist movement in Belgium because it's the two basic halves of the country. It's not like Brittany or the Basque Country or somethinbut you have this big umbrella and underneath it there's a lot of movement in these national identities; and whether in due course, if you do have political union of a greater degree of cohesion within this European umbrella then is there room for some movement. We've seen the Scottish parliament now and that's a step in some direction. If you were a football fan, you'd say, "We're never going to abandon our national identities," or a follower of the Olympics, because everything is predicated upon this national identity. Maybe it's not a reality for the twenty-first century; it's a vestige of something earlier.

Of course what's important about the devolution is, as we talked earlier, the way they parse out the monehow do you tax people and how much goes to a central government and how much stays there. So these are interesting issues but we didn't actually have much time to do that to the degree?And this was particularly important in the area of the environment because that was kind of the bellwether issue for the regions. That was the area where they were doing their own thing first so those were areas that were personally of interest to me and I thought they had some resonance; but we're in this period in the mid '90s when the Congress is reducing the money to the State Department. All I want you to do is tell what jobs you can give up. Finally I got so exasperated at one of them. They came in and I said, "Well we've already done this, that, and the other thing. If you want another job it's going to have to be mine," because we can't not have a political and an economic section. And you need to have a consular officer; we only had two consular officers and we had some terrific FSNs. Well, Belgium has wonderful FSNs; they're linguists, they're efficient, they work very hard.

Q: They know the territory of course.

SCHERMERHORN: And they're loyal. Given the amount of work that the consular section had, the amount of American Citizens Services and visas and all that, they have some efficiency scale, how many cases per capita, and the embassy and the consular section in Belgium was at the top of the?They did a lot with very little but you couldn't take it down any more. So this was a period of total unrealism. It was Washington as to what. And here we are, the greatest country in the worlwe say and we think and I believe and so do you, I knoand we're nickeling and diming. It's just incredible.

Q: During this period did you have a problem with particularly the election of '94 and Congress being taken over by the pretty extreme right people? At least it seemed to be coming that way. Was that sort of discouraging or did that have any effect on you all? We had a Congress where many of the new members, Republicans, were boasting that they didn't have a passport because they had never traveled.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, as I said, you didn't see any immediate direct impact. The dialogue about NATO went on and all the technicaand even at a higher levebut what it did mean is there was a tremendous squeeze on the budget. And then you were saying, well, what do we need people to talk about various things, various issues? But it didn't have any direct impact. Maybe that's not a good thing to say because the Congress would like to feel that they form an impact on policand they do over time, but as far as an immediate flip-flop you don't see it so much.

Q: Well then in '97, should we leave Belgium do you think?

SCHERMERHORN: I think I talked about the U.S. trade center that Ambassador Blinken?his idea was that Commerce and USIS should work together because one of the things is Belgium had a very fine library and Belgium had one of the earliest incarnations of the Fulbright program as soon as the legislation was passed. In 1997 they had the fiftieth anniversary of the Fulbright program, which had been very effective. Most of the people who had been Fulbright becamwe chose well and we had one of the highest records of people who then went on and over time?So we had chosen well and they had benefited, or so we thought, from whatever they had done on the Fulbright program.

And we had a wonderful library which the government and a lot of other people used, but this was a period when they said we don't need to run libraries in Europe because they have access to?Well, yes and no. So they wanted to close the library and I think we moved forward with that. But then the ambassador put together this idea of having a trade center where people could go and come as a base to work not only in Belgium but throughout the European Union and it would be the assets of USIS, their databases and so forth and Commerce and work together. The two counselors, USIS and Commerce, said, "Well, you know, we've never done this before," and I said, "This ambassador, you notice his body language, we don't say 'no'. We figure out how we can do it," and we did. And he did it and it worked very well and it was very productive and so forth. He got the prime minister to come and open it. The ambassador was very persuasive and the government liked him; so they responded to these initiatives. It all worked very well together.

We had a very good Commerce operation. Again, wonderful FSNs who knew the business community. And they did more with fewer people than most other places too.

Did I mention Libya at all? I think I did. I said the Belgians represented us in Libya when we closed our embassy. They were our protecting power or whatever you call it. So we had a dialogue in the foreign ministry again. When their person in Belgium came back periodically, every six months or something, he would sit and talk to us.

Q: The person in Tripoli?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. Although none of the diplomatic corps in Tripoli had much access; they were kept pretty isolated too. But we did have some issues, American Citizens Services issues and property issues, housekeeping issues. But it was also interesting because he, to the degree that they were given any access, some of them were more forthcoming than others and willing to share with us. But that was a little interesting thing, too. So we did that.

I have the feeling that I've talked about this. WE were inspected toward the end of my time there and? Oh, one of the things that came out of the Congress of '94: the European bureau sent a cable asking us to list, for the people with representational housing, how many representational events you had had and how many people and what the purpose of them was and all this kind of stuff. One of the things that the ambassador and I had worked out was what I thought was a very good representation program; he liked to entertain people and they did it extremely well and we focused it on events. I did the ten to twelve people lunch for the people on the foreign ministry on an issue, whether it was the UN?every fall we had somebody come from IO, the International Organizations bureau, and we'd do that kind of luncor Africand it worked very well. So we did this list and I was very happy because I had about one event a week on average, or more.

Then at the end of it they didn't ask this question but I decided I was going to supply the information anyway. I had a representational house with extra bedrooms and I even had a little guesthouse, so I put down how many U.S. government visitors had stayed there for how many nights, which was quite a lot actually. What they were looking for, they wanted to be able to tell people, "If you're not using the representational housing we're going to take it away." They were trying to find an excuse, is what it was. Of course the ambassador did a lot and they couldn't find it with us. But they did ask a second year and the second year it came back and that had that as a question at the bottom of it. We were both doing fine on that; we never got a peep out of anybody. In fact, when we were inspected they said we had one of the best representation programs they had seen. We were actually using it effectively.

With the ambassador we would try to design events that were a little different and interesting. One was in the World Cup of '94 the Belgian football team, the Red Devils, were going to the United States so we did a reception for the football team and the prime minister is their chief fan. Well that doesn't sound too good. What we did, we invited all the representatives of the various sports organizations in Belgium and we made a little talk about sports and environmental issues. So we tied it in with things we were doing. And a lot of the people in the sports activities said they'd never met each other and they said, "We're going to do this and that and the other thing," so it generated some activity that was different.

Then when the Beijing conference in '95 we were going to invite the Belgian contingent before they went off and it was in September but it didn't work because of the summer. So I said, okay, let's do it when they come back and then we can talk about it. What I would do with these events, I'd give one of the officers the responsibility to kind of think it through and how are we going to do it. So Harry O'Hara did this and he was excited. He, on his own initiative, called the White House and he got Mrs. Clinton to do a video pegged right to this using the names of the Belgian delegates and all of this and we got it and we had a hundred people and it was terrific. This is the kind of thing we did, rather than just having a reception. We tried to do that and I think we were quite effective at it.

Another thing we did [laughs] I remember somebody from the chamber of commerce said, "You know, they'd like to do [thus and so]. Can we do it in the Residence?" So big mouth here, before they even got it out, I said, "Sure, if you pay for it," because we had a limited budget. And they said, "Oh, that's no problem. How much would it cost?" and I said, "Well I can't tell you that. You have to talk to [blah, blah, blah]. It wouldn't be more than [whatever]." And they said, "Oh, that's nothing," because they were used to doing things in the hotels where it was more expensive. We had to find the guidelines for whether you could do what you could do with this, but we found the right ones and so we were able to have the Residence used for some of these things that were useful for us and stretched our representation budget a little bit. Again, that's something we checked and I think whatever we did was okay. [laughs] As I said, that was something in the inspection.

But the inspectiol may have said this before tothey were looking at?we had people who hadn't been in an embassy in a long timthey had been retireand I think there was a little bit of a problem with this because things had changed so radically in terms of the constraint on resources that there were some things you couldn't do anymore or you made a judgment about you could only do "A" or "B" and which one was more useful and which was more important. So sometimes the things that traditionally we had always done, we didn't do because we didn't think they were as important any longer. I remember the political/econ inspector right in the beginning came and said, "Well, you know, I don't see any of those industry reports in the files in the econ," and I said, "That's right. We don't do term papers anymore. We're issue oriented. We have a limited time. Our role is advocacy, representation and reporting." And I said, "I think the advocacy is more important sometimes and the representation and if we don't write terms papers on whither the steel industry, I think that's probably okay because I don't think anybody reads them anyway." The point is the mindset of the inspectors hadn't really caught up with the problem of the resources.

Q: That's interesting. You'd left there in '97. What happened?

SCHERMERHORN: My initial assignment was for three years and the ambassador didn't know when he was going to?he wanted me to stay. I had my aging mother with me; I had taken her there because she was at the point where she couldn't be by herself anymore and I had help that I hired for this reason. I knew we'd have to leave, but it was a good arrangement so it would've been more?The ambassador just?they sent him a short list and he said, "No, I'm not going to select one. I want to keep her," and I said, "Well, I don't think that's going to work," [laughs] and I put in my bid list and I didn't hear anything. So finally they allowed?the problem was my predecessor had much the same situation; he had his aging mother-in-law and father-in-law and his father-in-law actually was ill and died in his fourth year there, which is what happened for me when I did get the fourth year. Anyway, that was good because it would've been very difficult at that stage to move henot impossible, but difficult. But they had made this exception for my predecessor and it was the same?I wasn't just asking?if I didn't have that issue, I knew there was no way I could've stayed. But anyway I did get the fourth year.

I think it was September of '96 the director general of the Foreign Service came through and he had been at a meetinit was something called ICASS (International Cooperative Administrative Support Service), which was an acronym for a new kind of administrative organization for embassies, and he had been at a conference in London to launch this thing and so he came to Brussels because that's a big concentration of FSOs and so forth. He was someone I had known from my?

Q: Who was this?

SCHERMERHORN: Tony Clayton. So I had a dinner for him. Again, this was not a representational dinner, but I wanted other people in the other embassies to meet him and he appreciated that we'd done this. It wasn't something he'd asked for and we didn't have to do it. That was fun. Then of course he talked to my ambassador and I didn't know at the time- (end of tape)

Tape 9, Side B

He talked to Ambassador Blinken and apparently Ambassador Blinken said, "You know, she's up for reassignment and I hope you do something nice for her," [laughs] or whatever he said; I don't know exactly. Also, at that point, George Moose had been through there, as I said, and Dick Bigosi and a former director of the East African bureau whom I knew well. The three of us went out to dinnethis was a little earlier in the yeaand George was saying, "I'm looking for a new deputy assistant secretary for the African bureau and I said, "Well, you know, my political counselor is leaving and would be a great candidate for that," and he said, "Who is it?" and I said, "Judy Johnson." I said, "She's done a wonderful job here," and he said, "Well she doesn't have African experience," and I said, "Yes she does. She was director of AFW," the West African, "and she's been in Nairobi and she's had a lot of African content in this job." I didn't say anything to Judy but anyway he went back and she came down to me and she said, "You know, George Moose just called and asked me?" [laughs] She said, "But I don't know. He's been in that job and he's probably going to move on." And I said, "Judy, do it if you want to go back to Washington." I said, "If he does leave and a new person comes in, they're not going to kick you out in the street. They may ask you to do a different job but it'll be something else nice if you've been there." So she did go and do that. And I knew George from Vietnam.

So I'm sitting minding my own business there and putting together a bid list again and a DAS in the AF bureau, not Judy who had moved, called and said, "You know, we're putting together our list for embassies. Would you be interested in one for Africa?" and I said, "Of course." [laughs] And then he said, "Well these are the ones that are open. I'll give you the names and you tell me if there's any one of them that interests you more than another. That doesn't mean that you're going to get that one; it doesn't mean that you're going to get any of them, but if we're putting you down, what would you prefer? And he started through and the third one on the list was Djibouti and I said, "Bingo," and I think he thought I was crazy because probably from the likes of the African bureau that was not the most desirable one. But it was East Africa which is what I was interested in and none of the others were in East Africa.

So then I don't know what's going to happen and finally somebody calls and says, "You're the nominee for Djibouti," and then I had to fill out all the papers and so we did all that and then you sit and wait. And you're not supposed to tell anybody so then everybody is asking you, "What are you doing?" and you say, "Well, I don't know," [laughs] because you don't know.
Ambassador Blinken was very happy that they had offered me something and so on. I think actually Djibouti is actually not the kind of place that anybody leaps at, so if somebody does they probably?[laughs]

Q: It was not a political plum.

SCHERMERHORN: No, although some places as small as Djibouti have gone to political people. The reason it was coming up again was that the person who had been there from '93 to '96 was a fellow by the name of Marty Cheshes. He'd been gone from there to be a diplomat in residence at UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) and his name came to the ambassador as the short list for DCM in Brussels to replace me. The ambassador gave the short list to me and he said, "What do you think?" and I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, I have an opinion because I'm not going to say until you talk to them because you should talk to them first before I say anything; and then I'll tell you what I think." So he did talk to him.

I saw Marty's name on there and I knew Martnot well, but I knew hiand I thought the ambassador would like him and he had good credentials for this. He spoke good French; he'd been in Europe before. He had the African issues but he had European issues too. So after the ambassador talked to him on the phone, he said, "What do you think?" and I said, "Well, you know, this one is [so and so] and that one is [this]," but I said, "I think that you would probably find Mr. Cheshes most simpatico." And he said, "That's what I thought." [laughs] But it's much better to do it that way than to say?So I knew Marty was going to come so I talked to him a little bit about Djibouti. What had happened, he had left Djibouti in '96, there was somebody in the pipeline, a USIA officer called Stan Schrager, and Stan had been the spokesperson in Haiti. He was on American television a lot during Haiti because he was down there as a USIS officer. But I don't know what happened but sometime in July, just before he was going to get this hearing, he dropped out. I don't know what happened. It was so late in the cycle because to nominate somebody and get them to do their paperwork, so the Department just decided to kick it over into the next cycle and leave it for the charge. So they hadn't had anybody for a year.

So I'm sitting there and doing my papers and then we're talking and it's May and when to leave? "Well your hearing might be in July, but we'll let you know." Anyway it turned out that the hearing wasn't?And then they called and they said, "Well, the Africa sub-committee of foreign relations has not scheduled the hearings yet and they're not going to do it before the August recess which was like July 24th or something like that. So I stayed in Brussels because Marty wasn't going to be coming until the end of August anyway and I took some leave which I hadn't been able to do before. I went to Vienna and then went to Prague with some people from the embassy, which was great because I hadn't been in Eastern Europe before.

So we're sitting there waiting and then of course when they go on recess they don't come back until after Labor Day, so we knew it wasn't going to happen?I'm all ready; I've moved out of the house into the guest house so they can clean it and paint it and do all that and whatever they were going to do. I'm sitting there waiting and finally they called and said, "Oh, it's going to be next week." This is like the second?So I do rush back and of course it wasn't the next week. So I'm sitting in the African bureau waiting, along with a lot of other people; that year they hadn't held hearings for about forty people. Finally it's scheduled for the third week of October and you go up with three or four other people. I went with the ambassador designate for Nigeria and for Burkina Faso, and of course they were mostly interested in Nigeria. And it was Senator Ashcroft and Senator Feinstein was the democratic. Apparently Ashcroft that was his first time on the Foreign Relations Committee. So as the last man in he didn't get his choice of subcommittees so he got put on the African subcommittee which was not his interest. So it was very, I would say, pro forma.

Again, when I got back to the Department there was no Djibouti desk officer; the previous one had left in July and the new one wasn't coming until the end of September. So I did all my own stuff; I wrote my own statement. Nobody seemed to care what I said about it [laughs] and I couldn't find any files so I just wrote what I thought made sense. Usually you get a little more support. They had a lot of vacancies. The African bureau has four country directors: AF West, AF East, AF Central and AF South. AF East, of which Djibouti was a part, has fourteen countries. It doesn't work terribly well. Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenyplaces that people were a little more interested in. So I basically did my own thing and made my own appointmentusually a desk officer does that [laughs]. You can tell I'm at the bottom of the food chain here, but that was fine. It was no problem. I didn't have anything else to do.

So I had the hearing but then the committee had to vote and then the full Senate has to do it. So the actual confirmation didn't happen until November. And then of course all these forty people who were waiting around, not all in the African bureau, then they schedule their swearing in. So December, I remember somebody in the elevator saying, "Well I'll just go up to the Seventh Floor. I know somebody is going to be sworn in." [laughs] But this really was quite bad because it set the timetables back and here's Djibouti, which has had a charge, so it's actually not a year, it's almost a year and a half. And then when I scheduled my swearing in I wanted, of course, the Djiboutian ambassador, and he's also the ambassador of Djibouti to the UN and to Canada. And we set a date that he could be there and then after it was all confirmed, they called and said, "You know, he's suddenly been called and he's got to go to Ottawa." So he wasn't there; the other Djiboutian in the embassy was there. I, of course, met him right after he came back and he said, "I'm terribly sorry." And it was very funny because when I met him I spoke in French and he says in perfect English, "Never mind that." [laughs]

The Djiboutian ambassador, it turned out, was the second senior diplomat, second only to Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia who has been in the United States since 1982. Ambassador Olhaye has been here since 1986 which makes him the dean of the African ambassadors and the deputy of everybody. And also Djibouti's number had come up for a seat on the Security Council from '93 to '95, so when I met him he said, "Oh yes, I know Madeleine Albright." Well the reason is in the Security Council she was up there for the U.S. and because Prince Bandar apparently is often not present, the deputy would be; so he had been in the White House with the President and Mrs. Clinton, which was actually great visibility for Djibouti. And he's a very active person anyway. He's an interesting personality.

I was sworn in, but then of course we were talking about when to go and since I didn't get sworn in until the twelfth of December I wasn't going to go before Christmas. Ramadan started that year around the 27th of December; so I'm talking to the embassy and they say, "Well, you know, if you get there at the beginning of Ramadan the president goes away, so you can't present your credentials. Djibouti is such a small place that if you're there and you can't do anything it doesn't make much sense. So why don't you wait a little bit?" I said, "Okay," and I made my plans. I'm going to spend a week in Europe in January while I'm waiting. I left all my coordinates with the embassy and the charge called me and said, "Can you get here sooner because the president didn't go away at the beginning of Ramadan, he's going to go away a few days before it ends. But if you get here he will receive you before he goes." So all these best laid plans got?Well that was fine.

I got there. You go to Paris and then you arrive at Djibouti at like nine at night and I get off the plane and I'm met by the man from the protocol office who said, "Okay, tomorrow morning at eight o'clock?" I wrote my statement in Paris and faxed it off. I wrote my statement and nobody?I got to be ambassador and I thought all those people who do that and I found out I was the one who did all this stuff. [laughs]

Q: It reminds me I interviewed Nancy Ostrander who was ambassador to Suriname. I said, "How was it being ambassador?" and she said, "Oh, it was great. I'd give an order and run around to the other side of the desk and take it and go off and do it." [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: [laughs] But I did have this time in Washington so I had a lot of opportunity to go and talk to people in other agencies and so forth.

Q: Before you went out there, what were you picking up from Defense, CIA, State, and all about Djibouti? What was the situation?

SCHERMERHORN: The basic facts about Djibouti were it was one of the last African countries to get independence because it didn't become independent until 1977. That was in part because of the wishes of the populace. They've had actually three referenda about independence and the first two were defeated. Only the third one carried the day and there are reasons of ethnicity for that which I will talk about later. I knew there had been a French dependency, colony, to overseas territory. It had various legal constructions at different times, and that there was still a significant French presence and military presence. They obtained the rights to an airbase and some other activities, and that it had two major ethnic groups. Somali was the mother tongue because one of the major ethnic groups, the majority now, is Somali. And that we had had an AID mission; we had had various adjuncts of embassies, but because of this budgetary crunch in the '90s, for example, when I first heard I was going to Djibouti we had a Marine Security Guard. By the time I actually got sworn in it had gone.

We had had a big presence there during UNSOM, the Somalia activity in the Gulf War from the end of the '80s up until '92. Temporary, but a big presence. That had all gone away. And, in fact, the charge said to me when we were talking, "Well I'm glad you're going to finally get here. The Djiboutians kept asking me were we going to downgrade the embassy because we had this big gap of ambassadors; or were we going to close it," which would've been a great disaster for them. I also realized that even though the military had this interest when they needed something, that they weren't paying much attention to it now, nor was, in fact, any other government agency. And again, everybody was so focused on the need to downsize activities, this great budget crunch in the middle '90s, that a place like Djibouti came to the bottom third of everybody's list.

What happened in '92 and '93 in the new administration and the new Congress with their budget cuts, we did what I consider to be some very silly things in the sense that, okay, people had to downsize and rationalize their activities, but there was no adult supervision for this. What happened, every agency got a budget cut, so they said, "Okay, what are we going to do?" and they each went and prioritized on whatever grounds they thought they should be prioritizing. It wasn't structured. And of course, as I said, the same third of countries, especially in Africa, came basically to the lower third of everybody's priority list, which meant that they all left certain places. Instead of saying, okay, if AID is going to leave here, maybe USIS should stay heror whatever it was. If the defense attachï¿½ is going to close up shop, then maybe something else should stay. It didn't work that way.

A third of the smaller countries in Africa, regardless of their relative location, importance, strategic interest or whatever, simply on the basis of size, got stripped of all the U.S. government programs and they kept pouring in things to places. I really fault USIS particularly for this because thel'm sure they had some criteria that they would assert was followed, but what it looked like is that basically they left the more difficult places, the Francophone places, and stayed in the Anglophone places, which was contrary to Europe where they were saying you don't need libraries, for example. Instead of saying it's the Francophone places that need the English language access, they didn't do that. Of course part of it is because some of the Francophone places fell in the lower third criteria for whatever other reason, but all I'm saying is it was obvious to me that this was not a well thought out downsizing. USIS abandoned universality in Africa; AID abandoned universality. The argument for AID was if the program money we have is below two or three million dollars, it costs that amount to maintain an office; I don't know why it should be that expensive, but anyway that was their argument. So that basically if we don't have enough to do a good program, we shouldn't have a mission there.

Q: Well I've talked to people who've workel can't think of who the director of AID was at the timthey said he used to go around and look up the?and say, "I've often wondered why we should have USIS at all." In other words, he was essentially not a person who wanted to do something. He was a peculiar chap.

SCHERMERHORN: Are you talking about USIS or AID?

Q: USIS. But anyway, that's what was happening back in Washington.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, right. There were a lot of strange things. But what it meant is that some of the poorest countries in Africa where you could get more bang for your buck, even if the buck wasn't very big, we didn't have any bucks at all. And I went to ISA, International Security Affairs, in some fellow called Bear McConnell, in DOD, and he told me, "Oh, yes, Djibouti, we were there doing UNSOM; it was very useful." And I said, "Well, and now you're not interested in this," and it went on like that.

One good thinone of my friends was the political adviser to Central Command in Tampa, Larry Polk, who had been in Vietnam.

Q: Oh, yes, he was there when?

SCHERMERHORN: You remember him in Vietnam, and then he had been ambassador in Chano, I don't think it was therin Africa anyway, and he was now the?And General Zinni had recently taken over as head of Central Command. And Central Command includes East Africa, Egypt, down through Kenya and Djibouti and the Middle East. They hadn't yet taken on some of the "stans;" that came in '98 or '99. So I called because I was going to go down there as part of my consultation, but it turned out that he wasn't going to be there. But Larry said, "Well, you know, we're going to the Middle East and we're going to go through Brussels in January." And I said, "Well I'm going to be in Brussels in January. I'm positioning myself to drop into Djibouti whenever the time comes." So I actually had a consultation with General Zinni in Brussels in a restaurant, which was fun. But he was terrific and we talked about Djibouti and I said, "I hope you'll come early on there," he hadn't been there yet actualland he did. He's a great fellow and we got him interested to some degree, which I can explain later.

Q: Well maybe this might be a good place to stop. Essentially we've picked up you're coming to Djibouti. We'll pick it up when you move down in Djibouti.

SCHERMERHORN: Let me just mention that I did something called the ambassadorial seminar in the fall. In October before the hearing I did the ambassadorial seminar and this is interesting because new ambassadors, both career and political, are mixed together in a two week seminar that is supposed to, for the political people, introduce them to the whole concept of what an embassy is and what their role is; and for the career people it has the same role because all of us have been in embassies but we haven't been an ambassador, and it's also to give us exposure to the different personalities of the political people and for them to see what we're like and hopefully to have both of us learn a little bit from each other about that. And more for the career people, help us understand where the private sector people are coming from and what their expectations are and how we can help them meet them or, if necessary, diffuse them a little bit.

And I had a very mixed bag of people; we had Dick Celeste who was going to India. He'd been there early on; he was a staff aide as a personal aide to Chester Bowles and he'd been head of the Peace Corps, too, I think at one point. And then he'd been a politiciagovernor of Ohio and all of thaso that was an interesting, rather high-profile figure. Then we had a businessman who was going to Singapore, Steven Greene, and he really?I mean Dick Celeste, of course knew the milieu; he'd been involved in international affairs; he'd been in the embassy in Delhi and still had Indian friends and so on. And then, you know, we had a person going to Singapore and he was a businessman from somewhere in Florida. It was all totally new to him. He knew nothing about this. So you had everything across the spectrum. So that was an interesting two weeks. The last two or three days of it are actually what they call media; you have a class with a media expert and then you get taped being interviewed, supposedly to teach you?And it was funny because the instructor said to me, "Where are you going?" and I said, "Djibouti," and she said, "Well, is there much media?" and I said, "No, there's not a lot of media," and she said, "Well then you won't need this." I said, "No, to the contrary. In a place like that where there is no media, they're always after you to say something because they don't have a lot of other people to talk to." [laughs]

It was very good and I think it's good for the political people and it's good for us too because depending on the kinds of embassies we've been in before, we may be going to the kind of embassy we know and have been in or we may be going to a different kind of embassy that we've never been in.

Q: Well also, too, some people who have been career diplomats don't ordinarily jump and make good ambassadors. They're often a problem because they haven't had the responsibilities and all this; and to understand and to be made aware of what's going on. You're coming out of the DCM with a very positive ambassador who was very helpful for you, but for other people they could get a bummer too. [laughs]

SCHERMERHORN: I'll just say one more thing about meeting with the Djiboutian ambassador. He took me to lunch, which was nice, and at the end of this he said, "Now, good luck. I expect great things," and all of this, and he said, "I'm just going to tell you one thing," and I said, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador?" and he said, "Just make a difference." And I said, "Well, sir, I will try."

Q: So we'll pick it up next time. We've talked about the preliminaries and we're really picking this up when you arrived in Djibouti and we'll go into the whole thing about what was it like and what were the issues.

Q: Lange, in the first place, let's talk a bit about Djibouti as such. What sort of is the history of Djibouti, because this is not a country that's not well known, the government, the language?

SCHERMERHORN: Well Djibouti is one of the last former colonies or territories in Africa to become independent. It didn't become independent until 1977 which is almost a generation after those of the late '50s and early '60s, of course. It had been a French overseas territory; it had been called the overseas territory of the Afars and the Issas. The Afars are an ethnic group and the Issas are ethnically Somali, but one of the clans of Somalia. The French involvement with it goes back to the 1880s or so, the 1890s, and if you look at the capital city, with is called Djibouti Real, Djibouti City, it reminded me in some ways of Colombo, my first assignment. It's an overseas colonial city of that period. That was sort of when it was constructed, most of the buildings, between 1910 and 1930, I would say. And in its heyday was a very, very attractive place. It's a little the worse for wear these days because Djiboutians don't have money to maintain the buildings and so forth in the way one would hope.

Actually, Djibouti is a totally new creation. It didn't exist until the end of the nineteenth century. The population center, such as it was, was a little town called Obock, on the north coast. Djibouti is cut almost in two by part of the Red Sea called the Gulf of Tadjoura that goes away inland; so you have to go way around to the end of this until you get to the northern part or take a boat trip across, which from Djibouti to Obock is about two hours in a small boat. If you drive it's longer. Obock was the landfall, or whatever you want to call it, the center for the salt caravans that came out there. Djibouti, geologically, is very interesting. It's at the northern end of the Great Rift Valley which actually extends from Tanzania up around Kenya, Ethiopia, and right through Eritrea, part of Djibouti, part of the Red Sea and then it continues on. So geologically it's got that structure.

The landscape is likpeople used to say, and I don't know if it's apocryphal or not, but that the movie in the '60s, The Planet of the Apes, was filmed there. But it looks like a lunar landscape when you get out of the city, some of it. It's got a lot of basal black lava rock, lots of sand, and lots of stony escarpments that aren't particularly hospitable for travel. It has very few resources but because it is on the end of the Great Rift Valley it does have some potential for thermal energy and for wind power because of the way it's situated. It doesn't have oil as far as anyone knows, although there are believed to be other oil deposits in northern Somalia and offshore in that area. Because it's such a humid, hot?it's arid, so there's very little potential for agriculture. It's pastoral; it's nomadic sheepherding and camels and whatnot. Sheep are the kind of money, or the coin of the realm, if you will, and the people are basically nomadic. It wasn't until the French came that the port was established in Djibouti. Obock was not considered suitable and there was a better potential harbor in Djibouti on the southern part of this part of the country. So this is a manmade creation of recent day, really.

Djibouti, administratively, is divided into four districts: Obock districand they call them cities, but by our lights they're small towns, or villages eveObock, then north next to it is Tadjoura, and Obock and Tadjoura is where the Afar ethnic group is predominant. And then you have the Dikhil district to the west and Djibouti district where the city is in the east and the south. In the French administrative model they centralized everything in Djibouti City, which is now a point of issue for the Afars. They'd like to see justice devolve to the regions and so on. But it's such a small country that in some ways this doesn't make sense. But that's the roots of what some of the political problems are now. So the French actually went in there, in part, as a counter to the British being in Aden; protecting the route to India, the British took Aden; and then they more or less appropriated; they never made it a formal colony but they appropriated the coastline of northern Somalia and called it British Somaliland and administered it, but administered it very lightly. So the French decided they needed to balance this and have a?

Q: When did the French go into Djibouti?

SCHERMERHORN: In about 1890 it would a serious?The cultural center of the French embassy there is called the Arthur Rimbaud, after the French poet who was a very interesting character. He wrote most of the poetry for which he's remembered today before he was twenty-three or four. At that point he went off as a trader in East Africa following in the route that Richard Burton had actually had landfalls in that area, actually a little south. Rimbaud was a variously thought to be a slave trader, a drug tradedrugs of the period, the different kind of thing. He was a trader and he wandered all over that part of the world in what is now parts of Ethiopia and parts of Somalia and Djibouti. He finally became ill and he left on a ship for Marseilles when he was about thirty-seven or -eight and he died just as soon as he got to France. So he had a very short life and an even shorter writing life for which he is remembered. So that was the kind of atmosphere people were in. The salt trade was big.

Q: Well in a way was this occupying Djibouti sort of an end run after the Fashoda problem on the Nile and the Sudan? The French wanted to?

SCHERMERHORN: They wanted a foothold and I haven't done enough reading to know that it was in direct result of Fashoda, but it was certainly the scramble for Africa, part of this. And they thought, here the British are after Suez. This is what became important; to have some kind of presence at that end of the canal is basically what it meant. Then, of course, they used that as a place?they stamped it with the Foreign Legion partly. The Foreign Legion of course we think of in Morocco and Algeria but it was also in Chad and it was also there, and still is today; part of the French military presence that continues is a battalion of legionnaires. So the French moved themselves in and there were a few businessmen who came. For example, the leading Djiboutian businessman today is actually of Lebanese descent and he's fourth generation. He's a Muslim, but he's an Arab Muslim, not a Somali or?He owns a food conglomerate, we would call it, the ice making company, the coal stores, the Coca-Cola bottling franchise, which at one point Djibouti was said to have the highest per capita consumption of anywhere because of the heat. [laughs] And actually they regularly get medalwhat I learned there is that Coca-Cola has a contest; they have samples from all their bottling franchises every year and they award medals and the one in Djibouti often does well with this. They do their water with reverse osmosis and apparently this makes for a good product.

They brought in some "foreigners" because the Somalis, as I said, there were no people there who were really, at the end of the nineteenth century, educated in a European fashion; they were all these nomadic people. What built up in Djibouti City was a cadre of people, as in all the colonial things, who worked with the French in one capacity or another. They had various administrative arrangements. As I said, they kept changing the name but at one poinl think in the '40it was the Overseas Territory of the Afars and the Issas. This leading businessman who is now in his '80s was a?they allowed Djibouti to have representation in the French parliament in the chamber of deputies and this businessman back in the 1940s was one of the two Djiboutian representatives, Said Ali Kubesa good Lebanese name with a little French accent.

So the French needed this as a foothold and then there became a small but influential group of French businessmen who basically had a lock on the port provisioning things and providing services to the community which was basically French, and an increasingly, if you will, middle class or upper class Djiboutians who adopted French manners.

Q: Did Djibouti act as anything, sort of an entrepï¿½t for Ethiopia, for Asmara, for Somalia?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. I should place it geographically because it's again just at the bottom of the Suez Canal, Eritrea to the north, what then was the Eritrean province of Ethiopinow is independenEthiopia and northwestern Somalia sort of enclosed by all of these. And it is an entrepï¿½t because of course Ethiopia has no major port; they did on the Red Sea Massawa and Assab but those were not as well developed as ports, nor as good harbors, and of course they were not outside the canal. They were in the Red Sea, not out in the major gulf area. Not in the major roadway, I should say. So, yes, this became very useful and of course when Eritrea became independent in 1993 then it became even more of an issue; and when Eritrea and Ethiopia went to war in 1998 it became very much an issue. So it has a strategic importance and it was also a useful place as a staging area for French troops; that's why they have they presence there or that's one of the reasons they assert as to why they have a significant military presence there. Even though the military presence is considerably reduced from its high point, it's still about 2500, 2700 troops.

Q: The French military there is really for to be used somewhere else?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: It's not sitting there protecting the?

SCHERMERHORN: No. Although clearly after independence whatever treaty arrangements or agreements they made, the presence of the French means implicitly that Ethiopia is not going to move in on them; and this is one of the things that is of concern to Djibouti: as the French put more daylight, if you will, between them and Djibouti, what is the future for them because Ethiopia is paranoid about a lot of things [laughs] and they could someday envision "having to take over Djibouti for the port" if they were given free rein or something.

Q: Well they don't have a window on the ocean, in a way.

SCHERMERHORN: No, they don't. It's a landlocked country.

Q: After Eritrea made its move?

SCHERMERHORN: It's a landlocked country of 60 million or so people, which requires a lot of outside provision. The thing that makes Djibouti port so importanthe fact that it's a viable, well-developed port, but it was linked as early as 1900 by a railroad that goes directly from Djibouti to Dire Dawa in Ethiopia, which is about halfway, and then continues on to Addis Ababa. The line has one tracthe train goes up and down once a daand the rolling stock is very old. It really needs major redevelopment to be more useful than it is now; but it's a lifeline and if it were not to function at all it would be a great problem because while there is some air cargo, it's expensive and there really isn't a cargo airline that's been developed. That would be a great boon for East Africa, a cargo airline, but nobody thinks that it's economic at the moment. It's one of things where everybody is waiting for the time when it will be economic, so everybody is waiting. [laughs]

Q: What about the government there?

SCHERMERHORN: Well let me go back to 1977. Why did they wait so long to become independent? There was a nationalist movement of sorts but it was never as strong as it was in a lot of the other African countries, especially the West African countries. In this colonial setting the Afars were nomadic too. They didn't have any more claim to education or anything than the Somalis, but they were the ones who, because they were sort of a minority and because the Somalis in Somaliland were oriented toward the British, and because there were more Afars at that poinearly on in the situatioin that area than there were Somalis, some of the Afars became affluent working with the government and got into the administration and so forth.

Beginning in the 1930s, I think more and more Somalis of the Issa tribe, which is the tribe of the northwest Somalia, the clans, began movinthey were always moving across these borders which are very porous because they're nomadic people, but they began migrating toward this new city basically that was being created. The Afars didn't want independence because they were afraid there would be a point when the Somalis would outnumber them and that wouldn't be good. They'd rather stay with the protection of the French. They thought their bread was better buttered that way. It was put to referendum and the first two times basically the Afars voted down independence which was a little unusual in those days, but then there was pressure for a third one and in 1977 they carried the day. The Afars claim that the Somalis packed the books by sending a lot more people over the border to vote. This will never be known. There's some truth to that; whether they were actually sent or whether it was a natural migration, the balance had tipped.

Q: The Somalis were interested in an independent state as opposed to being part of a greater Somalia?

SCHERMERHORN: Well this is all intertwined and it's harthis is against the backdrop of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia, having both been granted independence in 1960, a few days apart by their respective colonial powers. There was the SNM, the Somali Nationalist Movement, and there were people there who were very strong advocates of Greater Somalia; and the five-pointed star of Somalia stands for?

Q: I keep hearing about the- (end of tape)

Tape 10, Side A

SCHERMERHORN: So the balance was tipped and independence. The Somali Nationalist Movement then had advocated the five points of Somalia being organized under Greater Somalisome elements, not all of them; this gets wider with splits in Somalia when this happened. One part was the Somalis of northeastern Kenya; the second was the Somalis of Italian or southern Somalia; the third was the Somalis of British Somaliland, north, west and northeast Somalia; the fourth were the Somalis of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia which is the part of Ethiopia that bulges out towards Somalia; and the fifth were the Somalis in Djibouti. They all have somewhat different characteristics; of course in Kenya under the old guidelines that the borders became independent in 1960 and so the two, north and southern Somalia, and Djibouti at that point because the Afars were not willing to see this subsumed into anything else. And of course the Ogaden was Ethiopia and that became a later issue.

But anyway, in the beginning it was just some Somalis who were successful in stimulating Britain and Italy to give independence said, okay, these two parts now are independent; we are going to voluntarily fuse together and be the Republic of Somalia. So this was one instance where what emerged from the independence movements was not the replication of the colonial borders. This was a new creation subsequent to independence, which is a very important legal point for some of the issues that are now going on in Somalia, although it was not described by people at the time nor particularly recognized as being something different.

You have a very interesting situation. You see very starkly when you're in that part of the world, the results of three different models of colonial administration. Southern Somalia is kind of chaotic [laughs] and British Somaliland they had a very light hand, they didn't even call it a colony, it was just a protectorate or something and consequently the British did very little there; but that had the benefit of not upsetting, in a great way, the local customs and mores. They kind of let them administer themselves in the way according to the clan and tribal mores.

Q: Mainly to keep other people out, on the British side.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. In Djibouti you had this highly centralized French model, very bureaucratic, which maybe worked in administering the colony but doesn't work when you convert it to what's it got now. It doesn't work as well. We never got to greater Somalia and in fact?I'll talk about Somaliland, too, and my experiences there separately so why don't we wait and talk about that and talk about Djibouti now.

Q: Let's talk about your staff.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, the embassy was very small. We had, when I went there at the end of '97, it had been reduced to four officers, including the ambassadothree staff and one military officer. We had ambassador, a DCM who was also the econ officer at the -02 grade and at the 03 or 04 depending on who was available a person who was half the time political, half the time consular; and an administrative officer. We had one secretary and two communicators; and the reason we had two communicators is the equipment there was quite old and needed more maintenance and also the idea was that the second communicator could be a swing person and when there were requirements in Africa somewhere they could be detailed to do that; and then and Army major who worked for the Central Command in Tampa administering?he did not function as an attachï¿½; the attachï¿½ was the attachï¿½ in Addis. We had no other agencies present.

Q: No Marine guards?

SCHERMERHORN: Marine guards left in September of '97.

Q: So while you were there.

SCHERMERHORN: This is an interesting thing. The Marine guards we'd always had universality with this but after the fall of the Soviet Union and with so many new embassies there was a demand. At some time in the early '90s, the dialogue went something like this, as I understand it, the Marine Corps said to the State Department, "We need to reduce the number of Marines because our total force is down and we don't want the percentage of people in the Marine guard program to be higher than [whatever the percentage was that they liked,]" and the State Department said, "Well, gee, that's funny. We were just going to come to you and say we need more people in the program because we have more embassies." Well the compromise was they didn't take any away but they didn't give them anymore either. So there were not enough guards to do the twenty-four hour shift in all these places; you need a minimum number to make the shift work and so forth. So there was triage and people somewhere in Washington and Marine Corps headquarters decided they'd have to take away the guards from some of the places. Again, as I said, a lot of this fell on Africa.

In 1993, I think it was, they closed about fifteen or so Marine guard programs in various places. One of them was in Luxembourg, interestingly enough. The majority were in Africa. Then, of course, we continued to open postVladivostok and Yekaterinburg and more places in Russia, and here and there and arounso they did another round of this in '97 and that's when Djibouti lost theirs; which is somewhat ironical when you think of what happened a year later in Nairobi and Tanzania.

I was very disappointed because I've always thought the Marines have been an asset in the places I've been, and especially in a small community. On the other hand, it's such a small community and not a lot of amusement and potential for getting in trouble with the French militarthe brawls at the bar.

Q: No matter how you slice it, these are young men and they're the same problems you'd have with college students.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, it's the same thing. Before I got there I was very disappointed. After I got there and thought about it for a while, I was disappointed but in some ways I thought, well, maybe it's okay. The way the embassy was situated and constructed I don't think it made a difference for the security necessarily. That's hard to evaluate. So we didn't have that either.

The one military person was this wonderful Army major. Put this against a backdrop of the end of the 1980s when we had a lot of military, not permanently stationed but short and long TDYs because of the Gulf War and then UNISOM in Somalia following on it. And we had more employees in the embassy; AID was there up until the early '90s and various other people were there; USIS I think had a small program there. Anyway, as I had mentioned earlier, in '93 a lot of these places closed down their programs in smaller African countries without a lot of real planning as to what was the best bang for everybody's buck in terms of keeping our interests alive in a variety of places.

Then of course the embassy had a further problem because, as I explained, there had been an interregnum, if you will, between ambassadors because the person who was supposed to go there in the summer of '96 dropped out at the very last minutlike Augusso since the process of nominating and vetting someone and all takes so much time they just rolled it over for the next?they didn't try to get somebody there right away. My predecessor had recruited, however, a wonderful officer to come in the summer of '96 as the DCM and her name was Terry Roble. My predecessor, Marty Cheshes, had known her in Paris and she was an economic officer. She had wonderful French because she had done that year at the ANA that we offer as training, and interestingly her husband was born in Somaliland. He went to college in the United States where they met and he was a microbiologist. When she was assigned to Paris he worked at the Pasteur Institute. He was very interesting and very formidable intellectually, I must say. She's a superb officevery organized, very methodical, lots of initiativand she had been there for more than a year as the charge having only?

But she was blessed also because there was a wonderful administrative officer, also a woman, who has a very interesting personality. She grew up on a farm in Indiana, the eldest of eight children, but her father was also a school teacher. Her parents were school teachers as well as farmers. She went to university and went into the ROTC or whatever they had; anyway, she got a commission as an Army officer at the end of that and was an Army officer in Germany for four years; then worked on her Ph.D. in English literature and her specialty was Edith Wharton although she didn't do the dissertation; and in Germany she had met an Iranian student who was studying engineering there and they had married and she was there with two small children. She had so much initiative, so much insight, and always I had described her as someone for whom the glass is always half full, not empty. And it's a wonderful thing to have in a small post because?

Between them they knew the American community who came up to me and said, "You know, before these people were here nobody ever paid any attention to us." There isn't a large American community; they were mostly missionaries. They had started all these?you know, they had them over on Friday, which is the Sunday in Djibouti since it's primarily Muslim, to swim in the embassy and had parties for the children. This is partly because they both had young children themselves, so they had more avenues of approach maybe but a lot of people wouldn't have done?So there was a lot of good feeling in the small American community and the French community and the Djiboutians too because they were very visible in the community and people said to me more than they thought previously. This may or may not be true; I don't know because people always tend to say what?But they weren't saying

Q: [inaudible] to a?

SCHERMERHORN: A positive situation, yes. The only aid we had present in 1997 was a $50,000 a year self-help program which has to be administered by aid regulations with accountability and all of this. Terry had organized how to do this and we had a very good system and it was a committee of everyone in the embassy, including the secretary. We sat down to decide this and we tried to parcel it out according to region and type of thing. The women in the community were really very taken with all of this, that there were women doing this. Somali is Muslim and it's a male dominated culture in many ways, but it's not hardcore Arab Muslim. The Somalis have a much more relaxed approach, shall we say? People were concerned because they saw the embassy shrinking all the time and some Somalis would say to me when I first got there, "We're so glad you're here. We thought maybe you were going to close the embassy because it keeps getting smaller."

Their reaction was very carefully?If people in Washington think people don't watch this in small places? "And then there wasn't an ambassador for a long time."

Q: What was this saying? It really was a bureaucratic thing back in Washington.

SCHERMERHORN: I would just say, "Well, you know, we have a process by which we get nominated to be an ambassador and it takes time. Don't worry about it." I was worried about it though; given the climate I could see?People are still talking about do we need universality. The day when the great United States of America cannot afford to have an embassy everywhere, then we're in really hard times. People don't appreciate how especially in these small countries they really look to us. Yes, they have this relationship in Djibouti with the French and it's a love/hate relationship and there's a lot of symbiosis. They need certain things. But they like to branch out; they like to be more independent. They like to develop closer relations with us. The cynics here would say, well who cares whether we have good relations with Djibouti or not? We'll get into that later, post 9/11.

I went into a very positive situation in the embassy. Ambassadors are permitted two choices; they may choose their DCM. I didn't have any desire to change in midstream. First of all, in a place like that it's hard to find people who can go. The main issue that limits people is schooling. In Terry Roble's case there was no problem because she'd been in France prior and her children had started in French nursery school and she was happy to put them in the French school. The oldest one was seven, and five, so there was no issue. The admin officer actually started her own bilingual school. That's another story. [laughs] She's a terrific woman. Anyway, I was blessed with these two. And the third one was a young man who'd been in Saudi Arabia and been in a lot of different places, and he was the consul cum political officer.

The secretary was wonderful. She'd been in many, many places in Africa and she'd been selected to go there by the man who never got there, the reason for which there was the years?so when Terry Roble hearl got in touch with her saying I'd been nominated and we were back and forth; she said, "Well, you know, Donna got her just before Stan found he wasn't coming and she's been here with me and she'd like to stay and I recommend that unless you have somebody you want to come," and I thought that's all the recommendation I need. Somebody who had been in Africa, likes it, and wants to be there. Most of the secretaries I know are at the stage where they wouldn't want to go to a place like that. So I thought that was a great idea and I said, "Fine, let's do it." And she was absolutely wonderful too. She functioned like an officer. She drafted and she did?She was so bright and so able to put things together and figure out who was who. So it was really a benefit. I was blessed with that.

The interesting thing about this staff? There were two male communicators. Of the three spousethis is an interesting comment, if you will, on our foreign policof the three spouses at the embassy at that point, as I said we had onall American citizens, of course, now, but one originally SomalMrs. Robles' husband; one originally IraniaMrs. Krasnajafy's husband; and one of the communicator's wives was originally Vietnamese; and the secretary's husband was originally Filipino, but back during the Vietnam era Air America had hired a lot of Filipino engineers and mechanics and he had initially been hired by them in Laos and then they offered him a contract after that in Africa to do admin/GSO type things because we needed them. So he had been around in Africa doing that and that's where Donna met him. She used to laugh and say, "Well people ask for me but they really do it because they want my husband because he can fix everything," [laughs] which is true. The admin officer's husband was an engineer too, so in a place like Djibouti where maintenance was a real problem this was a tremendous boon. We had these PIT (Part-time Intermittent Temporary) jobs but of course the bureaucracy is such that one of the first things that happened when I got there, there was a big to-do about we had to have these cut-outs, because it was so small, about who supervises whom and all of this kind of thing. And then they said, "Oh, his appointment has lapsed. You have to renew it after a year and he can't work for her." I had to sort that out. I said, "Look, let's not be crazy. We have these resources that we need and you can't hire anybody else. It's one of these almost axiomatic?in the small places where you most need the PITs, that's where the rules say you can't have them because?

Q: Could you explain what "PIT" means?

SCHERMERHORN: PIT is part-time intermittent temporary, which is terminology for somebody who is hired locally, is not brought from Washington as worldwide available; so in this case they went with their spouses and then a job existed there. Again, you have a choice; you can try to find qualified engineers on the economy of these placewhich you're not going to finwho want to work there, or you can put some people in it who aren't qualified or you can use what you have. But again, we're always tripping over ourselves on the administrative side. This is all based on the government's anti-nepotism. You have to evaluate each situation and work it so that it comes out. This is a country where it's over ninety all the time and when it rains it pours and floods. It does rain but not for very long. So you need to paint all the time; you need to constantly fix things. The air conditioners always need?This kind of thing. So having these spouses work was terrific.

What had happened over time, when Washington would say, "We're going to take away the direct-hire positions and you can hire a PIT," they would say this and then when you went to do it and make it work they'd say, "Oh well, it's nepotism," and I'd say, "We only have seven people. How many dependents can we get out of that?" We're lucky that we get some that want to work; some of them didn't want to work. So, it's again, talking across purposes [laughs] saying, "We're telling you what to do but we're also telling you that you can't do it." This is endemic now in Africa.

Q: It sounds like though you had an experienced staff because one of the complaints I've heard about so many of our small African posts is that they end up with say somebody doing consular work who has never done il mean brand-neand nobody else in the very small embassy has ever done it. So you have an awful lot ol won't say incompetence, but lack of competence because everybody is new at the thing. It sounds like you had an experienced crew.

SCHERMERHORN: The consular officer was?Henry hadn't done too much of that but he had taken the course before and all of that; that was okay. But we really needed a political officer more than half-time. [laughs] So this was not a good fit because they had compressed jobs and that was how it came out. These were extraordinary people.

Rowena, the admin officer, this was her third African post; but from the first one she was clearly somebody who had her head screwed on right and knew?She had actually closed our post in the Comoros. That had been her first post and she closed it. We posed a lot of confidence on her. She bid all these. She liked being in Africa. But she finally got a little upset and she needed to go back to Washington. I was very positive about her in my evaluations. I said to her, "You know, Rowena, you have all the tickets to go high in the admin field so you should go back and do a job in personnel because I think every admin officer needs to have that." Since I had not that long before been there I was able to talk and I recommended her to people, and it did work out for her to do that and that was very good and she's onto something else now.

For example, we didn't have USIS and she had startel inherited all these things but I kept them going and expanded them because they were so goosomething where once a month we had what we called "English conversation" at the embassy. And we got Somalis who wanted to hear English spoken come in and we were up to sixty or seventy people and we'd have it on the patio outside and we'd just serve soft drinks. We'd have a theme to every one. We had a guest speaker do somethineither somebody in the embassy or somebody we kneand then we'd have discussion. And they loved this because there was no USIS program, nothing. I'm sure in a lot of other embassies they weren't as proactive with this. So we kept that up.

We also had an extraordinarwhat can I say? And these are all womewe had an admin secretary and it was not a Djiboutian; we were allowed to hire a Belgian woman. This was a job that at one point had been filled by a spouse and then there weren't any spouses who wanted to do that or able. So for about a year before I got there, there had been a Belgian woman whose husband was the chief engineer in the Coca-Cola bottling franchise because all the equipment was made in Belgium or something; and she was extraordinary; she spoke six languages and then she was learning her seventh, which was Arabic, while she was there. She was about thirty and so efficient. I recognized and appreciated this from my time in Belgium. I thought she's just like that. She and the admin officer worked wonderfully together. They sent out the invitations to this monthly thing, did all the parties for the children. We didn't have a CLO (Community Liaison Officer) because we didn't have anybody to do this. There had been a position when there was a spouse at one point who had wanted to do it, but there wasn't one at this point. So she just did all of thil call it community relations in the absence of USIS. They had a sewing group to teach some of the women how to mend. They were doing all of this stuff which was terrific, apart from doing their job very well too.

Q: When you went out to Somalia did you go out with either given to you or your own mental instructions about I want to do this or I want to do that? Were there any situations or problems?

SCHERMERHORN: The new assistant secretary for Africa had just come in in the summer of '97.

Q: Susan Rice?

SCHERMERHORN: Susan Rice. In fact, I told you there were a whole group of ambassadors waiting for hearings in July and they didn't get them but they did have a hearing for Susan Rice because the administration said it was alright. So she was fairly new. In fact, there was a chiefs of mission conference in November of '97 in Washington for which everybody came back, but I hadn't yet gone out. Those of us who were just getting confirmed then went to this. Obviously there are some very big, important countries in Africa that are the focus of attention; and it was Nigeria and the Congo was a problem as always, and South Africa and Kenya and Ethiopia at that point it was sort of because people respected it for its size; as I said, the 800 pound gorilla of East Africa, but the war hadn't started at that point. The smaller countries got short stripped.

There was something called the African?Anyway, we were trying to put togetheit was a political/military projecwe were trying to create basically a peacekeeping force for Africa by training people and having them contribute various military units to a joint force. Mostly we were starting in West Africa with the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and all of that. Again, there wasn't a lot of time. When you figure there are something like fifty-four countries in the African bureau, as I said, fourteen in AFE alone, that you know the African bureau has the same structure as the other geographic bureaus but it has many more countries. But it has one assistant secretary and three DASes and sometimes desk officers have three or four countries. People say, "Yes, but they're small countries," but that begs the question. It doesn't matter what the size of the country is. You're still asked to do one human rights report; you do one of the same as the big countries do but you don't have the people to do it, either in the embassy or at the end of it. And in some respects it's more difficult to do that kind of reporting from a small country without a written tradition where the information isn't that easy to come by. If you're writing on human rights in France you've got all these human rights organizations that put out their reports; you've got people in the government who will tell you anything you want to know. In these smaller countries you don't have that level of support so it's much more difficult.

By the same token, it's much more difficult in Washington because if you're talking about in Ethiopia, yes, there's a constituency in Washington in the agencies. There's somebody whose portfolio is that place. So there's always a nexus of interest to talk to people about it. Some of these small countries, the State Department desk officer is probably the only one who has any consistent interest in it and even they don't have consistent interest; they're doing five countries. But this is not understood when people start talking numbers and how many people you need to do things. They don't take into account the degree of difficulty of doing what it is, but they expect the same things. You get these round-robin demarches.

One of the issues that has always been a problem in the African bureau if you want to make a demarche and you're asked to present a written paper to the Djiboutian minister of foreign affairs, he doesn't speak English and he doesn't have very many people who speak inot at the level that they can understand some bureaucratic paper. So you need to present it in French. We had one part-time translator who was a Frenchman who sort of washed up on the beach there, a very interesting character. But these complex demarches and of course they always came in and said deliver it immediately because it's for a meeting that starts tomorrow. But by the time you got it, tomorrow was already there, which was useless because if anybody from Djibouti was going to the meeting they had probably left already; or it was in New York and the ambassador up there would take care of it.

The cry of these posts is please do these translations in Washington, for several reasons: doing one translation is much more efficient than having each embassy do it, and maybe not having quite the same translation and also just using up a lot of time. But they found it very difficult to do that. It's because a lot of the demarches came from USTR (U.S. Trade Representatives Office) and issues like there where they wouldn't probably even consult the State Department or present it to them in its final form enough ahead of time to do. So this was always a problem. Again, we're very ethnocentric about our?we just assume all we do is fling the paper on the desk and everybody is going to immediately drop everything and read it tomorrow. [laughs] You'd go and you'd make your presentation orally, but still.

Q: When you first went there what type of government and to whom did you first present your credentials?

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, they said there had been a change in plans and the then eighty-two year old president, or whatever age he was, normally went out of Djibouti during Ramadan; he had a house in a suburb of Paris. He changed and he stayed and he said he was going to leave just before the end so if I got there I could present my credentials the next morning. So I did and I arrived at nine o'clock at night and got off to this steaming tropical place, the first time I'd been in the tropics like that since Vietnam and it was nice. Steve at protocol said come in the morning so we went at eight o'clock and the DCM and the admin officer went with me. So we're three women and we go and you're escorted in - and that's fine - and greeted, and then you read your statement and go through all the protocol. That was very nice; they do things nicely. And then we sat down with the president to talk. He spoke French and he looked at the three of us and he said, "You know, I think the United States must like me very much to send me three women," and I'm thinking uh-oh [laughs]. So we have a little fun with that. And I made a statement that said?it was very hard to write a statement because we had basically abandoned Djibouti, having had activities with them in the end of the '80s and then we just?But, you know, you tried to make lemonade out of these lemons and tell him we're going to try to help some business come here, always couched in the conditional because I knew it was?

Also, Djibouti had had a civil disturbanc"civil war" is perhaps too stronin the early '90s, '94 and '95. Everything the Afar community feared before independence about being upstaged by the Somalis and basically not having their rightful share of the pie had happened as far as they viewed it. They felt they weren't giveunder the constitution the way it was set up the prime minister was an Afar but it was mostly a figurehead kind of thing, and that they didn't have everything they wanted. And there had been an armed, actually, rebellion in these two northern provinces where as I said, Obock and Tadjoura, and then there had been a truce signed with part of this group in 1994, '95. But another part of it, a minority part of it, had declined to participate in the truce and said no, we don't agree. So the ones who came in out of the cold there was some power sharing and they got a couple of cabinet seats and so on, but we still had this group of Afars that were armed and creating some mischief. Their leader was a man called Ahmed Dini Ahmed and he had removed himself to Paris where he was in exile and launched literary missives from time to time and other?There were incidents with guns and people killed, which still happened a little bit. There would issue something claiming responsibility or disclaiming it or whatever, and basically it was a power sharing issue: we don't have what we want.

At the time that this happened, my predecessor once removed, Chuck Bacay, had tried to get the Peace Corps to come there and they had signed an agreement and they were all ready to come when this rebellion broke out, so we withdrew the offer. When Chuck left he was going back to Washington as deputy director of the Peace Corps. He said he would work on this. Mrs. Roble had tried to restart this and I knew that so before I left Washington I went and talked about it. And that was one of the things that we were saying that we would try to get them there. And they wanted English language programs. This was again part of their independence from the French, but they felt increasingly isolated there. Djibouti is like the Francophone hole in the Anglophone donut. The other Francophone countries are not contiguous to Djibouti; it's a problem for them. And of course if they had English they'd be well positioned with Arabic, English, and French. So that was one of the things we were trying to be positive about. A little scrap here and there and getting spare parts for these Humvees and this sophisticated transportation equipment that we had given them in 1989 or '90 when we were there; but we hadn't arranged the funding in the out years for the spare parts. [laughs]

Q: Humvee is the present equivalent to the Jeep, except much bigger and much more sophisticated.

SCHERMERHORN: There were some other trucks and so forth too. And part of this of course was we had given it to them because we wanted to improve our relations with the army. Then of course we got concerned that the army was using this against the Afar dissidents and maybe there were human rights violations and all of that. So here's the eighty-three year old president saying, "They sent me a woman," and I felt like saying, "Well, Mr. President, some of your people are concerned that they might not have sent anybody at all." [laughs] But he was twinkling when he said that. It was all very cordial and nice. The next day we went to the airport to see him off. In Africa they still do that in a few places when the president travels.

There I was, so I began my round of calls and of course the next call was on the dean of the diplomatic corps who was the Ethiopian ambassador who was a woman. She had been there alreadthis was now January of '9since '94, four years. She was a very nice woman and spoke very good English and beautiful French because she had done her university in France in French so she was a good person for that. Ambassador Sale said, "Well you're my third American ambassador," and I said, "Oh, well, okay." One of the reasons she was there for so long, there aren't many Ethiopians who have good French in their diplomatic service. She had been in Senegal before, another French speaking country. I think she was Amhara, and of course the current regime in Addis was Tigrean, but they valued her expertise and her assets. And she said to me, "Well, you know, when I first came the president was a little astonished and not very receptive." But she said, "Now that I've been here three or four years and he sees how I work and so forth, we have a good relationship."

But he was of the old school; he was eighty-three at that time. He was the George Washington, if you will, of Djibouti. He had been also in the chamber of deputies. That's why he had a house in Paris. And he became the first president. In theory there were supposed to have been elections, and I think there was one along the way and nobody opposed him, but clearly at this point people were beginning to think what was next and he had said that there would be an election. This was one of the demands of the Afars during the dissident period. There was a constitution that called for elections but basically this man had been in place since the first election and it was time to do something else.

The diplomatic corps was a wonderful conglomeration: Ethiopian because of course that's an important relationship for Djibouti, and the French because of course there's that still somewhat paternalistic relationship, if you will. And then there were the neighboring countries: Yemen; Saudi Arabia who only had a chargthey did not have it at ambassadorial level; Iraq; Libya; Sudan; no other Europeans except the French and a European Union representative office subordinate to the European Union in Addis.

Q: No British?

SCHERMERHORN: No. The British had an honorary consul who traditionally had been the representative of the shipping line there, who at that moment happened to be a Belgian. The honorary Belgian consul happened to be a Brit. [laughs] And the Chinese and the Russians. Now this is quite a group, right? The Russian was a lovely man who was usually under the weather from his vodka intake; he spoke very good French and Arabic. The French ambassador when I got there was unusual for France in that he had been a career army officer and retired from the army after a long career and then went into the diplomatic corps. He had been the deputy of the mission in Saudi Arabia and I guess that was because of the military issues. And, in fact, our young second secretary, Henry, the political cone consul, he had been in Saudi when the French ambassador was there and he knew the family and so forth. And the Chinese ambassadothis was very difficult to figure out because he went around with a minder all the time because he did not speak French or English or Arabic so he had no way of communicating. He had a young, very attractive, nice man who spoke impeccable French and impeccable English and always went. It was very heavy going.

Q: Did you get any feedo you think he was somebody put out to pasture to keep away from somewhere or was it a reward?

SCHERMERHORN: I was astonished to find that it was his third Francophone African embassy for China; two in West Africa and this. The Chinese had a big aid program there. I shouldn't say a big aid program in terms of money. They did a lot of building and renovating of buildings for the Djiboutians. For example, when you went into the foreign minister's office there was a little model of a new foreign affairs building which wasn't built yet but they were going to fund it. They rebuilt the wall around the hospital, they renovated the presidential palace, which I said, maintenance is a difficult issue there. The French had always kept these things immaculately, but once they left? There are some photos of Djibouti City in about 1982, about five years after independence, and it looks beautiful; the buildings are pristine, white, everything. But fifteen years later that's not the case. They need painting, they need plastering, they need all of this stuff. They don't have either the resources or the management ability to keep these things organized. It's hard. This is something Americans do well and we find it difficult to? We say preventative maintenance is a concept that in Africa?

Q: In the Arab world, too. I've served in a lot?

SCHERMERHORN: It's like inventory control. For there, it's when you get to the bottom of the box you order another. They don't look ahead. It's not a culture, a mindset, where you plan ahead. It's something to do with the fatalism of the religion and the hardness?

Q: "Inshallah" (God willing).

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, inshallah, and the hardness of the life. You count each day you're here as a lucky one and you don't worry about the future that much, I guess. Maybe that's kind of a pop psychology way to look at it, but it is a different mindset. Even the people who've been trained in France and know what they should do, there aren't enough people like that to make it all work together. So the Chinese do a lot of that. They don't give blank checks. When they do this they bring their own workmen in and it's actually work. They have their own agenda for this. And they did some public housing, what was going to be? And of course it was always embarrassing because they'd have big ceremonies to inaugurate these things and you know, [laughs] I'm kind of looking around or looking up. I decided thal guess I didn't really decide, I just did thithat we didn't have a lot of programs and things but we would work with what we had, these little self-help programs, and we would take an interest- (end of tape)

Tape 10, Side B

So I decided everything I was invited to I would go to and I would go to some things that I wasn't invited to if I knew about them and it wal mean out in the Djiboutian community. There were always dinner parties and that kind of stuff. I had a lot of lunches in the dining room in my little house. People say, "Well what was your house like?" and I say, for people who knew the one in Brussels, "Well it wasn't like the one in Brussels." It looked like a three bedroom crack house in Virginia. It was one floor. But it was fine. I'm not complaining at all. It had a beautiful garden right on the sea. The embassy and the Residence are in a compound all together. As I said, this is terrible for the exercise program because it's all on one floor and I walked five hundred yards to my office which is also on one floor. [laughs]

And they always look for the American ambassador. Of course the ambassadors from the Arab countries, they had their own culture there and they could speak Arabic with people, but, as you were saying, I don't think too many of them?In fact, the Libyan used to try to talk to me and he talked to everybody our embassy, he tried to, and he was asking me, he wanted his son to go study oil engineering in Texas or something. He spoke very good English; in fact, I don't think he spoke French; he spoke English and Arabic. He took long times away. I'm sorry, he was the charge. The Libyan ambassador was quite an attractive man who popped up about every three or four months. He was supposed to be resident there but he hated it so? [laughs] And he used to say it, quite audibly, at these ceremonies.

I used to laugh and I said to the ambassador who was seated next to me when he first camthat was the Sudanese ambassador who came after mthey always seat you in protocol order. This new Sudanese ambassador, they say you're not supposed to talk to?it's ridiculous, but we're sitting in this convocation waiting for it to start. We were asked for nine o'clock, or whatever it was, and at ten o'clock there's still nothing happening, and I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, you're new here but you have to understand there's regular time and then there's Djibouti time," and he laughed. [laughs] He always used to laugh and say that. And the Libyan ambassador then at one of these functions was saying, "Oh, what do we have to stand around out in this sun again for?" [laughs] The only things that started on time in Djibouti were the French military ceremonies, and there were a lot of them, which was nice. They respected the?And I liked that, having come from this experience in Brussels with all this. It was very nice. They did it basically for something to do there and to keep the troops active because there wasn't a lot to do. We had the usual Armistice Day and Memorial Day. Every French battalion or regiment there had some date that they were in a battle that they commemorated. One was Cinco de Mayo, the fifth of May, in Mexico with Maximilian.

Q: Yes, this was of course very important for the French. What was it the wooden hand or something?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes and whenever there was a change of command. The generals changed every two years and the colonels they all change every two years. They always had a very formal change of command ceremony and invited?Those started on time. And sometimes the guest of honor was high-ranking; General Zachariah or the prime minister. And it was important because they either had them at night or very early in the morning, like six o'clock in the morning, before the heat of the day. I'm sorry; I'm wandering a little bit here.

Q: No, it gives a flavor for a place that's not well known and I think it's interesting to capture this.

What about the French ambassador? I would've thought the French ambassador would've been important. Talk a little bit about the French relationship there.

SCHERMERHORN: After I called on the dean he was the next person I called on. As I said, he was a former military officer and I didn't know a lot about the?but he gave me his view on the status of the Afar dissident group and what it was dointhe whole scenand who would succeed President Gouled, the eighty-three year old, and so forth. The president had as his, he called him his chef de cabinet, somebody who was usually referred to as his nephew Ismail Omar. The president and his wife had no children; again, something quite unusual in that part of the world. That's another issue. The president had only one wife; most of the Somali Muslims don't have multiple wives. That's not a thing they do. That's an Arab thing somehow.

Ismail Omar was in his fifties and he was one of those people that people love to hate because as the chef de cabinet he'd also been the liaison to the police force and the "intelligence service," whatever that was there. He had started athey used to say somewhat disparagingly, some of the Frencbasically an informant to the police. I don't know if he was actually, literally, the nephew, but he was a member of the family. In his role as chef de cabinet I called on him because he was the person you called on there, and in this first period when the president was gone I called on all the cabinet ministers and everything, and I think that was a little unusual in the sense that I'm not sure that all thI mean the European ambassadors would do this but I'm not sure the other ambassadors did that, they would pay much attention to these people. They had a big cabinet because again it was part of the power sharing. You give this clan so many and that one so many and whatnot. I'd call on Ishmael and we spoke French. I was there only a couple of months when Kofi Annan came through and?

Q: Kofi Annan being?

SCHERMERHORN: The UN secretary general. The first African UN secretary general.

Q: Yes, from Ghana.

SCHERMERHORN: He had with him Ambassador Sanu who was an Algerian who had been in the political directorate at the UN and had been very involved in Somalia in the UN UNSOM period. I think it was a dinner for him, or maybe it was for DOV or FAone of the UN peoplso I was next to Ishmael and we chatted in French. I had been there abouwhen did we have the strike on Sudasix months and we got this cable at night and we call and inform them. Of course the cable was already on the news that we had done this, that we were supposed to call and explain. Anyway, so I had to find him at eleven o'clock at night and I had the number and I called. So I started in French and I said something and I said, "Non, on se parlera en franï¿½ais, Monsieur Chef de Cabinet?" I was stuck for a word there, and he says, "Never mind, say it in English." [laughs] And that was the first time I knew that he spoke English. It turned out that he spoke five languages. After he became president later he went to Europe he was on television from Europe in Paris speaking French, in Rome speaking Italian; he spoke Arabic, Somalia, Englisfairly good English, not perfect, and a couple of other things. But that's because he had been born in Dire Dawa, this city in Ethiopia, which was the railhead there. And when the railroad was a condominium administered by Djibouti and Ethiopia they had the administrative offices in Dire Dawa and his father had worked for the railroad. So he had gone up there and there had been a French lycï¿½e there in those days; I don't believe there is now. So that's where he got the French and the English because it was the Ethiopian and the Italian and whatever. So that was kind of amusing, although I continued to speak to him in French or whatever, sometimes both. But that was unusual. Most Djiboutians in the government had no English whatsoever.

Q: In any place that's been a formal French colony or protectorate they don't let go easily and so the power center is oftethe French ambassador is usually quite a powerful figure? How did you find this in Djibouti at that time and the relationship with France?

SCHERMERHORN: Well France announced in the spring of '97 that they were going to reduce their presence in Djibouti, phased over a period. They had had something like 3200 troops and they were going to, phased over two years, take it down to about 2700. So that's a twenty percent reduction. Now this has an important impact on the economy because the families were sent; they had two-year tours and at least the officers families went. So there was an economy built up to support them. Some of it was owned by Djiboutians and some of it by other French people. For example, there were three French lady hairdressers in town. But it had a more economic impact than that for the Djiboutians. Of course the Djiboutians were quite concerned about this. But what was even more important than reducing the numbers, they also were going to change the way in which they assigned people. The officers were going to continue with two-year tours accompanied, but the men were now going to come on rotations of six months unaccompanied. So that was going to make a big difference, not only the reduction, but a significant, or so it appeared, a significant reduction in spending for this economy.

I think the reason this ambassador had been sent there is because he had this military background and he was supposed to be negotiating this. So he was not entirely popular, but he also apparently, I found out lateit wasn't apparent immediatelthat he wasn't that popular with the military either. I don't know whether they saw him as a renegade or what, one of their own who was not seconded by the foreign office to do the dirty work so to speak, and he was a bit of an abrupt personality; he wasn't that sympathetic a personality. His wife was very charming. I could see there was some sort of friction there, I think, with his colonels and the general. So this was a period of difficulty for the Djiboutians. They didn't know where this was going and what was going to happen. This was also the period when there was a lot of speculation as to what would the eighty-three year old president be doing, what was going to happen. Who would run for president, would he designate a successor, would it be Ismail or the chef de cabinet?

The French ambassador was leaving in the summer of '98. He'd been there since '96. So he had a farewell. Oh no, actually that's not how it happened. He'd only been there a year and a half. On Bastille Day, French National Day, in '98 he got up and he made a short speech and he said, "This is also my farewell. I'm leaving." This was a big surprise. Nobody knew this. So after people at this thing asked they said, "Oh he's going to Bahrain," and then he left. One of his daughters had come to Djibouti and was going to spend a year teaching as a French cooperant, that's like the Peace Corps except they get paid a lot of money which our Peace Corps people don't. So Sophie had to find a place to live because they weren't going to be there any longer and so after we saw her at one point in the spring we said, "Where's your father?" and she said, "Well, he's in Paris; he's not going to Bahrain." So there was something that went on there. I never learned what it was but he didn't get another embassy and I think he didn't get anything. I don't know whether it was because whatever he negotiated wasn't really what the French thought they wanted once they did it, or whether the military just said no. Bahrain was important for the military too. Whatever it was, it didn't have a happy ending exactly. But he did do what they set out which was to get the agreement to reduce the numbers and so on.

Now this was supposed to be phased, so it wouldn't have an immediate impact. Actually, he explained to me when we went and talked, because I went and talked to him, he said, "Some people say it's a big aim, but you have to understand that the enlisted men, a lot of them don't come on accompanied tours anyway." Like Legionnaires aren't married or their families have young children and they choose to stay there and they can go back every four or five months and visit their family. It's not actually quite as Draconian as you might think, but clearly the trend of the French presence was down. I remember the French number two when I was there, he was getting ready to leave and he used to pontificate about how the French would be out of there in no time and the future of Djibouti was with Ethiopia whether they liked it or not and so on. I didn't hear that from other people though.

Q: But unlike our people who served in Francophone Africa into the West where the French were sort of suspicious of the Americans and this was our chase garde or something like that, here the French didn't have any great proprietary feeling about this place?

SCHERMERHORN: They did. As I say, it's a love/hate?They were under the same strictures, I think, that our budgetary problems caused us in the mid '90s. They were told to look at ways to reduce expenses and they had had a military presence in Chad and that was basically finished or about to be finished. They still had some troops somewhere in West AfricSenegal, I think, or Cote D'Ivoire, but not much. I was led to understand that the biggest concentration of French military outside of France was in Djibouti with this three thousand, give or take. Again, people would say, "Oh yes, French; that's where the French Foreign Legion is," but the structure wasn't just the legion; it was a military encampment of five or six components. The commanding general was an air force general typically and there was an air wing with its own colonel with eight mirages at the airport, the military airport which was immediately contiguous to the civilian airport, so it was basically one airport. There was an engineering battalion but that was a battalion that was decommissioned while I was there; that was another ceremony. There was the regular army delatte, or the regular army. Each of these components was about five hundred or so with the commander, the five colonels. And then they had a hospital which had its own commanding general. There were actually three generals in Djibouti but two of them were medical service generals. The commander of the medical services for the whole military contingent and the director of the hospital. There was a naval attachï¿½ or something, but there were no navy people permanently there but the admiral of the Indian Ocean used to sail his flagship in about every six or eight weeks and he would invite you on board for lunch which was a great treat because it was the best restaurant in Djibouti. [laughs] They were really very nice to us.

The French were very hospitable and immediately invited me everywhere, as they did every American ambassador. That wasn't specific to me. We were included, and actually in a way I think they kind of liked the fact that it was a woman. They had an Ethiopian ambassador with her beautiful friends and they always had two women; and there were usually more men around because the wives either weren't there or temporarily?It balanced their tables, as they said. There were a certain number of Djiboutian couples who ate and entertained in the French manner too. It wasn't limited to French. And there were some other nationalities. There was a Greek couple. There was an international community and it included Djiboutians, the ones who had been educated in France and had connections. And there were a number of them. This businessman, Said Aleh Kubesh, and his wife was actually a French citizen. He was a very courtly gentleman. So there was that kind of social life. They knew a lot of things so you learned a lot about what was going in on Djibouti and what was going on in the business community and so on by going to this.

Q: Well I think this is probably a good time to stop. We've got you into Djibouti and we've talked about the staff; we've talked about sort of the diplomatic corps and also on the French side. Some other subjects I'd like to bring up would be, in the first place, how was the European Union represented there, and then you were there during the Ethiopian-Asmaran war. How did that play out and was Djibouti sort of a site where people would come over and observe this war? Did the assistant secretary for African affairs get involved in this with you? Obviously terroriswere you there when the embassies were attacked in Nairobi and Tanzania? The effect of this and then the September 11th attack in the United States and that. And then relations with Somalia because at that point we didn't have any relations there at all and you were sort of the closest person abutting onto thiwell, Kenya tobut how that played out and maybe there are some other things.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. All of the above. [laughs]

Q: Lange, let me go through my list maybe. In the first place, I saw on TV the other day that thI'm not sure if you mentioned the figure, but the French really have a considerable force in Djibouti, don't they? Because that's their main strategic African reserve, isn't it?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. The numbers have been coming down slowly from a high point of whatever it was, five thousand or something like that. In 1997 or so they had 3200 and there was a commitment then to take it down by about twenty percent to 2700 by the end of 2000, which they had begun to do. And then when the Eritrean-Ethiopian war broke out they actually augmented it a bit with some additional air assets and so forth. So they stopped the ratcheting down for a bit, but this was constantly going down. But at this point it is, so I'm told, the largest concentration of French troops outside of France because they no longer have very many, if any at all, in Chad and there are some in West Africa, Senegal, whatever, but not as many. I think all of their numbers are down worldwide, as ours are, after NATO in Europe going down, but that's still the biggest. But it's not just the Foreign Legion, as maybe we talked about before; it's a mix of troops.

Q: Well let's talk about the EU. EU is sort of gaining its clout and all. Did the European Union as an organization play any role in Djibouti?

SCHERMERHORN: The European Union had a branch office of its representation in Addis Ababa. In other words, the accredited European Union representative to Djibouti was the man in Addis. They had an office with one EU member representative in Djibouti which was to administer the aid projects or whatever. It was vacant when I arrived and then a few months after I got there it was a Brit who came, but one who had been in New Caledonia and other places and spoke excellent French. They didn't play much of a political role; like I said, it was purely an aid operation. It was so lopsided in a sense that the French, of course, were the first among equals there in terms of their embassy and their representation. It was their turf so to speak, so there wasn't a political element. The other EU member states their representatives for the most part, in Addis, were accredited. In the case of Italy it was their ambassador in Yemen who was accredited. I don't know why that?I think they thought their interests in Addis were probably sufficient that they didn't want to dilute that presence by?Also the German representative in Yemen was accredited, but otherwise it was the Danes and whatnot.

Q: Well let's talk about Ethiopia and Eritrea because you had a nice little war going on there, didn't you?

SCHERMERHORN: Being in Djibouti was like being the referee at the net in a tennis match watching them lob?I used to call it the war of the press releases because the embassies of the two countries every morning they would be delivering press releases which were diatribes against the other one until the embassy in Eritrea closed because they accused Djibouti of not being impartial.

Q: So tell me, when you arrived what was the state of relations with Eritrea and Ethiopia?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it seemed that everything was going along swimmingly. I wasn't aware of any problems. Apparently something came out that in the previous, at some point in '97 there had been some economic actions taken by Eritrea which were annoying to the Ethiopians, having to do with the exchange rate of the currency and a few other things there. On the surface it didn't seem it would be something that would erupt in any kind of violence or anything. So I think most people were taken by surprise, including probably a lot of the residentthe Ethiopians and Eritreans themselvewhen this broke out. It certainly took, I think, the United States by surprise. Nobody was expecting that kind of activity, as I said. There were apparently some issues between the two that had dwelled. From '93 when Eritrea was established as an independent state with the complete agreement and so forth of Ethiopia, it was lauded at that time as a very amicable way to arrange these things and so forth. So no one expected that the cousins who would basically? The Tigrean regime in Addis and Isais, the president of Eritrea? I mean they had fought together to oust Mengistu from power in Ethiopia, so no one thought that they would have a falling out.

Q: How did this impact on you? Did people take it seriously when it first happened?

SCHERMERHORN: Oh yes. I think they did in Washington. I think it was on a Thursday when it happened; it was the end of the week. I was talking to the office director on the phone and he said, "Well, the assistant secretary is going to take a trip to the area and see if they can talk to people and so on, and I've been tapped to go with them," and I said, "Well, isn't this something that EGAT ought to look into?" EGAT is the regional organization of which both Eritrea and Ethiopia and Djibouti and four other countries are members. They had a division that was reconciliation and peacekeeping and so onot physical peacekeeping in terms of assets, but reconciliation. And he said, "Well, we'll let you know once we're on the road whether there's any role for this," and I said, "Well it seems to me like we're trying to encourage the organization to be more robust in its actions and so forth."

Well I didn't hear anything right away. So I did ask to go and I called and asked for an appointment with the president. They didn't tell me to do that; I just decided I'd go see what he thought. And I had this meeting and I think he was taken by surprise too and he said at one point, "Well, if they don't settle this very soon, it will go on for a very long time," which, in fact, is what happened. You know if they don't, in the next few days, do something. I asked if he was going to take a role, both as the senior statesman among the EGAT countries and because the EGAT secretariat was there, and he said something about he had been on the telephone to both of them. This is a man who was in his eighties now, and of course the other two were fifty-something who perhaps didn't have as much respect for him as they should have. So he was prepared to play a role and so forth and I went back and reported what he'd said. But I didn't hear any more and they didn't push to involve EGAT. Both the NSC, Gail Smith and the assistant secretary in the State Department, with later Tony Lake as the national security adviser, basically played the role themselves and didn't look to any kind of international organization or regional organization to do much in it.

Q: Was this atypical?

SCHERMERHORN: I can't answer that because I didn't observe. Of course this was '98 and the assistant secretary for African affairs had only been in office since the summer of '97.

Q: Susan Rice, was that?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. But the Africa director in the National Security Council, Gail Smith, had firsthand personal knowledge of these actors. In her previous career, whatever it was, I'm not sure, it was with an NGO (Non-governmental organization) or something, it was a part of the world that she had been in and she did actually know both Malis and Isais personally. So I think that militated in favor of taking a more personal and less institutional approach.

Q: It smacks of let's get in there and do something.

SCHERMERHORN: This is where something, in terms of aid and humanitarian assistance in the administration's stated policy of we want to encourage regional organizations to be?we want to help strengthen them, we want to encourage them to play more active roles, this whole thing didn't play into that stated policy at all. AID was funding some activities in the EGAT secretariat to strengthen the apparatus, the institution itself, so that it could take a bigger role in these things. And of course at various stages along the way in the Clinton administration they said, "We encourage regional organizations; we think they're the way to go for dispute resolution and for cooperation on economic development and a whole range of issues." So this was a little bit of I don't know what the right word ibut it really was sort of don't do as we say.

Q: From what I've heard it just sort of smacks of some people want to get their hands on things and want to get out and do something rather than do it by formula.

SCHERMERHORN: There's certainly a role for personal diplomacy and I'm a believer in that too, but you have to also look at the whole picture and use the institutional arrangements when it made sense to do thaor at least force the people you are trying to work with to at least recognize the existence of those institutional arrangements. As I said, I think there were some very personal relationships here which skewed the methodology that they used.

Q: From your perspective when you heard about this, what was the thing about?

SCHERMERHORN: Well that was the first thing. They said Eritrean troops had moved in in this place called Badme and Ethiopia was saying, "No, it's ours," and Eritreans were saying no. If I understood this correctly, and I'm not sure that this is right at all, but apparently this area called Badme was kind of a no-man's-land; there was nothing there worth anything. It was pretty bleak territory. But for some reason Ethiopian settlers had been moving into the area so the Eritreans moved some troops out to say, "hey, wait a minute," and the Ethiopians said, "No, no," by one treaty from 1890-something, "this is ours." The problem was that apparently the line of demarcation was not absolutely clear from back at the end of the nineteenth century when some of the treaty with Italy and so forth laid down some boundaries there, but it was a little murky as to?

Q: Did you get involved?

SCHERMERHORN: As I said, right in the beginning I called on the president of Djibouti because of EGAT and because it was Djibouti and because he was the senior statesman I said that. It's fascinating. Nobody even acknowledged that we talked to him and I never got anything back from the office director after that that there might be a role for EGAT. Because he understood that too, that that was something to take into consideration. But then whatever happened with the people who got caught up with it, that didn't?

Q: Did you get involved in any support or missions or anything like that?

SCHERMERHORN: No, because Tony Lake made a stop in Djibouti once on one of his shuttle missions and I said, "Well, should we arrange a meeting with you?" and the answer was no, they didn't want to talk to?and I felt like this was really not very good either. Here's this senior statesman who you think if he's going to drop in?It was a little bizarre actually because the answer was, "Well, no, he's been in a lot of African countries but he's never been in Djibouti so he wants to touch down?" So I didn't make any arrangements and I didn't even want to tell them if he was just going to be at the airport. So then they come there and then he looks around and he says, "Oh, I'd like to drive around town," [laughs] so we did that and everything. But I didn't want to do that because if we had time to drive around town, we had time to call on somebody as a courtesy, but we didn't do that. The reason for that was, very early in the process when they'd been working on the shuttle the U.S. negotiatorthe assistant secretary and [inaudible] believed that there had been a leak from somebody; I don't know from where they thought it came; and so they were playing it very close to the vest and not talking at all, even to people in the two concerned embassies all that much.

However, as I said, we had the war of the press releases in Djibouti. [laughs] But it was fascinating because after a while, every day from the Ethiopian embassy there would be three or four a day and it would be this rhetorical denunciation of these aggressors who had moved into their territory and the language was?I mean the only political rhetoric people in that part of the world know is from all their Socialist masters. There were things like the Tigrean People's Politburo and stuff. These are our great democratic friends but they haven't been able to shed the language of what went before in the '70s and '80s there, so it was kind of amusing. The language of denunciation that you use, the venomous kind of rhetoric, is not something we're accustomed to dealing in. So that was a bit amazing.

The second thing was, you know, after you read a couple of these and then you realized that they were basically all the same. And then you looked at it again and you realized they were the same; you could've just changed the date from one year ago and one month ago. The point is they never changed their positions. They both were totally inflexible in this and still are.

Q: Did you get involved with refugees coming through?

SCHERMERHORN: Refugees were not coming into Djibouti there. That was not an issue.

Q: So you weren't feeling at all that you were going to get?

SCHERMERHORN: No. There was an issue about whether the Ethiopians might cross Djiboutian territory to get to the lower part of Eritrea, and whether the Djiboutians would allow them to do that because the port of Massawa, of Saab, was down here not far from?And the easiest way to get to that port and block it off completely would've been to cross a little bit of Djiboutian territory. Some people said, oh yes, that did happen, but others said, no, it didn't happen. So I don't know. But that was one of the reasons, that possibility. Some of the language that Djibouti used that caused Eritrea to say they were not being impartial. And they were about to assume the presidency of EGAT and they said it's particularly inappropriate if you're the president of the regional organization. But it had some interesting effects.

They had two EGAT summits of heads of states a year. One is always in Djibouti at the secretariat and the other rotates among the different capitols. The executive secretary of EGAT at that time was an Eritrean and the minute the war starteand there were EGAT meetings in Addis that he had normally gone tthe first time he asked for a visa to go to a meeting in Addis after the war started the Ethiopian embassy in Djibouti said they'd refer it to Addis and he never got an answer. So effectively what they did was paralyze the organization by not allowing him to do his job. And he was not a political man; he was an agronomist and he was being very scrupulous about not taking?So that was not a good thing. You had another reason to try to say you have to work with a regional organization because when you've got an Ethiopia, which is sort of the 800 pound gorilla in that organization, if they want to sabotage it from within easily, they can do it unless people call them to book for this. So the executive secretary had a hard time. And they played this game. He applied in the same way which is a staff member with the EGAT secretariat went over with the passport and they said now we have to work for it. And then they kept saying, "Well, we haven't heard from Addis." And then finally some members of the EGAT donors asked in Addis, "What about Dr. Tutestay's visa?" and they said, "Oh, we don't know. We've never gotten an application." So they were playing this game, which wasn't nice.

And then there was a summit where the foreign minister in Addis, the session was supposed to open at nine in the morning or something and he didn't get there because he was waiting to come dowhe had an Ethiopian government planhe was waiting to see if the foreign minister from Eritrea was going to show up because if he was then he was going to come because he didn't want to leave the chair vacant. On the other hand, he didn't want to go there if he didn't have to. So they were playing all these games with it. And actually he waited until he heard the guy was on the ground and then of course they had to delay the opening because he didn't actually?he led that at nine o'clock and got there at whatever it was, ten or something. That was the kind of nonsense that went on. But at least the organization didn't dissolve. They didn't say, "We're withdrawing from the organization;" they just kind of ignored it. But at least they didn't dismantle the thing on the basis of?

Q: Did Susan Rice come out to your place at all?

SCHERMERHORN: She came through Addis, then to Asmara, but she didn't come to Djibouti.

Q: Well then moving on to the bombs at our embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, that obviously caught you by surprise, but what did you do then?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it was actually a Friday morning, which in Djibouti is the weekenIslamic countrand the phone rang and it was somebody from Washington calling and saying, "Have you seen this?" and then I turned on the television. It was already on the television; if I'd had it on I would've seen it already. This was like noon or one o'clock and it had happened at nine or whatever it was in the morning. So immediately they wanted to know if anything was going on in Djibouti and as far as I knew the answer was no, but I called the head of the police, General Yasin, and said this has happened and "Would you consider extra activity?" and so forth and so on. So we did all that and had a country team meeting right away to talk about it and see what we needed to do in the embassy and then calling the American community and all those things you do when you have a problem like that. General Yasin was very cooperative.

We have a compound that one side is facing on the water with a beach in front, but there's a fence- (end of tape)

Tape 11, Side A

The fourth side borders on a road that goes right up the side and across from the entrance from the embassy you can see stores and residential buildings which is mostly vacant now. Anyway, he said yes to this and that, that he would do this, and he was really very cooperative. And he went through all this and he said, "Well, you know, you've got the vacant lot there," and then the French general was one place removed on the other side of this vacant lot and he had a patrol that always went around with French soldiers. The ocean, yes, and the [inaudible], and finally I said, "Well, yes, but what about the building in front of the street?" and he gave this smile and he said, "Oh, that's alright. We know what goes on in there." It was amusing because they could actually watch what was going on in the embassy from there anyway.

Q: What was going on in there?

SCHERMERHORN: No, I mean they had some people who were observing what was going on in the embassy, I'm sure. But anyway, they were very cooperative with that and did a lot of good things and so forth. Again, this is with an intelligence service and a police and so forth that we used to give some little assistance to in the mid '90s and then when various elements left the embassy and it was downsized, that kind of assistance and cooperation was no longer offered. They would've loved to have some help with it but I wasn't authorized to offer them anything. But then we later?that was right at the time and then in weeks following they asked every embassy what we thought we needed and asked us to do certain inventories and surveys. You know, things like putting Mylar on the windows, which we'd already done and so on.

And of course a lot of the embassies who did not have Marine Security Guards because one of the fallouts of the budgetary crunch of the mid '90s was that they no longer had universality of presence of Marine Security Guards and Djibouti was one of the ones where they had left shortly before I got there. I said they left in '97. I'm not sure that was?in some ways, in a country as small as Djibouti, having them is maybe more of a magnet than a deterrent. But in any case, that was not going to happen. That was not something that was in the power.

I was not too concerned about Djibouti. Obviously it's a place that has a lot of holes if one chose to try to take advantage of that, but I also thought that if there were bad guys coming through, that is a port of entry and they wouldn't want to do anything right on the ground in Djibouti because that would endanger any access they might have. One of the things I remember back in the Department they were saying, "What can you do in the embassy to cover information about how to deal with terrorism and all this stuff?" There was a whole list of topics and I say, no, no, no. When they take your embassy down to four officers including the ambassador and you have no military or intelligence assets or anything, there's not much you can do to figure out who's in the back of the mosque cooking up something. But I said that I was a little surprised that we hadn't paid more attention in Djibouti because there was a fictionalized work set in Djibouti, one of Helen MacInnes'? Are you familiar with her?

Q: Yes, Above Suspicion and?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, that, but this was called Cloak of Darkness and it was written in 1982. The storyline is there's a German sort of Red Brigade type who has gone to a training camp in Yemenow this was twenty years ago, but training camps in Yemen were on the screen. Then he hooks up with somebody and they take a dhow across the bottom of the Red Sea there, across to Djibouti, and land in a little covwhich you can do, you don't have to go through any process. Then somebody on the ground in Djibouti, some Arab family, gives them some support and then they stow away on a ship in the harbor that's going to Europe; and they do this all without being traced. This was something put on the table in 1982. It's perfectly plausible and it could well have happened without anybody in Djibouti knowing it. It could happen with the assistance of people in Djibouti; it could happen any number of ways. So yes, this is a place that, because it is the major port in a fifteen hundred mile shoreline there, it's the only really large port. So it should be a place of interest, but somehow the U.S. government had lost its interest in all this between the UNSOM in 1993 and?

We had a number of troops temporarily in Djibouti starting with the Gulf War and then through the UNITAP and UNSOM episodes. The minute we decided not to play in that sandbox everything left.

Q: One of the problems you mentioned, Yemen, is just across the water from you. Was there a Yemeni community in Djibouti?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes.

Q: Yemen has been the source of a lot of trouble and I was wondering was this of concern to us, the Yemeni community in Djibouti?

SCHERMERHORN: No. Maybe it should've been but it?It was a Yemeni community, but with long ties in Djibouti. Ambassador Shelker was originally Yemeni.

Q: The Yemenis have been exploiting their people for hundreds of years and it was natural to have a Yemeni establishment which would also give maybe scope to the more radical Yemenis to play around there.

SCHERMERHORN: I think that General Yasin was a pretty shrewd guy and I think the Djiboutians, my belief was they had a pretty good handle on what was going on. I mean if there were people there that we didn't like it was for reasons that were important to them. I'm not saying there were people there; I don't know. I think they did have a pretty good handle on it. And in that culture people, if they're foreigners, they stand out. I mean not just European, but even from the local?They can recognize Somali clans by the accent, the way the speak Somali. They have ways of intuiting and knowing what's going on that we can't really fathom.

Q: Did the attack on the World Trade Center in New York or by the al-Qaeda thing on September 11, 2001, were you there?

SCHERMERHORN: No, I wasn't there. I left in November of 2000.

Q: Well let's talk about Somalia because you talk about while you were in Djibouti about?because you were kind of the Somali observer, weren't you?

SCHERMERHORN: In 1992 when everybody pulled out of Mogadishu, the embassies and the UN agencies and the NGOs and so forth, all removed themselves to Nairobi. In 1991 the Somalilanders had said, "We're going to be independent," up there and then they had to work out some issues among themselves, until '95 when they had an all-clan conference and they put together a government headed by Muhammad Ibrahim Igal, who had been prime minister of the Republic of Somalia in 1961 to '69. In fact, he was on a trip abroad when Siad Barre staged his coup d'etat. Actually when I first learned I was going to Djibouti I didn't focus on Somalia that much and I didn't know a great deal about it. I knew something because I'd been interested in it, but not a lot. But anyway, in the course of my preparations to go there somebody said, "Well, people from the embassy in Djibouti have gone there," and I asked them, "Does that mean may I go there as ambassador?" and the answer was yes. I don't think the person who gave me the answer really thought about it very much because?And I said okay. Because at that point it was considered safe although the travel advisory issued by the State Department is focused on the lowest common denominator in security, which in the case of Mogadishu it was not very safe. It said as a country Somalia is considered one that they issue a travel advisory and you shouldn't go and so forth; but, in fact, for that portion of it in northwest Somalia?

Q: This was at one point kind of known as British Somaliland.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, that was a colonial moniker. Then I got into this very soon after I got there because I arrived at the end of January and a week or two later Mohammad Igal was coming back from a trip to Europe and he was coming Air France to Djibouti and then going?and so they wanted to meet me and so I had dinner with his foreign minister and whatevethey used these titleso before I'd even been to Somaliland I met him right there. He was actually coming because there was an EGAT summit in early March of 1998 in Djibouti and there was something afoot between the Djiboutian chef de cabinet and to see if they could see Igal because the chair for Somalia had not been filled by anyone for a long time. But in the event they were not able to bring this off, for whatever reasons, with the other members. So that didn't happen but that was the reason he was hanging around.

And of course I got the pitch from Igal about independence, recognition for Somaliland; and their thesis is that British Somaliland was granted independence by Britain, and Italian Somalia by Italy, in the same month, June 1960, but four or five days apart. And the two Somalias agreed to merge and create itself as the Republic of Somalia. In other words, the Republic of Somalia is not a colonial creation. It didn't exist in that. And this was an important issue because under OAU (Organization of African Unity) resolutions dating from 1962 were, they say, the sanctity of the colonial borders; and that was an attempt by the OAU not to let people keep peeling off and creating all sorts of problems. The Somalilanders say, yes, that's alright but we were never the colonial border anyway so there isn't any reason why we can't reassert our independence. And then they cite examples like the United Arab Republic that voluntary came together and dissolved and the fact that Eritrea was granted independence without regard to this OAU issue and so on, although there are some technical issues that are different there. Also at this time people were beginning to talk openly about independence for southern Sudan, which of course would be a violation of this OAU resolution if it were to come about.

And they had a lawyer write a good brief, so you could make a legal case for that, that it doesn't fit the model that the OAU was talking about; however, nobody in the international community has bought that yet, so?But this is something they keep pitching; they pitched it when I was there two weeks ago.

Q: Can't they just declare it?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, they've declared their independence, but if nobody recognizes them as independent? See, they've done that. And then some lawyers say, "Well, it wasn't mutually agreed to, this dissolution;" this is people responding to the UAR, and they said, "Yes, but there was nobody home in the south to deliver this message, nobody to negotiate with." Basically they say when those people in the south get their act together, if in fact that ever happens [laughs], then we might be willing to talk about getting together again. And they say, "We're being held hostage by the various factions in the south to come to some accommodation," and so on.

Q: Was their any interest in the AF bureau to this?

SCHERMERHORN: Somalia is one of those issues that here, when I go it's '98, and the Clinton administration came into office with this awful thing that happened before they really knew where Somalia was. They kind of there it was in October of '93 and they'd only been?So people would say things like, "I don't want to hear the word Somalia." In other words, they were just hoping it would go away or at least there wouldn't be any issue that would be so overriding that it would rise up and smack them in the face. So there wasn't any inclination to do anything proactive to help the situation. The only thing that was going on is that various people in the international community, not just Americans, the Italians have a great interest in there and various diplomats in Nairobi. These various faction leaders, or warlords, as the press likes to call them, would go around and it was sort of warlord tourism; they'd go and talk to various people and make the same old statements. They didn't really advance any dialogue nor do anything very creative or constructive. Each one would be saying why they should be the person that should be supported by the international community to do something. So that wasn't a very constructive dialogue over four or five years. The Italians were more interested in seeing something happen.

We had an AID program here at one point. Somalis were saying to me, when they had this big conference, "Why has the U.S. abandoned us?" and I said, "Well, we've been spending $26 million a year for the last four or five years, so I don't think we're exactly abandoning you. The issue is that $23 million of that was food assistance administered by OFDA," the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, humanitarian food aid. It's not development assistance. So the development assistance budget was like $3 million, out of which the overhead for the people who constitute these officials of AID who work on Somalia came. So that's not anything really. So in that sense they were right, but technically we weren't abandoning them, we were spending money. At one level the food assistance impedes a solution instead of?it's a necessary thing if you want to put off starvation but the politics of food distributiosome of the people who contract to distribute it were misappropriating it or using it, or just the fact that the contract provided funds to buy guns. It's the apple pie and motherhood; you can't say you're against humanitarian food assistance, but in situations like that it sometimes has some unanticipated consequences, shall we say.

Q: Were there any other countries that were trying to get involved in Somalia?

SCHERMERHORN: Italy. Well, there's this whole organization in Nairobi called the SACB, the Somalia Aid Coordinating Board, and that was put together when they realized all these NGOs and agencies and embassies and so forth had moved themselves to Nairobi, but a lot of them, especially the NGOs, were doing their own thing without coordinating it. So they built this mechanism and they have a rotating chair, which currently is the Dane because the Nordics do per capita more aid there. But it's all pretty small stuff. It's not the big infrastructure projects that you would need to actually get the economy going again.

Q: In Djibouti were there borders where you hal've heard about the Danakili or somethinvarious tribes crossing back and forth into Somaliland or something like that. Was this a problem?

SCHERMERHORN: This whole area, this is what it's hard for us to grasp because we deal in national borders and there the majority of the population is nomadic. They follow their camels and their sheep around and they don't say, "Gee, I just crossed this thorn bush and now I'm in Ethiopia," or "I'm in Djibouti," or whatever it is. So it's a very fluid border. And this again is a problem when you're talking about aid. Because we had no aid mission in Djiboutit was one of the ones that fell by the wayside in 1993 when AID said we could no longer have universality because we don't have enough program money. So they're doing HIV programs in Ethiopia and I'm saying, "How can you say..." The Ethiopian truck drivers who come to the port, and they have all the contracts for driving, are the ones who are bringing HIV up to Djibouti, so how can you say it stops here and you're not going to do anything. This is not a rational approach to these things but this is the way AID operates; they find it very difficult to do multi-country projects.

They had a program in the beginning of the Clinton administration which was a very good concept but there wasn't a lot that actually came out of it, and that was called GAGI, the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative: meaning that this is a nomadic, porous border and these are transcendent issues and you need to approach them cosmically. But they only have missions that operate on a bilateral basis. They used to say to me, "Well, yes, you don't have a program but perhaps we can do something under GHAI. So tell us what it is." So then I'd go and say, "Well how about doing a little (this, that and the other thing)?" and they'd say "Oh, that's a good idea, but of course we can't actually implement it because we don't have a mission there." So it was a totally circular?I found it a bit cynical. I don't know whether they meant it to be cynical but that's how I interpreted it after a while when they'd just keep running you around the bush on this.

Q: Was our embassy in Nairobi basically picking up what was happening in the warlord torn part?

SCHERMERHORN: I'm sorry, I digressed a bit there. I said they all moved to Nairobi and we have a position in the political section at the -02 level which is called the Somalia watcher and we also had another one that was called the Sudan watcher when we moved the embassy from there. Basically they talked to the people in the south, but the people in Somaliland, their natural orientation is not to go to Nairobi; they don't even go to Mogadishu. So they would come to Djibouti for consular work; there were some American dual citizens and especially as things began to be organized there, a lot of Somalis of the diaspora came back and they'd want absentee ballots if they were voting. So there was that issue and then it was simply that they came out through Djibouti much more. You asked about the tribes; you mentioned Danakil. That's an older name for the Afars. Geographically it's called the Danakil Depression, the end of the Great Rift Valley there. But the Danakili are actually Afars, which are not ethnic Somalis. So about thirty percent of the population now in Djibouti are Afar and they're in the north part near the northern part of Ethiopia and the rest of them are Somalis and the majority of the Somalis are from the Issa clan, which is there and also partly in Somaliland although the majority clan in Somaliland is Isaait's a different thing.

You had some clan rivalries there but you also had a number of Issas and Isaaqs? Well, in the time of the British they developed two boarding schools in little hill stations modeled on British boy schools; and those were the two schools where anybody who was educated in Somaliland at the secondary level has gone there. And that prepared them very well for universities in the U.K. or the U.S. or so on. And then there are some of those people who actually either originally came from Somaliland or were in Djibouti but their parents sent them to this school. So sometimes when you sort of scratch a Djiboutian who is speaking French and you find out they do speak English, it's because they're actually Isaaqs from there. It gets a little complicated. You have to know them for a long time before they tell you that because they've assimilated by learning French and being more?So that's one of the problems.

Issas and Isaaqs for the most part are not found in the rest of Somalia. Some of the other clans now have moved around a bit and it's a long, devolved story about?And that's part of the problem in the south now; there's land claims because some from the central part of Somalia had gone down to areas of the south where the land is more fertile and basically appropriated it and one of the problems of reconciliation in the south now is how to adjudicate these claims, or do you adjudicate them and if so, how.

Q: There has been a certain migration from Somali areas to the United States and we're living within a few miles of sort of a Somali settlement right here in Arlington and Fairfax county. Were these from the old Italian Somaliland area or were they from Somaliland?

SCHERMERHORN: Some of them are from Somaliland but most of them are from the south because they fled what became Siad Barre's increasingly repressive regime. Even the worst of dictators sometimes does a few things in the beginning in their reign or regime that are okay. One of the things Siad Barre did was he held a referendum on selecting an alphabet so they could actually have a written Somali language, which up until 1973 there was not one. And the vote was for the Roman alphabet as opposed to Arabic script. And there were a few things, but he got increasingly megalomaniac or whatever.

Q: What is the Somali language? Is it Arabic?

SCHERMERHORN: No, it's a Chasidic language, I think it's called. They know some Arabic though because of reading the Koran.

Q: You went into Somaliland then?

SCHERMERHORN: There was a little twin-engine plane hired by the UN to take UN agency people and it was based in Djibouti. It wasn't the whole time I was there; it was taken away. In Hargeisa they had UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) because there is still a big refugee community in the Ogaden portion of Ethiopia; there are two refugee camps of Somalis, many of them from Somaliland, others from further down. There were also two refugee camps still operating in Djibouti with Somalis and Ethiopians. The Ethiopians have now been sent back. Yes, that was a big problem for Djibouti; there were Ethiopians who claimed they were refugees from Mengistu, but of course he's long gone now but they haven't gone back. And the Somalis are beginning to repatriate some 2500 Somalis. But we're talking about much larger numbers in Ethiopi20,000 to 30,000.

Q: What sort of a presence did Ethiopia have in Djibouti?

SCHERMERHORN: Well it had an embassy and next to the French embassy it was important because it's the big neighbor. Of course a great portion of the traffic through the port is destined for Ethiopia because it's landlocked, and especially after May of '98 when the Eritrean ports were not used any longer. But even if the Eritrean ports were used they were good for the northern part of Ethiopia, but for that whole southern part you need?And of course when Mogadishu was a functioning port and Kismayo, the port of Mogadishu, but those are not really working to the capacity that they once had either, and won't be probably for a long time. So Djibouti is really the access point so that's important. The Ethiopians had a big embassy and they were there.

There was no daylight between Ethiopia and Djibouti in the beginning when this war started, in fact to the point where the Eritreans were complaining about this, that it should have been impartial. The response of the Djiboutians to that is the Eritreans are welcome to use the port if they want; we're not saying they can'which is true, they weren't saying, "You can't do that." But that wasn't exactly what the Eritreans had in mind. When the war started the eighty-three year old President Gouled was still in office and there was an election set for the spring of '99 and he had said he was not going to run; he was eighty-three and he'd had a good career. His nephew was his chef de cabinet and he was in his early fifties. Anyway, the idea was he was the heir apparent and he was going to run, but who was going to oppose him. And he was working very closely with the Ethiopians. In fact, the nephew, who had been born in Dire Dawa, which is in Ethiopia, because in the heyday of the railroad which goes from the port of Djibouti up to Addis, Dire Dawa is roughly halfway up in Ethiopia, and a lot of the management jobs of the railroad used to be in Dire Dawa and there was a French lycï¿½e there. That's no longer how it works, but anyway. And apparently the father of the chef de cabinet had worked for the railroad in Dire Dawa and that's why he learned his French in the lycï¿½e there. He's now the president of Djibouti and he speaks Amharic, Somali, Arabic, Italian, English and French.

Q: Were there any other relations or episodes that we haven't covered about your time in Djibouti?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, there are quite a few things. I can talk a little more about Somaliland. I asked if I could go there and so I met the president immediately because he was in Djibouti and then I went there in May of '98 and this was a little game; they knew if they said oh, it means the U.S. had recognized us if the ambassador from Djibouti comes here, but I couldn't come there and we would repudiate that. But they knew that the more people who came, the?So they were very anxious to get not only Americans, but anybody who would come. Of course when you're an ambassador you have to ask permission to leave and go and so I always asked and I always got permission. [laughs] In one sense it was probably encouraging them a bit. But I went for reasons; when I went in May there was a conference that was going on and the consul went to do the consular work. We had a little self-help money for Somaliland, $25,000, and we administered that from the embassy in Djibouti, as well as some DHR money, Democracy and Human Rights monea little pot of money for that $25,000. These were not government to government; these were local NGO type things that we would do that way. So various people in the embassy went for various functions and then we'd have a meeting with the American community there, such as it was, and so on when we did that.

Every time you went, what was fascinating about it is to see how this area was really functioning with the help of the Diaspora. One of the problems of not having recognition is that the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) wouldn't do anything there. The UN agencies did. There was no banking system, so that's why you had things like al-Barakat, which has featured now post 9/11 as possibly a conduit for money to terrorists. It's the system they devised to have money transfers in the absence of any banking system. This is not only in Somaliland, this is all of Somalia. And there were like five different telephone companies and you go in some office or a hotel and they have three or four telephones on the desk because they didn't have connectivity; so you'd have to have a phone for the three or four?but it was better than not having any and it was cheaper.

You have to understand, the whole city of Hargeisa was basically destroyed by the Somali Air Force; it turned against their own people and that's why they're so adamant about not wanting to join the south again and so forth. If you talk to some Somalilanders in the government, they'll tell you everybody is adamantly opposed to joining the south and if you talk to people in the south they say, "No, there are only a few diehards who don't want to come in with us." The truth is somewhere in between. It's not monolithic either way. It's one of those situations where politically it's impossible for a politician in Somaliland who wants a high office to say he's looking to accommodate with the south.

Q: Well then what else was going on?

SCHERMERHORN: Did we talk about the American community?

Q: Not really.

SCHERMERHORN: There is a little American community in Djibouti. Mostly missionaries and they do either educational or health. They're not proselytizing because they're not in that area.

Q: I was going to say in the Islamic world missionaries don't seem to get anywhere.

SCHERMERHORN: Yes. They're permitted to function as long as they're not actively proselytizing. One woman had put together an Afar dictionary. The Afar language is not the same as Somali so there had never been a written dictionary. Another one was a midwife who was working with the local hospital and another group taught English classes. I'd say there were like thirty, with their children, at any given moment. Sometimes they went off on their sabbaticals and then they would come back. There were like twenty or thirty people like that. And the pilot of this little UN plane, when we had it there, was a contractor with an American company. So there were a few people like that. We opened the swimming pool on Friday afternoon for them and had parties for the children. So we tried to keep the doors open to all of this.

There was a UN family of agencies in Djibouti. The UNDP (United Nations Development Program) rep, the senior person of course; the UNHCR, the refugees; WHO (World Health Organization); UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund); and WFP (World Food Program) because that was very important not only for Djibouti, but when they had famine in Ethiopia the port of Djibouti was where the food came through. They actually had more to do with making it work for Ethiopia than? In fact, when we had drought in '99 and so forth, AID was very forward leaning on this and they didn't want to have a problem; they wanted to be ahead of the curve on this, which they were, and they got it organized to bring in all for Ethiopia. This is this issue of the borders; it doesn't stop at the border. And I'm saying, "But there's drought in Djibouti. They have the same problem," and the head of OFDA, of foreign disaster assistance, wanted to come to look at the port of Djibouti to make sure that it was going to work for Ethiopia and I said, "Well you can come but only if you let a couple of sacks of grain fall off that lorry before it leaves Djibouti." This is not right. And they said, "You didn't say anything about it," and I said, "Yes I did. I have three cables asking for the declaration you have to make." Nobody pays any attention to this. Anyway, the guy did come, Hugh Parmer, and he did then allocate something for Djibouti. He wanted to go and talk to me about the port and I said, "Are you going to go and tell them that you're only interested in this because of what you can do for Ethiopia?" This is the mindset of this. It's very difficult. You have to beat them over the head.

Same thing with there's an organization called FEWS (Famine Early Warning System) and it's something that is a contractor to AID and they have an office in Nairobi. This, again, started after the famine in the '80s when they decided they needed to be able to anticipate these things more skillfully and with longer lead time than had been the case before. It's a lot of scientific indicators, but it's not simply rainfalthat's an obvious onbut they get into secondary and tertiary indicators like they measure the weight of the animals going to market and whether they're the right size, they've gotten nourishment and all. They have a whole bunch of things. They also had a bulletin [laughs] and in the summer of '98 one comes across my desk and it's got a nice map of that section of Africa showing the EGAT countries because FEWS is operating in Nairobi with USAID for the EGAT countries.

All the countries are shaded that are in thiSudan and Ethiopiand then there's this little blob that doesn't have any shading and it's Djibouti, and I'm looking at this and I called the fellow up and I said, "Djibouti isn't shaded. Does that mean you don't do anything about Djibouti?" and he said, "Yes, that's right." And I said, "Well how can you call this the Horn of Africa that you're dealing with? That is the Horn of Africa." And he said, "Well it wasn't in our contract with AID," and this was because AID didn't have a mission there. I said, "Well, it doesn't make any sense. These borders are porous. You can't have this initiative for everything around it and it doesn't apply here." So he kind of laughed and actually he happened to have in his office when I called somebody from their office from Washington, so we got on the phone. So I had to complain about this. I said it's not rational. So there was a lot of to'ing and fro'ing and I finally said, "I wish you would come to Djibouti and look around here," and so the guy did come up. He spent three days and we showed him Djibouti's scientific institute and all these things. So he said, "Well that's very interesting. Now we're supposed to be looking for signs of impending famine. Here it's like it's a chronic condition in Djibouti." I said, "Yes, that's right." So they're not interested. I said I could understand that if our AID people were responding to the fact that it's a chronic condition; they're not, they're only responding when it pops up as a problem. So it really kind of gets to you after a while. But at least they did?and even AID was embarrassed that they had not marked it. I said, "How can you call it the Horn of Africa project when it's not?"

I think I talked about General Zinni and CENTCOM. As I said, because they had taken away everything in the mid '90not only from Djibouti, but from some of the other smaller countriethe only thing we had was a little bit of international military education and training money, IMET; we had $100,000 a year which is the cost for two students. It was not money that ever popped up in Djibouti. They costed out a couple of military exercises; these are what they call humanitarian. They do things called vet clinics where they come and they inoculate the goats and everything and this is good for where we are. But they would cost those out like at $300,000, but again, because the people who did it came on commercial air and they costed their time or their salary, it was not money that actually did anything tangible that you could see in Djibouti other than whatever these people did in the course of the exercise. So we're not really talking about any kind of assistance other than the $25,000 of self-help.

General Zinni was very good and he came four times, in the AORs they call iareas of responsibilitand I had some ideas about things I hoped they would try to do and he was very responsive. Not big things, but ratcheting up the level of exercises a bit and doing some special humanitarian activities and doing a port call. We hadn't had a port call since 1994 in Djibouti. Now this is the major port in the area. We had a bunkering contract so that ships came in and refueled for two to three hours and then left again; but they hadn't actually had an official port call and we finally got one of those in April of 2000. One of the reasons we weren't getting these: the admiral, apparently, and other naval people were very interested in beefing up Aden which was coming on stream as this modern port that had been constructed there and so they were trying to get everything to go therin fact, even to the point of canceling the bunkering contract for the refueling for some of these ships. We were told that they were going to cancel this like three or four days before, "Oh, we're going to cancel this," and I said, "Please don't do that. This is the only thing," other than the little exercises that we have here, and again, it doesn't mean- (end of tape)

Tape 11, Side B

I thought the whole idea was we wanted options. And they said?this was green-eye shade stuff, the Defense securitwhatever that acronym is; it's in Fairfax out here. They cost out what the refueling costs are in the places they do it and they said, "Well, it's more expensive than it is in Aden," because the management of Aden was given a preferential rate when the new port opened in order to get people there. I said, "Even if it is more expensive you want to have options, right?" and there was a lot of putzing around.

Q: Was this before the Cole was attacked?

SCHERMERHORN: Yes, this was before the Cole. This was the end of '99 they were going to cancel this thing. So we bitched and moaned and said all this and they said, "Well, okay. We'll give another contract but not right now," or something like that. And then of course the Cole happened and now, of course, Djibouti, after absolutely ignoring the whole thing, now they're interested again. This is the problem; we're very changeable, in and out..

Q: You better explain for somebody what the situation was with the USS Cole.

SCHERMERHORN: Well, the USS Cole was a U.S. naval ship that was calling in Aden port. They had some kind of floating pier or whatever it was; so it wasn't actually anchored close to shore, it was off out in the bay and a small boat did a suicide mission with bombs and blew a big hole in the Cole. It wasn't sufficient to sink it but it did kill seventeen sailors and a number of wounded. It was clearly a terrorist operation. And this was after looking at this port and saying they've designed it in a way that is going to prevent this kind of thing from happening because it's not going to be right close to shore and everything. But that was a very, very unexpected event; it was the second week of October in 2000.

The French have a military hospital in Djibouti and so they sent their medevac plane with six doctors from the hospital over to Aden right away because the American embassy in Yemen is in Sanaa, not in Aden. There was only one military attachï¿½ or something on the ground in Aden at the time this happened and they had to get everything down there. So the French just sort of did this and they went and the doctors did triage, looked around and said, "We're going to take these eleven back to Djibouti and operate because your medevac plane hasn't even left Germany yet and it'll be nine hours flight here and two hours on the ground, nine hours back and we don't think these eleven will make it if they have to wait that long." So they brought them back and operated; all eleven of them. After twelve hours in Djibouti we had a plane come, they were able to be taken out and go back to Germany and they were absolutely wonderful. They have two French medical generals; the head of the hospital and the head of the medical services, plus all these doctors, and they did a fantastic job and they were so cooperative and so wonderful on the ground. You know, there's a lot of complaining about the French being very difficult to deal with and so on, but when you're working on the ground with them they're terrific. So that was very, very good.

Q: So Aden, the bloom was a little bit off the rose, wasn't it, as far as?

SCHERMERHORN: See this happened just as I was leaving. It doesn't take any great mental capacity to know that Djibouti is?People used to say, "Well it's small and so we're not interested," and I'd say, "It doesn't matter if it's small. As the real estate agents say, 'location, location, location.'" But we just had people who didn't want to pay any attention to that.

Q: What else do you have on your list?

SCHERMERHORN: Just to emphasize how useful Djibouti is as a platform: when we had the floods in Mozambique in the winter of 2001 and we did a massive airlift of assets and personnel down there to help. They were coming from Germany and some were coming from the U.S. to Germany. So they had to have one stop and Djibouti airport was it, so our poor little major who was the only military officer there was busy doing all this. In the course of a month we had two or three flights a day down there. The Djiboutians were very cooperative with all of this.

There was a policy issue, which is a very interesting one also: when I got there I found that there was a back issue about paying landing fees at the airport. A policy that somehow had been clarified or enunciated around '94 was that military planes or U.S. government planes that we don't pay landing fees on state to state as a reciprocal thing; but of course that's a bit of a phony argument. A country like Djibouti doesn't have anything to reciprocate with. Nothing that they'd get any benefit from. So we were not paying landing fees at the airport for any of this. Every time they would come, they never refused us but they would present the documents and the army major would sign the part of it that we could pay for and the other was under protest. But what they were saying, there were also certain fees we could pay but they didn't disaggregate this in the bill, the landing fees from the other thing, so we weren't paying really anything much at all except the refueling. And the airport management would come and complain about this.

Our claim was that if it were a private airport we would pay, but we said, no, it's a parastatal field, which is truit was under their Ministry of Transportation. But they said, "Well yes it is, but we don't get any funding from the ministry. We're supposed to be self-financing so we not really a parastatal." This is what the lawyers get into. And then of course to complicate it even more, we had been paying these fees back in the period of the Gulf War. We had a lot of traffic. So it was lucrative; it was good for them. And then at some point in '94, as I said, the lawyers determined that okay, we can take the stance that we don't need to pay this. It wasn't only in Djibouti; almost every country in Africa had this issue. We had run up a big tab here and we weren't paying. At one point the management at the airport used to say, "Well we'd like to say you can't use it," but of course the president of the country wouldn't have done that because that would've been a policy earthquake, but it was an irritant. And then they said, "Can't we get some help with the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration)?" and so I went back and asked about that and the answer was, "No. The FAA doesn't give help unless American carriers come in," and of course there were no American carriers going to Djibouti airport. I said, "Well there aren't any American carriers but there are a hell of a lot of U.S. military airplanes. Either the military or the FAA ought to be interested in helping the airport." They wouldn't do that either. Sometimes we don't seem to know where we're going.

We did solve the landing fees problem though because I had our economic officer write a number of cables and we went back and we asked them to get the documentation. You know, you claim that you're not a government organization; show us the charter that we can send back that you have to be self-sufficient. Finally we wrote this and I said, "Look, I think we can make a good case here," and we did. Just after I left they came back and said, "Yes, we'll pay the landing fees." They had to disaggregate the bills but they'd gotten a new computer and we helped them figure out how to do that. But it's only fair. That was an issue that we got a little help for.

The question of an election in Djiboutl started to tell you about thawhich was very interesting. Of course when you're there the opposition politicians always want to come in and talk to you. And I use the plural advisedly because there were a lot of opposition politicians representing themselves basically; political parties are not well advanced. They would come in and I used to hear people talking outside and they'd say, "Well, you know, they're all so fragmented. How are they going to do anything?" and finally I got tired of listening to this myself and I'd say, "Well, you know, this is all very interesting, but you know, this one was in the other day and now you're here and somebody else wants to come next week. If you don't work togetheif you're not a unified oppositioyou're complaining, but?" They'd say, "Well, how are we going to counter the government?" and I said, "Well, you have to be a political party. You have to be a unified opposition."

Well this went on for a while and then about six weeks before the election I saw on my calendar there was a deputation and they were all coming in together and they came in and they said, "We've agreed. We got together this week and we have a charter. We're the unified opposition and this is our candidate," and they pointed to one of them, and that's what they did. They didn't do it because I said that; there were other people telling them that too, but they did this and so they actually had a horse race for an election. The chef de cabinet, he was going to run; he did get a little nervous at this. As long as they were fragmented he knew there was no chance. But when they actually looked like they were going to cooperate that put him on his mettle and he organized the campaign. He actually offered to debate the guy, who actually declined, and they gave him television time and they let them have rallies. And the president had an election manifesto, his vision for Djibouti, and they had a press attachï¿½ and the foreign press. And they ran the thing and it was a big improvement over previous elections. It wasn't perfect, but of course they never are. Ours aren't perfect either, right?

Actually the chef de cabinet did win but it was with seventy-four percent of the vote. And this was at the same moment when these great bastions of democracy in AfricMeles in Addis is running and getting ninety-six percent of the vote; Mubarak in Egypt is getting ninety-seven percent; somebody in West Africa is getting whatever. And they didn't get any credit for this at all and even the international observerwe tried to get election observers and that wasn't going to work. Finally it did work; we didn't have American ones there but we stimulated the UN. We worked with them to say, "Look, we need to have some kind of observers." So it ended up being the Arab League and the Islamic conference and the OAU, which was okay; those were all local. They were very complimentary and this really worked. It actually worked out to the president's advantage because he had to do something that looked like it was?and then he did and it worked out.

And then there was another very important thinthere were so many things going on there: they had had this dissident activity with the Afar minority. They had a little shooting war in '93 and '94 to early '95 and then there was a truce. Most of the Afar dissidents came back and were given some jobs in the government. But a minority of them stayed out in the cold and their leader, a man called Ahmed Dini, went in exile in Paris. He left and went to Paris. And periodically there would be missives and there would be some shootings, or whatever, and this dissident group would claim responsibility maybe for them. In the winter of 2000, in February, Ahmed Dini comes back from Paris. So he's been back about two weeks or so and I said, "Please call him up and ask if he would like to talk to me because I would be very pleased to meet him." So he did come to the embassy, and of course I knew the government would know because they knew everybody who came ibut that's okay.

So we had this interesting conversation. I said, "Why did you decide to come back now? Why not two years ago or two years in the future or never?" He said something quite profound actually. He had beautiful French, in his seventienot a young felloand I thought I was going to see some wild-eyed radical, the way he'd been depicted to me, but he was a very thoughtful looking intellectual character. He said, "Well, it's clear that neither side can prevail; neither the government nor we Afar minorities here. That's a situation that's not good for anybody in Djibouti. If the government can't prevail and they're at a standstill, they can't get on with doing things that need to be done here. So it's in everybody's interest to bury this hatchet." He didn't use that word, but that's the gist of it. He said, "For Somalis and Afars both, our future is not with Ethiopia. What we need to do is establish a stable platform here in Djibouti for the whole region. And therefore I've decided I'm going to come back and make my peace and work to cooperate." What he meant by that, they still had to go into power-sharing negotiations because what the Afars wanted was basically to devolve the government to the local districts, but Djibouti is so small that you can't do much of that.

But the primary issue they were interested in was devolving the justice system so that everybody didn't have to come into Djibouti city, that these four district seats could have?They began those negotiations which were very slow and went on and on, at the same time that this Somalia reconciliation that the president launched was beginning. That's another whole issue too. As I said, Somali reconciliation is a very important issue and I should devote a separate issue to that. Also, as I said, when the president first took office, President Ismail Omar as he's called, in May of '99 there was virtually no daylight between Ethiopia. They were all very cozy together talking about their future together and all of this. Then the president goes off to his first UN General Assembly four months later to New York in September of '99 and he devotes his maiden speech there to launching an initiative for Somalia reconciliation.

He says, "It's time; the Somali people have suffered too much and we've gone for ten years without any progress on this. The time seems right now. People are tired; they're ready to take a further step and we Djiboutians are well placed by both by ethnicity and geography to stimulate this process but we're a small country and we can't do it by ourselves. Therefore we solicit the moral, psychological and material support of the international community." And he said, "We will do our part and then the Somalis must do their part; and if those two things happen then the international community must do its part." So then he steps down from the podium and they all were laughing. Before he was back at his hotel room probably the first fax was in the office, from Somalis in the Diaspora anyway. And everybody applauds and so forth and the Security Council gives a resolution: yes, everybody is for peace; nobody is going to say no. So he launches into this activity which becomes all-consuming over the next year. But this is not something that Ethiopia was really very enthused about. That's another whole set of issues which I won't talk about now about why that's true. So that put him a little out of step with Ethiopia. Then Ahmed Dini in the middle of all this comes back in the winter. Then in April of 2000, again when this process is going on, a consultation within Somalia, within Djibouti, and with people in the Diaspora, constant focus groups and meetings preparatory to a big gathering; this is all going on and all the ministers are very involved. Then the president announces that he's signed a management contract with the port's authority of Dubai for a twenty year management contract for the port of Djibouti. Again, he hasn't consulted anybody in Djibouti about this, understandably. But it was probably a brilliant thing for him to have done.

The port is the only income generating asset in Djibouti; there's nothing else. It's a parastatal and the government is controlling it. It's the trough that everybody feeds at. And they're not reinvesting the money that they need to reinvest to upgrade it and modernize it and expand it and do all those things that are necessary if it's going to survive. But as long as it is in the government's domain it's very hard for the president to say no to people because he's using it too. This is how they find everything that's going on. So the ministers are not going to be happy. A lot of people are not going to be happy here. The employees in the port are not going to be happy because there's a lot of featherbedding. So they know if it's privatized that basically there'll be unemployment, at least initially until they build it up. And of course the third and probably most important party that is not happy with this are the Ethiopians because they were operating through the port under an agreement signed in 1995 which was on very favorable terms for Ethiopivery low costs in tariffs and all of that.

Now why such an agreement was signed in 1995 on terms that were so preferential for Ethiopia, I don't know, but they were. I think at that point when the two Eritrean ports were still on that Djibouti thought it would offer lower prices and attract more business but it turned out to be that it was too good a deal and they were losing money on it. The president says he's going to give the management, including setting tariff structures and all of that, and he doesn't consult beforehand because if he did everybody would say, No, don't do that. But it is a brilliant thing. The port's authority of Dubai at that point was operating Dubai port, Beirut port, Jeddah container port, and another port in Oman. So this was going to be their fifth port in the area. And the operations manager for all of this happened to be an American who was a thirty-year veteran of the Merchant Marine and very efficient and so forth; and the team was international. They put in a Belgian who spoke both French and English as the resident manager to do this. This turns out to be a good thing but of course Ethiopia at this point is getting very annoyed. So you begin to see daylight here between them. He's gone off on his own bat and done some things that the Ethiopians are not happy with.

And again, this is all going on in the light of the Somalia initiative which many, many observers said, "Oh, it's just another attempt and it's not going anywhere again," and so forth. And I said after watching this and talking to people, "Well no, this is different this time for a lot of reasons. It's much more inclusive; it's much more far-reaching; it's predicated on a different basis than previous attempts," and so on. I said, "They're very determined. There will be a result. The issue is not whether there will be a result. The issue is whether it will be a viable and a durable result. There are certain things that people in the international community could do now to try to ensure that it is viable and durable." But again, we couldn't get anybody interested in this. But the whole process is fascinating and it's a subject of a whole separate thing.

So here we have a new president in Djibouti, thirty years younger, and an activist. He's doing things; he's looking ahead. He has a vision for Djibouti; he's not just letting it stand there. But he's running a great risk of making a very dangerous enemy of Ethiopia which if it's goaded enough to the point?Some people have said, "Oh, the only future of Djibouti if the French ever leave is with Ethiopia. The Ethiopians would move in and do it." I think what we've seen in the last two or three years: the United States needs a place like that when we need it. We don't always need it, but when we need it, we need it. So I think for the international community, and for NATO allies and so forth, it's not in anybody's interest to see Djibouti be subsumed under one of the other countries in the area. It is a platform, as Ahmed Dini said, that's useful to people and if you let the Ethiopians have too much sway they will run over it if they could.

At one point the French were going through what we were going through in the mid '90s and saying we've got to reduce government costs. That's when they began to ratchet down the presence. And there were French people who were saying, "Well, you know, it's not too long before we'll be out of here too." But I think maybe in the last couple of years now there's been some revisionist thinking and people say yes, there's a cost involved in being in a place like this, but it's an essential cost because of their other interests.

Q: Was the Central Command looking at this sort of thing, do you think?

SCHERMERHORN: Well, I don't know. I used to talk about those things with General Zinni. As I said, I was saying, "I thought we wanted options." A question which the U.S., as far as that goes, hasn't gone into is what would we do if the French said Look, we can't bankroll this operation anymore. We're picking up our marbles and leaving. I don't think they're ever going to do that; I shouldn't say "ever." There might've been some movement in that direction three or four years ago but I think it's probably nothing now. But that's always a possibility. Is this something that's important enough to have some kind of NATO presence, whether it's the U.S. or some other European country? I don't know.

Q: While you were doing this did you ever run across our old Saigon colleague Larry Pope? Was he political adviser to Zinni at the time?

SCHERMERHORN: When I went to Djibouti in January I went by Europe, of course, and I went via Brussels. General Zinni was making a trip to the AOR but not to Djibouti at that point. When I was talking to Larry he said, "We're going to be in Brussels," and I said, "Well I'm going to be there." So I actually met General Zinni for the first time in Brussels and we talked, and Larry was with him. Larry came once with him but the other three times Larry didn't come so I didn't actually see him on the ground that much, but we used to talk.

Q: Was there a community of interest by telephone, fax, e-mail, or something between you and the ambassador in Asmara or Addis Ababa or Nairobi?

SCHERMERHORN: Well we didn't have classified e-mail and some of the others did. Yes, there was some discussion. The embassy in Addis was extremely prolific. You'd look at the cables in the morning and there would be twenty long conversations. In fact, they finally said back in the African bureau that we didn't need quite so much detail. [laughs] In Eritrea they had some difficulties there because of course when the war started that was more difficult for that embassy that they drew down their staff and they also in Addis drew down some of the staff. But in Eritrea there was a gap between ambassadors for a while. Yes, we used to try to talk but, you know. The phone connections weren't always that good either.

Q: Anything else?

SCHERMERHORN: The French community there was very good. I had this rather amusing?as I said, we didn't have any USIS programs there and when USIS left various embassies in 1993 and 1994 they were more organized. They left a memorandum of understanding with the post about what USIS programs were still accessible without actually having a presence there. Their memo had something like twenty different programs on it. In the case of Djibouti, they said we could continue to access two programs. One, we could buy books from their list. If we didn't have an allocation for their budget, we had to find the money from somewhere to do that. And we could nominate people for international visitor's programs without any guaranteed numbers of positions and we did do that a little bit. So that wasn't much of anything.

They were always begging me to teach English there. Here's Djibouti, this Francophone hole in the Anglophone donut, and what they really wanted, they knew that they needed English. They had Arabic and French and if they had the English they could try to position themselves as a service industry using the port and various things, and just to get on in the world, go to universities that were Anglophone. And I said, "No, USIS doesn't do that unless the programs are self-sufficient." In other words, you have to charge money for it so that it pays for itself. I mean this is ridiculous in a place as poor as Djibouti. And then the head of the Alliance Franï¿½aise came to me and he said, "I've been teaching some courses in English at the Alliance because my ambassador here," the French ambassador, "wanted me to do this." Well the French ambassador who wanted him to do this was a somewhat unusual person. It was his second career. He'd been an army officer and he was an Arabist. He understood that they needed some other strings to their bow, and also I think the French, even though they said they weren't leaving, they knew that they needed to expand the opportunities for people there in whatever way they could. And he said, "But, you know, I was doing it this year but my principals in Paris got on to me and said I can't do it anymore." Well of course that would be like USIS teaching French [laughs]. He said, "But I can make the building available to you for the same thing if you will pay the teachers," and I went back and said, "Can we do that anyway?" We're not talking about big, big bucks here. And the answer was, "How are we going to get the money to do this?" I don't think there's any place in the world where the director of the Alliance Franï¿½aise [laughs]?This is really?

Actually, somebody who had read our MPP?we had this management program plan that we had to do every year and we put all these things in it all the time and nobody would ever?Well, we can't do it because we don't have the money. And I said, "Well, you have to read the beginning of it, the rationale about why it's important to do something here," which is what I said: location, location, location. And the fact that you can't isolate Djibouti in this nomadic, porous border region of the world and say this little place, nothing around it impacts on it. Of course it does. So there were anomalies like this that you laugh when you hear about it, but the director?So what we did, and I said to my people I wanted them to go out and be seen, to do things, be encouraging; always be present in the donors?and even stimulate. They didn't always have donors coordination meetings and we used to organize some of those. The UN people came and went and it wasn't always that?And of course it was a little embarrassing because we never had anything to put on the table except our encouragement to the others to put something on the table [laughs]. But anyway this was appreciated and I said we'd go out and we'd do things and we did a lot with the self-help and I had some wonderful people in the embassy who were doing things like teaching sewing classes to women. And it wasn't so much that we did big things, but we were expressing an interest so people on the street knew that the Americans were sympathetic. And even the American community said there had been periods there when there hadn't been much visibility from the embassy and they appreciated that we were?We were not doing much, but we were maximizing what little we did have there to do.

For example, one of the things is that my admin officer actually started a school. It was going to be a bilingual English/French school. She kept it going for a year and a half and she left and when she left I worked very hard to keep it going but I couldn't get anybody else and I knew that when I left that nobody in the embassy was going to be working on that. I don't know if it's still going. She said, you know, in America the parents have to run the schools; you have to do these things and so on. And we did actually get a grant from the overseas schools for $10,000. This is a little difficult because when the admin officer thershe had a child in the school; that was sort of her purpose in starting ibut of course they like to see American children and because there hadn't been any school like that the missionary children usually went to the French school. But one of the reasons to do this is it was hard to recruit people to Djibouti; if they had children they said, Well, there aren't any schools, which of course I used to laugh at that. I said, "Of course there are schools. They happen to be French speaking schools here." But if you didn't want to do that?Some parents look at that as an opportunity, but there are some who don't. The idea of having this school was to make it slightly more attractive to getting recruits from Foreign Service people to go there too. But I don't know how that's prospering. But it took a lot of work and we did things like that.

I don't know. When I left I had a meeting with the president, as you dyour farewell caland I got up to leave and he escorted me out in the anteroom and then he beckons to this flunky who is standing there, who pops up and he's got a little pillow and he's got a little box on it. So the president gives me a medal. I knew that some ambassadors got medals when they left, but it made my jaw really drop, like the Chinese ambassador who had been there for four years who didn't speak English, French or Arabic or anythinhe had to go around with a minder; he got a medal, but that's because the Chinese do a lot of bricks and mortar. They were building some things. They don't create jobs because they bring in Chinese to do it all, but at least there's a building standing where there wasn't one before. I clearly was surprised and when I got back to the embassy my DCM said, "Oh yes, well I thought you'd get a medal," and I said, "Well I didn't think I'd get a medal because not all the ambassadors got them and we don't do anything here. At least the Chinese do something." So when I came back to Washington I called on the Djiboutian ambassador to say the president was very kind when I left and I had a good meeting. So he says to me, "Well, you know, you're the first American ambassador we've ever given one to." Now I don't know if that's true or whether he was just?I think it was. He's been here since 1986 so he knows. And so I was pleased. And then he said to me, "Do you remember what I said to you before you left for Djibouti?" and I said, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador. You said, 'just make a difference,'" and he smiled at me and he said, "Yes, you did." As you can tell from this, I was somewhat frustrated by my own government's lack of attention and interest, but this was nice.

Q: Well you did what you could and from what you've been saying it sounds like whenever there was an opportunity, get in there and do it.

SCHERMERHORN: I mean like things with the IMF, they had a program but not a resident office. Shortly after I got there somebody said, "Oh, the IMF rep is in town," so I called and I said, "I'd like to meet you." So he came over and he talked and I sail hadn't been there that long but I'd already figured this out [laughs] "You know, I really think if you really want this to work here, you really need somebody on the ground here." That was like February or March. They came back a couple of more times in the spring and he said, "Well, you know, we are thinking about it," and I kept pressing for that. And then they did put one in. I'm sure, again, that I wasn't the only person saying that, but the fact that?and it really was something that was needed to get any result. It's just like the African Development Bank had a seminar there and I went up to talk to the person afterward and the seminar they had was actually with the local NGO communitand this was a first for Djiboutto ask the NGO what are your priorities, what do you want to see happen in the country; what do you think we need to do. And so I was talking to the man after this and he said, "We've had a few big projects here that are white elephants. We came in and designed these big things and we didn't monitor it very well and we didn't actually test whether they were appropriate projects. We realize we don't have a resident office here so we haven't paid the right kind of attention to this and we want to do better in the future with it." So, again, a lot of these countries get a lot of blame that AID doesn't work, but a lot of it is the fault of the country. I took that as a good sign that there's more?and this was another African saying this; it wasn't another European coming in and saying, Look, they've done it all wrong. So I think there's some hope here to?

Q: Well, Lange, I want to thank you very much. That was very interesting.

End of interview