

CEYLON-SRI LANKA

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MAX WALDO BISHOP
Consul
Colombo (1944-1945)

Ambassador Max Waldo Bishop was born in Arkansas in 1908. He graduated from the University of Chicago in 1932. He served in the United States Army Reserve until entering the Foreign Service in 1935. Ambassador Bishop's overseas career included positions in Saudi Arabia, Japan, Thailand and Ceylon. Ambassador Bishop was interviewed in February 1993 by Thomas F. Conlon.

BISHOP: In 1944 I was assigned as Consul in Colombo, Ceylon. I didn't do much consular work. My principal duties involved advising our military leaders in Southeast Asia Command on the various problems which came up, which have been well described in published histories. I was also assigned as a secretary of the Mission in New Delhi, India, where I was Political

Advisor to General Wedemeyer, then the commanding general of the U. S. Burma-India Theater of Operations. I knew General Merrill, who commanded Merrill's Marauders in Burma.

Q: At the end of World War II, were you a part of the discussions about what to do with Japan? In other words, whether to try the Emperor as a war criminal or keep him as a symbol of Japan.

BISHOP: That was absolute stupidity in the Department of State. When the war was over, unless we wanted to act like one of the Balkan countries, there was no reason to try the Emperor. We had fixed Japan. We had burned them out. They knew that they had it coming to them. There was no point to a trial. Thank God that General MacArthur was put in charge in Japan, because he was tough. He purged some of the military leaders, but that was about all. They were finished. I was the first Foreign Service Officer back in Japan after the surrender.

HOWARD IMBREY
Labor Reporting Officer
Colombo (1951-1952)

Upon receiving an education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Howard Imbrey joined the CIA in 1948. Among Mr. Imbrey's CIA postings included India, Sri Lanka, Congo, France, and Italy. Mr. Imbrey was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in June 2001.

Q: So, where did you go then?

IMBREY: Well, I was sent to Ceylon or Sri Lanka.

Q: And you were there from '51 to ?

IMBREY: It was one year, '52.

Q: What was the political situation in Ceylon in '51 and '52?

IMBREY: Oh, there again I was under cover as labor reporting officer. That was a new thing that they had invented at the time instead of having a labor attaché in the Embassy, which you couldn't afford because there weren't that many people, you just assigned one of your low-level guys as labor reporting officer. That gave me access to what was a very important labor movement in Ceylon. They had five distinct labor organizations one of which was Trotskyite, the only Trotskyite as far as I know, and run by a very clever man. The reporting of that was eaten up by the Department of Labor. They loved to know about what was going on in Ceylon.

Q: So, was that pretty much what you did?

IMBREY: Oh, I had relations with the police and I would go occasionally to Joffna in the north of the island because they were always hacking down telephone poles and other nasty things. Oh,

yes, they had a communist party, which I was watching, too. That was our principal interest in those days. Watch those Russians.

Q: The Tamil movement, how did that stand at that time?

IMBREY: The husband of Bandaranaike, Solomon Ward Bandaranaike, he was, when I was there, he was running a newspaper called Sengalalay, which means Sinhalese blood and he was declaiming against the Indians. What are they doing here, they're taking our money. The Indians worked the tea plantations. The tea plantations are situated on hills and the tea picker had a huge bag about the size of this table or longer and he has to fill that with two leaves on a bud from each plant. Each day you'll get another blossom, two leaves and a bud. That is broken orange pekoe and it goes in the bag. You don't put in any single leaves or single buds in. It has to be quite vigorously gotten. Now, for filling a bag like that, means being almost bent over vertical getting your bag back to the tea factory, they will pay one rupee a day. A rupee that was about thirty cents. This money, many of them sent back to India to support their families there for there were no jobs in India.

Well, this was, in brief, that they were sending all this good Sinhalese money back to India so they should get rid of these guys. Sinhalese wouldn't take on any tea-picking job. They were basically happy go lucky and it's a country where if you take a banana seed, you go like, and that you've got to duck because of the banana tree. Now, at any rate, he was one, he started a great deal of animus against the Indian workers. As a matter of fact he was shot in 1953 or 1954, shortly after I left, by some people who thought he hadn't gone far enough.

Q: So, I mean how did you find sort of getting on in society there? Did all sit around and talk about how awful the Tamils were?

IMBREY: No, no, no. My wife had a Tamil obstetrician as a matter of fact. No, they were well considered when we were there. People liked them. This was only the tea pickers.

Q: How about the unions? I mean I take it there wasn't a tea pickers' union.

IMBREY: No. As far as I can remember I don't think there was one.

Q: What about the union? Were they sort of imbued with the class struggle as taught by northern school of economics and all that?

IMBREY: No they weren't that far educated. They paid their dues and they looked to the union to do something for them politically, but I can't imagine that any of them had any real notions.

Q: I guess our only interest there in a way was the Chinese or the Soviets?

IMBREY: I was not interested in the Chinese or the Soviets there, or I was not directed in that or not in that direction. Most of the time I was in India, I think the Embassy in Delhi possibly had people who were directed in that, but there just weren't enough of them around.

Q: So, you had to deal them out to the top levels?

IMBREY: No, I don't recall.

Q: Did the Soviets have an Embassy in Colombo?

IMBREY: Yes, I guess so.

Q: But it wasn't a major operation?

IMBREY: No, it wasn't on my list. No, I didn't do anything with them.

Q: Did you feel by this time that you were really an Indian hand, I mean a sub-continental hand?

IMBREY: Oh sure, yes. I knew it all.

ROBERT ANDERSON
Near East Asian Affairs, Ceylon Desk
Washington DC (1956-1959)

Ambassador Robert Anderson was born on January 6, 1922 in Massachusetts. He attended Yale University until 1943 when he joined the U.S. Army, where he served as a 1st lieutenant from 1943 to 1946. Throughout his career he has held positions in countries including Thailand, China, France, Benin, Morocco, and the Dominican Republic. Ambassador Anderson was interviewed by Horace Torbert on March 12, 1990.

Q: Was he a pretty good ambassador? Of course, he didn't stay in India very long. I knew him later, as a senator, of course. He was a great guy.

ANDERSON: Yes. He did not stay there very long and there's a little story about that I want to tell you. I can't say that he stayed there long enough to make any particular mark on United States interests with India; I can't recall any. I was back in Washington as the Ceylon/Nepal Desk Officer and the assistant India Desk Officer, after I left India.

We might jump to that right now, because it involves John Sherman Cooper. He came back shortly after I arrived in '55, and he asked if he could talk with me alone. We went into his office and shut the door and he said: "Bob, I have a difficult problem. I don't know what to do." "President Eisenhower wants me to run for the Senate from Kentucky. But I haven't been in India long enough. What's this going to do to our relations, and what's Nehru going to think of me and think of us, with my leaving so soon? I don't really know what I should tell the president. I really don't know what to do."

And I said: "Mr. Ambassador, if you don't want to run for the Senate, that's one thing. If your concern is about what Mr. Nehru is going to think, I don't think you should be worried about that, because Nehru is very much of a politician, and he knows that if the President of the United States asks you to take on a political assignment, such as being one of 48 senators, he's going to understand that. I don't think that you need to worry about that aspect at all. Plus the fact you haven't been there a year yet, almost. You go back, it'll be another six months before anything really happens; you know that. Then you'll have time to campaign. And I really think that you've got to make up your mind on what the president has asked you to do. And if you want to be a senator, I think you ought to do what the president wants you to do."

And he put his arm around me, thanked me and walked out. He went back, saw Nehru, and eventually came back, to become a senator.

Q: *That's fascinating.*

ANDERSON: He asked for my thoughts, and that is why we became very, very close. There are so many fascinating things that happened when I was back in the State Department, from '55 to '59. There's no point in talking about many of them, but one event that changed the traditional way of handling ambassadorial appointees happened, when I was the Ceylon desk officer.

There was a gentleman named Maxwell H. Gluck, whom Jack Javits had persuaded Eisenhower to name as Ambassador to Ceylon. He owned a clothing store chain called the Darling Stores. He also had one of the largest racehorse establishments in America, the Elmendorf Farm in Kentucky. In those days, an outsider, as you will remember, could not come to the Department and receive any briefing whatsoever until he was confirmed by the Senate. He went before the Senate--Fulbright was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee--and he was asked the name of the prime minister, and became flustered. By the way, nobody from the State Department was ever up there, to help these guys; they were on their own.

Q: *Fascinating. We did it, of course, totally differently.*

ANDERSON: He became very flustered, and told the Committee: "I don't know." And the press and Fulbright jumped on it, and that was it; the fat was in the fire. Now, the prime minister's name happens to be Solomon West Ridgway Díaz Bandaranaike. Well, you know, you either know that or you don't. He said "I knew his last name, but," he said, "I was afraid that if I didn't say it all, or that if I made a mistake I would be insulting the prime minister that I was going to have to deal with."

Now, for a fellow who ran a lingerie department store chain to think like that, I thought was pretty damn good. And I thought the press and Fulbright were very unfair to him. But there it was. And John Foster Dulles, to put it mildly, was very disturbed. Butts Macomber and Rod O'Connor, who were the Secretary's two special assistants, and also happened to be classmates of mine at Yale, saw me and asked: "What the hell is going on here? Should this guy go to Ceylon?"

I said: "I don't know. I'll tell you later, I first have to meet him" My wife and I spent one month with Mr. and Mrs. Gluck, arranging briefings, day and night, on Buddhism, on cultural life, on political and economic conditions and the history of the area. Nobody has ever had briefings like that fellow.

And at the end of the month, I was summoned by Bill Rountree and George Allen (George was the assistant secretary and Bill was his deputy). Bill Macomber and Rod O'Connor came down from the Secretary's office. They said to me: "Well, should he go?"

And I said: "Well, first of all, he has to go. You can't, six weeks later, suddenly say no. He's been confirmed by the Senate and everything else now. Secondly, just to give you some peace of mind, he's not going to be a disaster; he can go. And we've probably had others who were worse than this guy. He'll be fine and he's a very decent person." The conclusion to this is very important. That was the last time in our history that an outside political appointee ever went up to the Hill without a State Department briefing. It was that case that did it. And I made that recommendation to Dulles, because Macomber took me up to Dulles afterwards and I said: "Mr. Secretary, I think, this business of you and others not seeing these people before they are confirmed, because of our fear of treading on the toes of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is wrong. We have to do it." And so that is a little historical vignette.

Q: Well, you just finished talking about the famous Gluck case, which, of course, the whole world heard the opening of, but very few people heard what a success he made of himself.

ANDERSON: Ambassador Gluck did a passable job out in Ceylon. He didn't drop any major balls and the Ceylonese liked him. They had a couple of flood catastrophes, and he was flying around dropping bags of flour. It was fine. And above all, he cared and he tried to do a good job.

ROBERT A. LINCOLN
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Colombo (1958-1961)

Robert A. Lincoln was born in New York in 1921. As a Foreign Service officer, Mr. Lincoln served in Syria, Ceylon, Turkey, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt on April 19, 1989.

Q: Okay. So what year did you leave Syria and where did you go then?

LINCOLN: Well, it was in July or August. It must have been August, as I recall it, of 1958. We went from Syria to Ceylon on assignment. Ceylon was then Ceylon. This was before it was Sri Lanka. It sounded like a very interesting assignment. It was an easy assignment from the standpoint of living, because you lived extremely well there. Ceylon was one of the old colonial countries the British had run. The house that I lived in, I remember, was an old British colonial house. Most ceilings were twelve feet high. Although the house wasn't air conditioned, it was cool. One room was air conditioned. Its ceiling was very high. There was a Columbo editor, I

remember, who used to love to come there because it was the coolest place in Ceylon -- the coolest place in the city of Colombo, at least. Another thing that was good about the housing was the existence of the Eighty Club. A block away, the Eighty Club was the old British/Ceylonese colonial club. The British had created the darned thing and the Ceylonese were taking it over, quietly, of course. At that time, in the latter part of the 1950s, the Ceylonese in the Eighty Club were mainly people who had been trained by the British.

For example, Dudley Senanyake, who had been for a long time the leader of the United National Party, was one of the prominent members. A man named Shirley Amerasinghe was a prominent member. I used to play a lot of tennis with Shirley.

Q: We had better spell out these names. We had better go back to Senanyake first -

LINCOLN: Well, Dudley Senanyake. I will go into Bandaranaike later. Dudley Senanyake -- that was S-E-N-A-N-A-Y-A-K-E as I remember it. I am not sure of my spelling. Shirley Amerasinghe. Shirley is a strange male first name, but he was quite male. He was a superb tennis player. He used to beat the hell out of me, I remember, regularly. Amerisinghe was A-M-E-R-A-S-I-N-G-H-E, probably originally an Indian name. I am not totally sure of that. The spelling of different names was a real problem, but you learned fairly rapidly how to do it. The question was whether you should attempt to do it before you went there. One American ambassador, you remember, did attempt to. He shouldn't have. He made a terrible mistake. He should have waited until he learned something about it. His problem was with S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. S.W.R.D. was Solomon West Ridgeway Bandaranaike, who had gone to Oxford and had been the leader of the political union when he was a student up there. A fine mind, absolutely superb, and he was a marvelous political manipulator. He discovered fairly early on that he should tweak the noses of the British, the French, the Americans, etc., that this would achieve more than anything else he did. Bandaranaike was B-A-N-D-A-R-A-N-A-I-K-E as I remember it. That may or may not be right. He was assassinated while I was there. He became prime minister and then was assassinated. When he became prime minister he was the first left-of-center prime minister Ceylon had ever had. Up until that point the various people had been British oriented, and I don't recall if any was a Tamil. I doubt if any were, but an awful lot of the people who ran governmental institutions were Tamil-oriented rather than Singhalese.

Q: So actually Tamil is by ethnic origin?

LINCOLN: Yes. In other words, if you went back three generations the family came from southern India, without any question.

Q: Had they polarized at that time to any extent?

LINCOLN: Yes. They had polarized and in 1957 there had been the Tamil-Singhalese outbreak. I don't remember how many were killed, not as many as have been killed today, but there were tremendous differences between the Tamils and Singhalese. At that time the Tamils ran many things in the government which they don't run today. At that time -- this is interesting, too -- the man who most recently has been prime minister was the second leader of the United National party, so he is quite aware of the long history of Tamil-Singhalese strife. Before Mrs.

Bandaranaike became prime minister, another socialist-nationalist leader briefly held the position. She held the power, of course. That she took over was of great benefit as far as I personally was concerned, in that I was one of the few Americans who knew her.

It happened that she didn't live too far away from me. She had been to our house and I had been to hers. While it sounds logical enough, it was relatively unusual at the time because westerners did not normally know anyone but pro-western Ceylonese.

Subsequently, when she had become prime minister, the U.S. was trying to renegotiate the old Voice of America treaty with Ceylon. The original treaty was then -- would it have been thirty years old?

Q: I thought I heard the recorder click, but I didn't. It is still going, so go ahead.

LINCOLN: I am delighted to have this time delay. I think that the old treaty with Ceylon in which three Collins 30 kW transmitters were involved was thirty years old and, therefore, we had to negotiate a new one. Under the old one in Ceylon, we had a resident engineer from Voice of America. The Ceylonese relied heavily on his advice and his day-to-day operational techniques.

There were three old Collinses which we had installed. Radio Ceylon had a Marconi transmitter of 100 kW. We had worked out quietly -- I think the engineer arranged all this; I had nothing to do with it, I know -- an arrangement whereby Radio Ceylon for broadcasting used the 30 kW Collinses and we used the 100 kW Marconi transmitter to broadcast northward into India. All of this was to our benefit. It has now been forgotten because it was so long ago. I am sure that the Marconi 100 kW transmitter is no longer in existence. Again, we had a special permit to have the Voice of America engineer assigned there under diplomatic immunity. So, we renegotiated the contract and we had just about completed the negotiations when I returned on assignment to the United States, after having finished three years in Ceylon. I met Ed Murrow, the new USIA director, because he was directly interested in what was happening to the agreement.

Q: Was the new transmitter agreement reached while you were still there, because Henry Loomis, head of VOA, went over and hit it off very well with Mrs. Bandaranaike

LINCOLN: We had reached an agreement with the radio station and this went up to Mrs. Bandaranaike, and she had decided to approve it at the time I left. In other words, it had been ninety-five percent settled, but Henry went to Ceylon -- very sensibly -- at the suggestion of Murrow. That would be early 1961.

Q: Well, our overall USIS program in Ceylon was to attempt to reach the upper levels -- academic, government, media and so forth -- rather than a mass program.

LINCOLN: Were we successful or not? Yes, I think we were in the sense that tremendous changes were taking place in Ceylon at the time.

As I said, tremendous changes were taking place in Ceylon at the time. We saw the discontinuation of power on the part of people whom the British had trained when Ceylon was a

colony, and the taking over by people, some of whom were British educated and some of whom were European educated, but all of whom were nationalists. They were Ceylon first, Singhalese first, and western second. I say that this was a tremendous change because of the suddenness of the wrenching that went on. You saw the United National Party losing all power and the socialist-nationalist party taking over.

Before Mrs. Bandaranaike became prime minister, another leader of the socialist-nationalist party was prime minister. In less than a year, she took his place. In her government, the foreign minister was Felix Bandaranaike, her nephew. He was often accused of being a communist. Was he?

Whether or not he was, the communists generally supported him, and there is no question but that he felt Marxism better than anything else for Ceylon. In the various elements of the government you saw the promotion of people who were left, not because they happened to think that this was the best thing perhaps, but left because this was a way of bothering the west. It was a way of showing independence.

In many cases Mrs. Bandaranaike herself did that sort of thing. I recall the comment of the then Vice Chancellor of the University of Ceylon the night that Mrs. Bandaranaike became prime minister. I was talking with him at a reception. It was up in Paradiniya, where the university was, the University of Ceylon. I asked -- he was a former gynecologist and had delivered two of Mrs. Bandaranaike's children and knew her very well -- "What do you think of this?" He, incidentally, was a United National Party senator. He was a right of center, pro-British. He said, "Mrs. Bandaranaike is a hard-headed, straightforward, stupid housewife." Now, that was the typical attitude of people who represented the colonial element of Ceylon and it probably was exactly the opposite of the attitude which anybody who was trying to get new things accomplished in Ceylon favored. Therefore, even though we opposed, quietly perhaps, leftist influence in the government, we were able to maintain good relations with the new government.

As an illustration I remember the tremendous effectiveness of the educational exchange program which we were conducting at the time. I was very fortunate in becoming vice chairman of the Fulbright Commission. One of the men -- I will use this as an illustration, not necessarily typical, because we were not always this successful -- who went on a grant to the United States we had carefully gotten to know quite well over a period of three or four months before he went.

He was the leader of a pro-national Ceylonese element. He himself held the second position in the Foreign Ministry. After he came back from his grant to the United States, I spent a lot of time with him. He was a favorite of Mrs. Bandaranaike. He was immensely impressed by what he found in the U. S., because so much of it was contrary to what he had heard before. We weren't terrible capitalist ogres after all.

Q: Was he pro-leftist oriented prior to his visit to the states?

LINCOLN: Very much so. His orientation within Ceylon when he returned remained pro-national, without any question, but at the same time his thinking about Marxism, state socialism and so forth and so on had changed quite a bit. Is he still involved in government today? I haven't

any idea, not the slightest, but I remember his influence at the time was immense. He had his own personal following. We achieved with one grant more than we could have with a whole year's program of media operations. Another thing that happened was our getting close to all the editors over at The Times of Ceylon group. There were two major newspaper groups at that time in Colombo. One was Lakehouse, which today is paramount. The other was The Times of Ceylon group. The chief editor of the English language Times of Ceylon was not really a Ceylonese. He was a Goanese from Goa in India. His name was Tori de Souza.

Q: Was he partly Portuguese, do you know?

LINCOLN: Probably, probably. I remember once coming back from a day spent beyond Kandy in the mountains with him. I had gotten a deep tan that day. He was dark-skinned but he had gotten a tan on the dark skin. I recall his saying, "The sun was so strong today that even I got a tan." Tori and I became close friends. I think he is dead today. He was one of the more interesting, highly intelligent people I knew when I was there.

Tori was a great cricket player. One night he - well, we got a little bit fried together and he and two or three of his assistants invited me to join their squad. I was braggadocio saying that any baseball hitter could hit a cricket throw. They said, "Okay, come out and play with us tomorrow."

Well, a baseball player could. Not only that, but American baseball players are very good at fielding and most cricket players are not as skilled. So as a result, I ended up playing silly mid-on for the Times of Ceylon cricket team. Silly mid-on is the fielding position close in. It is roughly the equivalent of a baseball short-stop if the short-stop were playing halfway between his normal spot and the pitcher's position -- halfway closer to the batter, in other words. Silly mid-on had to handle anything hot that was hit out. Again, with American experience, you could handle it. You knew what to do with the darned ball.

So I had a lot of fun playing cricket when I learned how. I was then -- let me see, I hadn't hit forty yet so I could still play cricket. The Times of Ceylon group published an English language daily which had the smallest circulation of all of their papers, a Ceylonese daily newspaper which probably had the biggest circulation, and a Tamil newspaper. Unfortunately for us and for their future they probably had more influence on the public from the English language and the Tamil dailies than from the Singhalese. The people who ran The Times group leaned toward the west, and darn it, it didn't work. The people who ran Lakehouse leaned toward the west, too; but they didn't lean as far.

Q: Did the government under Mrs. Bandaranaike ever attempt any overt censorship of the press?

LINCOLN: During the time that I was there under her, no. No. They were, of course, able to censor their own radio, but it was a government-run radio operation. They were pretty darned careful about that.

Q: What do you think was the general level of literacy among the masses of the people?

LINCOLN: Much higher than it was in the Arab countries. The educational system in Ceylon in any language had been established when it was a colony, and it was a pretty effective one no matter how you look at it. Now, again, I don't remember the figures, but I would assume it was close to sixty percent. It was quite high. Among the people that we dealt with -- we were dealing with the leaders - there was never a question of literacy, not the slightest. There was no difficulty whatsoever. Ceylon's higher literacy rate made it an easier country to operate in, of course.

Q: Of course.

LINCOLN: It made a whole lot of difference. In Ceylon you could go to cities, towns out in the country and speak and you didn't have to have a translator with you. You could often ask somebody who was a village schoolmaster or what have you and he would be just as good as anyone from your staff, time and again. There was probably too large a percentage of people of Tamil background on the USIS staff. You naturally would lean toward hiring somebody who was a Tamil because time and again he was better in English than the Singhalese was. I hope -- I don't know today -- that gradually we have overcome that by changes in the staff. I have no way of knowing.

There were some other fascinating things that went on, though. This was a great country to be in.

Q: Do you have any anecdotes you would like to put forth on Ceylon before we pass on to your next assignment?

LINCOLN: Some hilarious ones. I remember one instance involving an official named Abeykoon, who was the chief of police. The chief of police didn't mean just chief of police of a city. He was, in effect, the head of the FBI for the country of Ceylon. I had only been there six or eight months and he came to the house privately and talked to me. He wanted to be sure that nobody else was around and that my room wasn't bugged. He said, Mr. Lincoln, I have to tell you something serious. We have a new Egyptian ambassador. I said, yes, I know -- he was a former general from Egypt. Abeykoon said, "He has given to me just yesterday a sheaf of papers about three-quarters of an inch thick swearing that you are actually a member of the CIA."

That was what I had been wrongly traced as by the suspicious Syrians in Damascus. Yes, I did realize it but I didn't think it would follow me this far.

Q: It is an assumption in many countries, particularly in the east and far east.

LINCOLN: Yes. Well, fortunately Abeykoon rejected the whole story and quietly told the Egyptian ambassador no, we have investigated this and we don't believe it is true. Another tale concerns the admiral of the navy. Ceylon didn't have a terribly large navy, of course, four or five ships. The admiral was a delightful fellow. He was a good looking man. His English was impeccable and so forth; he was obviously fun to sit and talk with. At one time he said, politics in Ceylon is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians. I remember the quote because Bill Handley was then the assistant director for Near East and South Asia for USIA, was out on a visit and I happened to have had a reception where Bill heard it from the admiral. Handley never forgot it.

The admiral represented the British-oriented element in Ceylon. He later, three or four years later, after I left, was involved with several other men in an unsuccessful coup to overthrow the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike. It didn't work and I don't know what has finally happened to him. I have no idea. Another story -- our ambassador at the time, and he was excellent, was a man named Bernard Guffler. I got to know Guff quite well because he and I made a project of walking to the airport outside of Colombo. It was probably six or seven miles out or maybe eight or ten.

Our system of walking was to use his car for a certain distance and get out at the spot we had last walked to. We would walk the next mile or so and his car would come and pick us up. Then a week later we would walk the new distance. We never made the airport. As I said, Guff was an awfully good ambassador. He was a trained stylemaster who, although I don't really believe that he knew south Asia or knew the languages, had a sense of what to do and what not to do. That is about it. He was awfully tough to work with. Some of the people on the staff absolutely hated him and some liked him, but again he was an individual and always interesting. He would review anything you turned out if he found it of interest and would talk to you about it a day to two later.

He was concerned with the overall problem of public affairs which so many ambassadors may not be. It meant a lot to him. He spent more time with people from USIS, I think, particularly those in the cultural side, than he did with some of his own staff who were on the political side.

Q: You spoke earlier of your exchange program out there. Did you have a very large one?

LINCOLN: No, because a country like Ceylon is a small country. We didn't have a big program in anything, let's face it. I am trying to remember how many people were there - myself, one cultural affairs officer, one information officer, an executive secretary, and that was about it. We had a four-person staff in Ceylon. I don't know how many national employees there were, let's say ten or fifteen.

Our total educational exchange program was proportionately nowhere near as large as a lot of other countries may have had.

Q: I would like to ask you one other question before we pass along. I was very interested to find that in a lot of -- not a lot, but in two or three southeast Asian countries -- the USIS operation was exceedingly well known and that it had in the minds not only of the people but a number of the government executives a place almost comparable to the embassy. What was your experience in Ceylon?

LINCOLN: Probably true. It hadn't been true up in Syria. I would say it was probably true, and this may account for the fact that the ambassador, Guff, spent so much time with his USIS people. He was personally well known and quite a close friend of the USIS librarian, a woman named Margaret Gunei-akne, British by origin, married to a south Asian national. Her husband's name was Chandra. He had originally been a leader in the Congress party in India. At some time or another when he was very young, he had come down to Ceylon to lead affairs there.

Guff became very close to the two of them. He used to go hunting with Chandra and he spent a lot of time with Margaret over at the USIS library, not a little bit of time but a tremendous amount. Also, he found wonderful a USIS cultural assistant named Diana Captain, whose family was from India; Captain is an old name from Bombay. Her father had come down to Colombo in the 1920s or early 1930s. He had established a textile plant. She went to work for USIS.

Well, she was worth her weight in gold. She had more contacts up and down in Ceylon -- for example, the head of the Trotskyite Marxist party was an old friend of hers whom she called Uncle So-and-so when speaking to him on the telephone. The governor general of Ceylon was Uncle Oliver. Political leaders right and left were her friends; so were media executives, and so on.

Although she worked for USIS, Diana spent a tremendous amount of time doing special things for Ambassador Gufler and that was good. We never stood in her way -- just the opposite. She is still there, occasionally sending us high tea from Ceylon. Originally, of course, and when I was first there, the high tea from Kandy and upward geographically grew on plantations owned by the British. They were nationalized by Mrs. Bandaranaike. She started the nationalization in 1960 and by 1964 or 1965, after I left, she had pretty much taken over the operation. The high tea I get today is government-owned tea.

C. WILLIAM KONTOS
Deputy Director, USAID
Colombo (1959-1961)

C. William Kontos was born in Illinois in 1922. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Pakistan, Lebanon, Sudan, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Thomas Stern in February 1992.

Q: Then in 1959, you returned overseas and were assigned to Sri Lanka (Ceylon then) as the Deputy Director of the AID Mission. How did that come about?

KONTOS: I had for some time wanted to go back overseas. I always felt that most of the joys and the challenges in our agency were overseas. So I welcomed an overseas assignment. Since I knew what vacancies would be occurring in the African Bureau, I considered filling one of them. There were two possibilities: one was Salisbury (Rhodesia) as a liaison officer with the British colonial government or, as an alternative, a similar job in Nairobi (Kenya), where the British were already phasing out. Nairobi would have been more substantive since we had already initiated several projects with the approval and cooperation of the British government. Though Nairobi itself with its salubrious climate and setting was attractive, I would have been by myself in a colony (though in the process of becoming independent) and where the British would allow only a marginal US role. Then came the opportunity to go to South Asia to become the deputy director in an already established mission with an established hierarchy and programs.

Jim Grant had been the Director of the AID Mission in Ceylon. His successor was John Roach who was the mission's Legal Advisor when I was in Athens. I knew him fairly well when he asked me to join him as his deputy. I opted to accept that offer rather than Nairobi.

I arrived in Colombo in early 1959; John Roach was already there. We had a small mission which was facing a difficult environment in which to operate. The government had moved sharply to the left and was seeking to achieve a socialist approach. It had nationalized a number of key industries and services and it was engaged in a highly dubious government-dominated economic program. It also was racist; it gave full support to one linguistic, religious and cultural group, the majority Buddhist Sinhalese to the detriment of the Hindu Tamils who were a large and very important minority. There was a resurgence of latent animosity that had always existed between these two groups and that, in the past, had been suppressed by the British. In fact, the British had favored the Tamils in part because, as a minority, were perhaps better motivated. They tended to be better educated, were better civil servants, and the British thought that them smarter.

The British approach meant that when Ceylon reached independence, the senior civil service included a high proportion of Tamils. English remained the language of education and of governmental affairs. The regime of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, after a fair election, had supplanted the regime of what he called the "Black Englishmen"--the United National Party, which had been the first ruling party after independence. Bandaranaike headed a party that was nativist, Buddhist, socialist, and in power when I arrived in Ceylon. For every step forward that the aid Mission took in trying to deal affirmatively with the problems of underdevelopment, the government would take two backwards. It was a very discouraging atmosphere for an aid mission to operate in.

I therefore argued that we should reduce our program. It was a situation in which we were making little, if any progress. This view got me involved in one of the major confrontations of my career. I was espousing a point of view that was unpopular both in Colombo and in Washington. In this case, which is an exception to the general rule I mentioned earlier that embassies tended to support larger aid programs, there was an Ambassador, Bernard Gufler, who agreed with me and supported my point of view.

I must say that the British had left Ceylon in remarkably good shape. They had created three of the major foreign exchange earning industries: rubber, coconut, and tea. They had taken barren hills and developed productive tea and rubber plantations and coconut groves. They left Ceylon an excellent road system, a good civil service, a quite adequate educational system, and, on the whole, an exchequer that was in reasonably good order. The Ceylonese took these good legacies and turned them into a series of economic declines, by their spectacularly inept socialist orthodoxy which skewed badly their approach to economic development. Ceylonese politics spawned an extraordinary phenomenon, i.e., the largest Trotskyist Party in the world and a number of Marxist and socialist smaller parties. Therefore, Ceylon was generally oriented in its governmental policies in a socialist direction; they assumed that the State was omniscient and knew better how an economy should be conducted than the private sector. Bandaranaike threatened to nationalize the tea estates as soon as he took power and nationalized the rubber plantations. It was enough for the threat of nationalization to exist. The estates and plantations

were primarily financed and managed by foreigners who reduced their investments in the maintenance and expansion of these natural resources since the future looked fairly bleak for private enterprise. There ensued an almost immediate decline in the production of the three major export commodities. This was accompanied by a growing anti-Tamil agitation including a declaration of Sinhalese as the national language to be used by government officials exclusively. This governmental policy of reducing Tamil influence and power, of course, increased the tensions between the two Ceylonese ethnic groups.

Q: Do you recall what the aid Mission was to do about the declining economic conditions?

KONTOS: Our Mission was small. We had a few development loans, but we did not see ourselves as a factor in influencing government policy. I thought that was a mistake since we were contributing, although modestly, to the development of the country. Our assistance should have permitted us to express our views on government economic policy. I personally made some attempts with the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank staffs to discuss the negative effects of the government's policies. Those policies were clearly detrimental to sound development. But these negative policies were not viewed as a central concern of the Mission, much to my dismay.

Our technical assistance was provided primarily to the agricultural sector. We tried to foster some small business enterprises. We had a very successful health program, including the continuation of a good malaria eradication program that WHO had initiated. We provided some useful engineering assistance. We had nothing to do with the three major export crops.

The development loans were modest and directed toward infrastructure, e.g. power and roads. I should mention that other countries had programs in Ceylon as well: British, Canadians, Japanese, Scandinavian (Norway primarily). The Colombo Plan had its headquarters in Ceylon. That program covered all of Southeast Asia, including Ceylon. There was a pretty good informal exchange among the donors. The principal avenue for coordination was the Colombo Plan, whose chairman was responsible for making sure that the donors were all in sync.

Q: Let me return to the political issue. What was our relationship with Ceylon in 1959?

KONTOS: It was cordial. They viewed us as a friendly country. They were inclined to give the Soviets, who had a large Embassy there, the benefit of the doubt. The home-grown Marxists and Socialists were not particularly friendly towards us and they did represent a fairly sizeable element within the government.

Q: You mentioned your relationship with the Ambassador. How did that develop and what was the role of the Mission Director?

KONTOS: The Director saw his role as an implementor of the existing program and did not offer any initiatives of his own. He tended to be a passive leader. He and the Ambassador, while maintaining cordial relationships on the surface, had in fact some personality conflicts; they did not really get along very well. The Ambassador was a stickler for correct English and precision in the use of the language. The Director was a lawyer who felt that his English was adequate for communications to Washington. This resulted in some silly difficulties over the use of words and

syntax. The Ambassador seemed to prefer my style: being brief and to the point. On a couple of occasions he commended me as a teacher does when grading a paper.

The relationship with the Embassy was good on the whole. The Economic Counselor was very cordial and helpful; the DCM was helpful, as was the Political Counselor. We had no problems with the Embassy, at least initially. Later, as it became clear to me and ultimately to the Ambassador, that our assistance was not being used in an optimal way, tension did rise somewhat. The aid program was not effective either in quantitative or qualitative ways. The Mission Director wanted to expand the loan program and increase our involvement in agricultural development and other efforts. I thought that such a move would be counter-productive. I thought we should be in fact contracting and drafted cables to that effect. The Director modified or rejected many of these drafts, but in the Country Team meetings that I would often attend because the Director was frequently absent due to health problems, I would set forth my point of view, which would, on the whole, be supported by the Ambassador. That became a bit awkward when messages were drafted and sometimes sent, based on Country Team discussions, that the Director, upon return to his office, found incompatible with his own views. I don't want to leave the impression that we had a large policy gulf between us, but the Director was more inclined to maintain the program and perhaps even enlarge it somewhat than I was. In the end, the Director had to leave for health reasons.

I stayed on for another six months or so with the new director, Jim Baird, who had just transferred from Indonesia, which had a much larger program. The new Director was a strong proponent of a much larger program in Ceylon. He wanted a bigger, better, and shinier assistance program. He thought that our efforts had been much too modest. I had been the Acting Director for an extended period. It was clear from my early contacts with the new Director that my more conservative, modest program goals were completely contrary to his views. Hence there was a difference of views at the outset. I was shortly to be transferred to my great relief. His views prevailed within the aid mission, but the Ambassador was not happy with the proposed new directions. This gave rise to a period of hiatus during which program goals were not articulated; no specific new proposals were sent to Washington because of the local policy disagreements although it must have been clear to Washington from the messages that were sent in fact what each side had in mind. The Ceylonese government was of course pressing for higher aid levels. They wanted more assistance because we essentially fed the government apparatus. For example, one major project, which John Roach had pushed, was to support a government-run factory for the manufacture of small agricultural tools which would be designed to meet the particular requirements of Ceylonese agriculture. He assigned a full-time American agriculture advisor to the factory. We ended up with a big government corporation having a relatively large overhead, with expensive production facilities not driven by profit requirements and, therefore, not concerned with efficiency. So we ended up supporting a white elephant--perhaps a baby white elephant--run by the government. It is not surprising that the government was delighted by our largesse.

Our technical assistance program in general was very generous. The debate on the nature and extent of our assistance program to Ceylon concerned how flexible a concept could we make of our technical assistance program. The first Mission Director, Jim Grant--a very creative bureaucrat, had worked out a plan that while maintaining the fiction of a technical assistance

program in fact spilled over into a project development program. For example, under the guise of a "demonstration", he initiated the building of a highway. By stretching the meaning of the phrase "technical assistance" he would in fact build a road which was in essence a developmental project. We brought in bull-dozers and construction supervisors and material to build a road that was far removed from Colombo. We built this road to American interstate highway specifications to serve as a model to Ceylon's road engineers. It ended up as a multi-million dollar project, but all under the heading of technical assistance. That was just one illustration of Jim's bureaucratic ingenuity. The road itself was far too expensive to be at all relevant to Ceylon's needs.

When I returned to Washington after the end of my tour, I made a strong pitch at all levels that we were really wasting our resources in Ceylon and should be cutting back, not expanding. If we wanted to have any impact, I suggested that we concentrate in a few areas such as agriculture and particularly rice cultivation. But I found no sympathy in AID-Washington for a reduced assistance program even though the Ceylon government was embarked on reducing the private sector through confiscation and other actions. No one wanted to reduce the program; there was no sympathy for my view of the situation. State showed some support, but it was not strong enough to bring about any policy change. It was clearly seen as an AID issue. Most of the concerns in the Near East and South Asia Bureau (NESAs) of AID at that time had to do with India and Pakistan; Ceylon did not loom large on the agenda.

Looking back on my Ceylon experience, the professional rewards may not have been great because our assistance efforts were obviously not making much of a dent, but personally and culturally the tour there was very congenial. The rich and fascinating ancient Buddhist and Hindu cultures from the 2d to the 12th Century were of great interest. We found the Ceylonese to be extremely warm and friendly; they were easy to know well, they were very social and outgoing. We still have many friends there with whom we correspond regularly. We led a good and interesting two years in Colombo.

Q: You had an opportunity while serving in Ceylon to watch two Bandaranaiques as Prime Ministers. What were your impressions of them?

KONTOS: Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was a scion of one of the most distinguished families in Ceylon. From an old line Buddhist family, the Bandaranaiques were extremely well treated by the British. His father had been knighted by the British government. The initials stand for Simon West Ridgeway Dias. He was brought up in the Church of England; he went to Oxford and returned to Ceylon as a "proper black Englishman," as his opposition party called people like himself. When he returned as a young man, he sensed that the UNP, the party that came to power after British withdrawal, could be unseated if one could appeal to Sinhalese emotions. In fact, his party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, did start a blatant anti-Tamil campaign--anti-Hindu, racial. In a short period of time, that platform evoked an enormous emotional reaction that in the year before we arrived in Ceylon (1958), resulted in a major Sinhalese uprising led by some local hoods. A real blood bath took place. Tamils were taken off buses and killed. It was correctly called the "Massacre of 1958." The root spark for this mob action was Bandaranaike's pandering to Sinhalese emotions. It was a terribly bloody affair. S.W.R.D. took off his coat and tie, put on native dress and sandals and went around inflaming the Sinhalese population, which,

until that time, had been living peacefully side by side with their Tamil neighbors for more than a century under British rule.

Late in 1958, an election was held and Bandaranaike's Freedom Party won. They held a good Parliamentary majority. It should be noted that from the late 1950s to today Ceylon has had a functioning parliamentary system with voting counted more or less accurately. That is quite remarkable given the vagaries of political life in that country. When S.W.R.D. became Prime Minister, he began to dismantle many of the private sector institutions that the British had established and left behind. He nationalized, for example, the port of Colombo which had been a flourishing enterprise. He kicked the British out of Trincomalee, a great harbor, where they had a naval base; it became a ghost town. The Freedom Party did a lot of foolish things, including, as I mentioned earlier, threatening to nationalize the tea estates, although that was did not happen while I was there.

In September 1959, the Prime Minister was assassinated by a possibly deranged Buddhist monk who thought that Bandaranaike was not sufficiently orthodox in his religious views. No one is sure even today what the motivation was or whether the monk was fronting for a cabal that wanted S.W.R.D. dead. There was an interim government and then Mrs. Bandaranaike, his wife, won a by-election in a constituency dominated by the family. After becoming a member of Parliament, she was chosen by the Freedom Party to be head of the Party and, therefore, Prime Minister. She continued her husband's policies in perhaps an even more dogmatic and rigid fashion. She brought into the government as Minister of Finance Felix Bandaranaike, a nephew of hers. He had been educated in British schools and was a flaming socialist--perhaps even Marxist. He was also a flaming opportunist and the two Bandaranaikes managed to accelerate the decline of the Ceylonese economy.

When I left Ceylon, the country was really on the skids. Years later, when I was AID Mission Director in Pakistan, the officer who was the labor expert in the Greek Mission when I was there, Alan Strachan, became Director of the Colombo Plan. His daughter, Heather, whom we knew as a little girl, later married Tom Foley, now the Speaker of the House. The marriage took place in Colombo and we were invited to come to the wedding. Unfortunately, we arrived in Colombo the day after the wedding because Ceylon Airways had over-booked and we were delayed for a day in Bombay. In any case, the word got around that we had arrived in Colombo and our friends all got together at a great party at the AID Mission Director's home. This was in 1968. We of course wandered around Colombo while we were there. It was depressing. There had been no new building since we had served there eight years earlier. The lack of maintenance was noticeable. We saw a city in decline, falling apart. The people were still as happy and as friendly and as ebullient as ever but very distressed by what was happening to their economy which was in a real free-fall.

Eventually, the Bandaranaikes were thrown out; the UNP came back to govern. Under the leadership of a new Prime Minister, the economy began to be freed up; the port was returned to private hands. Now Sri Lanka is flourishing again economically, although the deep-seated Tamil-Singhalese animosities have not abated. In fact, a civil war is still on-going in Sri Lanka and I attribute that tension to a legacy of the policies, words and acts of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. He has much to answer for.

Q: *Where did the Marxists and the Trotskyites get their philosophical base and how did they use it?*

KONTOS: The Trotskyites learned their catechism in Madison, Wisconsin. The head of that party had been a student at the University of Wisconsin. He apparently became involved with the resident campus Trotskyites, and returned to Ceylon after absorbing an American political science education. In my days, he was the Minister of Agriculture. He was very much the agricultural czar. So our technical assistance program was in fact supporting this Trotskyite and our projects in keeping with his philosophy. We, of course, were doing what we thought would be helpful to Ceylon, like the government factory for small agricultural tools, but in fact we were following his views which were rooted in Trotsky's philosophy. The Minister was extremely bright, well read; when he wasn't talking politics, he was quite congenial and a good conversationalist. But his basic approach was certainly founded on Trotsky's views. He was for nationalization, although I am not sure that he would ever have gone as far as collectivization. Trotsky would probably not have devastated Russian agriculture as much as Stalin did.

I have often thought about the imposition of Russian philosophy on the Ceylonese culture. It happened that Trotskyism was congenial to them. It may be that the sense of hierarchy represented by that philosophy, which sought to stimulate a contented and productive peasantry ruled by an elite, was in harmony with Ceylonese aspirations and view of the "good life". There must have been something in the Ceylonese character that made Trotskyism acceptable because that philosophy found a fruitful ground for those views. It must be said that the more orthodox Marxist philosophy did not grow deep roots; the Ceylonese learned from their experiences and saw where a Marxist path would lead them. Even when they played around with Marxism, they did accept aid from capitalist countries, although it had to be essentially on their terms. In looking back on that period, I am amazed by how generous, if not foolhardy, we were in providing aid. We certainly were far short of rigorous: I am appalled when I think of what projects and programs we supported with American resources, even under a strong Republican administration of President Eisenhower. I think Stassen was still in charge of the assistance program in 1961 when I left.

JAMES G. LOWENSTIEN
Political Officer
Colombo (1959-1961)

Ambassador James G. Lowenstein joined the Foreign Service in 1950. He served in France before joining the U.S. Navy in 1953. He reentered the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Yugoslavia, Luxembourg, and Washington, DC. Ambassador Lowenstein was interviewed by Ambassador Dennis Kux on June 6, 1994.

LOWENSTIEN: At some time I was called and advised that I had been assigned to Lyon as vice consul, which I was very pleased about. Several weeks later I was called and told that I was not

going to be vice consul in Lyon, I was going to be the junior officer in a two-man political section in Colombo, Ceylon and that this was a great opportunity to get into the real meat of the Foreign Service, etc. So I said, "Fine," not having been to Asia at that point.

Q: Did you have any hand in that?

LOWENSTEIN: No hand at all, I didn't even know where the place was and knew nothing about it. I immediately bought all the books I could find on Ceylon. In those days, of course, it was possible to take a ship out, not only from Europe, but all the way from New York to Europe to Ceylon. I can't remember what line we took, but it went to Naples. We had two days in Naples and then continued through the Suez Canal. It took almost a month, and I had that time to do all my reading on Ceylon.

So I got to Ceylon in May, 1959 with a year and a half year old daughter, a pregnant wife who was going to have our second child three months later, and a Swiss nanny we had picked up in New York for the transatlantic crossing. But we all got along so well that she decided to stay with us providing we could get her a visa. The one day we had in Naples, I ran up to Rome to get a visa for her to go to Ceylon.

The Ambassador then was Lampton Berry, but he was very ill and rarely showed up in the office and left in a few months.

Q: He was a source for some research for the book that I did. I found that he was the contact with Nehru during World War II, at a time when the US was terribly active. I always wanted to meet him.

LOWENSTEIN: I think I only saw him twice. He was replaced by a career officer by the name of Bernard Gufler who had been a German expert but had been in Ceylon as DCM before. He knew everybody in the place. He knew the country very well. He was an absolutely marvelous man to work for.

Q: I met him a couple of years later when I was in Personnel. I remember trying to boot him out of the Foreign Service and I loved his attitude. In the old days they would say that your time had come, why don't you quit. His attitude was "Wait a second, I have two or three more years, here is my address, I am ready to go to work, send my paycheck." He did not allow himself to be browbeaten by the Department.

LOWENSTEIN: No, absolutely not. He was a terrific fellow. When he had begun life in the Foreign Service, he was one of the people originally trained in Russian. He had lived with George Kennan, Llewellyn Thompson, and Chip Bohlen in Riga. Instead of going ahead with Russian, he became an expert on the Baltic countries. But although he was an absolutely marvelous man, I cannot say the same thing about the rest of the Embassy.

Q: There was Smith.

LOWENSTEIN: Yes.

Q: I knew a lady who showed up in Karachi when I was there, Francis Hyler.

LOWENSTEIN: Oh, she was nice. She was the economic officer. Jack Kubisch was the AID director.

Anyway I found that I had carte blanche to do any political reporting that I wanted. The first head of the section was an expert in international law. He was quite academic and liked to deal with the Foreign Ministry. He was succeeded by somebody else who also liked dealing with the Foreign Ministry and had a lot of experience in South Asia. But I was really left alone to deal with the internal politics and what was going on in the country which was exactly what I wanted to do and liked doing. Whenever I felt slightly oppressed by the senior political officer Gufler, whom I saw a lot of, would say, "Don't worry about it." He was extremely supportive. He loved the country, as did I. He provided me with a wonderful opportunity. I didn't feel at all constrained about whom I could see so I got to know everybody in the place from the Governor-General and the Prime Minister on down.

Q: Who was the Prime Minister?

LOWENSTEIN: Well, Bandaranaike was assassinated shortly after Gufler arrived. I went with Gufler to the Prime Minister's as a note taker. When we got there, he said, "I don't think I will take a note taker, stay in the car and wait for me." He went in and came out and we left Bandaranaike's house. As we drove out the gate and down the street, there was a popping noise. We got back to the Embassy and a friend of mine from the British Mission who was their intelligence guy called me and said, "Chap's been shot." I said, "What chap?" He said, "The PM old boy." I said, "Really, that is impossible, we just saw him." "Well," he said, "He was shot right after you saw him." And indeed he was. I think Gufler was the last person who saw him alive. I can't imagine that anybody else could have gotten in there between Gufler's departure and the time of the shot.

Anyway we had five governments in the course of the time I was there...Bandaranaike, Dahanayake, Mrs. Bandaranaike, C.P. DeSilva, and Dudley Senanayake. So there was a lot going on politically. I traveled all over the island.

Q: What was our role in Ceylon? What were the US issues with Ceylon then?

LOWENSTEIN: I would say benign neglect. The issues were Cold War issues...Chinese presence, Chinese and Russian economic and political penetration, the Communist Party, the Trotskyite Party, the cultural wars, non-alignment.

Q: The previous governments had been pro-Western, but Bandaranaike was not.

LOWENSTEIN: He was very much in the non-aligned movement and saw himself as a sort of junior Nehru, and so did all his successors. Non-alignment was a very big thing, but it was a loaded non-alignment. It was much more anti-American non-alignment than it was pro-Russian

or pro-Chinese non-alignment. The Chinese had a rice/rubber agreement and were in there trying to carve out a sphere of interest that would have made them the most important foreign power.

Q: Did we have trouble with the Battle Act which prohibited us from giving aid to a country trading with Communist China?

LOWENSTEIN: Yes, we did. We had trouble with that and later on we had trouble with the Hickenlooper Amendment which conditioned economic aid on no nationalization of U.S. assets, and by that time they had nationalized everything that wasn't tied down. But the issues were really sort of marginal, looking back on it. We had a small AID program.

Q: Did you think they were marginal at the time?

LOWENSTEIN: Yes, I really did. I thought it was too bad that the Ceylonese didn't understand where their true interests lay and that kicking the British out and nationalizing the economy was absurd, that all this Marxist rhetoric was a lot of nonsense and that it was too bad they were going to ruin a great country which is exactly what they succeeded in doing. When I arrived there was still a huge British community. When I left there was practically no British community. This was in a two and a half year period. They just disappeared, because there was no reason for them to stay. Now, at the same time I felt that the British had played their cards stupidly. For example, my son was born in the local British nursing home, which was the only decent hospital in Colombo. It was staffed exclusively by Ceylonese doctors and British nurses. It was called the Krazer Nursing Home. One of the provisions of its charter was that only whites could be admitted. This was 12 years after independence. This meant that an English woman married to a Ceylonese could have her child in the hospital, but if the child became ill two weeks later it could not be admitted to the hospital for treatment. There was that sort of thing. There were clubs where Ceylonese were not allowed. When we gave dinner parties with mixed British and Ceylonese, the British, generally not university educated, would try to high hat the Ceylonese who had been to Harrow and Oxford. So the whole thing seemed rather absurd in terms of their future interest in the country. Hence the anti-British reaction to a love/hate relationship with the hate translating itself into a desire to see the British leave while mimicking everything British, struck me as totally understandable.

Q: Do you think that contributed to the push for socialism, trying to get the British out? They presumably were the major owners of the plantations.

LOWENSTEIN: I really don't. I think there was a perfectly good alternative, which the Sri Lankans are doing today, which was to run the place themselves as a market economy. I think Bandaranaike managed to marry nationalism with socialist rhetoric and this helped. When the mass of people feel that they do not have a proportionate share of the national wealth, this kind of argument is kind of appealing when they haven't tried it and don't know that it is not going to work and won't produce the kinds of result it promises. Plus the fact that this whole identification of non-alignment with the Russians and the Chinese--I think that was one that got away from us in the West. We should have tried to capture the non-aligned movement, instead of turning against it and describing it as a movement that was antithetical to our interests. After all, that attitude drove the non-aligned into the arms of the Chinese and the Russians.

Q: How was our attitude manifested in Ceylon? Were we just ignoring the Ceylonese?

LOWENSTEIN: No, it didn't happen in Ceylon, it would happen in the UN and in the international environment when we wouldn't give the non-aligned any credit for anything. And we were constantly threatening to cut off aid or conditioning aid or giving aid in a form that was less evident than what the Chinese and Russians were doing.

Q: How big an AID program did Ceylon have?

LOWENSTEIN: It was a major effort in Ceylonese terms, but not compared to any large programs. But we had an awful lot of AID people there and they didn't seem to me to be very effective. There seemed to be a lot of people given the small size of the program. Again, it seems to me we over promised at the time and a lot of what we gave was in the form of credits and other ways of giving aid that aren't very visible and don't make an impact. I mean the attitude of the Ceylonese towards the Americans was perfectly friendly. The intellectuals, the press were rhetorically anti-American. One leading anti-American journalist was a guy named Mervin DeSilva. I used to see him all the time and he couldn't have been more friendly. He is still friendly. I see him whenever I go back. So I think the main thing was not to take all this rhetoric seriously. Americans generally got along very well with the Ceylonese then and they do now.

Q: Were there any relations with the Chinese and the Russians?

LOWENSTEIN: No there were no relations with either the Russians or the Chinese. Gufler saw his Russian counterpart but nobody else mixed...we lived next to the Chinese, in fact. We never met the Russian diplomats. We occasionally saw large, overweight, white bodies on beaches. The Diplomatic Corps was small, but we had a lot of friends...the Australians, the British, the French, the Germans, the Indians mainly. We were all a group. We played tennis together, we went on weekends together along with a lot of Ceylonese. It was a very happy, informal, integrated life. That is, the Ceylonese that you could relate to, the city dwellers, were perfectly at ease in this kind of environment and vice versa.

Q: What about relations with the British? Did you defer to them?

LOWENSTEIN: No we didn't defer to them and they didn't expect it. The relations with the British were very close.

Q: You talked about their relation problems with the Ceylonese, what was our attitude towards that?

LOWENSTEIN: Our attitude towards that was that we shouldn't be part of it so that we were not encouraged, shall we say, to join any British clubs that didn't allow Ceylonese members. Obviously an exception was made for the hospital. Except for two British couples whom we knew extremely well, I would never give a dinner without Ceylonese present. And I would never have in my house any red-neck British who couldn't get along with the Ceylonese. I probably wouldn't have gotten along with them either, so the issue never arose. There were plenty of them

around. The Brits that I knew were all very integrated into life in Ceylon. At this point there was still a British member of the Ceylonese parliament, the Chief Justice of the Court was still British. I think the commander of the army was still British. Now all these British knew the country very well, and it would never have occurred to them to live a segregated life. So, the British really split into two groups. There was a sort of educated, sophisticated, elite that got along totally with the Ceylonese, and then the sort of red-neck element that had nothing to do with them and only knew each other.

Q: What was the relationship between the government and the opposition?

LOWENSTEIN: It depended on the government and there were five governments during my time there. The opposition was led by either the SLFP, Mr. and Mrs. Bandaranaike's party, or the UNP. The only Trotskyite party in the world, the LSSP, always allied itself with the SLFP. The whole political scene was much more British than it was anything else. There was a lot of spirited debate in the parliament. No political assassinations. A lot of good fellowship after hours. You could mix politicians from any party with any other party, including the Communist Party. In fact, the head of the Communist Party, Peter Keunemann, had been head of the Cambridge Debating Society at the same time that a lot of the UNP people had been students there. The head of the LSSP had gone to the London School of Economics. The head of the Communist Party had gone to Cambridge. The head of SLFP, Bandaranaike, had gone to Oxford. So they all knew each other. It was partisan politics much more on the British/American model than on what later became sort of bitter ideological, violent politics. On the other hand, the Tamil problem was very much there. It was more difficult to mix Sinhalese and Tamils than it was to mix Europeans and Ceylonese. The Tamils were very sensitive about their position, very worried about their future. There had been riots the year before we had arrived, in 1958, and a lot of Tamils had been killed. I saw no disposition on the part of the Sinhalese, in any political party, to compromise on this issue, to arrive at any solution, to give the Tamils any kind of a break. In one of these governments, J. R. Jayawardene was the Finance Minister. He was just giving the Tamils nothing. I didn't see any disposition to accommodate them. After all, Bandaranaike rode to power on a nationalist platform which was very anti-Tamil by indirection. He was a Sinhalese nationalist who wanted Sinhalese to become the sole national language, Buddhism the state religion, etc. Well this was ipso facto anti-Tamil and a lot of what is happening today you can trace back to Bandaranaike's coming to power. He was the one who really, more than anyone else, changed the political landscape in terms of ethnic racial conflict. The 1958 riots occurred after he became Prime Minister. Before then the two communities had gotten along. The British had favored the Tamils in their usual divide and rule way, but it was really Bandaranaike who started this.

Q: Did the Americans all live and stick together?

LOWENSTEIN: There was quite a lot of sticking together, which we didn't do. That was the first time I had seen that kind of phenomenon in action. I found a kind of reverse discrimination, if you will, in effect. If you didn't have anything to do with the American community and really spent your time with the foreigners of other missions and the Ceylonese, they resented you. On the other hand, if you spent your time with them, well, you weren't in Ceylon to spend your time

with a lot of Americans. I would say about half of the people in the Embassy did stick together and half didn't.

Q: Was it more the substantive people who didn't?

LOWENSTEIN: Yes, it was more the substantive people who didn't.

Q: It was more the job of the substantive people to get out and get to know the Ceylonese.

LOWENSTEIN: True.

Q: What about the AID people?

LOWENSTEIN: Well, I didn't know any of the AID people except Bill Kontos and Jack Kubisch and they certainly mixed.

Our social life revolved around journalists, politicians, and the bright Brits who had been there for a long time. Tennis was always a very important part of my life, and I played every afternoon. So that was another group. That, of course, was mostly with Ceylonese. There was a guy in the Embassy who was a very good tennis player by the name of Frank Lambert and he and I played in the Ceylon Nationals twice. We were the first American team to play in the Nationals.

Q: Kennedy was elected at the end of this time. Did that bring about a change of any kind?

LOWENSTEIN: My recollection is that it didn't. The policy lines were set and life went on as before.

Q: Jim Grant was the AID director.

LOWENSTEIN: Yes, that is right. He was the AID director before Jack Kubisch.

I might add that for the last three weeks, Frances Willis was there, but I had virtually nothing to do with her.

Q: So for the whole time you were there, Gufler was there.

LOWENSTEIN: Yes, that's right.

HAROLD G. JOSIF
Political Officer
Colombo (1959-1962)

Born in Burma in 1920 to American Baptist missionaries, Harold G. Josif graduated from the University of Chicago in 1941. Josif served in the Army Air Corps during World War II, received a M.A. from Tufts in International Relations and entered the Foreign Service in 1947. His overseas posts included Pakistan, Portugal, India, Iran, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka, Somalia, Libya). Josif also served as an instructor at the Air War College. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: Today is October 25, 1999. Hal, in 1959, you were off to Colombo, Ceylon. It was still Ceylon.

JOSIF: It was still Ceylon. It is now Sri Lanka.

Q: You were there from 1959 to when?

JOSIF: To 1962. I was there for three years.

Q: What was your job?

JOSIF: I was the chief of the Political Section. I reported to Turner Cameron, who was the DCM. I served under two ambassadors: Bernard Gufler and Frances Anderson, both career people and both very fine ambassadors. I supervised Frank Lambert, who was the Labor officer, although he was the same grade that I was - Jim Lowenstein, too, who was a junior officer at that stage.

Ceylon and the embassy had become notorious in a way. I might tell a story about a previous ambassador, a political appointee whose name I've fortunately forgotten. He became notorious when he couldn't pronounce the prime minister's name in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His misadventures continued in Ceylon.

Q: I might have to add to that that the name is Bandaranaike. Everybody in the Foreign Service had to learn how to pronounce the name. This was not the wife. This was the husband. He was assassinated, I think.

JOSIF: Right. Later, when I was there, his wife was prime minister.

Q: How did Gluck do when he was in the job?

JOSIF: I wasn't there, so I won't say, but I have a good story about when he left. He had a sale. He had been owner of a ladies dress business. So, he had a sale of a large number of ladies garments at the embassy residence before he left. There was a big turnout. That evening, the Egyptian ambassador called Jim Lowenstein, whom I just mentioned, and said, "Could you come over here? I have an item that I thought was rather attractive, but I don't know what it is. I bought it at your ambassador's sale." Jim Lowenstein walked over to the Egyptian ambassador's residence, which was right next door, and lo and behold, it was the Great Seal of the United States.

Q: Oh, God!

JOSIF: Ceylon was our pleasantest posting. I liked the job situation. I thought I was qualified and people were congenial. It was a tropical paradise. An Anglican bishop had visited the country in the early 1800s and wrote a famous hymn in which he referred to Ceylon in these terms: "Where nature's every prospect pleases and only man is vile."

Q: I think it is. "From Greenland's Icy Mountains, from India's Coral Strand."

JOSIF: Yes. He was a little hard on the people. They were really very pleasant, certainly to us. The poverty there was less oppressive than it was in India or Pakistan. People were smiling and there was no language problem. Almost everybody spoke some English and many of them spoke it perfectly. There was an interesting political situation, too.

In the first place, I might mention the vestiges of British colonialism. The governor general was a Ceylonese whose name was Sir Oliver Goonatilake. Then, there was evidence of rising communal friction. By "communal," I mean between Ceylon Tamils and the majority Sinhalese. This has since become a civil war. At that time, it was a latent problem. Mr. Bandaranaike had started the trouble really by declaring Sinhalese as the only official language.

Q: This was the mail bombing.

JOSIF: He was killed. That put the fat in the fire. It gave an excuse to any Sinhalese bureaucrat who wanted to discriminate against a Tamil. A Tamil ordinarily wouldn't speak Sinhalese. The fact was that in most government offices, at least at the higher levels that we dealt with, English was used.

There was also an interesting left-right division there. We had in the local parliament some people who were big landowners, very right. On the other hand, there were some very left people. There was a regular communist party and then there was a Trotskyite party. One of the curious things was that the leaders of these two parties and other parties met regularly, not only in parliament, but on the social scene in Colombo. It was quite common to run across the leaders of all parties. I myself entertained the two I just mentioned, plus several from the two majority parties, the UNP and Mrs. Bandaranaike's party, the SLFP.

One of the things I did there was to hire a local person as a political assistant, partly because of his language abilities, but also because he had been a police officer and knew the local situation in Colombo very well. It's the same policy I had adopted when I was in Tabriz where I found that the one interpreter we had was a Christian, whereas my district was almost entirely Muslim. So, I hired a local Azerbaijani landlord. He had been in the Persian foreign service. Then when he left, I hired a Kurdish gentleman. So, we got a little more variety in our sources.

There were a couple attempted coups in Colombo while I was there. One in particular posed a problem for me. This assistant that I just mentioned who was a former police officer reported one night rather late, about 10:00 p.m., that there was an attempted coup afoot involving some police and army officers. So, I reported it to Turner Cameron, the DCM. He was having a huge party. It

was probably the biggest party he gave while he was there. I think it had at least a couple hundred guests. I had to call him and get him on the phone. He said, "Come over." So I went over and briefed him at the party. He didn't, frankly, seem to be very interested. So, when further developments occurred later that evening, I thought, "Well, look, I had better not call the DCM out of the party again. It's going to be kind of obvious. I'll just tell the ambassador," which I did. The ambassador was Frances Willis, the lady ambassador career person who had worked up from mail clerk. She was glad to get the information. I think by then we knew the coup was going to fail. Anyway, I didn't report again back to Turner Cameron. He chewed me out for that the next day. But it was a case where my judgement was that it would look suspicious if his guests saw me again or even if he was called to the phone again. It would be around town the next day that the Americans were somehow involved in this attempted coup. Maybe I was being overly suspicious, but that was my feeling. I think I was right. Later, one of the guests at the party was heard to say, "Well, that evening I was at the party, Mr. Josif came over and talked to Mr. Cameron" as if this showed some connection to the attempted coup.

While we were in Colombo, my family and I went on an extended visit to Burma. My mother came out from the States. We met her there and had about 10 days going around the country. This was in January of 1962. When we got back in our social circles, it became known that we had been to Burma. A communist paper the next week had an item that said, "It's no coincidence that Mr. Josif visited Burma. He came back last week just before the Burmese military staged a coup." This was a reflection of the social situation I mentioned where people of all these parties, including the extreme leftist parties, were active socially and exchanged gossip and so on.

Q: Were we under any constraints regarding contact with communist or Marxist parties?

JOSIF: Not in Ceylon. Since everyone else was meeting with N.M. Perera, the Trotskyite leader, or Peter Kunaman, the communist leader, at cocktail parties, why should we stop? In fact, Frances Willis and other Western ambassadors chatted with them regularly. They were members of parliament.

Q: How did you find Frances Willis?

JOSIF: We admired her. She was 100% professional. She didn't make a big point of being a career woman. In fact, she told me once, "I know I was appointed to Ceylon because there was a woman prime minister here (Madame Bandaranaike), but I don't think it makes any difference. I don't think it improves my access or hinders it either." I think she had three ambassadorships, all told, to Norway and Switzerland, as well as Ceylon.

Q: During this 1959-1962 period, what were our American interests as we perceived them at that time?

JOSIF: We had to submit planning policy papers to the Department in which we tried to show the importance of the country we were assigned to. Every embassy had to do it. In Ceylon, we had to think hard about this. It was a "medium-sized" country. It happened to be in a fairly strategic location if you were interested in sea transportation. It was a bit off the main route for air transportation, but we made the usual comments about the crossroads of the Indian Ocean. I

personally didn't attach much weight to those things. It was a democracy. Naturally, we wanted to see it continue as a democracy and solve some of its problems, namely the communal problem which was beginning to loom, and the economic problems, too.

We had a large AID mission there. The embassy was active in the decision-making on what to support and what not to support. The AID director got up in front of us on starting to support a huge irrigation project, which the embassy thought was too expensive.

The Peace Corps came while we were there. They made a point of trying to distance themselves from the embassy, and succeeded.

The USIS was very large. Bob Lincoln was the PAO. I thought it was effective on the whole.

Q: Did India sort of loom as the colossus to the north or anything like that? India was going through trouble with China at the time. I was wondering whether there was any feeling that India was fishing in troubled waters.

JOSIF: At that time, I don't think so. I think that India - although it's terribly massive compared to Ceylon (The ratio of population was about 40 to 1.) - was preoccupied, as you pointed out, beginning in 1961 and then especially in 1962 with its northern border and the Chinese incursions across the border. There was one respect in which India was of concern to the Ceylonese and therefore of some interest to us, namely the Tamil problem. The Tamils in northern Ceylon were related, of course, to the Tamils across the narrow Palk Strait in Madras, India. Also, there were Tamils working in the tea plantations up-country around Kandy. Between them, the two Tamil communities amounted to about 22% of the population. It was a considerable minority. There was a feeling among the Sinhalese that they shouldn't let India support the Tamils or get involved in local politics. I was surprised, frankly, when much later, the Ceylonese were persuaded that they needed Indian troops to put down a rebellion by the "Tamil Tigers," and when the Indian Army got involved. It was a thankless task. They wound up killing Tamils, which made them very unpopular in Madras, where a suicide bomber killed Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

WALTER A. LUNDY
Consular/Political Officer
Colombo (1961-1963)

Walter A. Lundy, Jr. was born in Georgia in 1933. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia in 1954 and serving in the US Air Force from 1954-1958, he received his master's degree from Georgetown University in 1961. His career has included positions in Colombo, Saigon, Hue, New Delhi, Teheran, and Seoul. Mr. Lundy was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in September 2005.

Q: So you went to Colombo, then Ceylon now Sri Lanka, in 1961. What kind of work did you do there and what was it like? Not too large an embassy I think?

LUNDY: No, it was a very small embassy. There were two junior officer slots, and the local pattern was to spend the first year as the Embassy's consular officer and the second year in the political section. As it turned out, I spent about 17 months in the consular section and about nine months in the political section. The consular job was by far the more interesting. I was the only consular officer, and I of course was very dependent on the local employees. I learned a great deal from exposure to all phases of consular work. Since I would never do consular work again, this was very valuable experience.

The political section was not a happy place; it was overstuffed. There were three political officers, one of whom was also the labor officer. The political section chief was not at the counselor level; there was only one counselor in the embassy, the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). Once I got out of the consular section I realized how well off I had been there and in all candor was glad when my Colombo tour ended.

Q: In the consular section, as the only consular officer, you had to do everything, which I suppose was mostly visas or protection of American citizens?

LUNDY: More protection and welfare work than anything else. A great deal of shipping and seaman work too. Colombo was not a major port, but there were enough American flag ships in and out and enough American tourists to give me the opportunity to learn much about both aspects of consular responsibilities. Ceylon was in the old Asia-Pacific triangle which meant that the annual immigrant visa quota was only 100, but we only came close to that number in 1962. Visitors visas were issued mostly to very rich people. There also were some business travelers and a few students, but the visa workload was never heavy.

Q: Then in the political section you said you were the junior officer of a relatively large staff, and so you were doing some biographical reporting and cutting out newspaper articles?

LUNDY: Yes, that sort of thing, not terribly inspiring. The embassy never had any money for travel. We should have been getting out into the countryside. I learned in later assignments how important that was, but we were not traveling other than what we paid for ourselves. Our contacts tended to be among the elite in a very small capital city. I don't think we did a very good job of political reporting from Colombo.

Q: Had the ethnic strife that later affected Sri Lanka not really started yet at that time?

LUNDY: They had had some bad times in the mid-1950s, but it appeared at the time I was there the reasonably enlightened leadership in both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities would be able to work things out. The elites were still in control, i.e. those who had inherited the mantle from the former colonial power, Great Britain, which did not leave Ceylon until 1948. There had not been a well organized independence movement; the British simply so no reason to remain in Ceylon after they had left India. The civil servants they had trained were still in place.

In light of the severe communal strife of the past three decades, the country's prospects at the time we were there seem overly optimistic. Even then, however, they clearly were not getting on

top of their economic problems. This was long before the Asian economic miracle had begun to occur. Basically the economy was subject to fluctuations of agricultural prices; exports were mainly tea, rubber, and coconuts. I was not an economic officer at that time, but it was obvious the country was struggling economically. Ceylon was nowhere near meeting the aspirations of its well educated (by Asian standards) people. The country had made commendable progress in providing medical and other social services. In retrospect, ethnic strife probably was inevitable. In addition to linguistic and religious differences, both the majority Sinhalese and Tamils believed the other community was receiving more than its share of economic benefits.

Q: Were you involved at all with Ceylon's relations with its neighbors? India in particular?

LUNDY: To some extent. The Tamils had migrated to Ceylon from Tamilnadu, the largest of India's southern states. A large number had come as much as 2,000 years ago. Others had been brought by the British in the 19th Century to work on tea plantations in the hill country of central Ceylon. I was supposed to be reporting on the Tamil community, and should have been talking to people outside Colombo, particularly in the Jaffna area in the north. Because of the lack of travel money, I never went there.

Q: Did you have as one of the most junior officers in the embassy much contact with the ambassador and the DCM, or were they somewhat distant?

LUNDY: No, the ambassador and the DCM kept their doors always open. There was a remarkable ambassador who arrived in Colombo about the time I was assigned there, Frances Willis. She was the first woman to have made it through the career ladder to an ambassadorship. In retrospect, however, I have mixed feelings about her. She was an extremely hard working and completely dedicated public servant; on the other hand she simply had no idea how to delegate.

Q: She wanted to do it...

LUNDY: She had to see every written word that left the embassy. Such scrutiny reduced the volume and content of the reporting. I had an easier time there than my more senior colleagues who knew what they were doing, while I was very junior and had so much to learn. I was lucky to have worked for her in that I much benefited from exposure to her long experience. I believe strongly, however, the first rule of management is that the best supervisor is the person who supervises the least. Ambassador Willis' very cautious management style made life difficult for the deputy chief of mission, embassy section chiefs, and heads of other agencies.

Q: Had the Colombo Plan started at that time?

LUNDY: The Colombo Plan was launched in 1950; it was never much more than a coordinating mechanism. Later, I attended a couple of their annual meetings representing the East Asia Pacific bureau. At no time did the Colombo Plan have much real influence.

Q: Frances Willis was also ambassador or maybe minister to Switzerland. Was that before or after Sri Lanka?

LUNDY: Before. She was chief of mission both in Switzerland and in Norway. I think probably while she was in Switzerland the status of the legation was upgraded to Embassy, and her title then became ambassador. In either case, she was chief of mission. After she left Bern, she became ambassador to Norway and then was moved from Oslo to Colombo soon after President Kennedy was inaugurated. South Asia was a completely new experience for her, which may have been one reason she seemed to be a bit unsure of herself. She had started out as a young officer in Latin America in 1927. After her first two posts, which were in Chile, Valparaiso and Santiago, she was assigned either to Europe or in Washington.

Q: OK, anything else Walt that you would like to say about your first post in Colombo?

LUNDY: No I think that about covers it. I could talk about personnel problems there but would just as soon not open that door.

Q: Sounds like there were several that had affected you there.

LUNDY: There were.

HARRY I. ODELL
Economic Officer
Colombo (1961-1964)

Harry Odell graduated from Brown University and later attended graduate school at the Fletcher School of International Affairs at Tufts University. Prior to attending Brown University, however, Mr. Odell had served in the US Army Air Corps during World War II. His Foreign Service career began in 1950 and it took him to places such as Germany, Israel, Sri Lanka, Greece, Jordan, and Switzerland. In addition, Mr. Odell has held several positions within the Department of State. He was interviewed by Peter Moffat in April 2000.

ODELL: This was 1961 that I went to Sri Lanka. There had been a very few years before that some serious "communal disturbances," community disturbances - Tamils and Sinhalese - which had taken very unpleasant forms, but they hadn't created a national crisis that caused a great deal of trouble. In the circles in which we moved in Colombo, the educated well to do professions that we tended to know, civil servants, senior civil servants, and so forth, and the club we belonged to, the Eighty Club, which I think was probably the best club in Sri Lanka (I joined to play tennis primarily.), Tamils, Sinhalese, and Burkers were the Eurasians there mingled freely on the social level. They played tennis together and had dances together and parties together and so forth. You didn't sense much, except that marriage between those groups was very, very rare indeed.

Quite a few of the people at that level were at least nominally Christians rather than Hindu or Buddhist. The religion was a kind of blanket that covered them to some extent, but it was very rare for them to marry. I still have friends whom I haven't seen in years, but they spend part of

their time in London and the rest of the year in what's now Sri Lanka. He is a Sinhalese, a very good family, and she is a Tamil. I think they were the only couple that we knew that somehow bridged that gap. To answer your question, we didn't see much actual trouble.

Q: Who was our ambassador at that time?

ODELL: Frances Willis. You've heard of her. She was a career officer, of course, and she was our first minister at that time to Switzerland. Then when we raised the legation to embassy rank, she became the first ambassador. Then she was subsequently ambassador to Norway and then her sort of retirement post was Sri Lanka. That was a good thing for me.

Q: Did you ever know her?

ODELL: No. She's dead a number of years now. She was one of the genuine brains that I met in the Foreign Service. I met a lot of very bright people, but she was in her 60s at the time. She doesn't seem all that old to me now, but did then. She was bright and very demanding. She could have quite a ploddy demeanor that some people didn't like. But she had a great capacity for going to the heart of an issue. I found her very helpful in the sense that she could sense what you were getting at very quickly, sort of like a good editor helping somebody write something. At least with me, she could sense what it was.

I was fortunate professionally in Colombo that I had been kind of bumping along and the job was not terribly exciting. Having to write about tea and all and rubber... We didn't have a great deal of interest. We had a fairly large AID mission. I never quite understood how the AID mission had gotten to be that substantial in Ceylon, but it was a big one. The first thing was, Miss Willis decided that she wanted to keep the AID mission director kind of at arm's length - for whatever reasons, I don't know. She wanted me as her economic officer to be the one that kept in touch with the AID mission and kept her informed as to what they were up to, which was not easy because they were up to all kinds of things. That was the first thing. I had to report to her on what they were doing.

This got me involved with the AID mission director Jack Bennett, who had been a fairly senior guy in the Treasury at one time. I don't know how he ended up in AID, but I think that was Jack's retirement post somehow. He and I got along fairly well. I told him, "Jack, the best thing I can do for you is, you are persuaded that your AID mission is doing good things - let me see as much of it as you possibly can. I'm not a spy, but Miss Willis is asking me questions every day." So, he arranged for me to go with all of his field officers to every damn thing they were doing, which got me all over the island. I saw all sorts of things, which was fun.

But the big thing that happened in Colombo was that Senator Hickenlooper attached an amendment to the AID appropriations bill or something. It said in substance that any foreign government that nationalizes, seizes, American property and doesn't provide adequate, prompt, and effective compensation shall not have a USAID program there. We would suspend the AID program. Well, at that time in Brazil - I think it was one of the federal states of Brazil - was giving IT&T a very hard time. Of course, nobody wanted to suspend the AID program to Brazil. It was a big operation down there. But the Ceylonese in their wisdom decided to nationalize

American Oil Company. There was no oil in the ground as far as I know, but there were two American marketing companies, STANVAC and CALTEX. They split half the market and British-Dutch Shell had the other half. Well, they decided to nationalize these marketing operations. They sold the gasoline and the diesel fuel and the kerosene and so forth on the island. They set up Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. To give the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation facilities, they nationalized all these gas stations, storage tanks, and distribution facilities. Well, they didn't provide prompt, effective, and adequate compensation. As I say, nobody really wanted to move in on the Brazilians, but here was Ceylon up there. You could do anything you wanted to with Ceylon and that wouldn't cause any particular trouble. So, we suddenly from being a fairly obscure place started getting an awful lot of attention. Boy, the oil company, figuring that this was setting a precedent, their high-powered brass from London, Amsterdam, and New York were out there all the time, coming and going. The U.S. government got very much interested, too. We were constantly being visited by people. So, just fortuitously, being the economic officer, I was it. I started dealing directly with Frances Willis and this became our prime occupation for close to two years. This was about what we did. That was very enjoyable.

It ended up, of course, by suspending the AID program, finally deciding that they hadn't provided the prompt, effective, and adequate compensation, although they kept saying they were going to and I believed that in their own way they fully intended to do this, but they were going to get around to it sometime next year or something. So, we suspended the AID program, closed the whole thing up, and sent everybody home.

Q: What was the reaction of the Ceylonese authorities?

ODELL: It was a very interesting reaction. I remember the day I went down with Ambassador Willis. The final word had come through that there was going to be no further reprieve and "You are hereby instructed to go down and tell the foreign minister that as of midnight or something, he is going into the gas chamber." I remember going down there and Francis saying, "Oh, dear." So, we went in and she told him and put a formal note on his desk. We sat there for a moment and he said to her, "Is there anything else?" She said, "No." He said, "Well, thank you for coming" and rang his own bell. An assistant came in and he said, "See that the ambassador's car comes around, please" and down we went. That was his reaction.

But then, the Ceylonese press picked it up. There was an official statement from the government saying how terrible this was and so forth. But I went that evening to play tennis at the Eighty Club. Here was the foreign minister's assistant there and nobody said anything. We played tennis as usual and everything went on.

Relations got a little chill; there is no doubt about that. I think I have to backtrack. I think it was just before we did this when relations were getting kind of difficult. The prime minister was a woman, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the widow of the man who had been assassinated. Just before Christmas, it didn't occur to us at the time, but the ambassador came in and said that she had been invited - not summoned, but invited - by the prime minister to come to her residence that afternoon. If the ambassador would like to, she could bring Mr. Odell with her. I said, "What is all this about?" She said, "I don't know, Harry. I think that maybe they're going to break diplomatic relations with us or something." We didn't know. Whenever it was, relations were

very funny. We rarely saw the prime minister directly except on social occasions. She dealt with us through her foreign minister. We got over there to her official residence and came in. The prime minister greeted the ambassador and then nodded at me. She said, "We've been kind of quarreling with each other lately. I thought we all ought to have some Christmas cake together." So, we sat down. Some of her personal staff came in and we had tea and Christmas cake. Then we went home. That was all there was to it. We didn't discuss any business.

Q: Was there some coup or coup effort?

ODELL: Yes. I don't remember the exact dates. I would guess it was about a year before I left there. There had been unhappiness for some time with the government in power. Mrs. Bandaranaike had replaced her assassinated husband. I think his party thought that they would use the name Bandaranaike and that she would be a figurehead. Somewhat to their surprise, I think, she became a powerful personality in her own right, and she was very much in charge. She had a controversial nephew named Felix Bandaranaike, who was always kind of off there on the side and so forth. There was a lot of dissatisfaction among the capitalist-minded, free trade, right wing, if you will, types in Ceylon. There had been rumblings for some time. There is no doubt that the government in power had a number of pretty far left types in it. They were doing all kinds of things, many of which needed to be done - in other words, spreading the benefits that were available down to everybody on the island. They were on this Sinhalese nationalist kick, which meant attempting to have everything in Sinhala, which is understood by only a few million people in the world. Of course, educated Ceylonese, which extended pretty far down in the population, whether they were Tamil or Sinhalese, English was the common language. It was a shame, but it was impossible to break away from that. That was causing problems. Then there had been a lot of changes. They made a lot of changes in the upper structure of the army, which was not very important at that time (This was before the real civil war developed.) and the civil service and the businesspeople and so forth. So, there were constantly rumors. Something had to be done about this. A bunch of these people got together and plotted to overthrow the government. Then they realized that their plot was being talked about around town, so they all met down on a beach near Colombo one night and decided that they'd better call this thing off. Exactly what their physical plans had been, I don't know or I've forgotten. Anyhow, they all went home and, of course, the government then sent policemen around and arrested them all. They were held in prison before trial for a long, long time. Then finally a special panel was convened of judges to try them. The trial was still going on at the time I left. They were convicted and sentenced to prison, but some years later, after a change in government and so forth, those that were in prison were amnestied. Nobody was hanged or anything. There is no doubt about it that they were conspiring to overthrow the government. There is no doubt about it that when it came down to it, the trial was probably fair enough. However, a lot of people felt that, yes, they had been bad and they had been punished and eventually they were amnestied.

Q: Was the embassy involved or informed at any point?

ODELL: That the coup was going to take place? I don't know. I was not sufficient high ranking in the embassy at that time to know how much we knew about it. I don't think there was any doubt in the coup planners' minds, however, that strong elements in the American embassy didn't like the government in power. Certainly, the Defense attaché made no bones about it, nor

did the CIA people. Whether they were actually involved in the planning, I doubt it. I don't think they did. But at the Eighty Club, where a number of these coup plotters were members, you would have to be kind of blind not to realize that there was a considerable amount of grumbling going on, talk, this, that, and the other thing, and rumors circulating that something might go on.

Anyhow, the coup didn't succeed and the government was more firmly in power as a result. It was still in power when I left. We had in the meantime suspended our aid program and sent all the AID mission people home.

JOHN L. DeORNELLAS
Political Officer
Colombo (1962-1965)

John L. DeOrnellas was born in Alabama in 1921. He received his bachelor's degree from Spring Hill College. His career included positions in Mexico, Paraguay, Ceylon, Honduras, and Dominican Republic. Mr. DeOrnellas was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 2002.

DEORNELLAS: At any rate, and then, by golly, about two weeks before we're supposed to leave, we've got the house sold and all that stuff, they tell me, "No, not going to New Zealand, you're going to Ceylon," which is now called Sri Lanka, as you probably know. A big switch, man. British Commonwealths, if you like, but different climate completely, different society and so forth. The first thing I said was, "Well, I don't know any language for Ceylon." The guy says, "Oh, anybody that counts in Ceylon speaks English." That, of course, was not really true, there was a little truth to it, but not for the guy going to do a Labor attaché. Well, the embassy never accepted it, they claimed, as an attaché job, I was kind of betwixt and between on that one to start with because the Labor Department thought of it as a specialized job, in fact, that's kind of how I wound up in the job. I was even the third or the fourth person named for the blasted job because most of the people named before me weren't considered interested enough in labor affairs to be acceptable to the Labor Department. The last guy before me was too much of a Labor attaché to be accepted by the Ambassador. The Ambassador was Frances Willis, the first career woman ambassador, very hard set lady. In any event, so Labor Department really wanted to hold on to that job as a specialized job and they were willing to give up the job in New Zealand, at any rate, for the time being, in order to hold on to the job in Ceylon. But the embassy didn't really think of it as that specialized a job, so I was in the political section and I was supposed to keep track of the left side of the political spectrum, which I did. There was a reason for that, it's quite an overlap. Far and away the major part of the Labor movement there was, shall we say, Marxist, theoretically. Most of it was independent Marxist, and quite a bit of it was Communist, actually. In any event, that was understandable, but it kind of meant that I'm betwixt and between in terms of the Labor Department and the Embassy. The situation there was that I also got a scoop there, in connection with political developments, but I was never appreciated by the Embassy and was never put in any efficiency report that they sent in on me. What actually happened there was that - one of the most notable things that happened during that time - they started their Socialist orientation. They had decided to expropriate the petroleum marketing

business there. There was no petroleum production, no prospects for petroleum production. But there was some marketing business, not a lot. Shell was there, and from the U.S. side, both Caltex and blend of Standard of California and Texaco that applied to most of the Eastern Hemisphere, actually, not in Latin America. Caltex was there and Esso was there. Mobil had once been there but it had sold out to Esso. In any event, so the stakes were not that big, it wasn't production or anything like that, it was just merchandising. But at the same time, the oil companies were worried about Sukarno in Indonesia, where they had a lot of production, Sukarno was throwing his weight around. So the Hickenlooper Amendment was invoked, this was a part of the aid funding program, but it expropriated American businesses and didn't immediately pay satisfactory compensation, so forth. We pulled the aid program out. Well, just about the time I got there, sure enough, the properties had not yet been taken over, but the legislation was going through and so forth. So, by god, Washington wants to invoke the Hickenlooper Amendment, and pull the whole aid thing out. Well, Ambassador Willis tried to keep it from happening, but it did, and the independent Marxists and the Communists who had been at one another's throats, more or less, ever since World War II, because at the beginning of WWII, the whole Marxist movement there, had opposed the war, as an Imperialist war that Ceylon should have nothing to do with. And then when Hitler attacked Russia, by god, the Communists, Stalinists if you will, all of a sudden, it's a noble war. When the independent Marxists didn't change their minds, so they had a fight about that and the Communists arranged to stick some of the independent Marxists in jail. In any event, they had never been close together. And then, by god, when this business of the American government picking on them about the aid program and so forth, the Communists persuaded the independents to form something called the United Left Front. So that gave me some extra hostility, so to speak, to cope with. Complications for a while. Fortunately, I had some contacts, and after about a year, I learned from the contact that Mrs. Bandaranaike, female Prime Minister in the job because her husband had led the revolutionary movement to bring on the indigenous power of Ceylon versus the British government, and then he had been assassinated. In any event, Mrs. Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister and that was one reason, I think, why we had a female ambassador, but in any event, Frances Willis really worked at the job, but she was very European-oriented. In any event, Mr. Bandaranaike had made a deal with the independent Marxists, some of whom were very sophisticated types. The head of the party had a Doctorate from the London School of Economics and the number two guy, the head of the Labor movement, in fact, was a criminal lawyer, who had gotten his law studies in London. Both of them were very British-oriented types, really. So in any event, partly because the people she had in the cabinet were a bunch of clods and these people had some brains, technical qualifications, and partly because she wanted to break up the United Left Front, she had decided to make a fusion government with the independent Marxists, split up the United Left Front. Well, I got the scoop on this, and I thought it made sense. We didn't want the United Left Front, certainly, and I thought we could live with independent Marxists. It wasn't a matter of getting the oil stuff back, that was gone over a dam. So I duly reported to the embassy this was going to happen and it seemed to me we could probably live with it. Nobody else at the embassy knew about this at all. In any event, it made Ambassador Willis kind of uncomfortable because she felt that if people thought that the Leftists and Marxists had come into government on her watch, people in Washington would think she hadn't done the job all that well. I kept trying to emphasize they were independent Marxists, they weren't really Communists, but of course they had been buddied up with the Communists for a year or so, the United Left Front. And the [CIA] station chief's pitch was, "Any Marxist is bad,

John, don't start telling me there's a distinction - Marxists are bad." So my neck was a little bit stuck out, some people didn't even want to believe this was going to happen, but it did. It did. And I really got credit for it at all, for having scooped the situation. Instead, I got into some criticism because I was supposedly too close to these people. So it turned into a problem, for me. Eventually, I did get to see the efficiency report. You probably were around in the days when you didn't get to see the efficiency reports.

Q: Yes.

DEORNELLAS: So I didn't know what they were sending out at the time. Eventually, after they tried to get rid of me, I eventually did see the efficiency reports and nobody had ever given me the slightest bit of credit for my work in that regard, instead they picked on miscellaneous things. Well, the agency just couldn't be trusted on this stuff, because they, well, they didn't have people that understood the clients, the culture or whatnot. One time when the Communist labor movement split actually, between the people that stayed with the Russians, and the people that went with the Chinese, you know, after the Russian-Chinese split. The labor movement there, the Communist part of the Labor movement, split. You could even read in the newspaper about who went with what and tried to separate. Well, I was appalled to find, in reading a report from the station chief - they did let us look at some of the stuff they sent out - he had gotten the names exactly backwards. He had down as the people that went with the Chinese the people who stayed with the Russians and vice-versa. So I just quietly went instead of saying anything to the Ambassador or whatnot, and I said, "Jake, you got this backward here." He said, "Well, that's the way I got it from my source." I said, "But this means I've said one thing works, but you're saying something else. Here's a clipping out of the newspaper so you can see that what I'm saying is what's being reported in, what's really true." "Well, I just sent in what my guy gave me, and I'm not going to change it." That was how badly out of touch he really was. This is the same guy, of course, who kept insisting that no good Marxists, all Marxists were bad, and so forth. But he went back to Washington on leave and sold Washington the idea that we should destabilize the government to precipitate the downfall and bring in the right-wingers, the supposedly conservative party group. I tried to suggest that I didn't think it was necessary or desirable, but in any event, the idea got sold in Washington, and we were supposed to go on with it. I figured well, if they were going to do it, by god, it better succeed! So I didn't scheme against it or anything like that, but I nevertheless was somewhat blamed for the fact that I wasn't enthusiastic about it, I didn't really approve of it, so to speak, even though I had gone along with it. At any rate, the eventual result of this was that I was up for selection out - the board had met in the fall of '64 who had put me on the list. But there's a story there too. Were you a Foreign Service Officer?

Q: Yes, I came in in '55.

DEORNELLAS: Okay. In '64, the board was given a mandate to select out at least 10% of the Foreign Service Officer Corps. And to do so, if necessary, by relying on one year's efficiency report only. They never got such a mandate, I'm told, either before or since. They never were given that high a percentage, if they were given a percentage, and they were never told to do it on the basis of one year only, it always used to be at least two years. Dean Rusk thought there were too many people in the Foreign Service Officer Corps. He was having trouble with some

people protesting about Vietnam, of course. That was the mandate they got, or so I'm told. In any event, I was promoted in '58, '60 and '63 and the board that met in the Fall of '64 had me on the list for selection out. And nobody ever alleged that I had become a drunk, or - well, to the extent that they subtly indicated that I might be a security risk - it was just about the business that I was so damn close to these independent Marxists, whom I was supposed to be close to, you understand? I mean, that was my assignment. It wasn't something I took on as an avocation [laughs.] So I really was upset about the thing. So I come back to Washington, I was talking to various people and it turned out that a very large percentage of the people that the board selected for selection out were people that had come in as "integratees," they had been "Wristonized" and whatnot. And somebody began to think, well, maybe this is snobbery or something going on here, you know, people are still resenting the "Wristonization" process. So they decided to offer those of us who had been FSS, now watch this, I had not been "Wristonized" but I'm in the [stud] book as an FSS because of that second security check, so I have FSS on the history. They decided to offer those of us that had that background, on paper at least, a chance to revert to being a Foreign Service staff, be on the payroll. Well, hell, I had a bunch of kids, I had no independent means-

GEORGE G. B. GRIFFIN
Second Secretary and Vice Consul
Colombo (1962-1965)

George G.B. Griffin was born in Turkey in 1934. He graduated with a BA from the University of South Carolina in 1957, and served in the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant overseas from 1957 to 1959. After entering the Foreign Service in 1959, his postings abroad have included Naples, Colombo, Calcutta, Islamabad, Lahore, Kathmandu, Kabul, Lagos, Seoul, Nairobi and Milan. Mr. Griffin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: You then went to Colombo in '62?

GRIFFIN: Yes.

Q: And you were there till when?

GRIFFIN: 1965.

Q: Was it called Ceylon then?

GRIFFIN: It was called Ceylon.

Q: It was later Sri Lanka. When you got there in '62, what was the situation like?

GRIFFIN: It was tense because in late 1959 Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was assassinated. A few months later, in 1960, his weeping widow Sirimavo was elected his

successor – the world’s first female prime minister. She and the socialist Sri Lanka Freedom Party men who put her in power declared that rapacious foreign capitalists were ripping off the good citizens of Ceylon. They nationalized foreign oil distribution companies, mostly American and British, without paying compensation, which brought into play our so-called “Hickenlooper Amendment.” It mandated that Washington cut off our aid program. For Ceylon it was actually the second, or maybe the third time our aid had been cut off. I think Ceylon may hold the record for the most times our aid was cut off.

The Ambassador, a wonderful woman named Frances Willis, was the first female Career Ambassador. Some people in Colombo said that sending her to deal with the world’s first female prime minister was a mistake, and she certainly had her disagreements with Mrs. B., as the Ceylonese was called. The Ambassador tried hard with Washington to forestall or turn around the decision to cut off aid, but didn’t succeed. There were almost daily demonstrations against the Embassy, which made our work more interesting. While we were not in good odor in Ceylon, the Soviets were, the Chinese were, and other not-terribly-friendly countries were, especially the other “Non-Aligneds.” All of them had a good time laughing at the demonstrations and newspaper editorials against us. But that didn’t inhibit our life much. We were not told we couldn’t go anywhere. Today it’s impossible to visit the north, for example, but in those days there was no problem in going to Jaffna or anyplace else. One of our staffers hit and killed a child one day when she was out driving in the countryside. That caused a mob scene, but it had more to do with poverty than with politics.

About midway through my tour, in November 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated. I was Protocol Officer, and was tasked with organizing a memorial service in the main cathedral. Prime Minister Bandaranaike came to the service, despite her public antipathy toward the United States. After that she began to come to other official USG events, such as Independence Day.

We all remember where we were when we heard he was killed. I was the Embassy duty officer, and was waked up in the middle of the night by the Marine Gunnery Sergeant. He said, “The President’s been shot. It doesn’t look like he will live.” He asked who should call the Ambassador. I said I would, but he beat me to it. We both called her.

Like many of my generation, I admired the President Kennedy. He spoke at my graduation at South Carolina when he was a senator. I met him there. At my commencement ceremony, Senator Kennedy essentially paraphrased his book, *Profiles in Courage*. He was a good speaker. In my FSO class, he was our hero, especially after his inaugural address, so I wanted to do a good job of his memorial service, and think I did.

Q: In Colombo was there much of a Soviet presence there?

GRIFFIN: Yes, the Soviet Embassy was huge. It certainly was among the five largest embassies there. The Indians probably had the biggest one, the Chinese had a big one, the Brits did, and we did. When aid was cut off, ours dropped, or cycled down, because people left. When it was turned on again, they came back. Colombo is where I first encountered the Soviets, to my detriment. I think it stemmed from an incident at a reception. I had on my political officer hat, and represented the chief of the Political Section at a reception at the Galle Face Hotel, very near

our embassy. The host was the Publisher/Editor of the Ceylon Communist Party newspaper, the name of which I don't recall. In any case, I talked to him for awhile. He had had a couple of shots too many of something to drink, and started bragging about how much money he was getting from the Soviets. He said they paid for publishing his paper, and many other things. He described how they infiltrated the school textbook market, the movie market, and other sectors with Soviet propaganda. It didn't cost him a cent, so he was having a good time, including vacations in Crimea and other goodies. I had the sense to go back to the office and stay up half the night banging all this out in a report. The Ambassador's praise for that in my efficiency report helped get me promoted.

The pool at the Galle Face Hotel was a sort of international gathering spot. Much of the diplomatic corps used to hang out there, including the Soviets. My wife and a young Russian woman became friendly, and I began talking to the husband. We were all about the same age, in our 20s, and our kids were the same age. As I was supposed to, I always reported our conversations. He didn't say much of intelligence interest, but he seemed to want to be friends. Our station chief, who read those reports, saw this as an indication that the Soviet wanted to defect. He knew the man had a particularly sensitive (i.e., KGB) job at the embassy, and asked me to keep talking to him. I agreed, after Ambassador and the DCM authorized it. That led to a wild dinner party one night.

The Soviet invited me to dinner at his house. I said sure, assuming it included my wife and son. But he wanted just me, saying he wanted to talk alone. So, after a nod from my boss, I agreed. I arrived to find a table the size of two put together, groaning with food, and thought it was going to be a big party after all. But there was only one other guest: his boss, the KGB station chief. They spent the evening trying to convince me to defect to the Soviet Union, pouring Scotch down my throat, and asking me to chase it with vodka. I can't drink vodka and told them so, which seemed to upset them, but they finally agreed I could do beer. Soon, things were moving right along. The station chief was a Georgian who had been the equivalent of a Golden Gloves boxer as a young man. He had been assigned to Rome and then Paris as cultural attaché, and claimed to be an opera singer. He proved it loudly, running around the room, on the back of a sofa, onto tables, leaping here and there, singing various Italian and French opera roles. He was very good.

They tried hard to convince me, going into deep, embellished detail about how great the Communist Party was, and how well one could live as a member. They said I could be a member as a foreigner and get special benefits – blah, blah, blah. Afterwards, I went to the Embassy and reported as much as I could remember. Our station chief was excited. He was convinced that the younger officer tried to cover his tracks by saying that I wanted to defect, but actually wanted to do so himself, and asked me to keep after him. He suggested that I try again to get him to come to my house for a return visit, and said that if I could get him there, his people would be outside and get him safely away. I was to make sure he brought his wife and child. I tried. The Russian sounded excited over the phone, but said he had to check with his boss. The next day he called me back and said he couldn't do it right away, but perhaps a little later. I said it was up to him. The following day he showed up at the pool with his boss, the KGB chief. They walked around a bit and generally ignored us. My wife went up to him and asked about his wife. He said she had

suddenly left for home, and seemed sad. So, his wife and kid vanished quickly, and a week later he was gone too. I never saw him again.

Shortly after that, I was condemned in *Blitz*, the Indian Communist Party newspaper in Bombay. I was charged with being a CIA spy; up to no good in this “idyllic” country down south. Then there was an article in another communist journal. Both stories were quoted by a Communist Party Member in a speech on the floor of the Ceylonese Parliament. He accused me, the USIS Cultural Affairs Officer, and a real spook of trying to unseat the SLFP Government, and asked the Prime Minister when she was going to have us PNGed and thrown out of the country. That was followed in 1964 by the publication of an East German book called *Who's Who in the CIA*. Sure enough, I'm in it.

Q: I'm in it, too.

GRIFFIN: Everybody's in it. Lyndon Johnson's in it. Dwight Eisenhower's in it. It's distinguished company.

Q: I had been in INR, and I think they picked...

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, that'll do it every time.

Q: I picked the book up and thought, gee, maybe I know somebody here.

GRIFFIN: I still have my copy.

Q: It was an East German publication, disinformation.

GRIFFIN: East German, fronting for the Soviets, who didn't want to put it out themselves. Well, all that haunted me the rest of my career. I think that dinner party was where it all began.

Q: What about the government and the political life? Did we play much of a role there, or were we pretty passive at this point?

GRIFFIN: USAID had some rather large projects in Ceylon in those days. They were doing reclamation work in eastern Ceylon, and funding some power plants, on the order of the Aswan High Dam – big stuff. Our aid programs have changed since then, but in those days it was considered the thing to do. When they expropriated the oil companies without compensation, all this came to a screeching halt, and most of the staff was pulled out. Of course, the rest of us still went about our business. The Peace Corps remained, but there was talk about shutting down the program because the Soviets and their allies, seeing that it was a success, were mounting a propaganda effort intimating that it was a cover for more nefarious activity. Sometime during that period, I was asked if I wanted to help start a Peace Corps program in the Maldives, which were part of our territory. Even though the Ambassador was duly accredited to the Maldives, we couldn't go there during my posting because the British were trying to hold down sometimes violent political turmoil in the southern atolls. They wanted to wiggle their way out of their mandate, and didn't want anybody else, including us, coming in and upsetting things. So we

didn't go, but I put my name in the pot in case a program opened up. It sounded like something that might be fun. A friend of mine who worked with Arthur Clark, the author of *2001, A Space Odyssey*...

Q: A science fiction writer, but more than just a science fiction writer, he's a future thinker.

GRIFFIN: Yes, he thought up communications satellites – his biggest claim to fame. He also used to go scuba diving and produced some underwater movies. I got slightly involved in that on the east coast of Ceylon. They were going to film in the Maldives and I wanted to go, but the Ambassador wouldn't allow it. That situation turned around just before I left, and after Ambassador Willis left. Our next ambassador, Cecil Lyon, managed to get there. He went on a U.S. Navy ship, shortly after I was transferred back to Washington. What was the point I was mentioning in regard to the Maldives?

Q: It was the Peace Corps thing.

GRIFFIN: Well, that didn't happen. The Peace Corps never sent a contingent to the Maldives. I saw it wasn't going to happen, so when asked what I wanted to do next, with Personnel saying rather firmly that it had to be Washington, I was ready to return home. Then my wife fell ill and I had to curtail what was supposed to be a three-year assignment. As I was preparing to depart, I got word that I was assigned to the Operations Center, which was considered a real feather in your cap in those days. I don't know what it's like now. They picked the best officers they could find - at least that's what I was told.

Q: Oh, I think it was. It was part of the introduction to how the Department operates and all that.

GRIFFIN: Well, it had barely started. The Operations Center was created during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. I got there in 1965, and found it a pretty rattletrap organization in many ways. Since I was curtailing, I had time to kill, so I asked for, and was selected for, one of the best deals that ever happened to us – a free trip from the Ford Foundation and the Wally Byam Foundation. They gave us a car and a trailer and let us see the USA for six weeks – a wonderful experience.

Q: To give talks on the Foreign Service?

GRIFFIN: Right. I had never been west of the Mississippi, so it was a real education for me. Nor had my wife, for that matter. We drove all the way to California and back and had a terrific time.

Q: I want to come back to that, but one last thing: When you were in Ceylon, were we looking at the Tamils?

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, very much so.

Q: What was the situation at that time?

GRIFFIN: The situation was, as always, tense. The middle political officer, Donald Rau, had come to Colombo from Madras. He filled a Tamil language-designated slot, designed to maintain access to that community. He would sometimes take me with him when he went to see senior Tamil politicians, so I heard their side of things. And sometimes Don would go with me or with the Ambassador to call on Sinhalese politicians. There were several murky and violent incidents, especially in the north. Most Tamils in Colombo at that time were professionals. I remember a couple of them – a lawyer, and an architect. They were prestigious, and quite well known internationally, not to mention within the country. One of them pulled me aside one night at a wedding and said urgently, “I hoped you would be here. I must talk to you, and this is the only place we can talk safely. They are killing us in Trincomalee and Jaffna, and the news is being suppressed.” He filled my ear with one horrific tale after another, which I reported. Don Rau said it was probably all true, but that the Bandaranaike government would never admit it.

It was clear to us that some Sinhalese priests were fomenting trouble. They were Buddhists, supposedly peaceful fellows, but certainly they didn’t always act that way. It was Sinhalese first. Mrs. Bandaranaike introduced Sinhala as the country’s sole official language. Up to that point, English had been the common language between Tamils and Sinhalese. But her government forced a change. Everything had to be in Sinhalese: signs, road signs, license tags. It put a Sinhalese symbol for the honorific *Sri* on all car license tags. It’s still on those the license tags. There is no Tamil lettering at all. Her government changed the name of the country from Ceylon to Sri Lanka.

My family and I, and other embassy officers traveled around most of the country, and would often hear tales of horror. We couldn’t always confirm them, but we heard accounts of whole villages being burned down in the hinterland, with hundreds killed. There are two different groups of Tamils – the so-called Ceylon Tamils, who have been there throughout history, and the “estate” Tamils, who were brought in from South India by the British to work on tea plantations. In ancient times, the island was ruled by Tamil kings, so it’s not new. Most Tamils now live in the north and have ties to Madras State, or what is now called Tamil Nadu, in South India. We heard stories of arms and money smuggled in from India, but the situation didn’t erupt into open warfare for another ten years or so. Just before I arrived in Ceylon, Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike tried personally to calm down incidents in which many people died. It was considered one of the reasons that he was assassinated by a Buddhist monk. Such people said he wasn’t doing enough for the Sinhalese.

Maybe I pushed our luck a bit. I bought a VW Bug from my predecessor, and we drove all over the Island. Nobody tried to stop us. It wasn’t a fancy car, so I could go places without attracting much attention. Once I drove to a new settlement, but didn’t realize what was going on until I got there. Mrs. Bandaranaike was recruiting Sinhalese from the cities and all over the south, enticing them into Tamil territory by expropriating land and distributing it to them if they agreed to farm it.

Q: Were we looking for the Indian hand behind the Tamils?

GRIFFIN: It was there. Many people talked about it. The Indians, of course, denied it, saying there was nothing official going on, but there were certainly suspicions. I seem to recall that some mid-level Indian diplomats were booted out for that sort of alleged activity.

Q: With the Hickenlooper Amendment, were we able to carry on any sort of exchange program and get some of the Sri Lankans or Ceylonese to the States?

GRIFFIN: Yes, we did; we tried. USIS, USAID, and the Asia Foundation were all working with the Embassy. We tried to get people to come here and see what America is all about. This is jumping slightly ahead, but when I was Desk Officer for Ceylon in the Department, I escorted a team of VIP Ceylonese visitors around the U.S. They included Dr. N. M. Perera, the head of the Trotskyite LSSP Party, a senator and a cabinet minister from Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP party, who happened to be married to each other, and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, all of whom I had known in Colombo. I took them around the country, from New York, to Puerto Rico, to the Grand Canyon, to California. They finished in Hawaii, where I didn't go with them. That was one such effort, so the IVP program was going strong.

Q: Did we feel the hand of the Fabian socialists and the London School of Economics in the Bandaranaike movement?

GRIFFIN: Yes. But especially Perera...talk about armchair socialists! He loved to go to black tie parties and drink scotch, and then rant and rave against capitalism. It was pretty phony.

But, back to the Bandaranaike government, it had some dedicated Fabian socialists. The Minister of Petroleum, Colvin R. de Silva, was probably the heaviest-handed Soviet lackey of that crowd, though he had lots of competition from Pieter Keuneman. On the other hand, there was little hesitation on their part to talk to the Ambassador, while they were rather snooty to me, in particular, Mrs. Bandaranaike's nephew, Felix Dias Bandaranaike. But that probably had more to do with my inferior rank, than in dealing with the United States. Felix seemed to respect the Ambassador, at least to her face. They all did. Members of the United National Party, the UNP – Dudley Senanayake's and later J. R. Jayawardene's party – seemed more comfortable with us. J.R.'s middle name was Richard, so some called him "Dickie." It had an Uncle Sam connotation – insinuating that he was in our pocket. But he was his own man, and a much colder fish than Senanayake.

Yes the socialist hand was there, and we would see it among newspaper writers and editors, as well as politicians. Compared to, let's say, India, Ceylon might not have the most respected brain power in the world but, on a per capita basis, the island is more sophisticated than its neighbors. It's smaller and perhaps more agile, because many of its people had been places and done things. Many of them spoke English, so communication was relatively easy and interesting. They could be engaging, but would not hesitate to argue with you if they didn't agree. At the same time their history is replete with violence; especially intercommunal violence between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority.

Q: Were the politics, particularly the leftist politics, of Ceylon sort of in line, and was there some relationship with the politics of Nehru and Gandhi up in India?

GRIFFIN: Well, they were at the Bandung Conference in 1955 when that group was formed.

Q: The Nonaligned. The NAM.

GRIFFIN: S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Mrs. B's husband, was a founding member of the Nonaligned Movement, and felt strongly about it. In my time, we watched visits by most of the others – including Ne Win, Nasser, and Sukarno. They all came to Colombo to meet the SLFP leaders and each other, so that was part of our political reporting process, and on our regular reporting plan.

Q: Did we feel there were any hooks that we had to deal with this as far as bringing them around, or was it just a matter of hanging in there?

GRIFFIN: Well, of course Ambassador Willis tried to influence the SLFP Government. I don't remember the length of her tour, but it probably was close to four years, so she must have been there for three years when I arrived. She seemed to think she had a handle on those people, and that she could reason with them. But there were differences of opinion in Washington, with some people saying, "Maybe we can edge them along," and others saying, "Oh, they're just a small part of the greater Soviet orbit, and not worth talking to." There were mixed attitudes on the Hill as well, which influenced what the Department did and said. We were not supposed to be too friendly with the SLFP Government people, especially after they were silly enough to expropriate our oil company properties. That set off many people in Washington, who said, "I told you so. They're not worth talking to. Why should we bother?"

Q: You left there when in '65?

GRIFFIN: I left in March, I guess, because our trailer trip, I believe, began in April, so I must have come home in March.

LaRUE R. LUTKINS
Deputy Chief of Mission
Colombo (1962-1965)

LaRue R. Lutkins was born in 1919 and raised in New York. His career with the State Department included assignments in Cuba, China, Malaysia, Japan, Hong Kong, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and South Africa. Mr. Lutkins was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 18, 1990.

LUTKINS: I had had my eye on and was more or less promised the job of the Far East liaison officer at the embassy in London. In those days, we used to have a man in London, a man in Paris and so forth. Which I would have loved, but Personnel came up with the DCM assignment in Ceylon, and career-wise it seemed more important.

Q: *Well, it is. I mean, DCM is...*

LUTKINS: So I was not unhappy at all about it. And, of course, Personnel saw it as a getting out of one's area and getting a little bit of broadening. And it was a very interesting experience.

Q: *You had two ambassadors there, Frances Willis and Cecil Lyon. I wonder if you could compare and contrast their styles, how they operated, and how they used you as a DCM.*

LUTKINS: Well, that's a very good question. And there certainly was a marked contrast there. They were both old pros. Frances Willis I guess was our first career woman ambassador. She had already served as chief of mission in Bern, Switzerland, and then in Oslo, and this was to be her last post. But, as I said, she was a thorough professional, had come up from the ranks and knew the Service inside out and the regulations, and knew everybody's job in the embassy better than they did. But she was not a delegator. I don't mean to say that she didn't have a good grasp of the overall situation, but she couldn't resist immersing herself in every detail in every section of the embassy.

Q: *That must have been a little bit difficult, being deputy chief of mission.*

LUTKINS: It didn't leave too much for the DCM to do except carry out some of her wishes, naturally. I found her a delightful woman and a very intelligent, able woman, but the contrast with her and Cecil Lyon was very marked. I served with Frances Willis for two years and Cecil for one. Cecil Lyon's approach was that, after about three months of working together and sizing me up, he said, "The embassy is yours. I'll concentrate on the big picture, and you run the embassy."

Q: *What was our policy and our interest in Sri... Was it Sri Lanka at that point?*

LUTKINS: No, it had not yet become Sri Lanka, it was still Ceylon and a British dominion. And it had a governor general, who, although a Ceylonese, was appointed by the Queen. Under which there was an elected prime minister, who at that time was the widow of an assassinated prime minister, Bandaranaike. When he was assassinated, they brought his wife in, who had no political experience but was fairly shrewd. She was not too experienced and was rather subject to manipulation and pressures by some of her political associates and advisors.

Her government, if not Leftist, was Leftist leaning. It was allied with the Socialists and even the very minute Communist element there. In fact, they had two Communist parties: the regular Communist Party and a Trotskyite Party. It was rather fragmented. Her government had been preceded by and was to be followed by a conservative government.

But, as I say, at that time, in '62 and for another couple of years, there was this Left-leaning government. Left-leaning, not so much socially, because Mrs. Bandaranaike came from one of the leading land-owning families in the country and was basically fairly conservative in her viewpoint. But the foreign policy they were following pretty much tended to be a neutralist, Third-World-country line, allied with countries like India and Ghana and Indonesia and so forth.

So that we were having some problems with them in foreign policy viewpoints and attitudes and positions.

It came to a head not long after I got there, because they put through a law nationalizing foreign oil companies: Standard Vacuum, Caltex, and, on the British side, Shell. Which wasn't earthshaking or anything, but it caused a major problem for us, because the Senate and Congress had recently passed something called the Hickenlooper Amendment, which made it incumbent on us to terminate any economic aid program to any country that had nationalized an American company.

Q: I think it was: nationalized and had not made steps towards compensation within six months.

LUTKINS: Not made proper compensation, right. Your memory is better than mine.

Q: Well, I've just been dealing with an oral history dealing with this major problem in Peru.

LUTKINS: Oh, that followed it, I think, yes. I don't think they ever went to the extent of actually implementing the Hickenlooper Amendment in Peru, did they?

Q: A long account by Ernest Seracusa of how they circumvented that, with the collusion of the president and everyone else.

LUTKINS: We were the guinea pigs in Ceylon, because they were bent on enforcing it. And, of course, it meant major tension in our relations with the government. We had endless negotiations at high levels, including the prime minister and the ambassador and so forth. I think they may have sent somebody out from Washington, too, but I can't recall.

But the upshot was that they wouldn't provide guarantees of what we considered prompt and effective restitution. So that we did close down our AID program. They retaliated by shutting down our Peace Corps program in the country.

And things were rather tense for quite awhile. I think they actually had some demonstrations. The ambassador and I and one or two others spent the afternoon playing bridge while she was burned in effigy outside.

There was a local election a year or so later, and the conservative government, which we were quite obviously sympathetic to, came back into power. I was gone by then, I don't know what was dreamed up in terms of a settlement of the oil company claims. Apparently it was sufficient for our purposes, so that we resumed relations on a normal scale.

Incidentally, I guess a year or two later, we sent a Peace Corps contingent back in again, which I thought was a great mistake.

Q: Why did you feel that?

LUTKINS: Well, it's interesting. It goes back to the beginning of why we had a Peace Corps presence there in the first place. That was, of course, a major initiative of the Kennedy administration. I thought it was an example of the American way of not doing things as well as they might.

What they did (and I wasn't there at the time, it was before I arrived), the Peace Corps sent out young emissaries to various countries and tried to persuade them that they needed a Peace Corps group. Well, some of these countries, including Ceylon, really couldn't have cared less whether they had a Peace Corps or not. But it was free and so they were prepared to take it. But they had no real idea what they would do with one when they got it.

It turned out, I think, and this may have been true in some other countries as well, that they were engaged almost exclusively, if not entirely, in English language training. I'd have to look at the records, but I don't recall there being any cases in Ceylon where they were actually working on village improvements, infrastructure. But I do know that they were teaching English.

To my mind, it's indicative of the general American approach, and not just in foreign policy, the idea that if X is good, 10X is bound to be ten times as good as X, and that therefore you want to get numbers. And the people back in Washington trying to, very crudely I suppose, build an empire, although I'm sure from a very idealistic point of view.

It may have been so in other countries, I think in Ceylon it was definitely a case of forcing this down their throats. And then when they pulled it out, I think it was a great mistake to go back and put it back in, but that's as it may be. I frankly didn't feel, in the year or two that they were there when I was there, that they were really accomplishing terribly much.

You can look at the Peace Corps in, I guess, three different ways. First, that it actually accomplished something on the spot. And I guess in certain cases it did. Second, you might say it was good public relations in persuading the foreign country that the Americans were pretty decent chaps after all, and really wanted to be of help, and were not like the hated colonials. Third, I think that the most useful effect of the Peace Corps was to give exposure to young Americans who then would come back and have some knowledge about the world. But maybe I'm overly cynical.

Q: Well, it was a good recruiting thing for the Foreign Service.

LUTKINS: Did we get many people?

Q: We did. I was on the Board of Examiners, and they were obviously a cut above somebody who had just gone through graduate school.

LUTKINS: Before moving on from Ceylon it might not be out of order for me to comment briefly on the country itself at that point in time in the post-colonial era Third World. It seemed to me, in retrospect, to exemplify the pattern of development (albeit on a small scale because of the country's relatively small size) of at least a number of Asian countries that were granted their independence following World War II. In Ceylon's case the new independent government

inherited from the former colonial power, England, institutions such as a shared language of government, a bureaucratic infrastructure, and an impartial judiciary, all of which cut across and blurred racial, religious, and language lines: Singhalese-Buddhist, Tamil-Hindu, Christian, Muslim. But after the restraining, moderating, and unifying lid of colonial overlordship was removed, gradually and at an accelerating rate the centuries- old ethnic and religious differences, mistrust, and animosities reemerged. This would have been difficult for any government, however strong and well-intentioned, to control. But Ceylon, like some other new, post-colonial states, was operating under a more or less imposed Western-style democratic constitution which provided for regular elections based on universal suffrage. It was simply expecting too much of the average Ceylonese villager or farmer, whether Singhalese-Buddhist or Tamil-Hindu, to abandon his society's age-old parochial beliefs and vote in terms of broad enlightened national interests. The result was that with each post-independence election one found in Parliament and therefore in the government more and more men representing and advocating views and policies which were conceived in narrow factional rather than broad national terms. Which has all led increasingly to the sad picture of modern-day Sri Lanka rent by bloody civil strife between Singhalese and Tamils and its once reasonably healthy economy in tatters.

CECIL B. LYON
Ambassador
Ceylon (1964-1967)

Cecil B. Lyon was born in New York in 1903. He graduated from Harvard University in 1927. He joined the Foreign Service in 1930, serving in Cuba, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Chile, Egypt, Poland, Germany, France, and Ceylon. Mr. Lyon was interviewed in 1988 by John Bovey.

Q: You could have said India.

LYON: The autumn of '63 I was back in Washington preparing to go to Sri Lanka. Of course, we called it Ceylon in those days. It was still known as Ceylon, and I was anxious to get there, because, shortly thereafter, in November there'd be the election of a new U.S. president. And I wanted at least to get to my post before I had to send in my resignation, as all Ambassadors have to do as you know when a new president comes in. And then I was told that I had to take a course on espionage. Actually it was counter-espionage, and it had been started by Bobby Kennedy. It was interesting but it delayed me six weeks which didn't please me at that time. Rob McIlvaine was running it, and he was the nicest thing about it. They took people in that course on a trip; we traveled around; we went down to a naval base, and I went down in a submarine, which scared me to death. We went to Fort Bragg, I think it was, where they had a lot of simulated traps that the Vietnamese built to catch our soldiers--booby traps--and all sorts of things. It was very well done. In any event, I finally got to the point where I was to go abroad and I asked to see the President. I always think its useful, that we all should see the President before going off to new posts. And I was told that he was too busy, he couldn't possibly see me. So I regretted that, but suddenly a telephone call came saying, "Get over right away to the White House, the President will see you at six o'clock," and it was then about 5:30.

Q: This was Johnson?

LYON: Yes, Johnson. I got over there at six o'clock and found that there were two other Ambassadors who were home from their posts and waiting to see him. We waited, and we waited, and we waited. Then in about an hour we were taken in and Johnson said, "Let's have a photograph." So we all had photographs with the President, and he said, "Ya'll doin' a fine job down there. Just keep on doing the fine job you're doing." And I said, "Mr. President, I'd like to take a message from you to Madam Bandaranaike, or the High Commissioner, because Ceylon is still a British Colony." He said, "Yeah, do that. Ya'll doin' a fine job down there. I'm proud of you, doin' a fine job." I didn't dare tell him that I hadn't even been "down there" yet. We went off for Ceylon.

Q: Excuse me. When did it become independent? Was it while you were there?

LYON: Well, it was a Dominion while I was there, and it had a High Commissioner, and then it became fully independent about five years ago, as I recall. But I had to get my agrément from the Queen of England. She was still the Chief of State. I started off and all the briefings in the Department led me to believe that I was going to be enemy number one when I got there. The Prime Minister was Madam Bandaranaike, she was rather leftist in her ideas. Her Minister of Finance was a man called Doctor N. M. Pereira who'd studied under Harold Laski at the London School of Economics, the gentleman who was largely responsible for much of the breakup of the British Empire. And she had nationalized the oil companies, two American and one British. They didn't have oil in Ceylon but only distributors. All the oil was imported by those three companies. She'd nationalized those, therefore we had cut off aid, and then she had thrown out the Peace Corps. So I arrived with nice things to look forward to.

The first night we were there it was awfully hot, and Elsie and I were tired: we'd been meeting people, meeting the staff and everything. We decided after dinner to go and have a little walk on the beach. It was a beautiful moonlight night and we couldn't resist the temptation, we took off our clothes and plunged into the ocean. And we hadn't swum very far when we saw something coming towards us. And I said to Elsie, "What's that?" She said, "I think it looks like another person swimming, who's doing just the same as we are." But as it got nearer, we noticed that it wasn't a human being, it was the biggest turtle you've ever seen in your life coming towards us. The turtle was coming out to lay its eggs on the shore, and if it had taken one snap at us we'd have lost a leg. We scurried out.

I arrived, I think, on a Monday and I was received on a Thursday by the Governor General. The night before, we had a big reception for the whole staff, and Elsie and I went to bed, and just as we were turning off the lights I heard a squeak, a funny squeaking noise. I said, "Elsie, what on earth is that?" "Oh," she said, "they tell me there are bandicoots in the roof and they make noises like that. They eat the insects and the snakes and things." We had all sorts of snakes. We had cobras in the garden, amongst other things.

Q: A bandicoot is a sort of rodent, isn't it?

LYON: I think so, I don't know what a bandicoot is, but anyway she said it was that. We had our bedroom, then a dressing room and then a bathroom. I said, "Goodnight Mr. Bandicoot" and went to sleep, and I was suddenly awakened by a scream from Elsie. I hopped out of bed, and just then a naked man rushed right by my bed. I pursued him, and he ran out in the hall and started going down the stairs. I pursued him half way down, and then I suddenly realized that I too was naked, and I was scared that if he had a knife it would not be too pleasant, so I rushed back and I wrapped a sheet around me and I went downstairs. By that time he'd vanished but all the other servants kept coming in with baseball bats, and tennis rackets, and everything. We didn't find him. He'd already gone. The police came and they went upstairs. There was a big armoire in the dressing room, through which Elsie had gone with a flashlight. She didn't want to wake me, so she just took a flashlight, and the police opened the armoire door, and it made just the same squeak we heard before, which we thought was bandicoots. And I noticed that this fellow as he was going downstairs, limped a bit as he ran and scurried down the stairs. The next morning we were waiting on the terrace in front of the house to be taken off to present my credentials. And the Chief of Protocol drove up to pick us up in the car; a couple of cars for the whole staff. And I noticed that our footman, who went out to open the door of the car, limped. We never could prove that it was the same man, but the police said he was probably a peeping tom.

Q: This was a footman from your own staff?

LYON: Yes, he was one of the Embassy servants. He was probably a peeping tom, and he hid in the closet. And just as he started to get out Elsie chose that moment to go through it with a flashlight so he scurried to get out of the way. We never really found out.

My way had been paved for my going to Ceylon by Peter Ramsbottam, who had been a colleague of mine in Berlin and later was in the British Embassy in Paris. His father was called Lord Soulby; he had been Governor General of Ceylon. He had helped in making the treaty in which the colony became a dominion, etc., etc., and then they later had sent him out as Governor General. He was very nice and had given me a lot of good advice. When I presented my letters of credence to Gopallawa, who was the Governor General, at Queens House, which was a great manor thing left from the days the British ruled...

Q: He was Ceylonese then?

LYON: Gopallawa was Governor General. And we were led in first by all the servants. In those days they wore a sort of chignon at the back of their hair with a comb stuck in it--the male servants.

I was shocked because all our servants were barefooted; they were in very nice uniforms but in bare feet and I, of course, immediately got shoes for all of them because I didn't think the American Ambassador's servants should be barefooted, and they were all furious. Every time I was out of sight...

Q: It probably was sheer torture.

LYON: ...they'd take off their shoes.

We went into this vast building, the Queen's House, and we went upstairs and through numerous corridors, and we finally got to the ballroom. It was in the middle of the rainy season and all around the ballroom where I was to present my letters of credence to the Governor General, there were buckets--drip, drip, drip, with rain coming through the roof of Government House. Well, anyway, the Governor General couldn't have been nicer and he was very friendly. I said I was sorry the relations between our countries had reached such a pass, and what I wanted to do was straighten them out. He was very encouraging; he said, "Well you know these things happen, and I think we have more reasons to be friendly than not," and all the usual things, but nicely done. He said, "Come and see me anytime you want." So when I left there I decided perhaps the job wasn't going to be as difficult as I'd thought. Actually, I was rather pleased that there were some problems to settle if I had to go there.

I'd succeeded Frances Willis, who was a lady Ambassador, one of the first career lady Ambassadors. I was told again we thought it wise to send a lady Ambassador to a lady Prime Minister, but Madam Bandaranaike didn't like it at all. She thought it was almost patronizing.

The next day I called on the Prime Minister, Madam Bandaranaike. Temple Trees was the name of the residence where the Prime Minister lived. Her husband had been called Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike. He'd gone to Oxford and he'd been in the Oxford Union at the same time as Eden. He was a brilliant man but he was a bit left wing. He came of a very important Ceylonese family. They had their own hierarchies, but he was very interested in the poor and the poor workers. As I said, he was rather leftist, and he had changed many of the laws, trying to make the lot of the poor better. There'd been riots and finally he was assassinated. His wife was rushed in on a wave of tears, so to speak. In any event she was pretty cold to me; she was rather a handsome woman, and she was a little bit hefty; but she had a great deal of charm. I tried to explain that I wanted to try and get the oil matter settled, and she said, "You wouldn't have cut off aid to a more powerful country, but Ceylon was a little country, you just took advantage of us, and if someone else had done, it you wouldn't have cut off the aid." I had to say to myself, "I think maybe she has a point." Because I know we were scared of the same thing happening in India. We thought if they got away with it in Ceylon, the Indians might do the same sort of thing. But I said the usual diplomatic things; let's forget about the past and think only of the future.

After that I left and I was rather encouraged and we immediately got to work, trying to settle the oil matter. I thought it would be a great thing if we could settle such a claim against a very leftist government. I thought it would have a good effect around the world, and I went to see Pereira and he said he certainly wanted to settle the thing. But they put such a high fee--our oil companies had put such a high fee on compensation which they wanted for the nationalization that we were miles apart. But we kept working on it, and working on it, and eventually it did work out but I won't go into that. Incidentally, Pereira was head of the Trotsky Party, one of the only ones still in existence.

Q: They did settle?

LYON: We got it, but not from that government unfortunately. I would have preferred it if we'd been able to do it with a very leftist government.

The second day we were there, I was sitting in my office and Elsie came in, looked around and said, "My, you've come down in the world, haven't you?" After the glorious office I'd had in Paris, looking out on the Place de la Concorde. I said, "Well, I'm told that when Frances Willis was here, and it rained, she used to have to sit under an umbrella because the roof leaked so badly."

Q: Tell me, was the Tamil-Singhalese trouble already boiling up?

LYON: We had some riots.

Q: But in Colombo there aren't many Tamils, are there, or am I mistaken?

LYON: Well, the Tamils are about 20% of the population. Most of them are in the north around Jaffna, of course.

Q: That's what I mean, yes.

LYON: But there also quite a number of Tamils in Colombo too, some even in the Government.

Q: There were outbursts when you were there?

LYON: They'd already started, and in that connection I would say they couldn't have a better president at the present moment than Jayawardene, who became president later. He was Deputy Prime Minister when I was there.

Q: You knew him well then?

LYON: Oh, I knew him well. And after Madam Bandaranaike's government fell--oh, I should tell how the government fell. They'd had terrible storms, lashing the country, and she called me up in desperation, and said, "Couldn't I get help sent in?" And I tried to, because I thought, you know, anything we can do to get this lady to come around.

And we did send some help but while the storm was lashing the country, Madam Bandaranaike's government fell, and it fell by one vote. It's rather interesting: she said that I brought down the government--I naturally would have, if I could have but I don't think I did. But I may have helped because a few weeks before that, the USIA had received a film called "Years of Lightning, Days of Drums"--did you ever see it? Its a documentary about Kennedy and Kennedy's life, and, all through it, they played the funeral march and the funeral went along. It showed how Kennedy went to Berlin, said, "Ich bin ein Berliner," and he made a lot of speeches. It was a marvelous documentary, and I wanted to show it in all the movie theaters in Ceylon. The government said I couldn't, because they thought it was too disagreeable for their good friends the Russians and the Chinese; they were very friendly with our so-called enemies in those days.

Q: Why would it be disagreeable for them?

LYON: Because it was very pro-democracy and pro-West.

Q: Oh, I see. Surely, there was no attempt to tie the Russians or the Chinese into the assassination?

LYON: Oh, no, no. Mrs. Bandaranaike just didn't want to do anything that might offend them because they were very friendly.

Q: The Cubans might have been irritated.

LYON: Well everybody who was not too democratic, and not too pro-U.S.

Q: No, I was thinking of the conspiracy theories.

LYON: Anyway, they wouldn't let me show it at any of the theaters, so I invited any number of people to the residence, and we had several showings. And then I took it all over the country. I'd go to a town and I'd get a local golf club or whatever it was, to allow me to have a room. I'd hire a room, and I'd invite all the leaders of the community to come and see it. I did it all over Ceylon. I was traveling around madly with this film, showing it everywhere. Then a picture came out in the press after one of our receptions where we had the film; the photo showed me and a Member of Parliament, C.P. DeSilva. But he was the one man who crossed over from her party to the other side and brought down her government. It fell by one vote. And that M.P. was photographed with me coming out of the reception...so she was convinced that I had put up the whole thing.

They were very clever, the conservative party. Some of the leftist Deputies were traveling in Europe and they were about to come back, just before the vote. The conservatives knew when this vote was coming up. The conservatives said, "Why don't you go down to the south of France? Its perfectly lovely, you ought to see it." "Well, we don't have any money." "Oh, we'll give you the money." So they got four votes to disappear, not to be back to support the government.

Anyway, the government fell, and in came Dudley Senanayake, who was the head of the conservative party. And he was a nice, slow-going individual. He was astute but he was rather like a great many people in that country: a little tired because of the heat. But this very bright Jayawardene, who is now the president was his Deputy Prime Minister. Whenever I had any difficult problems I would get hold of him, or go to see him, when I could, politely, without giving offence to the Prime Minister. We got lawyers down from the States, and after a couple of months of negotiations we settled the oil thing.

Q: That was while you were still there?

LYON: That was while I was there. Then I also succeeded in getting the Peace Corps to come back. So everything went very well, and then between you and me and the lamppost, things got a

bit boring.

Q: Tell me, what were the relations between New Delhi and Colombo at this period?

LYON: They were perfectly friendly. You had Indira Gandhi who was a lady Prime Minister and Madam Bandaranaike...

Q: I was thinking more of the present situation, where the Indians have gotten themselves into a terrible mess there.

LYON: Oh now, yes, but at that time it was perfectly friendly. I think the Ceylonese have always been afraid of India, I mean that they might be eventually taken over by India. And when I read about Indian troops coming in to try and quell the difficulties between the Tamils and the Ceylonese, and the Buddhists lately, I thought, "Aha, this is sort of the foot in the door. I think it's rather dangerous." But it seems to be going all right.

Q: Well the leadership, of course, is still Singhalese, isn't it? So it's Tamils versus Singhalese.

LYON: I say Ceylonese because that's the way the British pronounce it. It's really Tamils versus Buddhists.

Q: Tamils are not Ceylonese, are they?

LYON: Yes, but they're not Buddhists. I would call all inhabitants of Ceylon, or Sri Lanka, Ceylonese or Singhalese, to be correct. I would have to go to Buddhist ceremonies a great deal. It's sweltering hot; you sit there and, of course, you don't understand a word they're saying.

Q: What's the religion of the Tamils? They're a fairly primitive people, the Tamils, aren't they?

LYON: No, they're about the same. They go to the same schools...and they used to have Tamil people in the Parliament. The Tamils are mostly Hindu, and they have their own language.

As I say, we got the oil thing settled, and the Peace Corps coming back. I don't think AID had started before I left.

The Maldive Islands became independent from the British, and I used to say to people with my tongue in my cheek, "The President again has shown his great confidence in me. He's made me Ambassador to the Maldives concurrently." And people would say, "The what? The where?" Nobody knew what it was. Then I thought I should go over and present my credentials to the Sultan.

Q: There aren't very many people on those islands, are there?

LYON: No, but there are 300 islands and they're spread all over the place. It's a terrible place to get to, there was no easy way to get there. They didn't then have an airfield and the only way to get there was by boat, but there weren't any passenger boats. So the U.S. Government said they'd

send a destroyer to take me. The Ceylonese government would not allow any of our ships to come in unless we declared that they did not carry atomic weapons. We couldn't do that because, it would show which ones did and which ones didn't, it would give the whole thing away. Although the government had changed, and it was already the conservative government, the other government had put this regulation through.

Q: But where would the destroyers be coming from?

LYON: Our South Asian base.

Q: In the islands?

LYON: Oh, no, no. I mean it would have come to pick me up in Ceylon. But as we couldn't do that, the only way I could get there was to go on a boat that carried fish. The Maldivian Islands' sole economy is dried fish, which they send to India and the Indians use in their curry. The boat touches at Colombo on its way to Madras or wherever, Bombay. Well anyway, Jack Eaves, who was on the staff, and I set off on the Maldivian Star. The captain very kindly vacated his cabin for me. The cabin was hardly big enough for me to get in, and I shared it with a man called Gromov, who was the Russian head of the United Nations operation in Ceylon. He was going over for the first time to see what the UN should be doing in the Maldives now that it had become independent. Gromov weighed a couple of hundred pounds, and he was really delightful. It's one of those situations where you wish that the Russians were on our side. You're not allowed to have anything to drink in the Maldivian Islands because it's Moslem, but being a diplomat I was allowed to take alcohol. Anyway Gromov made such inroads on my supply of alcohol that one day I said, "Oh, Gromov you're nothing but a capitalist." "That's Peking propaganda. Why you say that." I said, "Well, you like liquor, you like fast cars, and fast women." "Peking propaganda." And when we arrived in the Maldivian Islands--and Male is the name of the capital...

Q: That's interesting. He was referring openly to the rift between the Soviets and the Chinese then?

LYON: Yes. We got there and he was lodged in the same guest house with us. It was three or four days before I could present my credentials to the Sultan. We got there on some religious holiday, and that was delayed, so I asked if we couldn't go swimming because the water is crystal clear, the coral perfectly beautiful.

I should say the cabin on the boat had been shared not only by me and Gromov, but all sorts of bedbugs. And poor old Eaves didn't fare quite as well as I did. He was down where there were many people. Finally in desperation he slept on the deck, it was so crowded below, and awful. Well anyway, Eaves, and Gromov and I used to go swimming every morning, and Gromov was always snapping out a camera to take pictures of me. I said, "Come on, Gromov, you don't have to take pictures of me to send to Moscow. They've got thousands of me that they took when I was in Warsaw and Berlin." "Peking propaganda." He was wonderful.

I presented my credentials to the Sultan. For a man who'd lived in such a remote place, I found him very much up on things. He dressed in an amusing way. He wore a little kepi on his head,

with a crescent--which is an emblem of the Maldiv Islands--made of diamonds, and three feathers like the Prince of Wales. And then he had on a sash across his chest. But he was really very well informed, and he was very pleased that we were recognizing his country. I'm sure he felt aid was going to start to flow immediately.

Eaves and I spent a couple of days there. It was very interesting. On almost every corner there was a mosque. The British were building a huge hospital with about, I think, 130 beds, something like that. But what they were going to use for doctors nobody knew, there were no doctors there. The country didn't even have a bank, and as I say, their only export was fish. I envisaged that, one day, it might be a wonderful tourist place because its so lovely, but they have to build some hotels or something.

Q: And an airport.

LYON: Well, they were building the airport while we were there. It wasn't built when I was to go there, but it was finished while we were there, and we came back on the first flight.

Q: You must have been there quite a while then?

LYON: I was only there three or four days but actually the airport was almost finished, when we started, but not quite. And they didn't have any regular flights then. That was just to bring back the Prime Minister, who had been ill over in his Ceylon home. As I say, Eaves and I flew back on the first flight and the next time I went--I only went twice--Mike Calligart went with me and this time we did go on a destroyer. And I'd asked the Department if they wouldn't give them a boat. I told them about the atolls, and how its very difficult for them to get around. The Sultan tried to visit all the islands but even he hadn't visited them all--and I thought a landing craft like we used to use in the war would be most useful. But no, they couldn't think of giving me one of those to present to them. I ended up taking them a whaling boat.

Q: What do you mean, they didn't even have an old LST lying around somewhere?

LYON: I would have thought they had, but they weren't that interested in Ceylon or the Maldives. I did take them a whaling boat on my second journey, and that was humiliating. Everybody came out, I was to make this grand presentation to the Prime Minister. And the sailors from the destroyer came in the boat; they dragged the boat close to the shore--towed it in--and then they started in "gr-r-gr", and they couldn't get the damned motor to go. It was terribly embarrassing.

It was rather a sad trip for me also because when I arrived, the first morning, we anchored in the harbor, and I was handed a telegram from the Secretary of State, saying, "Please request the agrément of Mr. Andrew Corry as Ambassador to Ceylon and the Maldiv Islands." I turned to Calligart, "What do you suppose?" and he couldn't make out. I said, "Isn't this funny. When I was home I was given the impression that everything was going well, and I would be staying there." I was rather hoping I would be sent one other place before I had to retire, which would have been about a year and a half ahead. But that didn't work out, so that ended my career as a Foreign Service Officer. I went home via Australia and New Zealand. I found it fascinating, and

I found Australia interesting--the north of Australia particularly so.

When I got home the Secretary said, "Cecil, I'm sorry this had to happen." I said, "Well, I understand." I'd found out that it was because Mansfield wanted his friend appointed, Andrew Corry. And I said, "I'm going out to Perth and make a fortune." "No, no," said the Secretary, "there are still lots of things I want you to do." But every time I'd ask the Chief of Personnel, or anyone, it was, "Well, we haven't anything just now. And you're very lucky. You've had two Embassies, a lot of Foreign Service Officers aren't lucky." I suppose I was, but still its a little bit...

DOROTHY A EARDLEY
Secretary to the Ambassador
Colombo (1965-1968)

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

Q: Well, then, let's go on to better things. Where did you go next?

EARDLEY: Well, I was first assigned to Phnom Penh. Randolph Kidder was named ambassador to Phnom Penh. Well, he got to Bangkok but he didn't get — Phnom Penh wouldn't let him present his credentials. So, even though I hadn't been in Gabon two years, they threw in home leave. They canceled my orders to Phnom Penh and sent me on home leave, so I went. And in Washington, they said, "Just go on leave, stay as long as you want to. If it gets too boring, we'll bring you in here to Washington." And what that means is walk the halls. That's all it ever meant. So I went on. A week later I got a telephone call from Cecil Lyon that he had been named ambassador to Ceylon.

Q: Sri Lanka now.

EARDLEY: I know, but Ceylon it will always be for me. And the tea planters. And Ambassador Lyon asked me if I'd come there. I was delighted. So in January I got to Ceylon.

Q: That was in 1965.

EARDLEY: Yes. And I was there for four years. I loved it.

Q: Tell me about it. You mentioned planters, the tea planters.

EARDLEY: The tea planters and I were great friends. We will always call it Ceylon. Sri Lanka doesn't mean beans to us. They never should have changed. They set the country back 100 full years over that nonsense. They forced the children in school, who already spoke fluent English, made them learn Singhalese.

Q: Who are "they"?

EARDLEY: I'm trying to think who was there after Bandaranaike. Sirimavo Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister when I arrived. Who replaced her? I don't know. This was 1968 when they began this nonsense.

Q: I remember reading about it.

EARDLEY: I don't know if it was Senanayake . . . I just can't remember who was in charge at that time.

Trying to think where Andrew V. Korry fit in here. Andrew Korry was a friend of Mike Mansfield, and that's how he got an ambassadorial assignment. He was a funny little character. Never married. And he lived with his mother until that assignment. I don't know if she died or what. Anyway, he was a lonely man. Had never been married. He took the ambassador's chauffeur to the beach every weekend, and they spent the weekend there together. Swimming. That was his way to get away from things and enjoy life.

Q: How did this affect the embassy? Were there strained relations?

EARDLEY: I don't think so. I was not aware of them.

Q: Did the ambassador have difficulties personally with the new government crowd?

EARDLEY: Oh, no.

Q: Your relations with Ambassador Lyon were obviously very good -- continued to be very good.

EARDLEY: Yes, oh we had worked together for years, and I liked his wife too. As far as I know she's still living.

Q: How were his relations with the other members of the embassy staff?

EARDLEY: Good. Oh, yeah. He was a likable guy.

Q: He was an economic specialist, is that right? No, political. OK.

EARDLEY: No, he was in the Foreign Service from the 'twenties. He came in as a young officer and stayed in. Career officer, he was.

Q: I take it he got along well with the Ceylonese government then?

EARDLEY: I think so. Let me tell you about one of his predecessors who was PNG'd out of there. He was called back by Washington. I'll give you his name, even though you may have to delete it. I did not meet him. I got all this second hand.

Q: What was his name?

EARDLEY: I'm trying to think now. He owned dress shops in New York City. That was his claim to fame. He was recalled because he could not learn to pronounce the Prime Minister's name, which was Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

Q: That's a mouthful in any case.

EARDLEY: All their names were. They all had six or seven syllables in the last name. "Wichigunawardide." What's that, seven syllables? Bandaranaike and Senanayake, that was a very common one. Ceylon was an ex-Portuguese colony, so there were still a lot of the Portuguese names there. Fernandos. Tons of them.

Q: Were there many Portuguese living there?

EARDLEY: None that I know of. But I was good friends with this one Fernando family. She was later arrested for embezzling jewels, diamonds and things from Singapore.

Q: Bringing them in illegally, smuggling them in?

EARDLEY: Yeah. Her husband was a lawyer. Fernando, good guy, I liked him. Titi [*phon.*] Fernando.

FRANKLIN J. CRAWFORD
Political/Economic Officer
Colombo (1967-1968)

Franklin J. Crawford was born in Ohio in 1927. After earning both his bachelor's and master's degree from Ohio State University in 1949 and 1950, respectively, he received his law degree from George Washington University in 1974. He also served in the US Navy from 1945 to 1946. His career has included positions in Hong Kong, Izmir, Isfahan, Teheran, and Colombo. Mr. Crawford was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in January 2002.

Q: Your next post was Colombo. Now, did we call it Sri Lanka then or was it still...

CRAWFORD: No. It was Ceylon.

Q: And you were political officer there?

CRAWFORD: Right. I was the political officer and head of what we called the “political-economic section” and our symbol was “P-E” and my wife saw that and she said, “Oh, now you’re the big pee.” [laughter]

Q: Did you welcome this assignment or not?

CRAWFORD: Actually, I would have liked to have been the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] there at that time. When I asked why I wasn’t given that job, they said, “You’re not high enough rank,” and so on. So I didn’t get it. The assignment was - I didn’t like it much. The ambassador was Andrew Corry, who was a very fine man and we became very good friends, but the trouble with the post, as I think is true of a lot of places, is that we had an ambassador, a DCM, a political section chief, an economic man, an AID [Agency for International Development] office, an attaché, and a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] operation, and USIA [United States Information Agency], so we had about eight or ten people chasing around after the 20-25 people in the country that mattered to the United States. As Andrew Corry used to say, “This place is antipodal.” And so U.S. interests there were really marginal. I mean in terms of Cold War interests and China and stuff like that. I didn’t have enough to do and I was bored to death with some of the politics. They’ve got 35 parties and various shades of Trotskyite-types and so on, all buried in the past. I didn’t like it much. I made no secret of it.

Q: Could you get by with English there?

CRAWFORD: Yes. We took some Singhalese, but I never used it. Our kids learned all the Singhalese swear words from the servants.

Q: Did you have many problems or difficulties?

CRAWFORD: No. Not really. I mean, I got along fine with Andrew, who was trying to make this a better, more interesting job for me, but it just wasn’t there with all those people. If we had had three people. We had the same problem in Tehran, I thought. We had far too many people. I had a good friend who was the political counselor of the Italian embassy. They had an ambassador and this man, my friend, an administrative man, and a consular officer and a few staff, but that’s all they had. And they knew as much about what was going on in Iran politically as we did.

Q: I found that out in other countries. With smaller missions and good officers, they knew as much as we did. Most of them. However, that is not the way we do it. We overkill.

CRAWFORD: Right.

Q: Did you travel around the country much?

CRAWFORD: Oh, yes. We traveled around a lot. It is a little place. But there were things to see and the kids were all of an age where they could travel. We went to some wild life preserves and the beaches and that was interesting.

Q: Was there unrest among the Tamils then?

CRAWFORD: No, that hadn't begun. And we were only vaguely aware of it. Ambassador Corry and I took a trip once to Jaffna, which is the center of the Tamil area, and there had been some agitation. When we were up there we drove out from this rest house that we were staying at and there were a bunch of Tamil demonstrators with some signs and they threw some stuff at us. The driver just turned down and went the other way. That was the only direct evidence I saw of them. There was this sort of political agitation about it. The Tamils felt put upon because the majority Sinhalese had now taken over and the government put the Tamils in their place, they thought.

Q: What was the attitude of the Sinhalese toward the United States? Was it similar to that of India or Iran?

CRAWFORD: Yes. I think so. The Sinhalese (I call them the "Ceylonese," because they include both the Sinhalese and the Tamils) were somewhat like the Indians, neutral, but they were much nicer than the Indians. The Ceylonese were really easy to get along with. They are delightful people, smart, capable. The Ceylonese themselves were great exports because they are so capable. It is a pity for the country that it hasn't been allowed to develop because of this Sinhalese-Tamil dispute. Generally they were well disposed toward the United States. They just thought we should give them more aid or buy more tea. One of them said on the night the moon landing occurred, we were at somebody's house, we were having some party, and we were sitting out on the verandah, and, of course, you see all the stars. I don't know if you could see the moon that night, I suspect we could. Anyway, one of them looked up, and we were all looking up, and one of them said, "Now if those astronauts would just drink one cup of Ceylon tea, our fortunes would be made."

Q: You know where his heart was.

Did you get a fleet visit while you were there?

CRAWFORD: I don't think they came in. That was one thing that we weren't doing. We did have a Peace Corps mission there, which had been kicked out by Mrs. Bandaranaike before I got there. And then when the UNP (the other major party) came back into power - Washington wanted the Peace Corps back in - and they came back in.

Q: Now, you mentioned that the Ceylonese were generally favorably disposed toward the U.S., at least more favorably than the Indians.

CRAWFORD: I thought so. Of course, I never lived in India, and I'm sure there were lots of exceptions.

Q: This was during the Vietnam War. Did that have any effect on...?

CRAWFORD: It did a little bit, because they had some trouble with the Chinese at the time and the Chinese didn't like something the Ceylonese had done, so they were camped out around the Ceylonese embassy in Beijing and so there was a lot in the newspaper about this and what was

going to happen. I remember making several trips to the Foreign Office to discuss this, like what was going on, what we were going to do and what the Chinese were demanding. The Ceylonese were keenly aware of the Chinese presence in the area and the Vietnam War affecting the relationship between the United States and China.

Q: All in all, I gather that the government there was fairly cooperative with us.

CRAWFORD: Oh, yes. I'd say very cooperative. The prime minister when I was there was Dudley Senenaika and he was the head of the UNP party, which was the majority party and they were quite good about cooperating with us. Anything the United States wanted, not that we wanted a lot, but we didn't have any difficulty with them. You know, landing rights, or things like that, planes came in occasionally, or various other things that we wanted. We were interested a little bit in all these things.

Q: Which was covered out of Ceylon...?

CRAWFORD: Yes. The ambassador to Colombo was also accredited to the Maldiv Islands and so were several on the staff. I was accredited.

Q: Did you get down there?

CRAWFORD: Yes. I went down there once. I was glad I didn't live there. Although it is quite a famous tourist spot now.

GEORGE G. B. GRIFFIN

**Near East/South Asia Bureau, Southeast Asia Affairs, Ceylon and Maldives Desk Officer
Washington DC (1967-1969)**

George G.B. Griffin was born in Turkey in 1934. He graduated with a BA from the University of South Carolina in 1957, and served in the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant overseas from 1957 to 1959. After entering the Foreign Service in 1959, his postings abroad have included Naples, Colombo, Calcutta, Islamabad, Lahore, Kathmandu, Kabul, Lagos, Seoul, Nairobi and Milan. Mr. Griffin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Well then in about '67...

GRIFFIN: No, 1966. In June again, a year after I came to the Op Center, I went to NEA as Desk Officer for Ceylon and the Maldiv Islands. That was of course the way political officers were supposed to progress; start out as a desk officer or as a political reporter abroad. It was a good job. At least I knew something about it. That was also about the time when the idea of cones was invented. Until then, most of us were generalists. I was summoned to Personnel, where Dave Zweifel and Dennis Kux told me I would make a lousy political officer. Why didn't I become an admin officer or consular officer? I said, "Huh? My bosses say I am doing great work. What do

you mean?” What they meant was they needed people in those other cones, and there were too many who wanted to be political officers. So they tried to talk everybody out of it. That just made me want to stick with it. They said, “The competition is fierce.” I said, “That doesn’t bother me,” and I did stick with it.

In any case the function of a desk officer then became apparent. I got to coordinate activities between the bureau and the embassy and to handle our relations with those two countries. I also worked part time on India. When I arrived, SOA was an office within NEA covering India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives. Carol Laise was the Director. Ray Hare was Assistant Secretary. He was succeeded a few months before I left in 1967 by Luke Battle. David Schneider was the Deputy in the office and worked mostly on India. Dave had a little test for new officers in SOA. It was a little delicately balanced toy on the corner of a table in Carol’s office. The rule was that anyone who knocked it over had to put it back together during the course of the staff meeting. Of course, he made sure that the new guy sat next to it and was jostled to knock the damned thing down. It was impossible to put it back during the meeting because others kept asking me questions – a little hazing.

My immediate boss was Carl Coon, who was the chief political officer for India. Mary Olmsted was the chief economic officer for most of my time. It was a good team, and we worked together well. I was there for two years. When Carol left, her position was elevated to deputy assistant secretary, and the office was split in two. One office – INS – covered India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Sikkim, and Bhutan. The other – PAB – did Pakistan and Afghanistan. The first Director of INS was Doug Heck. His soon-to-be wife, Ernestine Sherman, came in as a secretary. She had I believe, passed the Foreign Service exam.

Q: She was a Foreign Service officer.

GRIFFIN: Not at first. She wasn’t even a reserve officer because she was given a temporary job as a secretary. She did become an FSO and, later, was Consul General in Madras. Anyway, one of my more interesting chores was dealing with the Maldives, the chain of atolls south of Sri Lanka. While I was stationed in Colombo I wanted to visit there, partly to check it out for a potential Peace Corps job, but the British wouldn’t allow it. There was unrest in the Southern Maldives on Gan Atoll, where the British had a strategic air base. They didn’t want anyone else coming in and provoking the Maldivians. I was also interested in deep sea fishing, and knew it was good there. I had a friend who asked me about establishing a fishing resort, but the British wouldn’t hear of it, though some Maldivians were delighted with the idea. However, the idea of flying from the U.S. to go fishing in the Maldives would have taken some doing and lots of money in the early days of jet travel.

Anyway, the Maldivians knew the British would give them independence. When that happened they turned their office in Colombo into their lone foreign mission. The population of the islands at that time was less than 100,000. After awhile, they decided that they needed a presence at the UN in New York. They also wanted to set up an embassy in Washington, where the ambassador would be dually accredited to the United Nations. They immediately ran into a buzz saw in Protocol and on the Seventh Floor, where they were told they couldn’t have an ambassador dually accredited to the United Nations and to Washington. They said, “Why not?” pointing out

our that our Ambassador in Colombo is dually accredited to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. They got a fuzzy answer, and went ahead with their plans.

Abdul Sattar was sent out as Ambassador, but he had almost no money. It was really sad. He had never been outside of the Maldivian Islands in his life, except twice to Colombo, and once to Mongolia for a United Nations conference. He had a good story about that. As Minister for Fisheries and Economic Development, he went to a UN-sponsored conference in Ulan Bator. He said all he could see was dirt. Where he came from, you see mostly water. He was quite astonished. At one point he said he got tired of the conference, and decided to go shopping for presents for his family. So he went down the street until he saw some dolls in a window which he thought would be nice for his daughter. He went inside, and was soon overwhelmed by hospitality, even though neither side spoke the other's language, so it was all sign language. Finally, he walked away with two or three dolls, which they wouldn't let him pay for. He said he thought, okay, this is Mongolian hospitality and they are trying to be nice to the UN. So he asked his Intourist handler, his minder, to go back and pay for them. The minder quickly discovered that Abdul had walked into a private house. There were no curio shops in downtown Ulan Bator at that time. The people had just given him the dolls, and insisted that he keep them. After returning home, he sent them some Maldivian kites. Some of them are quite fancy, as almost everyone competes in that national pastime.

That is when I first got enmeshed in real estate in Washington. A friend who was an agent helped us find a run-down house on R Street off Massachusetts Avenue and got it fixed up to the point that they could tolerate it. One thing many South Asians don't understand and don't like about American houses is bathtubs. They aren't used to them; they like showers. The house didn't have a shower, but I managed to find some hardware and rigged up one. Similarly, in New York where the prices were even higher than Washington, they managed to find an apartment close to the UN. But that experiment didn't last long because the Maldivian Government really was strapped for money. Eventually they shut the Washington Embassy, but kept a toehold in New York for General Assembly meetings.

Sattar told me another funny story. At the time, Maldivians essentially lived off of fishing. The national sport was kite flying, and the national recreation was swinging. Their swings are large and lavishly decorated. They sell most of the sea catch to Ceylon in the form of dried fish, called Maldivian fish, which they dry by spreading the fish on beaches for months. After it rots to a certain degree, they crumble it up. It's used as a condiment for curries in Sri Lanka. It's very pungent, but is pretty tasty stuff.

When I was in Colombo, the Maldivian merchant marine consisted of five ships, mostly coastal steamers, which brought fish to Colombo, and a couple of larger ships which sailed as far as Bombay, Karachi, Singapore, and so forth. Then all of a sudden the merchant fleet expanded, and one day they had 15 ships. Now they may have 60 – I don't know. Anyway, a huge expansion for a country with almost no money. So I asked Sattar about it over lunch one day. He giggled and said, "Piracy." I asked him to explain. He pointed out that the Maldivian archipelago sits squarely on a direct line between Singapore and the Suez Canal. Any ship that tries to go straight can run into one of the atolls, especially careless sailors. Some of them are under water, but very close to the surface. He said the first time it happened, a Norwegian ship came barreling

along and ran aground. Some of the natives went out in their canoes to take a look. The skipper asked if there was a tugboat nearby. They told him no, but added that the ship wasn't so badly aground that it couldn't float off at high tide in about 12 hours. They advised him to relax until then, and invited him to come ashore and have a cup of tea with the island's headman. When the captain agreed, they suggested that he bring along everyone; they would have a feast. So, the whole crew clambered down a ladder and were rowed ashore in the little boats. But meanwhile, on the other side of the ship, a group of men was climbing onto the ship. They commandeered it, and said it belonged to them because it had been abandoned. They hoisted a Maldivian flag, and put the captain under house arrest for a few days before allowing him and his men to fly home. Sattar said that was just the beginning.

Mrs. Bandaranaike's Government in Sri Lanka was a coalition, in which one of the more powerful parties was the LSSP, a Trotskyite party. Its head, Dr. N. M. Perera, was expelled from the Fourth International for joining the coalition. When I was Desk Officer, he and several other politicians who had never been to the U.S. were offered an IVP grant. The delegation included the Deputy Prime Minister, James Obeyesekere, his wife, who was a Senator, and Sam Wijesinghe, the Clerk of the House of Representatives – a big political figure in Colombo. I was asked to be escort officer because I knew all of them. They first came to Washington, and then I went with them to New York. After that, we went to Puerto Rico to show them that we had tropical islands like theirs. Then to New Orleans, the Grand Canyon, Disneyland, and San Francisco. They went on to Hawaii, but I didn't go along. Obeyesekere kept asking me when we were going to a Playboy Club. When he heard about that, my boss Doug Heck told me he was a member, and gave me his card. He said, "If you find one, take him to it." I never did find one, but we did go to a topless show in the North Beach section of San Francisco, which the men thoroughly enjoyed. Even Mrs. Obeyesekere went and declared it fascinating and fun.

Q: Such is diplomacy.

GRIFFIN: Yes, and they were quite impressed by the U.S. You may have heard of Briggs Cunningham, who won several Le Mans races in France. James Obeyesekere had raced a few cars, and was the first man to fly solo from England to Ceylon. So, I lined up a visit to Cunningham's classic automobile museum in Long Beach, California, where Obeyesekere and I drove fabulous cars for a day.

Q: Okay. One question. Where did Colombo or Sri Lanka stand in the Cold War context of that period?

GRIFFIN: It was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, and not much liked in Washington for that reason. Ambassador Willis had a tough time trying to maintain decent relations and an AID program because they were not friendly to us at the UN. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's husband, was one of the founders of the Movement and she stayed on the same course, as did most other Ceylonese politicians. So, no, they weren't much loved here.

Another vignette. Cecil Lyon left, and it was a sad departure. He had expected another assignment, but didn't get one. He happened to be on his second visit to the Maldives on a U.S.

Navy warship when he got the news. Washington wanted access to the Maldives for use as a refueling station, mostly for Persian Gulf activities. We focused on the British strategic air base at Gan, the predecessor of what they have now in Diego Garcia. But the Maldivian Government's policy was a ban on visits by nuclear vessels, or those with nuclear weapons. At about that time, the nuclear powered USNS Savannah was sailing around the world trying to make the point that it was not dangerous. The Maldivians weren't very impressed. They were hewing to the Non-Aligned line. We searched for a way to say that, if we sought clearance for a ship visit, it would not be for one that carried nuclear weapons. But we wouldn't make a specific declaration, and hoped they wouldn't ask. They said no; they must have a declaration. We said we couldn't do that, because as a matter of principle we neither confirmed nor denied the existence of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. Ambassador Lyon invited their leaders aboard a Middle East Force destroyer, and gave them exhaustive tours from top to bottom. He argued that they could see it didn't carry nuclear weapons. But while we would not state that, we would never embarrass them. That was as far as we were willing to go. They finally bought it in principle.

The Ambassador went to Male to seal that agreement. One morning at breakfast in the wardroom he was handed a copy of a telegram from his DCM – who should have been sacked – telling the Department he had received agreement for Lyon's successor the same day he received the request from Washington. That was the first the Ambassador knew of it. He was devastated, to put it mildly. When he came back to Washington he thought he would get some sort of retirement ceremony. He didn't. To his credit, Dean Rusk called Cecil to his office and personally handed him his ambassadorial flag, apologizing for the way it was handled, but said it was the best he could do. That was the end of his career.

LANGE SCHERMERHORN
Rotation Officer
Colombo (1967-1969)

Ambassador Schermerhorn was born and raised in New Jersey and educated at Mt. Holyoke College. Entering the Foreign Service in 1966, she had several assignments in the State Department in Washington dealing with a variety of administrative and political matters. Her overseas posts include Colombo, Saigon, Teheran, London, and Brussels, where she served twice. In 1992 she was named US Ambassador to Djibouti, where she served until 2000. Ambassador Schermerhorn was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: 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 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 assassinated – I think he'd been in office since 1954 – and 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. However, 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. 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.

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; however, you did an area studies course before you went – two 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 was kind of curious, because I didn't think this kind of activity was what the Foreign Service did: but at that point the Maldivian 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.

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 rate; you 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; the training course is kind of a combination of some high faulting 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 there – other 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.

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 protégé 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.

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 I worked my way across to Hong Kong and then Ceylon.

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 Asians – educated 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 people – and 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 June, he came 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 people – very 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 to – I 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 knew – well, by this time we had a different DCM also – from 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 person – a new officer – but 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,

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 her – not because she couldn't do her job, she did an excellent job – just 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 reports – these little reports where you go out and interview companies and write up various stuff – and 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 fruit – wonderful tropical fruit there – and the other thing were the Ceylon gem stones – Ceylon 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.

Q: This entire 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. 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 three o'clock in the morning so they would get to Europe, 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. 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. 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 there – I 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 Kellogg – now this is what, 1927 or something like that – and 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.

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 trained – at that point it was secondhand because Madame Montessori was back in the '30s or whatever it was – but 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: No, 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.

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 volunteered – this was 1967 – were 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 jobs – the 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.

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.

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 Maldives – this was before I got there – to 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-gram – remember those – about 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 attaché 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; 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. 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 it – and I didn't say anything to anybody – and 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." I learned something then, early on; that you have to add things up and act on what your intention is. Again, I learned something, that the attitude of this 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.

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: 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 Tamils 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.

VICTOR SKILES
USAID Representative
Colombo (1967-1969)

Victor Skiles was born and raised in Idaho. He graduated from the University of Idaho in 1940. After graduation, his favorite professor helped him obtain a fellowship with the National Institute of Public Affairs. In 1942, he entered the Navy and was stationed in Berlin. His assignment to the military government operation was that of assistant to the head of the Food Distribution. He has also served in Germany, Israel, Afghanistan and Italy. He was interviewed by John Kean on December 4, 1998.

SKILES: Yes, and I went to Ceylon as the AID representative. One of the curiosities and so far as I know a completely accidental coincidence is that the Ambassador in Sierra Leone at the time of my field trip out there had been named Ambassador to Ceylon and for some reason he warmly welcomed the prospect of my going out there as the AID guy. In view of some of the less than complimentary things I've said of our State Department relationships, that was indeed a welcome sign and a welcome experience because good relationships obtained throughout the period that I was stationed in Ceylon. Compared with many, working with that Embassy was a joy.

I suppose the main thing to emphasize in the Ceylon program is that it was a good example of a country approach and a materials approach rather than a people approach to problems in the country. Policy and general economic assistance, not technical assistance. Some years earlier we had had quite an extensive technical assistance program there, but relations had been strained after the election of Mrs. Bandaranaike as Prime Minister. She made no pretense of being a friend of the United States, but proclaimed to be a neutralist and aspired to be a leader of the non-aligned countries. Among other factors, oil services were nationalized and (along with the announcement of a contract for the Soviet Union and the U.A.R. to provide oil) the facilities of three Western (two U.S., one U.K.) oil companies were appropriated, without appropriate compensation. In 1962 the assistance program was terminated. A few years later Dudley Senanayake's pro-western party won the election, compensation was arranged, the U.S. agreed to resume an assistance program in consultation with a number of Western countries, and an IBRD Consultative Group was arranged. This was in 1966 and I went out in '67.

The main policy changes were in the direction of "freeing up" the economy, dismantling some of the government controls, increased reliance on the free market and carrying out a development plan designed to increase exports. My primary contacts were Gamini Corea and David Loos. Gamini was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Planning, the ministry portfolio being retained, along with foreign affairs, by the Prime Minister. The staff had a number of mostly younger people on the planning side for Ceylon, rationalizing resources and development plans and policies - and they were very good. David was in charge of planning and operations for foreign assistance programs. Our assistance program in the form of commodity supply was designed to support those policy changes. Initially the AID program was about \$35 million - a loan program - but PL 480 programs of about the same size were quickly put in place, also primarily on a loan basis except for a little emergency relief and a continuing country-wide school and child feeding project run by CARE.

Q: This development planning operation was characteristically a central management of the economy, or was it a framework kind of planning?

SKILES: Both. This gets into what continues to be a touchy situation in many of these countries. Sure, we were encouraging them to do a better job of national planning, largely in terms of government activities, but at the same time our primary thrust was in the direction of bringing about conditions which would permit private enterprise to thrive, so they were doing both. We must keep in mind that this already was a centralized economy. The policies essentially were both in terms of carrying out government functions and in facilitating the activities of private enterprise.

Q: Private enterprise in all fields, or more in some than in others?

SKILES: More in some than in others. Exports were mixed, but the biggest ones (tea, rubber, coconut) were pretty much cartel arrangements. But starting from government policy from the top in things like ration controls on many items of distribution, and tight import controls on purpose for which foreign exchange was spent -- you couldn't bring anything into the country without a license. Licenses were handled not expeditiously by government machinery. The simplest way to make it more efficient is to get rid of the government machinery, or get rid of the import control program, but you couldn't do this all at once, and there was pretty good agreement on a step-by-step process.

Q: But they were moving in that general direction?

SKILES: They were moving in that direction, starting with things that didn't sound very dramatic. For example, controls were lifted on a series of small items that don't sound very important to an outsider, but when you consider the Ceylonese diet, they were quite significant. A substantial chunk of foreign exchange, for example, was used on the importation of consumption items like onions, potatoes and chilies, things that were large elements in the national diet and which were cheaper to buy in nearby India than they were locally. But of course the imports depressed prices to local producers and production went down. The imports had all been government imports, and when the government quit importing them, there was an immediate impact on increased production of these things in Ceylon-- a fourfold increase of potato production in the first year, for example.

Q: Was this the result of significant and relevant policy changes?

SKILES: I'd like to think so. Many of these in the direction of doing less rather than doing more. For example, in that case government got out of the business of controlling supply and partially out of the business of assuring distribution: the ration program. Now this can have some very unbeneficial immediate results, such as the removal of the assurance of supply, when you dismantle a ration system item by item, including likely price increases. But it also has the advantage of making the goods, so far as they are available, available to anyone with the wherewithal to buy them. This is always one of the disadvantages of going through a devaluation process. Sometimes you make it almost impossible for some people to buy the goods because prices tend to rise. One of the binds that this puts the government into is that preferred customers try to substitute for prior supply and price controls by such things as wage increases in some sectors. If labor costs rise in a hurry, then you swiftly affect the benefits of the devaluation, so

this is again, not something that you can do overnight and forget about. It has continuing influences and has to be watched.

Q: Were we significantly involved in promoting any kinds of development action locally, or was it mostly a policy and balance of payments support?

SKILES: Policy and balance of payments support. Conversationally we could encourage as well as discourage, but in general we didn't carve out special areas or projects. Exceptions, sure. In the balance of payments support, we tried to do a number of things. For example, the dearth of foreign exchange over the preceding three or four years had led to an extreme shortage of maintenance and operational supplies for such factories as did exist and for the private economy in general. They were grinding down. So we tried to make sure that the import program financed a substantial portion of that kind of commodity, that we had a big element of maintenance items and operational supplies in the program. The licensing system, which continued for many items, helped channel those imports to preferred uses. In other words, the reduction of licensing was item by item and certainly not across the board all at once. We tried to see that the imports were available to private industries, rather than being channeled into and absorbed by government operations and government monopolies. One example of an interesting little conflict was that Loos, while supporting these policies, was on the other hand encouraging the World Food Program to do a project in chicken production by, among other things, giving a private entrepreneur a monopoly on the import of poultry feed; that is, they would give him and only him a license. This was great for WFP because it gave a substantial guarantee that the project would work successfully, but it certainly was anti-free market because it was giving one entrepreneur exclusive import rights. This was interesting to me partly because our earlier TC program had a substantial influence on getting a poultry industry going.

Q: Was the poultry program then something of an exception in terms of having a direct interest in particular sectors?

SKILES: No, we didn't really take a direct interest in that sector. I did have a personal interest in that as I looked around for evidences of what was left behind from the Point 4 program this was one area where the results were obvious, partly because of the breeding programs and because of a feeding program. As you know in most of those areas chickens are just left to fend for themselves. Compared with India, Pakistan or Afghanistan, the chickens were very impressive: I mentioned the case as an example of a contradiction of policy - encouragement to private enterprise and free enterprise as against controlled imports exclusively to one entrepreneur, and therefore a monopoly. To me there was another interesting conflict, and that was the official policy of the U.S. - as enunciated by me - and the approach of the local representative of WFP (also an American) which was quite different. But that is not really a Ceylon subject. It may come up later when we come to the UN functions.

Q: We were not involved with support for irrigation programs, dam building, or water management, or any of those kinds of things.

SKILES: Well, this brings you to a different side of the coin. We were supporting the development budget / programs so some of the imports would go in those directions, and perhaps

more significantly, most of the local currency that arose because of the import program. Irrigation development, limited support for the dams, transportation, and there were some other things we might have tried to reflect an interest in by agreeing to this kind of a use of funds, but actually that was dealt with on an overall basis rather than projects or sectors, so it really was non-project support. IBRD was involved in the major power / irrigation project. Someone else was helping with a flour mill, which was a matter of some interest to us in terms of the import program, because at that stage we had to bring in flour, and it's much cheaper from a foreign exchange viewpoint to bring in wheat and have it converted into flour if you have the local resources to do the conversion job. In this particular case the flour mill, with the assistance of some other external providers of foreign assistance, was well along. Actually, by the second year I was there we were able to start bringing in some wheat. They couldn't handle it all in the form of wheat at that stage, but I suspect that not long after I left they could use all wheat. I also suspect that I didn't make it sufficiently clear that the U.S. financed import program consisted basically of two parts. One was the AID financed commodity import program, which followed our normal modus operandi, and the other was a PL 480 Title I program, which provided a part of the food imports for the normal feeding of the population.

Q: In that connection, let me ask a question that I'm not sure I'm on the right track on. Is it not true that Ceylon was traditionally a rice consuming country?

SKILES: Yes, that's true, and probably still is that they consumed a good deal more rice than wheat, and they grow a lot of rice. But wheat flour was important, too, and local production limited.

Q: Did you have any feeling that the PL 480 wheat program was in a sense distorting the country's normal pattern of consumption, and the economy with it?

SKILES: I don't remember the particulars too well, but the answer is a qualified no. Qualified in the sense that there was more of a limit to the resources for improved rice production than there was for improved wheat production. And the example that jumps to mind -- I hope it's an accurate one -- is that they were doing, on the far side of the island, what to a small country was a major undertaking in dam building and irrigation called the Mahaweli Ganji, in an area where it really wouldn't have been all that efficient to try too much rice production, but the amount of water which would be under control was plenty for raising wheat. This sort of a conflict was always present.

Q: Climate wise well suited to wheat?

SKILES: I think so, during major parts of the year. Wheat doesn't require a 12-month favorable climate. In that particular part of the country, which is the southern tip, and the eastern side, you literally have droughts in the summertime. Things dry up. There was a game park on the tip of the country where the animals have difficulty getting through the year because of the dryness. This is a little hard to picture in a country we think of as having an abundant rainfall and an almost tropical kind of climate.

Q: But that's why irrigation was so essential, right?

SKILES: Yes.

Q: And, if I'm not mistaken, this project that you mentioned, Mahaweli, was it, continued to enjoy great deal of U.S. support, and became the subject of a lot of intensive study of the social interactions between irrigation and people doing the irrigation and farming, but I guess we weren't that deeply involved at that time.

SKILES: Right. During the period I was there it would not have been possible to do much evaluation because the project was not all that far along, but they certainly were concerned about the settlement issue and it did involve a lot of resettlement. As I remember in AID terms we weren't all that involved in the project. I don't think we had any financial input, but that would except the local currency. The IBRD had a substantial leg up on the project, and I think that any foreign exchange contracts, for instance, would have been handled by the IBRD.

Q: So was this a really interesting time in your career? Or perhaps not the most exciting? How did you feel about it.

SKILES: Well, I said earlier that I thought the experience in East Africa was probably the best in terms of the kind of job that I'd had. In terms of interest and fascination with what we were working on, I guess I would rate Ceylon a close second, but Israel and the FAO/WFP (Rome) are right up there, too. In Ceylon part of the attraction, strangely enough, is that I had only a small staff which meant that I could devote almost all my time to substance and not people problems.

Q: Your relationships with the local people, both official and social, were pleasant?

SKILES: Outstanding. The Ceylonese are a different kind of people. They are much more effervescent, much more friendly than most of the situations you work in. Is it because or despite the fact that most are Buddhist? I don't like to say that it's partly because there's a substantive overlay of well educated people, but that has something to do with it. To some extent, it's a tribal situation and you have far less exposure to the Tamils than to the Sinhala. Having said that, many of the Permanent Secretaries were Tamil and we had a lot of contact with them. Many of the better educated people were Tamil. Yet their general contribution to the population is as a minority group, probably about one to ten, and largely descendants of those who came down from southern India to be laborers in the fields, primarily on the tea plantations. More recently they seem to be mostly revolutionaries, so there's a certain lack of consistency here, but by and large the social contacts as well as the working contacts were extraordinarily good. The ambassador was a friend of a great many people, including Arthur Clark, who wrote some challenging and imaginative books. When he would come to Ceylon, which he did occasionally, this would be an excuse for a fairly large gathering sponsored by the ambassador, and then some discussion periods delving into his theories of the universe. In one case it was a world premier for a movie that had been made out of one of his books. Congressman Tom Foley, later Speaker of the House, came out to get married; the bride was the daughter of the U.S. representative to the Colombo Plan. One of the economic / planners and his wife had us to dinner with a lovely lady friend of theirs who is now the Prime Minister. Actually the population is quite diverse - lots of evidence of earlier Dutch and Portuguese settlers, and of course the British. The Central

spine of the country -- only a few hours from Colombo by car, is picturesque, several thousand feet high - tea country and very pleasant. There is a reputable university at Kandy.

Q: So, summarizing that experience, you seem to be quite happy with it, both as an official responsibility and as a period when you were engaged in pleasant and interesting times. You came to the end of that stint when?

SKILES: Let me first reiterate that the answer is yes, and it was largely because of the quality of the people we were working with, as I mentioned before, both in the embassy and in the ministries, and out in the hinterland. Gamini Corea was an outstanding individual. I mentioned him earlier as one of my main contacts. A lot of our contact work was done early in the morning on the golf course, following the British tradition that you didn't talk business during golf, but it was quite alright during and after coffee. Occasionally the Prime Minister, with whom Gamini was closely associated, would join us for a fast nine holes, and I made a very fast rule not to discuss outside anything that he might bring up during those sessions. It just wasn't cricket. He was out of office again after I left the country, and I fear the country suffered - but apparently that's what the people wanted - or voted for. Apparently those reforms were not all popular! Mrs. B. came back in 1970 and a couple of years later the country became the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka - an ancient name. She lasted until 1977 I think it was, so I assume that most of our work was down the drain. Corea became the top man of UNCTAD. David Loos came to Washington with the IBRD. I read some scholarly pieces done by those more junior economists, but I don't know whether any of them stayed in the Ministry and continued to function or not. Likely not. This is one of the disadvantages of the conviction that you should not look back over successors' shoulders. You really don't know enough of what happened afterwards to be able to comment meaningfully on the end results.

There had been a number of discussions about moving me elsewhere, and I thought the most interesting elsewhere at that point was Kabul, to become Deputy Director of one of our biggest AID missions, in terms of personnel. Part of that reaction was defensive, because there had been talk, if not pressure, of moving me over to Dacca, and I didn't think Dacca was one of the places I wanted to go, even though it was a more senior job. To me, Kabul was a much better alternative. Timing was not exceptionally good in my case, because the deputy was leaving to go to one of those advanced school programs, the mission director was already due for home leave, and they wanted me to get in there and get my feet wet so he could do so. I went there in June, 1969.

BETTY CRITES DILLON
Peace Corps Director
Colombo (1967-1971)

Betty Crites Dillon was born 1923. She attended the University of San Francisco and the University of Indiana. She became involved in the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce as well as a number of political campaigns on the local and national level. After earning her pilot certification, she joined the Peace

Corps in 1965. While in the Peace Corps, Dillon served in Tunisia and Sri Lanka. She was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin in 1987.

DILLON: I did accept the Ceylon appointment, of course. I talked with my father at great length about it, and he wanted me to do it. He was, again, very, very proud and pleased, and he said, "Betty, by all means you must go."

I arrived in Ceylon in--I guess it was the spring of--goodness. Where are we? Spring of '67? Fall of '66? Somewhere along there. Spring of '67. The program had been asked to leave the country a year or two before because of the change in government, so I, in effect, was taking the program back in. I went six months ahead of the volunteers. I had to get offices, I had to get transportation, I had to hire local staff. I had to set up. I had to take what programming had been done, pick sites, visit all the sites, and so forth. And I was alone, so it was marvelous. I received very nice cooperation from the embassy, but I should remind both of us that Peace Corps in those days was far removed from the embassies. We didn't go near the embassy for any reason. It was a very independent, non-political operation. When I called on the embassy, they were very helpful, extremely helpful and cooperative. But getting all of this done on my own was a real challenge.

Q: It must have been. What language did you use out there?

DILLON: English. It had been a British colony, you see.

Q: And enough people could speak it?

DILLON: About 80% of the Ceylonese are Buddhist (Singhalese), and 20% Hindu (Tamil of Indian background), which is what's caused the big problem that's going over there now.

I had been there just a few months when I received a cable that my father was dying and that, once again, I should come immediately. He was not expected to survive. Peace Corps had given me one compassionate leave from Tunisia for that purpose, and felt they couldn't do it again. They didn't object to my taking leave, but they said I'd have to pay my own way home which I did. I didn't get there in time. He had passed away. I stayed for a couple of weeks. My mother was drained at that point and not terribly well. My sister was with her.

And I went back to Ceylon. On the way, Peace Corps asked me to conduct large completion-of-service conferences for groups in Turkey, in Delhi, in Bombay, which were extremely interesting.

Q: What purpose do they serve?

DILLON: A volunteer group is called together for usually three days, at that time to discuss their experiences, the nature of their programs, their successes, their failures, draw up recommendations regarding Peace Corps's presence in the country, particularly with respect to programming, suggestions regarding training, and so forth.

That has changed over the years, and completion-of-service conferences now are conducted almost entirely for the purpose of counseling the volunteers with respect to their re-entry and their ongoing careers. There's a vast difference now, a vast difference between what we did then and what we do now. At that time it was basically a programming and training exercise. Of course, we received invaluable information from volunteers who, after all, are the Peace Corps and had gone through this wonderful experience.

Q: Debriefing, in a way.

DILLON: Yes.

Q: So did you take your daughter back with you? Was she with you in Ceylon?

DILLON: Mary Katherine was with me in Tunisia and with me in Ceylon. I really asked a great deal of her throughout these experiences. Both countries were marvelous for her. She matured and became a very sophisticated girl. She was ten when she arrived in Tunis, and thirteen when we finally left Ceylon. She attached herself to Tunisia and has been back there since and was back there recently with me. It's our second home. She loves it. We have many Tunisian friends there.

Q: What schooling did she have when she was there?

DILLON: Yes, that's important. In Tunisia she went to the diplomatic school, because the local school systems were in Arabic, and that was too much to undertake.

Q: Was that diplomatic school supported by the embassy?

DILLON: In part, it was. It's called the American School. It still exists and has expanded and is doing a wonderful job. I can't at this point recall what funding precisely there was. Some private funding, of course, and some embassy funding. It was disappointing.

Q: Local teachers?

DILLON: American teachers, some of them former Peace Corps volunteers who had been teachers of English as a foreign language or a second language.

Q: Hired locally?

DILLON: Hired locally. But I think the big disappointment was with the other students. They were children of diplomatic families, many of them American families. We didn't cross paths even socially as families. They were the diplomatic community; we were Peace Corps. Kathy resented that, in the sense that she had very little in common with her fellow students. She did join the Girl Guides, but there again, there were Tunisian girls involved, which she very much appreciated.

Q: There were no Tunisians in this diplomatic school?

DILLON: No. For example, she often remembers that at recess, the students would go into the back yard of the school grounds and throw rocks at the Tunisian shepherds across the fence. This was not Mary Katherine's idea of why we were in Tunisia.

Q: No, I wouldn't think it would be.

DILLON: The classes were in English, of course. So when we went on to Ceylon, she said, "Mother, I want to go to a local school." I discouraged it, but she insisted. Ceylon had been a British colony and was English-speaking, so we thought we had some alternatives. We approached Bishops College, a very fine girls' school, which taught in three streams: English stream, Tamil stream, and Singhalese stream.

We put her in the English stream. There were about 500 Ceylonese girls in the school. She was the only foreign student. It was not easy: it was extremely difficult for her. Not because she didn't love the school and like her teachers and she had some very wonderful Ceylonese girl friends, but the system was quite different. The girls sat and wrote down every word the teacher said. It was a lecture system. You memorized your notes and you were examined based on your memory of your notes. There was no discussion, no show and tell, no intellectual intercourse of any kind.

I know one day I picked her up at noon and she was white as a sheet. I realized something had happened. She got in the car and started crying. It turns out that in her geography class, the western hemisphere was not on the maps. Well, you know, it's way over there on the other side. (laughter)

Q: "Here be dragons."

DILLON: So she had held up her hand and asked the teacher if she could say a few words about her country to the girls in the class who might be interested. The teacher had hit her with a ruler on the wrist for interrupting the class. "We don't talk in these classes."

Well, it literally made Kathy sick. She was nauseated and heartbroken and disappointed and confused. We had a long talk about it. She was ten years old, eleven years old. I pointed out that sometimes teachers have bad days, too, and that this was an unusual situation. They hadn't had a foreign student at Bishops College before. She accepted all of that, mulled it over, went on back, and coped with it. She coped so well that at the end of the school year, when they had the grand march at graduation exercises and the end-of-year festivities out on the parade ground, the principal of Bishops College found an old warped record of John Philip Sousa's "Red, White, and Blue" and played it in her honor for the grand march.

It was such a credit to what youngsters can do and can be when they're challenged in an overseas foreign environment. I knew what she had gone through to get to that place. She was loved by other students, she was respected by the teachers, and had really made a place for herself.

Q: Bless her heart.

DILLON: We loved Ceylon. She loved Ceylon. She traveled with me, both in Tunisia and in Ceylon, as I went out visiting volunteers and checking out sites and around over the country. We often took one of her girlfriends with us just so she would have company of her own age to discuss what they saw. We found very often that Tunisian girls or Ceylonese girls would not have been to these places before in their own country. They would not have been very far from their hometown or village or outside of Colombo or Tunis, so we were educating them at the same time, you see.

Q: Did you find that she came to you often for reinforcement as the year went along, or did she not come back confused anymore?

DILLON: We were very close. We always have been. We managed to have little discussions most every night, maybe not about a problem, but about how things were going or something good that had happened. As far as I know, there was no other serious incident that really shook her up. She coped.

Q: But did this have any effect on her educational progress? I mean, switching gears the way she had to from the inquiring type of learning that is taught in the American schools to this rote memory, which doesn't stick with you.

DILLON: I don't see that as having had an impact. She was only in that system for the one year, and by the next fall we came back.

Q: And she was learning so many other things at the same time, yes.

DILLON: She's an excellent scholar and is still in the academic field doing research. She has lectured at George Washington University.

Q: What is her field, Betty?

DILLON: Philosophy. She studied in France for two years recently at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes de Sciences Sociales*, and so she's an excellent scholar. I would say she combines very much the intellectual curiosity approach to learning and the research, note-taking, listening, memorizing approach. I would say she combines them well.

Q: Very good. I know sometimes students have a lot of problems switching from one type [of learning] to another among Foreign Service children as they move around the world. Sometimes it can be quite traumatic.

DILLON: It can be very traumatic. I think when people say that children in foreign countries have such a marvelous opportunity to learn and mature, they're quite right, but often times they don't realize the toll it takes. They don't realize the pressure it puts on the child and on the parents and what we all go through to bring about that learning experience.

Q: Yes. So you were in Ceylon just the one year?

DILLON: I was director for about a year and a half. My mother's health failed. She had a stroke. The program was well set there, so I felt I should come back.

I recall that Kath and I were on our way home and had to overnight in London April 4, 1968 and heard the news of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination on the radio in our hotel room. Washington was burning when we arrived there the next day.

Peace Corps assigned me temporarily to the Chicago regional office, where I was director for the midwest region, which was recruiting and some re-entry programming.

I actually lived at the homeplace in southern Indiana during that time and commuted the weekends to Chicago, and gave my mother some support. Then Peace Corps transferred me to Washington as director of special services, where I served for two years.

VICTOR L. STIER
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Colombo (1968-1971)

Victor L. Stier was born in 1919 in Michigan and raised in Oakland, California. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Thailand, Greece, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Finland, The Netherlands, and Washington, DC. The interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1990.

STIER: In September 1968, there was a little bit of an emergency which eventuated in my becoming a PAO. I went off to Sri Lanka, Ceylon as it was, and we lived in Colombo for three fascinating years. The tour was 18 months and we asked to double that. We enjoyed it. A beautiful place, fascinating and as you now see with tragic communal problems that are just awful. I had a letter from a Jesuit priest, a native Sri Lanka, that I became friendly with there, just the other day. He's very interested in ecumenicism, and he was talking about what the toll of this most recent communal strike in Sri Lanka has taken of the Buddhist monkhood, and he really didn't--he wondered, with the greatest of compassion and zeal, how the monks were going to come out of this. Looking ahead to the rest of this century and indeed into the 21st century, he said, we must pray hard for them. You know, Buddhist priests have been attacked awfully.

Q: Oh, yes.

STIER: We enjoyed it very much, the political life, the ongoing arguments with journalists; there's an awful lot of anti-Americanism there. Mrs. Bandaranaike rendered it a very fertile field for anybody who was pro-British, pro-Commonwealth, anti-Yankee, anti-big materialist United States. Vietnam made our position nearly untenable. It was very difficult. On the other hand, we went to the moon and brought back a rock, brought it to a Buddhist country, and the ambassador, Andrew V. Corry, that marvelous underrated American diplomat, what a splendid fellow he was, had a party at his residence which we put on for him and for hundreds and hundreds of people

we showed that landing on the moon. And some Buddhists told us they couldn't believe it--man cannot be on the moon. Some actually accused us of cheating, of faking the moon landing.

Q: Yes, I know. It was just a fake.

STIER: Yes, it was a fake.

Q: Special effects.

STIER: The famous Arthur Clark was very helpful. In fact, he brought his sophisticated electronic telescope to that party where he gave an explanatory talk. And we then looked through the telescope at the moon that we'd just seen in the film. It was a notable evening.

Q: I think I visited you on our way back from Thailand which was about the 1st of June 1970.

STIER: 1970.

Q: The election was just about to take place. On our way back from a fascinating tour around the island, which you arranged for us, we happened to encounter the then prime minister (about to be ousted in the election that occurred a few days after our departure). We stopped for lunch at a restaurant some distance from Colombo, and suddenly realized that the campaigning Prime Minister, with colleagues, was also dining there.

STIER: Dudley Senanayake.

Q: Yes. Anyway, Mrs. Bandaranaike beat him in that election.

STIER: Yes.

Q: That was just about a week or two after we had left Thailand, quite a landslide and she took over.

STIER: Yes, and not, in my opinion, very good for the country.

Q: No.

STIER: Dudley Senanayake was a much better manager and, of course, much more understanding of Sri Lankan and American policy needs. Mrs. Bandaranaike was always hostile.

Q: She was hostile. Was her husband a prime minister before she was?

STIER: Yes, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike.

Q: And they were always off in the socialist camp.

STIER: Do you have time for a little Bandaranaike joke?

Q: By all means.

STIER: Mr. Bandaranaike, who was dead by the time we got there, was a Cambridge man and a bit of a snob. While he was Prime Minister a new envoy from India was named who came to present his credentials to the Prime Minister. They loathed each other on sight. The Prime Minister made a point of urging the Indian ambassador to learn Sinhalese during his tour there. And the ambassador said I hope to do that. So they fought for, I think, for all the three years that the Indian was there. When he made his farewell call on Mr. Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister recalled to the Indian that he had recommended his learning Sinhalese and wondered if he had had any success. Well, the Indian said, it's been rather difficult, but I have made some progress. I have learned how to say Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, and he said it all out very carefully. In other words, showing just how Sinhalese the Bandaranaiques actually were.

But it was fun there despite the weather. There was a little lake, Balgoda, about 20 miles outside Colombo, and we used to go on Sunday and sail a 14-foot sailboat. We'd take a picnic lunch with us and mix with the local foreign people and Sri Lankans who belonged to the little sailing club there. It was nice. We learned to eat hot curry.

Q: Was there a pretty general antipathy towards the Americans and the American position during the time that you were there?

STIER: To the extent of Vietnam it was pretty hostile, yes. We didn't have much of an AID program and it was not easy for the U.S. to be heard in Ceylon. We were a lot below that. They were a commonwealth country and more interested in Europe and they received more help from Europe. Many of the educated people had gone abroad for an education, not all, but a lot of them. It was considered most advantageous to have been to Cambridge or Oxford. By the time we were there, however, many Sri Lankans had been educated in the United States.

We had a very strong cultural program that was very effective, I must say. We had wonderful national staff employees there, as--let me say--we had everywhere, how wonderful they were. The unappreciated "local" employee rarely got a fair break for himself, you know, in either pension rights or salary. It varied from country to country. But they had to pick up the pieces when they fell between the sticks.

Q: Yes, there was always the Washington assignment, but somehow the local employees weren't credited as being as smart or as well educated as the Americans, and therefore they automatically had a secondary position.

STIER: Yes.

Q: But in most posts that I saw, they were the ones that kept the ball rolling and the clock ticking and, importantly, providing continuity.

STIER: Absolutely. But Sri Lanka was a great tour. I think we had some--we had fairly successful programs; there was general admiration for American education and our economy, but

the insidious presence of the Indo-Chinese War just made it tough. The argument on the war went on incessantly.

Q: And with the predisposition, I gather from what you said, to look at the British as the ideal rather than the Americans.

STIER: Yes.

Q: On top of that the Vietnamese War was just too much.

STIER: Unfortunately. But we left Sri Lanka in 1971 and went to Helsinki, where the Vietnam War was even more of a thorn in our side than it had been in South Asia.

Q: Do you have any further thoughts that you want to give on the Ceylonese or the Sri Lankan scene?

STIER: They were in increasing political trouble when we were there and it was a harbinger of what has happened since. The first major communal riots and troubles in Ceylon were in 1958 I recall, and the first ones after that were in 1971, well, the end of 1970, early 1971, just before we left. It was dangerous around there. The so-called youth groups, the JVP, of the guerilla insurrection were storming police barracks and assassinating people, although nothing like what has followed. Our Embassy was attacked, a police guard killed, cars were burned and our flag stolen.

Q: Was this mainly the Tamil agitation?

STIER: No, this was not Tamil. It was a--they called themselves Youth Guerrillas. They were left wingers of a rare and, I might say, eccentric kind; hostile to the Buddhist leadership, hostile to the Ceylonese leadership, and not focusing on the Tamils nor the communal problems in the country. They were dangerous and violent. It was a nasty time. But it was mostly a political move by dissident Ceylonese groups who were being aided by the North Koreans of all things. But that insurrection was evidence of the underlying economic and social problems endemic in Sri Lanka.

Q: So that really the Tamils didn't become a problem until the Ceylonese made them so. Is that your reading of the situation?

STIER: Well, the Tamils brought this on themselves. The relations were always bad, but since 1958 they'd been fairly calm. Yet every time we went up to Jaffna in the North, we would hear the Tamil discontents. It was only 18 miles across the strait to India and India didn't make it any easier for a Ceylonese government of Ceylon to try to handle the Tamil problem and that has been revealed in the last few years, of course. But our relationships were good. We renegotiated a Voice of America transmitting station contract there when we were there very advantageously, even with Mrs. Bandaranaike as Prime Minister.

Q: Apparently, for all their differences politically and nationalistically, Henry Loomis and Mrs. Bandaranaike hit it off pretty well.

STIER: Yes. I think they did.

Q: And that seems to be the thing that finally made it possible for the new transmitter to be constructed.

STIER: Yes. Mrs. Bandaranaike had a kind of a caricature of a left wing reputation, I always thought. She's a different type of personality from Mrs. Aquino, but she had the same background. She was from a very wealthy aristocratic family which owned huge plantations. She was always the first one to talk--demand indeed, to demand land reform, but there she was with her millions of acres. It's ludicrous in some ways, but the people accepted it. Or seemed to do.

Ever since Ceylon won her independence from Great Britain in 1948 they have received substantive foreign assistance and more social programs the country really couldn't afford. There was a French diplomat there when I was who used to love to needle the Ceylonese newsmen who would give the west a hard time and argue that Ceylon was not getting enough money from the west. The Frenchman would say, no, you're wrong, you're a very, very rich country. You have free food rations. You have a free national health system. You ride for almost free on a heavily subsidized state transportation system. Your schools are free. Everything is free, and you call us--you want money from us? Don't be silly. In fact, you are very well off. Anyway, we went off to Finland and into the NATO world again.

TERRELL E. ARNOLD
Deputy Chief of Mission
Colombo (1969-1970)

A native of West Virginia, Mr. Arnold served in the US Navy in World War II and in the Korean War. He was educated at Champlain College, Stanford University and San Jose College. Entering the Foreign Service in 1959 he served in Egypt, India, Ceylon (Deputy Chief of Mission), Philippines, Brazil (Sao Paulo as Consul General) and at the State Department in Washington. From 1983 to 1985 Mr. Arnold served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Counterterrorism. Mr. Arnold was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: This is November 21, 2000. 1969, you went to Sri Lanka. You were in Sri Lanka from '69 to...

ARNOLD: '69-'70.

Q: How did you get the assignment to Sri Lanka?

ARNOLD: Well, it came out of the system, because I was not looking for it. The way it came about as it was described to me by the then ambassador, Andrew Corey, was that the Department

gave him a list of five names of eligible officers. And they didn't ask me whether I wanted to be on the list; they just gave him the list. And he came back and said, "I'll take that one." His rationale for that was, I presume, private because he never told me exactly why except that he said, "The Department likes you."

Q: Was this for what?

ARNOLD: For DCM.

Q: DCM. In those days Sri Lanka was considered to be really a garden spot, wasn't it?

ARNOLD: Well, it was. It was not yet Sri Lanka. It was still Ceylon, not for very long after that but it was still. But it was already engaged in some of the Sinhala-Tamal problems that have plagued it right up to this very day, the political division between the north and the south particularly.

Q: Could you talk a bit about the political situation in Sri Lanka in '69 when you arrived there, political and economic situation.

ARNOLD: Well, the economic situation was still, let me say from my perspective, a very traditional one. You had some remnants of the British Raj still there in relationships to things like tea production and sugar. And those were the big industries. Sri Lanka is still one of the major producers of quality tea. I'm not sure you're an expert on that, but the high-grown teas of Sri Lanka are competitive with the best of Darjeeling and the best of the high country in North Africa. That was an important area. A big business to the extent that that little island could afford it - and I say 'that little island' because it's about the size of West Virginia - was the export to teak. They grew teakwood as a commercial product and had been growing it for some time.

Q: Is it really that renewable?

ARNOLD: It's renewable if you're patient. I think it's 30 or 40 years to get a mature tree, but, you know, that's not radically different from the pulpwood industry in the United States, and we do that all the time. So that was an important business too. And tourism was a good business although not highly developed. There were a couple of prize areas. One was on the west coastal coral-display region called Hikkadua, a coastal resort, fairly primitive but nonetheless pleasant to visit. And on the other side was a place called Blue Lagoon, on the eastern side, a much deeper and a much richer place if you were a diver.

Politically the island was divided in three ways. There was a fairly traditional political organization, the United National Party, UNP, led by Mr. Dudley Sennanaike who was at the time the serving President, and there was shall I say in the terms of the time, a more leftward, somewhat revolutionary, certainly a reform party organization called the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and that was led by a man named SWRD Bandaranaike, who died and his widow took over the leadership of the party. She and Sennanaike were contending for the leadership of the country at the time that I arrived there. They were going into an election. The third main element was the Tamal population in the north. The Tamals felt disenfranchised and still do feel that way.

They had not been brought into the political parties in the main body of the country. That hasn't changed terribly.

Q: As you went out there, what were you getting from the desk, and as you look at it, what were American interests for Ceylon?

ARNOLD: By and large, it was stability of a friendly society in the near vicinity of India. No big interests to speak of there but, you know, we were in the Cold War after all.

Q: Well, they have, I'm told, one of the best natural harbors in the world there.

ARNOLD: Trinkomalii.

Q: It was used during World War II.

ARNOLD: It was, by both our people and the British particularly.

Q: Was that up for grabs or had it been so outmoded?

ARNOLD: Well, 'up for grabs' is a little hard. You know, it was a far piece from Russia to Trinko, and we were not yet as heavily into the Indian Ocean as we are now. It was of interest but not a vital one as I would have defined it in those days, even recognizing that it was a very fine natural harbor, beautiful place too.

Q: The Japanese came and shelled it once, didn't they, in World War II?

ARNOLD: That was a major effort on their part. That's a long way from Tokyo.

Q: Didn't the Russian fleet come in 190-whatever-it-was for the Battle of Shushima? Didn't they stop there? I know they stopped in Cam Ranh Bay.

ARNOLD: They might have stopped there, but the problem with Trinko, even though it was beloved of the Sri Lankan navy, was that it was not terribly well equipped and certainly was not equipped at the time even for the most current generation of very large tankers that were beginning to emerge in the oil trade.

Q: Well then, let's talk a bit about the embassy and then we'll talk about what was going on. Could you talk about Andrew Corey, his background and how he operated.

ARNOLD: Well, Andrew, first of all, was a bachelor, a perennial and very confirmed bachelor, somewhat anti-female, not quite certain that they should be in the Foreign Service but more or less accepting. He was a graduate of the Montana School of Mines. He was a good geologist, and he and I spent a fair amount of time talking about the geology of Sri Lanka, which is interesting stuff. He was a protégé, friend and classmate of Mike Mansfield.

Q: Who was at that point the majority leader in the Senate from Montana.

ARNOLD: That's correct, and later became our Ambassador to Japan - and when we come to that, we can talk about that, because I "inspected" him, if anybody ever inspects a senior Senator from Montana. Andrew was very conservative in the sense that I think he had a very strong preferences in Sri Lankan politics as well as in our own.

Q: So he was not for Madam Bandaranaike?

ARNOLD: He did not trust or like Madam Bandaranaike, and I don't know very many foreigners who did. They were sure that she, if she got power, would dismantle the infrastructure that was favorable to foreigners there, which of course she did, as a matter of fact, when she got into power. Dudley, who was a gentle man and very much in command of the United National Party, but all of the leadership of the party were getting long in the tooth including J. R. Jayawardene, who later became the President or Prime Minister. There was a new generation coming along at that time, represented principally by a young man named Premadasa, who was in the Assembly. I accidentally got out on a stumping campaign with him one time in the Muslim areas of the country, and it was kind of fun to watch him work. He became the Prime Minister much later on, and you will recall a lady walked up to him wearing a body bomb and blew them all away.

Q: This was when the Tamil Tigers were striking.

ARNOLD: Again.

Q: Again. What was happening when you arrived? Were the Tamils on their - I suppose you'd tell me if I call it - terrorist campaign at that point?

ARNOLD: No, they were not in the same degree that they were later when I was in the Office of Counterterrorism. They were not that highly organized or necessarily that violent on a regular basis. There were some problems. There was an outburst in Colombo in which a very large slum area was just erased in an overnight fire in a scrap between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. That was the only major demonstration at that time of this conflict, although the area of Jaffna to the north remained kind of out of the picture of leadership in Colombo.

Q: When you got there, what was the Embassy's, political officer's, ambassador's, whatever's, attitude towards the Tamil problem?

ARNOLD: Kind of off in the distance, not one about which we could do very much as we defined our terms, not one that Sinhalese leadership seemed particularly inclined to try to fix - and the Sinhalese were, after all, the majority - an unsatisfying situation but not one that we put any real energy into fixing. As a matter of principle, any assistance that we gave to Sri Lanka - and we did give some assistance to them in those days, we had an AID man - we were very careful not to bestow any of it on the Tamils in the north. That's not the only country in which we have historically made that kind of a distinction. When we get to the Philippines, we can talk about it there and some of the modern-day consequences that are visible on the landscape. They're visible on the landscape in Sri Lanka in that the Tamils do not trust Americans. They have a long history of, so far as they are concerned, being ignored by us.

Q: Did we feel that the Indians with their Tamil connections and their short communications across the water with that area of Sri Lanka, were a factor in muddying the waters or supporting the Tamils?

ARNOLD: Certainly there was always the concern, and from time to time evidence, that Madras state was sympathetic to the Tamils and gave them safe haven and support of one kind or another. No question that some of that was going on. How critical that was to the equation, I would say more than anything else as time went by that it gave the liberation movement a sense that it had a place to hide if it screwed up inside Sri Lanka. If the Tamils had to go to ground somewhere, they could get across the strait, which is quite narrow there, and get to safe haven in Madras.

Q: How did Corey use you as a DCM?

ARNOLD: He was pretty open with me, including being sure that I got personally well introduced to the President and to the Executive Secretary and the others in the regime. That way, it may have been merely personal, but it may have been a habit with him. He wanted to see that I grew with him, and since that was my first political/management post, that was a very important learning curve. It didn't last quite long enough, for reasons that we'll get into.

Q: Did we have a cadre of officer who spoke Sinhalese?

ARNOLD: Not very much Sinhalese spoken there in our group, mainly because the language of street communication for a very large portion of the urban population was English. That was one of the legacies of the Raj. Certainly most business communication was in English. Our embassy was fairly small, but, as embassies are organized, it was complete. We had a political section, an economic section, an Agency back-room group, and a Defense attache. The Defense attache was Navy, which you might expect given that location.

Q: This is '69-'70. The war in Vietnam was - I won't say at its height. In fact, the South was doing fairly well. The Tet offensive had knocked the Viet Cong out.

ARNOLD: Nobody back here in the United States seemed to know that, but they had.

Q: Yes, and I was Consul General in Saigon just at this time. Did that play any role, I mean the Vietnam War, for you?

ARNOLD: Well, it was kind of far away. There was an awareness of it. There was always nervousness in that region of the United States getting involved on the mainland in any of those places, you know. But, no, it was not a big factor in our situation in Sri Lanka nor in the way we were dealt with while we were there.

Q: How about the Indian Embassy? Did they have much of a role in there? Were they involved?

ARNOLD: Involved in the usual diplomatic way, yes, but I would say not any more than the Russians. The Russians had an embassy about comparable to ours, and in fact the Russian Ambassador and I kind of hit it off with each other, which was interesting.

Q: Was the election during your time?

ARNOLD: Yes indeed.

Q: How did it go?

ARNOLD: The run-up to the election was during the first six months of my time there, and the election for Terry Arnold turned out badly, because one of our missions, of course, was to predict with reasonable accuracy who was going to win, and the advance info was not quite as close as it has been here for some time, but it was very hard to call it. The preference was, of course, that Sennanaïke win and continue the United National Party in leadership. But in the midst of that run-up to the election, the Department of State decided it was time for Andrew Corey to retire. So they brought him home, and they retired him because he was 62 years old. Then they brought in a man who was 68 year old to be our new Ambassador, a political appointee by the name of Robert Strausz-Hupe. That was his first of a series of assignments.

Q: Something like five or six. Strausz-Hupe has a certain reputation around, particularly in his earlier days.

ARNOLD: It's well deserved.

Q: Could you talk about him?

ARNOLD: Well, I received him under difficult circumstances in two regards. I was chargé at that time clearly through the period of the election. He started out in my direction from Washington and developed a tooth infection, and he stopped in Greece. Of course, since he was Ambassador-designate to Sri Lanka, the Embassy took very good care of him and the Ambassador took him in and lectured him on how to deal with his DCM in Sri Lanka.

Q: Was this Henry Tasca at the time?

ARNOLD: Yes, and Robert was unhappy that he had not been in Sri Lanka at the time of the election, but he was even unhappier that I had lost the election, and he made no bones that this was my problem.

Q: Tell how the election came.

ARNOLD: The election came out that Madam Bandaranaike won handily, and the party in power changed. I wasn't there long enough to see where it was going, but I think most people could have reasonably predicted where it was headed for that period. Robert, to say the least, was sore embarrassed by the fact that we had miscalculated that election.

Q: We had said that the other party would win.

ARNOLD: We had said it was close, but we still thought the UNP had a slight edge, and we were wrong. No question about that. You know, history won't let you down on that.

Q: No, no. Looking in retrospect, to just sort of pass on the words of wisdom, can you figure what maybe had gone wrong in your prediction, or was it just events overtook you?

ARNOLD: I think mainly what went wrong with our prediction is what frequently goes wrong with our predictions in foreign countries: we're not close enough to the ground. And we were not close enough to the ground there. We - I mean our information service, our political, our economic, our agency and our military - we were just not close enough to the ground. We were too completely taken up with events in and around Colombo, and we were too closely plugged into the hierarchy. That's not the first or the last time.

Q: Oh, no, no.

ARNOLD: And I would put it right there. Had we gotten out and about and listened with an ear to the ground in some of the outlying regions, especially to the south, we would have learned more than we knew and we might not have called it quite the way we did.

Q: When Strausz-Hupe came, did he sort of light into you right away?

ARNOLD: He made it perfectly clear that he didn't like the way that had turned out, and he basically harassed me to the point where I had to leave.

Q: It was his prerogative in a way to say, "I want a different DCM."

ARNOLD: Of course.

Q: But he didn't do it that way?

ARNOLD: Well, he did eventually, but I also asked to be lifted out of there.

Q: Well, this must have been pretty uncomfortable for you.

ARNOLD: Very uncomfortable.

Q: In what manner did this take place?

ARNOLD: You mean how did he shut me out of his operation?

Q: Yes.

ARNOLD: Precisely that way. He shut me out of his operation.

Q: He just didn't talk to you?

ARNOLD: I was not in the loop on key contacts or anything of that sort, and I had some excellent friends there, most of them in the then out party but people who were very knowledgeable about what was going on, including the Russian Ambassador.

Q: What did you do, just tell the Department, "Get me the hell out of here."

ARNOLD: There were two different streams going there. I think he said, "Get him the hell out of here," and I said, "I want to come home." And I left on consultation, because I left my wife there. What the Department did about that was very good from my point of view. First of all, the Desk Officer was Peter Burleigh, and Peter had a very clear view of what was going on. But I had some excellent friends in the Department, among them Joe Sisco and Roy Atherton, people like that.

Q: At that point this is the Near Eastern Bureau that included the Subcontinent.

ARNOLD: Yes. So that what happened, happily from my point of view, was the Department folded itself neatly around me, sent me to the War College for a year, and then Hank Byroade picked me as his economic commercial counselor in Manila, and I was back on track.

ALBERT A. THIBAUT, JR.
Political/Labor Officer
Colombo (1972-1975)

Albert A. Thibault, Jr. was born in Massachusetts on August 5, 1941. He received his BA from the University of Windsor in Canada in 1962, his MA from the University of Toronto in 1963, and another MA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1964. He entered the Foreign Service in 1969. His career has included positions in Guinea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia.

Q: And where did you go?

THIBAUT: I then went to Sri Lanka.

Q: Ah, so you're getting down to the Subcontinent.

THIBAUT: Well, I, there's a story there, too, because the ambassador to Sri Lanka, a fellow by the name of Robert Strausz-Hupé, had been my professor at Penn. I had written to him asking if there was a spot in his team. He wrote back to say no, that staffing was complete. I get to Washington and I walk into the personnel officer, who later became a good friend of mine, Howie Schaffer. And Howie says, "What are you doing, meddling in the assignment process?" I asked, "What do you mean?" He said, "Strausz-Hupé specifically asked for you. We had

somebody else who was about to be paneled. We don't appreciate that around here." Ultimately, that's where I went.

I say ultimately, because I was originally slated to go to Vietnam. Coming back to my incoming Foreign Service class of '69, fifty per cent going to Vietnam and fifty per cent on other assignments: Well, those who thought they had escaped the prospect of going to Vietnam, thought they were out of that, were informed that our second assignment would be to the CORDS program in Vietnam. In fact, I was assigned to one of the provinces in the south and was getting ready to move back to Washington to take a year's language training when, I guess, as a result of the peace talks, the CORDS program was cancelled. Or at least our assignments were cancelled. I then went out to Colombo.

Q: You were in Ceylon from '72 'til when?

THIBAULT: I was there from January '72 to the spring of '75, for slightly over three years as a political-labor officer, assigned to the political section of the Embassy. My main responsibility was to cover domestic politics with particular attention to the trade union movement. And the reason for the latter was, given the complexion of the government at that time in Colombo, that the trade unions played a particularly important role. So prior to going to Colombo I took some training at the Labor Department, orientation really. Or should I say indoctrination?

Q: Quickly, what did you get from the Labor Department, because in those days, in foreign affairs, American labor was an important policy. It had real clout in foreign affairs.

THIBAULT: Absolutely, even though we had a Republican administration, it was quite sensitive to labor and, of course, when I say labor I should be very precise in saying the AFL/CIO. The AFL/CIO then totally controlled the labor officer program in the State Department. They had a number of their former officials who were now working for the Department. There was an advisor to the Secretary for international labor affairs, who was always hand-picked by the AFL/CIO. The training program for FSOs going overseas was very much oriented to AFL/CIO interests. By that I mean exposure to the type of reporting they were interested in, which fed into their own U.S. domestic agenda, for example, foreign worker conditions as these impacted the general competitiveness of American labor; labor rights, if you will, and the legal structure that affected labor in our countries of assignment. The Federation maintained its own overseas programs, funded by the USG with which we were expected to cooperate closely, for Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Anti-communism was a powerful leitmotif of the relationships they developed with other trade unions groups, mostly under ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) auspices. As a labor officer, and this was made very clear at the Department of Labor itself, you were expected to be very attuned and very sensitive to AFL/CIO interests and to their general clout in Washington. That was a very clear message.

Q: Was there a Mr. Asia in the Labor Department?

THIBAULT: Overseas, our awareness was less on the Labor Department per se whose focus was overwhelmingly domestic and much more on 16th street (the AFL/CIO headquarters, just a block up from the White House.) and for those in Asia on the Asian-American Free Labor Institute

(AAFLI.) It existed for many years and, for all I know, it is still active. There certainly was a Mr. Europe – Irving Brown. He and others around him had been active right after World War II in Italy and throughout the Continent, directly confronting the Communists. I haven't thought of these names in many years. Irving Brown and the others were held up as exemplars, if you will, as dynamic models of what U.S. labor policy, working very closely with the State Department, could achieve in influencing individual countries in ways that would be favorable to our interests. Asia was perhaps less prominent but its profile was rising rapidly. The AAFLI came into being only after the European institute, but was modeled on it. As I mentioned, there was also an institute in Latin America and one, either at that time or later, in Africa as well. Above all, they were concerned about the influence of Communists in the local trade union movement and this gave particular focus to Sri Lanka or Ceylon, as it was then known, because the labor movement there was divided into various federations, some of which were strongly Communist controlled. Not only that, but in fact the most prominent of them all was Trotskyite. Sri Lanka was one of the few countries in the world where Trotskyites were influential, even having powerful ministers in the coalition government that existed when I arrived there. On the other hand, the Tamil tea workers were mostly in the Ceylon Workers Congress, which was an ICFTU affiliate and worked closely with the AAFLI.

Q: Was Mr. Bandaranaike, was he a labor man?

THIBAULT: No, but his wife, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, was the prime minister when I arrived. She was certainly left of center in our terms and in her cabinet was the head of the pro-Moscow Communist Party, a fellow by the name of Pieter Keuneman, of Dutch background. There is a small but influential Dutch Eurasian community in Sri Lanka. The Trotskyite minister was Colvin Da Silva along with a third pro-China Communist minister in the government. All of them had their base in trade union federations.

Q: Now who were our ambassador and DCM?

THIBAULT: When I arrived, Ambassador Strausz-Hupé had already left. A fellow by the name of Pete Peterson, who died some years ago, was then chargé. Ambassador Christopher Van Hollen arrived in the late spring, I guess, of '72. His DCM was Patricia Byrne. They were the team leading the embassy throughout the time that I was there.

Q: These are two people who were familiar with Asia.

THIBAULT: Yes. I believe Ambassador Van Hollen had been deputy assistant secretary of state for South Asia in NEA at that time. Actually for Pat Byrne, it was her first exposure to Asia, but as is often the case, the ambassador had selected the DCM. I believe she had been in Turkey before going to Colombo.

Q: Later went on to be ambassador in Burma.

THIBAULT: To Burma, that's right and to Africa; she was ambassador in West Africa, also.

Q: How was the embassy constituted? Did you have to break ground on this labor thing, or had there already?

THIBAULT: No, I was taking over from my predecessor, Jim Leader, who then became desk officer and remains a good friend of mine.

Q: Jim has been very much a labor officer.

THIBAULT: Yes, over the years, that's right. For me, it was my first and only assignment as a labor officer but Jim's advice, counsel, and contacts were very helpful and greatly appreciated. So it was not a new position, nor a new area of attention by Washington. But otherwise the embassy was typical, in terms of the sections that were there and the agencies that were represented.

Q: So, what was the political situation, and economic situation, in Ceylon when you arrived?

THIBAULT: I recall very well taking a trip up to Kandy, which is the second city, in the interior, shortly after my arrival, encountering burned out bridges and evidence of the brief but very violent uprising that had taken place just weeks before my arrival, which as I mentioned was in January of '72. In what I believe is November or December '71 an extreme Communist group, extreme Maoist group, called the JVP, a very conspiratorial group, had organized and mounted an overnight attempt to topple the government. This included attacks on Temple Trees, the prime minister's official residence in Colombo, and coordinated attacks on police posts and other security agencies around the island. It was defeated, but only just so, with a considerable amount of luck on the part of the government. So, understandably, the environment there was very tense and was still resonating with what had just happened, both at the public level and within the government. There was enormous concern about what this meant, who was behind it. In Asia, my experience is that conspiracy theorizing is a dominant part of people's political analysis. How should the government then move ahead? This was very much in the forefront.

Over time and as it became clear that this was a relatively small though highly motivated group, they settled into this very typical Third World socialist agenda, the centerpiece of which was the nationalization of the tea plantations. Sri Lanka, or Ceylon then, is a major tea producer. Many of these plantations and estates, as they're called there, had been British owned and there was a very large British planter community still resident in Ceylon at that time. Very systematically, through legislation that they adopted, they took over the management and ownership of these plantations, but with very little real compensation. It was all in long term government bonds very little cash involved for the dispossessed owners. This was accompanied by other pieces of legislation which met the needs of their trade union coalition allies.

There was and still is, as I understand Sri Lanka politics to this day, enormous tension between Mrs. Bandaranaike's party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the previous ruling party called the UNP, United National Party, then headed by former Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and his deputy, J.R. Jayewardene. These two, like the Bandaranaiques, were members of very prominent families, of the same social background, educational and caste background. In many ways politics then, maybe even today, were organized on divisions among families,

prominent families, with ideologies as a convenient tag. At that time, the Tamil issue, which later became an all-consuming one in the Eighties, Nineties and even today, was not as salient. The Tamils - and I had many contacts with the Tamil leadership at that time, both in Colombo and then through regular travel up to the northern part where they're concentrated in Jaffna - were still hoping to find a place in this evolving system. But the ruling party reflected Mrs. Bandaranaike's husband's philosophy, and he was the founder of the party, which was one of appealing to the majority Sinhalese and to Buddhist sentiment, and of feeding on the perceived grievance that the Tamils had been favored by the British and, although a minority of only 15 per cent, they had enjoyed undue benefit from this history, in terms of positions in government, in the private sector, in education and so forth. So he went about cutting them down to size, using the one man one - vote principle, sort of excluding them from any real role in public life, and aiming at marginalizing them. A keynote of this was making Sinhalese the official language, excluding Tamil and even English. This became a real sore point for the Tamils, who of course also felt excluded because the ruling party played up the role of Buddhism, made Buddhism the official religion of the country, although there were very substantial Hindu, Christian and Muslim minorities. So it was a polarized society, if you will, split on ideological grounds, as I mentioned, in terms of the economic policies they pursued, and on ethnic, linguistic, and religious factors. If you could identify all of the factors that help divide a nation and a society, in Sri Lanka they pursued them all.

Q: I can't think of a worse recipe as you said than what their party was trying to do.

THIBAULT: So that was the environment. So far as the U.S. government was concerned, Sri Lankan foreign policy was what you might have expected of that kind of regime, which was very nationalistic, very Third World oriented. Mrs. B, as everyone called her, viewed herself to be her husband's heir as a leader of the non-aligned movement. After I had left she hosted one of the non-aligned summit conferences in Colombo. So her public line and the policy line of her government were very much couched in non-aligned terminology. It pitted her against U.S. policy rhetorically, in UN votes, and in Asian regional terms. Vietnam was winding down but only slowly, so that was a source of tension and certainly of pot shots, particularly from the leftist members of her government. And she particularly favored something called the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, which was directly aimed against the U. S. Navy presence in the Indian Ocean, especially at Diego Garcia.

The only additional point I would make, in response to your question about the economy, is that their economic policy was of the same type as their politics. In other words, an emphasis on state management of the economy which of course led to slow decline, stagnation of their exports, and a lot of other problems.

Q: I would think, you know, just looking at tea plantations, which require very close management. This isn't something you just sit there and let it grow. And it's just the sort of thing that socialist management would try to get in there, milk for what it could and not put the resources and the management in.

THIBAULT: Well, that the management aspect; the labor tended to remain in place and again that was sort of part of the nationalization deal with trade unions. But you're quite right, the

expatriate managers and Sri Lankan managers who were running these places earlier were replaced by political appointees. And of course, the other thing about tea plantations is that they require steady reinvestment. Bushes, what they call the tea bush, particularly in Sri Lanka at that time, had been planted in the 1880's and 1890's, and were old. They were not as productive as those in East Africa or in some areas of South India. It was time for significant replanting of new tea bushes and that was not done. So the profits, such as they were, were not reinvested as they should have been. So there was an immediate decline. This also, by the way, fit the rubber plantations. Sri Lanka was an important producer of natural rubber and coconuts. All three of those areas were primary commodities affected by similar state-oriented policies. I understand that since then, speaking about many, many years later, they've attempted to reintroduce private management and private ownership, but I have no idea how that is faring now.

Q: As the labor officer, you're looking at people, many of whom have relied on these plantations or estates of one kind or another, under steady management and if you socialize it, pretty soon when they start going to pot, the money isn't there, the benefits aren't going to labor. Is that apparent in your case?

THIBAULT: To be absolutely honest, one of the driving forces behind this nationalization was that labor didn't get much to begin with. An important source of grievance is that while the plantation labor force is Tamil, in Sri Lanka - if we want to get into nitty-gritty detail - the Tamils are divided into two communities. One are the northern Tamils, who have been there for many centuries. The second are indentured laborers who were brought to Sri Lanka, as to Mauritius and Trinidad and a number of other places, by the British in the late nineteenth century. They're very distinct from the ones in the north. They led self-contained lives on these estate enclaves, surrounded by Sinhalese villagers. The villagers felt that they weren't getting anything out of this system. They weren't getting any jobs for their young people or obtaining any benefits. So there was a hope that under state management the fruits of this would not go to foreign businesspeople, who would send out the money, but would invest it locally. None of that happened. Even when I was there, those trends began becoming apparent.

Q: How did our embassy, through the ambassador and up and down the embassy, including your contacts, how well were we connected to the government?

THIBAULT: We had good relations. Ambassador Van Hollen, of whom I have the very highest regard, had excellent relations with the GSL. For all of its shortcomings, this was a democratic government. They were freely elected. They conducted free elections, they always have. They were Western oriented, spoke excellent English. I'm talking about leaders drawn from the upper crust of traditional colonial society. They were very accessible. It's not that we were not able to interact with them at all. We had excellent contacts. We were able to see them when we wanted and there were points of agreement as well. For Sri Lankans, regardless of background or politics, are always concerned about the shadow of India. So they would want good relations with the United States, if only to balance potential Indian influence. It's just that on basic issues we often disagreed. As I say, the key one was this whole package of non-alignment and in particular the Indian Ocean Peace Zone.

Q: Well, we were going through a difficult time, as I think you expressed before, with India, anyway. They had the dissolution of East Pakistan and all that. But this didn't particularly draw them closer to us?

THIBAULT: The Sri Lankans, you mean? No. I arrived not long after the Indian intervention in East Pakistan but, to a surprising degree, there seemed little concern about what this might mean for Sri Lanka. This fact is itself a good indicator that the Tamil issue was nowhere near what it became just a few years later. You'll recall that India did intervene in Sri Lanka in the late 1980's. There was also the perceived similarity in views between Mrs. B and Indira Gandhi, the Indian prime minister at the time. In general, it was felt that New Delhi would act as a break on the Tamils, limiting the support they might receive from fellow Tamils in India. There was a history there. Prior to the colonial period, the kingdoms in south India often intervened in Ceylon and those memories are still quite vivid.

This is a long way of saying that concerns about India at that time did not lead the Sri Lankan leadership to draw closer to the U.S.

Q: How were, what's the name of the province in India's that's across

THIBAULT: Tamil Nadu.

Q: Tamil Nadu. Was there much sort of leakage back and forth, or what was happening?

THIBAULT: No, I would not say so. I would not say there was much. No. There were pilgrimages of Sri Lankan or Ceylonese Hindus to shrines in south India but no, there was no immigration, or emigration for that matter of the kind that existed some decades before. Later on in the Eighties, when the Tamil insurgency developed, there were strong ties between the Tamil nationalists in Ceylon and Tamil counterparts but they excited as much suspicion in New Delhi as they did in Colombo. It was a Tamil extremist, you'll recall, who assassinated Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. I should mention, by the way, speaking of the Tamils, as I said I had a lot of contact with them, but the people I dealt with were of an older generation and not the ones who launched the insurgency which began in the early Eighties. These were much younger men. The ones I knew were in their sixties, seventies, sometimes in their eighties, so were trying to carve out a place for themselves in the existing system. Whereas the younger ones and I had no contact with them because we didn't even know they were out there, the militants who later said, "The hell with it, we want independence."

Q: Did naval matters, outside of the Ceylonese wanting this Zone of Peace, were we concerned about, say, the Soviets using that

THIBAULT: Trincomalee.

Q: Trincomalee as a base?

THIBAULT: No, the Sri Lankans were very jealous of their independence and very sensitive to Great Powers meddling in their own country, and I know there were some so-called strategists

in Washington who were fearful of that, but it was never really an issue. The most specific issue we had, if you could call it naval, was Diego Garcia. Our presence in Diego which began to be built up during the Vietnam War and thereafter to counter the Soviets in the Horn of Africa, was a major reason for the Sri Lankans and others pushing the Indian Ocean Peace Zone. I don't recall any ship visits, any U.S. Navy ship visits, which isn't to say there weren't any, my memory just doesn't call up any at the moment. We had a navy attaché then; in fact the defense attaché was a naval officer, a U.S. Navy commander. Operationally, there weren't any really issues.

Q: How'd you find, what were you reporting. Were you more or less limiting yourself to labor or were you reporting on what amounts to internal politics?

THIBAULT: No, no, I was reporting on internal politics. I would have hated to follow merely the minutiae of Ceylonese labor politics. As it was, no one in Washington cared two hoots about what was going on in Sri Lanka or Ceylon, anyway. Nobody read our reporting. I know that only too well, because my next assignment was as desk officer for Sri Lanka, so I knew very well how little anyone paid any attention. No one paid any attention, or very little attention, to South Asia at that time and least of all to Sri Lanka. So just getting Washington to read what we were reporting was a chore in itself. Just as an anecdote illustrating this, I was particularly proud of what I recall was a 25 or 26 page air gram. You may recall that instead of telegrams in those days, unless it was really urgent, we would send an air gram, which went by pouch. It was a 26 page analysis of the so called land reform program, (i.e. nationalization.) I was very proud of that work which built on considerable research, field travel, and interviews. So when I returned to Washington I recall a conversation in the bureau. Someone, not knowing I was its author, held up my airgram and said, "If you want an example of what's useless reporting, here it is, right here." And slapped it down on the table all 26 pages of it. I learned a very important lesson from that experience. On the other hand, we enjoyed considerable latitude at post since no one cared really much about what was happening there. We had virtually no U.S. investment, no significant high level visitors. We had one or two CODELs (Congressional delegations) who came to shop for gems, Sri Lanka being a source of sapphires, shopping expeditions. Therefore, we could do pretty well what we wanted. There was no post reporting plan in those days, coordinated with Washington. So it allowed you to get into the nitty-gritty of the country. Which I did. Today, as I know only too well from my DCM experience, officers are pulled in so many directions that this is rarely possible. And in places like the Arab world, we pay a heavy price.

Q: Well then, as for being in this hot spot for a couple, three years, I guess. Were you married at the time?

THIBAULT: I was married. I was married in '68. I came there with my first child, a boy and then our second child, another boy, was born in Sri Lanka, in Colombo. Personally, I should say, it was an extremely enjoyable experience. We had many, many friends and very much enjoyed the Sri Lankan environment and the embassy environment as well. So I look back at that as one of the high points of my career, from a personal point of view.

CHRISTOPHER VAN HOLLEN
Ambassador
SriLanka (1972-1976)

Ambassador Christopher Van Hollen was born in Maryland in 1922. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Sri Lanka. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 23, 1990.

Q: I would like now to turn to your final overseas assignment as Ambassador to Sri Lanka--formerly Ceylon. You were there from 1972 to 1976. How did that come about?

VAN HOLLEN: It came about because I had been in a Deputy Assistant Secretary position which often, but not always, is a stepping stone to an Ambassadorial appointment. I had expressed an interest in Sri Lanka and Joe Sisco supported me, even though our relationship was not always that close. I was endorsed by the White House even though I was not fully persona-grata there--partly because of the Bangladesh affair. But the judgement was probably made that I was a career Foreign Service officer who presumably knew South Asia and Sri Lanka would have been an appropriate assignment for me. I was also given an endorsement by John Connally of Texas--under strange circumstances. Connally had taken a trip around the world in early 1972 and I was assigned to be the South Asia man for Connally on one leg of the trip. I seemed to have gotten along reasonably well with him. Connally had been Secretary of the Treasury . He had switched from Democrat to Republican and the rumor on the plane at the time was that Richard Nixon was going to drop Spiro Agnew as Vice-President and put Connally on the ticket as his Vice-Presidential candidate for the 1972 election. It didn't work that way. In any event, I was with Connally for two or three weeks, including the first visit of any high level American official to Bangladesh after its independence. Connally stopped in Dacca in early 1972. My appointment seems to have come about because of my rather good record in the Foreign Service, a helpful word from Connally and the fact that I hadn't made too many enemies in the White House.

Before I arrived in Sri Lanka, it had had an election in 1971 which brought into power a left-center Socialist government which had a fairly strong streak of anti- Americanism. The Bandaranaike government, headed by Mrs. Bandaranaike, kicked out the Peace Corps. The government was viewed by us as an unfriendly one. It consisted of three elements: one, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party--known as the SLFP--which was Mrs. Bandaranaike's party; then there were three Cabinet Ministers who were Trotskyites and there was one Minister from the Communist Party. It was definitely a left-center government which was anti-American in its orientation. That was the situation that greeted me upon my arrival, except that before I arrived, there had been an insurrection on the island by some young left wing Sinhalese youths. The government had applied to the U.S. for support. I was still Deputy Assistant Secretary for the area when this occurred. We had responded positively by providing some non-lethal equipment--such as helicopters--to assist in suppressing the rebellion. The fact that U.S. responded to the Sri Lanka request in time of need was one of the factors which made the government begin to turn around a bit. So when I arrived, the relationship, although not close, was better than it had been the year before. I benefited from that.

Q: What were American interests in Sri Lanka during the period 1972-76?

VAN HOLLEN: There were not transcendent interests, but there were some interests. This was a period during which we were in deep competition with the Soviets and the Chinese and both of those countries had active interests in Sri Lanka. So our concern was that there not be an excessive increase in Soviet or Chinese penetration, even though those two countries were no longer close--the break between them having taken place. Second, from a strategic point of view, although we did not covet the large naval base at Trincomalee, we wanted to be sure that no other country--i.e., the Chinese and Soviets--would be involved. Third, we were also building up Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and we were interested in having American ship visits into Colombo. It was a combination of not wanting the two other major powers to enhance their interests in the island and to have access ourselves for naval visits and trade.

Q: Did we have many commercial interests?

VAN HOLLEN: Very limited. Sri Lanka had three main exports: tea, rubber and coconut. We were interested in selling some products. There was some American business involvement in the pharmaceutical industry, Ever-ready batteries and other small businesses, but no large scale interests.

Q: How did you deal with the government?

VAN HOLLEN: One of the things I benefited from was that I was able to establish a good personal relationship with Mrs. Bandaranaike. I haven't kept up with her that closely, but I did send her a letter just a couple of months ago through Marion Creekmore, who is our new Ambassador there. I received a very nice letter back from her last week. I think it was felt by people serving there at the time, and I have heard subsequently, that my relationship with the top people in the government was a good one and it did contribute to positive U.S.-Sri Lanka relations. Having said that, I am not suggesting that the personal part of the equation was by any means the entire reason. There were other factors. One was the fact that relationships were already beginning to improve before I arrived. Second, I think Mrs. Bandaranaike saw the United States over time, not initially, as an off-set to the Soviets and the Chinese. She was concerned about the left wing elements within her own Cabinet. She had real problems with the Trotskyites in particular. To the extent that we were seen as a countervailing force to an increase of Chinese or Soviet influence, she saw the U.S.-Sri Lanka connection more positively than when she first came to power. I benefited from that.

There were several instances in which Prime Minister Bandaranaike supported the U.S. position, even though it caused strains in her Cabinet. Her Finance Minister, for example, was a Trotskyite--a member of the LLSP party which purported to follow the teachings of Leon Trotsky. On that strange little island, the Trotskyites had three Cabinet posts, including the very important Finance portfolio--held by N.M. Perera, who was known as the "Golden Brain." I got along with these people pretty well. You have to know Sri Lanka to really appreciate this; even though these people would attack you in the press, they would come around in the evening to your receptions and drink your liquor. It was a pleasant environment in terms of personal

relationships which could sometime take the sharp edges off the political attacks. So these people, on an individual basis, were by no means antagonistic, but they did not want to see Sri Lanka tied too closely to the United States.

Q: In looking at some of the reports, there seemed to have considerable press repression during the time you were there.

VAN HOLLEN: There was some. The press was reasonably free at the time. One of the things about the three countries in South Asia in which I served--India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka--is that all of them in a way derived advantages from the fact that they gained independence from the British. Whatever one thinks about the British Empire, it established well organized structures of government, endorsed the rule of law and permitted active political participation in the latter stages of its rule. This meant that when these countries became independent they had already had some democratic experience. That doesn't mean that Pakistan wasn't under military rule for much of its history; it doesn't mean that Sri Lanka hasn't hedged its democracy in recent years; it doesn't mean that India did not go through a two-year emergency period. But over-all the British heritage was a positive factor in the post-independence environments of those countries. For American diplomats, that made those countries very interesting to serve in.

In the case of Sri Lanka, we also benefited from the fact that many Sri Lankans, in the immediate post-World War II period, were very well educated--more so than now. They later de-emphasized English and since 1983 the country has been torn apart by the Tamil-Sinhalese dispute and, more recently, by a revival of the leftist Sinhalese JVP group. These conflicts were not as prominent when I was there. There was an under-current of tension between the minority Tamils--who lived essentially in the north and east and who were Hindus--and the Sinhalese who were in the central and southern part of the Island who were Buddhists. This tension was manifested most directly in the assassination of the Mayor of Jaffna whom I called on when I went there. He was killed a couple of months later as a reflection of the feeling between the Tamil and the Sinhalese communities. While I was in Sri Lanka between 1972 and 1976, the domestic scene was reasonably stable and it is therefore upsetting to me to read about the developments in Sri Lanka since 1983. My period in Sri Lanka was very pleasant. My wife, Eliza, and I had our three young children with us and we look back on it as a very enjoyable period. Two of my children have returned to Sri Lanka for visits and we all have an attachment to the island.

Q: You were there when we left rather ignominiously from Vietnam. How did that play in Sri Lanka?

VAN HOLLEN: It played well and the U.S. opening to China also played well. The interesting thing was that partly because of the Nixon opening to China, partly because of what was perceived properly as Nixon's less-than-warm feeling toward India, Mrs. Bandaranaike, leader of the left-center Freedom Party and Richard Nixon got along quite well in their one meeting in Washington which I attended. I can remember the great difficulty I had trying to explain to the government what "Watergate" was all about and why Nixon had resigned.

Q: We had the same trouble in Greece.

VAN HOLLEN: The meeting between the two leaders in Washington, and the Nixon policy toward China and the rather cool U.S.-Indian relationship were three factors that tended to make the U.S.-Sri Lanka relationships under Nixon quite good. That continued during the Ford period. That explains in part the concern when Nixon left the scene. The U.S. was no longer the country that Mrs. Bandaranaike had run against in her election in the early part of the decade. The Sri Lankans did not understand "Watergate". They had their own problems of corruption, etc. but they could never fathom, and I could never successfully explain, what "Watergate" was all about or why the President of the United States had to resign. One of my jobs, of course, was to reassure them--and I tried to do this again and again--that under Gerald Ford, the new President, the relationship between our two countries would continue to be good. I did get out of the Ford White House an invitation to Mrs. Bandaranaike to visit Washington. She was never able to do it before Ford left office, but the fact that he did invite her was helpful.

Another element of U.S. interest in Sri Lanka was that as late as early and mid-70s, the Non-Aligned movement had a certain clout to it--I don't want to over state it--and Sri Lanka, for its size, was playing a fairly important role in that movement. In fact, one of the Non-Aligned summit meetings was held in Sri Lanka--after I left.

To re-cap, I would say that the U.S. relationship with Sri Lanka--a relationship between a major power and a small country--is a good example of a relationship in which ideology over time gave way to pragmatism, assisted by the international environment and by personalities. I don't take credit for the improvement, although I did have unusually good relations with many of the senior officials of the Sri Lankan government. There was also the strange Nixon- Bandaranaike relationship which wasn't long-standing-based-- one visit--but it did underscore that the personal equation, which is hard to weigh, is important. It can, of course, work the other way as well. When Indira Gandhi came to the States in 1971, according to Henry Kissinger in his book, it was the worst meeting Richard Nixon had with any foreign leader. That was a case in which the chemistry didn't work, but in the case of Mrs. Bandaranaike it did work.

Q: What was the relationship of Sri Lanka with India during your period?

VAN HOLLEN: It was reasonably satisfactory. Historically, there had been a good relationship between the Nehru and the Bandaranaike families. Both represented the Brahmins of their respective countries. The Nehrus are, in fact, high caste Brahmins under the Hindu caste system; although in Buddhist Sri Lanka technically there is no caste system, the Bandaranaikes were high caste Buddhists. Partly because of the family relationship, the relations between the two countries were reasonably good. There has always, however, been an underlying tension between the huge Indian land mass to the north and the little island of Sri Lanka hanging off to the south. That problem has been accentuated by the fact that about 18 percent of Sri Lanka's population is Tamil. Forty million people in South India are basically the same people ethnically and culturally. Thus, you have within Sri Lanka a Tamil minority which has increasingly felt oppressed by the Sinhalese majority, and that minority has sought support from across the Palk Strait in India. In quite a different context, there are some similarities between the Sri Lankan situation and the Cyprus situation in the sense that the Turkish Cypriot minority seeks protection through its relationship with mainland Turkey. The Tamils have done the same thing.

The relationship between India and Sri Lanka in recent years has deteriorated sharply because of the Indian military intervention into Sri Lanka two and half years ago. This has strengthened Sinhalese national elements who want to get the Indians out. The present Indian government has indicated that it will withdraw its troops shortly. But the intervention in Sri Lanka, even though it came through a formal agreement between Rajiv Gandhi and J. R. Jayawardene, the current President of Sri Lanka, nonetheless brought about a rekindling of all the Sri Lanka-India strains. The sooner the Indians pull out, the better the relationship will be.

I might just add as a footnote that I also had the unusual experience of being an Ambassador accredited to a second country--the Republic of the Maldives. That is a country consisting of two thousand islands, two hundred of which are populated, located in the Indian Ocean southwest of Sri Lanka. I was therefore also Ambassador to the Maldives. We had no resident representation at that time. I visited there officially three or four times and went there once on a vacation. These days there are not many dual accreditations. There are some in the Pacific islands, but it is rare.

Q: Did we have interests in the Maldives?

VAN HOLLEN: Very few. At one time, the British used to stage aircraft through Gan in the Southern Maldives. Our basic interest is to ensure Maldivan independence and to discourage others from moving in.

EDWARD BRYNN
Economic Officer
Colombo (1973-1975)

Ambassador Edward Brynn was born in Pennsylvania in 1942. He graduated from Georgetown University and received an M.S. and a PhD from Stanford University. He also attended Trinity College in Ireland and served as a captain overseas in the U.S. Air Force from 1968-1972. His postings abroad have included Sri Lanka, Mali and Cameroon, with ambassadorships to Burkina Faso and Ghana. Ambassador Brynn was interviewed in 2000 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Had you asked for Sri Lanka/Ceylon?

BRYNN: It was Ceylon that I accepted; it was Sri Lanka by the time I arrived.

Q: In your class, beginning class, how about women and minorities?

BRYNN: I don't recall any African Americans in the class. We had, I would say, a half dozen women. Otherwise it was very much white male. When we had our little graduation ceremony from the A100 course, we were held up as proof positive because more than half of our class came from west of the Delaware River! Our class was a vindication of the new effort at

nationalization of the Foreign Service. I remember the story vividly, but I have no idea whether it was true.

Q: Well, of course, they play these games. I came in back in 1955 and I was part of what they called a massive invasion of Main Street into the Foreign Service, and I had a residence in California at the time. I hadn't lived there in 15 years or so, I'd been in college and in the Air Force, but had a California address. This is something they go through to try to show that they're representative of the entire U.S.

You took Sinhalese. How long would that be?

BRYNN: I think we started in late summer, and I know I took the exam a week before Christmas. I did not find it an easy experience, and I did suspect that my proficiency level of 2-2 given to me was probably given to me more than earned on effort than acumen. The experience was exotic. To approximate "immersion" we spent one day each week in a viyhara on 16th Street. At any rate, the investment was suspect. In Colombo nearly everyone spoke English fluently, and they wanted insure that we knew this!

Q: When you went out what sort of preparation did you make? What were your interests?

BRYNN: I was excited about Sri Lanka. The A-11 preparations were informative, and I had encountered a fair amount of historical material concerning Ceylon during my studies at Stanford and in Ireland. We were given what I recall was a superb reading list.

Q: Sri Lanka doesn't come up much. It would come up in the news only when the ambassador designated didn't know the name of Bandaranaike or something.

BRYNN: I remember the story as part of the Foreign Service folklore. In Sri Lanka I encountered some daunting names, and remember clearly the moment of enlightenment when I realized that the most formidable Sinhala names were composed of polysyllables that could be combined in all sorts of ways.

Q: When you arrived there, who was the ambassador and what were you doing?

BRYNN: Christopher Van Hollen was there and remained the ambassador for the duration. He had arrived, I think, only six months earlier. The Deputy Chief of Mission was Patricia Byrne. The head of the political section was H. G. Wing. I arrived to be the junior political officer in a three-officer section. I was there only a few weeks, starting in late January of 1973, when the economic officer informed the ambassador that, having decided to get a divorce, he was disenchanted with life in the Foreign Service, and had accepted a good job offer in the U.S. His resignation was accepted, and he left very, very quickly. Ambassador Von Hollen calling me and he said, "Mr. Brynn, have you ever studied economics?" Well, at Georgetown I did because that was part of the curriculum. "Excellent. You're now the econ officer. I then moved into that portfolio. It was a great deal of fun. I remained in that position for two years until Al Thibault, a very good friend of mine, a political labor officer, left and I was moved into his slot.

Q: How did Ambassador Van Hollen operate?

BRYNN: He was a supremely professional career officer, focused on his work and in touch with the troops. (End of tape)

I became interested in Ceylon's academic community at the University at Peradenija partly with the encouragement of Ambassador Van Hollen so that I could get some interfacing with members of the academic community up there, many of whom were very far to the left and who were driving Mrs. Bandaranaike down the primrose path. My contacts were genuinely Laskeyite. They were genuinely convinced that the appropriation of private resources into the public domain was really the only way to go. They were intellectually respectable people and well educated, and they were not malign in their attitude, but they were really right out of the London School.

Q: Why did this take so well, throughout Africa and the Subcontinent and all that?

BRYNN: I think it took especially well in India and Sri Lanka because it was the modern pushback against a caste scene. Oddly enough, of course, many of the people who were the most articulate spokesmen of the Laskeyite system were at the very top of the caste system, but that was the syndrome that always seemed to prevail. And it was also a way to attack the commercial community that was largely Tamil. Under the cover of socializing property, putting property into the public weal, you could attack an entrepreneurial class which had gained enormous power.

Q: During this time was the Tamil community sort of a self-enclosed one, or were they getting feed-down from India?

BRYNN: No, very much self enclosed. They, in fact, did not relate at all to the Tamil community from south India because those Tamils had come across as estate workers and formed a class so apart from the Ceylonese Tamils as to be not identified with the other at all.

Q: How about your contacts? Were we working both sides of the aisle on this particular situation?

BRYNN: I think we were. As it turned out, I think I was working the opposition side of the aisle better or more frequently than perhaps other people in the embassy. It happened partly because I was doing the economic agenda. That meant that my entree into the Tamil community was larger, partly by an accident - I think Jane's friends tended to be more from that side - and partly, I think, because I was interested in history and I tended to spend a lot of my free time talking to some of the older class of people, both Tamils and Sinhalese, who were at least mildly regretful that the British had left.

Q: What was your impression of the British rule during the colonial time?

BRYNN: I developed a quite positive attitude. I know that there was certain aloofness on the part of the British, which is part of the way of ruling the vast masses in South Asia with a very small number of people. But I think that the judicial system, the relative sense of fair play, and a very

high standard of public probity by British officials was appreciated, all the more so because it was lost by the time we arrived in 1972. I think that many, maybe most, citizens of Sri Lanka, Tamils and Sinhalese, alike have a fairly affectionate and positive view of British rule.

Q: What were you getting from political contacts of both classes about India at that time?

BRYNN: Active, very interesting, very little. There was a subliminal feel that India would absorb Sri Lanka. Every cocktail party or every conversation that you had always featured the phrase "India's population growth in a year is the same as the entire population of Sri Lanka" - 16,000,000, I think, was the number at the time - and a feeling that at the end of the day this would pose a serious challenge to Sri Lanka. Interesting, there was an interpretation of India as a monolith largely orchestrated by the Tamils, because, of course, they were looking across at south India, that India carried a great deal of weight, and for this reason, even though the Bandaranaike government had many, many sharp-elbow contacts with the British, Sri Lanka was a very firm supporter of the Commonwealth idea and remained so because it provided some sort of a protection from its big neighbor.

Q: This was the - what do they call it; there was Tito, Nehru, and Nasser and all that - the Nonaligned Movement. Was Madam Bandaranaike in that?

BRYNN: Yes, she was absolutely in it, and she and Indira Gandhi, they were the women contingent of this crew. Oh, yes, Madam Bandaranaike played, and thought she played, a very prominent role in the Third World Nonalignment Movement. I think the resources of Sri Lanka were not so great as she had thought. But she traveled extensively and felt herself very much the carrier of the flame for the Nonaligned Movement.

Q: What were you getting from the ambassador and others, and your own feeling about Madam Bandaranaike?

BRYNN: I think Ambassador Van Hollen fairly early on, even before I got there, had something of a rude awakening when I think he was assured on some point of importance to us that the government of Ceylon would be supportive on a UN issue of importance to us. Mrs. B. (as she was called) violated her assurances to Van Hollen. I think that made him much more cautious. He was more cautious and less accepting of Madam Bandaranaike by the time I arrived. But he was extraordinarily even handed. He cautioned the young troopers like me not to feel that we would find any higher level of veracity in our contacts on the other side of the political blanket. We should really make sure we checked every point several places and put it into a larger context.

Q: I gather the United States didn't play a medium-sized role. In many other places the United States plays a pretty big role.

BRYNN: We were probably, of course, quite deferential to the British in that respect. We were interested in the possible use of Trincomalee the great harbor on Ceylon's northeast coast, by the Russians.

Q: That was the big port there.

BRYNN: That was the big port on the other side of the island. We were more wary of India than we were of Sri Lanka, and therefore our relationship in Sri Lanka was correct and even friendly but our expectations were rather low. Our economic investment levels were very low. We bought a lot of tea, but the tea was bought through London brokers, and our economic profile in Sri Lanka was modest.

Q: Was there a feeling - I won't say of rivalry; they were kind of on the other side - with our embassy in New Delhi?

BRYNN: Interestingly, this didn't come up in my consciousness very much, maybe because I was at the bottom of the totem pole. It came into focus only once and it did in a rather unusual way. At the very end of his tenure as Ambassador in New Delhi, Moynihan came down to spend a few days in Sri Lanka. When he came down - and he came down on the spur of the moment - Ambassador Von Hollen was away, and for the first and only time that I can remember, Patricia Byrne (the DCM) was ill. She was in the local hospital. I believe it was late 1974. But anyway, it fell to Jane and to me to put on a big party for Moynihan, which we did. The next morning we talked a little bit about the relationship between the embassies in New Delhi and in Colombo. I drove him around Colombo in my little mini-Minor. In fact, we drove around back in those days with not much attention to security; we just went down the street. He confessed that he was quite astonished that there was a Sri Lanka. It really just hadn't come onto his radar screen. He was quite open in saying, "I wish I had been more focused on what was going on down there."

Q: How about economically? Was India seen by the merchants and people you were dealing with as the colossus to the north?

BRYNN: No, it wasn't, and, in fact, I think the trade flows were still very much more in old imperial patterns. Much of what we regarded as state-of-the-art stuff all the way down to toilet bowls and sinks still came out of England. But the Sri Lankan economy had declined to the point where imports were almost non-existent.

Q: This was because of the trade policy?

BRYNN: That's right. Well, the coffers were bare, and Mrs. Bandaranaike was so keen on protecting start-up local industries, especially those that were now in the hands of the Sinhalese as opposed to the Tamils, that it was pretty hard to find imported goods.

Q: Was there such a thing as the politics of tea, because there are in some commodities?

BRYNN: All that we knew was that there were representatives of a couple of the big American companies like McCormick who were in Sri Lanka to look at tea production and to monitor tea tasting, but I don't recall any big tea transactions.

Q: It's not like coffee and some commodities where it gets very political?

BRYNN: No, it was not. Of course, tea wasn't high on our radar screen as an American imports as coffee would have been. I just don't recall. I do remember going with representatives from some of the American tea importers to check on production and what was coming down the pike in terms of the quality of the tea.

Q: Who were the tea pickers?

BRYNN: They were Tamils from south India brought over by the British in the 1880s. Until then Ceylon had been a major coffee producer. Suddenly disease wiped out the coffee plantations within the space of two or three years, and they were replaced immediately by tea plantings which came down from the lower slopes of the Himalayas. They were planted in the upper slopes of the mountains in Ceylon up about 5,000 feet in particular, and within a period of five years Ceylon became a major tea exporter and the coffee crop had been entirely destroyed. When I was there, coffee was making a very modest comeback; I don't know what has happened since.

Q: You mentioned when we were talking about Moynihan that there was another incident you wanted to talk about.

BRYNN: Yes. It revolved around my appearance before Threshold Board. I was dispatched over to Bangkok to meet with the Board in the winter of 1974-5.

Q: You might explain what the Threshold Board was.

BRYNN: I don't know what the system is now, but at that time before you could get tenure in the Foreign Service, you actually met a board and the board was under an injunction to tell you where you ranked in performance to date relative to your peers, find out whether you actually had a strong career commitment to remain in the Foreign Service. Their findings were to be included in recommendation for tenure. I went over to Bangkok to meet the Board, and in the course of the conversation the head of the Board, whose name I do not remember, said, "Well, Mr. Brynn, on the basis of your performance to date, we would put you in the top 10 percent of your peers. But we are strongly persuaded that, because you had a career in the Air Force and you have a Ph.D. and that you are working on a second Ph.D.," (which was true,) "we suspect that in relatively short order you will make a decision not to remain in the Foreign Service, and on that basis we think we should knock you out of the top 10 percent and put you down into the top 25 percent." When I got back to Colombo, I received a letter to that effect. I replied to the chair that the Board's observation was a self-fulfilling prophecy; if you really wanted me to think seriously about getting out of the Foreign Service, dropping me down in the ranking because I have these options on the outside was an effective way to reinforce it. Well, Moynihan arrived on the scene. He had scene just a couple days after I had received the notification and that I had replied. The ambassador, of course, was no stranger to festive evenings, and at the end of the evening - I had invited, in fact scrambled for, people to come to the house on very short notice for the dinner for Moynihan. A colleague at the Canadian High Commission was there - he has remained a very good friend of ours - and I apparently was telling him maybe not in an entirely *sotto voce* voice what had happened. The next morning when I went to pick up Ambassador Moynihan at our ambassador's residence, Moynihan said, "Mr. Brynn, what is the story you were saying last night to your Canadian colleague about a self-fulfilling prophecy? Tell me about it." I

went through it, and he was understandably quite unaware what this whole process was about. He said, "Well, I find it absolutely unacceptable. Do you mind if I write a letter to Ambassador Davis," Nathaniel Davis, who was, I guess, the Director General at the time, "expressing my indignation." I said, "Well, that's all right." I didn't, of course, expect that he would send that letter. Moynihan then left for New Delhi a day or two later. In fact, while we were sitting there chatting that morning he got a news flash or something from the United States saying that William Saxby had been nominated as his successor as ambassador to India. I recall Moynihan saying that this was "absolutely unacceptable".

Q: His Attorney General.

BRYNN: Anyway, Moynihan went back to Delhi, and he was only there a few weeks before he terminated his stay and headed back to the States. But in the next week's packet there came a letter, a thank-you letter for Jane for hosting the two events at our house, and then there was another envelope addressed to me. I opened it up, and it said, "Dear Ed, I hope that you will find the letter that I sent to Ambassador Davis, a copy of which is enclosed, a full expression of my sentiments regarding this matter." I looked at the letter; it started, "Dear Ambassador Davis, you would not want it thought that," and it went on with two pages of praising my academic interests, stressing their relevance to the Foreign Service, and expressing his indignation with the Board's conclusion. Jane looked at the letter and said, "Well, Edward, I honestly believe this is the end of your career." I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. A few weeks later I got a letter from Al Thibault, who had gone back to be the Ceylon desk officer in NEA, and he said, "Dear Ed, you may or may not be aware that Ambassador Moynihan has sent a letter of certain vigor to Ambassador Davis. Ambassador Davis gave the letter to the head of your Tenure Board in Bangkok and asked him to prepare a response. The gentleman prepared a number of drafts for Ambassador Davis, all of which Ambassador Davis rejected. The Ambassador has himself replied to Ambassador Moynihan's letter. I recommend that you drop this issue." Well, a few weeks later I got notification that I had gotten tenure, and on I went. I cherish my letter from Moynihan.

Q: Oh, yes. You were saying the political situation was extremely complicated: family, clan, I suppose, social class, and everything else?

BRYNN: It was a microcosm of all types of third and first world countries. We had a country where the literacy rate was higher than that of the United States. We had an extraordinarily active press with many papers suspended for 24 hours at a time but no long shutdown. We had a large percentage of the upper class had been educated in England. I think there were more officer Ph.D.s in any given Sinhalese ministry than there were in Britain at that time. Ceylon has supplied more presidents of the Oxford Union than any country outside the United Kingdom. On the other hand, you had a very decaying and very weak economic infrastructure, increasing evidence of serious poverty and overcrowding in places like Colombo, a certain fatalism which perhaps you get in South Asia about whether anything could be done, and ominous threats about terrorism. We always thought that Sri Lankans were rather cowardly as individuals when it came to making a statement. When you got them in a mob, however all hell could break loose and they could really defy public order. I think the younger, more junior officers in the embassy found monitoring developments in Sri Lanka an adventure on a day-to-day basis without, I think,

having an overarching view about the tragic road Sri Lanka had chosen. I guess that's part of the syndrome of being a junior officer.

Q: What about the Soviets? What was their presence like at that time?

BRYNN: Their presence was large on the ground, and I must say I had very little to do with it because I think we were expecting our friends across the river to take more of an interest there. They made a lot of visits, the military; a lot of ships came to Sri Lanka. On the other hand, my firm understanding was that they didn't feel that they were very well plugged in. Other than the fact Soviets posed as anti-imperialists, Sri Lankans simply didn't like them, and therefore I didn't get a sense that the Soviets were much welcomed.

Q: You were there during the Watergate period. How did that play?

BRYNN: Well, that was interesting. We were really at the end of the era where you didn't get the news in a very timely fashion. The State Department was being fairly brave about trying to send out some daily bulletins on this thing, but we waited avidly for the *Herald Tribune* to arrive, which would be mostly a week later. We followed this newspaper intensely. This is the very first time I can remember where I really became very focused on contemporary political developments. I found it an absolutely fascinating exercise. I know up in Vermont I have a box which had the clippings of hundred of issues of the *Herald Tribune*. I also kept all of Herblock's cartoons from that period, pasted them into a book and gave it to Jane as a birthday present. The Ceylonese were very interested. They're very litigiously oriented and they have a very fine mind. Watergate became a dominating point of conversation. In fact, it was very distracting; it was hard to do any other business.

Q: How did you feel about the whole thing?

BRYNN: I felt that Nixon was a crook. I became very strongly anti-Nixon. I think this is the moment where I moved more ideologically into the Democratic camp. As I say, I don't have a strong set of political bones in my body, but I felt that Watergate vindicated two things: one, that you can fool a large percentage of the American public much of the time; and, two, it brought home to me the virtues of a parliamentary system where you could divide political responsibility from the formal aspect of government. We found it so hard to get rid of Nixon, because we revered the Presidency. Yet at the same time our destination with Nixon the politician was enormous.

Q: Obviously it wouldn't be at your level, but you were at a small enough embassy. Did you have the feeling that Sri Lanka was not on anybody's radar in Washington, particularly Henry Kissinger?

BRYNN: No, we always thought that our reporting - that's the wonderful thing about being a junior officer, you think that what you were writing to Washington and spending so much on commanded an interested audience back home - and that supported my belief and, I must say, Van Hollen and Pat Byrne were really masters of the cable - that what we sent to Washington was important. I'm glad that we felt that way, because that's what kept us going and provided a

lot of energy. (Nothing is so dispiriting serving as a desk officer and finding out how little attention was paid to most of our lapidary prose. That's why I always tell younger officers, "Don't be a desk officer first. Get out in the field and have a great time when you think you've got an audience in Washington." We thought that we were at the center of the world in our own little embassy, but of course we weren't. I think probably Van Hollen and Pat Byrne were right in not disabusing us of that notion; maybe they were persuaded that Sri Lanka counted for more than it did.)

Q: When you were there, were there from our embassy level there any serious issues that came up?

BRYNN: We were mobilized on one occasion - I do remember this. A group of Japanese terrorists had seized a plane either in Japan or in Singapore and were programming to fly via Colombo with hostages toward the Middle East or Western Europe. That's the first time I ever heard the word 'flash message'. We got 13 of them from Kissinger in one period of five or six hours. I was sent to the airport to work with the Sinhalese in security procedures and authorities so that when the plane landed the whole airport was to be cleared for the plane to be refueled. I don't recall that there were any Americans on the plane, but I remember getting to the airport, getting up into the airport tower. All of a sudden there was a general power failure, all the lights went out at the airport at the moment the plane was scheduled to land. I was convinced that terrorists would conclude that Sri Lanka's authorities were ready to assault the plane. Well, as it turned out, even though we were getting flash messages from Kissinger giving us point-by-point instructions, nobody had told us that in effect the plane had never left the runway at its previous point. I remember quite vividly that brief shining moment when we were on the Washington radar screen.

Q: What about the split-off of Bangladesh from Pakistan? That was on your watch, wasn't it?

BRYNN: It was on the watch. I didn't focus on it too much at the time, but I do remember Chris Van Hollen being very upset about it, I think probably because he had had previous tours in South Asia and felt that - I don't mean to speak for him, but my impression- the policy had gone the wrong way. But at my level really I don't recall having any strange feelings of my own.

Q: Did the American recognition of China, or reopening relations with China, have any effects in Ceylon, or was it just interesting?

BRYNN: It had an effect in that it gave at least a temporary lift to our credibility with the Bandaranaike government. We had walked away a certain distance from the old John Foster Dulles syndrome of containing the Communist behemoth. By recognizing we had demonstrated that we were moving into a reality-check phase, and they thought that was a pretty good thing.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss there?

BRYNN: I don't think so. I think the only thing I recall that I was most proud about or happy about was doing some cables to Washington on poverty. The subject had nothing to do with politics but I do remember getting some accolades from people back in the Department of Navy

who had quite enough all of the political reporting we were feeding them. I was very briefly, for reasons that are absolutely bureaucratic, the acting AID Director. I went out to look at some of our programs, and I came back feeling that we were really missing the boat. I wrote a couple cables, and at the end of the day, for my three years or two and a half years in Sri Lanka, I think they stood out as some of my best work.

Q: What were we doing aid wise?

BRYNN: We were at the end of the great-project era, building great roads into the jungle and building a large dam. When I was in Sri Lanka, I we were reaching the moment when we realized that these great projects, were probably very beneficial to some large American construction firm, were perhaps insensitive to environmental concerns and were putting an awful lot of money into infrastructure projects that were not terribly useful to the country. Ironically, of course, we then switched in the Carter period to helping the poorest of the poor where you had American technicians earning 100,000 dollars a year working with one peasant tomato grower, and that was worse. I swung back to the belief that if we're going to be involved in aid programs - it turned out, of course, by then I was in Africa - perhaps infrastructure was what we should be involved in.

Q: Anybody else doing things there?

BRYNN: The Chinese were building public buildings for legislators. The British had a number of smaller projects too, but I think the projects that I remember the most were Japanese. They were deeply involved, I believe, with the Mahaweli Dam project, boring a huge hole through the mountain using Yugoslav construction firms. The project was quite fascinating, and I spent a fair amount of time going to mountains to inspect the tunnel. At considerable cost to the environment this rearrangement of the great central river system in Sri Lanka and to an enormous increase in rice production, coupled as it was - something that we did not get much credit for - the sharp increase in the productivity of rice itself coming out of the IRI laboratories in the Philippines.

And that, more than anything else, that we had a hand in, transformed Sri Lanka by enormously increasing food production within 10 years of my departure.

WILLIAM P. KIEHL
Press Attaché, USIS
Colombo (1975-1977)

William P. Kiehl was born in Pennsylvania in 1945. He received a BS from the University of Scranton in 1967 and an MA from the University of Virginia in 1970. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1970, he was posted in Belgrade, Zagreb, Colombo, Moscow, Prague, Helsinki, London and Bangkok. Mr. Kiehl was interviewed in 2003 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: You went Colombo in – was it Sri Lanka at the time?

KIEHL: Yes, it was Sri Lanka then. Ceylon had changed from Ceylon to Sri Lanka officially in 1959. It was Sri Lanka, although everyone called it Ceylon still.

Q: You were there from when to when?

KIEHL: From June 1975 through June of '77. I had one year with the esteemed Richard Ross ...

Q: Whom I am interviewing. I'm interviewing him this afternoon, again.

KIEHL: You can get two versions of the same events, perhaps. That would be interesting.

Q: Talk a little about the embassy there at the time.

KIEHL: In Sri Lanka? Sure. Well, the embassy – and you know, I ought to go back at some point, and talk to you a little bit more about the embassy in Belgrade, because in fact, right now, I guess they're going to probably bulldoze that whole complex down and build a new embassy on the outskirts of town, so that embassy itself was kind of a rat trap even then, back in the early '70s.

| In Sri Lanka, to go back into the right time frame here, it was a charming building that was a little bit past its prime, even then, right on the ocean, and of course the monsoonal winds and the salt spray could really play havoc with a building like that. It was an old building, even when the U.S. government acquired it, I think. In fact, there was a story – and I actually saw it happen – | the place was infested with rats, as well. I remember the occasion, the ambassador had a staff meeting in his office, and we all lined up our chairs in his office, and he was sitting at his desk, and there was a flagpole on either side, but you know, in the middle of the meeting, a rat pops up out of the floorboard, runs up the flagpole, looks around, runs back down again, and back in the hole. That pretty well shot that meeting. Apparently the rat would do that regularly. It was almost like a trained rat.

The ambassador when I first arrived and the first year I was there, was Chris Van Hollen, and his wife, Eliza Van Hollen. Their son is the guy who is ...

Q: Congressman now, in Maryland.

KIEHL: Right. Of course Chris Van Hollen was a classic career officer from South Asia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and so on, steeped in the area. His DCM, I think at that time and also later, for the next ambassador, was a fellow named Ray Perkins, who later became consul general in Bombay, before he retired. He's down in Richmond, Virginia. His wife was from Wyoming and she was really quite a character, really gregarious, almost a cowgirl.

It was a pretty good embassy. Jim McGonnigle was the administrative counselor. My first PAO was David Briggs, who was a remarkable guy. Again, tons of experience, et cetera, and I think he was in *Who's Who* not because of his diplomatic career but because of his coin collection. He | was world class in numismatics, published widely in the field, and had I suppose, most of his

weight allowance was taken up with cabinets sort of like that, filled with coins, of great vintage and rarity, all quite carefully labeled in plastic sleeves, which he carted around from place to place. He went to Pakistan after Sri Lanka and then retired to Vermont from the Foreign Service.

So he was the PAO, and then Dick Ross was the cultural officer, and I was the press attaché. It was a great operation, because we had an office apart from the embassy, just down the road, with a nice beach view. I could walk out on my verandah from my office on the ground floor, and there's the waves crashing against the beach. You can't ask for a more ideal situation. You could see the monsoon coming, and each day it would come a little bit earlier and so on.

Dick and the PAO were upstairs. What I was responsible for was a press section where we'd be doing press releases in English, Sinhala, and Tamil, and also doing media reaction reporting, and a print shop for a lot of publications. We did a magazine there, printed on site, in the basement, called Darshana, which was one of those worldwide magazines translated into Sinhala, but we had a 24-page insert, which was done all local news, that kind of thing. That was all done in Sinhalese, and sent out to our mailing list. Then a radio and film section, of course there was no TV, which was kind of nice, actually. We had radio, with these gigantic editing tables for radio placement, and of course the film section was very important because we produced films, 35 millimeter films, shorts, we would dub some stock USIA films, American propaganda films, essentially, into Sinhalese and Tamil, as well as English, and place them in theatres around the country, attach them to the right film, you see, and they would get all over the country. We also produced a couple of films, one was a co-production with India called *The Dance of Shiva*, and another one was the film on Henry Steele Olcott, Searcher After Truth, which Dick Ross actually has a bit part in, wearing a white linen suit, as Henry Steele Olcott, sort of a side view or back view, but nevertheless a film credit.

The films were extremely successful, I mean, they were placed in the theaters and everybody knew these films, because it was a great moving-going public. There was a film there, an Indian film called Geet, which played for 18 months in the local theater, and there were people who'd seen it 300 times. It was a "round and round the bush, round and round the tree" song-and-dance, Indian love story type movie, and if you attached your film to that, everybody in Sri Lanka would see it. After seeing Geet 300 times, they'd also see *The Dance of Shiva* 300 times.

Q: What was The Dance of Shiva about?

KIEHL: You know, you've got me. I'm trying to think. You know, I can't really remember. I believe it has to do with the role of Indian culture in America but it has been too long ago.

Q: I think Shiva's fertility or something?

KIEHL: Well, you know the dance of Shiva actually has to do with a destructive power, the dance of Shiva. Let me think, I'd have to think about that a little bit, because I mean, I remember the opening credits of the film, I can see it, and the Shiva statue that is in it. I think it was basically done by the post in India. They paid for most of the cost. It was largely about U.S. relations with South Asia, and principally India, with a little Sri Lanka thrown in. That's why we dubbed it in Sinhala and used it also.

Q: When you were the information officer, what was your impression of the Sri Lankan press, where did they stand, what did we do with them?

KIEHL: Oh, listen, after four years of the Yugoslav press, which was so predictable and so much in the kind of East European mold. You could make a good guess about tomorrow's headlines nearly any day. And, of course, there was always a bit of paranoid fixation with the CIA- (end of tape)

Aside from situations like that it was dull as you could imagine, but the Sri Lankan press was lively, it was entertaining, it was outrageous, and it was highly professional, all at the same time. It was in English, it was in Sinhalese, and it was in Tamil. There were newspapers that had a 300,000 daily circulation, and a million on Sunday, and there were circulations that had 5,000 circulation, and the 5,000 circulation sheet might have been more important than the million circulation because of who read it. There were several big newspaper enterprises, Lake House being the classic one, which had papers in all three languages, and the great old British-trained journalists, and so on. Then there was the Sun Group, which was much more outrageous and more of a tabloid, kind of a Murdoch-type operation, and many, many others. There were little independent presses, the *Tribune*, a fellow named Amasingham, a Tamil who must have weighed 450 pounds if he weighed an ounce, gigantic man, who ran this enterprise out of his back pocket, and was either in the pay of the Americans or the Russians, depending upon who you talked to.

There was a whole panoply of characters, as well. The de Silvas-- Melvin de Silva, Neville de Silva, Manik de Silva, all three were journalists. There was the Tamil press, the editor of the leading Tamil newspaper was someone I go to know pretty well, and his family, we went to his daughter's wedding and we were pretty close friends with them. And all of these people interacted with each other and were quite friendly with each other, and in some cases, intermarried with each other, and that was true of all the professions and all the society back in those days. It was before the resurgence of this kind of ethnic hatred that became the monster that devoured Sri Lanka.

It was in a way an ideal time. People say, "When were you there?" and I usually reply, "Well, I was there between the insurrection and the civil war." We arrived about a month or two after the bomb blew up, killing a policeman in front of our embassy, which was the insurrection part of it, and the civil war, which began to appear after the election right after I left, in which the UNP (United National Party) party dominated so much that the only minority was the Tamil front. When they were frustrated by a 400 to 20 imbalance in the parliament, it emboldened the Tamil Tigers and the radical faction of the Tamils to seek redress in violent ways. Sometimes a democratic election can set off terrible and unintended consequences. The democrats, small d, of Sri Lanka, were destroyed by their own success.

Anyway, where was I? Oh, the press there. I inherited the house of the former station-chief, who was named in Blitz and other publications in South Asia, he was sort of "outed", you might say, and he had to disappear for a while. He did disappear for a while and then reemerged in another house, a smaller, less conspicuous house. About the same time I arrived, and was looking for housing, and the embassy had this house, so I moved into it, unbeknownst to me, that it was the

house of the guy who had been “outed” in Blitz earlier, a beautiful house, second biggest garden in the embassy, after the ambassador’s, a lovely old house, right across the street from Peter Kennemen, who was the leader of the Ceylon Communist Party. So I moved in there and I remember the first time I had some journalists over for lunch, there were several of them who looked under the plate for the envelope. It was kind of funny. I had to explain to them that they weren’t ever going to find an envelope under their plate here, but, if they played their cards right, I’d give them a nice book at Christmastime.

As I said, it was all of those adjectives, it was an outrageous press, it was a yellow press in that sense, of blowing everything out of proportion, and yet it was highly professional, it’s the spectrum from extreme left wing, Maoist, pro-Soviet, Social Democratic, centrist, to an almost Republican, right wing press, all coming out, every day, every week, and wonderful stories. The kind of stories you just have to cut out and paste in a scrapbook and go back to and just laugh over.

Q: What kind of stories?

KIEHL: Oh, like the “Trousered Johnny” who basically went around town showing his johnson to people. Terrible stories of people committing suicide by drinking insecticide, or throwing themselves in front of railway trains and stuff. This stuff was going all the time in the press, front page, and then of course, thinly veiled scandals about the Bandaranaike family, the Senanaike family, the Wickramasingas, and all these other notoriously famous families of the ruling aristocracy of Sri Lanka, because in large measure, the same half-dozen families still dominate politics today as they did in my day and as they did in the ‘50s, and as they did under the British.

Q: In Sri Lanka, looking at the information side, was there the equivalent to in France they would be the intellectuals, or in Britain the chattering class, a group of who were important, rather than just sounding off?

KIEHL: Of course, in any society as complex as Sri Lanka you’re going to have the chattering classes, and in fact, so much of it is modeled on the Brits that some of the same categories of chattering classes evolved there. The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation was modeled on the BBC (British Broadcasting Company). Just as the BBC provides fodder for the chattering classes in the UK, especially Channel 4, SLBC would do the same for the intellectuals of Sri Lanka.

And there were quite a few intellectuals. Not only were they Oxford- and Cambridge-educated, but they were Harvard- and Stanford-educated, and they were also educated locally at the University of Colombo, Peradeniya campus, outside of Kandy. You could get a University of London degree by attending and graduating from that school, the quality was sufficiently high.

So you did have the intellectual_elite and you did have the chattering classes, most of whom were, as they are in the UK, left of center, a bit skeptical of American intentions, et cetera, and they were a great challenge and great intellectual fun to engage. The civil service there was a very important force, just again, modeled on the British civil service. The permanent secretaries (Perm Secs) were very key players. The provincial governors were all senior civil service. They were the people who actually made the place run, and they were the most important people, far

more important, other than the top politicians, than your run-of-the-mill members of parliament, because they were just faces on a placard. They could be changed tomorrow. It was the permanent secretaries in the ministries that were really the people who ran the government, just as it is in the case of the UK.

It's thanks to people like, there was one Perm Sec – the Non-Aligned Conference occurred in 1976 there, and I had made up my mind that, well, we wanted to engage in this. This was a major event and we wanted to make sure that American values and American policy were presented to the people who are attending the non-aligned conference, and make sure that they understand U.S. positions on the issues. Also it was important that I could contribute, or our office could contribute, to the reporting on it. The first step would be to get inside the gate, so I went to Ridgeway Tillkkratne, who was permanent secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and as a personal favor he gave me accreditation to the conference. I end up being the only Western diplomat with accreditation to the Non-Aligned Conference, which gets me inside the gate so I can, whenever there's an issue that comes up, I can put out the word, in other words, I can provide our material to the central information office within the Non-Aligned Conference, so they can then disseminate that information to all the delegates. That's great. I can also attend the sessions and write reporting cables and phone them in to the political section, and they can send out a cable to do the reporting.

Now, in some measure, obviously, this is a kind of parallelism, because the U.S. mission would presumably, though other (i. e. Intel) sources, have the same information I was reporting, but because it may have been a foreign source, they couldn't very well report it in the same way. So by me doing it, it gave it some legitimacy as an embassy officer reporting it. In other words, the intelligence traffic would be one thing but the embassy reporting traffic, which might parallel it, was a source that could be named. That was quite a dramatic Non-Aligned Conference, because ...

Q: What was the thrust of it?

KIEHL: It was a period of great tension. If you recall, right in the middle of the conference, the North Koreans came across and chopped up an American soldier with axes. It was pretty nasty business, which ...

Q: I know, I was in Seoul at the time.

KIEHL: It had a huge effect on the Non-Aligned Conference there, because the North Koreans were very active in the Non-Aligned movement at the time, and were trying to throw their weight around to the extent where a North Korean spy ship was also in the harbor in Colombo, spying on communications of the various delegations and so on, and the Sri Lankan government raided the ship and sealed the radio room on the ship and posted guards on the ship while it was there. Interesting, eh? I don't know how they found out about it that.

Ghadafi made a triumphal entrance into Colombo in a motorcade, handing out full-color pictures, kind of almost calendar prints of himself, with a retinue of 150 heavily-armed bodyguards. If you recall, at the time, the Libyans and the Egyptians were practically on shooting

terms, and the Egyptian delegation was in one wing of the Lanka Oberoi Hotel, and the Libyans were in another, and there was a very good possibility of a firefight between the two wings of the hotel. It was really an extraordinarily volatile situation, and that all made for very interesting reporting and reading, I can tell you.

Q: Did we view this Non-Aligned Movement as essentially an anti-American ...

KIEHL: Oh, yes, very much so. Very much so, and of course a lot of the tone was very anti-American. It's not to say that many of the countries there had any great love for the Soviet Union. It was, supposedly, a third path. However, when you had countries like North Korea as a major player, and folks like Ghadafi as a major leader there, who were on record as being essentially biased against the United States, it was not being paranoid to think that the U.S. was enemy number one of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Q: Did you find yourself shunned when you were there?

KIEHL: When I operated in the press area, I wasn't, because journalists are journalists in whatever country. They were just grateful for information that they could feed into their stories, the U.S. viewpoint. They were happy to engage with me. There were a lot of U.S. and Western reporters there as well, who weren't at all hostile. When I would move over into the main hall for the plenary meetings and so on, I was able to get into plenary meetings which were supposedly closed to the press and so on. It was a great source of information, a way of duplicating information we might have obtained from other sources.

Whenever there was a formal session I would sit behind the Yugoslav delegation because the people doing the TV feed for the world was Zagreb television, and I knew all those guys, so I had an in with them. Also, their interpreter was from the English department of the university, and he was an old contact, as well. In fact I had them all over for a Croatian meal before the conference actually got underway. I had used my Croatian contacts and my local contacts to get the accreditation, so I was in pretty good shape there, however one time I remember sitting in on the meeting, and I was there taking notes and sort of chuckling to myself that boy, this would make interesting reading, and I looked up and I was surrounded by North Koreans. They were like ten rows away from me, it was a nearly empty section of the hall, in the balcony, but they were all around me. I continued to work, and a little bit later I looked up and they had moved closer. I thought to myself, "Would these idiots be crazy enough to throw me off the balcony?" because they had been doing things like that.

Q: Oh, yes, they'd set a bomb off in Burma, in Rangoon.

KIEHL: So I decided to get up, I walked along, and walked over to another section of the hall, in the balcony, and sat down, and lo and behold, every damn one of them followed me over there. So I'm thinking, "OK. They made their point," so I got out of there. That's the kind of weird stuff that would happen.

In the hall, of course, I didn't have a delegates badge, so there were parts of the hall that I couldn't get into, or I couldn't talk my way past the guard by joking about something, or talking

| to somebody and then walking through. So there were parts of the hall I couldn't enter, and then, of course, some of the delegates would see that I had a press accreditation rather than a delegate accreditation around my neck, and obviously if they didn't want to talk to the press, they didn't want to talk to the press.

I wasn't being shunned by anybody in particular, except maybe shadowed by the North Koreans.

Q: Where did the Sri Lankans fit into this Non-Aligned Movement?

KIEHL: They had been an early supporter of the Non-Aligned Movement, from the Bandung conference on. Bandaranaike was a great adherent to that.

Q: This is Mister...

KIEHL: Mr. Bandaranaike, right. SWRD (Sirimavi Ratwatte Dias [Bandranaike]). Mrs., was, of course, a head of government during '76.

So Sri Lankans considered themselves a founding member, which they were, of the Non-Aligned Movement, and it was very important to their prestige in the world, and to their philosophy of not choosing sides in the superpower rivalry, et cetera. In Sri Lanka, of course, the American embassy was pretty big, as compared to other embassies. The Russian embassy was a little bigger, but the gigantic embassy was the Chinese embassy. They had over 500 people in their embassy.

Q: Good God.

KIEHL: They were all over the Island with their little red books. So we thought it was a little disingenuous of the Sri Lankans to worry so much about the Russians and Americans when the Chinese were basically taking over. A lot of the journalists were very, especially in the Sinhala language press, there were a lot of journalists who were, as my press assistant would say, "Maoist liners." They really, if they didn't truly believe it, at least the case of scotch that they got every Christmas ensured that they would print a lot of story lines that would favor the Chinese. They had a real presence there.

Sri Lanka relations with the U.S. were not unfriendly, but they weren't particularly warm.

Q: What about India? Was India the colossus to the north, so to speak?

KIEHL: It was, but it didn't really play the crucial factor until the civil war began. India obviously had a lot of interest there, there were a lot of Indian citizens there, the Indian Tamils, for example, and of course there was India's Tamil Nadu and the Tamil areas in the northern part of Sri Lanka. Again, the Tamils didn't make up *Illam*, the greater Tamil entity, just at the time of the civil war. It was there, beneath the surface, for a long time.

India, again, was a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, again, a major player in the Non-Aligned Movement, and relations between India and Sri Lanka were actually quite good at that time.

Q: While you were there were there any incidents or anything that really sticks in your mind?

KIEHL: During the Non-Aligned Conference?

Q: No, I mean during the whole time you were there.

KIEHL: The things that I remember, aside from the beauties of Sri Lanka and all the great events we had, there were a couple things that might be of some historical interest other than the Non-Aligned Conference. One was the conflict between the theater owners in Sri Lanka and the Motion Picture Association of America. The Motion Picture Exporters Association of America wanted to dictate to the theater owners there a package of films, so that when they got the top-rated films they'd also get some losers along the way, as motion picture distributors do. They give you a package when you own a theater and you either take it or leave it.

Remember, at this time, the Sirimao Bandaranaike government was composed of a coalition of Social Democrats, the Bandaranaike party, essentially, which is really a family party, and the Communist Party of Ceylon, and also the Sama Samajist party which was a Trotskite party, adhering to the Fourth International in London. The housing minister, for example, was a big Communist, which is a very important thing, the housing ministry in Sri Lanka, and the finance ministry was in the hands of a fellow named N.N. Perreira, who was a Trotsky-ite. So you've got a pretty schizophrenic government there. Things, shall we say, for the chattering classes, were not particularly great, because if you wanted a bottle of Johnny Walker it was \$40 down at the local liquor store because of all the taxes on it. They had a wealth tax, which meant you had to pay 100 and sometimes 110 or 120 percent of your income in taxes. They wouldn't tax your income, they would tax your wealth, you see. So you had to end up paying more in taxes than you earned.

Of course there was a program nationalizing the tea plantations that was ongoing. So it was a pretty left of center government and it caused a lot of imbalances, you might say, among people who were used to an almost British colonial lifestyle, the upper class of Sri Lanka, you might say. They lived a very British colonial lifestyle, and these were rather abrupt changes for them.

So there were a lot of internal conflicts there. Anyway, with the Trotsky-ite as finance minister, the government was in a really shaky state, I mean, they weren't getting the revenues, they were piling up deficits, it was becoming a real crisis. As a way of choking off the expenditure of foreign reserves, the government sort of put pressure on the theater owners to take a very hard line with the Motion Picture Exporters Association of America, and when push came to shove, Hollywood doesn't give a damn about movies in Sri Lanka, and they said, "OK. You're cut off. No more American films" and this was a tragedy of great proportion for most people in Sri Lanka, because they loved American films. This went on for a couple of years. They finally came to an agreement, I think, with the emergence of the new government, right after I departed.

| When the UNP government came in they were friendlier to the U.S. and this was all settled, but

until then it was a real irritant. It was an irritant even to the supporters of the government. They liked American movies, too.

One of the things I remember, which is really a great thing, I was able to get films out of the embassy in New Delhi on a courier run, but not too many, maybe one every couple of months. One I got was *All the President's Men*. I showed that film on the lawn of our house, stretched a big bed sheet between two palm trees, and put that movie on, and I had basically invited all of the major players in the newspaper world, because this was essentially a newspaper story, and the power of the press against government. I think that film, it made such an impression on the press there actually had an effect on the way they dealt with the government from that point on. It really had a profound effect on them.

Q: It sort of inspired investigative reporting.

KIEHL: Exactly, and reporting that didn't tow the government line, because the government could restrict newsprint, in other words, you had to get your allocation of paper to print your newspaper from the government there, and your ink. It really took a lot of courage to rebuff the government, and I think that film actually inspired them to get some of that courage.

Q: Yes, that's lovely.

KIEHL: Another thing that was of some interest--1976 was the bicentennial year, and we did something that I thought was really a great thing, which very few embassies could have done. We decided to investigate the roots of our relationship with Sri Lanka over those 200 years and we did it in a couple ways. One was with a book, and the book is called *Images of Sri Lanka through American Eyes*. It's a compilation of the writings about Sri Lanka by American visitors to Sri Lanka, or Ceylon, from the very first American who saw the shores of the island in the 18th century and noted impressions in a ship's log, to 1975 or '76 with Thomas Merton's visit, when he wrote some poetry before dying tragically only a couple of weeks later. It had everybody, Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, every famous American, it seemed, at one point or another touched down and wrote something about Sri Lanka, either published work or a memoir, or letters, or something. The librarian of the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya campus, that prestigious university with the London accreditation, was in the States on a JDR III (John D. Rockefeller, III) grant a few years before and wanted to do something for the bicentennial, so we got him to be the editor of this, and he put the whole thing together, obviously we had to buy the publication rights for those works not in the public domain, we had it printed in our regional office in the Philippines. We had photographs done by a Fulbright photographer who had been on a Fulbright to Sri Lanka and taken pictures of various aspects of life in Sri Lanka described in the book, and put these in the book as well.

The book was just an enormous hit. We gave it away to 5,000 of our closest friends, but it was so popular that people wanted to buy it, and so another printing was made and another printing, and I think it must be in its fourth, or fifth, or sixth printing now. For the last 30 years this book has been published, and now I think they're doing an updated version. So it was something that really caught the imagination.

The other part of it was an exhibition of American interest in that island country from the earliest days, and for that, of course, we had to go back to some of the early American missionaries, back in the early 1800s, who were able to work only in the north of the island because the British wouldn't allow them in the south. Then, of course, the exports during the age of the clipper ships and so on, and we actually had a lot of the objects there. Everything from the bell of a mission from 1806 up in Tamil, to some Seth Thomas clocks that were imported from the United States back in the 1880s, and then photographs as well. It was this huge exhibition which we mounted on the whole first floor and garden area of the ambassador's residence for the Fourth of July party, and again, that took the imagination of people so much that it then toured the country. It was unbelievable that they could do this. The exhibit toured the country, a publication was made of it, and the publication has been reprinted for years after that. All these display items were borrowed from various people and institutions; they had to be given back after the tour of the exhibit, but they became part of this spectacular exhibit.

I think it reinforced the idea that America has had a long term interest and connection with Sri Lanka, and that was the whole point of the bicentennial celebration that we did there. It was, really, I have to say, one of the more successful things that was done, and all done locally, nothing was imported from the States, no prepackaged thing was done by some outfit in the U.S. and plunked down there.

Q: Who did your research?

KIEHL: A lot of us did research, a lot of it was the staff, our Sri Lanka staff. I took several research trips, which was a lot of fun for me, and in those days you could drive from Colombo to Jaffna in about eight or nine hours, fourteen hours and you'd get anywhere on the island. This is before the civil war and the boundary lines and so on. We would go up to Jaffna, and Trincomalee and all these places, and meet with people, and everybody we met would tell us about something else, and we'd start plotting this out.

It took about six months of research and identifying things and then saying, "Oh yes, can we have that bell? Great, we'll pick it up a week before the Fourth of July, and we'll take it back to you when the exhibit's over," and "Sure, you can have the church bell," people were delighted to be involved in this. So we had all of these artifacts, all these photographs – people would open up desk drawers and get these photographs out, just unbelievable stuff, because everybody had some ownership of this exhibition. They all felt that this was a contribution they could make. After about six months we had all this material, and we sat down and storyboarded the thing out, and put up the exhibit. Again, this was all done with carpentry. For about three weeks – who was the ambassador then? I think it was still Chris Van Hollen, he must have been leaving that summer. We took over the downstairs of his house for three or four weeks, building all these panels out of wood and plywood and so on, and painting it all, all over the downstairs of his house and his garden, to do this exhibit. It showed an extraordinary amount of patience on his part to give up his house for that long, but it was really a remarkable thing. People were just blown away by it, and they just – again, it made an impression that no amount of canned spin out of Washington could ever do.

Q: This exhibit was our bicentennial, '76. Did the election of the Carter administration make any impact on your work at all?

KIEHL: I think it made it a little easier, in that Carter was respected in the developing world. His policies were very much looked upon with favor. Remember, this is a left-of-center government in a developing country that's part of the Non-Aligned Movement, and they saw in Carter maybe a kindred soul, in many ways. They were happier with the Carter administration than they had been with the Ford administration. There wasn't any particular love for Nixon in Sri Lanka as there was in Eastern Europe, so there wasn't any remorse about his departure and so on. Yes, I think Carter made our work a little easier, but not tremendously so.

Q: The change in title?

KIEHL: Of course the other weird thing that happened in the Carter administration, as you know, is the U.S. Information Agency became the International Communications Agency, or USICA, and that became a bit of a joke overseas, a lot of people switching the initials around [USICA to USICA]and that sort of thing. It was kind of ridiculous, because they wouldn't let us use any of the old stationery or anything until it ran out, so a lot of paper was wasted. It was probably more of a big deal inside the Beltway than it was overseas, because frankly, everybody knew us there as USIS and we were USIS, period. It didn't make any difference what the home agency was called. Nobody ever used the terms.

Q: It came and went.

KIEHL: It was a little bit of a different feeling, too. This is nothing against the integration of USIA and State, but USIS was seen as quite a separate thing from the embassy. For example, all the people in the embassy wore suits and ties. Now, they didn't wear those jackets most of the time, but they dressed like that. We in USIS wore safari suits or batik shirts and slacks, and we were in a separate building, and our library was in yet another separate building. Our press releases and so on, people knew that was the embassy, but it wasn't really the embassy, it was the USIS office. We were somehow seen as less political and more trustworthy by people because we were out there and we weren't seen as in a diplomatic enclave. In developing countries, I think that really goes a long way. It probably wouldn't make any difference in the UK or in Belgium or in Italy, but in Sri Lanka, and India and Africa and Latin America, it does mean something, because embassies are considered somehow more formal entities and, shall we say, less friendly to the average people. They're somehow separate from the society, whereas the USIS office or the AID (Agency for International Development) mission, if it has a separate compound, and people are dressed more casually and they are working more with people in the society, and less with the foreign ministry and the government, are seen as less political.

There are some real advantages to that. Obviously, there are some disadvantages, but there are a great many advantages.

Q: You left in '77, is that right?

KIEHL: Yes, I did.

ALBERT A. THIBAUT, JR.
India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives Desk Officer
Washington DC (1975-1978)

Albert A. Thibault, Jr. was born in Massachusetts on August 5, 1941. He received his BA from the University of Windsor in Canada in 1962, his MA from the University of Toronto in 1963, and another MA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1964. He entered the Foreign Service in 1969. His career has included positions in Guinea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia.

Q: During this '75 to '78 period. In the first place, had this become Sri Lanka?

THIBAUT: Just trying to think. I believe it did, I believe it did. That's the traditional name of the country. Ceylon was the foreign name.

Q: Was there anything that happened? Were you getting 26 page reports there that got you all excited?

THIBAUT: The major issue there was grappling with the Zone of Peace concept that aimed at regulating, i.e. constraining, non-littoral naval presence and activities in the Indian Ocean, including the right of free passage. Understandably, this notion was anathema to our Navy. It became a real irritant, because it was not only a Sri Lankan notion. It had been, if I recall correctly, initiated by Mrs. Bandaranaike but it was very much picked up by India and by all the countries of the littoral who made it a centerpiece of their regional policy, recalling how the USS Enterprise had sailed into the Bay of Bengal to apply pressure on India during its 1970 war with Pakistan. It was a constant point of friction between ourselves and the Sri Lankans. Those were the days when the Soviets had a base, we thought a naval base, in Somalia at a place called Berbera and there was a lot of dire thinking about the Soviets, how they were expanding their presence in the Indian Ocean. That was sort of the grand issue, the one issue in which Sri Lanka could claim higher level attention. I recall it involving a lot of interaction with the PM Bureau, the IO Bureau (because much of this was played out in the UN environment,) and with the Pentagon. Otherwise, there was the routine work of the desk officer. A lot of managing of visitors, for example, the PL-480 program, the sort of briefing memos on military assistance or at least military relationships, briefing a new Ambassador for his nomination hearings, you just name it. But I don't recall any sort of glowing moment at that time.

Q: I would image this Sea of Peace Zone of Peace Zone of Peace wouldn't even get the time of day from, particularly the American Navy.

THIBAUT: Oh, the Pentagon was very concerned about this. If it was ever adopted and implemented then it would have severely limited our ability to deploy in the Indian Ocean. And of course, as I mentioned, it reflected a hostility to U.S. Navy operations in the Indian Ocean and

had some impact on our ability to access ports, to have joint exercises with local navies, and to develop navy to navy relations.

Q: Well how did we, the Navy of course, and rightly so, immediately goes into extreme defensive mode when it comes to anything that would limit its ability.

THIBAULT: Exactly, and so there was a lot of pressure on the Department to counter this. A lot of the action took place at the United Nations and in various UN fora so that the concept wouldn't gain traction. Coordinating with our allies as well and keeping an eye on what the Russians were up to, the Soviets were up to, in the Indian Ocean. So I certainly don't recall ever twiddling my thumbs or having nothing to do, as we were always very busy. But, as I say, I can't recall the specific details of individual issues.

FRANK D. CORREL
Special Assistant, USAID
Sri Lanka (1976)

Frank D. Correl was born in Germany in 1929. He received his BS from Rider College in 1950, and his MA from Columbia University in 1955. He served in the US Army from 1953 to 1955. His postings include South Korea, Vietnam, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Lesotho, and Zambia. W. Haven North interviewed him on September 29, 1990.

CORREL: But, what happened was that with me on the loose and having a fair amount of experience, people started getting in touch with me to do specific jobs for their Bureaus. The very first that came along turned out to be one of the most rewarding in terms of personal satisfaction, as well as career. After the Near East South Asia Bureau was broken up once again, a more traditional Asian Bureau was set up, headed by Arthur Z. Gardiner, Jr. with Michael Adler as his Deputy. Mike Adler got in touch with me to undertake an assessment of what we might do in the way of a new assistance program in Sri Lanka. This was in early 1976, only a short while after I'd gone to the DSP and I'm pleased to say that the DSP people were very generous in letting me go. It was a last minute sort of thing. I was originally supposed to have a couple of people on a team with me, but all I ended up with was a very junior, completely green intern of some kind who I can't say was much help. But, all of a sudden I found myself arriving in Colombo where there was an AID representative, an assistant, and a secretary within the embassy, all of them looking for some advice on what might be done in Sri Lanka in an AID Program.

Q: Great opportunity wasn't it?

CORREL: Not only was it a great opportunity, but it was also something that I would never ever have been able to do quite as well as if I'd still been in the old Bureau. It was very intensive. Sri Lanka was a very different place from when I was subsequently assigned there. It was run by a coalition government, headed by Mrs. Bandaranaike, who is a socialist of sorts. It was hard to

tell from party names what they really are in Sri Lanka. The parties have names like Marxists, socialists, radicals, and everything else. But, essentially, there was a Singhalese nationalist presence, and a kaleidoscope of smaller parties, including parties representing the Tamils. Mrs. Bandaranaike's government was a leftist coalition and it really had no foreign exchange. It had little to do with the Western countries in practical terms. There were diplomatic relations, but they were getting next to no aid from us. There was a feeling in Washington, both in AID and the aid side of State, that we wanted to do something there, but we really didn't know what.

Q: Why would we want to do something there ?

CORREL: At that time?

Q: Yes.

CORREL: I think again, it was Cold War world politics and possibly an opening for a more accommodating and friendly outlook by the government there to our foreign policy objectives.

Q: What year was this?

CORREL: 1976.

Q: That was the time when the New Direction policy was pushing us to go into all the poor countries of the world and perhaps that was the reason.

CORREL: Perhaps. But, in any event, I remember sitting in Art Gardiner's office. He was eating a Milky Way bar and I was looking at that most enviously while Mike Adler was explaining what they wanted me to do. The trip was very short, only a couple of weeks. I made my introductions and then spent two very intensive weeks in Colombo and various places in the countryside, including the Agricultural Research Station at Peradinyia outside of Kandy. This was a very important stop, because support to that facility was one of the key recommendations of my report. I also went to an area in the middle of the country around the Mahaweli Ganga River, where other donors were getting involved quite heavily in a huge irrigation and resettlement project including a lot of construction, the kind of things that we were abjuring at that point. In addition, there was the question of a PL-480 Program. We had a sales program going in a stuttering way and we and the Sri Lankans were hung up over a down-payment issue. As I remember it now, the amount of a down payment that was involved was something like two hundred and fifty or three hundred thousand dollars. We were totally unable to get anywhere on this. One really needed to go to Sri Lanka at the time to realize what two hundred thousand dollars foregone meant to them. They just could not afford it. When I had some free time or between appointments, I was out walking everywhere. I visited the extensive market area outside of the commercial section of Colombo, called The Fort, and I literally saw no imported goods whatsoever, none at all. This made a very deep impression on me. Here was a country with very, very modest modern resources. They had their rubber and tea exports. Mrs. Bandaranaike's economic policies weren't helping the country very much. The idea that somehow the United States had to extract that pound of flesh in connection with the PL-480 sale program just struck me as being totally against our own interests.

Q: How did they get it resolved?

CORREL: As I remember it, I made a very strong recommendation when I came back to forget about it and I believe that they actually ended up waiving it.

Q: Well, what kind of a program or study did you come up with?

CORREL: I came up with a couple of things. At the Agricultural Research Institute, it was explained to me that in Sri Lanka, there was an extraordinary variety of different agricultural zones. A major recommendation was assistance to that institution in order to let it be able to do the kind of research that was necessary for more modern, diversified agricultural production consistent with the different climatic zones. The second thing I recommended was that we should not get involved in major capital construction in the Mahaweli area. Instead, I suggested that we should consider some kind of assistance up there so that all of the big things that were being built would be more likely to benefit the people. I did my report in 1976 and when I was sent on a program evaluation mission to Mahaweli in 1983, AID was financing a sector support loan. I won't say that it was my recommendation directly that resulted in this approach, but I was able to see how the sector support loan ended up doing exactly what I was concerned about. But, visiting the Mahaweli area in 1976, I remember seeing that very little of the so-called downstream work was being done by the Sri Lankans. They had very little or no outside aid because the big donors, the World Bank and whoever else it was, were building these huge dams. The Sri Lankans had undertaken to build the downstream work and it wasn't being done. I remember coming across a guy sleeping by the side of a canal next to some kind of pump that was running and he woke up as our vehicle came close. When my Sri Lankan guide from the Mahaweli Development Board, said, "How are things going?" He said, "Oh, things are going very well, we're working day and night." It was the kind of thing that really makes an impression on you. I also recommended an expansion in PL 480 activities and I don't immediately remember what else there was, but it was a modest program, maybe \$7 million all together.

Q: Did the government have any special views they were trying to impress on you, the things they wanted?

CORREL: No, not much. Mahaweli was the big thing. It was the Mahaweli Board that they wanted me to talk to. As I said, I was there only a very short of time. I ended up sending Mike Adler a 14-page cable which converted into a full-scale report when I came back. Apparently, that cable made a big hit with him personally, and with Gardiner. Ambassador Van Hollen was very complimentary, too, when I gave him a verbal report.

I found what had finally happened was that I had gotten into a dream situation and had done well in it. I liked Sri Lanka very much. I thought it was a fabulous place. It was a strange experience as an American coming there and finding that it was off the map as far as we were concerned. They had no tourism, except from the Soviet bloc. The only visitors were Russians. The Russians weren't big suppliers or spenders of foreign currency. I still remember those mornings where these Russians, all of them dressed alike with little white caps sitting on their head, waiting inside the hotel yard to get picked up to be taken on a bus tour somewhere. Nobody ever

ventured out on their own. Apparently what happened was that they were sent on these Communist “strength-through-joy” trips. They certainly didn’t spend any money. Apparently, they would bring gold or silver coins, either from the 1920s or even czarist times, or else from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia between the wars, and try to barter. I bought some old coins and stamps from a shopkeeper in the Fort area and he had all these things in the window. I asked him where they came from and he said, “The Russians come and sell them when nobody is watching and then they go and buy big five pound bricks of tea to take home.” That was Sri Lanka’s foreign tourism. Obviously, they could do much better than that.

JOHN H. REED
Ambassador
Sri Lanka (1976-1977)

John H. Reed was born in Maine, and graduated from the University of Maine in 1942. He then served in the Navy for four years. Following World War II, Reed entered Maine state politics, eventually serving as governor for seven years. He was appointed Ambassador to Sri Lanka in 1976 and 1982. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: Well, then, moving back to the time that you went to Sri Lanka the first time. It was 1976 when you started?

REED: That's correct.

Q: What sort of preparation did you get before you went out?

REED: I felt the State Department had an excellent program for preparing ambassadors. We had many briefings, some at FSI and in the various departments, and also on the Hill.

Q: For the record, FSI is the Foreign Service Institute.

REED: And I made it a point to visit with a couple of former ambassadors to Sri Lanka. Ambassador Philip Crowe came over from the eastern shore, and I got a great deal of information from him. And another friend of mine knew a Foreign Service officer who had served in Sri Lanka, and I got together with him. I found it extremely helpful to have input from someone who had actually lived in the country.

Q: Sri Lanka sort of occupies a unique situation. I mean there's this India-Pakistan conflict which is a can of worms from American policy, and Sri Lanka is sort of down there and it's just plain different. What was our policy at the time? American interests in Sri Lanka?

REED: Actually, American interests were limited in the country. However, we were very pleased that they were neutral, and they had a practicing democracy. We'd always had very fine relations with them. There were some commercial interests. We bought tea, rubber and graphite from

them. Singer Sewing Machine had been there, in fact they celebrated their 100th year while I was there. So we had fine relations with Sri Lanka, and we maintained those relations. They also have a very fine relationship with us. And, of course, the ship visits were very important. We didn't have too many that first year, not nearly as many as in my second tour. But that was a real plus because so many countries will not allow our ships to visit. India wouldn't allow us port visits.

Q: So it was a matter of keeping good relations?

REED: Yes, that is correct. For a number of years relationships had not been too good. As I understand it, we favored the United National Party and they were defeated by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party. However, when they had the insurrection against Mrs. Bandaranaike, who was the Prime Minister at the time, we did send in some helicopters. That was under Ambassador Robert Strausz-Hupé, one of my predecessors, and that did improve relations considerably. So when I arrived on the scene I felt that relations were quite good.

Q: Speaking of Mrs. Bandaranaike, were they very careful to brief you on how to pronounce her name before you went up for confirmation?

REED: Yes.

Q: You might explain what the reference is to.

REED: As I recall there was one candidate for ambassador who had been nominated, and was having his Senate hearing, and he was asked to name the Prime Minister of the country and he couldn't seem to remember the name, or pronounce the name of the Prime Minister, and that was a rather embarrassing incident. That has been a classic example of being prepared.

Q: I think from that time on, if nothing else, everybody has learned to pronounce the names of the Prime Ministers. All of us took that to heart, I think.

REED: I'm sure everybody did, and for a very good reason.

Q: Were there any things, particularly as a former governor...I imagine there were no particular problems of confirmation hearings?

REED: No, there was no problem whatsoever. It was very pleasant and went along nicely. In both of my hearings, I had support from both sides of the aisle.

Q: In the first place, were you able to pick your own Deputy Chief of Mission when you went out there?

REED: No, he was already on the scene, and there really wasn't an opportunity to do that. This is a key position but he was an astute professional and I had no difficulties.

Q: Who was he?

REED: That was Ray Perkins. Ray Perkins was a longtime Foreign Service officer. Mrs. Perkins was also a very fine individual.

Q: How did you find the staffing of the embassy? Did you find it worked? Or sort of a disappointment? You came from a different environment and all of a sudden there you were faced with this operation.

REED: The staff was very effective, and I never really had any difficulty. I was impressed by the caliber of individual, and we worked together as a team.

Q: I think this is all very interesting for somebody coming from a political field, I think often has an easier time getting into the swing of it, than someone coming from the business world where it's different.

REED: I would say you are right. Someone who has been in politics can usually adjust quite easily. I found them loyal and hardworking and competent in their fields.

Q: Sometimes this is considered a detriment when we're pushing trade. What was the situation in Sri Lanka during this '76-'77 period, particularly politically but also economically?

REED: Let's start with the economics. Actually they were at a very low ebb. Mrs. Bandaranaike is a fine individual, I have great respect for her, and we got along very well. Her policy was, at that time, not to let foreign imports come in, feeling thereby that their own people would develop these industries. But there was a shortage of consumer goods on the market, mostly of poor quality and the country wasn't big enough, I guess, to develop the type of industries that would provide the consumer goods that the public really wanted. She tried to get programs going. It was pretty much of a socialist system. There were a lot of government corporations and they just couldn't seem to generate the kind of economy and industry they wanted.

Q: Did you or your staff ever get involved in some discussions on this pointing out, an economy of this size, this won't allow for it, or anything like that?

REED: That was a rather delicate subject, and we really didn't try to pursue it. Sometimes they would question us about it, and we were glad to furnish information, but we had to be very skillful as far as dealing with that particular problem. They believed in their philosophy, and they were trying to make it work, but it just didn't seem to be working. So that was it. The economy was at a low ebb. There were a lot of people unemployed, and things weren't working the way they hoped they would have. For instance, automobiles. Practically the only automobiles around were a few old Austens, and Morris Minors, and they kept them going, they made parts and you didn't see any new modern cars around in '76-'77. So the economy wasn't in good shape.

Q: Was there a feeling that if they opened up things too much there would be a flood of material, particularly from India, and maybe Japan? Was this a concern?

REED: I think they were concerned about that. They wanted to build their own economy up, and they were concerned they'd be carried away by opening up. You could feel the ground-swell before I left at that time in '77. The public was just dissatisfied. They had a free rice program, and still everyone was unhappy. I remember my chauffeur saying after Mrs. Gandhi lost in India. "It's going to be just like that here." And he was right, they wanted a change. Mrs. Bandaranaike was a very decent, honorable person who wanted to make things work. But the philosophy, as I say, just didn't translate into reality.

Q: What about on the political side of this dissatisfaction? Because now we're looking, and I'm sure your second tour was filled with the ethnic problem, but...

REED: Yes, I'd like to comment on it if I may. In my first tour you could travel safely about everywhere. I went to Jaffna which is predominately Tamil a number of times and everything was friendly. You couldn't see any great unrest on the surface.

Q: Was this a sort of deliberate effort to make sure that we kept relations open with all groups?

REED: Yes, we kept relations open, but it wasn't front and center in those days. You knew there was a problem but it didn't seem to be of great proportions. However, when I returned it was a complete turn-around.

Q: Did you have a feeling...and again, we're referring just to this one period, that the Indians were messing in the situation, or what did you feel Indian policy was towards Sri Lanka?

REED: The biggest concern between India and Sri Lanka was the repatriation of some of the Tamils--the so-called estate Tamils who didn't have legal status. They didn't vote and worked on the tea plantations. Sri Lanka was ready to let a lot of them go back, but India wasn't taking them very fast. Also many weren't anxious to go back. That was the biggest bone of contention between India and Sri Lanka at that time. Of course India was looked upon as the big brother.

Q: What was your impression of how people looked at India? Was it a benevolent big brother? Or maybe not so benevolent?

REED: Well, I think they always kept a wary eye on India. It was probably normal to be concerned about a mammoth country like India exerting pressure in the area.

Q: I'm sure the Canadians could probably relate to that.

REED: Probably, and I guess we could understand that.

Q: Again, at embassies was there a pretty good mix say when you'd have receptions between Tamils and Sinhalese?

REED: Oh, yes. There was no problem in those days at all.

Q: You just didn't have any feeling, "Gee, we've got so many of this, we've got to have so many of that."

REED: Not at all, and you hardly knew one from the other. The people themselves hardly knew. I remember them telling me after the riots, "We didn't know, we were all going to the same schools whether they were Sinhalese, or Tamil, while we were growing up." The seeds of dissent came after they became independent. When Sinhalese became the national language, the Tamils felt they were being pushed to the back burner. But in those days, as far as parties, or social events, there was no difficulty at all.

Q: Well, how did you deal with the government? I mean, while you were there Mrs. Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister. Which party?

REED: She was a Sri Lanka Freedom Party member. Her husband founded the SCFP. He had been assassinated before I got there so I didn't know him. He established the Sri Lanka Freedom Party during his early years. His family was very close with the British. He went to Great Britain to be educated. But it was there where he saw the thing differently. That's when he began to change and become more nationalistic and changed his whole outlook. So when he went back he saw the people wanted to be independent and that they should return to their roots, and cultural heritage, and throw off the yoke of colonialism. And that's why he established his new programs. He was a very dynamic man, and he espoused those views to the people and naturally there was a great deal of pride in their heritage. We understand that, so that's why the big change came. But that is also when the problem started. That is the difference with the Tamils. They had known each other for centuries. There had been enmity between the two because the Sinhalese arrived first. Then the Tamil kings invaded from the north and there were wars going on for years and years. So there was a latent problem. However, during the colonial period they got along quite well.

There was one thing that was always pointed out, and that is the Tamils are very hard workers by nature and the British used a lot of Tamils in their government services. Some of the Sinhalese were unhappy and felt the Tamils were getting preferred treatment in the government service. Even President Jayawardene said, "The Sinhalese people enjoy their Poya days, Peoratteras and festivals and don't feel as committed to hard work as the Tamils." So some of the traditions, and characteristics of the two peoples caused some of the Sinhalese people to be resentful. Some even suggested the British did this deliberately.

Q: The British tended to use different groups for different things--the warrior classes, the governing classes, and this type of thing.

REED: Yes, so it's not unknown.

Q: How did you and the embassy deal with the government, and with Mrs. Bandaranaike?

REED: Well, it all depended on what issues we had. We would meet with her on the major issues. The Voice of America station was one of our major interests. She allowed us to keep it open. Some of the communists felt that it should be shut down. However, after that insurrection,

I believe in '71, we sent in helicopters to help her and relations did warm up considerably. I dealt with her on the new contract with Voice of America which was about to expire so we did get preliminary discussions started on that. Also we were able to get clearances for ship visits.

Q: These are port visits of naval vessels.

REED: Yes, exactly. So, as I say, in those days there were a limited number of interests.

Q: I wonder if you could talk... '76 was really sort of the aftermath period of Vietnam, did you feel that American prestige, or something... I mean we lost the war in Vietnam, that this had an effect as far as the United States was viewed at that time?

REED: I didn't really detect that. I think they respected our position in the world. However, it was difficult for us to adjust to the situation. 1976, you will recall, was our bicentennial, and that was one of the biggest social events we had and it was very well attended. Mrs. Bandaranaike came, so our relations with her were very good. At that time there was a Vietnamese ambassador posted in Sri Lanka. It was interesting because when I returned in 1982 they discontinued their embassy. In those days the relations were much better with the Soviet Union than when I returned. The Cubans were active but avoided Americans.

Q: Did you feel the Soviets were trying to push you out? Was it sort of a live and let live thing between you and the Soviets? Or was there real competition?

REED: I didn't see that much competition. We were always watching them, as they were watching us. We were concerned, they were trying to get a foothold in the Maldives. The Republic of Maldives was the other country I was accredited to, as you know. We were concerned there because they were sending specialists in such as medical people. We were afraid they were going to lease Gan which is a very fine air base which the British left. And I think they probably did have designs on it, and were trying to develop a relationship. So we were very suspect of them in that aspect. It really was more to do with the Maldives than it was with Sri Lanka.

Q: How did it work being the ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives? Maldives are some distance away.

REED: About 450 miles. Things worked fine, I'd go over there probably a half dozen times a year. It was an interesting change of pace to go over there, and relations were very good. They were developing the islands for the tourist industry. And so they too were open handed. They were concerned about the Soviets taking over. So they held them at arm's length pretty much. They did have some medical people come in, and a few doctors, and I guess soccer coaches or something of that nature.

Q: Did we have anybody there?

REED: No. In those days we didn't have anybody. We did have a consular agent later, a native lady. But, we had nobody there at that time.

Q: They were developing tourism at that time.

REED: They were developing tourism. They are very resourceful people, and they sensed there was a market for it. They had many small islands right around Mali, and they would develop a number of these islands for tourists. They were wonderful. The accommodations were pretty modest, but the climate is excellent and they were getting a great clientele from Europe. The Germans liked to go over there in the winter, and the Maldivians were making a good profit on tourism. There was a different president in my first tour. Later they had a palace coup and a new president took over. But anyway, they were developing a national tourist industry. They are a very practical, pragmatic people. I was very impressed with them.

Q: We were at that point beginning to establish the island of Diego Garcia as a major base which was later used during the war with Iraq in the Persian Gulf. Were they making any feelers towards maybe doing something in the Maldives, or mainly just to keep the Soviets out?

REED: It was to keep the Soviets out. We pointed out what a great base it was. I used to tell the Department we had to keep them out. There was considerable criticism in Diego Garcia by the communist element in Sri Lanka.

Q: Ceylon has got one of the great ports anyway, doesn't it?

REED: Oh, yes. A deep water port, and that has been developed a lot in recent years. It has been developed further and that's why our ships liked to come in. But Diego Garcia did come in for a lot of criticism from the leftist element.

Q: How about things like...Sri Lanka has been sort of a charter member of the non-aligned movement. It changed a lot since the early days when it was a real thorn in our side. How did we feel about it in the mid-'70s when you were there, and Sri Lanka's role?

REED: Well, we respected their position in the non-aligned. In fact that first year I was there they had a non-aligned conference, and that, of course, was the highlight of the whole year, and all of them showed up. It was a big event. So we respected it, and tried to counsel them against the more extreme elements in the non-aligned. We didn't have too much difficulty.

Q: How about with the United Nations votes?

REED: I'm glad you mentioned that because that was one of our major interests. They generally took a neutral role, and sometimes were supportive. One of the U.S. real interests there, was their support in the United Nations. That was one of the things I would discuss with the Prime Minister.

Q: Did you find that she would listen? Or did they have their own thing, and you felt it was a pro forma thing to go with the yearly shopping list of the issues that we're interested in? Every ambassador does this.

REED: Yes, we did that. But on individual votes from time to time I would make a demarche and meet with the Foreign Minister directly. I also had a lot of contact with the Foreign Minister, and with the Foreign Secretary. They were quite helpful. A number of times they would take a position that would be contrary to the non-aligned, and we appreciated that.

Q: During the period you were in Sri Lanka this first time, Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State. I was wondering...I'm not sure if it happened right at your time but during the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. Henry Kissinger was the prime architect in sending an aircraft carrier task force up into the Bay of Bengal, and so-called tilting towards Pakistan. This was some time ago, but did you sense any kind of either resentment or aloofness, or anything about that type of policy? The Indian-Pakistan equation.

REED: I didn't really sense that. Mrs. Bandaranaike was very close to Mrs. Gandhi, and they were pretty much pro-India at that time. But, no, I didn't really detect that point of view. In regard to the fleet it must have happened before I got there because I don't recall any of that.

Q: It wasn't a burning issue. Just going back to the political thing, there's an outfit which issues a yearly report called "Freedom House" and I notice in early '76 they listed Sri Lanka as partially free, and then at the end of the year they listed it as free. It's sort of a world survey and this is one. Had things changed much regarding political prisoners, or that type of thing?

REED: There was always some criticism about political prisoners even during that early period. And I didn't think things changed too much while I was there. The Prime Minister had kept a number of them in jail after the insurrection. She let some out as President Jayawardene did later. But I didn't see too much in regard to this. There was a lot of criticism afterwards, but during that period I didn't see much.

Q: Is there anything else we haven't...

REED: As I say, the economy was at a standstill, there were no buildings going up, and there was a great deal of unhappiness and discontent, of course the campaign was well underway before I left.

Q: Was the Near East Bureau concerned about how this discontent might turn into something? Were we saying, "Gee, this thing might turn radically leftist," or something like that?

REED: There was always that feeling, but no, I don't think there was too much concern. Actually we were tracking the election campaign, and it looked quite favorably to the UNP. But there had been an election before when the UNP was defeated and it was felt the U.S. favored them, and that made Mrs. Bandaranaike very distressed. And our relations were quite cool at that point. So I tried to be very even handed in our contacts with all parties. It wasn't too much of a problem along that line.

JOHN R. ERIKSSON

**Deputy Mission Director, USAID
Colombo (1977-1979)**

John R. Eriksson was born in Detroit, Michigan. He joined USAID in the 1970's. His foreign service posts include Sri Lanka and Thailand. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1995.

ERIKSSON: Tom Arndt was the first USAID Director in Sri Lanka after it reopened in 1977. Tom said he would love to have me come out to be his deputy. In those days Sri Lanka was really the darling of the development assistance community because it seemed like it was doing everything right; it had in its earlier years emphasized the social dimensions; the so called "physical quality of life" (PQLI) dimension. Partly because of the British policy which emphasized education, health and infrastructure, literacy and longevity were quite high and infant mortality was quite low relative to per capita income in Sri Lanka. However, under Prime Minister Bandaranaike during the early and mid-70's, Sri Lanka had followed disastrous economic policies. In 1978, under a new government headed by J.R. Jayawardene, there was a move back to free market policies and an opening towards the West. So, Sri Lanka looked like a marvelous place to go: a real development laboratory.

Tom Arndt was called back from Sri Lanka and replaced by Sarah Jane Littlefield, quite a different personality from Tom. But Sarah Jane and I decided we could work with each other. In fact, things turned out to work quite well; we complemented each other, and I learned a tremendous amount from her. Sarah Jane was one of my top mentors in USAID because she knew the nuts and bolts of field operations so well, was a very strong manager and extremely loyal to her staff.

At this point I need to return to the issue of ethnicity and development. One of my PPC colleagues, Jonathan Silverstone, Chief of the Civic Participation Division in PPC, when he learned that I was converting to the Foreign Service and going to Sri Lanka, said "That sounds wonderful and that should be really exciting but let me raise one note of caution: there is a serious ethnicity problem between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese majority simmering just beneath the surface in Sri Lanka, and I wouldn't be surprised to see it explode. His words were prophetic. Even during my tour there from 1978 to 1980, a state of emergency had been called for several months in Northern Sri Lanka because rebel groups, such as the "Tamil Tigers," were already active. Ethnicity is a problem we don't yet know how to reckon with very well in development.

Q: You went out to Sri Lanka with Tom Arndt?

ERIKSSON: No. Sarah Jane Littlefield had arrived in Sri Lanka just a month or two before I did. I enjoyed my tour thoroughly, but it was more of a mixed experience for my family. They weren't prepared for the poverty they encountered, notwithstanding Sri Lanka's higher standing in terms of social indicators than other South Asian countries. For me, working in Sri Lanka was a great professional experience, partly because the Ambassador was also the leading US academic expert on the country: Howard Wriggins, Professor of Asian History at Columbia University.

Q: What did you try to do; what was your mission programmatically?

ERIKSSON: It was an exciting time to be there because the program was just starting up after having been shut down five or six years. One of the center pieces of the program was support for the massive Mahaweli River basin development scheme, which consisted of a number of dams and associated hydro-power plants, along with down-stream irrigation infrastructure and resettlement of people from other parts of the country. Other interesting projects included water management activities in different parts of the country, environmental and reforestation projects, and a water supply project in northern Sri Lanka.

Mission Director Littlefield and I had an agreed division of labor. I focused on socio-economic issues and she focused on technical and administrative issues. Among other things, it was my job to marshal academic experts to help us put together the new assistance strategy. It was fortuitous that at the same time Norman Uphoff, political scientist from Cornell University, was on sabbatical at the Agrarian Research and Training Institute in Sri Lanka. We forged a friendship that continues. Norman's seminal work on participatory development draws much of its inspiration from the work he did on one of the USAID-assisted water management projects ("Gal Oya") in Sri Lanka. I also recruited Cal Tech's Ted Scudder, an anthropologist and one of the world's leading experts on river basin settlement schemes in developing countries, and organized a symposium for the Government with Scudder to discuss population resettlement issues in the Mahaweli program. That led to work by Scudder which continues to this day, through Ted's collaboration with Sri Lankan social scientists.

Q: What was the main theme of the program that you were involved in? Was there any core approach that related to the PPC policies? How did you deal with the growth with equity question if that was the line you were following? Were you still in the basic needs arena?

ERIKSSON: No, in response to your last question. I saw my objective as ensuring that equity and employment considerations were taken into account in the program in a sensible way; that they would not conflict with growth objectives, but not get ignored either.

Q: Were you involved in designing specific projects? Or was it a matter of projects that came up and making sure they were responsive?

ERIKSSON: For the most part, it was trying to ensure that projects were consistent with our strategy. I did write the first "CDSS" (Country Development Strategy Statement) for the Sri Lankan program.

Q: That had a line or rationale that you developed; maybe you could articulate later what you saw was the theme? How about working with the Sri Lankan people? How did you find that experience in terms of your ability to communicate, the acceptance of your ideas?

ERIKSSON:: It is a little hard to judge in a way because it was a while ago and partly because it was my first tour. But my recollection is a positive one.

Q: You met with the government regularly?

ERIKSSON: Yes, and I developed good contacts with the top civil servants (Permanent Secretaries) of six key Ministries with whom we worked most closely, as well as with the heads of the research and statistics departments of the Central Bank.

Q: But in those contacts did you find receptivity to the concepts that you and USAID were trying to put forth?

ERIKSSON: By and large yes; you also have to take into account that Sri Lanka was a fairly receptive environment for a "growth with equity" approach at that particular time. Coming out of the ethos of a heavy emphasis on social development; and then the more free-market orientation of the Jayawardene Government. There were some people who were not as convinced, however. That was more difficult. For example, the head of the Mahaweli Authority, who was in a very critical position and had come from the private sector as head of the largest accounting firm in Sri Lanka. He was not persuaded about the importance of farmer organizations, especially water-user associations, which was one of our major emphases, one in which I was heavily involved. However, we did find some "champions" of water-user associations that we could productively work with in the Irrigation Department and with the Permanent Secretary of Land Development. This is an example of the axiom that "no government is monolithic."

Q: The idea you were promoting at that time, while not still generally accepted, planted a seed; something that has proved successful over time. Other aspects of the program that you felt were particularly significant: both as successes and not successful?

ERIKSSON: We supported a water supply project in Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka . If one did an expost analysis of this project, I think the technical design flaws would show it to have had a negative rate of return. But there was a lot of pressure to do something at that time, to have some project activity in northern Sri Lanka that would be seen to be benefiting the Tamil population.

Q: Were you trying to address the ethnicity issue?

ERIKSSON: We were, in fact.

Q: Do you think, apart from the technical aspect, there were any positive effects vis-a-vis the ethnic issues and concerns?

ERIKSSON: Perhaps. I remember that in the summer of 1979, I accompanied Alex Shakow, who was visiting from Washington, on a field trip to Jaffna. We met with local leaders, including someone whom I suspected was very closely connected with the rebel leadership. We received what we thought were sincere expressions of appreciation for the US assistance. I still have my doubts about the economic justification for the project, but in any event, the explosion of the ethnic crisis in 1983 swamped everything else.

Q: Any more on the Sri Lankan experience at this point?

ERIKSSON: I don't think so. The only additional thing I might say is that had it been strictly up to me, I would have opted for a second tour in Sri Lanka. But the family decision was to return to the US. One factor was that the international school in Colombo did not go beyond the eight grade at the time.

Q: What about one last point about relationships with the Embassy? How would you characterize the interaction?

ERIKSSON: By and large, positive. I don't recall any significant substantive disagreements on the directions of our program. I do recall that Sarah Jane got into some nasty fights with the DCM over administrative issues, a typical thing. But not on substance.

Q: Was there any cold war intrusion at all in this situation or was this a purely development interest?

ERIKSSON: Very little. The Soviets had a presence there then, but it was scaled back during the Jayawardene regime compared to what it had been during Mrs. Bandaranaike's administration.

Q: So this was a relatively pure development situation...

ERIKSSON: The cold war didn't intervene.

Q: The motivation for the program was driven by development philosophy..

ERIKSSON: Yes, I would say so. But another factor underpinning the financial level of assistance was that the US continued to see Sri Lanka playing some balancing role in the Cold War. Sri Lanka was the leader of the so-called "Non-Aligned Movement," which, ironically, made it an actor, albeit a relatively minor one, in the Cold War game. The US had some naval rights (as did the Soviets, I believe) to use of the excellent Indian Ocean deep water harbor in eastern Sri Lanka, at Trincomalee, and the US also had a Voice-of-America transmitter in north-central Sri Lanka. These were considerations, but they never seemed to loom very large, at least in my work. Of course, I wasn't regularly attending the "Country Team Meetings" at the Embassy, so I wasn't fully aware of all the issues.

Q: The driving motivation for having such a large program?

ERIKSSON: I think it was mainly for development reasons, that Sri Lanka was an important laboratory of development, both on social and economic fronts. Other donors were also heavily involved for similar reasons. But I suspect that my Embassy colleagues would have given the geo-political factors I have already mentioned a heavier weight in providing a rationale for the level of US aid to Sri Lanka.

Q: Would you say this was part of that era when development had a political priority?

ERIKSSON: In some places in the world, and I think that Sri Lanka at this time was one of those places.

HERBERT LEVIN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Colombo (1977-1979)

Herbert Levin was born in New York in 1930. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included posts in Hong Kong, Japan, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, and India. Mr. Levin was interviewed by Mike Springmann in 1994.

Q: *And you went from there to where, New Delhi?*

LEVIN: No, I went from there to Colombo, Sri Lanka. Ambassador Howard Wriggins was a professor at Columbia University who specialized in South Asia, most particularly in Sri Lanka. He had first gone there as a graduate student, as a Fulbright scholar. He wrote a book on the history of Sri Lanka which was so respected by the Sri Lankans that they used it as their standard English text. Even the communists considered that he had treated with them absolutely scrupulously. The Carter administration appointed him Ambassador to Sri Lanka. I honestly don't know how that came about, but he is certainly America's ranking expert on Sri Lanka.

He and his wife interviewed us to be his DCM and wife, for we had not met before. I think in the customary academic way, he checked around as if he was appointing someone to his faculty, if you will. We went to Sri Lanka.

Howard Wriggins knew more about Sri Lanka than anyone else in the U.S. government. The nature of the Foreign Service being what it is, it is unlikely that we would produce Sri Lankan experts. It is a small country, fascinating but not terribly important, so it is unlikely that anybody would really be able to focus their career on it. Having as the head of the Embassy a noted scholar who had resided in Sri Lanka a number of times, visited regularly, had written about it, and was respected, as I said, by all shades of local political public opinion, was extremely useful.

In short, he looked to me to manage the Embassy. He was far from ignorant of the U.S. government. At one point he had been on the National Security Council staff. The reason I'm mentioning this is not only because I learned a great deal from Howard Wriggins about Sri Lanka and South Asia, but also because this experience made it very easy for me ever after when I was asked to give an opinion about non-career ambassadors.

It seems to me that the answer is simple--I realize there are women involved in this also--does the office bring distinction to the man or does the man bring distinction to the office? Howard Wriggins brought distinction to that office. He brought into the office of the American Ambassador an enormous knowledge about that country that the Sri Lankans, and the few American official travelers or others who came through, recognized.

He had been preceded by a Lieutenant Governor from Maine, who was I think a distinguished potato farmer. Probably for that man, and I'm sure he's leading an honest life back in Maine, I think for that man his greatest distinction was being Ambassador to Sri Lanka.

Q: What made you, the resident Chinese expert, pick Colombo as a place to lay for a couple of years?

LEVIN: I would say that the assignment was determined by the incompetence of the Director General's office in assigning senior officers. Because after Wriggins interviewed me, and after everything was set in motion the DG's office suddenly came to life, and said, "Wouldn't you rather do something else than Colombo?" I said, "Look, I've been interviewed by Wriggins, I've accepted his invitation to come, if you guys want to change the assignment, you go ahead but I'm not going to slip away from it." So that was that.

Anyway, we went there and we learned about South Asia and we learned about Sri Lanka. It was a country that used American aid and the economic assistance intelligently, and their debates among themselves were about real problems. The subsequent insurrection of the Tamil separatists against the majority Sinhalese community was not initiated from New Delhi but was aided, abetted and nourished by Mrs. Gandhi--all that happened afterwards. The Tamil-Sinhalese frictions and resentments were there when I was but hadn't yet reached monstrous proportions.

Mrs. Gandhi felt that if she supported the Tamils in Sri Lanka, this would put her Congress Party in a good position to have the Tamil party, which controlled the important state of Tamil Nadu in India, voted out of office. She was going to out-Tamil the Tamils. She caused the loss of tens of thousands of Tamil and Sinhalese lives.

Q: The papers never picked any of that up. They always said what a good job the Indian government was doing to help defuse a terribly tense situation.

LEVIN: This was eyewash while Mrs. Gandhi was alive. At any rate, when we were in Sri Lanka, President Jayawardene had come into office replacing Mrs. Bandaranaike who had been an ideological socialist--she sought to drive out foreign investment, the International School had been harassed to near nonexistence, all of this kind of thing had gone on. But during the time I was there, it was an improving period. The island is beautiful, the people are nice, literacy is high, there is reason to be optimistic about Sri Lanka.

Near the end of my assignment in Colombo, the American Ambassador in New Delhi, Robert Goheen, former President of Princeton University, etc., needed a DCM. I was not anxious to have another South Asian assignment and I was therefore not particularly interested to go to New Delhi. But apparently he had rejected various candidates and he had met me though we had no previous association of any kind. The DG's office worked out that I was to go to Delhi for a short time as Political Counselor (he was needed back in Washington), the DCM was going to become Ambassador someplace, then I would be already at post ready to move into the DCM slot.

This was all wired up by the DG's office and the South Asia Bureau. I had not known this but the decision was being made in Washington to recognize Beijing. This would mean the withdrawal

of the Ambassador, and the downgrading of the Embassy in Taipei. The East Asian Bureau wanted me to go to Taipei to be the Chargé when the Ambassador was withdrawn, so I got frantic phone calls to change the assignment. I would have much preferred Taipei for obvious reasons. I said, "Well you guys in Washington go and fight it out. I'd been asked to do this in Delhi, I've said okay, now you're calling and asking me to go to Taipei. It's really not up to me to start walking out on this. You work it out in Washington."

Ambassador Goheen had not wanted other candidates, whoever they were, he did want me and I had accepted. So we went to Delhi. This worked out badly because my friends in the East Asian Bureau were annoyed with me for not going to Taipei, somebody else was pulled out in mid-tour elsewhere to go there and they were disappointed with me.

I got to New Delhi and the DCM, for reasons that had nothing to do with me, was denied his ambassadorship. He stayed as DCM as an extremely embittered person, and retired thereafter, a very unhappy man. I stayed for two years as Political Counselor and never became DCM. India was professionally challenging and the Indians were serious people with whom to do business. But from the standpoint of positions and promotions, New Delhi was not a plus for me.

WILLIAM HOWARD WRIGGINS

Ambassador

Sri Lanka (1977-1979)

William Howard Wriggins was born in Philadelphia in 1918. During World War II he served with AFSC. After the war, he attended Dartmouth and Yale. Wriggins was appointed Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 1977. Ambassador Wriggins was interviewed by Paul D. McCusker in 1995.

Q: Obviously, somebody had been going over your background. It wasn't exactly a hit or miss...

WRIGGINS: No, no.

Q: It wasn't because of your major political contributions to Carter.

WRIGGINS: Oh, no. Actually, I had worked for Hubert Humphrey in that primary campaign. I wrote some papers for him on foreign policy generally, though it didn't matter. He lost abysmally; he didn't make it. And so Carter owed me nothing.

But, anyway, that's how it happened.

Q: I see. Now I guess you got this appointment at a very delicate moment in the history of Sri Lanka.

WRIGGINS: Oh, a very interesting moment, yes.

Q: What was going on when you arrived?

WRIGGINS: Well, they'd just had an election, as I mentioned in my note to you, in which a new man, Jayawardene, had won hands down. I mean, an overwhelming victory.

Q: Well, I guess people were sick and tired of the...

WRIGGINS: They were all sick and tired of the Bandaranaike government, which had been a combination of representatives of three leftist parties in key positions in the cabinet. They had severe economic and public order problems and all kinds of things, and so the population was very enthusiastic about this new man.

But there were serious ethnic riots on our arrival. I remember, there were curfews and police everywhere, and it was a very difficult time. And it was about five or six days before the curfew was lifted. This wasn't the Ceylon I'd known before, which had been a very peaceful place.

Q: Except you had known the new prime minister.

WRIGGINS: Yes, I had known him since my first research stay; and every visit I made since then, say every two years, he was one of the people I had gone to see. So we were more than casual acquaintances.

Q: Was he prime minister or president?

WRIGGINS: Well, he was prime minister until they changed the constitution, and then he became president. It's an innovation which I think they'll change. They'll go back to their old way, I believe.

Q: Who would be the chief of state, then, if they went back to prime minister?

WRIGGINS: The president would be the symbolic head of state.

Q: I see, but not the political man.

WRIGGINS: A queenly role, rather than an executive role.

Q: Of course, the ethnic conflicts, as you referred to them, had been going on before you came there. So you stepped into it.

WRIGGINS: That's right. As I thought about it at the time, the ethnic conflicts had really begun when I was there the first time. As I said, Mr. Bandaranaike had seized on the language question and made it his political vehicle for getting into power. For the first ten years of independence, they had followed a multilingual policy, under which about ten percent of the population spoke English, about 20 percent spoke Tamil, and the rest spoke Sinhalese. But Mr. Bandaranaike decided that he'd get to power by promising Sinhalese only. And any of us who have worked in

South Asia know that as soon as you set a match to the linguistic and ethnic tinderbox, you have terrible problems.

Q: Even in places like Ireland.

WRIGGINS: Yes, you bet. Mr. Bandaranaike once told me, the first time I was there, "Professor Wriggins, I've never known an issue as good as the language issue to excite people."

And I thought to myself, "You foolish man! you don't know what you've begun."

He had a kind of false conception of public opinion, I call it the faucet view. You could turn these things on and you could turn them off again. But, of course, you couldn't. So, after each succeeding election, there had been some ethnic violence. But nothing as serious as what occurred at this time. I don't know how many people were killed; maybe 500 people were killed. Of course, this was nothing compared to what happened in 1983, after we left. But, while we were there officially, things were not bad, although I knew that this was one of those problems government needed to deal with very vigorously. And it seemed to me, they were cautious.

Q: The new Jayawardene regime apparently stopped the leftist trend.

WRIGGINS: Yes, very much so.

Q: Then you must have been deluged with all kinds of do-gooders (we call them aid do-mores).

WRIGGINS: Well, it was a very interesting period. The most significant thing, from the point of view of getting the record on this, is that Jayawardene undertook a complete shift in economic policy. Instead of following the sort of Fabian Socialist tradition of Nehru and previous governments in Ceylon, he opened the economy up and took most of the regulations off. He had a lot of help from the Bank and Fund, who thought this was marvelous, to find a democratic government that had seen the light and was really following liberal economic principles.

Q: Except for the mention of democracy, I'd say you're describing Indonesia in 1966.

WRIGGINS: Very good. Yes, exactly. It was really quite amazing to watch this. Jayawardene was very impressed with Singapore. I never heard him mention Indonesia as an example, but Singapore certainly was. And it made an enormous difference. When we first went there, most of the stores were virtually empty, but within six months, everything was there. People were buying all kinds of things, goods were coming in, shops were being painted, and so on. So that it was economically a very lively time, a very promising time, and the outsiders were cheering; to see a former "socialist" country join the free market club!. And so a lot of foreign businessmen came pouring in.

One interesting aspect of Sri Lanka is that they have very heavy rains that are highly seasonal, as anybody who's been in monsoon country knows, but Sri Lanka had a very sophisticated hydraulic society from about the 1st Century B.C. until about the 12th Century. There are very substantial and impressive ruins in what is normally thought of as a dry zone. But this dry zone

was irrigated through a very elaborate series of channels or reservoirs, or "tanks" as they are called.

Previous AID and government programs had planned a number of dams for developing this hydraulic society. And Jayawardene comes in and says, "A 40-year plan? Why can't we do it faster than that? And let's see if we can't do four or five at once." I thought this was foolish. I thought of how Menderes in Turkey had pushed an enormously rapid program of capital investment, military bases, all kinds of things.

Q: And infrastructure.

WRIGGINS: Inflation got going at such a pace that everybody got angry at him, there was a military coup, and in the end he was killed. And I worried about this with Jayawardene. I tried to get material from USIS and various other places about Menderes. But, of course, the process was so cumbersome that I never got anything.

Q: Did they ever finish the dams?

WRIGGINS: Oh sure, they have. I mean, it was quite astonishing what was accomplished. Let's see, the Germans, the British, the Swedes, and the Canadians all agreed to build dams and within ten years, they were all built and functioning.

Q: And no Eastern European country, neither the Russians nor...

WRIGGINS: No, no, they weren't interested.

Q: They'd lost the battle.

WRIGGINS: With Jayawardene's change in economic policy, they weren't interested any more. And he wouldn't have been interested in having them.

Anyway, here we have a bunch of donors competing against each other for dam sites. And one of them, I think it was the Japanese, in the end, got squeezed out - they donated a hospital instead!

Q: Unusual.

WRIGGINS: I much would have preferred for the Americans to build a dam than to get involved in the downstream channeling and agricultural water control. Very difficult stuff to handle. But Jimmy Carter had stopped building dams in the United States, for ecological reasons, and so we couldn't build a dam.

Q: Tell me, having myself served in a developing country, Indonesia was my first... and I've talked to enough other people whom I've interviewed for this program of oral history to know that relationships between the ambassador or the little State Department entourage in any post, and the AID mission often were strained, depending upon the personalities of the ambassador or the AID director, how do you feel, over your period of three years or so, that you got along?

WRIGGINS: Well, that's an interesting question. I was much concerned about the development program, having been in Sri Lanka in the 1950's when the first aid program began; started, by the way, by Jim Grant who ultimately became head of UNICEF. From the Policy Planning side, I'd watched and been connected to a lot of AID programs in the countries I was interested in, and because I'd spent time in Sri Lanka before. And the first AID director, named Tom Arndt, was a very cooperative, very interesting young man. He was willing to recognize that I knew quite a lot about Sri Lanka. We worked closely together, and I enjoyed him. Of course, his mission was very small. This was the very beginning of it. And so, from his point of view, there was no reason to be anxious. But, after about a year, he went off to something else, and a gal took his place. I can't remember her name.

Q: Is that an intentional lapse?

WRIGGINS: I'm sure it's a Freudian thing; I just can't remember the lady's name. She was really a pain, because she wanted to have as little to do with the embassy as possible. My experience in South Asia as a scholar suggested to me that sometimes there is validity -- if you want to do certain things, the less association you have with the embassy, the better. And so I understood part of her orientation toward this.

Q: But, on the other hand, it kind of destroys the concept of the country team.

WRIGGINS: Yes, it wasn't really very helpful. She was in fact very uncooperative, as if the less you had to do with the embassy, the better. So I had to really go around, clandestinely, in various ways, to find out. I had no reason to suspect that there was any hanky-panky going on, or anything wrong with it; I was just damned curious. It wasn't that I was trying to check up on her, really, but I was trying to be perfectly clear about what was going on.

Q: Well, I think the ambassador is entitled to know what's going on at a post.

WRIGGINS: Yes, that's true. Also, you learn a lot about what's going on politically through the people who are actually out in the field. So I had a lot of personal contact with them, but it was all kind of sub rosa. Very stupid.

Q: Trying to keep the director of the AID mission out of the loop.

WRIGGINS: Well, yeah, it was really stupid. I think she was quite effective, and she had a very rapidly growing organization to deal with. There were a lot of specific congressional requirements; the whole contracting structure is enormously cumbersome. So she had her own problems, and she ran a good show, but she was just a pain in the neck.

Q: Well, I've seen that to be the case in other circumstances.

WRIGGINS: Sure. As far as I was concerned, it was totally unnecessary. It was just one more thing.

Q: You did have a very good DCM (deputy chief of mission).

WRIGGINS: Oh, yeah, Herb Levin.

Q: Herb Levin was to become an acquaintance of mine in New York here.

WRIGGINS: Oh, Herb was marvelous. I thought he was great fun.

Q: He thinks very highly of you, too, I might say.

WRIGGINS: Oh, well, good.

Q: He was working at the U.N., after I retired.

WRIGGINS: Yes, he had a big job there for a while.

Q: He got caught in the RIF (reduction in force) which particularly affected senior Americans, and he was out. But I understand he's still doing something with China.

WRIGGINS: He's working with Cy Vance and Henry Kissinger now. Yes, he lands on his feet.

Q: Well, that's good.

WRIGGINS: He's very able. Oh, he's a terrific man. I just dumped all the administrative stuff on him. I think the DCM job is probably the worst job in the embassy.

Q: Well, that's what everybody says, but it's difficult to get to be an ambassador unless you're a DCM, someplace.

WRIGGINS: Yes, I'm sure that's true.

Q: That's what happened to Frank Galbraith, who was my DCM in Jakarta when I first got there. Eventually, he became ambassador first to Singapore and then to Indonesia, where he had started his career as an Indonesian language officer.

WRIGGINS: That's good. That's unusual.

Q: That's right. Well, he passed on, but I won't talk any more about Frank Galbraith.

Again, as a, let's say, non-career Foreign Service officer, despite your history with the State Department and with the National Security Council, I know you're aware of... First of all, let me say, this interview is off the record. You need not feel particularly feel by any classified rules, if there are things you don't want to talk about. We've all had experience, at whatever posts we've been in, with our, shall we say, sometimes unhelpful colleagues from another part of the government, the Central Intelligence Agency.

WRIGGINS: Oh, yes, right.

Q: I make it a habit to ask tough questions about the relationships and what you feel they should have been, or might have been, or should be, not just were, in your case, but should have been.

WRIGGINS: Yes, this is a good question. It's a puzzle to me, too, because at the time I was there, we'd already had the... what was the big commission exposé of the CIA, the Senator from Utah? Frank Church.

Q: Oh, Senator Church, who was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

WRIGGINS: We'd had the Church Committee investigation of the CIA, and they were somewhat under wraps. I had remembered, from my previous periodic visits, that they were sometimes quite active, it seemed to me. I was never fully knowledgeable, but I knew some of their guys; they were asking the same kind of questions about the political system that I was asking, as a scholar. And so we were sometimes in touch with each other. And it did seem to me that some of them were really, at periods, quite active in... I never knew what, exactly, maybe providing funds for various kinds of activities.

Q: Would you say that since you arrived after the election of an anti-leftist regime in Sri Lanka, the CIA was in any way responsible for that, shall we say, from their point of view, victory?

WRIGGINS: Oh, no, I don't think so. I believe it was a virtually completely homegrown operation. Everybody was so angry at them, and they'd been so unreasonable, and, you know, all kinds of things. Maybe there was some financing, but if so I never knew. I never inquired about it; it wasn't necessary. It does seem to me that the thing was so thoroughgoing and inherently domestic that we can't claim much credit for it, even if we should want to for some obscure reason.

Q: I'm glad to hear you say that. Some people think that the Central Intelligence Agency had something to do with the felicitous outcome of the abortive coup in 1965 in Indonesia. But that's absolutely not true. There is no way that the Agency could have influenced it.

WRIGGINS: That's right. Okay. So, no, I don't think so.

And so, because of the Church Committee and various things, they were, I felt, under a sense of restraint. And that was fine by me. There was no reason to be active. I mean, this government was perfectly friendly to us. They were falling all over themselves to be nice to us, and their policy was perfectly congenial, so, you know, what's the point?

There were certain things they were doing. They were bugging certain places, meetings and so on.

They did perform one service, and that is, they provided the material to me to pass to the president (which they had derived I don't know where) about some people with Middle Eastern training who had taken over property opposite the president's residence.

Q: Potential terrorists?

WRIGGINS: And allegedly tied in with some Tamil groups who had been training with the PLO in Lebanon. I saw the list of names of the people who turned up in one of the camps, and there were quite a few that looked like Sri Lankan Tamil names. So there was a connection there that they were able to alert the government to. But, beyond that, I often wondered what in hell they did.

Q: Weren't there an awful lot of them?

WRIGGINS: No, no, no. There were only three.

Q: Oh, really. I see.

WRIGGINS: One was busy in the visa department, and the other two, I couldn't quite figure out what they were doing. But it didn't bother me.

Q: They didn't bother you, so you didn't bother them.

WRIGGINS: Yes, that's right. Although I did have an interesting thought. I got to know the Czech Ambassador very well, and we played tennis together. He was a very interesting fellow.

WRIGGINS: I speculated to myself, well, now I wonder if he might jump ship? And if he did jump ship, I was very glad those guys were there. But he didn't jump ship.

Q: Well, they would have sent somebody in, anyway, if you had an inkling from the Czech that he was interested. Or they would have arranged to meet him outside the embassy.

WRIGGINS: Oh, yes, sure.

Q: Well, this was, of course, after '68, wasn't it?

WRIGGINS: Oh, yes.

Q: So he was not a Dubcek representative.

WRIGGINS: No. But he turned up again. I've seen him since at Columbia;...

Q: Still playing tennis?

WRIGGINS: I guess.

Q: Now let's get into the nitty gritty about the separatist movement. I'm appalled by what I read fairly recently in the papers.

WRIGGINS: It's been a tragic decline; particularly hard on the people of Jaffna, but a great diversion of resources from other, more needed domestic developments.

Q: Well, what's happened, I mean, since 1983. I read one article which talks about at least 40,000 people...

WRIGGINS: I think that's probably true.

Q: Now I gather that the Tamil group, a minority... and it is still a minority of only about 12 percent, I think, isn't it? Somewhere around there?

WRIGGINS: Well, there are two Tamil elements in Sri Lanka, which are often confused.

One is the estate workers who were brought in from South India. They are coolies, and they are low, very low, caste. They've been up in the up country, manning the tea and rubber estates. And they, on the whole, have not been involved in this separatism.

Q: When you say "up country," let me get the geography. You're not talking about Jaffna Province.

WRIGGINS: No. Jaffna's on sea level.

Q: I see. Oh, in the highlands.

WRIGGINS: The island has a core that rises to 6,500 feet. In the area above sea level, as the air is cooler, that's where the rain condenses, as in Indonesia's mountains. So the Tamil population there is pretty isolated and encapsulated in their estates. And they've had a political leader who's been very clever, a fellow named Thondaman. Thondaman has worked very closely with the United National Party and collaborated with Jayawardene, and, as a result, kept the Tamil estate workers quiet, but he won a lot of rights for the Tamil estate workers, education etc. in return. So that's one group.

The second group, however, is the Sri Lanka Tamils, and they have been there for well over a thousand years. In my view, they're as much Sri Lankans as the Sinhalese, although the Sinhalese may, in fact, have come earlier. Quite a few of the indigenous Tamil families came in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries. But, for an American, these are people who typically have been there for generations and generations.

Q: They're natives.

WRIGGINS: Yes, they are. They, too, are natives.

Anyway, I guess encapsulating the story somewhat, I put it to myself this way: during the British colonial period, the American missionaries were given the right to have schools in the Tamil areas. The British reserved to themselves the education of the majority population. In the British Empire (I don't know how it was in the Dutch), the British assigned the task of education to

religious bodies. So it was the American missionary schools in Jaffna that were far more energetic in training people for practical skills: engineering, medicine, accountancy, things like that, while the British schools stuck more to the traditional British arts curriculum. So that, during the colonial period, it was the Tamils who found wonderful opportunities in the bureaucracy. The British were quite willing to have the minority perform these necessary tasks. And they did that in quite a few of their colonial areas. So, at independence and post-independence, you have a lot of Tamils in relatively senior bureaucratic positions, because the British depended on large numbers of local folks to manage their bureaucracy.

So, following independence, the Sinhalese looked around, and they found that a lot of the senior positions were manned by Tamils. Whenever they needed to get any responsible official, quite disproportionate to their number of 12 percent, there was always a Tamil there. And disproportionately in the schools, the Tamils. Maybe 50 percent of medical-doctor candidates would be Tamils, and maybe even 50 percent of the engineers. There would be some elements of the bureaucracy that were being entirely manned by Tamils, as you bring in your cousins and your brothers and your nephews. The Irrigation Department and Public Works Department and quite a few were Tamil preserves, just like the New York police, for a while, were Irish.

Q: It's changed now.

WRIGGINS: Yes. So, as I said, Bandaranaike saw the Sinhalese language as the thing to get him going politically.

Mrs. Bandaranaike then went further. She began to cut back on the proportion of university positions that could be taken by Tamils.

Q: You mean a quota system.

WRIGGINS: Yes, a quota system. And so a well-educated Tamil father could see that his son was not going to have the same kind of opportunities he'd had, and the son could see that he was not going to have the same kind of opportunities that his Dad had had. Under Mrs. Bandaranaike, this became quite acute. So that, by the time this election came along, the Tamils were organized.

For a long time, they had tried to promote a federal structure, which would mean a decentralization of the highly centralized administrative and political systems that the British had organized in order for to control the place. But the federal issue became always a Tamil issue. And so you couldn't conceive of changing the highly centralized system to a federal system because that would be giving the Tamils the right to change "our" constitution. That's outrageous, they're only a minority of 12 percent. So we can't accommodate them in this way. And Mrs. Bandaranaike refused to work on serious decentralization.

There were, however, two examples of negotiated and mutually agreed decentralization proposals. In each case, they were negotiated by the government with the Tamil leaders and accepted both by the Tamil leaders and accepted by the Sinhalese leaders. But then in each case there would be a public uproar, and the Sinhalese leaders wouldn't dare to implement it. So, the Tamils came to distrust offers by the Sinhalese leaders. And the Sinhalese distrusted the ultimate

aims of the Tamils, because there were 60 million Tamils over in India, and over 3 million Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese reasoned, if the Tamils are able to gain some autonomy in their area, sooner or later they're going to hook up with the Indian Tamils and either break away entirely, or bring the Indian Tamils in to swamp us.

Q: With the Indian Tamils.

WRIGGINS: Yes. So you get these worst-case anxieties on both sides. We have the paradox that two communities acting as if they are both suffering from a minority complex.

Q: Because of the mainland.

WRIGGINS: Because of the mainland. And the Tamils know they're a minority because they are a minority on the island, an increasingly disadvantaged minority.

Anyway, that's the background. By the time the election came along, then, the young Tamils were demanding independence.

Q: Independence under a federal system?

WRIGGINS: No, Tamil Eelam, "We will have our own state."

Now we all remember, those of us who are South Asianists, the Pakistan-India partition. But we also recall that large numbers of Pakistani, looking back, who think that Jinnah and some of the others at his period, were really using this as a bargaining ploy, attempting to gain stronger guarantees for the Muslim minority in Nehru's India. And some of the Tamil leaders at first may have been using the call for independence as a bargaining ploy, or perhaps just to stay ahead of the youths who were taking the call for Eelam seriously. But the youngsters began to take this seriously. So a real momentum gets going.

One of my real senses of failure here is that I was not able to level with Jayawardene on my anxiety about his country. I feared that if he didn't move more rapidly toward devolution of power as Tamil demands for independence became strident, something awful could well happen. But I also knew that this shrewd politician had been in politics for 35 or 40 years. He was a very smart man; he knew the mood of the place a lot better than I did. I also knew that, in 1956, he had lost his seat in parliament because he had been associated with a party that had not gotten onto this language bandwagon, and so he had been out of parliament for three years. No fun for somebody like that. So who am I to tell him what he ought to do? Anyhow, I didn't.

But I was also in close touch with many Tamils. There was a complicated negotiation going on between Jayawardene, on the one hand, and the Parliamentary leaders of the Tamil movement, on the other. But it seemed to me that these negotiations never got anywhere. And you know in this part of the world, how you can do things for symbolic reasons; but you really don't take them seriously, you just string people along? It seemed to me that at times Jayawardene was really stringing the Tamil leadership along, although I must say the Tamil leadership was not very distinguished, as compared to the previous generation, who had been very, very able people.

Q: Because they'd been trained by the British, you mean?

WRIGGINS: Well, they were lawyers; they were highly educated. They'd been trained in the British and the American schools, or whatever. And the younger people were just of a different educational generation, so they were less well-trained, perhaps not quite up to the challenge of the times, which by this time faced a far more radicalized youth than had their predecessors. And Jayawardene himself is fairly aristocratic, so he really didn't have the sense of fellowship and personal chemistry with these more modest people than he had had with their more distinguished and professional predecessors. Anyhow, they did not take advantage of the opportunities that seemed to me to have been there. As a result, in 1981, there was a set of riots, and then, in 1983, the whole place blew up.

Q: It certainly did blow up.

WRIGGINS: Yes, it did.

Q: And that was the beginning, of course, of what you could really call a civil war.

WRIGGINS: Yes, right, that's true.

Q: How much of the...

WRIGGINS: Fortunately, it didn't happen while I was there.

Q: Not on your watch.

WRIGGINS: I'm thankful for that.

Q: But, on the other hand, I think you feel a regret about the fact that you were not able to convey some sense of impending doom to Jayawardene.

WRIGGINS: Yes, that's right.

Q: Which may be your major frustration from your tour of duty there.

WRIGGINS: Oh, absolutely. Let me just make this a little more vivid. I can still see an evening in which there was Jayawardene and myself and our two wives, and three other couples, the man with whom I wrote that book and his wife, and one of them who was just recently assassinated, Gamini Dissanayake and his wife, just this group.

Q: His wife survived.

WRIGGINS: Yes, his wife survived. It was on the tip of my tongue to say, "you know, we're all here, this is a family evening, we're among friends. Let me tell you what really worries me." But I didn't do it. And I still feel I should have. It's kind of absurd, but I still look back on that as a real opportunity missed.

Q: Of course, but then there were opportunities that you took advantage of as well.

WRIGGINS: Yes, that's true.

Q: Really, everything balances out.

WRIGGINS: I know, but when we're exploring these things...that recollection remains vivid.

Q: I don't think we've quite finished the separatism business. We just touched on the beginning of the violence. Now, the violence consisted of the assassination of a lot of important people, particularly recently, in 1993 and 1994. The way you presented it, it sounds as though there was this kind of, sure, next generation of Tamils, but no explanation of how it became so utterly violent, on both sides.

WRIGGINS: Well, it's a very complicated thing, because there were actually two different sources of political violence, one within the Sinhalese community.

In 1971, a year after Mrs. Bandaranaike became prime minister, there was a youth rebellion in the Sinhalese areas, in which something like 15,000 young people took part in a kind of wild effort to seize power-- a politically romantic revolution led by somebody who had had some training in Moscow and who thought seriously of a one-night seizure of power. He was a real charismatic figure, who must also have been a considerable organizer. They attacked 75 police stations in one night.

Well, even on a small island, to be able to organize something like that, secretively, and take so many people by surprise, was really quite astonishing.

Mrs. Bandaranaike was very strong and vigorous in repressing it. Fourteen thousand of them were put in various reeducation centers, and quite a few of those who were "reeducated" came back and participated in the political system and were normal citizens. But a group of them was arrested and tried, and the leader, Rohan Wijaweera and his closest associates were given life sentences.

When he came to power, Jayawardene released them, because he realized that they would be more critical of Mrs. Bandaranaike and her party than they would be of him. And so, too clever by half, really, because in the 1980s, the old leadership reemerged and contributed to the enormous violence within the Sinhalese community. But that really didn't occur until the Tamils had gained momentum.

One could sketch the sequence. For instance, you begin your guerilla movement by picking off policemen. And then the government no longer can count on the police. Then the army is sent in to restore order. The previous government had stopped recruiting Tamils, so most of the army are now only Sinhalese speakers, so they don't understand the language of the people for whom they're supposed to be providing order. And then this movement gains a kind of momentum. It's a self-generating business. As the police become more severe and apparently arbitrary, then the

Tamil guerilla leaders have more of a following. So you get this terrible vicious circle going. Jayawardene was unable to break through this, and so he increased the military pressure.

And then, as a result of anti-Tamil riots in 1983, many Tamils fled to India, and because of understandable sympathy, the Tamils gained support from Tamil N_du in southern India. Mrs. Gandhi had two reasons for contributing to supporting this movement. One, she knew that if she didn't support it, she would lose votes in south India, in Tamil N_du. So that's a domestic political reason. Another reason was that she wanted to bring pressure to bear on Jayawardene so that hopefully, he would be somewhat less independent of India, I believe. And she wanted to be sure that Jayawardene didn't do anything with the United States that would work to India's disadvantage. In other words, she wanted a kind of deterrent threat, by intensifying the Tamil difficulties that Jayawardene would face. This was a really nasty.

Q: How long did that period last, her contribution, shall we say?

WRIGGINS: Well, I don't think she really got going, although my colleague, who's written a book on this subject, thinks she did begin earlier. I don't think she got really going until the 1983 eruption in Colombo, when large numbers of Tamils fled to Madras for safety. Then, Tamil political leaders, seeing they could be heroes for the voters in Madras if they garlanded and welcomed as heroes Sri Lankan Tamils who came for rest and to reequip themselves. This further frightened the Sinhalese. And so this kind of vicious circle gets going. But it was not only for vote-getting purposes. She also had the Indian intelligence service, RAW, help these fighters by setting up training camps, safe houses, radio communication with Jaffna, etc.

Q: On the mainland.

WRIGGINS: On the mainland.

Q: And re-exporting them.

WRIGGINS: And exporting them back, yes. So she played really a dog-in-the-manger role here. Many of my Sri Lankan Sinhalese friends say, "well, of course, if she hadn't done this, we'd have been able to deal with it."

Q: Well, I don't know about that. She did it, so that's a hypothesis and nothing more. You mentioned the Sinhalese factions, and one of them, I guess, is this extreme group.

WRIGGINS: The JVP.

Q: I know you're watching what happens there all the time, and that's why I don't mind asking you what the current situation is. Do you see that as a possible...

WRIGGINS: A return of the JVP?

Q: Yes, is it going to harden the line between the Tamils and the Sinhalese?

WRIGGINS: Frankly, I don't think it affects that very much.

First, on the JVP. At one point, it looked as if a stalemate had virtually been achieved between the Colombo Government and the Tamil Eelam movement. At that point, Jayawardene asked the Indians to come in as peacekeepers, and to help disarm the Tamil movements. The reaction among this group of Sinhalese to that invitation to the Indians was enormous, much more than Jayawardene expected. He obviously touched a very sensitive nerve; the longstanding historic Sinhalese fear of India burst to the surface. That's when the JVP revived their violent attack on the Colombo establishment that had had the nerve to invite the Indians in. The degree of violence of these people was just amazing.

For instance, they would take a particular professional group, like the electricians who were running a public electric service, and say, "If you go to work tomorrow, we will kill some of your people." And they would. Then they went to the garbage collectors. They'd take different parts of public service. But they went even further. They went to hospitals and said, "If the nurses come tomorrow..." This is a degree of unfeeling that's just almost unbelievable. And they killed some nurses. They even picked off some doctors. And then they were foolish enough to say to the army, "If you don't stop killing us, we will begin to attack you, as individuals." Then they began to pick off some officers and attack their families. And that was the end of it! Then there was real repression, a real crackdown. I have no idea how many were killed. Nobody will admit how many were killed. But to stop this thing, the repression among the Sinhalese was very great...many disappearances, many suspects summarily killed by ununiformed death squads, etc.

I happened to be on the island at the time when they found, exposed, and captured Wijaweera, the head of this Sinhalese extremist program. He and his top aides were identified, arrested and shortly after Wijaweera was taped for television, urging his followers to give up, he was killed by the army units that had found him. Colombo heaved a collective sigh of relief.

Q: Was that the Tiger leader?

WRIGGINS: No. no. This was the leader of the extremist Sinhalese movement that had erupted after Jayawardene invited the Indian "peacekeepers" in to help deal with the Tamils.

So they repressed that, and I think that's finished for now. It may come up again; it shows how volatile the Sinhalese community can be; it suggests that many grievances persist within the Sinhalese community. But I don't expect that to return any time soon.

The Tamil problem is of a different order. The Tamil leader, V. Prabhakaran, had proved to be a much harder customer. He has some of the same charismatic leadership qualities and inspires highly unusual degrees of dedication. The readiness of his followers for self-sacrifice is quite remarkable. He is also a far more sophisticated and ruthless political leader.

Q: He must be. He must be.

WRIGGINS: And there are caste issues involved. I don't want to spend too much time on it, but there's a caste implication to it. There's caste in both Sinhalese and Tamil societies. But the

Sinhalese caste system is very casual and relaxed compared to the Indian. The Jaffna one has been much more severe, more like the Indian system.

Q: You mean it's more rigid than the Indian?

WRIGGINS: Well, perhaps. But by comparison with caste in the south of Sri Lanka, it has been historically more rigid, more like India's in more traditional parts of India. Almost all the political leaders of the north, of the Jaffna area, had been of upper caste vellalas. The agricultural caste are generally considered to be the top status group in both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. The lawyers and the doctors and the professional people and all those who had tried to work the deals and compromises with Colombo, they were all Tamil vellalas. The people who are heading the LTTE, by contrast, are fisher caste, which in the Sri Lankan system is fairly low.

Q: LTTE is the Liberation Tiger Tamil Eelam.

WRIGGINS: Yes, that's their official title in English. The lower-caste folks who dominate the LTTE, are now in charge. While some of the young, upper-caste people also joined in their "national liberation struggle," the fact that, through this eruption, the lower-caste people are now running things contributes, in my view, to the intractability of finding a peaceful solution. How could they imagine that, if they reach a deal with these people in Colombo, they will still be able to be top dogs? Rather, they must fear they will be pressed back down again to the inferior position they used to occupy before the struggle.

Q: And defers...

WRIGGINS: It makes it harder to reach a deal.

JAMES R. MEENAN
Project Officer - Private Sector Development, USAID
Colombo (1978-1983)

Mr. Meenan was born in Rhode Island and raised in California. After graduating from Woodbury College he entered government service. Joining USAID in 1965, Mr. Meenan had a distinguished career with that Agency, serving as Mission and Program Auditor in USAID Missions throughout the world. His foreign postings include Liberia, Vietnam, Brazil, Chile, Panama, Sri Lanka and Philippines. Among his Washington assignments was Committee Staff Member in the Office of Senator Max Baucus. Mr. Meenan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MEENAN: We enjoyed one of our longer assignments in Sri Lanka, serving there from 1978 to 1983. This was one of the most enlightening parts of my career where everything came together.

The country had just finished a socialist regime; had a good social services network for catching people who were disadvantaged; had a heavily controlled and regulated economy; and lacked real growth prospects with needed new investments. Sri Lanka played a pivotal role in the life of Buddha and still contains the bow tree where supposedly Buddha passed on and reached Nirvana.

My first task was to see what I could do in designing a program to evolve a private sector development strategy along with a follow-on support project.

Q: What was your job?

MEENAN: Since the national government was in transition from a closed to an open economy, I undertook the design of a private sector development strategy and follow-on project. It first took many separate meetings with the individual public and private sector leaders, until the mistrust could be calmed and a common ground could be identified for collaboration and development. Once brought together, the services of a well respected U.S. commercial development firm was introduced to work with the parties to identify and document the policy reforms needed to best develop the sectors offering the greatest opportunities for growth, using comparative advantage and value added analysis. In the end, a good development strategy was evolved and interesting enough the Japanese Ambassador, with U.S. Embassy blessing, hosted a presentation of the findings and recommendations. They filmed the event for Japanese business consumption, while the U.S. Embassy only sent the final report to the U.S. Commerce Department, by sea shipment. The Japanese were very active in the commercial development of the Asia region, including Sri Lanka.

Georgia Tech University had a good USAID/Washington sponsored program of introducing hand pumps on newly cleaned/capped wells in developing countries to provide a safer rural water supply. With my local business contacts, a good foundry was identified and the project move ahead at a good pace. Sri Lanka had a rubber institute that proved most helpful in improving the design of the old leather flapper valve on the pump with a sturdier rubber valve.

With the good results from the hand pump, we explored what could be done in the Northern Jaffna region of the country to provide a better water supply. I soon became friends with the leading Parliamentarian, N.V. Navaratnam, from that area and head of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). I traveled often to that area with a U.S. geologist who identified a good underground water supply. We witnessed some of the damage that was done by the national police in the North and the clashes between the two ethnic groups in the country.

During the Indian Ocean Crisis, the U.S. fleet was not welcome for port visits in many countries in the area, but Sri Lanka was an exception. The Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy, Harry Cahill, and I were tasked to organize civic action projects for volunteers from the fleet when they came to visit. One such project was the repair and painting of the emergency room at the local hospital. The conditions were sickening with blood splattered walls and bare electrical wiring.

The sailors did an outstanding job, and as a thank you, Harry's and my family opened our houses for a barbecue and refreshments. However, the biggest hit was the opportunity to have a fresh water shower, since they had been at sea for some time taking only salt water baths.

Q: What did you find the cadre of Sri Lankan government officials? How well were they suited for this type of work?

MEENAN: The officials I had the pleasure of working with were open and committed to doing what was right for the country's growth. Likewise, the private sector leaders also proved extremely cooperative, thus we were able to broker a mutual dialogue and formulate a private sector growth strategy for the country. Mr. Harold Fernando, Senior Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Construction was our lead official for the private sector effort as well as the introduction of the Georgia Tech hand pump. He was a very dedicated official with strong social responsibility views that reflected his related work as a preacher. Mr. M.D.P. Dias, President of the Chamber of Small Industries also proved invaluable and his foundry produced the hand pump.

Q: Did you find any particular problems with your American staff?

MEENAN: While the USAID functioned reasonably well, there was one senior official who continually inserted himself, usually at the last minute, into the design effort. This became problematic in that he would make uninformed changes that went counter to the arrangements that had been worked out with the host country. In one incident, changes were made on the private enterprise project design that was questioned by AID/Washington. A congressional staff member even got involved and upon his arrival in Sri Lanka learned of the original design and supported the reversal of the impromptu changes.

MARY JO FURGAL
Cultural Affairs Officer Trainee, USIS
Colombo (1979-1980)

Ms. Furgal was born and raised in Illinois. She attended a number of colleges and universities in the US and Austria, including the University of Chicago, where she pursued Library Science Studies. She entered the USIA Foreign Service in 1978 and served as Cultural Affairs Officer in Colombo, Madras, Katmandu, Dhaka, Bucharest and Harare as well as in Washington, DC. Her assignments were primarily tandem assignments with her Foreign Service Officer husband. Ms. Furgal was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

Q: Well, where was your first assignment?

FURGAL: Sri Lanka.

Q: You were in Sri Lanka from when to when?

FURGAL: I went to Washington in '78 and Sri Lanka in the fall of '79 to summer of '80. My first tour was a short one because it was considered a training tour and we were there 10 months in Sri Lanka and from Sri Lanka we went to India. My husband was my dependent in Sri Lanka, the only male dependent at that time. It was a funny situation; they wouldn't let him join the American Women's Club. It was a very small post, only 12 staff in all, and there was no the American Dependent's Club. The women's movement in the '70s did a lot for the Foreign Service. I heard that Tezi Schaffer and Jane Coon and a couple of other Senior Foreign Service women had to drop out when they married. And then when the laws were changed, to its credit the State Department invited the women they could find to be reinstated and these people came back in. Finally when we went up to Madras, Joe got tired of not working. So he went in as a communicator and later became a human relations/personnel specialist. But when we went back to Sri Lanka, 1990 to 1993, on our second tandem assignment there were nine dependent husbands. Tezi Schaffer was the ambassador and Howie Schaffer was the dependent spouse. There were nine dependent husbands and when we were there 10 years previously, there wasn't one.

Q: Seventy-nine-'80. What was the situation in Sri Lanka at the time?

FURGAL: It wasn't as bad as when we went back in '90... We were there at a quiet time. The language changes had already taken place. Previously everybody studied in English but in the mid-'50s, the prime minister husband mandated a change to Tamil or Sinhala. Since that had already gone through, the political situation seemed relatively calm to us. And we had no problems traveling; we went all over the country, even north to Jaffna. When we went back 10 years later, because we left there in '80 and went back in '90, there was definite change.

Q: Well, who was the ambassador when you arrived in Sri Lanka?

FURGAL: The first time was Howard Wriggins, the academic.

Q: Who?

FURGAL: Wriggins. He was a political appointee but he was an academic who knew the area well. The man who took his place was a career diplomat who went to the Colombo Plan after that and later died in a plane crash. We only knew Professor Wriggins.

Q: How did you find the embassy at that point?

FURGAL: Well, you know, we were pretty lowly JOs (Junior Officers). I mean, I was; my husband was my dependent in those days when I it was pretty scandalous to have a male dependent. I was the oldest in my class, too; this was a second career. I was 40 years old by the time we got to Sri Lanka. So I was kind of an odd bird. You know, I had some bosses younger than me because they had entered in their 20s so.

I remember one woman inviting us for Thanksgiving dinner. I thought my goodness, why is she inviting us for Thanksgiving dinner; she hardly knows us? We weren't used to that embassy

form of hospitality, when you automatically invite any new staff. We got into that habit ourselves but that time I remember thinking how unusual it was. I also remember she wore short skirts which were no longer being done in the U.S. And I thought, well of course, she's been out for a long time; she doesn't realize how fashions have changed. But it was a funny thing to remember.

Q: Well, you were what, the librarian?

FURGAL: No, I was a generalist. I was not a specialist. I was a CAO (Cultural Affairs Officer).

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

FURGAL: Well, you know, when you were a JO you followed the CAO around and did whatever he told you to do.

Q: Cultural Affairs Officer.

FURGAL: Cultural Affairs Officer. Basically, a CAO handled the speaking tours, the Fulbright program, the East West Center program, the short and long term exchange programs, the cultural visits. I've been fortunate; I've done that my whole life. I successfully avoided being an IO.

Q: Information Officer.

FURGAL: Information Officer.

Q: That's for the press.

FURGAL: That's the press, right.

Q: Well, what were relations with the United States at that time?

FURGAL: The first time I was in Sri Lanka?

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: I don't know but I suspect they were okay. We never felt any personal animosity, any difficulties on the streets; nothing. I never really did in any of the posts I was in.

Q: Did you feel- Was the United States- did you feel was an important factor there or were you just another embassy or what?

FURGAL: I think at that time the British and the Indians were a little more important than we were. James Spain, whose name you might recognize, was still retired and living there.

Q: I've interviewed him, yes.

FURGAL: The poor man is no more, right?

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: He passed relatively recently. I'd like to read his book.

Q: He'd written a book, which we published, I think.

FURGAL: Oh, okay.

Q: Were there many Sri Lankans coming to the United States, either to study or Fulbrights or just going to get educated?

FURGAL: I think so. The consular officer would have a better idea of numbers. Our grants to Sri Lanka have always been very small. When I was there the second time, I helped organize the East West Center Alumni Association, which still exists. The number of grants dwindled over the years because of money going towards the Vietnam War and other situations. But I think there's really only one country that I've been in where relations were not so good and mainly that was after I left anyway; that was my last overseas post - Zimbabwe

Q: Well, how about in your work did the Sinhalese/Tamil division play any role in the embassy or your work at all at that time?

FURGAL: That came during my second tour. When we went back to Colombo in '90, we could not go north anymore to Jaffna. We used to go to Trincomalee, the wonderful British harbor during the Second World War; one of the most beautiful beaches I've ever seen. We were there the first time since we joined the Sri Lanka Wildlife and Preservation Society. The organization used to have once a month meetings where we met both Tamils and Sinhalese we'd go on monthly field trips. When we went back, that organization barely existed. And there was a much more palpable sense of division. Another ethnic group is the Burghers, descendants of the Dutch and the English. Burghers were similar to those in India, especially in the professions, like the railroads and government. One of the local employees who was a Burgher went to Bill Maurer, the Public Affairs Officer, and told him not to hire a Tamil secretary because it would lead to too much trouble among the staff. And the head librarian at the American Cultural Center was a Tamil who retired in time to get his daughter into the U.S. on the green card... It's been difficult for the Tamils, I think.

Q: What was life like there, for you?

FURGAL: It was fine both times. We could travel; we could walk wherever we wanted to and never felt threatened. Both times we didn't have any difficulty personally living there.

Q: How did you feel about the, you know, Foreign Service life? Was it kind of fun?

FURGAL: Yes. We would not have stayed in, if we had not enjoyed it. Since we were both in our second careers, we were not as professionally ambitious as younger officers seemed to be.

People always ask what our favorite post was, what it was like living there, and I say we liked them all, and disliked them all, for some reason. You either didn't like your staff or you didn't like the country or you didn't like the ambassador or you did or- for whatever reason. I believe there's no perfect job but all in all, we're glad we did it. You give up certain things, you know; you miss your family, you don't see your nieces and nephews growing up. If we'd stayed in this country who knows, maybe we would have had children or adopted but I was already 40 years old when we went in so it was unlikely. But the opportunity to live in another country and to experience day-to-day life was priceless. I also felt like I was doing something worthwhile. I wasn't saying no to people, which I think unfortunately a consular officer has to do a lot... The work I was doing helped to build better relations between the countries because the kind of programs that I administered had long term value.

Q: How about the Fulbright program? You were working on Fulbright Program?

FURGAL: Yes.

Q: How was that working?

FURGAL: Oh, very well. We think it should be funded at a much higher level. It's significant that India has given enough money to the program that their Commission is now considered a bi-national one. It didn't used to be since the U.S. Government contributed the bulk of the funding. Germany also gives more money to the Fulbright program than the U.S. does. This means that other countries are able to make some of the decisions. You have to weigh the benefits of giving up some control but I think all in all, it is better that way.

Q: Was America seen as a place to go to get a higher degree, particularly some of the areas where we go and sort of computerize education but also in business management and all; was this a place that the Sri Lankans were looking to improve their skills and business type things?

FURGAL: I think that tended to be more in the sciences and business. The Fulbright program used to put more of an emphasis on the arts and culture and younger people. That was Senator Fulbright's idea but over the years, the program attracted more MA and pre-PhD students than post-BA students. There was a program for graduating college and university seniors in which a student didn't have to have very much of an idea of what they wanted to study. The purpose was to explore a field of interest. We had one young art student who tried to sell his art work in the library which was a big no-no. All the Fulbright programs are wonderful. There's a very active Fulbright alumni chapter here in the DC area which I joined just to see what they were doing. Working with exchange programs is one of the few things that I miss about not working.

Q: We've been doing this and it sort of sounds like half the educated population of China has ended up coming here now.

FURGAL: When we were young, we used to pray for the conversion of Russia at church and now we can talk with Chinese and Russians in person I remember meeting my first Russian person face to face; it was really exciting.

Q: Yes.

FURGAL: Things have changed a whole lot. I think it's a pity, although I can see why it was done, that USIA was absorbed into the State Department. So far, a fire-wall is protecting former USIA program funds but I don't think that will last in an era of tight budgets. It is difficult for Congress to see the benefit of long term education programs. The investment in my education and those of my student friends at the East West Center took a long time to show a benefit whereas a bomber or a trade route shows a much quicker return.

Q: You know, my prejudice is that the whole exchange program has probably been the most potent weapon that we've had in our foreign policy quiver.

Well, I'm thinking this is probably a good place to stop now. And we'll pick this up the next time — I put at the end here where we are — pick it up the next time in 1979?

FURGAL: Nineteen seventy-nine when we left for our first tour.

Q: Okay, where did you go?

FURGAL: That was Sri Lanka in '79. We were there twice.

Q: Okay. But you left Sri Lanka in what?

FURGAL: 1980.

HARRY A. CAHILL
Deputy Chief of Mission
Colombo (1979-1981)

Harry A. Cahill was born in New York, New York and raised in New England. He received a bachelor's degree in English from Manhattan College and served in the U.S. Army. His Foreign Service career included positions in India, Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia, Uruguay, Colombia, and Bombay. Mr. Cahill was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 29, 1993.

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

CAHILL: Yes. There were twenty of us, all male. The great majority of us were State Department. I remember Patt Derian coming, Carter's forceful spokeswoman for human rights. She sat and kept looking at us, nodded her head and intoned: "Twenty of you and not a woman in the group." She gave one of the better presentations, incidentally. That was an enjoyable year,

but I should have instead taken an assignment in the Department. What we did in the seminar year, visit cities and companies and civic officials, I had done before on my own. It was *deja vu*. Working in State would have been far more useful. Having been promoted to FSO-1, the then equivalent of today's minister-counselor, I presumably could have filled a responsible State slot. But I thought one had to have his DCM ticket punched, and Asia, especially Sri Lanka, had long attracted me. Ambassador Wriggins was a political appointee, a Columbia professor who knew Lanka better than any American. A key attraction was the country's recent switch from suffocating, stifling socialism under Mrs. Bandaranaike to a free enterprise market economy. It was an exciting new model for the developing world.

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

Q: Was there corruption?

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

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

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

Q: How did the ambassador work with the population?

CAHILL: He worked well because of his vast knowledge. Towards the end of my tour he was replaced by a career officer, Don Toussaint, the best all-around ambassador I have known. I will

always admire him tremendously for his ability, gentleness and strength, character and integrity, sense of humor. A top, top human being. After Lanka he died of a heart attack. This was a terrible loss to our Service.

Q: How did you find dealing with the government?

CAHILL: Officials were professional and cooperative.

Q: These were Sinhalese for the most part?

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

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

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

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

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

HERBERT G. HAGERTY
Deputy Chief of Mission
Colombo (1981-1984)

Herbert G. Hagerty was born in New Jersey in 1932. He graduated from Columbia University in 1954 and from the University of Pennsylvania with a MA in 1956 before joining the US Navy. After joining the Foreign Service, Hagerty served overseas in India, Norway, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In Washington DC, he served as the Director of the Office of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh Affairs and as the Director of the Office of Intelligence Liaison. Hagerty was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Well, then you went in 1981 to Sri Lanka, direct transfer? Just to put at the beginning, you were in Sri Lanka from '81 to when?

HAGERTY: Yes. '84. Three years.

Q: What brought about this very quick turn around?

HAGERTY: Hardly quick; I was four years in Pakistan. My own career plan had been to go on to Afghanistan as DCM, but that didn't work out obviously once the post there had shed its dependents. Don Toussaint was Ambassador in Colombo, and he chose me from, I understand, a large number of bidders on the job. The sad thing is that Don didn't stay very long with the change of administration. He was gone in the space of six months, I was Charge for a month, and then I had a very different kind of ambassador.

Q: Well, his name was what?

HAGERTY: John Reed

Q: Well, what was his background?

HAGERTY: Unlike Toussaint, who was a career officer, Southeast Asia hand, and a former DCM in Jakarta, Reed was a former governor of Maine who had served once before as Nixon's ambassador to Colombo and had come to know Reagan was governor in California. He parlayed this to promote another stint in Colombo. So, he arrived, and I have to say, he had a lot of weaknesses of the type often attributed to such political appointees. Let me add, however, that I worked for more political appointee ambassadors than career officers, and among them some were excellent, while others were not. John Reed was a weak reed, not make a pun but...

Q: What were some of the weaknesses that you saw?

HAGERTY: First off, he had no real interest in or understanding of foreign relations. I came to believe that he liked *being* ambassador but didn't like *doing* ambassador. The work of being ambassador was not to his interest. He was vain and liked the status and the 'perks' of the office. He had become governor of Maine because he happened to be next in Maine's upper house when a former governor died. He thought of himself as a politician but never was reelected. Despite his earlier stint in Colombo, he simply seemed to be over his head and required a lot of careful handling. I was 'Mr. Inside' to his 'Mr. Outside,' in the sort of traditional way. I ran the embassy for him, but I also had to spend a fair amount of time coaching him on being 'Mr. Outside.' When he'd go off to carry out an instruction by cable from Washington, he simply would not take a note-taker. He didn't want to take me because I think he felt that I might upstage him. I met that concern by regularly suggesting that he take an officer from the political section as note-taker. But he would say, "No, I'm going to see politicians. I'm a politician, and I know politicians don't like to talk with note-takers around."

His reluctance to use a note-taker gave us had a hell of a time trying to figure out what happened so as to report the result to Washington. He would come back from the conversation and sit down with me and tell me in general about how it went. Then I'd write the reporting cable as if I had sat in on the meeting anyway. It was very difficult to assess the nuances of his exchange with the Sri Lankan government official with whom he had met.

When I prepped him for such a call on the government, I often felt that it was like preparing someone for a tennis match in which he had to ace his serve; if the other side returned the volley, he (and we) would be in trouble, since his ability to follow up would be limited. To ensure he got the message across, I often took advantage of my own contacts at the ministry to make sure that whatever message he was supposed to have conveyed was understood at the next echelon in the ministry. I did not undercut him, but I played it as if I wished to ensure the level where I was frequently in contact also got the message. As they got to know Reed, I think my contacts understood where I was coming from. The Sri Lanka Ambassador in Washington, a friend, later told me he and his government understood and appreciated my 'follow-up' actions.

Q: I'm sure they were used to sizing this up and finding out. But it does mean that our position is not as strong there where you have to deal in this type of thing.

HAGERTY: He had a tough time saying no to Sri Lankans about things to which they had no reason to expect a positive response. He'd get a call from somebody about a visa case, and you know, we'd have a conversation about it before I checked with the visa officer to assess what the problem was. Usually, the visa officer had absolutely done the correct thing in terms of the consul's responsibility under our immigration laws.

Q: The ambassador cannot issue a visa. By law, only the consular officer can issue it.

HAGERTY: Actually, the ambassador cannot order an officer to issue a visa. I could have issued the visa if I thought the consular officer was in the wrong. But when, as usual, I saw that the law was appropriately executed, I would then tell the Ambassador, "We're doing what the law requires and don't have much of a choice." I would then inform him that he could approve the visa on his signature, but I would counsel against doing so in this case – that kind of drill. We had problems about the "leader grant," where USIA and the political section and the economic section would come up with candidates for such grants to travel to the United States. We only had a limited number of them of them, and very often he'd get pressure from some political element of the government in favor of somebody who was somebody's bag man and not the sort of person we wanted. I'd make the best case possible for our choices. In fact, I was as interested in a broad range of Sri Lankans during my time as DCM. Sri Lanka was undergoing a rejuvenation of the private sector at that time, which we encouraged as a matter of policy. So I'd try to ensure that two of the seven or eight grants a year that we had went to both deserving private sector candidates and deserving women. But it was occasionally very difficult to resist Reed's efforts on behalf of deserving candidates when he was under that he recognized as a politician-to-politician pressure.

Q: What was the situation in Sri Lanka during the time you were there in '81 to '84?

HAGERTY: Well, there had been a major change of government in the 1977 elections, with the success of the United National Party (UNP) and its commitment to privatization of the economy. President Jayawardena had a towering majority in the parliament, where the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), with a dozen seats or so, led the opposition. But Tamils generally had welcomed the UNP's success because Jayawardena had offered negotiations on a number of long-standing Tamil grievances. As time went on, however, it became clear to me (and to the moderate TULF leadership) that these negotiations were a bit of a sham, because each round of negotiations would *de novo*, virtually where the previous round had started, rather than ended. There never was any progress, and the end result was that the moderate leaders of the TULF were undercut by not being able to deliver. In time, a number of moderate Tamils were assassinated, and the Tamil leadership fell into the hands of increasingly extremist elements. By the time I left, of course, there was a civil war underway up in the northern part of the island where Tamils were the over-whelming majority. During part of the summer of 1983, the deaths of 13 soldiers in the north led to extensive anti-Tamil bloodletting all around the island, including in Colombo. We were under twenty-four-hour curfews for a time when I was Charge that summer, and the government found itself under great pressure. While Jayawardena, as

President, had been remarkably effective at doing a number of things that opened up the society for free enterprise, in his heart he was a Sinhalese nationalist and really didn't want to do much to address the Tamil minority's legitimate political grievances.

Sri Lanka, as you know, is a unitary state; its provinces are little more traditional geographic entities with no local power. Tamil strength is in the north and on the east coast, and Tamils were demanding an opportunity to have more local influence on taxation and spending in the Tamil majority areas. They were also asking for more respect for their distinctive language and culture. Back in 1956, all education in the country from the first grade on had been divided into two language systems, one for Tamil-speakers and one for Sinhalese speakers. This was the act of the Sinhalese Prime Minister at the time (and the father of the current president of Sri Lanka). So these two tracks had taken the population that previously had gone to school together and separated it by language (and thus culture). So that by the time this civil war started, no Tamils under the age of 40 had ever gone to school with Sinhalese students and vice versa, and few Lankans had friends of the other community. The society had divided, in some ways retribution by the Sinhalese for the widespread notion that Tamils had been favored by the British prior to 1948 when the British departed. Whether this was true or not, I'm not certain. It may have been the case that the Tamils were harder working or better educated in some urban areas, but whatever it was, the majority of the Sinhalese were determined that once they got independence, it was going to be their country, and with 80 percent of the population, they had certainly all the means - and the votes - to make sure that was the case.

Q: Were we doing anything, I mean, you know, a normal embassy just sits there and observes and reports. Did we get involved in this at all?

HAGERTY: Of course, we observed and reported, but when given an opportunity we would express sadness that the latest negotiation hadn't worked out. We wished them well, and we also kept our lines open to the moderate Tamils, with whom I sought to remain in contact. But, basically, we did just that and not much else. And, once the insurrection began to take shape, Washington's interest was limited to keeping a watching brief, with concern about the possibility of foreign intervention or exploitation.

One thing you should remember is that historically a lot of the northern Tamil leaders had been influenced by the presence, the Christian missionaries, mainly American Baptists. During the British days, when American missionaries came to old Ceylon, the British sent them to the north. The result was a strong American Baptist influence from the 1870s on to the north of Sri Lanka. The Federal Party, which was the original Tamil party in the early part of the 20th century, was a party that urged a federalist structure on the island in part because its leaders had learned from Baptist teachers about American history and the way in which the American federal system protected the rights of people in distinctive areas. While we were actively in support of the Tamils, we recognized that history and did not want to appear to be their advocates. Many Sinhalese were aware of that history of the American private involvement in the north, and so that was a constraint. I don't think we would have done anything very active anyway, but it was a constraint.

Q: What were American interests there at that time?

HAGERTY: We encouraged the Sri Lankans in the commitment to the private sector and in their economic development. We had the largest per capita aid program in Asia going in Sri Lanka. We were contributing to this free market economy in many ways. We were also involved in assistance to secondary irrigation projects, which were intended to bring to fruition the primary irrigation and dam projects that the Sri Lankans and Europeans had invested in. We had some interest in naval access to the port of Colombo for ship visits. Remember, also Trincomalee on the east coast had been a huge British naval base during WWII. Lots of Sri Lankans and other South Asians assumed our interest in Sri Lanka was in the possibility to the port Trincomalee, which was in total ruin by the 1980s. There wasn't anything except a very large natural harbor. To make it a base again would have involved the same kind of investment that we put into Vietnam or in other places around the world. We didn't have that kind of interest. At the time, you know, we had a less active naval interest in this Indian Ocean at the time than we had a decade before.

Q: Because of what was happening.

HAGERTY: Well, partly because we had developed and had access to the British facility at Diego Garcia. We had earlier beefed up the number of ships that we normally keep in the Indian Ocean because there was a Soviet naval squadron in the Indian Ocean with access to Aden and an anchorage at Socotra. We occasionally had US warship visit, and once, while I was in Colombo, we had visit to Colombo by an aircraft carrier, with several one or two escorting ships. So port visits were an important part of our naval interest. But basically, we wanted a moderate, friendly government there that was looking free enterprise our way, and in a third world setting; we wanted them to succeed.

Q: How about what was Sri Lankan ties to India? Were they good, bad, indifferent?

HAGERTY: Suspicious. You could compare Sri Lanka and India in some ways to Canada and the United States or Mexico and the United States. Canada is a better illustration, but the Canadians might be offended by that. But Sri Lankans and Indians are the same kind of people. The Sinhalese are said to have come into what is now Sri Lanka from somewhere in northern India, different schools of thought suggesting Bengal or possibly western India. There are linguistic commonalities. But some of that is because Buddhism came to Sri Lanka in the then-languages of northern India where the Gautama lived and preached (Pali or Prakrit, I can't recall which).

Then there were two very substantial Tamil migrations from just 14 miles across the strait in what is now Tamilnadu, a state of fifty million Tamils. One Tamil movement goes back deeply in history where the Hindu kings of the Tamils and the Buddhist kings of the Sinhalese were at war with each other for control of the island. And in the nineteenth century, the British imported a large number of Tamil workers for the tea estates. So, you had that additional movement. Overall, the Tamils make up about 18% of the population, but about one-third of which are these estate workers who are essentially outside the dispute. They are organized in unions and are not party to this civil war. The insurrection derives support from the larger part of the Tamil population, which lives in the Tamil majority areas in the north and along the east coast.

Q: During this '81 to '84 period, was the civil war going on at that time or was there unrest?

HAGERTY: As I left it was beginning to look like a civil war up north. The central government had lost control of the northern city of Jaffna and that whole peninsula up there, and they were beginning to lose control of other areas in the northeast. What you were dealing was a situation in which Sri Lanka was an insignificant military country. During my time, the Lankan army amounted to like 11,000 or 12,000 soldiers in the country the size of West Virginia and with a population just under 20 million. I remember that during a call I paid on the chief of the army when I arrived as DCM -- having just been involved in multi-million dollar arms negotiations with Pakistan -- I asked the Chief what was his main problem as army chief? He replied, "Bullets for training." I said, "Sir?" He said, "Yes. We have to import all of our rifle ammunition so we can only train our soldiers with seven bullets each during their basic training."

It was a minor league military operation by any account. They were not looking to us for any kind of military assistance, and we never offered any. They bought their systems out on the world market. But this all changed soon after. The army expanded as the fighting spread. The Indians came in, forced their way in, in an attempt to force a cease-fire after I had left, and for their troubles, they ended up with thousands of casualties of their own. They eventually withdrew acknowledging that they couldn't handle it. The Sri Lankans on both sides weren't awfully unhappy about that; they were perfectly happy to have the Indians get a bloody nose. But the war continued and the number of casualties continued to rise.

Q: Did you have much contact you or the ambassador in Tamil territory?

HAGERTY: Neither he nor I went up to the northern Tamil majority areas. I visited the east coast, the Trincomalee area, twice, I guess. I traveled up fairly far north, but I wouldn't have gone to Jaffna because I would have been a target for kidnapping. Toward the end of my time, when the fighting really began to be severe, the Lankans encouraged the Israelis to provide some assistance to them. The Israelis have a variety of skills they can offer apart from military skills, including on-farm water management and irrigation and so forth. The Israelis did establish a diplomatic presence finally in Colombo but only with the U.S. as their agent. That is to say, the Israeli diplomat in town who represented the Israeli government was legally and officially part of the Israeli Affairs Office of the American Embassy. The Sri Lankans shied away from direct relations with Israel so as not to offend the Arabs, who were a major market for Ceylon tea. Once the Tamils got the wind that maybe this meant that we were supporting the government against them or might support the government, then we began to get bomb threats of our own. I spent the last year that I was there with a bodyguard, and so did the Ambassador. Two weeks prior to my departure in 1984, I think, we had three bomb threats at the Embassy. In fact, we were building a new embassy to replace the former residential building we had long used. I was Charge that summer, and when the new embassy was ready, I sought and received Washington's approval to move into it, since its security was tighter. We postponed a formal opening until the Ambassador got back. I left the day after he returned, and he had his formal opening ceremony the day after that.

Q: Well, in a way despite this thing having come from Pakistan, it was essentially a backwater, wasn't it? It can be very pleasant though.

HAGERTY: It is very pleasant tropical island, but from excellent from professional point of view, you know, it was good to be moving up from being political counselor to being DCM. Sure, if I'd gone to DCM of a post the size of Pakistan, that would have been a bigger job. These are the days when we had Class one (e.g., London, Paris, etc.) down through Class two and Class three to Class four posts, and I recollect that Colombo was Class three. We had a USAID mission of over 50 people, and it was a managerial challenge. But it was not on the front burner on the way that Islamabad had been in regard to the Afghan situation.

But as you know, if you worked with South Asia over the years, you were pretty accustomed to not being on anybody's front burner in Washington anyway, because South Asia doesn't normally get a lot of attention in Washington and hasn't for all of the years that I've been involved with it -- except when there is a crisis going like the Afghan crisis to focus attention or during the Dulles days when we were recruiting alliances around the world and establishing a cordon of alliances around the Soviet Union.

Q: Was Sri Lanka doing anything with the Chinese at that point?

HAGERTY: They had a good commercial relationship with the Chinese. The "rice-for-rubber-agreements" of the 1950's and 1960's that caused lots of problems for the US Congress were still in existence. A huge amount of the cotton that went into the mills near the Colombo airport that produce shirts and garments for the Western market was coming from China in return for rice for Sri Lanka. So, yes, they had a good commercial relationship, and politically, they were friends, but I had virtually nothing to do with the Chinese there. By the way, I was also accredited to the Republic of the Maldives while in Colombo.

Q: What was going on there?

HAGERTY: Not very much. I would visit Male, the capital, once every three months for a long weekend. After a one-hour flight on a Thursday, I would pay calls on government figures and then enjoy the Islamic Friday on one of their resort islands. They worked half a day on Saturday so that meant I pay another call or two on Saturday or Sunday (a normal work day for them) before returning to Colombo on Monday. The Ambassador would over a month later and do it, and followed by our political officer the next month. So, I was there about every three months, not counting longer leave time there. It's about 400 miles to the west of Sri Lanka, and a very quiet and interesting place to visit. We had an interest in making sure that the old British facilities that were there on the southern island of Gan did not fall prey to supporting the Russian naval presence in the Indian Ocean. But the old facility there, like Trincomalee in Lanka, had declined. Many of its former buildings had been converted into sort of an industrial park producing cotton goods for export under the generous 'developing world' quotas allowed the time. We were happy to keep it that way. Since Gan was about 500 miles from Diego Garcia. We once had success in getting a US Navy P-3 to land at Gan to check out the runway. They seemed little interested in doing it again.

Q: P-3 being a?

HAGERTY: A turboprop antisubmarine (ASW) maritime surveillance aircraft. It staged from Diego Garcia. We did have a continuing interest in insuring that that facility stayed out of hostile hands. The Maldivian government was a non-aligned and friendly, nominally democratic but actually autocratic in its structure. There had been a couple of coup attempts earlier, but it was a peaceful place without much going on and without much trade except for cotton exports to the West and fish exports to Japan. We had a Maldivian as our Consular Agent in Male but didn't have any particular issues with the government. We were just showing the flag.

HOWARD L. STEELE
Agricultural Research Training Institute, USAID
Colombo (1982-1984)

Dr. Howard L. Steele was born in Pennsylvania and graduated from both Washington and Lee University and Penn State University. Assignments abroad have included Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia, Honduras and Sri Lanka. Dr. Steele was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: You left Honduras in '82. Off to Sri Lanka.

STEELE: That was a change.

Q: You were in Sri Lanka from when to when?

STEELE: 1982 to 1984. That was frustrating. In Latin America, I spoke Portuguese, spoke Spanish, understood those languages very well. I think I understood the culture pretty well, too, after a number of years there. Sri Lanka was a different ballgame completely. Why? Because the Bandaranaiques, first the husband and after he was assassinated his wife, moved Sri Lanka into the Soviet orbit and refused to allow even English to be taught in the schools. So I was assigned to work in the ministry of agriculture in a group called ARTI, the Agricultural Research and Training Institute, a separate part of the ministry. I had these young officers, some of whom were Tamils, some of whom were Sinhalese, getting along well together, having gone to the little agricultural college up at Kandy, very bright. English was just a language they had only recently learned at college. As soon as something sensitive came up or something that was a little controversial, they would revert to their native language, Tamil or Sinhalese, and I didn't speak either of them. So, not only did I not know what was going on, I wasn't even able to pick up any nuances, as I would have in Central or South America. But still it worked alright because they were such good young people. They were in their 20s, some in their early 30s. They wanted to learn, wanted to change things.

Q: If Sri Lanka had such an orientation towards the socialist world, why did they allow somebody like you to work there?

STEELE: Because they threw the Bandaranaiques out and went democratic and moved to the West, moved it out of the Soviet orbit. The Soviet orbit died in 1989. It was in deep difficulty at the time. Jayawardene was the president who moved the country to democracy and toward the west. The Chinese also had an influence there that tried to move Sri Lanka away from the Soviet influence. There was competition between them. The Chinese built a beautiful auditorium for them there in Colombo. But I think behind all of this, I was impressed with one thing. You think that the British Empire is dead. No, it's not dead. It's just behind natives. The British still controlled the banks in Sri Lanka. They controlled the tea companies. They controlled a lot of the industry. But yes, they have Sri Lankans that are in the presidency and in management, but I believe that the boards of directors and the money is still tightly controlled by the former colonials. That had an influence.

Q: What were you doing?

STEELE: I was brought out again by the AID mission there to try to help the ministry of agriculture through this Agricultural Research and Training Institute, set up a system of grades and standards and begin to report market prices and price movements and inventories and movements of goods from the interior markets into the central market and then back out to other centers of population. That was interesting because they had no system of grades and standards. I don't know why the British had not set up a system of grades and standards for local produce, and a market news system - usually where the British were there were things like this historically, but not in Sri Lanka. So, I took a group of them down to the main rice market in downtown Colombo one day after I'd been there for some time and figured it was time to do this now. Samba rice is the commodity of preference in Sri Lanka. They have one of the largest per capita consumptions of rice in the world. They had this big Mahaveli development project, a big dam, a big irrigation scheme, that we were helping support. And so everybody was excited because they were going to have irrigation. Instead of consuming 100 kilograms of samba rice a year per capita, they'd be able to consume 105. I said, "What a boring diet. What about fruits and vegetables?" I got their attention. I said, "That's just my bias, of course, but I think you ought to try and diversify. More animal protein, more fresh fruits and vegetables, maybe not consume a lot less rice but not go thinking you're going to increase the per capita consumption of that product." So, we went down to the central market and I said, "Show me the best samba rice here." They looked around and went over and picked out one merchant's rice. I said, "That looks very nice. How do you know that's the best?" "Well, we just know." "What is that, samba number one? Samba A+? Samba 101? What is that?" So, we started working on grades and scientific standards for grading products that are acceptable by both middlemen, producers and consumers so you can begin to report prices and you don't have to really examine every unit before you buy." That was a novel concept to them. In 2 years, I didn't get it fully established. I brought an agricultural marketing specialist out from the U.S., and we did get them to report high quality, average quality, low quality standards and prices. But by the time we left, they did not yet have the objective criteria like how many broken grains, the size of the grains, the amount of chaff, the amount of moisture in a given volume of product, and so on. They didn't have those technical coefficients developed yet. But they were working on them.

We had proposed - Charlie Porter was the man I brought from the Ag Marketing Service, who was an expert extension marketing specialist in Maryland and Pennsylvania - we got them a nice

little computer for the Ag Research and Training Institute and they were going to use it for research during the day and we were going to have these reports come in at night and we'd have people put the data in the computer, crank it out, and go to the television station and radio stations the next morning to report the prices. Not. The woman who controlled the statistics center, that was her computer and she locked it up with 2 padlocks every night when she went home. We couldn't use it. It was so frustrating. Typical old time development country philosophy. In fact, the system was finally implemented when she retired. She was very powerful.

Q: People get into these positions... Were you getting any reflection of the system in India?

STEELE: I bought my automobile when I arrived there from the wife of the political officer of the embassy who was asked to leave Sri Lanka within 24 hours by the Sri Lanka government. At the time I arrived, he was the only person in either AID or the embassy who spoke Tamil. That's incredible because 15% of the population were Tamil, a pretty large minority. He found out that they were really getting upset because up in the northern part of the island where they were in the majority, they couldn't have their own mayors, their own police force, their own school system, and so forth. He said at a social gathering, "The Sinhalese are going to have to do something about this. They're going to have to give some local suffrage to these people or they will be in serious trouble." They kicked him out of the country. I bought his car from his wife. Of course, in July of 1983 the civil disobediences broke out. That lasted longer years. There were 60 million Tamils right across the Palk Strait from Sri Lanka. What kind of enlightenment was that? The war's been going on. 60,000 people killed, I believe. And they're finally trying to have peace there.

Q: How was the food distribution system when you were there?

STEELE: There were a couple of supermarkets but most of it was the old British system. The British had built good highways because of the tea and coconut plantations and the necessity of getting coconut and tea to the main ports. So there were good highways except they weren't being maintained properly. So, if you had a big rain, which you had a lot of, you have potholes. You wouldn't know how deep they were. So you had to slow down at every pothole. That was a real problem.

Communications? They had a good communications system. They had radio, television, telephones. The telephones worked except sometimes in the monsoon season they would not work very well and you were out of telephones. But basically they were hanging on and trying to maintain the system that the British left. They weren't making a lot of innovations when I was there.

Q: Did they have an agricultural research station there?

STEELE: They did. They had good agricultural research up at their university and then they extended out to the country. But it was pretty much limited to rice production, tea, coconuts, the export commodities. Of course, they were keying up for this new great Mahaveli project which

was going to create irrigation. They were beginning to think in terms of, okay, diversification into other commodities.

Q: You left there when?

STEELE: 1984, and came back home.

VICTOR L. TOMSETH
Near East Affairs/South Asia, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka Affairs
Washington DC (1982-1984)

Victor L. Tomseth was born in Oregon in 1941. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in 1963 and his master's degree from the University of Michigan in 1966. After joining the Peace Corp and going to Nepal he joined the Foreign Service. During his career he had positions in Thailand, Iran, Sri Lanka, and was ambassador to Laos. Ambassador Tomseth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: Were we seeing India at this time as being a potentially aggressive power towards Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or exerting itself in the Indian Ocean or something of this nature?

TOMSETH: As an example of what India could do in that area, during the time I was on the desk and then subsequently when I was deputy chief of mission in our embassy in Colombo, the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka really came to the fore. There was no question that Tamil groups, rebel groups, were using Indian territory to prosecute the insurgency in northern Sri Lanka. The Indians tolerated that. I think they subsequently regretted it because it was one of these groups that blew up Rajiv Gandhi, Mrs. Gandhi's son, when he was prime minister a few years later. But the position of India in that issue made it extremely difficult not only for the Sri Lankans to deal with an insurgent issue on their territory in the way a sovereign nation might like to. I am not addressing the human rights concerns, obviously. But in terms of the ability of the government in Colombo to actually try to deal with this insurgent situation, it was very severely constricted simply by the presence of India and its attitude. It didn't have to invade Sri Lanka to exercise its power in that situation. Just by being there, it could do so. It also affected what other countries like the United States might be willing to do or could do in terms of dealing with that problem in Sri Lanka. And the Indians really weren't shy about throwing their weight around. One thing that Americans heard from Indians all the time and still hear, for that matter, is, "Look, you have your Monroe Doctrine. Why can't you let us have the Indian equivalent of it in this region? Why are you always complaining when we act in our neighborhood the way you've acted in your neighborhood for nearly two centuries?"

Q: Did we have any problem with Diego Garcia while you were there and our base there?

TOMSETH: The fact that the U.S. was going to utilize that facility had been well established by the time I came along. As much as the Indians had complained about it earlier, I think they had

come to accept its existence and U.S. use of it. But one of the issues while I was in Colombo from 1984-1986 that came up was how we got aircraft to and from Diego Garcia. Up to that period, all aircraft had flown in from points outside of South Asia itself from Singapore, Thailand, or Australia, wherever. One of the things that we, the United States, endeavored to do during that period was to demonstrate that we weren't going to be restricted to our use of other country facilities as points of transit into and out of Diego Garcia. During that time, we started using (not a lot) both the Maldives and Sri Lanka as a transit point for some of these flights into and out of Diego Garcia. The Indians weren't at all happy about it and were not at all shy in bringing pressure to bear on those governments to not let us use those facilities.

Q: Did we get involved at all in trying to moderate or do anything about the Tamil movement in Sri Lanka?

TOMSETH: We were fairly proactive in that. The first real serious outbreak of violence in Sri Lanka occurred in the summer of 1983 mid-way in my tenure on the desk. In one sense, there was a fair amount of sympathy to the Jayewardene government because it represented a rather striking departure from the kind of governments that Sri Lanka had had up to his election in 1977. The inclination in Washington was to try to be supportive of the Jayewardene government, including on this Tamil issue, particularly when it often manifested itself in acts of terrorism, but a constraint in that regard was that the government response to that often was not much better in terms of behavior than the Tamil groups themselves. Their military and police forces often behaved in a rather undisciplined fashion. But we, the U.S., were trying to do what we could to encourage some kind of dialogue with responsible Tamil political leaders and pushing on the government a bit to think in terms of some kind of structure through federalism or regionalism that would address a lot of the concerns that a lot of Tamils had, not just the radicals. But that was without a great deal of success. That certainly continued when I went to Colombo in 1984.

Q: Turning to Sri Lankan Affairs, during this 1982-1984 period, was the Tamil problem the major focus in U.S.-Sri Lankan relations?

TOMSETH: In 1982, when I arrived on the desk, no, I think not. But at that point, there hadn't been any serious outbreaks of violence yet. I suppose there were a couple of minor incidents. The real focus of U.S.-Sri Lankan relations at that point was, we had a fairly large AID program. One of the things Jayewardene had done when he came into office in 1977 was, he had a concept for developing the major river system in Sri Lanka for both electrical generation and irrigation. There was a lot of international money going into that Mahawehle scheme, including a lot of U.S. money. They had also made it much easier for foreign investors to come into Sri Lanka. They had set up a free trade zone out by the Colombo airport. So, there was a big push on the U.S. side to get U.S. investment in there with a number of companies doing that.

Q: Had the movement of American companies to do high labor, low cost - making shoes, tennis rackets, or what have you - begun by this time?

TOMSETH: Yes. Most of the firms that went into that initial free trade zone that was set up at Colombo Airport were just that sort of thing. They were labor intensive manufacturers for export, a lot of it garments. The U.S. was a major destination for much of this stuff, whether or

not it was a U.S. company making it, particularly garments. So, one of the issues that we had with Sri Lanka involved textile calls and negotiations on quotas.

Q: I would have thought that you would run up against somebody like Jesse Helms and others. The garment and fabric industry at one time was quite important in North Carolina. Did you find yourself up against political problems in various sectors of the United States and this type of thing?

TOMSETH: Actually, less North Carolina than South Carolina, I suppose, but, yes, that was constantly there. The domestic political pressure to create as many barriers to the import of these sorts of things (garments), particularly from these low labor cost countries that were going for it... The garment industry is very mobile. It doesn't take a lot of capital investment to set up operations somewhere. They tend to really be birds of passage. They will go into a country and exploit that until often the U.S., but not exclusively so, start slapping quotas on them, raising barriers to their exports, and at the same time, wage costs tend to rise over time in these countries and then they move on. I suppose one can debate whether that is good or bad. I can cite a number of countries that have used that as an initial stepping stone on the road to transforming their economy, so there are merits on both sides of it.

But the thing that struck me in these negotiations was that they tended to be dominated by U.S. domestic constituencies, whether that was labor unions or towns in the south that still had a garment industry or whatever. Often, the State Department found itself in a very lonely position trying to argue "Let's be reasonable about all of this in terms of the effect that it has on the bilateral relationship, what it does for economic development in the country, how much does it actually cost to protect that textile job in the United States?" I remember at one point when I was in Colombo reading a study that suggested that it cost over \$60,000 a year to save a job in the garment industry in the United States through import barriers and the other things that go into it. In the mid-1980, I doubt that there were very many garment workers in the south that were making \$60,000 a year.

Q: I doubt that. Who was our ambassador while you were doing this in Colombo?

TOMSETH: John Hathaway Reed, who had been governor in Maine and was very active in Republican politics. He had been appointed by Gerald Ford as ambassador to Sri Lanka with less than a year remaining in Ford's presidency. When Carter came in in 1976, John Hathaway Reed had to leave Colombo. Four years later when the Reagan administration came into office, someone asked Ambassador Reed, good Republican that he was, very hard worker for the Party, was there anything that he would like to do for his country? He said, in effect, "Yes, I'd like to finish my tour in Colombo." So, he was the ambassador in Sri Lanka when I arrived there in 1984. He stayed another year and then was replaced by Jim Spain, a career officer.

Q: How did you find Reed?

TOMSETH: I liked him a lot. He is a very decent person and very good at some things. He was very assiduous, as one would expect from a politician, I suppose, in following up on things. He answered all the mail I got. He would write personal letters to anybody who wrote to him. He

was very good about trying to master the Sri Lankan names, which are not always easy, and remembering people. He was good at that.

But he also understood what his limitations were, too. He knew that he didn't know a lot about South Asia and even foreign policy. He relied on his staff to help him out with that. So, as a political appointee, I would certainly rank him among the good ones that I have seen. He didn't have a lot of substance in terms of the U.S.-Sri Lankan relationship, but he knew where to get it. I think he deserves a lot of credit for that.

Q: Was he able to because of the political pressures in the United States (tariffs and that sort of thing) use his political know-how to understand how to play that in support of our policy?

TOMSETH: He tried to do what he could. The reality was, there wasn't a whole lot that he could do about that. These domestic constituencies are pretty powerful in that right.

Q: They know what they want and you can't sweet-talk them out of it.

TOMSETH: No.

Q: Did you find that Sri Lanka took up much of your time when you were on the desk?

TOMSETH: It was sort of interesting. Of the five countries that we had, Bhutan took almost no time. It is an independent country, but India actually looks after all of its defense business and handles its foreign relations in all but a couple of places. At that time, they had an ambassador in New Delhi and they had a permanent representative in New York and that was it. So, our bilateral diplomatic intercourse was limited to once a year when the foreign minister would come to New York and then make a side trip down to Washington. Usually, when he did that, Howie Schaffer, who was the deputy assistant secretary for South Asia during my tenure on the desk, and I and the desk officer who handled the Bhutanese account would have coffee or go to lunch with him and over the course of an hour or two discuss everything that needed to be discussed for U.S.-Bhutanese bilateral relations.

The Maldives was a little more active. We covered that out of Colombo. The ambassador in Colombo was also accredited to the Maldives. But before I came into the desk, there had gotten to be enough business that it had been decided to hire a Maldivian citizen as a consular agent in Mali. So, we had her there. There was also a nascent textile industry in the Maldives, so we had some textile negotiations with them. There, the fellow who had the Sri Lankan account in the office might on average spend two or three days a month doing Maldivian business as well.

Nepal, this was one of these countries that at one point we thought was more important than we thought it was in the 1980s. We probably think it's even less important in the 1990s than we did then. So, the woman who was the Nepal Desk officer often was at loose ends and we would put her to work on Indian issues. There was enough going on with Sri Lanka that that really kept the desk officer for Sri Lanka busy most of the time. Then we had a couple of people who handled Indian affairs full-time. So, the office really was dominated by Indian-related issues, as one

would expect, with Sri Lanka bringing up a distant but fairly active second and then the rest of them there, but not demanding much time.

Q: Did the confrontation between the Tamils and the Sinhalese that got really active during your mid-time in this 1982-1984 period put the embassy and the officer in charge of that into a state of crisis or emergency or did we just see it as something to keep an eye on?

TOMSETH: Well, in the summer of 1983 when they had very severe rioting in Colombo itself, yes, we did go into a crisis mode. We were fortunate in that we had a summer intern who we put in charge of fielding... There were a lot of phone calls coming in. Colombo and Sri Lanka had become a fairly popular tourist destination, much more for Europeans than Americans, but there were always some American tourists coming and going there. So, there were a lot of phone calls. There was not a big, but there is a Sri Lankan immigrant community in the United States which tends to be more Tamil than Sinhalese.

Q: They are down in Miami. There is a drug problem down there, isn't there, as far as being drug operators in a small way?

TOMSETH: I am not so much aware of a drug problem in Miami with Tamils, but it did become a very serious problem in Europe. A lot of refugees out of Sri Lanka wound up in Europe. What they would do is, there was an Aeroflot operation out of New Delhi. Lot, the Polish airline, was out of Colombo. They could get cheap tickets out of these flights. They would wind up in Moscow or Warsaw and then make their way to East Berlin, get on the subway, and show up in West Berlin. In fairly short order, one of the ways that these guys would finance that travel was, they would take along a load of drugs as well, so there was a big problem in Europe in that regard. But certainly in my time, that wasn't an issue so much in terms of the Sri Lankan Tamil community in the United States.

Q: Back to the crisis in 1983, you said you had an intern who could take the calls?

TOMSETH: Right. We gave him a desk and a telephone and said, "If we have concerned mothers and fathers or angry Tamils or whoever might be calling in, you field these things. If there is something you can't answer, call on the desk officer to field it." He was a great help to be able to do that.

Q: Did anything develop in Nepal there outside of the fact that you kept a benevolent eye on it?

TOMSETH: Not really. We had the King visit in February of 1985. That was the singular Nepalese during the two years that I was on the desk. There was a constant fight to get money for the AID program. I remember when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal in the early 1960s, the aid program was sort of \$25-30 million a year at that time, when \$25-30 million would actually buy something. By the early 1980s, when I was on the desk, that had slipped down to less than \$15 million a year and was each year being cut back a little bit more. So, each year that I was on the desk, we went through this anguished process of trying to keep the level of the AID program in Nepal respectable. But the reality was that this was a country that more and more

people in Washington were concluding really didn't matter too much in terms of U.S. policy interests, local or strategic.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

TOMSETH: Carl Coon most of the time I was on the desk. He was replaced by a political appointee, Lee Weil, just as I was leaving.

JOHN H. REED
Ambassador
Sri Lanka (1982-1985)

John H. Reed was born in Maine, and graduated from the University of Maine in 1942. He then served in the Navy for four years. Following World War II, Reed entered Maine state politics, eventually serving as governor for seven years. He was appointed Ambassador to Sri Lanka in 1976 and 1982. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: So you served from '82 to '85.

REED: Yes, I was confirmed in December, 1981 and got over there in January, 1982.

Q: Before you went over...you, of course, were an old hand by this time, but what sort of briefing did you get, and preparation?

REED: The thing that sticks out in my mind was a briefing about the ethnic problem. It was a much more prominent issue than in the first tour. I also went to the United Nations for a briefing. Overall it was excellent preparation for both me and my wife. But there was a big change when I got there. I could describe that.

Q: Yes, if you would.

REED: OK. It was as different as day and night, an absolutely incredible change. The Japanese, of course, had really arrived. There were brand new automobiles running around, new buildings going up, and a lot of construction. South Korea was also there, some of their contractors were there. Japan built a brand new 1000 bed hospital and gave it to the government. Banks were coming in. The Bank of America came in, City Bank came, and also American Express. The free trade zone was going strong, and some textile industries had started. So it was just different as day and night, absolutely booming at that time. They were developing the port, and they had a whole new young team in there and everything was coming up roses. It looked just great. Couldn't believe the big change.

Q: This is the new government?

REED: This is the new government.

Q: *Where did they come from, and who were they?*

REED: I left in July of '77, just when the election was coming up. Mrs. Bandaranaike was defeated and President Jayawardene of the United National Party was elected.

Q: *Could you spell his name?*

REED: J-a-y-a-w-a-r-d-e-n-e.

Q: *Just for the transcriber.*

REED: We all called him J.R., his first name is Junius, but he always went by the name of J.R. I think he was in his mid-70s, because he was in his 80s before I left. He is a fine gentleman, a tall man, had great energy, a very clean living man. He drank coconut juice every morning. The Prime Minister became the number two person, and the President was the one with the power, and that was President Jayawardene. When I got there, of course, they were all entrenched. They had a big majority in the parliament, and they had a group of young lieutenants who were coming on strong. One heading up the port, another heading up the great Mahaweli scheme which many countries came in and gave millions to develop this river, the Mahaweli Valley River to bring many more acres of land under cultivation. The British built a big dam. They wanted us to build a dam, but somehow our AID people felt, "well, let's do something to get the water off to the people." We didn't get much attention, because that wasn't as glamorous, or spectacular, as dedicating a huge dam. But we put a lot of money into it, giving the conduits taking the water down to the farmers. So things were booming and going along nicely.

Q: *Do we have a Peace Corps, or anything like that there?*

REED: We had no Peace Corps, when I arrived but they were invited in by President Jayawardene. He called me over and said he wanted to get the Peace Corps back to teach English. He felt that one of the real problems was if the young people wanted to go to a foreign country to study they had a great handicap, because they couldn't speak English. So that's what got the Peace Corps back after a 13 year absence. So we did bring them back, and it was also during this period I worked on renegotiating the agreement for the Voice of America radio station.

Q: *Was there pressure to get it out?*

REED: They were a little reluctant to go ahead. They really were because they were getting pressure from the left. So it went on and on, but maybe I'm jumping ahead of my story.

But, of course, after July of '83 they took a much more conciliatory view on that, and we finally did wrap it up and got the new agreement. They were a little wary about going into it because I'm sure the Soviets were opposing it. They wanted to maintain an even handed relationship with the super powers. Relations were not nearly as cordial with the Soviets the second tour as it was in

my first tour. The first tour was rather open and friendly. The second was rather reserved because of the relationship with our country at the time. In the early Reagan years it was pretty much of a stand off.

Q: Yes, this is the evil empire. Did you have a feeling as ambassador that the Ford administration was not as ideological as certainly the early Reagan years? Did you have a feeling that you were representing a different country in a way?

REED: Yes, I did. You didn't see nearly as much social activity. It was very strained and reserved.

Q: Were you under any pressure from the White House, or the State Department, to push things more? I mean, the American point of view, more than you had in your earlier tour.

REED: Yes, on a number of issues, considerably more demarches the second time, especially votes in the United Nations, and things of that nature. There was much more contact. Of course, I was there a lot longer. There were a lot more things, and more interest, we had a lot of cables from the Department asking to see the Foreign Minister particularly to get support on various issues such as the Puerto Rican situation.

Q: The Puerto Rican situation...

REED: Yes, statehood for Puerto Rico became a big issue. The average American wouldn't know what I was talking about. But it was a pretty potent issue.

Q: What were the political developments during the time you were there in the country?

REED: Well, one of the major ones was, their sensitivity in regard to any criticism of the government. I should bring this in because this erupted fairly early in my tour. We had a very fine, young, political officer who had some experience--the election was just coming up.

Q: This is Kenneth Monroe Scott.

REED: Yes.

Q: I saw some reference to it.

REED: Kenneth Scott is a fine young man. The election was coming up, and he would be talking with people, and trying to get some insight into the election. I recall one particular incident which took place at the American Center at a reception. Ken was talking to a close friend of the President and he said, "What about corruption?" Apparently this man told the President about it, and it became a big issue.

Q: It was normal political work...

REED: Yes, he was just trying to find out about these issues and it was interpreted as trying to exert influence. The Foreign Minister called me twice on the matter, and then it went on for months. Finally the President even mentioned it to me. They were determined, and we fought as hard as we could. Finally they forced the young fellow to leave and I think it was very unfortunate.

Q: *I think actually wasn't there a quid pro quo? I think Sri Lanka had to...*

REED: I think that's what happened, as I recall.

Q: *But you felt this was something blown up?*

REED: It was blown up way out of proportion.

Q: *Just for domestic reasons?*

REED: Well, it got a lot of coverage, that may have been part of it. I don't know, but it could have been because of thin-skinned people. I don't know how this was interpreted. Scott was a man who wanted to do his job, and felt he was just trying to be objective, and he was interpreted as interfering.

Q: *This must have had an inhibiting effect on all of you in doing your job.*

REED: Well, for a long time it really got to be a major issue, and I didn't think it would get to those proportions, but it did. And as I say, we were not happy about it whatsoever, we didn't feel it was justified, and we said that right to the end. But finally, in talking with the Department, we moved forward on a quid pro quo.

Q: *Did you find in general it was much more difficult to deal with various parties? I mean, was there more sensitivities so the embassy felt inhibited? Were political passions getting higher, or something like that?*

REED: They were getting higher, but we kept on doing our job. I didn't feel it inhibited us really in a sense, and with the election coming up, we were scrupulously careful to be neutral, and just get the facts, and keep in touch with the other elements.

Q: *The election was when?*

REED: Well, let's see--that election was shortly after I got there, it must have been '82. The President was reelected by quite a margin. However, the next big thing that came up was, suspending the parliamentary elections. And that caused a lot of problems. The President defended his position. It bothered many people and looked like a danger to the system. Suspending the parliamentary elections meant binding them in for another five years. The President took a lot of criticism on this position. I remember him telling me, "Even Abraham Lincoln did it." He felt very defensive. There was a great deal of unhappiness among some of the embassies.

Q: This was nothing particularly overt that caused this?

REED: No, I wouldn't say there was. But that caused a lot of unhappiness, why he would just suspend these elections, and bind these people in.

Q: How about the Tamil-Sinhalese?

REED: Yes, let me get into that. I was about ready to mention that. I made a visit in May of '82 to the north. Here again there was a dramatic change in the Tamil areas. There was an obvious change in the attitude of the Tamils. They were much more militant. I remember here again, as if it were yesterday, that we had a big event at a hotel and I met a lot of the leaders, and some of the younger leaders wanted to see me after the meeting. So I naturally stayed and talked with them, and you could see they were deadly serious about the concern, and for us to try to keep an even handed position as far as the issues that they were pushing for. They felt we should not try to interfere with it. They felt the Sinhalese were trying to hold them down. They said there was a large element in their population that was prepared to make radical changes. So you could see there was a tinder box in the north. As a matter of fact that was in May of '82, I never did get back up to Jaffna again.

Q: Was this too dangerous?

REED: Yes, it was considered too dangerous. In my first tour I was up there often. So I knew right then that this was a big issue, it was altogether different, it was real serious this time. It would never be referred to in a humorous way. The Tamil leadership there was more of a moderate type, they were in the parliament, and I met with all their leaders and they mentioned some of these things. They weren't nearly as militant as the younger people, but you could see they were very serious about it. And when the thing erupted they all resigned. I always felt that was a mistake. They were forced to take a loyalty oath, and this led to another problem. The President had started a program of improvement projects. I talked with an older Tamil who was heading up the program. I asked him, "How do you think this is going to work?" "Well," he said, "its got to work out." I remember, he was an older leader, a lawyer. He said, "If this doesn't work out, there's going to be a real problem. This thing is going to degenerate badly. We're going to watch it to see if they give us the money, and develop it, and improve the economy up here. We're going to watch it, and if it doesn't work out there's going to be an extreme change." In July things got worse, and there were the riots. You could see the change, in the eastern province also, but of course Jaffna is practically 100% Tamil. They are fine people up there. I come from a farming area and noted that they raise most of the potatoes in Jaffna. It was tragic to see what had developed in this beautiful country.

Q: You could see these things; obviously we were reporting...

REED: I reported all these things back to the Department.

Q: Was there anything we could do?

REED: There was very little we could do. At that point I don't know what we could have done to avert the problem. I don't know as there was too much we could have done. We didn't intervene at all, which I don't think we should have at that point.

Q: How about the Indian government? Did you have a feeling that they were beginning to fish in the troubled waters, or were they unhappy about it?

REED: Well, they took an almost ambivalent position because at that time obviously some Tamils were training. It was generally known India was being used as a training base.

Q: What happened during the riots as far as the American embassy and your work? What sparked these riots?

REED: Well, I arrived at post in January of '82, and I was there a year and a half and I was coming back to the States for R&R. I just arrived in Washington when the riots erupted. I received a call from my PAO. I said, "I am glad to hear from you." "Well," he said, "you won't be when I tell you what's going on." When he told me about the riots, I made plans to immediately go back. Mrs. Reed stayed here in Washington, and I went back at once. You could see the havoc that had been wrought. It's a long way from the airport into Colombo and you could see all the devastation, homes had been burned, and people had been killed. The American embassy was all right. There wasn't any particular problem at the embassy.

Q: There weren't sort of leftists stirring up the mob?

REED: No, not against ex-patriots, and I never did see any of that during the rest of the time. They were careful not to, because that would have hurt their cause.

Q: Who was rioting against whom?

REED: It appeared to be the extreme elements in the Sinhala community were destroying a lot of the Tamil homes, and killing people right on the street. Hundreds and hundreds of burned vehicles were all over the place, stores and factories were destroyed. It was generally blamed on some of the extreme elements in the Sinhalese community. The devastation was enormous...they just ravished Colombo, and created a permanent enmity for the foreseeable future between the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities. The Tamils are good business people and there were a lot of Tamils in the business community, so it put them in a difficult position. The damage was enormous. In those days we were still in the old embassy. That was unusual, I might mention as an aside, when I was there in '76 they were developing plans for the new embassy. Well, I looked them over, and they looked fine. I never dreamed I would come back, but I actually came back and dedicated the building in the fall of '84. The construction was underway when I arrived in 1982. Some of the embassy people did have trouble getting to their homes, but no one was injured.

Q: What did this mean to your mission?

REED: I should mention we had a lot of Tamils working in the embassy and, of course, they were severely frightened. Actually some were so threatened that some of the senior people were allowed to come to the States. Quite a few came from our embassy, and of course, we were besieged by Tamils wanting to get out, and the consular office was swamped. This was the big impact upon us. Of course, we also tightened up security. When we moved into the new embassy security was tightened up considerably, and there was always a threat then about where you could go, what you could do, etc.

One of the biggest incidents we had while I was there was the kidnaping of an American couple, in the Jaffna area working on one of the water projects. Fortunately we were able to secure their safe release.

Q: How did that play out?

REED: Well, it appeared that extreme Tamil elements had taken them into custody. In fact, I couldn't attend a chiefs of mission meeting in India that the Vice President attended. I didn't feel I should leave the country while this was going on. The pressure became very heavy, and in fact, Vice President Bush spoke to Mrs. Gandhi about it, and I think she exerted some influence. Finally they were released to a priest of the Catholic Church, in Jaffna. I think they were kidnapped for a week or ten days. I think the terrorist felt they made a mistake because it hurt their cause. It was a very tense time.

Q: What affect did this have on AID, Peace Corps, and this type of thing?

REED: Well, it inhibited doing anything in Jaffna. We finally had to shut that project down. It even slowed down a number of projects in the Mahaweli Valley because the terrorists would make raids and some people were killed. So it did impinge considerably and cause slowdowns on a number of other AID projects. We had just about reached our peak in doing things, you know, in the dollars expended. So from then on it was all downhill, I mean, things were phasing down. I don't think to this day that the water project was ever completed.

Q: Were the sort of central government urging you to go up to Jaffna?

REED: No, no.

Q: They were avoiding it too?

REED: Yes, they became embattled up there from time to time. They had an old Dutch fort and that was surrounded a number of times. They had to use helicopters to get supplies in to them. We did get a few Americans up under very guarded conditions, but they certainly weren't suggesting Americans go up. There were also problems in Vaunuia, we had to send some Americans up. There was a priest killed, and some suspected their soldiers did it. No conclusive evidence was found.

Q: Were there any attempts on our part, or on the insurgents part, to make contact with each other just to keep the dialogue open?

REED: You mean insurgents with the U.S. Government?

Q: *Yes.*

REED: No, no overtures at all. I don't recall any. Of course, the agency kept us well informed of these various elements. Of course, they had a number of competing groups during that time. The LTTE, the Tamil Tiger's group, and a number of others. Since I've left, the other leader has been killed and militants were pretty much the LTTE. They are still in the jungles and carrying on the civil war. There is a feeling they have got to learn to live with violence.

Q: *The Indians hadn't sent troops in while you were there.*

REED: No, that came much later. They sent a new Ambassador over there to help resolve the thing, but the troops finally came in.

Q: *Before this, did you feel there was any dispute within the Department of State, or White House instructions of how to treat this? Were they trying to blow this into a communist conspiracy by any chance? Or were we able to keep it as an ethnic thing, rather than a geopolitical thing?*

REED: I think we did. I think their government tried to portray it that communists were providing support for the militants. They wanted us to bring in a battleship as a show of support. They were naturally very concerned. The President was anxious to get some military support, but we advised him we could not do that. Caspar Weinberger was coming in for a refueling stop, and the President wanted to see him.

Q: *He was Secretary of Defense.*

REED: He was Secretary of Defense at the time, and we arranged for him to meet with the President. They used every possibility to get us to influence the situation, and to help them out.

Q: *We were being rather careful.*

REED: Yes. We were very careful, very even handed. They wanted to buy more arms, and munitions from us, so we just had to stay within our guidelines and regulations.

Q: *Did you have the feeling that the Soviets, or even the French or somebody, were trying to get some more influence on arms deals, or something like this?*

REED: Well, there was talk that the Yugoslavians were selling them arms. The Soviets, I think, felt they wanted to try to avoid looking like they were supporting the insurgents. They had to walk a fine line also.

Q: *So about the Vietnamese, were they playing any role?*

REED: They no longer had an embassy in Colombo and I'm not aware they were involved.

Q: So Sri Lanka was being neutral but avoiding the more militant types, the Vietnamese, the North Koreans?

REED: Yes. They were trying to have a neutral posture, and were open handed with everybody.

Q: Diego Garcia was really getting built up at this time.

REED: Yes, it was.

Q: ...under Carter, but it was continuing under Reagan. Did this cause unease?

REED: You'd hear talk about it from time to time, but it didn't erupt into a major problem. They knew we had to have a base over there, we had it and nothing they were going to say was going to change that. You'd see signs, graffiti, "Americans get out," and then references to Panama and Granada, the usual leftist propaganda on the walls.

Q: How about with the Maldives? Did anything happen during that period there?

REED: Well actually, it appeared they were beginning to phase down. I made a number of trips there, and talked with the President. They did not want to get in anyone's pocket and they assured us they were not going to let the Soviets get a foothold. There were a few Soviets living there and the government kept a close eye on them.

Q: How did you find your staff?

REED: Generally speaking they were excellent. I did have the opportunity to select my own DCM. I do think it's useful for an ambassador, especially a political type, or any ambassador for that matter, to have an input into the DCM selection process.

Q: I thought this was sort of standard.

REED: No, often times they are already on the scene.

Q: How about public affairs? Was there much problem of getting our word into the papers?

REED: No. All my PAOs were excellent people. I had three during my tours, they kept good relations with the people in the press. We got our stories across quite well.

Q: Did you have any problem on the narcotics thing? Because I recall later on at some point Sri Lanka became involved with Sri Lankans outside of Sri Lanka...became involved in the narcotics business.

REED: Yes, there was some of that going on. As a matter of fact we urged them to tighten up their drug laws. We had experts come over from the States to help them on this. I remember attending a big drug session. They did tighten up their laws while I was there.

Q: Was there any feeling that Sri Lanka was sort of a way station for narcotics stuff coming out of Thailand, or Burma?

REED: Well, there were allusions of that, but I don't think anyone felt it was a major transit point. I don't think it was that bad. There was some, of course, with tourists coming in and they arrested some on drug violations.

Q: During the Carter years, human rights all of a sudden became a major thing. Did you find this was a problem for you as the ambassador?

REED: Yes, it was an emerging problem, and there were many more contacts from the Department on human rights. They became very sensitive on it, especially on the human rights report.

Q: How did you handle this? I mean, this is always a very tricky thing. Most ambassadors would almost wish the thing would go away because it doesn't help their work particularly.

REED: No, it doesn't. They had a veteran Foreign Secretary and I would sit down and we'd talk about it. We generally got along all right. We did spend considerably more time on it during my second tour.

Q: Were there any problems as you saw it, on the human rights side?

REED: Yes, after the riots we felt there were some, and we kept pointing them out to the government. We did what we could to urge them to be careful. They felt their backs were to the wall, and they became very defensive on these matters.

Q: Speaking of the fighting, obviously when you've got an insurrection like this the military takes a greater role. How were our relations through our attaché and yourself with the Sri Lanka military? And how did we view this? Was this a professional military a la the Indian military, or was this getting more political a la the Pakistani military?

REED: Yes, that's a good question. We generally felt they were pretty much a parade ground army. They were not a very effective fighting force at that time. Hopefully they have improved considerably since then. But we felt they had a definite problem as far as that was concerned.

Q: How about China? Did China play any role in the area?

REED: I'll refer back to 1976. China had given to the country a great conference hall, the Bandaranaike Memorial Conference Hall. Sri Lanka felt very close to China, and the feeling was mutual. The two countries had a rice and rubber pact. A lot of rice came from China, and Sri

Lanka gave them rubber in return. So there was a very close relationship. By the time I got back the second time, we had relations with China.

Q: *So we weren't looking on the Chinese as meddling particularly?*

REED: No, not particularly.

Q: *The Chinese did not have a community as they did in Indonesia and other places?*

REED: No, it was very small.

Q: *Not a merchant community?*

REED: Yes, a small merchant community. It wasn't a major factor at all.

Q: *How did you find the Department? Did you find much attention to Sri Lanka? Or did you feel that as long as you didn't get assassinated, or your embassy surrounded or something, that was what they wanted?*

REED: Yes, I think as long as everything was going all right we weren't on the front burner. We had good response from the Department when we needed it. Overall we had excellent relations with the Department.

Q: *As every administration...particularly one that has sort of an ideological center--I mean we went through it with Carter, and we went through it with the Reagan administration, they start from one position and then some events come along and eventually they usually end up at about the same place. Did you have the feeling that the Reagan policy as regards that area was changing at all? Or were they getting a little more relaxed about the "Soviet menace" or something like that there?*

REED: Oh, I think they were always pretty wary. During the time I was there it really didn't change too much, it was pretty much hands off.

Q: *It really came a little later.*

REED: It came later. In fact I thought they were even more hands off than in my first tour. They only wanted junior officers to attend events. I think that was a mistake.

Q: *Oh, that's a terrible mistake.*

REED: Yes. I believe in keeping the lines of communication open.

Q: *This sounds like a very petty type stuff. We're talking about, for the record, that when several of the Soviet leaders--Andropov and Chernenko and Brezhnev, when they died within about a year of each other...*

REED: Yes, I would go immediately to sign the condolence book, otherwise I probably would be instructed not to go.

Q: *...this is going over to sign the condolence book, which everyone does. It's common politeness.*

REED: Of course, diplomatic courtesy.

Q: *And there's no point in the gratuitous, the snubbing.*

REED: That's right, and I felt the same way about their functions. I couldn't see sending a junior officer. The Soviet ambassador came to a couple of my things even then which I thought was good. On the other hand, I couldn't go to his events. It was very petty.

Q: *These things are petty, and often it's done at a relatively low level within our own government.*

REED: Probably so. I think it's shortsightedness. I couldn't see anything to be gained whatsoever, and I think it was a mistake. I felt embarrassed frankly that I couldn't go to some functions they had. I just thought it was a mistake.

Q: *Was there anything else that we haven't covered?*

REED: I thought of something but it slipped my mind again, I'm trying to remember what it was.

Q: *We were talking about the Peace Corps was still going.*

REED: Yes, but of course once the riots started, we were very concerned about the safety of the Peace Corps volunteers. In fact we brought some of them back to Colombo for a time, and I think that has been an ongoing problem because it's pretty dangerous out in the countryside. But the program itself was going strong.

Oh, I know what I was going to mention. That is, it was very interesting that they were looking for help wherever they could get it, and they wanted to make some contact with the Israelis. It got in the press and the leftists were really complaining. The government did want to get some contact with the Israelis. So we had to interface with them, and finally they did get an Interest Section. The President wanted it, he felt there was some benefit. It was an interesting development.

Q: *What were they after from the Israelis?*

REED: Well, I think they felt there was some intelligence they could get as far as developing their skills in fighting the insurgents. That was it. And yet they got assailed in the press, and the leftists were all over them. But they moved forward, and the Department wanted us to cooperate, so we did. But that was an interesting aspect, I thought.

Q: Was there any pressure on us to send out our counter- insurgency specialists?

REED: Well, they wanted any help they could get, but naturally we had to be very careful.

Q: Were you under strict instructions not to?

REED: Oh, absolutely. Our government felt it wasn't appropriate. It got to the point that they wanted anything you could give them. I felt sympathetic for them, but we could not get involved. It was sad to see the problems emerge in the Sinhala and the Tamil communities. They are both fine people.

Q: You left in what?

REED: I left in September of 1985.

Q: And at that time where did you see Sri Lanka going?

REED: Well, it looked like they were going through a long period of instability as far as maintaining law and order was concerned. You almost wondered if they could ever really get it back to where it was. And another thing I'll always remember, after I came back from home leave in 1983 I saw the President and said, "Mr. President, you were moving to try to correct the situation." I'll always remember, he said, "But I didn't move fast enough," these are his words. I think they might have been able to stem the tide if they'd done more to try to assimilate the Tamils into the mainstream. Maybe I'm wrong, but I always remember him saying that. He didn't do enough, and move fast and forceful enough to show they wanted the Tamils to be equal citizens. So there was a turning point in history. If they had been able to have done that, things may have worked out.

Q: This is all over pledge allegiance to...

REED: Yes, the government demanded a pledge allegiance to the country and here were these Tamil parliamentarians put in an impossible situation. Thirteen of them resigned so the Tamils had no representation in the government. And these people were pretty reasonable, and they might have been able to work something. So there was no one in there to represent the Tamil viewpoint. There were some fine Tamil lawyers and students who tried to help and with whom I always kept in touch. However, there just wasn't enough give and take and it was too late. Maybe I'm wrong, but I always felt if they'd moved early enough they might have stemmed the tide and changed the course of history. But it was tragic and it's still going on.

NANCY E. JOHNSON
Political/Labor Officer
Colombo (1983-1985)

Ms. Johnson was born in Washington, DC and was raised in Germany and the Washington, DC area. She was educated at Oberlin College and attended several colleges and Universities in the United Kingdom. After returning to the U.S. Ms. Johnson joined the State Department as a contract employee and later joined the Foreign Service, serving as Political Officer in Colombo, London, Algiers and Baghdad. Her Washington assignments were primarily in the Near East, South Asia bureau. Ms. Johnson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: Like the famous one of somebody learning English and was learning, "Zounds! My posterior has been struck by lightning."

JOHNSON: Exactly! That kind of thing. I went to Sri Lanka in January of '83.

Q: You were in Sri Lanka from when to when?

JOHNSON: January of '83 to June of '85. Six months after I arrived that which hits the fan, hit the fan. There was serious rioting between Tamils and Sinhalese. At the time an English friend was visiting. Things were pretty ugly. I was at the office and she was walking down the street where I lived and someone stopped her and said, "Where are you going? There is trouble up ahead. You better go back and go home." She went back to the house. We were not in any danger, but could smell smoke from fires. In various parts of the town people were rioting and people were killed.

Q: Let's talk about when you got there in '83. Who was the ambassador and what was the situation?

JOHNSON: The ambassador was John Hathaway Reed, who had been governor of Maine.

Q: He'd been there twice, hadn't he?

JOHNSON: No, there were two John Reeds. John Verner Reed was Ambassador in Morocco. John Hathaway Reed was a very amiable, very nice fellow. The situation was tense, but nothing on the surface.

Q: Up to that point, had there been much in the way of riots and that sort of thing?

JOHNSON: Not in recent years. I think communal tension was a persistent problem and it had really got started by Mr. Bandaranaike when he brought in the Sinhala only legislation that made Sinhala the official language of the country. Until that point, English had been the lingua franca and everybody spoke English so it didn't matter if you were Sinhalese or Tamil or whatever because you all used English to talk with one another. The Sinhala only policy created segregation. I can remember at the time in '83 someone telling me, "I ran into a man I'd been to school with and had not seen since because he was Sinhalese, I am Tamil. We were in different worlds." It got me thinking long term about this whole issue of using multiple languages in a society. How difficult and divisive that can be.

Q: What was your job?

JOHNSON: I was the junior political officer and the labor reporting officer. The DCM was an old NEA hand, South Asia hand called Herb Haggerty. In order to give me some responsibility, he said, "You are now the Maldives officer. Be it ever so humble, it is yours." I got to go three times a year out to the Maldives. We had at that time a consular agent, a woman called Rashida Didi, a wonderful woman. I would go and stay on Male, the capital, and Rashida would set up appointments for me and introduce me to people. I would talk with her about people and events. Every time I went, we had a tea party and invited ten women. We sat in the hotel garden and they talked. They were all friends, had all known each other for years. Most of them had studied in Australia or elsewhere. They gave me a real sense of what it was like to be an educated woman in the Maldives, to live there and the kinds of things they did. I'll never forget the first time, I was standing on the steps with Rashida saying goodbye. It's a wonderful place, but it's hot. It is right on the equator and I got very tan. We were standing there, side by side and someone said, "Look, your arms are the same color." That really struck them that Caucasians could get dark.

Q: What was the situation on Maldives?

JOHNSON: Gayoom was President. It was quite quiet. We were trying to show interest. I went the first time because the U.S. Navy had sent in a couple of ships on a visit and I got to brief the ships about what they were dealing with. It is a Muslim country and it's very conservative. I had to say things like, "Don't pee off the dock," and "Girls are going to be hard to come by and drink is going to be hard to come by, so forget about that. But if you want to swim and play volleyball and relax and do something really different, then this is your place. So enjoy it because these are little paradises these islands." The visit turned out to be a great success. I called on various people in the government and on my diplomatic colleagues. The Indian of course was typically Indian and very aggressive about our ships visiting. When I pointed out that Indian ships had visited the week before, he backed off right away. The first visit I stayed on the island closest to Male called Villingili, a boat ride from Male. Later I always stayed on Male and that made me unusual because most people didn't. I was there once when Yasser Arafat came to visit. Every foreigner was asked to leave Male except me. They didn't tell me why, but just asked me to move to a different hotel and stay out of sight. Later I learned Arafat visited. I guess they let me stay on Male because they knew that I was a friend. I have photographs of 'Welcome to Arafat' posters from that time in Male.

Q: Did we have any interest in the Maldives as a place to put ships?

JOHNSON: Not to put ships in. It was not the sailors' favorite kind of port because there weren't women available or alcoholic beverages. It was, however, a nice place for a break. I think we used it a few times.

Q: Also, I would think in a place like that you would sort of want the Navy to come in a take a look around because one can't help but feel a typhoon or a tsunami or some sort of disaster might hit and you'd have to bring a ship in.

JOHNSON: Global warming means the Maldives will probably disappear. I think it is the country with the lowest high point in the world. Like six feet. I don't know how often the Navy uses it. I suppose if you are making the trek from Diego Garcia to Singapore or somewhere you could stop there. They usually prefer a bigger place, such as Madras or . . .

Q: Was the Bandaranaike /Sinhalese situation still intact?

JOHNSON: Well, the Bandaranaike's were no longer in power. The President was a man called J.R. Jayewardene, a very pleasant fellow. I can't remember what prompted the troubles that began in June/July of '83, but they were very ugly. They have not stopped since. It was the forerunner of all the troubles that still go on. They were burning parts of town. Embassy people were sheltering the families of their Tamil cooks. People came into the Embassy off the street to talk with me about what was going on. One man had just seen soldiers killing someone and was just appalled. He had been in the Sri Lankan army. He was Tamil. Sri Lanka has been a one issue country ever since. But it is also paradise. It is a perfectly beautiful island. Wonderful ruins of ancient pagodas and other antiquities. My houseboy planted a papaya seed in the garden and six months later I was eating papayas. It was a lovely place to begin because like any small embassy, you got in on all kinds of things. There was an NEA Chiefs of Mission Conference and I got to be Assistant Secretary Dick Murphy's note taker. That was the first time I had ever been on television and it became very useful. I spent a lot of time with Dick Murphy taking notes during his calls. He has a very quiet voice and so does President Jayewardene. I said to Murphy afterwards, "Sir, there were bits in that conversation I didn't get because I couldn't hear because there was somebody was using a chain saw outside." And he said, "It's happened to me too. Just wing it." It was a very pleasant place. I was the junior political officer and a woman called Karen Stewart was the junior econ officer. Although younger than I, she had more Foreign Service experience. There was a group of 12 single women, secretaries, communicators, Karen and others. We did things as a big group or in smaller groups. We would take trips around the island as a group. It was very nice to have that company.

Q: Did the United States have any particular interest in the area, in the country?

JOHNSON: In the country itself, I can't remember. I don't think so. We wanted it to be peaceful and not fighting with India. It was a friendly country, benign. Don Toussaint had been the ambassador there before Reed and was held in high regard. It would have been very awkward if Sri Lanka had been anti-U.S. I think.

Q: The _____ is basically designed to beat up on the United States.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. And the Sri Lankans at this stage weren't hostile in that sense. I was looking at it on the map. It has the most wonderful sea coasts and parks. I saw leopards and all kinds of things. It was there I learned that in the Foreign Service you work Saturdays, Saturday morning anyway. You appear when invited to something at the Ambassador's residence five minutes before the event begins and work the occasion. In big events you become either a pusher or a puller, that is, help move people along. I remember going to the Reeds' house, early as usual, and finding them sitting there silently waiting for somebody to come. They were a very nice couple.

Q: Did you have any problem dealing with the Sri Lankans? Were you able to do your business easily?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, very easily and with all kinds of people. When Don Toussaint was Ambassador, his wife who had been British, knew well Lalith Athulathmudali who was the Defense Minister. He had been the first non-Brit to be president of the Oxford Union Society and he was a very keen Oxonian. I thought it would be very sensible to put me next to him somewhere just because it would have been a really good contact. John Reed didn't want anybody to have contacts with ministers except him. When I finally met Lalith, he said, "Where the hell have they been keeping you?" He had breakfast once a week with a cousin who worked in the cultural section of the Embassy. She would have been happy to invite me to join them for breakfast occasionally. That would have been the way in to have a really interesting tie you wouldn't normally get. My not being able to meet Lalith was one of my first realizations that the Foreign Service could be a stodgy outfit and I had to obey orders. I mean I could not go behind the ambassador's back.

Q: Course not.

JOHNSON: And it's really too bad, a missed opportunity.

Q: I know he recently died, _____, went to Oxford in the thirties and was a classmate of Ted Heath's and Harold Wilson and he played that for years very professionally as a minister in London.

JOHNSON: Lalith was eventually assassinated, but he was a good friend of Don Toussaint's wife. The double connection—personal and Oxford-- would have given us lots to talk about. Had I been ambassador, I would have put me there right away and said, "Get moving and don't come back until you have breakfast with him once a week." But it wasn't for me to decide. Years later after I left, one of those teams went out to Colombo to conduct an emergency drill. I can't remember what we called them. They pretended there was some big crisis and, they told me later gleefully, Ambassador Reed was sent off to the Foreign Ministry and left there. The Embassy just carried on. Not physically, but the Embassy just played the game without him and functioned very well, thank you very much. They forgot about him.

Q: Who was DCM?

JOHNSON: It was Herb Haggerty, a real pro. There was a minister who had an autistic child. USIS sent Colombo a film about autism. Herb had invited the minister over to see that film privately and he got into trouble with Reed for doing that. The film was only going to be available for a week and the Ambassador was on leave at the time, so Herb met with the Minister. Sri Lanka was fun because I got to travel all over the island. There were problems in the North with the Tamil Tigers, so I never got up to the far north. But I did get over to the east coast and to the south. A lot of friends came and stayed with me and we toured around.

Q: Did you get any feel for the role of India during the time you were there?

JOHNSON: Yes. India was the nine hundred pound gorilla in the room. I should say I started to learn Sinhala. I was one of the few people at the embassy actually doing it. I learned to read and write it because I had made a promise to myself that wherever I went, I would learn the language. I am not a linguist, but I would work at it. Eventually, within a couple of years, India had sent in troops. India was always playing with Sri Lanka and always there.

Q: I would assume that at this time our relations with the Indian Embassy were correct, but not very close.

JOHNSON: I really can't remember. I think probably that would be accurate.

Q: It would strike me, this was not a time of great friendship between the United States and India.

JOHNSON: I get confused with later posts. I wasn't as much on the circuit there as I was later in other places. Because I had a boss, my boss would be the one to go to national day receptions and other formal events. Occasionally I got to go to Parliament. But I got to meet a lot of people and they were always very charming and kind and what have you.

Q: You left Sri Lanka in '85. At that time, whither the Sri Lankans from your point of view?

JOHNSON: It hasn't changed. It was foundering in a sense. The domestic problems continued. They continue to this day. It's funny, Mrs. Bandaranaike's daughter was very critical of the United States. I invited her and her husband to lunch one day and suggested that they should visit the US. I got USIS IV grants for them to come to this country and spend a month. I said to her, "Look. You are very critical of the United States. You have never been. You don't know what you are talking about. So I think you should go. Learn what you are talking about. Then you can criticize us. It's fine to criticize us, but at least go." In the end, they didn't come. It's really a pity. She is the President of Sri Lanka now, Mrs. Kumaratunga. It's too bad. It's a country that has been shooting itself in the foot. It's really too bad because they were on the edge of doing quite well, they had a duty free zone and were producing clothes and other goods that we have been buying for years and years.

Q: That is sad.

JOHNSON: It is sad because it's a beautiful place. A lot of Europeans would love to have gone there as tourists.

VICTOR L. TOMSETH
Deputy Chief of Mission
Colombo (1984-1986)

Victor L. Tomseth was born in Oregon in 1941. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in 1963 and his master's degree from the University of Michigan in 1966. After joining the Peace Corp and going to Nepal he joined the Foreign Service. During his career he had positions in Thailand, Iran, Sri Lanka, and was ambassador to Laos. Ambassador Tomseth was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: It was a natural for you to go as DCM to Sri Lanka, wasn't it, at that point?

TOMSETH: Yes. Certainly in the time that I spent on the desk, it was a job that very much appealed to me. I am not too shy to admit that I certainly lobbied for it.

Q: Fair enough. You did this from 1984 to when?

TOMSETH: To 1986.

Q: Jim Spain was...

TOMSETH: John Reed left in September of 1985. Jim was held hostage by Jesse Helms for a couple of months through no real fault of his own, but he happened to go through the confirmation hearing at the same time Winston Lord did with China. Helms held Lord up for a little bit. So, he didn't get there until about November of 1985.

Q: In the first place, how did Ambassador Spain operate? How did he take to this area?

TOMSETH: Well, he was an old South Asia hand himself. He had had a couple of previous ambassadorial assignments. In fact, he had been ambassador to Turkey in the latter part of the Carter administration. I think what he really would have liked and certainly what he thought was more in keeping with his experience and abilities was to replace Harry Barnes in New Delhi. Occasionally, I would catch him being a little bit resentful that he had been given a post that he thought was a bit beneath him, but for the most part, he took on the job with enthusiasm. He had also had a great deal of tragedy in his personal life in the year or two just prior to this.

Q: His wife and daughter had died.

TOMSETH: His wife had cancer. They were in a very bad auto accident in which his daughter was killed and his wife, who was already dying of cancer, was severely injured and then she subsequently died of the cancer not too long after that.

Jim was a consummate professional. Aside from these occasional lapses of bitterness, he took the job on with enthusiasm and professionalism. In many ways, it was a real contrast to John Reed, whom as I said, didn't have a lot of substance, but knew he didn't and had the advantage of knowing he didn't. Jim did. He knew a lot about South Asia and particularly on some of these more strategic within a regional context issues, he had a very clear sense of what he thought needed to be done. That included the Tamil issue and how you deal with India in that regard. It also included some of these U.S. military related things like transit flights into and out of Diego

Garcia. So, in that sense, it was a real change when he arrived. Jim had a very clear idea of where he wanted to go in policy terms.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the Sri Lankan government and where they stood, how they operated, and how we dealt with them?

TOMSETH: Yes. In Sri Lanka, since independence in 1948, there were two parties that dominated the political process there. They took turns defeating one another at regular national elections. The only exception to that was when the last time that Mrs. Bandaranaike was prime minister. She was elected in 1970. During her tenure, they had a very violent, radical Marxist insurgency among Sinhalese that was eventually put down. But during that emergency, they postponed elections so that she was actually in office for seven years rather than the usual five. But they had election in 1977 and the other party won. Both of these parties in the earlier years had pretty much followed the same kinds of policies. A lot of these people too had come out of the London School of Economics in the 1930s, so they had a well-developed state welfare system that had driven the country to the verge of bankruptcy, but had produced some results. It was a very literate society. Education was virtually universally available. The healthcare system was good in the sense that it reached most people, not so good in the sense that they didn't have any resources for the physical infrastructure of it. Infant mortality was low. Longevity was right up there among developed countries. But the country by 1977 was a basket case economically.

J.R. Jayewardene, who won that 1977 election, whose party won it overwhelmingly, did several things. One of the first things was that they pushed through some changes to the Constitution and instituted a strong presidency. Before, it had been a strictly Westminster parliamentary system. He then became president as opposed to prime minister.

The other thing that his government did was that they threw out all of these Fabian socialist ideas of how to organize the economy and adopted a market-driven approach. They lowered tariffs, created conditions that made it attractive for foreign investors to come in. From 1977-1983 when the beginning of the ethnic problem really came to the fore, the Sri Lankan economy was doing extremely well. It was growing by seven and eight percent a year and there was a real transformation in terms of the economic life of the country, which probably... The causes of this ethnic problem in Sri Lanka are very longstanding. But rapid economic development probably exacerbated the situation in that in many senses, the Tamils in the traditional Tamil areas of the north and east were being left behind by this rapid economic change that tended to be concentrated in Colombo and on the southwest side of the island.

Q: When you were there, what government was in?

TOMSETH: J.R. Jayewardene's government.

Q: He had won again.

TOMSETH: Right. That was the first time that had happened since 1948, the first time that an incumbent party had been reaffirmed in a national election.

Q: How were relations between the embassy and the government?

TOMSETH: Excellent between the Sri Lankan government and the U.S. government. That had been reflected in the fact that Jayewardene had gotten one of these monthly state visits in June of 1984.

Q: What was our view of how the government was treating the ethnic problem?

TOMSETH: I think there were several dimensions to that. By 1984 when I arrived in Colombo, there was an active Tamil insurgency in the north and eastern part of the country. Occasionally even in Colombo itself bombs went off with some degree of regularity in Colombo and elsewhere outside the Tamil area. I think our view was that the government's police and military actions against the insurgents were not helping because the government forces often behaved just as badly as the insurgents did in terms of savagery against innocents. That was an issue in the ongoing dialogue with them, how they really needed to improve the human rights dimension of their police and military actions against the insurgents. We weren't telling them that they shouldn't hunt these guys down, but the way in which they did it certainly needed a lot of work.

Another dimension was the political dimension. There were a lot of Tamils who didn't necessarily agree that taking up arms was the way to solve this problem, but who felt that there were some real grievances on the side of the Tamil community and that one way of addressing those grievances was through a greater degree of local autonomy in Tamil majority areas in the north and the east. I think that was a view that the U.S. government shared, that you could separate the portion of the Tamil community, which we thought was a fairly substantial majority if you would make some reasonable concessions in terms of greater local autonomy to Tamil majority regions. That too was part of the bilateral dialogue between the U.S. and Sri Lankan governments.

Again, during that time, without a great deal of success, the attitude of the Sinhalese (Most of the people in the government were Sinhalese. There were some Tamils, but not many.) was that federalism is just the first step on a slippery slope to separatism. They really resisted the notion that making these kinds of concessions would actually alleviate the situation.

Q: What kind of role were we playing? Did you feel that maybe we were trying to act in our good offices? Were we meddling? Were we able to come up with good advice?

TOMSETH: Not meddling. The Sri Lankan government actually wanted us to be much more intimately involved in all of this. One of the things that we were doing, particularly when these ethnic conflicts became violent was, there was a small military education and training program that had been there for a number of years. We tried to focus that in a way that would give some Sri Lankan military personnel some training that would be relevant to how you deal with the civilian population in an insurgent situation that doesn't result in human rights abuses. So, in that sense, we were engaged very directly with the Sri Lankan military. The Sri Lankan government would have liked to have seen us much more directly involved with their military. We had to keep them at arm's length in terms of the extent to which we were going to get into this. So, certainly not from our perspective were we interfering. From the Sri Lankan perspective, call it

what you will, interference or assistance, they would have liked to have had us much more extensively involved.

Q: Did military equipment or anything like that get involved?

TOMSETH: That was something that the government would have very much liked to have seen. They would have liked to have seen a fairly extensive U.S. involvement in equipping their police and military forces for a couple of reasons, not the least of which is that they thought that that would demonstrate to New Delhi that the government in Colombo had the U.S. on its side and therefore New Delhi ought to back off a bit in terms of the sub-rosa support that Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka were obviously getting from southern India - with official Indian blessing or otherwise; it didn't really matter. That consideration was a reason on our part that we would prefer not to get too extensively involved, thank you. We were not really out looking for trouble in our relationship with the Indians. We are not going to let the Indians dictate what we do, but we weren't looking for trouble either.

Q: How about the role of the Indians? Did we get involved in that at this time?

TOMSETH: To a degree, not in Madras so much as in New Delhi and Washington. There were some discussions in which we suggested to the Indians that there probably was more that they could be doing in Tamil Nadu to check arms deliveries across the Pocs Straits to insurgent groups in Sri Lanka and probably more they could do in terms of not allowing their territory to be used for training of insurgents, which they were doing. They were turning a blind eye to it.

Q: What about the effect of this on the operation of the embassy? Were we concerned about bombings and that sort of thing?

TOMSETH: Increasingly so. We had a couple of incidents there that very directly affected U.S. personnel. In one case, an AID contractor who fairly recently arrived, his wife had come in to visit him. She was leaving, but was going to come back later with the rest of the family. He had taken her out to the airport to send her off in the evening. On the way back, there was a blackout in Colombo. By that time, there had been a number of bombings around Colombo, so there were a series of police and military checkpoints around the city. In the dark, he came upon one of these and didn't recognize what it was. The people at the barricade apparently told him to stop, but it may not have been in English. In any event, he didn't understand that he was being told to stop and he drove through the checkpoint, whereupon they opened fire on his car and he was fairly badly wounded, lost an eye. He lived, but was fairly badly wounded in that incident.

On another occasion, the regional customs officer who was based in Karachi had come down from Colombo and was going from there to the Maldives along with our commercial officer to conduct some textile negotiations. They had a flight from Colombo to Mali that was supposed to leave about mid-morning, an Air Lanka flight. He had a business class ticket. Lorraine Takahashi, our commercial officer, had an economy ticket. But when they got to the airport, he asked the crew if it would be possible to move Lorraine up with him because they had some things to go over before they arrived in Mali for these negotiations. They had a seat, so they said, "Yes, she can come up here and sit beside you." While they were sitting on the tarmac, Air

Lanka, as was often the case, was late in taking off, and a bomb in the back of the plane went off and blew back through the airport, killing about 20 people and injured quite a few more. But because the two of them were sitting up at the front of the plane, neither one of them were hurt. Had the plane taken off when it was supposed to have taken off, they would have all been dead. The bomb had a timing device on it and was set to go shortly after it was supposed to be in the air.

So, yes, during that period, we got much more security conscious than had been the case even just a couple of years prior.

Q: What about the military, the transit flights and all? Did these cause any problems?

TOMSETH: It caused a certain amount of angst in New Delhi. But in the end, it worked out fairly well. I'm laughing because of the way we brought the first C-130 through the Colombo airport. There is an annual event in Sri Lanka called the Parahara Kandy, the old royal capital up in the hills of Sri Lanka. It's part of the Buddhist calendar. There is a big parade with elephants as the central piece of this celebration. At that time, the elephant that led this, a big tusker, was getting rather elderly. I think he was over 70 years at that point, which is about as long as elephants live. The question became, what were they going to do to replace old Raja when he went on to his reward? I don't know a great deal about elephants, but you can tell fairly early on whether they're going to have particularly long tusks after they're born. The Sri Lankans had gone through the inventory of all the young elephants that they had in captivity on the island and there was none that was going to grow the kind of tusks that they needed for a replacement for Raja, but they had identified through their Thai friends, another essentially Theravada Buddhist country, that in Chiang Mai, they had a young elephant that was going to grow these long tusks. They were prepared to donate that elephant to Sri Lanka, but they had no way of getting the elephant there. So, my idea was, well, why don't we just see if the U.S. military can bring that elephant to Colombo on a plane and, by the way, that plane can then go on to Diego Garcia with other cargo. So, that is how we did it. That first C-130 flight brought in the elephant from Chiang Mai, landed at Colombo, offloaded the elephant, and then flew on to Diego Garcia.

Q: Did the Cold War intrude at all while you were there in Sri Lanka?

TOMSETH: No, not really. Well, I suppose the closest it ever came was the annual at that time UN General Assembly Resolution on the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace Proposal.

Q: What is that?

TOMSETH: Well, it has died. When I was up in New York two years ago, it had gone the way of the dinosaurs. I don't know what happened to it ultimately. The idea was that the Indian Ocean would be declared a zone of peace. Among the provisions that would be included in this would be a... They can't stop a country from sending a nuclear powered or nuclear armed warship through the Indian Ocean whether or not they have such a resolution, but part of it was that nuclear powered and nuclear equipped warships should not transit the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, so naturally, we were opposed. The Indians were the great proponents of this. They had Soviet support for this. I think the Soviets concluded that they didn't have to pay a great price for

sticking their thumb in the American eye on this issue. The Sri Lankans actually supported this, even though it was essentially an Indian idea. The Sri Lankans actually proposed the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, but not with the enthusiasm of the Indians. Annually, we were lobbying them to abstain at least on the vote in the General Assembly.

Q: Were there any other developments there in this 1984-1986 period?

TOMSETH: No. The main ones from the U.S. point of view were this Tamil insurgency and the government's response to it and then secondarily our strategic issues, particularly transit rights through the Indian Ocean. And we had an aid program and some economic interests in Sri Lanka.

FRANK D. CORREL
Mission Director, USAID
Colombo (1984-1986)

Frank D. Correl was born in Germany in 1929. He received his BS from Rider College in 1950, and his MA from Columbia University in 1955. He served in the US Army from 1953 to 1955. His postings include South Korea, Vietnam, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Lesotho, and Zambia. W. Haven North interviewed him on September 29, 1990.

CORREL: I was pulled out of the Senior Seminar first for about 10-12 days to attend an Asia Bureau regional conference in Bangkok. That was in January 1984. I actually went as Director in May of 1984.

Q: What was the situation in Sri Lanka at that time?

CORREL: The situation can best be described by what happened on my arrival at the airport in Colombo. My wife and I had spent a week in Denmark on leave on our way over there. We were met by my Deputy. He said to me as we were talking, "I guess you haven't heard the news." We had arrived on a Saturday, and on the previous Thursday evening, an American contractor and his wife had been kidnapped up in the North, in the area of the town of Jaffna by the Tamil Tiger rebels. So, on my very first day in the country, I was faced with an AID contractor kidnapped by terrorists. There was, of course, considerable contact over the weekend with the Embassy. I knew nobody at that point, but thanks to my Deputy we were able to stay in touch. The contractor and his wife were released on the Sunday and came back to Colombo on Monday morning. My first official act as Mission Director was to interview the American couple and then go with the Ambassador and the released contractor couple to call on President Jayewardene, because he wanted to meet them. So, on my first day in office in Sri Lanka, I got to meet the President on a topic like that. From there, it was pretty active all the time.

Q: Was there a particular reason why they were kidnapped or was this just an arbitrary act?

CORREL: It appeared to have been a target of opportunity that a wise guy thought would make a lot of sense. However, once they thought about it more, they moved to release them pretty quickly. There were no demands. I think once they had them, they tried to find some way of letting them go as quickly as possible. They, and we, were lucky.

Q: What was the political and economic situation in the country?

CORREL: The insurrection had started not quite a year earlier. It was a manifestation of feeling by the more militant Tamils that they were getting an unfair deal from the majority Sinhalese. In British times, peace had been maintained in the country by sort of a sharing of power. The British relied on Tamils to quite a substantial degree in administrative positions and the Tamils had achieved considerable prominence in economic affairs. In the late 1950s, the more conservative party that had dominated Ceylonese politics, even before independence, lost the election to a coalition government headed by a man who was nominally socialist, but in actual fact was a very strong Sinhalese nationalist. That was Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who proceeded to introduce legislation to give greater power to the Sinhalese at the cost of the Tamils. From that moment on, there was considerable racial tension on that island, which from time to time manifested itself in armed clashes and uprisings.

I'm not able to get into a detailed discussion of what happened before I came, but I remember that in July of 1983 when I completed my evaluation mission of the Mahaweli, there was an incident where, during an armed clash, some isolated rebels had killed seven or eight soldiers of the Sri Lankan army. When those soldiers' bodies were returned to Colombo, there were riots and a giant demonstration, which led to the massacre of many Tamils in Colombo. In turn, that sparked widespread unrest by not only the Tamil Tigers, but by other militant Tamil groups. Eventually, the northern and eastern parts of the island, which have a Tamil majority, largely came under the control of the rebels, including the city of Jaffna in the extreme North. In Jaffna, we had a water project, a fairly big project. I don't recall what the kidnapped contractor did for the project, but he was associated with it. There were constant attacks on Sri Lanka military facilities and many civilian targets in many parts of the island, including Colombo. The economic situation began to deteriorate more and more as the government had to shove some of their development work aside in order to finance the counterrevolutionary activities. Some of our projects became endangered, particularly this water project.

Q: Did you visit the water project?

CORREL: I, myself never got up there, but my deputy did on one occasion.

Q: Did it go ahead?

CORREL: It continued for a while, but then there were interruptions. Fighting and incidents of sabotage really built up. I don't recall what triggered the whole business, but at one point we began to consider closing it down.

Q: Did it ever get finished?

CORREL: No, it did not. We closed it down. There were a lot of objections by the Sri Lankan government departments to my decision. They were still in control of Jaffna at that time, but essentially they were powerless to prevent the raids and were unable to guarantee in a reasonable way the security of our people. I suggested that the project be closed down. Interestingly enough, the Sri Lankans did not appeal to the Ambassador. In my case, we had gotten to the Ambassador first with an explanation. The Ambassador was an interesting fellow and very nice to work with when you knew his approach. He had been Governor of Maine. He had been appointed Ambassador by President Ford. He was a political appointee, succeeding a career man, James Van Hollen, who had been Ambassador when I had been out to Sri Lanka in March 1976. Of course, he had gone out of office when Ford lost the election and then showed up again as Reagan's Ambassador in Colombo in 1981. That's where I became acquainted with him again and we had a pleasant relationship.

Q: What was his name?

CORREL: John Reed, former Republican Governor of Maine. A very courtly and kind man, very much aware of his prerogatives and very jealous in guarding them. He was concerned at one point that the Mission was going to rent a house that the Yugoslav Ambassador had an interest in. I don't know what happened, but the Yugoslav Ambassador said something to him and he got back to us and said that he would not agree to us renting this new house unless he personally signed the lease. Well, it turned out we didn't want the house. Ambassador Reed saw himself as the President's personal representative in Colombo, and in a very nice way, but very clearly he wanted it understood that this meant that he could get himself involved in just about anything. But, anyway, he was never approached by the Sri Lankans to try to get my decision on the water project overturned, little as they liked it, because I think they realized that in the last analysis it would be awfully difficult for an American Ambassador, particularly one with a great deal of political savvy, to override a decision based on the safety of American personnel.

Q: Well, what was the thrust of the program other than that project that you were concerned with?

CORREL: Again the old familiar range of agriculture projects, and of course, the Mahaweli project took a great deal of our time. We had some other water supply projects. We also had an interesting private sector development project with a contractor and an umbrella project that funded activities by indigenous private voluntary agencies.

Q: Let's talk about the Mahaweli a bit. What was our role in that?

CORREL: We still were not associated with the big Mahaweli works at that time. We were not obligating new funds anymore but we were still implementing construction of the so-called down-stream work from the big dams that other donors - the UK, Sweden, etc. - had built. An American contractor, Zachary Dillingham, was engaged in construction of the system of canals and related facilities. Besides this activity, there were the Mahaweli sector support loans.

Q: You made dollars available?

CORREL: We made dollars available to reimburse the Sri Lankans for expenditures of an agreed nature they were carrying out in the Mahaweli area.

Q: What kind of activities are you talking about?

CORREL: Most of them had to do with resettlement activities, bringing people from other parts of Sri Lanka into the area of the Mahaweli project. And the Sri Lankans were constructing housing, schools, roads, and other things, quite considerable activities. The loan was designed to encourage this work. We hoped it would be done faster so that services and benefits for the newly-settled populace would be in place much more rapidly than if they had to wait for the Sri Lankans to generate that money from normal budgetary sources.

Q: What's your view of the Mahaweli project overall? Was it a good project?

CORREL: At the time, I thought that we were playing a very constructive role. I'm glad we didn't get involved in any of the very big construction projects.

Q: How would you describe our role and what we were trying to do?

CORREL: Our role was to make these huge foreign aid investments work more effectively at the people level by providing necessary support structures and services to the settlements. It was part of the Government's Accelerated Mahaweli Scheme. The British had agreed to do the Victoria Dam, Sweden did the Kotmale Dam, and Germany and Canada also built dams. Our activities provided the means for the people settling in the area to benefit from the big works. I think we were right with the concept and the type of support we offered. I had problems with how the program was implemented, but I thought we offered the potential for the Sri Lankans to achieve their economic development objectives. They set up a special government establishment for Mahaweli and exempted it from all kinds of government rules. A special Mahaweli Authority was headed by a prominent government leader who had been chairman of the ruling party. He was highly respected and carried plenty of authority. Moreover, there was a special Mahaweli Ministry, headed by one of the leading young politicians on the rise in Sri Lanka and who very definitely had presidential ambitions. In the local scheme of things, association with the Mahaweli program offered much political benefit.

Q: Was our part of the program working? Was it beginning to have an impact?

CORREL: It was, up to a point. As I mentioned previously, I found I was a strong believer in non-project assistance. I found that when I started getting immersed in Sri Lankan matters, especially as Director, and started having to look at the whole program, I thought there were some significant gaps in the way that the Mission had approached that sector support loan. I believe that we could have done a hell of a lot more. I think we could have been much more effective.

Q: What for example are you referring to?

CORREL: I'm referring to the system whereby we cleared money to be paid to the National Bank of Ceylon. It was a very cumbersome system for reimbursement. And even then, the reimbursement was on difficult and restricted terms, so that it wasn't easy for them to use. During the time I was out there, I worked to revise the system to make it simpler for them to draw down the amount of money and have an incentive to increase their local project activities. That was the object of the whole idea of sector support loans and we were not capitalizing on it as much as we should have.

Q: And this was reimbursement for a specific activity?

CORREL: Reimbursement for specific activities that they were financing with their own money. I mean, they would generate some money and pay for the housing, the schools, the loans, or whatever it was and then they would present the bills to us. Our Public Works Office would take a look at them and they would say, "Well, twenty-five percent isn't for the purposes of this loan." I mean, you expect that sort of thing. But, the work wasn't going very fast. Part of the reason the work wasn't going fast was because the Sri Lankans never saw reimbursements for what they submitted until very late and then they couldn't use it for some of the things they wanted to. In other words, we were tying them up on several levels. Then, I remember, there were some terms in connection with the Federal Reserve letter of credit that were much less favorable than if you had just made the payment to the bank.

I guess it was the way that my predecessor saw that loan as a not very desirable activity. This drove the Mission view of the loan. It was an activity that people preferred not to have. My approach, on the other hand, was that this was the kind of flexible thing that ought to enable us to do a great deal if only the Sri Lankans also understood that it is a valuable program tool that they could use to greater benefit. We weren't explaining it to them. I asked an economist in the Program Office to go to the National Bank and start working with them on trying to accelerate that whole process. Arriving in Colombo in May of 1984, just about the first thing I had to do after taking care of the kidnapped contractor was to write a letter telling the government that because they were overdue in submitting acceptable requests, we were not going to be able to release any more money under that sector support loan. I remember looking at my Deputy and saying, "How could we possibly have gotten into this kind of a bind?" So, I feel that we were not as effective as we might have been. After that, we started getting more acceptable requests and drawdowns. In broad general terms, we were contributing very significantly to the Mahaweli development project. But we had problems with our support to Mahaweli because the Sri Lankans were not paying enough attention to some important resettlement questions. They had to do a lot with health problems.

Q: Well, anything more on the Mahaweli project? How many Sri Lankans were affected by this project, roughly?

CORREL: Several million. The population of Sri Lanka was 15 ½ million and for Mahaweli we're probably talking about somewhere between 2 and 2 ½. I should add a couple of things on the Mahaweli project. I just said that one of the problems was with health. It turned out that some of what had been identified by the Sri Lankans as part of the Mahaweli resettlement area was very unhealthy due to malaria in particular. As I will mention later, we were also helping on

nationwide control of malaria, and that was not a success. In my opinion, we had a disastrous project there and the Sri Lankans just were not paying enough attention to moving people into certain areas of Mahaweli that were very unhealthy. The other thing I want to mention is, I did get to meet a lot of people in Colombo. Among the people I met was the Cuban ambassador, who was an exceedingly attractive woman, probably in her 40s. We met at a dinner given by the Canadian High Commissioner. I met her again at other receptions. She introduced me to a couple of other people and I don't know whether there was a direct correlation or not, but at a reception sometime considerably after I first met her, I ended up talking to a fellow who turned out to be the Russian DCM. He told me that the Russians were contemplating getting involved in Mahaweli and did I have any comments or suggestions as to what might be an area for a project by them. I said I knew that the Sri Lankans still had several areas in which they were looking for donor coverage and that they might be worth looking at.

Q: Geographic areas?

CORREL: Yes. The ones I indicated to him I pretty much had identified as being the least desirable areas to work in anyway. I reported to Ambassador Spain, who had succeeded John Reed, that I had this conversation and was asked to write a cable back to Washington. It turned out that absolutely nobody, least of all the CIA in Colombo, had heard anything about this. The Russians did subsequently send some kind of an investigating team, so it wasn't just cocktail chatter. The idea of getting the Russians involved in some fiasco in Mahaweli seemed interesting. The other thing about Mahaweli was that I ran into fewer serious problems with the American contractor, the Zachary-Dillingham Company, than with the people who had the contract for the Southern Perimeter road in Lesotho. But, at one point their headquarters started pushing for expansion of the downstream work into other areas of Mahaweli. I was on my way back to the United States for a brief consultation and I said absolutely and positively no. We've gotten involved enough in Mahaweli and I would not support any expansion. When I came back here to Washington on TDY for various program matters, I was contacted at the Assistant Administrator's Office and told that there were insistent inquiries coming from the Hill. Would I go over and talk to them? I found myself confronted by two staff members who were very prominent in AID matters with the Foreign Relations and Foreign Operations Sub-Committees. Jim Bond was one. I spent about an hour and a half getting very severe pressure on why I wouldn't agree to an expansion of the project. I explained that first of all, we had sunk enough money into Mahaweli already, and moreover, the firm was experiencing interruptions getting their work done and the area they wanted to expand into was downright dangerous from the point of view of Tamil rebel activity. Under no circumstances would I countenance expansion of our efforts there. This took care of the matter, but it was a very interesting experience to me to what length people would push a construction project in order for a company to make some money.

Q: This was a construction project?

CORREL: Yes. It was continuing and expanding the downstream work.

Q: Irrigation systems?

CORREL: There was a lot of interest in Mahaweli. I got to be quite friendly with some of the key Sri Lankan people in the Mahaweli Ministry and Authority. The Minister himself was dynamic and not above using considerable demagoguery. The civil servants, the administrators, professional and technical people were always very cooperative and helpful, and we had an excellent working relationship. They were very frank about almost everything. I'm rather pleased to say that quite a few years after I retired, I ran into one of them in Eritrea. He had retired from the Sri Lankan government and become head of the World Food Program in Eritrea. We talked a little bit about Sri Lanka. He had always been one of the people who had been very straight and had, at times, given us a couple of good pointers that I know weren't easy for them to say politically.

Q: What other kind of projects did you have?

CORREL: We had a water project.

Q: What kind of water project?

CORREL: It was a water project in a number of smaller cities in Sri Lanka. Again, a project with a great deal of political push behind it. Our contact was someone in the Prime Minister's Office. In this instance, we had a bad American contractor; we had to do a great deal to get them up to snuff and we spent some time both redesigning the project and making the contractor perform adequately. Another significant project was a housing project. It was not so much because of the money in it, but again because of high political interests with which I was not very comfortable.

Q: A housing guarantee program?

CORREL: A housing guarantee program. That had been undertaken prior to my arrival, in the face of the Mission's opposition. It was being pushed by the Housing Office in AID/Washington. The Housing Office had its own regional representative stationed in Bangkok. In addition, there was a person assigned from that office to the Mission in Sri Lanka who was a very good, conscientious officer and who went to great lengths to report very meticulously on what was going on in the project and what the problems were. These included the Prime Minister's Office trying very hard to politicize that project more and more. The Prime Minister himself was basically pushing the program as a big part of his own populist program. Indeed, he took political credit for the U.N.'s decade of housing wherever he could. We had some extensive dealings with the people assigned by the Prime Minister to handle that project, and indeed we were able to engage the Prime Minister himself on some of our problems for a fair solution.

In Sri Lanka, there is a presidential form of government. In 1974-1976, J.R. Jayewardene was President, and he provided the general policy leadership. He also had, I think it was 68 different ministries, which meant that centralization was not one of that government's strong attributes. The Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, represented a very important center of power but he could only do so much. His largest felt need was basically to get enough of a high political profile so that he would be able to be elected successor to President Jayewardene. He also was a strong Sinhalese nationalist. He was accused of complicity in many irregularities concerning strong-arm methods towards his opposition. He was a very controversial individual who had

many detractors. I met him with one of the AID political appointees responsible for the Housing Office who came over to Sri Lanka. We had a delightful session with him during which we talked about housing projects and politics and things like that, as well as elephants. The Prime Minister had a real affection for elephants. He did subsequently succeed Jayewardene as President and was blown up by a suicide bomber. He was much disliked by the more well-to-do Sri Lankans, because of his caste. He was in a very, very difficult position and therefore he had to find a lot of ways politically to get the masses behind him. The housing project helped an awful lot.

Q: This was low cost housing or middle class housing?

CORREL: It was really designed for both, but mostly low cost housing was involved.

Q: Did the housing get constructed and occupied?

CORREL: Oh, yes. It wasn't bad either. I still remember some of my Sri Lankan friends going up in smoke on the subject of Premadasa, about what an awful fellow he was, dangerous and everything else. The worst thing about him, they said, was that he was from the caste that did the laundry for the cinnamon workers. It sounds funny, but in actual fact, it explains an awful lot about the chaotic political system and stratified social system in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka had all the trappings of democracy. In fact, at independence it had a working parliament and it had very fine numbers with regard to literacy, health, and things like that. These statistics became sort of empty shelves in a lot of ways, because of complacency and incompetence later on. In the case of politics, there was an increasing authoritarian flavor done in the name of the people. A lot of people here in Washington, and most certainly in international agencies, tended to take the description of the government and the statistics and things like that at face value, rather than check out actual conditions. In a situation like that, Premadasa saw himself as having to act almost like a warlord in many ways.

Q: You mentioned you had a small project in private sector development. What was it trying to do there?

CORREL: We were trying to help create sufficient expertise for Sri Lankan enterprises to be able to function effectively. Even after the end of the Socialist-dominated governments in Sri Lanka - after S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was assassinated and his wife, Sirimavo, became Prime Minister, there were many state enterprises and private enterprise was not encouraged. A legacy of colonialism also helped those socialist-oriented governments to rely on government enterprises. Our project was also to help with the privatization of some of these enterprises. The project made several of us a little uncomfortable. It seemed to be primarily a cash cow for the contractor, Coopers and Lybrand, to milk and we were not pleased with what was being done.

Q: Did it succeed in any privatization?

CORREL: I seemed to remember yes, that they did in some. I can't give you any examples. We also had the IESC, the International Executive Service Corps, which sent some excellent people

to work with individual enterprises. This was well run by an excellent Sri Lankan manager, and which, I feel, accomplished as much as the other much more expensive project.

Q: Other projects of this program?

CORREL: One which may not have seemed important, but which I spent quite a bit of time on because it gave me a chance to really look at Sri Lanka as people lived, was the fund that we had for indigenous PVO's. We enforced a lower limit on individual grants. I had the benefit of a local employee who knew the agencies backwards and forwards. Although he personally was a very reserved individual, he was not at all shy about being very frank about the agencies and encouraging me to meet the people and see what their activities were. There we had a number of income generating and education-type activities that I thought were doing a hell of a good job for the little bit of money that were put into them.

Q: These were indigenous organizations?

CORREL: Every single one. We had no American PVO's associated with any of them.

Q: How large were the grants that we are talking about?

CORREL: I think probably the biggest we ever gave was the rupee equivalent of \$30-40,000 and the smallest would have been \$5,000. I think we probably had about 30 individual activities.

Q: And you had a project from which you could then make these allocations, is that it?

CORREL: Yes.

Q: What was it called?

CORREL: It was called PVO Co-Financing or something like that. The recipient organizations had to put up some of their own money and they generally were able to do that. These activities produced a fair amount of political mileage in some cases. One of the people I got to meet and was very impressed by was the District Minister for the District of Kurunegala. This was a very dynamic guy who was encouraging that project by local associations to bring some activities in improving horticulture production in his area. A District Minister is an individual of Cabinet level rank. He is sort of the parliamentary political boss of the District; he is an elected government official who has oversight responsibility in his District, as distinguished from the regular government administrative system, which was headed by the District Officer. He was a member of parliament, appointed to this position. This District Minister at one point told me that they wanted him to become a departmental Minister of something or other which would have really exposed him to violence and everything else, and that he was able to talk himself out of that job. Through him, I got to see quite a bit of how ordinary Sri Lankans out in the countryside lived, in an area where things ran pretty well, as distinguished from some other areas where things were not so good.

The project I am referring to was not particularly important in money terms, but it provided valuable insights. My predecessor had very little patience for things that she herself was not really interested in. She tended to think in terms of regular projects. She didn't like PVO's; she didn't like IESC or other things like that.

Anyway, one of the things that I inherited when I got to Sri Lanka was this PVO project, as well as an American PVO project in the Maldives. This was, I suppose, a regional development project run by a PVO. It was solely in the Maldives, which consist of 500-plus little islands, some of which are barely as big as this house. This project was on one atoll called Raa, a 13-hour boat ride from the capital city, Male. It consisted of a variety of miscellaneous activities. One element was having built and staffed a little hospital on one of the islands, and supplying some medicines and equipment. Another element involved providing some agricultural production assistance. It also included building sanitary home toilets and something about reducing the presence of bats. It was a catchall and was run by an organization called IHAP, International Human Assistance Programs, which you probably remember from Africa, also. The organization was run by a former Assistant Administrator for Asia. It was time to evaluate that project. The officer in my Mission who used at least to open the mail on the project, came in to see me and said that nobody was familiar with the project. My predecessor apparently never let him or anyone else travel anywhere in connection with it. He knew absolutely nothing about the project and didn't seem particularly interested either, but it was time to evaluate the project. I said, "Well, you've come to the right place," and I appointed myself to evaluate that project. My wife went with me, at our own expense. I found myself in the Maldives, an incredible place. The project technicians were a young couple. She was an American, he was Dutch. They had done a pretty good job out there on this potpourri of a project. They had to hire a dhoni, a typical Maldives fishing boat, to take us out there. It was a 13-hour trip and we spent four or five days looking at all the different activities. The genesis of the idea of the project was that these atolls were located far from the center and modern conveniences and approaches were largely unknown. If there was going to be any kind of development in the Maldives, you really had to have this kind of activity. I did take a close look at the activities and came to the conclusion that what they were doing was in and of itself okay. Quite honestly, it wasn't cost effective, but even more important, I was not able to discern the kind of commitment needed by the Maldives government to make that kind of thing work. My evaluation covered all that. There were proposals for expanding this project to other atolls and I just flatly said, no, I really didn't think that we could justify that. While that was not that easy a decision to make since people felt you ought to do something in the Maldives, it stuck. I must say it was one of the most fascinating trips of my life.

Q: Why were we in the Maldives at all?

CORREL: To plant our flag. Somewhere along the line an American Ambassador had been in the Maldives and we had been hit up for something. I suspect what also happened was that when the former Assistant Administrator for Asia had taken up the job with IHAP, he had taken a trip around, and somewhere along the line had gotten to the Maldives. Somebody had persuaded him that this was a worthwhile activity to consider, and he had managed to sell it to Washington. Nobody had taken an interest in it since then. It had been left to sort of develop. The Mission in Colombo had washed its hands of it and it would probably have continued if a little bureaucratic

effort in Washington had been put behind it. More importantly, we were sending some Maldivian students to the American University in Beirut. Unfortunately, in the mid 80s, Beirut became a very unsafe place and we ended up not sending many people to Beirut, although we were sending some.

Q: Why did you conclude that it wasn't cost effective or wasn't worthwhile continuing?

CORREL: I didn't see where there was going to be any long-term effect from it. We weren't leaving anything much behind. The link that was missing was the kind of Maldivian support that would have ensured momentum and continuity. It was just a collection of activities with no prospect of sustainability. Things were okay while our people were there. But, you knew, whether you put in 50 thousand dollars or whether you put in a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, that at the end of that project, the result would be exactly the same than if you stopped now. In addition to that, I was very uncomfortable with the contractor, the PVO. They played around with the concept of co-financing. You recall, I'm sure, that in order to undertake projects with American PVOs, the PVOs also were required to enlist some resources. In this case, the resources that they invested often were phony. Because they could lay their hands on it, they would send a shipment of medicines to that hospital, and the medicines were all expired. I felt that for a US AID project, they had neither prospects for success nor the kind of characteristics where we could say comfortably that this was a project we ought to be associated with. I do not fault the two project managers at all. They were conscientious people trying to do what they were hired to do and do it as well as they could. In fact, I maintained a correspondence with them for many years after leaving Sri Lanka. Perhaps, under different circumstances and with a different agency, we could have put a project together. The Maldivians are an interesting situation anyway. At least from what I saw, they didn't seem to understand what the concept of development assistance was. Their approach was to get a project and that it was the donor's responsibility to make it work and they basically were to reap the benefits. That may be okay as long as they're ready to A) make sure that benefits accrue to productive people and that they are responsible for providing some of them; and B) that they contribute to the overall project, have a stake in it, and plan for phase-out and follow-on activity. This was definitely not the case in the Maldives.

Q: Well, in Sri Lanka, was there anything else that you wanted to cover?

CORREL: Well, it was a very difficult period. On and off, we had problems with some kind of terrorists out in Colombo or out in the field. I got around Sri Lanka quite a lot and saw activities and met many Sri Lankans in a lot of different positions and places. I had the feeling that a country that had a great deal going for it was in the process of disintegration. I think we had some good programs there, some that really didn't have a chance. Some probably shouldn't have been pushed in the first place. I must say I resisted several attempts by all kinds of people to come in with programs. I feel that we tried hard to concentrate both our attention and our assistance on key things and not become bogged down in a lot of tangential initiatives.

Q: What do you consider was most effective and had the most significant impact of what we were doing?

CORREL: I have to say it was Mahaweli. I think we could have done more and better for probably the same amount of money. I think on balance that made the biggest impact.

Q: Were we involved in any population programs?

CORREL: We had population activities, yes. I think they worked well. I don't think the Sri Lankans had any problems as far as population programs were concerned. But you remind me that I did not talk about our health project, our malaria project.

For as long as I was with AID, we had malaria projects in many parts of the world. There was some dispute about the nomenclature, whether they were control or eradication. But, I know there were several generations of the American foreign assistance effort that included malaria projects. We had them for pretty long periods, but somehow they would always peter out and then they would start up again. Sri Lanka was no exception to that. It seemed to me that a big problem with the whole concept of malaria eradication or control was that there was really only one legitimate objective, and that was to get the cooperating country or region to make it of sufficient priority to ensure continuous monitoring and continuous eradication or spraying and whatever else was needed. I never saw that factor in any project like that. In Sri Lanka, we spent money on this malaria control business with a ministry that among a good number of dubious ministries was easily the most feckless and irresponsibly led. Quite honestly, I had the feeling that we were pouring money down a rat hole. Of course, that is of great relevance to the comments I made before about sending people from relatively healthy areas of Sri Lanka into the malaria-infested areas that were part of Mahaweli.

Q: Do you remember what technique we were using for malaria control?

CORREL: I'm sure if you mention it I'll recognize it.

Q: DDT spraying and that sort?

CORREL: No, I think it was Malathion.

Q: Were we able to reduce the incidence of malaria during the time?

CORREL: On paper, yes, but I had the feeling that when things were coming to an end, everything would go back to the status quo ante. We had reports. We were dealing with a minister who couldn't care less, who wasn't interested, and who repeated again and again that Sri Lanka had the best health statistics. I know that we in the United States meant well in Sri Lanka. But in doing this project, I think we had the wrong approach worldwide. I think that the way the U.S. went about this campaign just was wrong for accomplishing the objectives of that project.

Q: Okay. Anything else on Sri Lanka that you want to mention?

CORREL: No, I think that covers my two years there. It was my last post before I retired. Again, I thought my mission had many very good people in it. I think I didn't have quite as good a mission as I had in Lesotho, but I had many really good people and really no great failures.

Q: What was the scale of the AID program in Sri Lanka?

CORREL: At one point we were as high as 42 to 45 million dollars. Then, toward the end of my stay there we started running into budget problems. As I recall, the level that was being talked about for the coming year was only about \$20 million, which left us in a difficult position.

Q: And most of this was for the Mahaweli project?

CORREL: By 1986, our Mahaweli new obligations were finished. It would have been for the other things that I mentioned, the water, agricultural planning and production, private enterprise development and things like that. I don't believe we had any new Mahaweli money at that point.

Q: Well, any other thoughts on this Sri Lanka situation; what you felt about the program?

CORREL: About Sri Lanka itself, I wish we'd had peaceful conditions to work in. I think that the Sri Lankans and we would have been able to deal much more effectively with each other if we hadn't had the insurgency hanging over our heads, and all the things that were becoming a real cancer in the Sri Lankan society and Sri Lankan government. The insurgency involved the Tamils of the North and the East. There was also a fair amount of discontent elsewhere. There had been trouble down South many years earlier which, I understand, had been put down with a great deal of brutality. This was by people who had a reputation of being very respectful of life and all that sort of thing. It is a country that has seen some very bad days and which doesn't appear to be able to surmount its troubles. The degree of incompetence in key places, like in that health ministry, is very worrisome. It's a shame, because it's a country that has an awful lot to offer and it is beautiful. And, when you deal with the people on the street and in many government buildings, you can really feel very gratified by your relationships with them. That extends all the way to ministers. Some of the people I recall from my time have left the country when they had the opportunity to do so. A lot of people are out of Sri Lanka now, but also quite a few of the acquaintances I made among ministers, including the Prime Minister, have been assassinated.

Q: Well, then you retired when?

CORREL: I retired on the 30th of June, 1986. I do have one other thing I want to just briefly mention about my stay in Sri Lanka. My wife and I lived in a house that had been found for us along a nice street. As Mission Director, I had one important perquisite, which was an armed guard who would stand in front of our front door with a long, old rusty rifle. Supposedly, that was my first line of security. Our embassy security officer came and took a look at the house and wrote a long report about all the shortcomings from a security point of view. However, he ended up saying that actually mine was the most secure house within the entire American community because we had this large dog, which was described as an awesome deterrent, and this became part of the official government report. I'm mentioning all of this because I had, through one of

my Sri Lankan contacts, established a contact with the leader of the opposition, Anura Bandaranaike. He was the son of the assassinated Prime Minister Bandaranaike, and who was likely to be the next President if he could only win the election. In fact, my wife and I set up a luncheon between the new Ambassador, James Spain, and Anura when Spain first arrived in the country because nobody else at the embassy knew him. I read in the local paper that one of Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party members got up on the floor of the beautiful parliament and announced that number 30 Horton Place, our residence, was the headquarters of the Israeli interest section in Colombo. This wasn't designed to make life any easier for us since there was some anti-Israel agitation at the time when this interests section was agreed to between the two countries. We told Anura about it at lunch and he apologized all over the place and said he'd have it taken care of. So, we had that additional factor complicating our security situation.

R. GRANT SMITH

**Near East and South Asia Bureau, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka Desk, Country Director
Washington DC (1985-1989)**

R. Grant Smith was born on Long Island in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1960. He later earned a master's degree from Columbia University. He joined the Foreign Service in 1963 and held positions in Pakistan, Nepal, and India. In 1995 he began his ambassadorship in Tajikistan. Ambassador Smith was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

Q: Well, what about the other problem that I would think you'd be concerned with, Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese and all that? Was that-

SMITH: That was very active during the period, and I don't remember all the details of what was going on. The big thing that I remember was the Rajiv-Jayawardene agreement, which I think again was in 1987, which we got a lot of criticism on, I personally got criticism on, because the U.S. government strongly supported that agreement. This was an agreement which provided for a framework for the solution of the problem, and we assumed that the Indians, particularly Rajiv Gandhi- (end of tape)

It had become clear by then that India, beginning under his mother, had training camps for Tamil militants in southern India and had very close ties. And there were a number of groups - I don't remember the details now of which groups - but it was closer to some than to others. But we assumed that Rajiv wouldn't sign this agreement, which as I recall provided for a way that the Tamils would get a fair amount of autonomy within Sri Lanka, unless he had the militants on board. As it turned out, he didn't, and of course India then sent in troops to try and deal with this, and with disaster, often referred to as India's Vietnam because the Tamil militants... Particularly the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) was and is an group that seemed unwilling and unable to compromise. Some of us thought that as it went on this was one of those militant groups that have been fighting for so long and of a particular kind of background that it really doesn't know anything else and doesn't have any other thing to do than to fight.

Q: Sort of like the IRA, some of them.

SMITH: Some of the parts of the IRA, I guess, are like that. And again, we thought that the Indians had made a deal, and they hadn't. Again, it may have been an example of poor coordination within the Indian government. I don't know. Actually, before the agreement, there was a situation where we were criticized because the Sri Lankans had surrounded Jaffna or cut Jaffna off, blockaded it, and it was running short of food - or at least the impression was that it was running short of food - and the Indian Red Cross tried to deliver food across the strait and was prevented by the Sri Lankan navy, and the Indians then did an air drop of food. And the Sri Lankans were very critical. But our position was rather nuanced that, yes, this was a bad thing, but on the other hand, there were human lives at stake here and humanitarian supplies were needed, because we were critical of the Sri Lankans for having stopped the Red Cross because we had the impression that this was a clean Red Cross operation. It was not an ICRC, but my recollection is that it was a fairly clean Red Cross operation.

Q: You mean by "clean" that -

SMITH: It only had food.

Q: Food, yes.

SMITH: It was an honest humanitarian effort. So in the case of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankans were very unhappy with our position, which was based, again, on a misperception of what the Indians had done or their ability to sell the agreement to the Tamil militants.

Q: Were we looking at this thing in East-West conflict? Did that enter into it?

SMITH: No, it was not East-West. It was very much the kind of problem that you encounter today as you look at other parts of the world, that you had an ethnically, religiously, and linguistically separate group after independence within a country, and we were saying there ought to be a way that this can be handled within Sri Lanka. We were critical of both sides and trying to see a way out.

Q: This is an example of what is termed "conflict resolution." How were the Indian government and the Sri Lankan government responding to this? Butt out, or trying to get us on their side, or how were they doing?

SMITH: We weren't in a heavy-handed way trying to resolve this for them. We were giving them advice and commenting but not in an intrusive way. We were not providing major military assistance to the Sri Lankan government, and our attitude towards the Tigers later changed, but at that point, we certainly saw that the Sri Lankan government had a long ways to go in the sense of providing some sort of local autonomy, and my recollection is that the agreement went in that direction and seemed like a good thing, because this seemed to be the only way that it could be resolved within the context of Sri Lankan sovereignty.

Q: Did we feel while this was going on that the Sri Lankan government was being overly Sinhalese oriented, sort of dumping on the Tamils?

SMITH: Well, I think that that has been a perception of the Sinhalese government ever since 1956, when J. W. R. D. Bandaranaike won on the basis of a Sinhala only campaign and started the separate language tracks of schools and things like that. The government at that time was not from his party - it was the old UNP - but it had certainly affected Sri Lankan politics, and it was very hard for any Sinhalese politician to move out of that.

Q: What about Mrs. Gandhi and then by extension her son Rajiv, training Tamils? Was this for the local politics - I mean inside-Indian politics, or was this an aggression, or how was this going?

SMITH: The Indians, first of all, do have something of a Monroe Doctrine kind of approach to their area, that they think that they ought to be able to take the lead in resolving problems within the area. They were concerned about the Sri Lankan Tamils, although the Sri Lankan Tamils had been in Sri Lanka for hundreds of years. This is a very separate issues: there is a small group - not small group, a group - of Indian Tamils within Sri Lanka also, who were taken as estate laborers, for whom India has much more direct concerns. But the Sri Lankan Tamils have been there for hundreds of years, but they also have real ties across the strait with the Tamils in southern India. So yes, it was India's approach to its role in the region plus the factor of Tamil politics, because as the Congress Party has over the years lost its dominant tradition in Indian politics, it has become more reliant on coalitions with some of the state parties. And in the State of Tamil Nadu, there are two - now, anyway, and as I recall they were prominent by then - state parties, which were feuding with each other but very assertively pro-Tamil. And the Congress party had decreased significantly in influence in the state of Tamil Nadu, of the DMK and the AIADMK, both of which have factored in recent problems, political problems in New Delhi.

JAMES W. S. SPAIN
Ambassador
Sri Lanka (1985-1989)

James W.S. Spain was born in Chicago in 1926 and at 18, entered the Army. After a year in Japan, Spain came back and graduated the University of Chicago with a Master's Degree in 1949. He then entered the Foreign Service, later receiving his Doctorate from Columbia University. He has served in Istanbul, Ankara, Tanzania and Sri Lanka. The interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 31, 1995.

Q: What was the situation when you got to Sri Lanka at the end of 1985?

SPAIN: The Sinhalese-Tamil conflict had been brewing for some time. Tamil radicals had assassinated the mayor of Jaffna and ambushed and killed a number of Sinhalese soldiers. In 1983 there had been riots in Colombo in which Sinhalese had killed a lot of Tamils. The By 1985

much of the north and east was out of government control but few yet realized that the country was in a state of civil war. For instance, one of the first duties of an American ambassador in Sri Lanka has long been to lay a wreath on the grave of Harriet Winslow, at the girls college just outside of Jaffna, originally an American missionary school. She was John Foster Dulles' great, great, great grandmother. It was on my schedule. At the last minute embassy advisers recommended delaying my visit. "Wait a month or two until things clear up," they said. In fact things got worse and worse. It was not until 1987, when the Indian PeaceKeeping Force was in control in Jaffna that I laid the wreath. I did it surrounded by Indian troops.

Q: What was the government like in Colombo?

SPAIN: The government was dominated by the elderly J. R. Jayawardene, head of the United National Party, who had been elected first in 1978. He represented a pronounced and deliberate turnabout in economic policy from the socialist Sri Lanka Freedom Party of the Bandaranaiques. The economy was booming under his new free market approach.

Our main bilateral issue was expansion of a VOA station. There had been a small relay station in Sri Lanka for 30-40 years. VOA wanted to upgrade it to being one of the six key stations in an around the world network. The problem was not public opposition but of finding the land for it. We would settle on one site and somebody would come in to JR and complain and we would have to find another site. Every time Sri Lanka was ready to sit down and negotiate, VOA would lose its money. When VOA had its money, then a new problem would crop up in Sri Lanka.

As the civil war intensified there was also growing US concern about human rights violations. I regularly expressed our views on these to Jayawardene. Our USAID program was significant but not enormous. It went on and on, seemingly without accomplishing very much.

The basic question before the government was whether a military solution to the Tamil insurgency was practical. When I got there the president was convinced that it was if only the US would provide military assistance. We had made a decision not to. At that time there was a lot of sympathy for the Tamil rebels, albeit more in Europe and Canada than in the US. Most of us who thought about it, including our military, were convinced that the government forces, like ours in Vietnam, couldn't win. Gradually J.R. accepted the fact that he wasn't going to get arms from us. After a while things got worse. Indian gave direct support to the Tamil militants. Their explanation was that it was the only way to get the Sinhalese government to make decent concessions to Tamil grievances. In 1987 Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardene made a deal to send in Indian troops to disarm the rebels and "restore normalcy" in return for "an equitable solution of Tamil grievances." At the time I thought was a good arrangement likely to bring about a solution to the ethnic problem. It turned out a complete failure.

Q: Were we playing much of a role or was India the real broker in this thing?

SPAIN: We were quite active. We welcomed the Gandhi-Jayawardene agreement with presidential letters. We committed ourselves to \$75 million of extra development aid for the reconstruction and renovation of war-devastated areas. Initially, we had some problems doubts about the initial agreement because there were side letters to it in which the Indians insisted on

Sri Lanka's pledging to have no foreign military advisors, to give no access to foreigners to the naval base at Trincomalee, and to grant no facilities to foreigners for military or intelligence use. These all seemed directed at us.

I went off to see JR and said, "What is this all about?" He assured me that the US had no reason for concern. The US, Sri Lanka, and India knew that the VOA facility had no had no military or intelligence implications. As far as he knew, the US didn't want Trincomalee. It had made clear that it wasn't going to provide military assistance or advisers. So Sri Lanka had made these meaningless concessions to Indian fears.

We got behind the July 29, 1987 agreement. Half an hour after it was signed I delivered congratulatory letters from President Reagan to JR and to Rajiv Gandhi. This was at a celebratory tea party--which half JR's cabinet didn't attend to show their disagreement with the pact with India. The tea party had its amusing aspects. Rajiv and JR kept me sitting with them. The rest of the diplomatic corps twittered. They had never expected the Indian-Sri Lankan agreement. Now here was the American ambassador sitting with the two leaders and passing papers around. For a few hours I was a very popular character as my colleagues tried to find out what was going on.

In short, we did have a role in the affair, but we didn't know about the agreement in advance. We didn't do a thing to affect the agreement other than to get assurances from JR that the things in the side letters about limiting foreign involvement in Sri Lanka didn't apply to us.

Q: Were there any problems with Americans coming there for tourism purposes and getting into trouble?

SPAIN: No. In the three and a half years I was at the embassy and the six years I have lived in Sri Lanka in retirement since, I think there was only one American arrested. It was a very different scene from the one I knew in Turkey in the 1970's. Relatively few American tourists come to Sri Lanka. It is half way around the world and on the way you fly over the Caribbean and the Mediterranean with their competing beaches. Most tourists are northern Europeans. Their embassies have welfare and protection problems but normally ours doesn't.

Q: I heard somewhat indirectly that there are some Sri Lankans down in Florida involved in drug business. Was there any kind of a Sri Lankan drug connection?

SPAIN : I wouldn't be surprised if there were some of them here and elsewhere. There are no drugs produced in Sri Lanka. Ten years ago when I got there drugs were virtually unknown in any form. Then a good deal of heroin started to pass through from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. It is much easier to get the stuff down to Colombo by ship or by air and get it out to Europe from there. Out of this transit traffic a local addict population developed. There is also some evidence that the Tamil rebels are involved in the trade to raise money to buy guns.

Q: I take it that outside of wishing the Sri Lankans well as far as settling their ethnic disputes, this was not an area of great interest to us, was it?

SPAIN: Correct. In 1985 I went over to the Pentagon for a briefing. I expected the US Navy at least to urge me to get it facilities at Trincomalee. No one mentioned it.

Q: A famous naval base during World War II.

SPAIN: Yes. I brought the subject up. Our military couldn't have cared less. Diego Garcia, they said, was all they needed in the Indian Ocean. Later in a conversation with the Sri Lankan foreign minister, he said something that suggested he might be willing to talk about Trincomalee--which he assumed we'd like to use. I replied, not very diplomatically, "Mr. Minister, if you called me in here to tell me you were offering the base, I wouldn't even have to go back to Washington, I would tell you simply 'thank you, no thank you!'" Let me add that I understand why everyone is impressed with Trincomalee. It looks as San Francisco Bay must have looked when the first Spaniard saw it. It is an incredibly lovely enclosed harbor. But it doesn't have a single deep water dock. Everything has to be unloaded by lighters. It is a beautiful place, but I don't think it is ever going to be of a particular strategic value.

Q: Were you involved much with UN votes?

SPAIN: No. Sri Lanka usually voted with the moderate commonwealth. I can't recall a single controversy, unlike Tanzania, with whom we had conflicts on almost every UN issue.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover?

SPAIN: No. I think we have covered things pretty well--from my point of view at least.

EDWARD MARKS
Deputy Chief of Mission
Colombo (1986-1989)

Ambassador Edward Marks was born in Chicago in 1934, and received his BA from the University of Michigan. He served in the US Army from 1956 to 1958. Entering the Foreign Service in 1959, his postings included Nairobi, Nuevo Laredo, Luanda, Lusaka, Brussels, Lubumbashi and Colombo, with ambassadorships to Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 12, 1996.

Q: So then you went to Sri Lanka. How did you get the job?

MARKS: While at CSIS I was looking for an onward assignment, as we all do near the end of an assignment. What I wanted, of course, was another chief of mission or principal officer position. I didn't particularly want to go back to Africa. I was prepared to go back to Europe but there wasn't much of any interest for my background and rank. I always wanted to go east to Asia and looked around there. Somebody asked me to consider going to Sri Lanka as Jim Spain's DCM.

Although it wasn't the most exiting of possibilities, from a career point of view, I didn't have anything better in sight, wanted to go overseas, and always wanted to go to Asia.

Jim Spain, someone I had known over the years, had been nominated as ambassador to India, which would have been the culmination of a very distinguished career on the subcontinent. However, at the last moment he got elbowed out by another career officer with better White House connections. Jim, who had the year before suffered a very serious personal tragedy when his wife and daughter were killed in an automobile accident, was offered the consolation prize of Sri Lanka. He shrugged and agreed, not wanting to stay in Washington.

And it turned out, my wife has always had a thing about Ceylon because she remembered her father, who had been with Iran Air, coming back from Ceylon when she was child with marvelous things to say about it and bringing her wonder presents of semi-precious stones and other stuff. So, I accepted Jim's offer and we went off as DCM in about August, 1986.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MARKS: Until November, 1989.

Q: Could you describe the situation in Sri Lanka at that time and the American interests therein?

MARKS: Sri Lanka is a comparatively small country, I believe it is usually described as about the size of Maryland, located just off the southern end of India. Except for its location next to India. it was of limited strategic or other interests to the United States. However, there has been a long American involvement there, particularly with missionaries, for many, many years. Mark Twain even stopped there during his trip around the world and one of the chapters of his book about that trip is about Colombo. It is a country which the Indians consider to be in their sphere of influence, and any American activity raises suspicions and concerns in New Delhi. In the subcontinent, it is really India and Pakistan [that are of high interest] and places like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Maldives really are peripheral to our relations with India and Pakistan.

One particular point has always bedeviled our relationship with Sri Lanka and India is the Indians conviction that the United States lusts after Ceylon's port of Trincomalee. [This was the port from which] England and Nelson protected India. The monsoons are such that sailing ships cannot sail out of India's east coast harbors for almost half the year. So, the English navy protected India from any invasion that way by Trincomalee, an enormous, gorgeous natural port, which stood off the side and to the South and provided a naval guard post for India. Later, when the days of sail were over, it became a mammoth coaling station for the British navy in Asia. So, for several centuries it had had a real strategic value for the defense of India. The Indians were convinced that the United States, with the end of British involvement as the former imperial power, lusted after Trincomalee and spent all our time trying to figure out a way to convince the Sri Lankans to permit the establishment of an American base which would threaten Indian interests. No amount of explaining to the Indians that in the days of modern ships, modern communications, and particularly nuclear subs, we have no need for Trincomalee for any purpose whatsoever and wouldn't take it if it were offered to us. It was both amusing and frustrating to have our relations with the Indians and the Sri Lankans (some of whom also

believed this nonsense) complicated even a little bit by this historical but outdated strategical romanticism.

As I said, there was an American missionary relationship which went back to the beginning of the 19th century and there was a small Sri Lankan community in the United States. By and large this was a relatively new immigration, and included a large number of Sri Lankan Tamils which posed some problems with the rise of the Tamil insurgency. Commerce had been limited to Ceylonese tea but more recently a Sri Lankan textile industry had been developed, and had quickly filled up their quota with Hathaway shirts, Lands End clothing, etc.

Q: Would you describe the embassy and how Jim Spain ran it?

MARKS: Yes, but let me back up for a moment. One very interesting aspect of Sri Lanka is that it is a functioning democracy. It has been since independence. It is an interesting little country which has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, compared to Western standards of literacy. Women had achieved the right to vote back in the twenties, before they did in the States even. It had had internal self-government even before independence a peaceful transition to independence in the late forties. And, despite a Maoist-type Sinhalese youth rebellion the early 1960s, and two current insurgencies when I arrived, one by Tamils and a resurgence of the Sinhalese movement, the country still had a functioning democracy. In addition, the Sri Lankan president, J. R. Jayawardene, had - in 1997 - been the first political leader in the Third World to win election on a platform calling for market based reform of the government's economic policy; in other words he had been the first Third World leader to jump the ship of "socialist" ideology. And this right in the backyard of Gandhi-led India. That, and Sri Lanka's open democratic political system, gave it a certain cachet in Washington.

Q: Did they play any role in the Vietnam War?

MARKS: No, not at all, which means they missed out on the commercial and economic benefits many Asian countries took advantage of. Sri Lanka, or Ceylon as it was called in those days, had been the most developed and most prosperous country of the region up to the 1950s or thereabouts, with high rates of literacy, excellent health statistics and life expectancy rates, and the best per capita GNP [gross national product] in the area - by far. Population pressure was not severe and the sort of poverty common in the other countries of Asia, and especially the subcontinent, was absent. But instead of building on that foundation, the country pursued the so-called "socialist" economic policies favored by most Third World countries and India in particular. These policies produced twenty years of stagnation, exacerbated later by internal insurgencies.

We had a very nice little embassy. The old chancery was a beautiful, turn of the century mansion, located right on the coast. We built a very attractive new Chancery about 1983. It was modern and contemporary in style but reflected local architectural traditions in a very sophisticated way which was much appreciated locally.

We had a Peace Corps program, a good sized AID mission (about 20 direct hire AID employees and a \$25 million program), an active USIA program (a cultural center, library, etc.), a military

attaché with a small military exchange program, and of course the regular embassy sections. Counting Peace Corps volunteers (about 30), there were about 80 or so official Americans in a comprehensive mission in a smallish country of about 16 million people. The private sector American community was quite small, even when counting a handful of missionaries.

Jim Spain was a very senior FSO who had written some well reputed books, especially his first book on the Pathans. He had served in India, Pakistan, and Turkey and knew that part of the world very well, going back to his first post, Karachi, in the late forties and early fifties. About a year or so prior to Sri Lanka he had experienced the tragic personal loss of his wife and daughter in a car accident. He was suffering some professional disappointment in having been at the last moment denied what would have been the culmination of his career as ambassador to India and instead being given one of the minor embassies in the area. He took it well and it helped him to come out of his personal tragedy.

Spain was strong ambassador, but also one able to delegate and he made me his alter ego. Therefore, most of the mission most of the time dealt with the head office, either Spain or myself. I spent more of my time on internal administration and management than he did, but also did a fair amount of my own reporting. We ran an active post, but with two of us to do the work and with neither of us interested in "make-work" we were out by 5:00 and playing tennis before we went off to participate in the very active Colombo social life.

However this does not mean that we were lazy or lax or disinterested. Both of us being quite experienced (as I noted above Spain had hoped to be given India given his experience and seniority, and it was not unreasonable for me - given my background - to have hoped for the COM [chief of mission] position in Colombo for myself. Both individually and as a team we were overqualified). For instance, we spent a good deal of time my first year on a traditional Foreign Service management question - the staff of the USAID Mission. In the fiscal year of my arrival, the aid program had been cut in half - from \$50 million to \$25 million. Spain's reaction - classic FSO - was that this cut should result in a proportional cut in the USAID staff (which was somewhere over 20 direct hire Americans.) The AID Director was a cooperative type but was replaced within a few months of my arrival before Spain's effort to cut staff had gone very far. The new AID Director was cut from very different cloth. He was smart and experienced but very "turf" conscious and protective of his mission. He rejected out of the hand the proposal that his staff should be cut (merely because the budget was cut). He resisted Ambassador Spain with great bureaucratic skill, and only after a long struggle was forced to give up some positions.

Substantively, Sri Lanka was an interesting post, with a number of political and economic problems but with limited U.S. interests. Therefore we were relatively free to go our own way, as Sri Lanka was - so to speak - below the radar level of the 7th floor of the Department One interesting aspect of the country was that it was a functioning democracy, with regular elections and political parties which rotated in and out of power. At the same time, however, there were two ongoing insurgencies.

The country gained independence in the late forties and by the early fifties the dominant political culture was Third World socialist, under the leadership of the most prominent member of a very prominent local family - the Bandaranaiques. When Prime Minister Bandaranaike was killed in

[September] 1959, his wife - Madame Sirimavo Bandaranaike - became the first woman prime minister in the world. She was also very Third World radical - à la Sukarno and Gandhi and such - in her perspective and politics. Then in the early 1960s an insurgency group of young radical Sinhalese, educated and without jobs and rather Maoist in character, revolted against her government. She crushed them with very real severity.

In the late seventies that same movement, called the JVP [Janata Vimukthi Peramuna, or People's Liberation Front], revolted again. At the same time the Tamil separatist movement in the north flared up. By the time Jim and I got there in 1985-86, the Government had lost control of most of the north, including the city Jaffna. Meanwhile in the southern part of the country the JVP was becoming increasingly active. So, you had both of these insurgencies going on at the same time on this little island: one ethnic based and the other ideological.

In addition, a few years before we got there, the 25-year run of Third World or Fabian socialist government had been replaced by J. R. Jayawardene, the first among the Third World leaders to make the shift to a free market approach to the economy. I think he won his election in February 1978. He ran for office with the argument that the socialist policies of the Bandaranaiques had been wrong and that the country needed to switch to an open, free market economy, privatize the government-owned institutions, etc. His plan was to open up the economy and focus on two sectors: textiles (clothing in particular), and tourism. Sri Lanka is a naturally beautiful tourist paradise. Just as the country was beginning to get some good effects from this policy, the Tamil insurgency started and a year or so later the Sinhalese JVP rebellion surfaced again. So when we arrived, Jayawardene was making economic progress but it was being stalled and frustrated by these two insurgencies. So, you have a democratic government with a market economy approach faced with two insurgencies. While none of this was top level policy in Washington, it was very interesting from a professional point of view.

Q: Did we have any stand in this?

MARKS: Yes, we supported the J. R. government, particularly in terms of his economic policy. We of course supported Sri Lanka democratic tradition. We were essentially opposed to the Sinhalese insurgency movement because it was rather Maoist in character although we were sympathetic to the problem of unemployed youth. We were not very sympathetic or supportive of the Tamil separatist rebellion, both because of its ethnic separatism and its violence. We took the view that while the Tamil community, which is about 15 percent of the country, had legitimate grievances, they were not severe enough to justify the taking up of arms. Also, we felt that they were still functioning in a democratic enough society which still offered political ways to deal with these problems. By 1985-86 the Tamil insurgency movement had had a shakeout and one group was now in charge: the Tamil Tigers headed by a guy called Prabhakaran. He was, and still is, obviously a very most talented guerrilla leader but he was also very blood thirsty. We were not too sympathetic to his movement and his tactics, although we were sympathetic to some of the Tamil concerns.

The Sri Lankan Tamils had played the tradition of colonial role of the outcast elite. They had done exceptionally well in the colonial period and naturally wanted to continue their prominence after independence (for instance, fifty percent of the Permanent Secretaries at independence were

Tamils). However the Sinhalese majority were obviously not going to permit this, and the independence negotiations were very concerned with the competition between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. That competition continued after independence and produced a very complicated internal political life in the country: the traditional divide between left and right complicated by the tension between Tamil and Sinhalese. Anyway it was all very complicated. There were many Tamils living in Colombo and well integrated into the professional and business elite (however no longer in the governmental ranks). We mixed with them as much and as easily as with Sinhalese; all this while the insurgency was going on. It was very complex.

So, although both Jim and I felt that our careers had come to a plateau, and maybe even an effective end, as professional diplomats we had a lovely island country, filled with interesting and friendly people with a rich, old culture, and interesting economic and political problems. Living conditions were excellent and the tennis good.

Another charming quality about Sri Lanka is that I have never been in a country in which foreign diplomats were so well treated. They thought we diplomats were just super. From the moment you arrived in country the invitations start to arrive. Sri Lankans are very social and sociable people; they love luncheon parties, receptions, cocktails parties, dinner, and dinner dances. They entertain extensively among themselves and their automatic inclination is to invite foreigners to join them. And, when you invited them, they showed up on time and within a week or so, invited you back. It was lovely. The women of the professional, business, and governmental classes were well educated and very social. So, in every respect it was an absolutely delightful place for diplomats. We weren't dealing with the great problems of the Soviet Union or the future of the world, we were not the major player on the local scene, but I must admit it was kind of fun.

Q: Which is always wonderful.

MARKS: Yes. Now, when I say we are not the major player on the Colombo scene does not mean we were not important - the United States is always important - but that in this case someone else, the Indians, were a more influential external actor. Of course, there were those who wanted us to play a bigger role, but USG policy was to be fairly restrained in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, the Indians assumed we wished to play a bigger role and some Sri Lankans wanted us to. For instance, the Indians always assumed we had a covetous eye on the port of Trincomalee. We did not, and one day Jim told the Indian High Commissioner quite flatly that we were not only not seeking access to Trincomalee, but that we would not accept it if offered, and that he, the American Ambassador was in a position to turn down such an offer without bothering to query Washington for specific instructions.

Colombo presented, very clearly, an interesting and amusing phenomenon of our profession. In any capital in the world, there is a diplomatic pecking order, that is, who is the most important ambassador in town. [The protocol pecking order is based on longevity at post. I'm talking about the local power pecking order.] Usually, the American ambassador is the chief pecker, to speak, in the pecking order but there are local variations. In French West Africa, for instance, the French ambassador and the French embassy generally occupies the top of the pecking order. He may have to share that position with the American ambassador, but the French ambassador is

always at least as important. On the other hand, if you go to Botswana, the French ambassador will not be very important, nor would I expect him to rank very high in Uruguay.

Now in Colombo, the number one diplomatic honcho was the Indian. His colleagues in some places barely can get into the local chamber of commerce but in Sri Lanka the Indian ambassador was considered (and often called) the proconsul. Sri Lanka was Indian turf and the Indian High Commissioner was the number one diplomat in town. He had a large and well staffed embassy and the intrinsic importance of the Indian High Commission was evident in the quality of the incumbents. (The man there in my time moved on to become the career head of the Indian Foreign Service.) The Soviet ambassador also carried a great deal of weight, even though they did little in the country, because the USSR was a world power. The Pakistanis were important as a regional power but were clearly in the shadow of India. The Brits, as the former colonial power, still carried a good deal of weight (their foreign aid program helped as well as the old colonial ties) but the French and Italians were all minor players.

I think our general importance was augmented by the fact we were a good embassy. Jim Spain was clearly a major league professional diplomat who knew his way around that part of the world. And, I think I was good at my job and we had some good people. So we were a good embassy playing a role there because everybody knew who we were in the world. We also had a reasonably big AID program, the Peace Corps, and some military assistance. However, people wanted us to play a bigger role than we wanted to play, playing us off against India. This was a nice little professional challenge for Jim and myself, both being American diplomats who grew up and worked during a period when the United States basically took the lead everywhere, or tried to. Since WWII Americans have been used to practicing aggressive and domineering diplomacy and but here the situation didn't call for that. Neither Jim nor I wanted to move beyond a somewhat restrained role, supportive of the government, but not going to far. It was a nice professional challenge and I think we did it well. While wanting to ensure that American prestige was protected, we did not want to challenge the Indians for influence. In fact, we wanted to encourage them to play as positive (as we saw it) role. However we always felt that the Indian never really trusted us, and the Sri Lankans were a bit frustrated by our unwillingness to step out too far (challenging Indian hegemony on the one hand, and actively supporting the government in its anti-insurgency war on the other.)

So, our professional challenges were in a sense modest and restrained. We wanted to be constructive but not take on more than we wanted, not to become the bull in the china shop. Nor did we wish to give intimations that we might do more in the future and certainly not let people jump to any conclusion that we could be the solution to their problem. At the same time we did want to be constructive and supportive with the Indians without pushing them to believe we were trying to supplant them, which they thought we were. There is an Indian paranoia about us. There was Trincomalee to start with and then they also thought there was oil all over the place, although no one had yet discovered any, and we were trying to get at it. Essentially they had the general feeling that we were trying to move into their turf.

The Indian involvement in the Tamil insurgency was long, involved and not completely honorable. The Tamil community of Sri Lanka, 15 percent of the population and about a couple million people, is only an overseas extension of the 50 million Tamils who form the population

of the largest and most populous state of India, Tamil Nadu, right across the narrow straits from Sri Lanka. There was an automatic ethnic alliance with the Tamil rebels who had always used Tamil Nadu as a base for recruiting place, raising money, and training. This was clearly allowed with the connivance and often the encouragement of the Indian central government, and of course of the state government of Tamil Nadu. Madame Gandhi and her government had been involved in the fostering of the Tamil rebellion as a way, I suppose, of keeping the Sri Lankans in line. There is an historical irony here because the movement she and her people helped foster was the movement which later assassinated her son, Rajiv. After taking office following the murder of his mother, Rajiv changed policy towards the Tamil insurrection and was later killed by the Tamil Tigers. Who says history doesn't have a sense of humor?

So, the Indians had been involved. Not the whole Indian government in a formal manner, but the intelligence organization (RAW [Research and Intelligence Wing]), probably some of the political types and certainly the Tamil Nadu provincial government, had been involved in some fostering and a mixture of encouraging and restraining the Tamil insurgency, if only as a way of putting pressures on the Sri Lankan government. The Sri Lankan government under J. R. Jayawardene had distanced itself from India. Madame Bandaranaike had been soulmates with Madame Gandhi, agreeing with her in every respect... their view of the world, their view of economics, and their view of the United States. When J. R. defeated Madame Bandaranaike in 1977 and became prime minister, he changed economic policy towards a free market economy. This was the first such economic policy change among Third World countries, which made J. R. popular in Washington but was considered heresy in New Delhi. As you know, the Indians are reasonably arrogant and don't believe that the little peoples surrounding them have any right to individual policies, much less distance himself from Indian international policy. Madame Gandhi was not amused, and was very angry. So, the fostering of the Tamil Tigers was to some degree teaching Colombo a lesson.

In 1985-86, the security situation in the North and the East kept deteriorating, although not in Colombo itself or in fact in most of the country. The Tamil Tigers kept bringing weapons and money across the Palk Straits from India and further afield, such as Singapore, conducting training in India, setting up an extensive international network in the United States and England where they were able to raise money. There were reports of their getting involved in the drug trade. The war kept going on and the situation kept getting worse and worse. By now they controlled the city of Jaffna and the only Sri Lankan presence up there was a small army unit besieged in the old fort. Throughout much of the north, the Sri Lankan army and officials could not go. Although, in a very charming Sri Lankan way, the civilian officials, like the mayor, the police, the teachers, and the hospital personnel were still being paid by the central government, even though the area was really under the control of the insurgents. We thought that was kind of civilized.

But, the situation kept deteriorating through 1985 and 1986, with respect to both insurgencies. For various reasons, Jayawardene was publicly and privately pushing the Indians into having to take an open position. Presumably he was taking this risk because he calculated that they could not come down on the side of separatism. The Indians, remember, while they were sympathetic to the Tamils never officially supported the Tamil claim for independence. As we got to the end

of 1986, Jayawardene, we felt, was starting to push the Indians to a fish or cut bait situation, something they didn't want to happen.

The general view is that New Delhi forced its way into the situation, playing the regional power determined to resolve local conflicts in its area. However, I always felt that Jayawardene maneuvered the Indians into their action. At the same time that the Tigers had become stronger, the Sri Lankan army had been improving as well. Up until the late seventies the Army had been pretty much a club for sons of the upper classes: good officers messes, nice uniforms, etc. Since the outbreak of the Tamil rebellion in the early 1980s the army had been improving and had had some significant successes in late 1986. There was some concern in many circles that Jayawardene would go for a military solution - try to crush the insurgency on the ground. Obviously this would mean enormous bloodshed, and quite possibly a really protracted civil war which India - and possibly the world - would not be able to ignore. A Biafra-like catastrophe. There was some public and political pressure in Sri Lanka (possibly orchestrated) to go for this solution.

Jayawardene launched a public campaign, in which he brandished two alternatives: either India would take up its responsibility, or he would be forced to go for "a military solution." In the end, the Indians decided that they would intervene. First, they sent a flotilla of ships who were turned back and then some airplanes who dropped food parcels to the Tamil population in the north. This produced little results and finally New Delhi decided to send an Indian "Peace Keeping Force." Numbering eventually 15,000 troops, the IPKF moved into the Tamil north. An agreement with the Sri Lankan government was patched up which authorized them. The IPKF took over administration of the Tamil north. At first they were welcomed by the Tamil insurgents, who may have thought that the Indians would expel the Sri Lankan Government and turn the Jaffna peninsula over to them. When this did not happen, and only three sided negotiations occurred, the Indians and the Tamil Tigers fell out and a conflict ensued which cost the Indians a thousand killed and several thousand wounded. At this point the Sri Lankans stood aside and let the other two fight it out.

Then in 1989 there was an election and J. R. Jayawardene lost and Ranasinghe Premadasa, from the same party, took over as Prime Minister and then instituted a presidential system. He started pushing the Indians to get out and, not resisting too much, they finally did. The Indians, especially the Army, left quite fed up and disgusted. The Indian army felt they had walked into a bad situation, having been misled by their civilian intelligence colleagues (RAW, the Indian CIA). The Army had gone in, did all of the dirty work, and accomplished nothing. They had suffered deaths and casualties and nothing had been accomplished. In a sense, the unhappy experience of the IPKF in Sri Lanka and the later assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by the Tamil Tigers demonstrated that his mother's policies came home to roost.

Now President Premadasa tried to implement a conciliation policy with the Tigers, but he didn't get very far either. He reworked various power sharing or devolution schemes, but the Tigers rejected them and eventually killed him as well. So, the Tamil Tigers, who were a very competent rebel organization, have killed two prime ministers, one in India and one in Sri Lanka, numerous Sri Lankan ministers, and have been very successful in their numerous terrorist or insurgency activities.

Meanwhile on the JVP side, the Sinhalese youth rebellion, events took a dramatic turn in late 1989. Up until then, there appeared to be a sort of agreement between the JVP and the security forces, especially the police. A kind of live and let live agreement. The JVP restricted its attacks on security forces - who mainly come from the rural areas - who in turn turned a bit of blind eye to JVP activity in the villages. Then in August or so of 1989, the JVP made a horrendous strategic mistake. They launched a terror campaign against the families of security forces person, killing some family members and distributing leaflets urging security forces personnel to desert the government and rally to the JVP or have their families face further attacks. The reaction was exactly the opposite, the security forces went on a rampage and in a period of several weeks or so destroyed the JVP, killing, presumably, many innocents at the same time. By the time I left Sri Lanka in November, the JVP insurgency was over.

So, you can see from a professional diplomat's point of view this was a complicated, maybe tragic, but certainly interesting situation. I had spent many years in the Third World as represented by Africa, but Sri Lanka was a very different situation. Third World by definition, yes, but a very cultured and complicated society with a rich history. Both Jim Spain and I were interested and active enough but also restrained as we agreed that there was little scope for a more active USG role in Sri Lanka. We were sympathetic and supportive on the fringe, but did not wish to play a more active role, for instance expanded military assistance. Ambassador Spain retired in the spring of 1989, and actually set up housekeeping in Colombo where he still lives, and I took over as chargé until November when I left. I opened up the reporting a bit, but made few other changes. Thus ended what both my wife and I considered our most memorable post in the Foreign Service. We loved the country, the people, and the culture and I certainly enjoyed the work even if it represented at best marking time for me professionally.

ERNESTINE S. HECK
Political Counselor
Colombo (1986-1990)

Ernestine S. Heck was born in Oregon in 1940. She received her bachelor's degree from Oregon State in 1962. Her career has included positions in Bombay, Saigon, Teheran, Niamey, Katmandu, New Delhi, Colombo, and Madras. Mrs. Heck was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in December 1997.

Q: Today is August 24, 1998. Ernie, now once again you went to Colombo to be what?

HECK: I went to Colombo in June of '86 to be political counselor, and I was there until 1990, until the summer of 1990.

Q: What was the situation in Sri Lanka when you arrived?

HECK: When I arrived, the country was deep in, I guess you would call it, a guerrilla war against the liberation tigers of Tamil. Trouble had broken out in June of 1983. There had been a

big funeral in Colombo. First of all, a group of soldiers had been killed, massacred, in the Jaffna Peninsula by the Tamil Tigers, who had at that point just been a sort of a local group, and they killed 20-some soldiers. The soldiers' bodies were brought back to Colombo, and there was a funeral at the major cemetery. Thousands and thousands of people went, and afterwards they rioted in the streets surrounding that and started attacking Tamil establishments. The trouble escalated, and for about four or five days groups just ran riot all over the island or in large parts of the island where there was a Sinhalese majority. The President, J. R. Jayewardene, stayed at his home and didn't say anything publicly. There was no call for calm on television or anything like that for four days. During those four days literally thousands of Tamils were killed, chased away, their property was burned. I think the final figure was several thousand, although I'm not sure anyone ever really knew. They were stopping cars on the main streets of Colombo and having people say something, and the groups could usually tell by an accent whether the person's first language was Sinhalese or Tamil. The Tamils got pulled out and in many cases executed in the most barbaric ways. What was even more frightening was that large groups of people went through, certainly in Colombo and in other places, armed with tax lists or property lists so that they would know which houses were owned by Tamils even if Sinhalese were living in them and vice versa. If it was a Tamil-owned house, they would burn it; and leave the people alone if they were Sinhalese. If it was the other way around where it was a Tamil renter, they'd kill the people and leave the house. It was very, very obvious that they had some help from inside. The trouble was finally quelled but not before literally thousands and thousands of people were refugees. Many of them left for India if they could get away. Many more were in refugee camps in Sri Lanka. Property was burnt all over the island. As a result, the Tamil Tigers became very strong, and this was one of the major regions, I suppose, and they became very active and pushed their fight to all of the eastern and northern provinces with very successful raids into Colombo, terrorist-type activities, bombing something usually. This was the state that it was in by the time I got there. The northern and eastern parts of the island were basically war zones. We were not allowed to travel in them. The army was in charge in those areas. The carnage, considering the small size of the population, was very, very bad, and the areas where we could travel were peppered with burnt buildings and refugees still, although most of them had by that point gone on to India and were living in refugee camps all over southern India and particularly in Tamil Nadu where they had a language in common. So it was an exciting time to be a political officer, because there was an insurgency going on, and that, of course, is always interesting from a political standpoint. It was interesting also - and I use the word 'interesting' advisedly - it was important to us also because there were some very bad human rights abuses apparently going on, and this, of course, was a major thrust of American policy. But as a political counselor, that was only one of my responsibilities. There was a lot of bilateral relations type things with the Foreign Ministry and so on.

Q: Well, first, who was the ambassador, and can you describe the embassy and how it operated?

HECK: The embassy is located on the ocean. It's a beautiful embassy with beautiful views of the sun setting over the Indian Ocean. It's on Gall Road, which is the main north-south highway which skirts the ocean from Colombo down to the southern tip of the island. My first ambassador was James W. Spain, who was an old South Asian hand who had been ambassador in several countries before that, Turkey and Tanzania specifically. This was to be his last post before retirement - a marvelous ambassador. He was followed two years later by Marion Creekmore,

who had been my deputy chief of mission in New Delhi, and this was Marion's first embassy. He had been a deputy assistant secretary. He is an economist and was particularly interested in human rights - and a good ambassador, I must say, very thoughtful of people. He has now become one of the vice presidents of the Carter Center in Atlanta doing international things.

Q: What were the major points of policy with the Sri Lanka government?

HECK: This is an interesting point. Sri Lanka as a nation is more First World than Third World in terms of all of the quality-of-life indexes, literacy and health and length of life and all of these things, maternal and child care. It is a beautiful island filled with beautiful people. The fact that there were all of these troubles is particularly damning. In terms of American interests in Sri Lanka, on the world stage they were relatively minor. We don't have a lot of Sri Lankan American citizens. Our business interests there were minimal, because it is a small island and because other things were bigger in the region for us, I suppose. We didn't have a lot of citizens living there. Our major concerns were about stability of the country - it's a democracy, and we wanted it, of course, to remain that way - and the integrity of the country - we didn't want to see it bifurcated or, even worse, trifurcated - and human rights. But it was and remains not as large on the scale of things for South Asia as other countries in the region. It's dwarfed by India and Pakistan. So our leverage was good, because the Sri Lankans let it be good. It was not because we had a great deal of things to pull out or to give that would have made a great deal of difference. The embassy itself was medium small, I guess you would say. It had a large AID component, and it had a Peace Corps, but the major interests of the U.S. government were in seeing the end of this insurgency and in human rights.

Q: How did you find just going to talk to the government? Any problems?

HECK: Marvelous, coming from India it was marvelous. India was always a difficult place in the mid-'80s. Of course, it was not my responsibility because I was doing internal reporting there basically, but dealing with the government could be a little prickly at times, more often than not in many cases. Dealing with the Foreign Ministry could be difficult at times. To be in Sri Lanka, to be able to call up the Foreign Ministry and say, "I have something I want to talk to you about. Can I come over?" and I could be there in half an hour. I could get an appointment so easily, and I could see virtually anyone I needed to see at almost any time. The hard part about dealing with the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry was that it was so small they were overextended in many ways. They didn't have a lot of officers. There was not fat in the system particularly, and people were being switched around. In my four years there I had seven different directors, what was called Director of the Western Hemisphere, I think - it was basically everything - but the person in charge of the United States also had all of North and South America and all of Western Europe and, I think, also the various remaining colonies of Western Europe. So it was like 53 entities that it dealt with, of which the United States was only one albeit an important one. So having seven different interlocutors became a little bit of a game, but they were all nice people.

Q: Did you find that you were at a certain point becoming sort of the institutional memory for them?

HECK: Well, yes, it got a little embarrassing. You are aware of how the United States just loves to go in and tell other foreign ministries what our opinions are on everything and asking their support to follow our lead on whatever the issue is. A big country can afford to do that. A country like Sri Lanka, they would listen politely, but most of these issues didn't matter to them. Their one issue at that point was, first of all the Tamil Tigers, or rather the Tamil insurgency because when I got there the Tamil Tigers was one of six groups but it soon became the remaining one of the six groups - it removed its competition, let us say, in some pretty violent ways - and then later the JVP. That's the *Jene Vemut de Peremuna*, which is people's liberation. There was a Maoist group on the other side of the spectrum. It was Sinhalese people from the deep south basically. When it got into the fray, the only thing that mattered to the Sri Lankan government was gaining support for its position against these terrorist or insurgency groups and very little else. So particularly the day I would have to go in in the fall and present the American position at the United Nations and you have 45 different subjects to cover, it got to the point where you could just see the eyes glazing over, but they were quiet about it.

Q: It may be a peripheral issue, but I was wondering whether you got involved in narcotics, because my wife's best friend's daughter married a Sri Lankan down in Miami who was involved in drugs, and I understand that Sri Lankans, the ones that were down in that area, were involved in the trade. Was there a problem?

HECK: Yes, we did, although it was trans shipment, as far as I know, and nothing else. The DEA office in New Delhi covered us and came down periodically. One of my officers - I say one of my officers, we were a three-person, one-secretary unit, so this is not a large organization - but one of the other political officers was responsible for narcotics. What that usually meant for us was funneling stuff from DEA to the narcotics people in the Sri Lankan police and vice versa, but occasionally we had an informant. We would get an informant, and we would get in touch immediately with DEA, and they would usually come down and relieve us of this responsibility. So there was an interest, although it was not nearly so big for the DEA office in New Delhi, as was the Pakistan-Afghanistan-India conduit. As far as I know, there was no making of anything in Sri Lanka; it was just a trans-shipment issue. The Tigers were using this as one of their ways of getting money, so it was of vital importance to them.

Q: In the first place, let's take the Tigers and then move to...

HECK: The JVP.

Q: The JVP, but the Tigers first. What was our view of them? Were we trying to act as an intermediary or were we trying to get information about them? Did we have any particular concern about them other than wishing well for the...

HECK: For the Sri Lankan government. No, we were not an intermediary in any sense. In the early '80s, shortly after this vast riot across the country in '83 summer - I'm just trying to remember, it must have been '85, because George Bush was involved, and he was in India in 1985 - up till then we still had in the north some AID people. One of the groups - and I don't remember at this point whether it was the Tigers or one of the others - kidnapped a bunch of our AID people, five or six including some spouses. They didn't harm these people; they just held

them. I just remember that George Bush was involved in a phone call, as I remember, when he was India down to Sri Lanka about this, which is how I think I can date it. After that, of course, we pulled out whatever remained of our AID people. The northern peninsula, Jaffna Peninsula, was first settled by Tamils a couple thousand years ago. They have been on the island a long, long time. They are, therefore, more like cousins rather than brothers to the Tamils in India. There is particularly in the Jaffna area, which is on the far northern part, or was before all the trouble started, a lot of cross-strait transport. People would go over to India to watch a movie, for instance, and this sort of thing. Well, they don't do that anymore. And there were marriages in the far north between that part of India and Sri Lanka. But basically they evolved somewhat differently from the people in Tamil Nadu. Their language is different enough that Tamils know the difference immediately. It's like British English and American English. But they lived in this region all this time. When the British got to Sri Lanka, not too far behind them were American missionaries in the first half of the 19th century. The United States was, of course, big on converting the "heathen," and why they thought that people who had had the same religion for several thousand years were heathen is another question, of course. But when American missionaries came to Sri Lanka, as they did, the British hierarchy in Colombo basically sent them to the Jaffna Peninsula. They maintained for themselves the more fertile area along the coast and the richer area, the Sinhalese area, and the church of choice at that point was the Church of England, of course. The Americans, therefore, were sort of exiled out there on that far northern thing, and they did something very good for that part of the country, but it also led to the troubles later in a way. It was education, and hospitals to a certain extent, but education particularly. They opened schools and colleges, and they taught English. So there has been that special tie between the United States and Sri Lanka particularly among mission boards going back 150, almost 200 years now. For instance, John Foster Dulles' great grandmother, one of his maternal relatives, is buried in Jaffna, and when we finally were able to go there, Ambassador Spain laid a wreath on the church wall where the plaque was about this person. So the connections have been high up there, but, no, we did not get involved in trying to do anything about it. Quite the contrary, among the Tamils who are in the United States, whether citizens or permanent residents, there was definitely following the 1983 troubles a move to send money, and particularly the Tigers but other groups also milked the community in the United States and Canada for financial support to help the struggle. I do not know whether this continues or not. But in any case, when I was there in the second half of the '80s, memories were still very, very raw about what had happened, and it was a great tragedy what had happened in 1983. The Tamil people, I think, as a whole basically at that point, and certainly in the Jaffna Peninsula, supported the Tigers, at least passively if not actively. I would say that by the time I left this had changed. There was a good deal of resentment about what had happened. Anyway, to go back to the education, if I may just finish that, the point is that the Americans taught English and gave a good education, and then these people became the people of choice for British civil servants' jobs. They became the baboos, they became the clerks. They had a much higher percentage of jobs in the central government than did the Sinhalese for their population. What transpired from all of this was in the '50s when S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike became Prime Minister, he lived in Sinhalese-dominated areas, and so they spoke at least some Sinhalese, but they were not of the educational level normally to work in government, so it basically took a major source of employment away from the Tamils in a very short order. That was one of the great injustices, as the Tamils see it, that precipitated some of the troubles later in the '70s and '80s. But going back to the American effort in the north; we tried to protect our citizens as best we could, but there

really wasn't anything we could do about it other than to keep in touch with them, and even that was difficult because mail didn't go and telephones didn't work, to the north. The government had, by the time I got there, long since cut off any shipments of gasoline, so no cars ran in the north. Whatever there was went to the Tamil Tigers, and the cars were all in storage. There was no electricity. In the northern part of the island, these very educated, sophisticated people were living in most cases with no electricity and no gas, and the Tamils wouldn't let them out of the region. They were forbidden to cross over. Some of them did come, of course, but basically they were captive in their own region. The damage done by the Sri Lankan military at various points had really wreaked havoc on things like the university and the major buildings in town. Some of it was imposed by the Tamils fighting back. I mean, this was not a one-way street. But the conditions up there were not at all good. We did a weekly cable, the D&D for Death & Destruction, of terrorist incidents and fighting throughout the island. The statistics were just horrendous, you know. First of all, it was hard to know what to believe. You could take things from the newspaper, but you couldn't go out and see these incidents yourself obviously. We couldn't go into the northern and eastern province, and so we developed quite a list of contacts, the three of us. We really worked the crowd trying to find out things from people in the military and civilians. There was still a modicum of central civilian rule, administration rather, in the northern and eastern provinces. There was an official assigned by the government to be in charge of each of those two provinces just as there was in the seven to the south. We would see them when they came to town, and we would try to see their senior people when they came to town. They could go back and forth, because they could fly on the Sinhalese government or the Sri Lankan government military planes. There was one base up there on the Jaffna Peninsula at a place called Palali which the army held and where there was a runway, so the planes did go back and forth, and so we could see these people. We would talk to Tamil politicians in Colombo who were out of the mainstream but still had family ties and had some ways of getting in touch with each other. The hard part was how many of these were lost, how many people were killed who had been friends of ours, acquaintances of ours, sources of ours, informants of ours. Of course, it only got worse when the JVP insurgency started a couple of years later. The last time I counted, I think I had lost 47 people who had been killed, whom I had entertained in my home, whom I had thought of as important people for me for various reasons.

Q: Now, these were on both sides?

HECK: These were on all sides.

Q: I take it that the insurgency was not confined to the peninsula, and things were happening...

HECK: They were blowing things up in town. I can remember waking up with big booms. I remember one horrendous boom, and it was the railway tracks coming into town that they had knocked out. Elephant House, the big supply store where we all bought our soda water and that sort of stuff, got blown up. They tried different buildings around town. They tried assassinations, and they got a certain number, but they were not as active in Colombo at that point as later the JVP became.

Q: What was our estimate or anybody's estimate of what were the Tamil Tigers after?

HECK: They wanted independence, as their name said. They wanted a separate country for the northern and eastern province. At various time in the intervening years when the government had tried to make some sort of negotiations with these people, there were whispers or thoughts about greater autonomy, never independence but greater autonomy for the region. I'm not sure where it's going to go. I heard a minister, whom I had known before he was a minister, speak several months ago, and he was talking then about they were waiting for the Tigers to respond to the latest offer by the current Prime Minister, Mrs. Humarna Tunga. But it was independence that they were after. These were fanatic young men. The leader, Prabakharan, must be in his 40s now, but in his mid-30s then. He demanded total loyalty of these young men who worked for him, and actually there were young women brigades also. They had military training, even the girls. They are noted for their devotion to the cause. They all wear a little cyanide capsule around their necks and, believe me, they use them when they are cornered, a number of them did so while I was there. When they say, "Bite the bullet," this was really biting the bullet. Going by cyanide is not a nice way to go. But it does take care of your turning over any information to the other side. They were getting even then kids that were just barely adolescents. You must have seen pictures of little boys holding automatic guns, and the guns are just as big as they are. That doesn't stop them, of course, from being able to cause some damage. Their complete willingness to die for the cause is what sets them apart from the army. Conscripts in an army are not so good, particularly in an army that doesn't have the luxury of tremendous training and doesn't have the equipment. So I would say that the Tigers had and probably still have the edge on the Sri Lankan army. The Sri Lankan army, on the other hand, is now better trained and is now better equipped and probably is a lot better than it was when I left Sri Lanka. These groups were bringing weapons in. They would buy weapons with the money that they collected, in Singapore usually, I think, or in Southeast Asia, and bring them in by ship. There were plenty of Tamils working for shipping companies. There were plenty of Tamil captains. One heard of ships that were supposed to belong to the Tamil Tigers. I don't know if they ever did, but they would land at night off the coast somewhere and ferry stuff in in small boats, and it would go into the arsenal. They even had a few missiles, surface-to-air missiles, SAMs. I think they have brought a couple of small planes down since I left, but they hadn't by the time I left. Anyway, the difference between the northern and eastern provinces is important to note, because the northern province really is entirely Tamil. I can remember meeting one journalist who was a Sinhalese who lived up there, and there were the missionaries who refused to leave, but basically it is entirely Tamil. The eastern province, on the other hand, is not. It's a mixture. There are Sinhalese populations, large ones. The Tamils are the largest of the three, but there are a number of Muslims also and different kinds of Muslims. Islam came to Sri Lanka in different fashions, so there are several different Muslim groups. They were represented on the eastern province, so it wasn't such a cut-and-dried proposition about the eastern province. The trouble there was just as bad as in the north and maybe even worse. The army seemed to be more in the northern province, and it has gone back and forth since then. At this point now in 1998 apparently the eastern province is much more in government hands than it ever was when I was there, but I could never go to any of the beauty spots on the eastern coast. This is where Trincomoly is. This is the huge base where the British fleet could put its entire fleet in.

Q: Very, very important during World War II.

HECK: That's right. I couldn't go there, couldn't go to Badakolol, the other major town in the region, couldn't go anywhere in the eastern province. I got only as far as the jungles along the border and never further east. To go to Jaffna, even though this was such an important part of what we were watching, I was only there twice. Once was in 1987, November of '87, when the Indian army pushed its way into Sri Lanka. The government had to bite its tongue and accept this, because it was India and it was huge and it had ships off the coast. You could see the lights of the Indian picket ships along the sea at night, and it had the air power, it had all the striking capability that Sri Lankans didn't. It was going to protect the Tamils from what the Sri Lankan army was doing to them. They came in the summer, July, I guess, of 1987. Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister, came down. There was a guard of honor, and one of the guard of honor tried to assassinate him right in front of the President of Sri Lanka, and the Prime Minister. He had a glancing blow on the head, as I remember, but he was not badly hurt. The man was, of course, caught and turned out to be a chauvinistic Sinhalese who didn't like the idea of the Indian occupation of his country. The Indian army moved rapidly into the north and the east, and in August or so of 1987 the diplomatic corps was invited to come up or at least was told that they could come up to Jaffna. I accompanied the ambassador, and we went up for about a total of four days, calling on people, meeting people, meeting the Indian army, and then driving back. It was a very interesting trip. The thing that interested me the most was when we went in to call on the I think he was a brigadier who was in charge of the operation in Jaffna city itself. Seated on his veranda of this colonial building in which he had been ensconced were some of his troops. I remember a Sikh enlisted man fixing Tamil Tiger radio equipment, repairing the Tiger capability to speak to one another. Things were all very friendly at first when the Indian army went in. This lasted until October.

Q: Excuse me. While we're talking about the Indian move in there, in the first place, could you talk a bit about just before they came in, our relations and our embassy and your relations with the Indian embassy there, and then when they came in, how we reacted to this, what we thought they were up to, and what we did?

HECK: Well, the Indian intelligence service had been training various groups of Tamil insurgents for many years, some of them in the south in Tamil Nadu. They had camps and training sites, and some in the north up in Beridudin in the foothills of the Himalayas. It was a pretty open secret that Indira Gandhi had put some of her government's resources behind protecting the Tamils. First of all, I should say that this event in the summer of 1983 shocked Indian public opinion. It really was upsetting and, of course, it was particularly upsetting in the south where Tamil Nadu is located, the state of Tamil Nadu. I believe that public opinion in India, such as it was at the time, would have supported what the Indian government was doing, but the Indian government did try to keep it relatively quiet. But it was no big secret, and certainly the journalists wrote about it and occasionally a few surreptitious pictures were taken. The Indian government had the deniability factor behind it, so they were able to get away with it. But there were these ties. Prabakharan had gone up and talked to Rajiv Gandhi when he was Prime Minister, and the Indians had tried to talk them into various types of things. Prabakharan was not particularly happy and wasn't buying much of this stuff. The Indians tried some strong arm on them, and it was not particularly useful, but by the time the Indians arrived in Sri Lanka, they had built up public opinion at home that they needed to do this to protect the Tamil populace. At first they were seeing them as welcome brothers when they got into the north and

east, but it didn't last very long. First of all, Prabakharan, I think, was still seething over having this done to him. They had a very big ceremony that the Indians played up tremendously early on when they first got there, a surrender ceremony of weapons. They had this big public ceremony in Jaffna where various members of the Tigers and others came and deposited weapons. They collected the most motley group of things. It wasn't a very big group, first of all, and it was nothing. It was just Enfields and things like this that were probably dug out of somebody's basement as much as anything else, if there are basements - I don't think there are in Jaffna. But anyway, it was obviously not their weapons. This was a symbolic gesture on the part of the insurgents, but not a real thing. Well, the honeymoon was over very soon. Part of it was that the Indian army really aren't brothers with the Sri Lankan Tamils. First of all, the Indian army is very, very diverse, and the units that came in were from all over the country and they were not Tamils and they didn't speak the language. This meant that at road checks they couldn't communicate unless the person involved was an educated person and they could use English. But a lot of the Indian enlisted men didn't really have a lot of English. They had some, of course, but it was not conducive to long discussions about what's in the basket, so it got a little bit hairy. Along about the second week in October of that year, the Tamil Tigers started sniping at the Indian army. From then on until the Indian army pulled out - and the last groups didn't go until 1990, I believe - it was a constant battle, and it became really open warfare. The Indians became the enemy instead of the Sri Lankan army basically, and the Sri Lankan army was basically told to leave this alone and the Indian army would take care of it with their superior fire power and all of their weapons. Of course, they did have a lot better weaponry, and they had a disciplined force, but they're not a guerrilla fighting organization. They didn't know the terrain, they didn't know the language, and they didn't really do very well.

Q: Did you kind of feel like it was deja vu all over again?

HECK: All over again, yes.

Q: From your time in Vietnam?

HECK: Well, yes, in a way, because, for instance, when we went up that year, that August, Ambassador Spain and I, I remember being taken to a church, and the Tamils were just livid because the church had been bombed. The word 'bombing' got thrown around a lot in Sri Lanka, but what was being used as bombs were makeshift. I think it was a yak, the plane, that was used. It's a Chinese plane. They use them occasionally for paratroops. The one I rode in I remember had the paratroop wire across the top. The bombs were barrels, they were old oil barrels with inflammatory material. They would push holes in them and light it and push it out of the plane. That was the bomb. It set fire to the roofs, but it was not a bomb in the military sense. India, on the other hand, has things that are really bombs, and they have airplanes and they have all of the equipment. So, it became very much like Vietnam, a smaller version, it was the Indian's Vietnam. Like us in Vietnam, they never really quite understood why these people they were trying to help weren't more grateful. It got very nasty at the end because the Tigers could get old ladies to carry things up and explode them. They could draw on a variety of people in the population, and the Indians just really weren't used to taking out after little old white-haired ladies. It became a really nasty thing. The Indians also had the problem of pulling out. First, I should go back a bit. You asked about India and its role. India saw itself, by the time I got there

in 1986, as in charge as much as any country could be in charge among the diplomatic corps. The then ambassador was J. M. Dixit, and Mr. Dixit, who is also called Manny Dixit, ended his career as Foreign Secretary, which, of course, is the highest professional rank in the Indian Foreign Ministry. He was a very erudite man who could recite couplets in Urdu even though he was from the far south, an extraordinarily active and energetic diplomat. I remember the first week I was in town being invited to attend a Rotary Club luncheon by a Sri Lankan friend. We trotted off to this Rotary Club luncheon, and the speaker was Manny Dixit. He proceeded to read this Rotary Club the riot act about the failings of the Sri Lankan government and their failings with the Sinhalese. It was a real talking-to, a real Dutch-uncle-type thing. It was not a pleasant lunch conversation. This man had no fear when it came to lecturing Sri Lankans about India's point of view. Although I never sat in on one of his meetings with the Prime Minister or the President, I suspect it was along this same line. He was a very direct person. After the Indian military came, the Sri Lankan government was faced with the fact that the Indians wanted to really solve the problem, as well they might, and the Indians began a peace negotiation. As far as I remember, at that point it was just with the Tamil Tigers, but they did keep the Sri Lankan government informed. The team that was involved in this was Ambassador Dixit, he was a high commissioner, because it was a commonwealth country - the High Commissioner of India who was Manny Dixit, his political officer, who was also hand picked by him for this job. There were long and very detailed talks in the Jaffna Peninsula area. The High Commissioner would go up quite regularly for these. It was announced jointly by the Sri Lankan government and the Indian government, but this was the Indians which had done this - that an agreement had been worked out with Prabakharan which would bring him into government. This would make him and his Tamil Tigers part of, or actually in charge of, the government of the northern and eastern provinces. He would have a year that way, and then after one year there would be some sort of a referendum to decide what the people wanted. I was over at the Indian High Commission that day for something else, and they were so excited. My contact, the political officer, was on the phone to Delhi and consulting with the ambassador. They were in constant touch with New Delhi about this, and they were so pleased about it, and it was announced that evening at five or five-thirty. It was on all the evening news. Before dawn Prabakharan had called and reneged. He called up Manny Dixit in the middle of the night and said he wasn't going to do it. I could never figure this out, because I always thought that, given the way things run in that part of the world, if the Tigers had been in charge of the government of those two areas for one year, they would have had it. I think it was our first real indication that this man, Prabakharan, really is not interested in governance. He is a guerrilla, and I don't think he really wanted to have the headaches of feeding the people and all these other things. So that was over, and in later times, in fact again in 1990, the Sri Lankan government tried the same thing. At that point the Tigers came down to Colombo, and we had the really strange experience in 1990 of having the number one or two person in the Foreign Ministry from the professional side calling the embassies and asking them to come see the Tigers, making appointments for us to be present at this. They were trying then to work out some sort of an agreement, and the Tigers backed away again, and since then they've done it a third time, and maybe a fourth, I don't know. It's pretty apparent that these people, at least the hierarchy, are not interested in governance. What they would do with independence I have no idea.

Q: When the Indians moved in there, this is the sort of thing that normally we would protest about. Here is India forcing their way into another country. It would be the sort of thing that I would have thought that we would have reacted in some way.

HECK: To the best of my knowledge we did not. It's possible in New Delhi - I do not remember though - certainly not in Colombo. First of all, living in Sri Lanka gave me an idea about how people in Central America and Mexico feel about the United States. A small country next to a giant faces a certain amount of things, and perhaps as a giant we understood this, I don't know. We certainly did want peace, and if the Indians could bring peace, that was all for the good. In any case, the trouble in the north dragged on. It became worse and worse as the Indians realized that they really had an enemy here and not a friend. When the new president was elected in Sri Lanka in 1988, R. Premadasa succeeded J. R. Jayewardene, and R. Premadasa had been J.R.'s prime minister. Unlike J.R. and the previous prime ministers of the country, R. Premadasa was really a man of the people. He was from a very, very low socioeconomic group and low caste. His education was not good. He was not a sophisticated type. J.R. was very, very sophisticated, and I have heard that he and his brother used to speak Latin to each other just to keep in practice. He was and remains quite a man. R. Premadasa was much more of a politician and had his finger much more on the pulse of the people. He made as one of his campaign pledges and ultimately carried it out that the Indian government was going to have to pull its troops out. He couldn't force them out, but it happened. So over the period after he was made President in 1988 or '89, they started pulling troops back and finally pulled out the last of their troops sometime in 1990, I believe, doing it all by sea, whereas they had flown them in in large contingents. Coming out was a lot slower, as they took them out by boats. One of the things that happened because of the Indian presence, which was such anathema to so many people in the country, was the resurgence of the JVP. There had been a JVP insurgency in the mid-'70s which was very bloody, ultimately controlled but very bloody. It was short but it was very nasty in the early '70s. After that point the organization had been basically underground, and the tenor of it had changed. The leader of the JVP was a man named Rehana Wujiwira, and he was from the very deep south. His father had been an ardent Communist. He had been sent to school at Patrice Lumumba University in the Soviet Union and, in fact, was expelled from Patrice Lumumba for being too revolutionary. He was not a Russian Communist; he was a Maoist of the Cultural Revolution type; Maoists with a really strong nationalistic, chauvinistic bent. The original JVP in the '70s had been university students in large part. They were doing this for an ideological reason and they understood what the ideology of this organization was supposed to be, which was something of a mismatch - nationalistic, chauvinistic, anti-foreign, anti-this, anti-that. The JVP began to appear in the mid-'80s - it actually had been doing a little bit of harm but relatively minor things, not to cause trouble and not to get headlines in the papers but not enough to scare the population in its entirety - this JVP was made up of a different type of person. When S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had instituted his language policy in the '50s, one of the things was, of course, that schools had to be in Sinhalese, and yet the elite universities in the country continued to teach largely in English. Part of it is just economic. You know, writing science texts in Sinhalese can be very difficult at the university graduate level. Many of the students were doing all English except for maybe a little bit of Sinhalese. The newer schools in the far south, which weren't very good in the first place, would be teaching in Sinhalese, and there were nationwide exams to get into colleges. These bright kids who could speak only Sinhalese could only get into these schools, and what they could learn would be either Sinhala or Polli, which was the previous

language from which Sinhalese was derived. So what do you do with a degree in Sinhalese or Polli? Well, you'd be a school teacher in a primary school out in the sticks somewhere and you make zero money and you have zero prestige and you don't have a chance at the big apple which is tourism. In tourism you've got to speak a foreign language, right? Where the money was in the country was not where they were. They were the semi-educated have-nots. That was the market from which this JVP got its membership: blue-collar workers, policemen, people like this who felt very strongly about Indian presence in their country but didn't really feel that they had any stake in the government of the country. The third thing was that there was a strong Buddhist component. They were very Buddhist in nature in many cases, and so there was a certain fear about who might be hiding among the monks, of whom there are a great number. This group only really became part of the forefront after the Indian process, and it grew like wildfire. It was all over the island in a very short time, or at least all over the non-northern and eastern provinces. Even worse than the Tigers, it was at that point a very violent organization aimed at bringing down the government. As such, anyone could be fair game, but especially supporters of government, particularly civil servants, high-ranking civil servants, politicians, particularly from J. R. Jayewardene's party. He was seen as the traitor who had brought in the Indians and so that meant the NP Party. They were fair game, and their family members were fair game. People's homes would be broken into at night, and they would be slaughtered under some pretty awful circumstances. Burning tires, what are called mekosin in South Africa, was a common thing. They'd try to get the bodies off the road before daylight, but you would see the circles where the tire had burnt along the roadside. The deaths got heavier and heavier and nastier and nastier. Extortion, coming to people's homes and demanding money to leave them alone: large amounts of money went to the JVP coffers that way. There were raids on army outposts or police outposts to get weapons. Their reach was far and it was into Colombo a lot more than the Tamil Tigers who could come in and bomb. These people were everywhere. It was a very, very scary time, and it got worse and worse, embassy employees' families getting dragged into this occasionally, and the Sri Lankan military reacting with great harshness. So what the military was doing made some of the human rights violations on the north and east even worse, because now they were doing it all over the island. People disappeared, tremendous numbers disappeared, never seen again. I'm sure that there are unmarked graves all over the island even now, although, as I said, the military really has cleaned up its act in the last few years. For the American community, we had an American school which was located quite a distance from downtown out on the edge of town, actually in the part of town that the government wanted to build up, and they built a new university out at this place. They had built some ministries, and the idea was that things would move out that way. Anyway our school sat out there, and part of our school got destroyed. They actually were trying to burn down the ministry next door. I guess that would have been in '87 or '88. We had to open quite late and lost a lot of our library. We started putting an employee on the bus, the school buses that picked up the children, with a walkie-talkie so that she could be in touch with the Marines. Occasionally they would see a body or something on the road. It could be a traumatic time for many of the children. I remember once - I'm not sure I want this in the oral history - we invited the regional psychiatrist down to talk to the children. It turned out that the regional psychiatrist's experience had been in prisons. He was not the person to talk to these impressionable little kids. He was not warm and fuzzy, let's put it that way. I remember parents being terribly upset about that. In any case one got very inured to things that went boom and shooting at night. Of course, we had curfews all the time. It was a good place to save money, because basically in my last two years there until my last maybe five months, but the previous

two years curfew had been anyplace between six and nine at night. You had to get special permission to go to the airport. There were lots of roadblocks, lots of paper being exchanged, and so on - a scary time. I lived very close to both one of the television stations and what used to have been the racetrack. One of the PMs, I think it was Bandaranaike, closed the racetrack because they decided gambling was bad for people. It still stood there big and tall, and it was used to house soldiers, who apparently camped on the field. You weren't allowed anywhere close to it. There was a great deal of barbed wire around it. I would lie there in bed at night and listen to gunfire, and then the next morning I would try to find out what had happened, and, of course, it didn't happen. Once there was a very big fight. The JVP was trying to get into the TV station. There was quite a fire fight, and, you know, nobody would admit it the next day. It's very hard to keep it a secret. I mean lots of us heard it, and we ultimately found out what it was. There were stories of killing prisoners at the racetrack. You'd hear shooting at night, and it was supposedly assassinations. As the trouble got worse, the Sri Lankans became more aggressive. By spring of '89 many of us were really beginning to wonder if the government might not fall. We thought that the JVP and the fear of the JVP were strong enough that the government might indeed collapse and the Sri Lankan body politic would just fall apart and the JVP "win." They were so anarchist in their nature, we couldn't imagine what would happen then, because as far as anyone could tell, there was no plan for what would come next but there was just this great desire to bring it all down like a house of cards. Well, as that began to really come home to everybody, the Sri Lankan government by this time was under Premadasa. Perhaps they were even there before, but they certainly became strong under him. Basically a counterforce dressed all in black went out at night with masks covering their faces and assassinated suspects left and right. They were involved in a lot of disappearances of journalists. Journalists who wrote about what was happening tended not to last very long. The river that was just out of town between the city and the airport would have bodies floating down it every morning. We just got inured to it. It was just there. It was terrible. In fact, one of the people who worked in my house lost some first cousins who were murdered by these people, and they were Tamils. They had nothing to do with this, but this is how the organizations like this, which really run under their own authority and are only very loosely connected to the army per se, operate. The point at issue on this particular squad was, I guess you would call it, marital jealousy. The major who was in charge of this particular squad, his wife had left him and had married, or at least was living with, a Swiss man. They had with them the child of the major, who had gone with his mother. He was about eight. The Swiss man was taking his family back to Switzerland for the holidays, so they were packing up, and there was a party that night to say goodbye to him at his home. The Tamil who worked for me had two cousins who were working in this house as servants. Like a lot of parties in Sri Lanka, if there was a party, everybody stayed overnight because you couldn't go home after dark. So at eleven o'clock or something, well past curfew, this group of masked men in their black uniforms with their automatic weapons burst in. They took the two Tamil boys, and the next day they were found with their hands tied behind their backs. They had been executed on the beach under one of the big tourist hotels. It was simply to scare (it turned out later or at least this is what we were told because nobody was punished), it was meant to scare this woman and this Swiss man. He didn't want these people to take the boy out of country, and that was at the bottom of it. Now why they didn't kill the Swiss man, I do not know, but they chose to kill the two servants instead. You heard stories like this relatively regularly.

Q: If the JVP was a sort of a Maoist movement, why weren't Americans the target?

HECK: You know, we never could figure that out. We were very concerned about this. We tightened security. We did not send families away. But, believe me, the embassy spent a lot of time on that issue. Why weren't we and other foreigners the targets? The only targets were the Indians. The Indians, of course, had to be very, very careful, the Indian High Commission people. There was a bomb once across the fence, but it was just a little one, at the India High Commission, which by that time sat right next door to AID mission, so there was some concern at the AID mission, but it was not directed at us. It was directed at the Indians. No, we did not have an answer to that. I believe that a few Indians were in fact killed but not a lot. There were Indian businessmen and first-generation or second-generation Indians in Colombo who, I suppose, the JVP would consider as outsiders. There was down in the south central area someplace a big plantation which was being run with Indian management, and they, as I remember, killed a group, nine of them or something, men and women who were living on this plantation running whatever, the rubber plantation or tea - it must have been tea.

In any case, as I said, this group of I guess you would call them paramilitary - anyway, in addition to things like this little story I just told you, they hunted down members of the hierarchy of the JVP, which was very secret. People knew the name of Rohan Wujiwira in charge. Nobody knew really what he looked like anymore, and nobody knew where he was. The Sri Lankans knew that there was a politburo of sorts with, I think, seven members. I'm not even sure they knew at that point how many members. They weren't even sure who all those people were. There were lists, but I'm not sure that anyone could be absolutely certain about this. The authority was given to a particular brigadier general to go out and get these people, and he proceeded to start to do that. It was not a pretty sight. They captured several of them individually. Strangely enough, they were always killed trying to escape. Finally, in late November of '89, they actually cornered Rohan Wujiwira, the leader, who strangely enough was killed trying to escape. It collapsed at that point. It just imploded. Little bits and pieces were left, but for the whole organization that was the coup de grace. One of our big things, as I said, was human rights and we did an awful lot of talking to human rights organizations - there were a few, a couple - and to various NGO groups, Sri Lankan or foreign, who worked in the countryside trying to get a handle on what was happening on the ground as well as the human rights issues. All of this was so patently false. Nobody stood up and said anything about it. Everybody was so relieved it was over. The human rights people never publicly, as far as I know, ever under any circumstances made any noises about this obviously fake everybody-dying-while-trying-to-escape routine. They were executed. But everybody was just so relieved that it was over. So many people had had to leave the island. The middle class was in absolute torment. The banking system had fallen apart. I mean, the whole country was torn up, and everybody was just relieved that it was over. So, people tried to just forget it, you know, and start to move on with their lives. It took a little while for the JVP to die out entirely. The army then started in with a vengeance trying to round them up, and they probably killed or caused to disappear a number of totally innocent or mostly innocent people. To be in the south at that point as a young country boy was to be suspected in many cases of being one. The most egregious, most awful thing - and this did get some cries of horror, was sort of the final blow on the very far south on the coast at a major intersection. The road was basically along the coast all the way from Colombo clear over to where it ran into a jungle national park on the far southeastern corner of the country. It skirted the water. Where that road intersected with a road that went north-south into the pea plantation areas, one morning toward

the end of January of 1990, the army had had a round-up. This particular man in charge down there was a major, and later promoted to colonel as his reward by R. Primadosse, who was secretly very pleased with this, I guess. People got up that morning, and there were 24 heads of JVPers stuck on the spikes of this fence that was across the sea road from where the north-south road came in. We were right back to the Middle Ages at this point.

Q: Well, it does seem that within the society that it didn't take much to strip away the veneer of what we would call - I'm not sure 20th century but - niceties. They seemed to almost run amok or the equivalent thereof.

HECK: This was a very scary time, and I would hesitate to be too harsh in my criticism, because I was able to feel the fear. I was afraid. Everybody was afraid. This was a very, very dicey time. We were not dealing with an army that might lock people up as prisoners of war. I mean by that the insurgents. We were dealing with people who would kill anything in sight and no questions asked. Prisoners weren't taken. So I don't want to be too harsh about it. Certainly not all of the Sri Lankan military did this, not by any stretch of the imagination. But harsh measures were needed, and ultimately they were taken, and I found that interesting.

Q: Did you find that there weren't the attention of international press coming down all the time or human rights groups which have focused on East Timor and other places? It seems to move around the spotlight, and the spotlight didn't...

HECK: The spotlight didn't touch it as much as it should, because pound for pound, person for person, that was a very violent island in the four years I was there, and there was a tremendous amount of death and tremendous destruction of all sorts. But it's rather small, it's out of the way. Although the number of refugees grew, the Tamils particularly had gone abroad. There were big Tamil contingents in Europe as well as coming to North America, more to Canada than the United States, of youngish people, young boys that families wanted to get away from this. Very often the more educated families would fit right in and sort of disappear into society as a whole. Then there would be these younger, less educated, poorer, very often what we called Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, which meant they were from those who had come to Sri Lanka in the 19th century as indentured labor. They were always poor. They were always less educated. They were the poorest of the poor in Tamil Nadu who had been rounded up by the Brits and shipped off there in the 19th century. They started out from a much lower socioeconomic base, and they ended up waiting tables in Germany. Germany particularly because of its laws, because each state its own, as you know, about refugee status. It was a relatively easy place in those days for them to get in if they could claim asylum. On their first stop in Germany, they usually stayed for a long time. A lot of Sinhalese did not leave permanently. If they had the money, suddenly it became the time to take a six-month trip to London to see cousin Betty who was living there, or something like that. It was a time to lay very low and then to try to get out, to try to move your money out.

Q: Well, it sounds like both the economy and the government must have been pretty close to collapse, weren't they?

HECK: I thought so. I am not sure that this would be the official American position, but tourism was a large part of the economy and, of course, it was dead. We would go to these very nice beach hotels and for \$15 a night get an air-conditioned room with, as they say, all the modern conveniences. You know, everything would be just lovely with interesting little restaurants, and they were so desperate for business that they undercut themselves. You could get the best hotel in Colombo for \$35, and some people even could get down to \$20. It was a perfect time for those of us who lived on the island to travel, because all these hotels had been built when tourism was big and now they were just fighting, scrambling for money. When Primadosse came in, he decreed - he was one for decreeing, and his parliament backed him completely - but he succeeded in cutting way back the discount in hotel rooms. So the prices started going up when our Primadosse came in, but there was that halcyon period in there for foreigners who wanted to go on Sunday to spend the day down at the beach where you could get all sorts of very nice things for no money, because people were so desperate. But, of course, tourism spreads. It infected all of the car rentals, for instance. In Sri Lanka, like India - I don't think Sri Lanka did anyway - I don't think they ever rented a car without the driver. You couldn't with your license. If you didn't have a Sri Lankan license, you couldn't drive. So there had been a big market for drivers, and drivers suddenly had no jobs. Souvenir stands and people who sold coconuts on the road, the gem business, all the little ancillary things that people think of as Sri Lankan, were hurt. The port of Colombo had been trying to be a trans-shipment port. Well, no business in its right mind was going to trans-ship through Colombo in 1989 when they could trans-ship it through Singapore, or wherever. So everything started to dry up. It was a very, very bad time.

Q: The Indians left about the time you left, didn't they?

HECK: Yes, a little later.

Q: Were you able to sit and have frank talks with the Indian embassy people? Could you see they were getting ready to get the hell out?

HECK: Oh, yes, they made no bones about it. After Primadosse started to talk about it and make all this bellicose noise that he couldn't do anything about, Rajiv Gandhi followed suit and said he was bringing the troops home. There was no question about this. They withdrew in an orderly manner, and they constricted their circle, as it were, and they went out of the ports on the eastern province. You know, it's just an overnight ship trip to up to southern India, so it wasn't particularly difficult, but it was long in coming. I am told that even today the Indians - well, I shouldn't say 'even today' because the Tamil Tigers are still very active - like the current Indian ambassador and his family, have bulletproof vests and they can never go anywhere without armed guards. They're still living in that cage that they had to live in in those days, and I suspect it will go on for some time. It's an important post for them, but it's a difficult one.

Q: Was there any connection with the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in the Indian incursion?

HECK: Oh, absolutely, Prabakaran ordered it, no doubt about that.

Q: When did that happen?

HECK: That happened while I was in Madras. That happened in May of '91 during the election campaign. Maybe we can talk about that when we talk about Madras.

Q: What about Washington? Did you have any high-level visitors, or were people just sort of staying away?

HECK: We had State Department visitors. We did not have a lot of high-level visitors. Visitors were staying away. First of all, particularly after the JVP started, we basically pulled our Peace Corps in. None of them, to the best of my knowledge, was ever hurt there, but they had tended to be out in the countryside in the south, since they couldn't go to the north because of the Tamils, so they began to be pulled in. We downsized our Peace Corps till, I think, it got to something like 13 people. We had a presence but only that. AID had had to refigure itself, because at the same time AID was interested in the sort of privatization that began about the same time. There were efforts afoot to modernize, privatize, all this sort of thing, so our AID switched from doing the traditional AID things to more things like the stock market, which meant they could be in Colombo. They pulled in contractors. We rearranged our official lives. Everybody was on tenterhooks all the time, pins and needles all the time, waiting to see what was happening. Of course, the government just limped along. It was a travesty almost of what it had been. The cabinet brought in by Primadosse had some real hardliners in it as had the cabinet of J. R. Jayewardene, but his hardliners had always been suspected of perhaps being involved in helping arrange the Tamil bashing that had gone on in 1983. Primadosse came in and he made as his Foreign Minister a man who never had really been a politician. Early on, I think, he had been in the military or at least in a, not the military, but a home-guard-type organization. He had been a planter in the south, and he was full of resolve and was one of the most outspoken of the cabinet about bringing the country back into normalcy. He paid for it, of course; he got assassinated, but after I left, I guess. His motorcade was blown up as he was going to work one day, and presumably that was done by the Tamil Tigers, who were by that time the only game in town. They blew him up in such pieces that apparently parts of his body were on the telephone lines on the street that he was killed on. It put a huge hole in the street.

Q: This was the time in the United States when we were really focused on what was going on...

HECK: As the Soviet Union began to...

Q: Sort of disintegrate and all. Am I right in saying you felt that developments in the subcontinent and all were really on the back burner and particularly in...

HECK: Certainly in Sri Lanka. I can't speak to India and Pakistan at that point, although I think you're probably right. I'm trying to think now, Stu, of visitors that we had then. We had a few Congressional visits, a couple. Larry Pressler came.

Q: Your eyes went up at that time. What happened with him?

HECK: Well, I'm not sure I want this in the report, but he was a very... Not Larry Pressler, I shouldn't have said Larry Pressler - Charlie, Texas Charlie, Charlie Wilson.

Q: Wilson, oh yes.

HECK: Texas Charlie Wilson. Larry Pressler was another incarnation; that was Madras. Texas Charlie came, and he was very bloodthirsty, as it were. He would like to have gone along on some of these raids and helped out, but he brought his young ladyfriend with him, and she wandered through town in short shorts, which was just unheard of in Madras and caused us no end of comment. But in any case, we had occasional members of Congress but just one or two. Solarz, of course, came, but he was the subcommittee chair for South Asia, and Steve Solarz was, of course, very much involved and very interested.

Q: I'm just curious. I'm interviewing him tomorrow. I've been doing a series of interviews with him.

HECK: Have you gotten to Sri Lanka yet.

Q: Well, I don't know, but I can always.

HECK: When Primadosse came in as President... Well, first of all, I should say that our embassy, our ambassador, was accredited to the Maldives also. The Maldives are about 500 kilometers west/southwest in the Indian Ocean. It's a little group of atolls. The population while I was in Sri Lanka finally crossed 100,000 for the atoll. The Israelis had been in Sri Lanka for a number of years. In fact, the Israelis had presumably trained certain of the groups in the Sri Lankan government in handling terrorism and so on. They were also very active in a huge development of the Mahavali - it's a river basin in the south - agriculture development and infrastructure development. So they were doing good works, and they were providing training for the Sri Lankan military at a time when nobody else was going to give them training because of human rights type of questions. Primadosse promised to get rid of the Israelis if he were elected, or at least he talked about it. I'm not sure he actually made a promise, but it was talked about that he might, the reason being that seven percent of the population was Muslim. Although they are not, were not then and are not now, fanatics, they were not particularly pleased with this turn of events. I was in the Maldives accompanying my ambassador - by this time, it was Marion Creekmore - when Primadosse announced that he was giving me the Israeli diplomatic office, which was a two-man office with their wives - the wives worked - giving them a very short period of time to leave. He was kicking them out. Ambassador Creekmore believed, and I think he was right, that Primadosse chose this time when he, Ambassador Creekmore, was not in country, because he was at that point perhaps the most vocal about protecting the Israelis' right to be there. So it was certainly a frustration for the ambassador. Shortly thereafter Steve Solarz came, and I went along with him and the ambassador and his factotum to call on the President. I was there as the notetaker. This was President Primadosse by this point. Big British colonial office, huge expanses of red carpet, big couches for the guests, and an almost throne-like chair for R. Primadosse, the President. This office was in the old parliament building which is down on the ocean and, as I said, very colonial. In any case, the meeting, as far as I was concerned, got cut short, because Steve Solarz chose to raise the issue of the closure of the Israeli embassy in Sri Lanka. He was, as you can imagine - if you've ever sat in on his meetings, he can be very blunt when he wishes to be, and this was a very blunt statement of American displeasure about this action and that the United States did not take it lightly and this was against international norms

of decency in terms of relations, something to that effect. I've never seen Steve Solarz flummoxed before, but I think he actually was. Primadosse just lashed out at him and talked to him like a real Dutch uncle - that's the second time today I've used that phrase - but anyway, really was very harsh and said in effect, "It is none of your business. This is my country. I am its leader. I will do what I think is right for my country, and it is not the United States' business. Be quiet." It seemed like forever, but I suspect it was only about 30 seconds of absolute quiet. The Steve Solarz got up, some perfunctory handshakes, and we were out the door. It was really a tongue lashing from the President to Steve Solarz on this issue. But Steve Solarz' subcommittee staff person was Peter Galbraith, John Kenneth's son who later became ambassador to Croatia under Carter and is now - I'm not quite sure what he's doing. He started to run for Congress and then decided not to. But both Steve Solarz and Peter Galbraith were very up on what was going on. They were as well informed as anyone could possibly be who was not right there all the time. So it was always something of a pleasure to have somebody like that come, who can carry some water. But those visits were not all that common, and then other than that, it was basically, as I remember, officials from the State Department or from the Executive Branch of government, from whatever organization, AID or Peace Corps or whatever. I do remember one time that we were supposed to have a visit of one of the Army bands which was on a goodwill tour of Asia. At more or less the last minute it was canceled because it would be too dangerous for the Army band to come. We always thought that was sort of funny, because we had women and children there, and if little babies could survive in Colombo, surely the Army band could, but anyway for whatever reason it didn't come. There had been in the past ship visits. Those had been canceled by the time I got there. I don't think we had a ship visit. All of our ship visits, and there were a number of them, were in the Maldives and were used basically for a little bit of shore time for these guys who were on ships for six months at a time without a great deal of opportunity to get off. The Maldives was not a good R&R point for them, because it's a very small little place. I don't think they were even let into the capital island; they were just let on some of the tourist islands. You could buy a beer at the bar, but it still was just a little tourist island with some water sports and some restaurants, and that would be it.

Q: Did Sri Lanka take much of an interest in things in the Persian Gulf? This is the Iran-Iraq War and...

HECK: The Iran-Iraq War, well, no, not really. That was a very focused country for my four years, just matters of survival. Iran and Iraq both had embassies there. They were both friendly nations as far as the Sri Lankans were concerned. The Muslims in Sri Lanka had no particular ethnic ties to either group. There was nothing particular other than what Iran and Iraq might perhaps be able to give them. The Iraqi ambassador was a very big part of the social scene while I was there. The Iranians were young and intense and basically kept to themselves. They may have been muddling around in Islamic things, but I wasn't particularly aware.

Q: India, of course, had these close ties to the Soviet Union, and we're talking about a dissolving Soviet Union at the time. Had the Soviets messed around in Sri Lanka, and their implosion or whatever it was, was that having any effect?

HECK: I'm sure that wherever one has intelligence services somebody is probably doing something that he wouldn't want to see on the front page of the newspaper. But, no, I do not

know of anything particularly that they were doing nor do I remember ever asking any of my confreres in the intelligence services. They had a big embassy there, much larger than they probably would have needed elsewhere otherwise, so presumably, yes, they must have had some interest in the island. They certainly were not doing the sorts of things that they did in India where you would know openly that they were supporting monetarily this newspaper or that, or that they were putting money into this party or that. Communists were almost nonexistent in Sri Lanka when I was there, and the ones that I did know basically had gotten over it. It was the sort of thing they did when they were in their 30s, and now they were all 75 and they weren't particularly that way. They were leftists but they weren't really Communists. We had a Trotskyite Party. I had a friend who was a member of parliament, and is still a member of parliament, as a matter of fact, and is a Trotskyite. One of the cheap ways to leave Sri Lanka was to fly on Aeroflot through Moscow and then transfer to something else. He and his wife were going to Europe once. He had a heart attack in the airport in Moscow, and his cousin, who is also a parliamentarian, told me later that Emil, this particular gentleman, was just panicked. He was conscious and he was so afraid of what was going to happen to him when he was taken to the Soviet hospital, because he was a Trotskyite and they were going to get him. This was in the late '80s. So we did have some Trotskyites, but not a lot. Anyway, it was a large embassy, the Russian embassy, and I became quite well acquainted with my counterpart, the political counselor, who, like me, had spent a lot of time in South Asia, so we had a lot to sort of gossip about, sort of one-upmanship with "my stories are better than your stories." I remember once toward the end of my stay there he and I decided - the Soviet Union was in the process of breaking up, it was the glasnost era, and there had been perestroika and all - we decided to do a joint demarche, and the two of us marched in on the foreign secretary. I don't even remember now what it was we were talking about, but it was a real motherhood issue. Everybody was in favor of this. But this man's jaw just dropped when he saw the two of us walk through the door together, because they were still seeing us as being completely at loggerheads. The one sad thing I remember at that point about sort of the breakup of what used to be the Soviet sphere of influence was the Yugoslav Embassy. I remember being told once when I met this man at my ambassador's home - it was a luncheon of some sort, and I'm not even sure why - but anyway, the ambassador for Yugoslavia was from Bosnia and he was a Muslim. By the beginning of 1990 Yugoslavia was - I'm not sure when Slovenia became independent - but anyway, it was all obviously going to be a real mess. The government in Belgrade hadn't sent money for this embassy for months, so they were just living on their own personal savings and couldn't supply things to the embassy. But more to the point, he was the only - and it was a small embassy - he was the only one from Bosnia. The rest of them were all Serbs, the other four or whatever. It was, as I said, a very small number. Anyway, he was the enemy. He was the ambassador but he was also the enemy, and he was really one shaken man. The fight hadn't started yet in Bosnia, but it was coming, and the Serbs weren't very nice about it. I remember that.

Q: What about, in the political life there, the hand of the doctrinaire socialists coming out of the London School of Economics, the British sort of labor class stuff? Had that - I'm using a loaded word - infected the Sri Lankan body politic?

HECK: Not the way it had in India. Yes, there was among the older intelligencia a certain residue of that, but it never was quite as strong even among the intelligencia, which was a small group of people on a small island. One of the things, by the way, that one noticed in Sri Lanka

was how everybody who was anybody knew everybody else who was anybody, and that crossed the line, Tamils and non-Tamils alike. The elite, such as it were, such as it had been, had been educated together, knew each other, knew each other's nicknames, knew each other's foibles, knew who had had an affair with whom, that sort of thing. It was just almost incestuous, it was so interlocked. But going back to the question, one of the real differences is that Sri Lanka, partially because of its size, appeared to get everything just handed to it on a platter. People will talk about the freedom fighters in Sri Lanka. Well, for every 1,000 freedom fighters, maybe three of them were, and they tended to be the ideologues, they tended to be the people who liked the Trotskyite or the Communist or the London School of Economics believer in changing the economic system, people like that. But the word 'freedom fighter', it seemed to be in reading obits, got thrown around an awful lot in Sri Lanka, when really it meant that maybe this guy had passed out pamphlets once, that sort of thing. The struggle for independence was, in comparison with the Indian subcontinent, nonexistent, almost nonexistent. The British put all of their effort into stemming it and then finally acquiesced to it on the subcontinent. That's where the battles were fought. That's where the real battles, the struggles were. Once the freedom fighters in that part of the world looked like they were winning, the British just basically gave Sri Lanka its independence at the same time. There were so many things that that meant. If you looked at it in comparison with India or Pakistan, the Sri Lankans were much more likely to want foreign goods, accept foreign goods, have foreign goods early on. India got to this point, is at that point now, but when I first went to India, everything was locally made. People wearing Western clothes, particularly women wearing Western costumes, Western dress, and street names that were not changed. India and Pakistan are full of obscure people's names on streets. In my part of the world in Sri Lanka, they were still the old names. They were named after various viceroys and things like that. There seemed to be less antagonism toward the colonial experience. It was just a softer situation. So that, I think, is partially the reason that the sort of social and political ideas that perhaps came from the West in the '30s didn't get such resonance there. Also, Sri Lanka doesn't have the great poverty that India or Pakistan had in that period. The poorest part of the country is the part that the Tamils want now, because it's dry, but even that isn't terribly poor. In the south it is said that one of the reasons the Tamils got such a hold on jobs originally was that no Sri Lankan had to do this sort of thing. He could just sit there under his fill-in-the-blank mango tree/papaya tree/breadfruit tree and wait for a piece of fruit to fall into his hands and he didn't have to really work hard to earn outside money. Life was just easier all the way through.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. You left there in...

HECK: I left there in the summer of 1990.

GILBERT H. SHEINBAUM
Director, Colombo Plan
Colombo (1986-1991)

Gilbert H. Sheinbaum was born in New York on April 20, 1929. He received a bachelor's degree in political science from New York University in 1950 and served in the U.S. military from 1951-1953. Mr. Sheinbaum entered the Foreign

Service in 1957. His career included positions in Laos, Vietnam, Denmark, Madagascar, Malawi, the Philippines, and Switzerland. This interview was conducted by Tom Dunnigan on September 6, 1995.

Q: Whether it's been closed. I haven't heard myself. Well, when your tour there ended in '86, Gil, you went into retirement?

SHEINBAUM: I was being ticked out, okay, and I had a call from Dick Murphy who was Assistant Secretary for NEA and who asked if I would be interested (this was in February of '86) in taking over the Colombo Plan because Don Toussaint who had been Director had died suddenly of a heart attack while on a plane over the United States. He'd been in the job only ten months and while normally a person of the same nationality wouldn't succeed, the President of the Colombo Plan Council decided that it would be best to offer it again to the United States since Don had had such a short tenure. And so I was asked about it, and I arrived the beginning of July.

Q: Perhaps you can describe the Colombo Plan briefly.

SHEINBAUM: Okay. The Colombo Plan was established in 1950 at a conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers. At that time there were seven member countries of the Commonwealth. There was Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, on the developed country side, plus India, Pakistan (then including what is now Bangladesh) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). And they decided that they needed some organization to coordinate the aid that they hoped would begin to flow from donor countries into that part of the world. The two people behind this idea primarily were J.R. Jayawardene, who was then Minister of Finance in Sri Lanka, later President, and Percy Spender who was Foreign Secretary for Australia. And so they established it in Colombo, and that's how it became known as the Colombo Plan. It was designed as a consultative organization; it did not have project funds. No money ever went to provide funds for specific projects. It was there to act as a deliberative organization. It was very prominent for the first fifteen years or so, but then it became overshadowed by organizations that had the project money -- World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the bilateral organizations, UN agencies, etc. And when you look at lists of participants of early Colombo Plan meetings, you see people like John Foster Dulles and others of equal status. And they did wonderful things in those days, especially in furthering education and technical training. Over 300,000 Asians studied abroad over the years - and they are known as Colombo Plan Scholars. A remarkable achievement.

Q: The U.S. has become a full member?

SHEINBAUM: The U.S. became a full member in 1951. It was opened up the year after its founding to non-Commonwealth countries, and it brought in other developing countries in Asia as they acquired independence.

Q: How many countries are now members?

SHEINBAUM: Twenty-four. Britain and Canada dropped out just after I left in 1991, which was unfortunate, I think, because of some short-sightedness on the part of the New Zealander who

succeeded me and because of one of the High Commissioners on the Colombo Plan Council. It was not a matter of money. Annual fees for each member country were only around \$12,000.

Q: To whom did you report?

SHEINBAUM: To the Colombo Plan Council, made up of the ambassadors and high commissioners of the Colombo Plan countries, resident in Colombo.

Q: How often would this take place?

SHEINBAUM: Well, we met four times a year but I reported regularly to the President of the Council who was always a representative of an Asian developing country. The present Director, by the way, is a Korean, the first time they've opened up the directorship to non-industrialized countries. And while Korea is an industrialized country, it's still included as one of the non-industrialized for the purposes of the Colombo Plan.

Q: How many people did you have in your staff?

SHEINBAUM: Twenty-nine.

Q: Twenty-nine; taken from all the countries, I presume.

SHEINBAUM: No, there were three international officers, two non-Sri Lankans besides myself, and twenty-six Sri Lankans. But I also have to mention that there's a Colombo Plan College in Manila. It's a college for the administrators of technician education - it neither educates nor are there technicians who attend it. These administrators of technician education come in for short courses -- which can be as long as several weeks or as short as a few days. And it is thriving in Manila. I visited when I was in Manila last month (August 1995). It has its own staff and then faculty, and the Director of now is an Indian, before him it was a Thai, and before that it was an Australian.

Q: And I gather the language used in the Colombo Plan is English?

SHEINBAUM: That's correct. I should also mention one important reason why the U.S. has maintained its relationship with the Colombo Plan. It's that the Colombo Plan has the only regional Asian drug-control program. It's called the Drug Advisory Program which has existed since 1973 with a small staff -- four people -- but they coordinate the activities of different agencies, bilateral and multi-lateral, that are doing work in Asia. We hold meetings, conferences and training programs for narcotics experts and people who are otherwise involved in . . .

Q: Do we get full cooperation from countries like Burma, Laos, and Thailand that are deeply involved?

SHEINBAUM: More and more. A lot from Thailand, some from Burma, but then the government of Burma doesn't have full control over the poppy-producing areas. But we get a lot of cooperation.

Q: Good. Did you have any liaison with the U.S. embassy there?

SHEINBAUM: Oh, yes, very close. Jim Spain was the Ambassador when we first got there. I knew Jim from some years ago, and he invited Inger to live in the Residence for the week before I arrived with the kids. He didn't know Inger beforehand but it was very kind of him, and as a result he and Inger became very close and then we all three had a good relationship. Inger worked as the backup nurse at the embassy whenever the regular nurse was away, which was a lot. And then Marion Creekmore came in as ambassador after three years. Jim Spain retired in Colombo and lives there regularly. He seems to be thriving there and likes it. His wife and daughter had died tragically the year before he went to Colombo, his three sons are scattered, and he had no home to return to, but he had a lot of friends in Sri Lanka and that's why he stayed on there. And Inger and I had very close relationships with the DCMs who were there, Ed Marks and Don Westmore, as well as others on the staff.

Q: Did the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka affect what you could do?

SHEINBAUM: It didn't affect me in my job. It did affect our children to the extent that school was closed every now and then during a period of about two years whenever there was a strike or a threat of some violence. There was one period when things were very tense, the summer of '89, and it was at that time that the army was beginning to develop a plan for getting rid of the Marxist movement (the JVP) which they did in a very brutal fashion in October-November of '89.

Q: While you were there?

SHEINBAUM: While we were there. We had no fears for ourselves. The rebels - Marxists and Tamil Tigers - stayed away from foreigners, but we were very concerned for our Sri Lankan staffs. Whenever a curfew was declared by this JVP, the opposition group, we had to be very respectful of it because if one of our Sri Lankan staff was caught on the streets by them, we didn't know what would happen.

Q: Your tour was five years, I gather.

SHEINBAUM: We were assigned for three years. I was asked by the Maldives High Commissioner who was then President of the Colombo Plan Council if would I consider staying longer. I said we would consider staying two more years -- not just one because then we could see our son through high school -- and the Council agreed to that without any question, so we had five very productive years there.

Q: Congratulations. I think that was an excellent assignment.

SHEINBAUM: It was; it was very interesting.

Q: It built on your Foreign Service background.

SHEINBAUM: Yeah. And I did a lot of traveling in Asia -- I was gone a quarter to a third of the time -- on mostly productive visits. Although some were less productive, I felt that occasionally I had to show my face, or rather the Colombo Plan face -- I shouldn't be so egotistic -- but the Colombo Plan face at various conferences was important and at each I made rather forceful statements as I was not hampered by bureaucracy or politics. So I think people remembered what we were doing and heard of what we were thinking.

Q: Do any countries dominate the Colombo Plan?

SHEINBAUM: Not really. India tries to but it depends on the nature of their High Commissioner at the time. But even so, their High Commissioners have been very respectful of everybody else. There was one occasion at one of our ministerial meetings in 1988, in Dhaka, when the Indian representative was being rather obstructive about a particular issue having to do with water resources up in the northern part of the sub-continent. They were resisting our call for regional cooperation which had already begun. But, you see, most of those waters flow through India and they wanted to have as much control as possible. Well, frankly, this guy was very stupid about it. He was awfully nice to me. He took me to lunch to try to convince me that we had to go slow on this particular thing. I said, "No, that's not the way to go. There's no reason why India cannot agree to this. This won't jeopardize Indian interests. If anything it'll help Indian interests because it shows a spirit of cooperation which your government at that time was trying to resist but knew it was not going to win." And in the end, the guy left early, and that opened the way for India to accept the thing with a footnote which didn't bother us. And subsequently, the Indian government began to reverse itself on water resources cooperation.

LOUISE TAYLOR
South Asia Desk Officer, USIA
Washington DC (1988-1990)

Ms. Taylor was born and raised in Illinois and educated at Wellesley College, George Washington University and Boston University. After joining the Foreign Service of USIA, Ms. Taylor served in Washington and abroad in the field of Cultural and Information. Her foreign posts include Moscow, Kabul, Tel Aviv and Rabat. She also served in Washington as USIA Desk Officer for Afghanistan/Pakistan and for South Asia and as Policy Officer for Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States. Ms. Taylor was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: In Sri Lanka, you have a civil war. Did this stop things dead?

TAYLOR: To me Sri Lanka is inscrutable. They are the loveliest people. They have the loveliest country. They are so well educated, the Tamils and the Sinhalese. There is a lot of intermarriage there. There is a lot of intermingling. They aren't separated geographically necessarily or even historically. I don't understand what's going on in Ireland either. To me, the Sri Lankan issues are very similar to the Irish issues. These are people who if they would just stop the violence

they have everything to look forward to. They have progress, health, literacy, democracy, and intelligence. They are highly respected in the world. I can understand the Indo-Pakistan thing. I can understand the Jihad. I can understand all that. But I can't understand the situation in Sri Lanka when they're just sort of shooting themselves in the foot and worse.

Q: Did we try to tackle that problem USIAwise?

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Again, it's all under the theme of conflict resolution and regional stability. Sri Lanka wasn't so extreme in '88-'90 when I was working on those issues, it has clearly gotten out of hand subsequent to that. What I found when I visited Sri Lanka was, you would have a room full of every ethnic group under the sun and they all knew each other and they all had gone to school together and they all had gone to graduate school together; some had gone abroad together. They had intermarried. They are a very sophisticated people. Nobody could explain it. They all understood that they were impeding their own progress. The USIA programs that we built up were like in other places, designed to bring together opposing parties, the leadership of those parties, both political parties and movements. It was a drop in the bucket. If we could bring them all here, if we could send them all to Salzburg, it might help. But if they're determined to slaughter each other until the Tamils have their little tiny peninsula of independence – and what could they do with that? It's a small island as it is. I don't know whether a Tamil nation could ever be viable. But they're pretty brutal.

TERESITA C. SCHAFFER
Deputy Assistant Secretary, NEA - South Asia
Washington, DC 1989-1992

Ambassador Schaffer was born in New York and later educated in France. She received her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr College and joined the Foreign Service. Her Foreign Service career took her to Israel, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in September 1998.

Let me turn to Sri Lanka, which was in this period going through a period of great difficulties. The Indian Army had moved onto the island in 1987 in fulfillment of a pledge made in an Indo-Lanka accord. The Indian Army's peacekeepers were supposed to be the peace keepers between the government and the "Liberation Tigers of Tamil-Eelam" (LTTE). The LTTE did not cooperate and in fact fired on the Indians. The LTTE was supposed to disarm as a prelude to a broad political settlement, which would have included major constitutional changes. That never happened. So the peacekeepers found themselves in an unforeseen situation and rapidly became part of the problem, rather than a solution.

The Indian presence triggered a violent nationalistic response by the JVP -- an organization somewhat reminiscent of the "Shining Path," whose name translated roughly "People's Liberation Front". I would describe the JVP as nihilists; they wanted to overthrow not only the government, but the existing societal structure and everything else. The support came from the

dispossessed -- people with a very poor education, unlike most of the Sri Lankans. The JVP had a substantial presence on university campuses. This JVP phenomenon was not new; it had surfaced violently in 1971. At that time, it was repressed by the government with the support of the U.S. and the PRC. In 1977, the JVP was legalized; it went underground again in 1985. In 1987, after the Indo-Lanka accord was signed, it began another violent uprising, including murders -- both random and targeted -- grenade throwing, leadership of general strikes, including threats of violence against anyone who might have tried to break those strikes.

So Sri Lanka had two civil wars going on simultaneously. When I started as DAS in 1989, we were receiving a weekly cable from Colombo, which we came to call the "D&D" reports (for "Death and Destruction"). The Embassy reported on the deaths that had taken place in the previous week due to these two uprisings. At one time they averaged 300 per week. By my calculations, had the same problems taken place in the U.S., the equivalent death rate would have been 4,000 -- compared to the height of the Vietnam War when we were losing 125 Americans each week. So Sri Lanka was facing an extraordinary level of violence. It affected all of the people on the island.

I happened to be in Colombo during one of the general strikes. That was quite an eye-opener. The violence and related events were not directed against Americans, but they could not help be seriously affected. The Vice-Chancellor of Colombo University was assassinated in his bed. There were similar events in the Peradeniya University in Kandy.

In the summer of 1989, a new President was inaugurated. He was a former prime minister, and had opposed the Indo-Lanka accord from the outset. In July of that year, he wrote a rather stiff letter to Rajiv Gandhi asking that the Indian troops be withdrawn. That hit India like a bombshell, which was just a prelude to the uproar caused the following day when the letter was published in the Sri Lankan papers. This started a highly embarrassing public analysis of who actually had written the letter, what was really said, what was really meant. Eventually, the Indians left in March of 1990 -- the so-called "de-induction" as it was called. That enabled the Sri Lankan government to give full pursuit to the JVP, which it did with a vengeance.

In the meantime, the JVP decided that its next target would be families of policemen. That had the effect you might expect; the police struck back with extraordinary ferocity. The JVP insurrection had always been marked by highly uncivilized behavior; now the government fought back in kind. By the April-June of 1990, the JVP had been essentially wiped out. All its leadership had been killed; most of their members were disbanded -- either assassinated or scattered. So peace was finally restored.

The government then began a negotiation with the LTTE in the hopes of finding a non-violent *modus vivendi* which would have settled the dispute that had plagued Sri Lankan politics since soon after independence. Unfortunately, this process was ultimately unsuccessful; in June 1990, the LTTE decided that it would return to the battlefield and attacked a number of police stations including one which held several hundred policemen, most of whom were killed. That started the war again. That was pursued in a fitful way; the map really didn't change much and was the same when I went to Colombo and during my tour there. There were periodic fire fights and periodic terrorist incidents and a continuing series of high profile assassinations.

The US in the 1989-92 period had human rights high on its foreign policy agenda. In Sri Lanka's case, it was an awkward situation because that country's record was deplorable. I am not just referring to the actions against the LTTE or the JVP; in Sri Lanka almost everybody's human rights were being violated. At one time, Sri Lanka held the world's record for disappearances. There were also wide-spread reports of torture of accused members of either the LTTE or the JVP. The U.S. was critical of the government's human rights record; at the same time, we understood the challenges that the government was facing. When it came time for the annual human rights report, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights was so revolted by the JVP that he wanted to take a much softer public line than the post or the bureau -- a very unusual situation. We had to point out to him that the U.S. government had to mention certain specific Sri Lankan violations because they would be raised in Geneva and we would look foolish if we overlooked them.

We held some back-stage discussions with the Sri Lankan government about their activities against the LTTE and the JVP as well as trying to find some ways which would bring both of these bloody insurrections to a peaceful conclusion. We did not try to mediate, particularly since we had no contact with the JVP. I am also not aware of any regular contact in this period and even later with the LTTE. There were some low level contacts prior to 1989, those ended once the fighting resumed. A mediation effort on our part was never part of our policy.

I have mentioned two of our Sri Lankan agenda items: the war and human rights. The third one concerned economic relationships. On the latter, my predecessor, Marion Creekmore, worked very hard to push American exports. I tried to continue that policy. Sri Lanka had the usual barriers to trade and investment; in addition to the usual domestic barriers, new investors were very reluctant to explore possibilities in light of the conflicts on the island. The ones that were already in Sri Lanka managed to find ways to live with the situation, but I doubt if they could have been very encouraging to new investors. When the situation hit calmer periods, then there were some inklings of interest from new investors, but nothing major. The domestic barriers were restrictive, perhaps not as bad as in some other countries, but certainly far from being inviting. The governmental system that new investors had to work with was not very user-friendly. Some of the most potentially attractive investment opportunities -- both then and later when I became Ambassador -- were in the private sector infrastructure area. The Sri Lankan government had accepted in principle the idea of opening this area to private investment. But the implementation became very difficult for them. They always seemed to decide on one approach and then back-track because of perceived labor or some other societal sector unhappiness.

During the JVP period, the economy was in a quagmire. The terrorism had a devastating economic effect. Through the 1990s, the economy grew quite well despite the war against the LTTE. at about a 4-6% growth rate.

MARY JO FURGAL
Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS
Colombo, Sri Lanka (1990-1993)

Ms. Furgal was born and raised in Illinois. She attended a number of colleges and universities in the US and Austria, including the University of Chicago, where she pursued Library Science Studies. She entered the USIA Foreign Service in 1978 and served as Cultural Affairs Officer in Colombo, Madras, Katmandu, Dhaka, Bucharest and Harare as well as in Washington, DC. Her assignments were primarily tandem assignments with her Foreign Service Officer husband. Ms. Furgal was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

FURGAL: We went back to Sri Lanka, '90 to '93, and that time there were a lot more problems. We had been there during a quiet time earlier but the political situation worsened in the '80s. We went back in '90 and things were heating up again. The president was assassinated, the vice admiral was assassinated and the joint operations command was blown up two blocks away from my office. But the U.S. Government in those days, reacted differently than they would today and didn't everybody; we stayed in place and carried on and we never felt concerned about our personal safety or that we might be in jeopardy.

Q: Was there concern, though, just walking down a street?

FURGAL: We were lucky. In all the places we were stationed, we never had, not even in countries where we stuck out like sore thumbs like Zimbabwe; no, I never had a bit of unease when we were stationed overseas. We were very, very lucky.

Q: Well then, you were in Sri Lanka, you were again the cultural affairs officer?

FURGAL: Yes.

Q: Was there a difference in attitude towards what you were doing and all?

FURGAL: Not really. We still had an open library. In Colombo, the capitol but unfortunately, when we were there the second time, we had to downsize. We closed our library in the old capital, the historic capital of Kandy. We took the books we wanted, gave the rest to the university library in Kandy and brought the librarian down to Colombo. She became our librarian in Colombo because fortunately we had an opening at that time so that worked out. But that was very sad; I think it was one of the hardest things Bill Maurer had to do; he was my boss there.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FURGAL: During our three years, Tezi Schaffer was the second one and Marion Creekmore before her. I don't know if he's still alive. Poor chap had a heart attack when he was there and the embassy nurse saved him. And I think he left shortly thereafter. He didn't leave because of that but his term was up and then Tezi Schaffer came in. When we were in Bangladesh we worked for Howie Schaffer, so we were the only couple, at least at that time, that had worked for both Schaffers, one in one place and one in the other.

Q: Did you find- Were the people who used the library, which I assumed would be mainly sort of university students and all that-

FURGAL: Tended to be younger people.

Q: Were they more politicized then than you had seen before or was there much-?

FURGAL: I don't think so. Journalists, of course, used it. The first time we were there was before Afghanistan and the staff of the Russian embassy, which was directly across the street from the USIS library used to use it. After Afghanistan they were told they couldn't step foot in our place, not by us but by their bosses. Of course, by the time I came back, 1990, you know, '89 had passed and things were opening up again. Library use was pretty much the same with students and media types being frequent visitors. I think the university system in Sri Lanka was better than India. India's a much, much bigger country with many more universities I think the universities in New Delhi probably received more money and had more prestige, although the University of Madras was one of the oldest and it was well known and well regarded. But the universities in Colombo were very good.

Q: Well, was the- this was still too early, was it, for the computer revolution to hit there or-?

FURGAL: I think so, in those days. I'm trying to think of my office. I think I had one. You know, the things I tend to remember are the people and some of the programs I especially liked. But things like that escape me.

Q: Well, I mean, sometimes after equipment but there was a whole change in how things were done with sort of the Internet really starting hitting. This would be too early.

FURGAL: I think so. We spent a lot of time working on English speaking programs. One of the things that had made Sri Lanka unique was that they had a common system of education in English. But when President. Bandaranaike was in office in '57, he abolished that and started separate Tamil and the Sinhalese mediums of education. Well, they lost a whole generation of people that don't know each other and can't talk to each other. They are now going back to English medium and in the early '90s, we brought in Fulbrighters and other specialists to help build up the English faculty. Some new universities were also opened; one called the Open University is similar to what we do now on the Internet but they were doing it more with satellite centers.

Q: Do you remember any programs that particularly- you thought were particularly effective there during this time?

FURGAL: Not quite with the impact of the one in Madras that I described earlier but there were always the long and short term exchange programs, i.e., Fulbright, East West Center International Visitor Program, etc.. Each country I was in, well not quite each but in Madras, Dhaka, and Colombo, I started little chapters of the East West Center Alumni Association; these were very popular because people who had studied in the US could get together and carry on about the good old days. It gave them a little bit of a special identity. Alumni meetings here

aren't always so important because we have many other institutional affiliations but in some of those countries, that affiliation was very important.

Q: I am told that they have sort of military – people who have gone to Leavenworth, and you know, in certain countries where the military support – in other words, this type of thing creates quite a bond.

FURGAL: We did do one project that was very good, and I regret that I never gave that FSN an award; I should have written him up but he's now retired. USIS (U.S. Information Service) published; a short paperback history of America. You might have seen it at one point during your career; it's been around a long time. We had that translated into Sinhala, one of the two local languages, accompanied by workshops. We took all the social science teachers at the high school level, some 240, and divided them into a couple of workshops over a period of a few years. We recruited Fulbrighters, both American and Sri Lankan to come and lecture. I remember one chap in particular, a Tamil Sri Lankan, who had studied in the U.S. When he came back, he tended to be a little anti-American but he taught his section beautifully. We would give them a little lunch and copies of this book, both in English and in Sinhala. Unfortunately then violence occurred, perhaps it was when the president was assassinated, before we could do one for the Tamil teachers, who had to travel from the Jaffna area to Colombo. I always felt badly that we were able to train the Sinhala teachers but we could do nothing for Tamil high school social science teachers. Then I left.

Q: Well you left when?

FURGAL: October of '93.

TERESITA C. SCHAFFER
Ambassador
Sri Lanka (1992-1995)

Ambassador Schaffer was born in New York and later educated in France. She received her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr College and joined the Foreign Service. Her Foreign Service career took her to Israel, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in September 1998.

Q: In 1992, you were appointed US Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. First of all is there any affinity between Sri Lanka and the Maldives?

SCHAFFER: The Maldives is a country consisting of a 1,000 islands -- 1,000 miles from anywhere. In 1992, there were about 250,000 people living on those islands. We had established diplomatic relations with the Maldives in the mid-1960s, but neither country felt that maintaining a resident embassy in the other made any sense. From the very beginning, our ambassador in Colombo also became our emissary to the Maldives. In general, most of the diplomats in

Colombo were also accredited to the Maldives. The embassies in Colombo were the nearest diplomatic institutions to the Maldives.

The Maldives have a very interesting approach to the management of their foreign policy. It has tried to avoid having any “special” relationship with any other state, even those that might be “close” by. It is on good terms with all of its “neighbors.” The only countries that maintain resident embassies in Male’ are Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and now Bangladesh. All four of these countries send a substantial amount of labor to the Maldives -- teachers, hotel workers, etc. The Maldives maintains only two embassies: in Colombo and at the UN in New York.

My appointment was announced in early May; the confirmation hearings were in late May; I was sworn in in late August and arrived in Colombo on October 1. So the journey took about eleven months, which is about average. Other countries find our system bizarre, but that is the result of our “checks and balances” system.

The confirmation hearings went very smoothly. Only one or two Senators showed up; I was being interviewed along with Kenton Keith, who I believe was being proposed for the UAE.

After confirmation, I attended the ambassadorial course. I had taken it before -- as the spouse of the ambassador-designate to Bangladesh. The first time, David Newsom and Shirley Temple Black were the majordomos of the course. It is hard to imagine two more different personalities. The second time the co-chairs were Tony Motley and Brandon Grove, who at the time was the Director of FSI. Both were superb. The content of the course had evolved over the years; so it was somewhat different from the one I went to as an ambassadorial spouse in 1984 -- not radically, but somewhat. The course’s main effort is to explore the meaning of leadership, both conceptually and in practical terms. This has been its focus since the beginning and was true in 1992 as well as later when I was the co-chair with Motley while serving as the Director of FSI. I might note that Motley is still co-chairing the course. We heard from a lot of people representing other agencies and many parts of the Department, particularly areas with which the putative ambassadors may not have had an opportunity to become acquainted. I found it extremely useful and it was an excellent preparation for my ambassadorial assignment.

My predecessor in Colombo was Marion Creekmore, whom I knew well and had worked with for quite a while. Creekmore’s DCM was Don Westmore; they both left at the same time, which I think is under normal circumstances a terrible practice. They had both arrived at the same time and left at the same time after three years of service. Before I left Washington, I picked Steve Mann to be my DCM. My choice raised a lot of eyebrows. I have long believed that ambassadors should not pick clones of themselves, but should select DCMs who bring some different strengths to the post. I was an area specialist; the Embassy Political Counselor, Bob Boggs, was also an area specialist. Therefore I did not look for a DCM who had area expertise. I was looking for someone who had had overseas management experience since that was the area in which I had little experience. I was also looking for someone to whom I could turn for advice on subjects that I did not know well. Initially, I was very interested in John Holzman, who is now our Ambassador in Dhaka; at the time he was completing a tour as DCM in one of the West African countries. John had had a substantial experience in South Asia and told me that he would be interested in the Colombo assignment. He was a splendid officer, but in looking at the issue a

little more closely, I had to reach the conclusions that his bio looked very much like mine. He was an economic officer, an expert on South Asia; furthermore, I was receiving mixed signals. He had family reasons to prefer a Washington assignment.

So in the end, I decided to ask John whether he preferred to become the Pakistan Country Director; that interested him greatly and I needed to fill that key job with an outstanding officer. That took care of John. I then interviewed people on the list of DCM candidates prepared by the Office of Personnel. I decided that Steve Mann was my choice; he was technically a consular officer, although he had spent much of his career in other fields. I had never met him before the interview. I knew that he had opened two posts: Mongolia and Micronesia. He appeared to me to have the necessary people-skills; he had experiences in those fields that I didn't know very well; he had run posts where the support services were minimal. He had no South Asia experience at all.

We were both interested in ideas. I had the impression, which turned out to be correct, that he would be willing to bring me bad news, if that was necessary. I think that attribute is essential in a DCM. An ambassador faces the ever-present danger of being insulated from what is really going on. I had been aware of this danger, but it was really brought home by the ambassadors' course. Both Motley and Grove emphasized that an ambassador must be served by people who will tell him or her things that may not be popular or well received. No ambassador can afford to be caught unaware when problems arise. Brandon used to say: "You have to have a psychological contract with your DCM so that you will level with each other, but at the same time, you function as one as far as the Embassy and the host country is concerned." I used the same phraseology when I co-chaired the ambassadors' course later.

I discussed this issue with all of the people I interviewed because this bond was very important to me. In fact, Mann and I had a very good relationship; we leveled with each other and made a good team. The Embassy in 1992 had about sixty direct American employees; by the time I left, there were about ten fewer.

My vision of the DCM job was that of managing the mission -- that is assuring that it was pulling together toward common objectives. This was particularly important in Sri Lanka where many US government agencies were represented -- AID, VOA, DoD, USIA and the intelligence community. For example, we were building a "Voice of America" transmitter; that required the presence of two independent sections of the "Voice" -- the engineers building the new facility and the radio people who were managing the existing facility.

Without diminishing the role of the Administrative Counselor, I expected Steve to pay close attention to the Embassy's administrative functions. In the case of our Embassy in Colombo, quite often the Administrative Counselor was outranked by several of the representatives of other agencies. AID for example still had a relatively large mission in Sri Lanka and the Mission director certainly outranked the Administrative Counselor. So it was useful to have the DCM fully cognizant of the major admin issues; he could influence the representatives of other agencies as the Admin Counselor could not.

I also expected Steve to be my understudy/alter ego on political and economic issues. When it became apparent that we would be entering into an active negotiation for a new country-to-country agreement for the Voice of America, I assigned that to him. He became the principal negotiator. Others were of course involved, particularly the VOA staff, but he was the head honcho on this negotiations. I was held in reserve to be brought to bear if the negotiations ran into some heavy seas.

I was not surprised by anything I found in Colombo, having been involved in the various issues from my Washington perch. Since I had known that I might be assigned to Colombo since Nov. 1991, I had ample opportunity to pay attention to what was going on there and to prepare myself for this assignment. I should say that in Washington, Sri Lanka is primarily of interest to the desk officer. In my days, and even now, the Bureau's front office paid relatively infrequent attention to Sri Lankan matters. Only if a crisis arose or if our Ambassador was in town, would the front office focus on Sri Lanka. I don't remember Kelly ever going to Sri Lanka, partially because he was so preoccupied with the Gulf War that he didn't have time to visit countries not involved in that matter. The Department's leadership may have focused on Sri Lanka perhaps twice per year. VOA did pay attention to Sri Lanka, not only because of the station, but also because it covered internal developments there.

Let me just briefly cover the activities of the other agencies. I have already mentioned VOA and its activities. AID had about 12-14 Americans when I arrived to administer an assistance program of about \$12-14 million, mostly technical assistance, as was true for most aid programs. AID was working on financial sector reforms -- working with the stock market to increase its efficiency; it assisted some environmental efforts on the west coast to stem erosion and with some environmental co-ops in one of the major water-sheds. We had provided major assistance to developmental projects in the Mahaweli River basin which is the major river in Sri Lanka, used for major irrigation schemes for the last 1500 years. By the time I got to Colombo, we were still marginally involved in an international effort to assist in the further development of that basin. We did nothing in the fields of family planning or health, largely because of Sri Lanka's extraordinary record in these areas. They had already done a lot of what AID was working on in other countries.

When I arrived, we also had a substantial food aid program -- PL 480. Sri Lanka was a food deficit country -- had been so for many years.

Now for VOA. It had had a transmitting station in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) since 1951. It beamed programs throughout the area. The one that was functioning when I first arrived was not very powerful. VOA wanted to build a more powerful one that could reach further; it was to be built in a different location. After much delay and discussion, the Sri Lanka government had offered a site which was about two hours by road north from Colombo on the coast. But this offer had been politically controversial from the beginning, largely because the groups not in the government used this facility-to-be as a part of their anti-American politics. The Indian government, while negotiating their peace-keeping role in 1987, made the Sri Lankans sign an annex to the agreement which would committed them to not allow any broadcasting from its territory which would be anti-Indian. This document was widely interpreted as an anti-VOA action, although we chose not to interpret it that way by declaring that VOA was in no sense

anti-Indian, which was correct. India has always been very sensitive about the interference -- actual or perceived -- of foreign powers in South Asian affairs. This annex was a manifestation of this concern. The book by a former Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka in 1987 makes it eminently clear that India was absolutely driven by a concern that Sri Lanka would become too closely aligned with the U.S.; that, in the Indian view, would have been quite contrary to the Indian interests. The VOA broadcasts was just another manifestation of this concern.

Both the U.S. and Sri Lanka saw the construction of a new transmitter as an opportunity to update the country-to-country operating agreement -- something that had already been done two or three times before. This was not an agreement that focused on the new transmitter primarily, but merely an update of an existing agreement; there was a new feature because the new facility was going to be both transmitting and receiving -- the latter being a new feature not covered by the existing agreement.

But most of the issues were entirely straightforward and not contentious at all -- such things as continued Sri Lankan sovereignty over the site, access to the site, conditions under which employees of the U.S. government would operate, etc. There was no argument about these matters.

More difficult were the questions about compensation. There had always been an understanding that the site then in use would revert to Sri Lanka once the new site was operational. But there had been a clause in a prior agreement which to the best of my recollection said that the U.S. government would give Sri Lanka the surplus broadcasting equipment -- or its equivalent. We tried to negotiate an equivalent compensation package. VOA of course was trying to spend the minimum necessary to complete the new agreement. This part of the draft agreement took a long time to work out; it was further complicated by the fact that the Sri Lanka was somewhat reluctant to announce a new VOA agreement at a time when various opposition figures were using VOA as the symbol of all evil.

Sri Lanka had always had a very important political left. It claimed that new station was really a new method to communicate with U.S. submarines. Further opposition came from an unexpected source. The new site was in an area heavily populated by Catholics. The Catholic Church was a curious amalgam of exceedingly conservative theology -- somewhat akin to the American Church up to the 1960s -- and radical politics. So there were Catholic politicians who belonged to one of Sri Lanka's most conservative parties -- the UNP -- which was in power at the time. There were a substantial number of Catholics -- both in the clergy and in the laity -- who were very sensitive to the charge that because they were Christians they were foreign to Sri Lanka. There were clergymen who, either because they were leftists or because they wanted to show their Sri Lankan *bone fides*, looked for opportunities to wrap themselves in the national flag.

Unfortunately for us, the then Bishop of Chilaw, who was responsible for the Catholic souls in the area of the new VOA site, was one of these clergymen. He took a very strident position in opposition to the VOA project, charging not only that it was to be a communication station to submarines, but that it would spread AIDS and immorality among the youth of Chilaw and Iranavela, the actual site of the VOA facility.

When I arrived, this political issue was a very hot subject, widely discussed in the newspapers. Our negotiations were obviously being slowed down by an increasingly nervous Sri Lankan government. As I said, our main negotiator became Steve Mann, but I wanted to be as supportive as necessary. In that role, I wanted to call on the Bishop. He sent word that he wouldn't receive me. I made one attempt, through the Papal Nuncio -- a Frenchman who had studied in the same Institute in Paris where I had also spent a year; he tested the waters and then advised me not to bother. The Bishop was not about to let go of an issue which was bringing so many headlines. That was the end of my efforts; I was not about to continue to beg for something that was not going to happen.

VOA was not very helpful to us in our negotiations. They were not unhelpful; they were essentially inattentive. As we were coming to a crunch, VOA assigned one of its lawyers in the Washington headquarters who I believe was less interested in trying to reach a conclusion than he was "looking for scalps." He would use the word "offer" to help us in the negotiations; I think a better term was "threaten." When we heard what his ideas were on how to get the negotiations moving again, we decided we would be better without him. He wanted to take the Sri Lankans to the World Court for not honoring the previous agreement. I am not sure that we had a strong case; there was no question that it would have been a tactic destined for disaster.

Finally, we had reached agreement on all of the issues except for compensation. We had some frank off-the-record conversations which gave us a pretty good idea of what it would take to satisfy the Sri Lankans. I decided to send Steve back to Washington -- on Embassy funds -- to see whether we could get headquarters approval for the final stage. VOA was absolutely astonished; I forewarned them by phone that I was going to do this. I felt some urgency to solve the final stumbling block because elections were about to be held in Sri Lanka and if we had to wait for the results of that, we might never have reached agreement. VOA bit the bullet; Steve came back and we made the offer.

By then the election appeared increasingly dicey. I finally went to the President and asked that the new agreement be ratified ASAP (as soon as possible). He gave me absolutely no answer at all. That led me to the conclusion that despite all of our efforts, the new arrangement would not be approved by Sri Lanka. But about a week later -- just before the election -- I got a call from the Foreign Minister who informed me that they were prepared to sign the new agreement, on one condition: no photographers. So we had a stealth signing the next day. We held a very quiet celebration in the Embassy. A week later, the government was voted out of power.

After the election, I called on the new Foreign Minister so that I could inform him of the VOA agreement that the previous government had signed. After the initial exchange of pleasantries, including the customary expression of hopes of close relations, I told the Foreign Minister that his predecessor had signed a new VOA agreement. I said that I thought it was a very routine matter, but I wanted the new government to know since VOA had so often been part of the Sri Lankan political dialogue.

That would have been the end of it had it not been for a scuffle that took place about two months later at the gate of the construction site in which a villager was killed by the police. That effectively shut down our construction project for about four months. During this time, the

government selected a panel consisting of members of the new regime to decide whether the agreement should be implemented. There was a consensus that Sri Lanka should not abrogate the agreement, but there was a question of implementation. Among the panel members were several people who were very friendly to us and although the commission did a thorough study, it was clear to us from the beginning that the results would be entirely acceptable to us. But the new government had to show that it had its own independent view separate and apart from that of the old regime. Steve and his Sri Lankan counterpart negotiated a new memorandum of understanding which was very carefully crafted so that the new government could argue that it had arranged for some new aspects and we could argue that nothing had changed. In fact, this new memorandum explicitly stated in writing a lot of understandings that had been implicit all along. Fortunately, the VOA people recognized that an acceptable solution had been reached and did not just reject the process out of principle or because it was somewhat unusual. So eventually, the new transmitter was built but only after my departure. It was scheduled to be finished in 1996; I am not sure it is entirely completed yet.

I know that the construction had run into all sorts of problems. There were some political problems while I was still there, but they were resolved. There were some environmental impact problems even though we had insisted at the beginning that there be a study conducted to eliminate or mitigate that impact. But new unexpected environmental challenges arose later. Then there was a fire. Then there were technical problems with the transmittal equipment. So it has not been a very smooth operation, but one of these days it will fully function.

Back in 1951, having a VOA capability all around the world was an excellent idea. By now, I tend to think that VOA has outlived its usefulness in most places. It is not heard as widely as BBC; we may be reaching the time when even CNN will have a wider audience. In most countries, there are a wide variety of media outlets which cover the total spectrum of political thought -- both domestic and international. VOA does create political problems for the U.S. -- and not just the kind that I went through in Sri Lanka. All of these factors lead me to wonder whether this instrumentality of the U.S. government is really useful in most parts of the world. By the time I got to Colombo, the issue of a new transmitter had been so long decided that it would have been useless to raise any questions at the time. Furthermore, I think my doubts about the utility of VOA have greatly strengthened since the early 1990s.

Now let me turn to USIS. When I arrived in Colombo, USIA had four officers -- that went down to two by the time I left and is now one. I found the USIS program in Sri Lanka extremely useful. It ran a library in Colombo -- a few years earlier it had to close a library in Kandy, which is the second largest city in Sri Lanka. That library cost about \$8,000 per year to operate, but USIA decided to close the facility principally because the Agency developed a new policy which barred the funding of any facility which did not have a resident American attached to it. I found that decision absolutely mindless, but the deed had long been done by the time I reached Colombo.

The closing of Kandy library was still an issue by 1992 with the local citizenry still wondering why the U.S. had taken such a step. It had cost us practically nothing, but had generated a tremendous amount of good will.

We still had a library in Colombo. USIS had an international visitors program which I have always regarded as one of our most successful foreign policy initiatives since it raised knowledge of the U.S. among foreign opinion leaders. In my years in Colombo, we probably sent 12-13 Sri Lankans for various period in the U.S. I always thought this was a wonderful program for the U.S.

The press work was not terribly effective. That was not anyone's fault. The Sri Lankan press was one of my major disappointments while Ambassador. The country has virtual universal education and a long tradition of university education. But it has a very weak press; it is a free press, except for those outlets owned by the government. But the reporting standards are very poor; stories are not checked for accuracy -- out of laziness, I believe. Sometimes the stories are quite inflammatory particularly in the vernacular press. I thought that one of the weaknesses of our program as well as those of the diplomatic community in general was that we tended to focus on the English-speaking press. That was a large enough presence to make one believe it was the only major voice in Sri Lanka. But that is an illusion; the vernacular press is much more strident and much more popular with the average Sri Lankan.

I had some contact with the Sri Lankan press, but not as much as I would have liked to. I was surprised that the reporters, even for the English language press, had nothing to do even with their counterpart vernacular language publications. In many cases, one found one publisher with a Sinhala and an English paper, but the relations between the two was not good. Relatively little material was translated from one to the other. During my time, USIS did try to work more closely with the Sinhala press, but the reporters were not really interested. We also tried to place more material in the Sinhala press, with limited success. What would really have been useful for the Sri Lankan political process would have been for local commentators, who wrote on issues of war and peace -- the ethnic question— to make more of an effort to have their views more widely disseminated. I found this material to be some of the most useful for me because much of it addressed the question of how to get beyond the current struggle and deadlock. Appallingly little of that kind of thoughtful material saw much daylight.

I did stay in touch with a number of press people. That did not tend to be as much "press work" *per se* -- people did not tend to turn out in large numbers when I or American visitors did hold press events, but we did keep in touch with the editors-in-chief and publishers and the major columnists -- and occasionally some reporters; these were people who were well informed about local situations; they moved in important circles. So I had a lot of press people who were important contacts, but it was usually for me to keep in touch, not for me to explain U.S. policy.

I had some opportunities to give speeches around the country. The most famous speech I gave was on the occasion of the opening of a new textile factory. When I first arrived in Colombo, President Premadasa -- later assassinated -- had a goal to open 200 garment factories in the country. He had sweet talked -- and perhaps bludgeoned -- some foreign investors into investing in these factories. I had heard that the opening ceremonies were usually amazing political theater. So I requested the Economic officer to see whether he could find a factory opening which had some American investment; I wanted to be invited to it. He did that; we went to a place in the Ratnapura district -- about a five hour drive. I had been offered a helicopter ride, but I declined that with thanks because I wanted to be free to arrive and leave on my timetable. Furthermore,

the helicopter was scheduled to return in the dark and I was advised by our Defense Attaché that that was much too risky.

The opening was quite an event. The President, a couple of Ministers, the representative of the American investor, local big-wigs and Howie and I were all on the dais. Of course the President was escorted by a whole host of troops and dignitaries. However, first came the unveiling of the plaque by the President, then the raising of the Sri Lankan flag and then in the anti-room of the factory, an oil lamp as lit -- standard procedure for all ceremonial occasions. There were six or seven young women, wearing white sarongs and white tops, singing the traditional songs for an oil lighting ceremony. The VIPs in the group were invited to light one of the wicks of the lamp. I dutifully did that as did the Presidents, etc. Then we went into the factory and there the Sri Lankan VIPs stood on a stand that looked something like the award stands of an Olympic event. All the workers, some 500 strong, filed by this stand singing the "Lux Shirt" song; 450 of them -- all women -- then sat down at their sewing machines and 50 -- all men -- went to their cutting tables. The President then marched to one of the cutting tables -- we all trooped diligently behind him to watch as he made the first ceremonial cut of a huge stack of fabric. At this point, someone appeared with a large sample of garments, similar to those which this factory would eventually produce. The President reached for a ghastly leopard spotted blouse; I had a sinking feeling that he then might turn and offer it to me. Fortunately, he just touched it and put it back on the rack. He then pointed to me and asked me whether my dress had been made in Sri Lanka. I replied that unfortunately it was not, but that my husband was wearing a shirt of local manufacture. So Howie had to be brought up from the crowd; the President reached for the shirt and sort of yanked on it; he pulled on the buttons, which fortunately held. The President asked Howie how much he had paid for it; he was told that it was about \$18 -- he probably had gotten it on a bargain day. The President nodded and then we followed him into a small VIP enclosure to have a cup of tea. Then we trooped into a huge public enclosure for the big ceremony.

So we were all seated on the dais, with fans moving the hot air around -- it must have been almost unbearably hot in the area where the spectators sat. The President asked me to sit next to him. Then the ceremony started. A high school group sang, another high school group danced; a local comedian did a comic bit -- in Sinhalese; a local politician who gave an overly long speech; the American investor gave a speech. One of the Ministers gave an extremely long speech. During this part of the ceremony, the President kept motioning to one or another of his multitudinous aides; they kept bringing him the program for the ceremony. I could see him changing the sequence of events and then handing it back to the aides. The President was a micro-manager with few equals.

Somewhere along the line, he leaned to me and asked whether I was still studying Sinhalese. I nodded. He asked me what I could say; I managed to get out some kind of a sentence. He then asked whether I could say a sentence that he pronounced. I told him that I thought I could do that. He then asked whether I could give that sentence at a public meeting. I swallowed hard and said that I thought I could. So he then said, he would ask that I be put on the program.

The President arose to give his speech. That was a real crowd pleaser -- in Sinhalese -- which I understood in part. The speech included some semi-raunchy material -- there were factories in Sri Lanka that produced underwear and the President commented that some had said that it was a

shame that Sri Lanka was producing underwear for British ladies, but he said that at least then the world knew that the British ladies wore underwear.

At one point, in a sharp change of subject, the President began to discuss the ethnic problem. He said that the country needed to have Sinhalese people speaking Tamil and vice-versa. I never heard him say that again. And then he turned towards me and said: "Here we have the American Ambassador. She has been studying Sinhalese. She is going to say a few words." So I got up and managed three sentences of the "I am pleased to be here" and "I am pleased by this American investment" variety. Then I switched to English for a few more remarks. I wanted to express some thoughts that my minimal Sinhalese could not have conveyed, along the lines that I was pleased that American investment would support so many more Sri Lankan jobs, but that I hoped that the Sri Lankan manufacturers would increase their purchases of American textiles so that we would have a two-way trade.

Those three Sinhalese sentences were by far the most famous words I uttered during my ambassadorial tour. They were reported far and wide by the Sri Lankan media. The ceremony had taken place too late in the day to be covered by TV. The night of this ceremony we stayed at a local hotel; by the following day, my remarks were being broadcasted and reported widely. On that day, we reached Galle, a very nice seaport and the third largest city in Sri Lanka. I could then watch myself on TV delivering those famous three sentences. On the following day, as we walked on the 17th Century ramparts of Galle, we passed a mosque. In front of that were some young boys of about ten playing. One of the boys approached me and asked whether I was the lady that had appeared on TV the previous evening. Fame spreads in a hurry!

By the next night, we were back in Colombo, just in time to read about my sentences on the front pages and in the editorial columns of many papers. I think the word had been passed by the government that they wanted this event highlighted. The editorials supported the idea of learning foreign languages. I was delighted to be associated with this great cause; I am only sorry that in my three years, these were the only words that attracted any attention at all. That was too bad.

I did give some other speeches, mostly informal as I visited various places in Sri Lanka. People often ask me whether I also learned Tamil. I did not, but after the press outburst, I decided that I had better learn a few words. When I visited the East Coast, I had a Tamil teacher for two weeks so that I could use some of the rudimentary; e.g., counting to ten, basic vocabulary; and the sentences "I am happy to be here" and "I am happy to be at X". I actually had an opportunity to use this sentence when I visited Batticaloa, which is largely a Tamil town on the East Coast, where I addressed a Rotary Club. I had been taken to this meeting by an American Jesuit -- a Rotarian. He had lived in Batticaloa for about forty years by this time. Inevitably, some one said that he had understood that I could speak Sinhalese and asked whether I could say something in Tamil. My one sentence did the trick.

The two languages are utterly different. There are some cognates. Tamil is a language related to those spoken in southern India. Sinhalese is a Sanskrit derived language, similar to the northern Indian languages. So the two languages had different alphabets, different grammar. If there were any similarities only a scholar could detect. I was told that some of the language structure is similar, but you would have to be a real expert in both languages before that becomes useful.

I did give one speech on Sri Lanka-US relations. That was late in my tour. That was the one time when I sought to give a speech. I did not do that, except for perhaps one other time, but on this occasion, I believed it important that I be given an opportunity to give my views publicly on those relations.

One of the Sri Lanka brighter spots was the economy. Sri Lanka in general has done extraordinarily well in the social sectors, but historically had not done well in production of goods. Both agriculture and industry had grown quite slowly. From 1977 until the early 1980s, there were great hopes for some major advances, following a change in government and in economic policy. Investments began to flow in. But as happens too often, in 1983 there was a serious increase in ethnic tensions with riots in most of the Sri Lankan major cities. That effectively put a stop to the economic revival. By the time I arrived, the UNP -- the more conservative of the two parties -- was still in power and was moving -- with all deliberate speed -- to the further opening of the economy. This policy, even if very grudgingly undertaken, was similar to that being adopted by many countries at the time. The fashions of economic policy had shifted in that direction. That was why the President was looking for foreign capital for his garment factories; in earlier years, he probably would have had the government make all the investments. The new policy called for deregulation of the economy, a more inviting climate for foreign investments and a more sympathetic attitude towards domestic private investment.

By 1992, Sri Lanka had attained a 4-6% GDP growth starting from the dark days when the JVP rebellion was underway. That rebellion practically closed down the country, as I have described earlier, until about 1991. This growth was not in the same league as the "Asian Tigers", but one would have to say that the Sri Lankan economy was performing reasonably well by 1992. The economy might have grown somewhat faster, but not much without significant changes in government policy. Sri Lanka was not a terribly "user friendly" country; even if you were willing to invest, there were many bureaucratic hurdles you had to jump over. The issue for Sri Lanka, essentially, was that India had reformed its economy significantly in the early 1990s; in order for Sri Lanka to compete for foreign investment it has to make considerably easier for that investment to enter the country than India does. It is a much, much smaller market, which somewhat reduces the attraction; on the other hand it is a much manageable market and government.

There was an American Chamber of Commerce which had been started by my predecessor. It may have 40 members in 1992; it had about 100 by the time I left three years later. The membership was overwhelmingly Sri Lankan -- those who had some connection with an American company. There were some expatriates, but they were a small minority. The increase in membership in the three year period was due in part to an increase in American investments, but primarily to the fact that the word got around that this new institution was alive and well. We worked very closely with the Chamber. In fact, when I arrived, the Embassy's Economic section was doing most of the Chamber's staff work. Soon thereafter, the membership was large enough that the dues could cover the cost of their own staff -- one person -- and rent some office space.

I was interested in increasing American investment in Sri Lanka. We had some success. At one point, a large investment mission, supported by OPIC, came to Colombo. I took them to another

garment factory opening, which was only slightly less colorful than the one I described earlier. There was some interest in investing in phosphate mining, which has by now materialized. There was an American owned flour mill, which had been in Sri Lanka for many years; most of its business came from milling PL-480 products. There were some garment factories in which American investors participated. There were a couple of American computer software and hardware companies; these were modest sized factories, but this whole field held potential for expansion. That was the kind of business that I was interested in attracting. Unfortunately for Sri Lanka, the competition from India and Bangalore was overwhelming; American investors went there rather than Sri Lanka.

AT&T looked for a long time to establish an equity position in a switching equipment project. Eventually, it turned out to be a complete sale to Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, this project ended badly, in part because of frustration generated by the dilatory Sri Lankan procedures and in part because of ill-advised bidding tactics by AT&T. As so often happens with American businesses, there is a sudden surge of impatience which demands that all the decisions be made in the next two weeks or the plug would be pulled. I think our businesses need to be more patient with their time schedules; the whole world does not work on American time. I do not object to a statement that time is running short and that the issues have to be resolved in the next four or five months. Then if the same American representatives return to maintain continuity, the time frame can be used more effectively than the usual practice of lurching from crisis to crisis and then demanding that everything be settled in two weeks.

We did not have a Commerce Department representative in Sri Lanka. When the commercial world was divided between State and Commerce, the latter took all the large markets; Sri Lanka was not one of them. At one stage, the Commerce Department put the word out that it was encouraging posts that had a Commerce representative to adopt nearby posts that did not. The "regional" Commerce representative was to provide ideas, some support and technical assistance. In a lot of places, I don't think this worked very well; initially Commerce undercut its effort badly. It would always invite State Department commercial officers to its regional conferences, but would never provide travel funds and would exclude them from important events. This insured that State participation would be minimal. Eventually, I believe under Susan Schwab's leadership in Commerce, that Department changed its practices and the conferences became a more friendly environment to State officers. All this was happening while State finally woke up and gave the commercial promotion the kind of support it deserved. So both agencies were coming to the appropriate conclusions at about the same time.

In Sri Lanka, we had an unusual arrangement. We had close working relations with two different commercial sections in two different posts -- India and Singapore. We used each relationship in different ways. Singapore was the Asian headquarters for a lot of American firms. We used the commercial officers there to open doors to these companies. Some Singapore-based headquarters were authorized to cover Sri Lanka; some were not but we persuaded a number of them to take a look at possibilities in Colombo. As luck would have it, one of the commercial officers in Singapore had started his career as a Foreign Service officer in Bangladesh when Howie and I served there -- a fact that we only discovered after he had agreed to come to Sri Lanka. In any case, this officer came and looked around and gave us some ideas. He returned to Singapore with our literature. This and my visit to Singapore on the way to my post in Colombo increased the

consciousness of American corporations based in Singapore. All this effort resulted happily in considerable American participation from Singapore when we held a trade fair in Colombo a couple of years later. Very few American companies would come from the U.S. at considerable expense for a small market, but it made sense to them to send their Singapore representatives.

In India, there were Foreign Commercial Service officers in three different posts -- Delhi, Madras and Bombay. Our relations were primarily with Madras. One of the officers from there came to visit us -- part work and part beach hunting. He looked over our operation and tried to see what he could do from Madras to help us. He focused on the electronic industry which is concentrated in the Madras consular district -- Bangalore. At one point, we were able to send one of our Sri Lankan employees to India to attend a training program that was tailored to our needs. He spent about a week in India -- two days in Delhi, two in Bombay and one in Madras. He came back with a long list of contacts in the Commerce Department. That was very useful and is one of the major deficiencies of most State Department-operated commercial efforts -- no contact with the Department of Commerce in Washington. So our employee was then able to contact the right person in Commerce when we needed assistance.

We pushed both trade and investment. Our pitch was that Sri Lanka was a good place to invest because it had a reasonably healthy economy, low wages, English-speaking and a reasonably friendly policy toward business. I recognized that if an American business had never worked overseas, it might not want to start in Sri Lanka. But if it had had experience in some other parts of the developing world -- which is almost a must if one is looking for a low wage economy -- then Sri Lanka was not a bad bet. Sri Lanka also has a very highly educated population; almost everyone had attended high school. Literacy is virtually universal. That is unusual in the developing world.

Tea was still an important export, although by then garments were by far the largest exports. Natural resources had become a much less important segment of the economy. Services and the garment industry were the fastest growing sectors. Agriculture was not doing as well as it should have. The hope was that some aspect of the electronic industry might find a home in Sri Lanka -- probably manufacturing of some hardware.

The plantations, so well known around the world, had been established by the British in the mid-1880s. The first major crop was coffee, but that was wiped out by a blight. The British brought in tea, probably from south India, in the latter part of the 19th Century. The tea plantations were primarily in the hills, although some was cultivated in the low lands. Tea has to be grown on slopes, so the best teas are grown at the higher latitudes. At the time of independence, the plantations were run by expatriates. The labor was virtually all Tamil who had been brought from India to work on these plantations during the colonial period. These tea plantation workers made up about 50% of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka, although it has maintained its own culture. The workers were downtrodden, but were not especially involved in the LTTE insurgency. They were involved in politics; they had a veteran politician who has tried to be part of every government that has been formed in Sri Lanka with the expressed purpose of trying to achieve better working conditions for the plantation workers.

The plantations suffered a great deal when they were nationalized by Mrs. Bandaranaike's government in the 1960s and 1970s. Investments stopped. It turned out that in tea growing you can coast for about seven or eight years; that is without new investments. Then the plantation suddenly crashes because there is a replacement cycle for the plants that can not be continued if there is no new investments. The new plants don't produce much until they reach about seven years. By 1992, the government was starting to move towards what it deemed "privatization" of the plantation; actually Premadasa referred to this process as "peopleization." -- he preferred that description. By this time, the plantations were almost all under Sri Lankan management. The government had decided to privatize by selling off an increasing percentage of equity. That brought in capital, but not the other important aspect of privatization; i.e. new management. The prospect of a new management structure was fiercely resisted by the plantation labor and their political backers; the workers were concerned that "new" management would be exploitive -- which may at some level have been the case. Eventually, agreements were worked out which privatized management by giving it some tenure to encourage investment. I think this new approach is beginning to have a beneficial impact. There was some foreign investment, but not too much; the Sri Lankans were very concerned about Indian investment; they did not want large Indian holdings of tea plantations.

Sri Lanka has the highest per capita GNP of any country in the region, except for the Maldives, although the figures for that country are highly artificial which is not particularly significant. Sri Lanka had a significant middle class; it had a low population growth -- about 1.4% for about a generation. So income increases don't get eaten up by population growth.

In traveling around, you can not help notice the gap between the very rich and the poor. You can see large estates; they also have beach houses or mountain villas. Then there are those who scratch out a meager existence in rice paddies. Historically, the rich Sri Lankans made their money in trade. There was relatively little industrial investment in Sri Lanka, so that trade offered the best opportunity to accumulate wealth. Many of these people started with some land - - you had to have at least some paddy land in order to qualify as a full member of the establishment. In most cases, this land was rented out to tenant farmers, but you had to own some paddy land as a status symbol. In fact, the term for the establishment caste in Sri Lanka is derived from the term for paddy land. People who had really become rich had probably been traders during the British colonial rule; in many cases, they had then expanded into industrial investments, often in the garment industry; if they were Muslims, it would be in the extracting and the manufacturing aspects.

There are urban slums, but much of the poverty can be seen in rural areas. One day, we had a fascinating tour of some parts of Colombo. The Housing Minister in Premadasa's cabinet was a very close political ally of the President; he was also known for his unsavory and thuggish approach to politics. He offered to give me a kind of Cook's tour of housing developments in Colombo. I accepted and found it an absolutely fascinating experience. The tour started from my Residence in his mini-van. We went to the northern part of Colombo in an area near the Supreme Court -- he and I and some security staff. There he showed us a new development that was under construction. Of course, everyone knew we were coming; that Minister did not leave anything to chance. This was a "well planned, spontaneous" visit.

We saw a model apartment and the Minister briefed us in detail about the layout and square footage of the apartments that people were moving into as well as those they were leaving. He took great pride in the fact that all those that had been displaced by this new construction had found other shelter. He emphasized that this new development would be multi-ethnic -- Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslims. He introduced us to a representative of each group -- all of whom indicated great thankfulness for their new dwellings. As we moved along, there were lots of people who were pushing little folded-up pieces of paper into the Minister's hand. I asked what was in those requests; apparently they sought more apartments and jobs for their children. We spent about 2 ½ hours going from one housing development to another; the Minister was able to tell us his involvement in the project, either when he was Mayor of Colombo or when he was Housing Minister; some were started by the President when he was Mayor of Colombo and later Housing Minister. It was obvious that these politicians were running on their housing program; not surprisingly, their party had overwhelming support in these developments. In the final analysis, I think he wanted me to understand what really mattered to him and how well he had Colombo organized.

Interestingly enough, he essentially made no demands on us. In fact, one day when I called on him to discuss politics, he told me that the Embassy had issued a visa to his son so that he could go to the U.S. to study auto mechanics. He said that he had sent this son to the Visa office without a letter of recommendation because he thought that he should begin to learn how to do things on his own. I know the son got a visa; I don't know that he did so without a letter from his father in his pocket. Had he used it, I would have known. But I thought the Minister's comment very interesting. He made a point of not asking us for a favor.

This Minister was unusual. Far more common, were people who were not well organized -- or at least not as well as he was. Many of those people asked me for favors all the time.

Now for domestic politics. At the time I arrived in Sri Lanka, the President was Ranasinghe Premadasa. He was the dominant figure in the United Nationalist Party (UNP) -- there was not even a close second. He worked very hard. He had been born in poverty. Upper class people in Colombo were embarrassingly snippy and snobbish and condescending about Premadasa's social origins. He was very much aware of this view. It was interesting to me that he reacted in ways that are exactly opposite to what one might expect from an American political leader. In the U.S., it is a sign of honor if you can say that you were born in a "log cabin" -- or the modern equivalent thereof. You lower your origins as proof that you are a self-made man who has risen due to hard work and diligence. In Sri Lanka, Premadasa tried to gloss over his origins and I think it made life more difficult for him. For example, there was a story that he had had a photograph of his father retouched to make it appear that his father was wearing the traditional comb-in-the-hair -- the traditional symbol of the Kandian gentry and nobility. In fact, his father had come from a very modest lineage from a relatively low caste.

He boasted that he had attended the St. Joseph School which is an establishment school; he in fact had never been there. He had risen in Colombo political circles which he was able to do since the population was quite diverse and the political practices reminded one of Chicago. That experience gives one a different perspective; one that was much broader than that of the upper classes. He had close associates who were Tamil and Muslims; that was unusual in Sri Lankan

political circles. As I said, he worked tremendously hard; he was well known for rising at 4:30 in the morning and calling people to give out assignments; if he had not received a report within twenty minutes, he would call again.

He had taught himself English. It was said, and I found it quite plausible, that he had spent hours on end practicing both with tapes and in front of a mirror. His English in fact was very good, but he had not learned the way the establishment had -- by listening while their parents talked to English-speaking visitors. English, I should note, has been a controversial issue in Sri Lanka from the beginning. As in India and Pakistan, the upper classes universally spoke good English. It was a sign of good breeding and economic success; it was also the way to greater economic success. It allowed Sri Lankans to interact with the outside world as well as other English-speaking fellow citizens, who were generally part of the same caste. The father of the present president, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, when he broke with the country's founding fathers -- the first leaders after independence -- quite cynically, I think, chose the language issue as a wedge to separate himself from them. He campaigned on a platform to make Sinhalese the sole language of the country. This was as much a gesture against the English speakers -- of whom he was one -- as against the Tamil speakers. He was trying to enlist the support of the villagers around the island; they resented the fact that English played such a prominent role -- even at independence, Sri Lanka had a 50% literacy rate which has almost doubled since then. So Sri Lanka has a population that may not all have spoken English, but who could in general read the local daily and who went to school at least until up through high school. They believe that just because they do not speak English they should not be considered as yokels. English is taught as a foreign language in school; in the 1950s it was the principal language in some of the schools. That has almost disappeared under present law; the only students who are allowed to go to a public school and study in English, are the burghers who are descendants of people who immigrated during the Dutch colonial period or people with mixed ethnic backgrounds -- whose parents came from different communities. There are a number of international schools in Sri Lanka which teach in English; they are, however, not approved by local authorities, although Sri Lankan children certainly attend.

He was a doer; he wanted to make a difference. He was a political "junkie;" he was fascinated by politics. When I presented my credentials in October 1992 -- during the height of the American presidential campaign -- he insisted on talking primarily about two matters: a) his own efforts at decentralization -- Premadasa style. He wasn't that interested in local elections, but he wanted to be able to appoint local village officials who would be answerable and beholden to him. He saw it as a very efficient way to provide service to the people, with him in charge. And b) he wanted to talk about the American political campaign. He was fascinated by the debates; he wanted to know how they were arranged, how they were managed and most particularly how the questions were screened -- to insure that improper questions were not asked. I sent him a tape of the first debate; within hours I got a phone call from his private secretary saying that the President had really enjoyed it and if I had anymore, he would love to see them. I think he was considering using the American debate model in the Sri Lankan campaigns, but he wanted to make sure that he had control over the proceedings. I am sure that he thought he could best any competitor in such debates. What he eventually did was to start a radio call-in show which was a great success.

Premadasa had a dark side. Violence was practiced in his name even if he maintained plausible deniability. He would not give the time of day to any member of the opposition. He was harder on the heretics -- renegade UNP people -- than on the enemies, which is not unusual, I guess. He was a very dominating and autocratic personality. As so often happens, he did both very good things and very bad things. When I first arrived, it was already apparent that Sri Lanka was practicing poison politics. People of different persuasions were really not on speaking terms; there was tremendous animus and bitterness between them.

The principal personalities on the political scene were Premadasa and Mrs. Bandaranaike -- who although getting on in years was still the leader of her party (LSFP). The UNP and the SLFP have taken turns leading Sri Lanka since independence. I should note that Sri Lanka's political history is somewhat unique because for the first thirty years of independence, the party in power always lost the elections -- without fail. After that, the pattern changed. Premadasa's predecessor, J.R. Jayewardene, played around with the Constitution as Mrs. Bandaranaike had done before although not as effectively. Both managed to extend their stay in office -- Mrs. Bandaranaike for seven years and Jayewardene for 17 years.

In the seventh month of my tour, Premadasa was assassinated. The week before that event one of his political opponents was assassinated -- a man who had left the UNP; he was also a leader of considerable talent. He was shot during a political rally. The government blamed the LTTE -- a little too quickly; it claimed -- again a little too quickly -- to have found the alleged perpetrator slumped over dead at the scene of the crime with an ID card on his person and a used cyanide capsule around his neck. Nobody believed the story; everyone thought that Premadasa had somehow engineered this assassination. A week later, Premadasa was blown up by a suicide bomber. Suicide bombing is usually an LTTE signature.

Today, there are a couple of people who challenge the assumption that that assassination was LTTE sponsored, but I think the prevailing view, to which I subscribe, is that the suicide bomber was affiliated with the LTTE. It had many of the LTTE signature marks; the bomber had been a "sleeper" in Premadasa's neighborhood for years; he had approached the President on a bicycle and then triggered the bomb that blew up both of them and some others as well. I don't think that there is anything in the Sri Lankan culture that fosters suicide bombings, although they have had more than their share. Sri Lanka has always had a vigorous and strident activist left movement. This began in the labor circles in the late 1800s and much of the violence has some of the same characteristics that one observes in labor movements in many countries including the U.S. Sri Lanka is one of the last countries that still has a Trotskyite party -- the members are not getting any younger but they still fly their flag. In recent years, there has been an abatement of terrorist violence, although it is not unknown even today. For example, in July of this year, a close friend of mine, a Tamil politician, was assassinated by a suicide bomber, undoubtedly by the LTTE; he was one of the last genuine liberal moderates and one of the architects of the present peace plan.

Premadasa's assassination brought a new President to power, D. B. Wijetunga. He was a man of rather limited abilities and intellectual acumen. He was from the Kandian countryside. I think he was a deeply divisive figure, even though he had a grandfatherly, folksy manner. He was not intelligent enough to know what a devastating effect his words were having on the country. This forced succession really shook up UNP politics because Premadasa had been such a predominant

figure. Wijetunga didn't even try to grasp hold of the UNP; in fact, he consciously tried to move away from the Napoleonic style of government used by his predecessor.

Wijetunga completed the unexpired part of Premadasa's term -- about a year and a half. The Parliament's term also came to an end around this time, although the President and the Parliament are elected at different times. Wijetunga, in what he considered a very clever move, suddenly decided in the late Spring of 1994, to call for a Parliamentary election in August of that year. He did this at a time when Mrs. Bandaranaike, still the leader of the opposition, was away in Singapore for medical reasons. She was not in good health; she had suffered a couple of strokes; she had very severe arthritis which limited her mobility. The assumption nevertheless was she would still be the standard bearer of her party, despite her health which would obviously have limited her campaign effectiveness.

At about the same time, the president's party lost a provincial election despite an intense campaign. Every politician in the country had been in the Southern Province handing out goodies and making speeches for his or her party and running the loudspeakers at every hour of day and night. The results were of earthquake proportions in political terms. The President's move to call for early Parliamentary elections looked to be have been too clever.

With the Parliamentary elections coming close, the SLFP decided that it would nominate Mrs. Bandaranaike's daughter, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga as its standard bearer. I understood that the challenge of convincing the mother to let her daughter take on the leadership position fell to a professor who had been the vice-chancellor of Colombo University; he also had been a brilliant lawyer -- one of Sri Lanka's two Rhodes scholars. He had resigned from the University and his position on the law faculty in order to join the SLFP because he felt the country was in desperate need for a change. He was the soul of sweet reason, a judicious and smooth personality; he became the obvious candidate to break the news to Mrs. Bandaranaike. She did resign and her daughter ran an absolutely brilliant campaign, based on a peace platform which all the conventional political wisdom deemed to be suicidal. But she had such passion and charisma that she was able to carry the day. She was helped tremendously by a nation-wide appetite for change.

Kumaratunga promised that, if elected, she would initiate real peace negotiations with the Tamils. She intended to approach the LTTE and bring about fundamental changes in the country. The election returns came in under intense scrutiny from both by the population and teams of international observers. When the ballots were counted, the People's Alliance -- an amalgam principally of the SLFP along with some leftist parties -- won a majority in Parliament by one vote. That immediately caused what could have been a constitutional crisis because the President was still of the UNP. The story in Colombo was that the President approached the Chief of Staff of the Army and asked whether, in light of such a close vote, if he called upon UNP to form a government would the Army be able to keep order. The Chief replied in the negative. The President really didn't want to ask the SLFP to form a government.

At that point, the prime minister, Ranil Wickremasinghe, who later became leader of the opposition, had what I consider to be his finest hour. He called a press conference at his official residence, and when the press arrived, informed the attendees that he wanted to thank them for

their good relations while he had been in office, and to let them know that he was leaving the official residence because there would be a change in government. This gesture ended any effort to circumvent the electoral results.

Chandrika Kumaratunga had two big agendas in taking over as prime minister. She wanted to sweep every possible vestige of the UNP out of the corridors of power after their 17-year stint in power; and she wanted to start peace talks.

The first task was complicated by the fact that for her first three months in office, she served under a UNP president, and the constitution gave substantial power to the president. Wijetunga, however, basically withdrew from running the government, and what might have been a constitutional crisis became simply a somewhat awkward phase of government.

Three months after her party won the parliamentary election, Chandrika Kumaratunga ran as her party's candidate for president. The election was punctuated by a disaster: a LTTE suicide bomber attacked the election rally of her opponent, Gamini Dissanayake, killing him and some 25 others. Despite the shock, the election took place on schedule, and Kumaratunga won by an unprecedented margin.

Her other big agenda item was of great interest to me, and to the United States: starting peace negotiations with the LTTE. This was Kumaratunga's signature issue, and she started up quickly, designating a team of four close associates to be her representatives to the negotiations. I can't improve on what I have written about the negotiations themselves ("Peacemaking in Sri Lanka: The Kumaratunga Initiative," in Rotberg, ed., Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation).

Obviously, I wanted to support the peace negotiations, but it was clear that Kumaratunga saw no role for the United States in this process. She and the LTTE had decided on a purely bilateral approach. So I defined a more modest role for myself and for the U.S. government. I decided to try to give the Sri Lankans as much exposure as I could to the U.S. experience with other peace negotiations, in the hopes that techniques and approaches we had found useful would help them craft a productive approach. With the help of the Public Affairs Officer, I put together a small package of reading materials, and funneled them to the people who were most active in Kumaratunga's negotiating "brain trust". I brought Hal Saunders out to Sri Lanka, and he was able to speak privately with them about his experience in the Middle East and, more recently, in Tajikistan. I tried to bring Hank Cohen out to talk about his work on South Africa, but the best I could manage was a video-conference between him and a couple of people who were working on Sri Lanka's peace process.

In the end, neither their efforts nor ours were sufficient. The negotiations grew testy, and the LTTE resumed the war in April 1995. The Sri Lankan government tried for nearly four years to make some headway with the constitutional proposals it had put forward, first informally and then formally, starting in early 1995, but once the negotiating process had ended, the many skeptics in the Sri Lankan Political mainstream lost confidence in the government's proposals. What followed was the bloodiest period in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

We had one more dramatic development before I left Sri Lanka, the visit of Hillary and Chelsea Clinton in April 1995. As so often happens with high level visits, preparing for it was an exasperating process, full of missed communications and non-communications between Washington and the field. When they finally arrived, however, the Clintons were marvelous guests. Mrs. Clinton spent time both with the country's political leadership and with prominent women from various fields. She put on an impressive and gracious performance, and I think she too was impressed with the variety of female talent she saw -- lawyers, doctors, university vice chancellors, bankers, from all Sri Lanka's ethnic groups. Chelsea, then 15 years old, had been traveling for 10 days without seeing anyone her own age, and handled that difficult situation with great poise.

The security presence that came with the Clintons was another story. Even in those pre-9/11 days, there were something like 80 security officers on the ground during their actual visit. And the traveling party's preoccupation with discount shopping at Colombo's outlet stores was a challenge.

I left Colombo in August 1995. It was by far the most fun job I had had in the Foreign Service. Being the leader of our small community was something I enjoyed far more than I had expected to, and something I knew I would not have another chance to do.

E. ASHLEY WILLS
Ambassador
Sri Lanka (2000-2003)

Ambassador Wills was born in Tennessee and raised in Tennessee and Georgia. He was educated at the University of Virginia and John Hopkins University. Entering the Foreign Service (USIA) in 1972, Ambassador Wills served abroad in the field of public affairs in Romania, South Africa, Barbados, Yugoslavia and Belgium and in India as Deputy Chief of Mission. He also served in Washington as Deputy Director for Southern Africa Affairs for USIA and as Political Advisor to the US Military Commander in the invasion of Grenada. From 2000 to 2003 he was US Ambassador to Sri Lanka. His final posting was as Assistant US Trade Representative. Ambassador Wills was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2008.

Q: Okay, today is the 18th of December 2008 with Ashley Wills. Ashley, we are talking about your going to is it Sri Lanka?

WILLS: Right, I ended my tour in India in 2000 and came back for actually several months as it turned out although my confirmation hearing went fine there was a problem with senior officers in the State Department accumulating security clearance problems or security violations and there for about two months everybody's nomination was held up. I had only three violations in my career so I was okay but some others in my group of ambassadors to be had more and they were harassed. They all ended up going to post as planned but it took several of them quite a

while to get cleared by the relevant committees of Congress. Although we left India in late June, I think it was, we didn't actually go to post until October of 2000.

Q: You were there until 2003?

WILLS: Yes, I was there three years as are most ambassadorial assignments.

Q: Had you been to Sri Lanka before?

WILLS: No, I'd never been there. Becoming an ambassador is such a matter of luck and I was very lucky. Originally I was asked whether I would like to be one and what post would I be interested in from a list that was sent out. I had originally...this was a year and a half or so before I ended my tour in India and I chose Romania, which had been my first post. My wife was actually excited about going back to Romania but the guy whom Clinton had appointed and who was coming up on the end of his tour petitioned President Clinton to stay a fourth year, he was a Democrat from the state of Maryland, so it remained political and he stayed a fourth year.

Of the other posts that were available I selected Sri Lanka. I hadn't been there but having lived in India for five years I certainly knew about it and it didn't disappoint me, it was a fabulously beautiful country. But when I got there it looked like Havana, although I've never been to Havana, it looked like what I imagine Havana to look like in that there were security check points every couple of hundred yards on every major road; this was because of the civil conflict going on between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which had used as a tactic, in fact it developed the tactic, of suicide bombing with a vest that people would wear under their loose-fitting South Asian clothing. They would walk up to the target and blow themselves up so the government of Sri Lanka at the time, there had been quite a rash of bombings just before I got to post. So it really looked grim despite being a tropical paradise. People would walk around with their shoulders sloped down and their heads down almost as if they were expecting a sudden blow; it was really depressing.

Before I went out there I'd talked to the then assistant secretary and every other person concerned with Sri Lanka in the government. I didn't really get any guidance about what to do as ambassador, what the goals of U.S. diplomacy ought to be. Everybody was focused on India and Pakistan and the Sri Lankan civil war seemed peripheral so people said go out there and do the best you can and keep us posted; that was the extent of my diplomatic guidance. When I got out there I decided this place is golden, it's a beautiful place, these people were delightful and I'd had a lot of experience in my career with people who could be perfectly sane and world class on any subject but politics when they would become unenlightened and bigoted even, South Africa, Yugoslavia, two cases in point. India and Pakistan both could be that way about each other so I decided right away that I knew that we would never send U.S. troops to Sri Lanka but they didn't know that. So I decided that we would be somewhat more aggressive than ever before in promoting a peaceful end of the conflict. While we would continue to condemn the LTTE which had been put on our terrorism list just a couple of years earlier we would show a lot of sympathy for the Tamil people who were suffering and who had been discriminated against for decades but also show support for the government to the extent it was trying to do the right thing. I was helped by a couple of things.

One was the arrival at about the same time of an Indian high commissioner to Sri Lanka, the Indian ambassador to Sri Lanka who was an old friend of mine from Delhi days. His name was Gopal Gandhi, he was the grandson of the Mahatma Gandhi and he had been chief of staff for the president of India when I was in India; I saw him all the time and we became friends there and here we were assigned to Sri Lanka at the same time. That was pivotal because the Indians had never wanted any outside power to have a role in bringing about peace in any South Asian country; this was their area, they had their own sort of Monroe Doctrine where South Asia was concerned. But I knew that if I worked with Gopal Gandhi I could perhaps venture a little farther out than had been possible in the past.

Q: Ashley, while you were in India had you picked up from the Indians you know they had put their troops in and they tried to do something say don't touch that place, sort of a...

WILLS: I became very aware; yes I talked to several people who had been instrumental in the decision to send Indian troops into Sri Lanka in the '80s. I had talked with the head of the India security agency at the time of that decision, by Rajiv Gandhi, who was then prime minister of India back in what '87, '88, and with the other major figures in the foreign ministry and in the military. I quickly learned that the Sri Lankan situation was a very sore subject for the Indians and a divisive topic but that many Indian officials were not sympathetic with the Tigers even leading figures in Tamil Nadu in the south. Tamils, for the most part were not sympathetic with the LTTE but they were sympathetic with the people of Sri Lanka who had been discriminated against, Tamil people; but they didn't want to have anything to do with it any more because of that incursion in the 80's had been so unsuccessful and led to the deaths of, I think about, 1,500 Indian troops. So I knew that the Indians wouldn't be making major commitments but they could screw up any efforts that we wanted to make. So I wanted to keep them well briefed so they would let us have some leeway.

The other key development was that the Norwegians had an excellent ambassador; he's now the Norwegian ambassador to India, as a matter of fact. He and I hit it off really well and reached an agreement informally that I would take a more outspoken public position on the war and he would offer Norway's good offices to bring about a ceasefire with the understanding that we were backing him up silently; that's exactly what happened. We spent about a year, I made lots of speeches. I mean an American ambassador in a country like that can make himself into a rock star pretty quickly.

Q: Why?

WILLS: Because everybody knows that we are the alpha male, we are the silverback gorilla internationally; so they want to know what we think. One has to be careful, obviously we are diplomats, we can't be agitators but one can use speeches, one can get the media involved and know that a major speech is coming or that a press interview is possible and make points that get attention. I was able to do that and John was able to move diplomatically between the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka; we, of course, could not have any contact with the LTTE. But I communicated with them publicly through speeches and press interviews. Anyway through a variety of interventions and there were dozens of developments in this period that I could tell you

about but won't. Eventually the forces lined up right. There are a couple of things that I should mention.

Sri Lanka has a very unusual political set up. It is very much like the French one in that there is a prime minister and a president and they are not necessarily from the same party. When I got there they were. The president was a woman named Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga; she was herself the daughter of two former prime ministers of Sri Lanka. She had almost been killed by one of these suicide bombers just a few months before I got there and lost an eye, in fact. She was the heir to a distinguished dynastic political family.

Her adversary, the leader of the opposition, was a guy by the name of Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was also the heir of another dynastic political family. They had been rivals for decades. He was in many ways a very unusual politician, he's very effete and almost feminine and yet deep down inside he's a pretty courageous guy. He was willing to say things that lined up pretty much with what the Norwegians and we and others who cared about Sri Lanka from outside wanted to be said. He said he was for negotiations not a war, he wanted to emphasize the private sector in Sri Lanka's economic growth like a lot of South Asian countries, although it had always had a private sector, it had been mainly socialist. He wanted to open it up to free market ideas. So we were drawn to him and he to us and lo and behold he moved a vote of no confidence in parliament against the prime minister who was from President Kumaratunga's party. There was an election and he won, this was about eight months after I had got there or not even, a few months after I got there, five months. So he became prime minister, formed a government and he and the president were at odds from the start. But he persevered and used the Norwegians and the Indians and us to communicate his intentions to the LTTE and through a long series of negotiations, very quiet negotiations a cease-fire was arranged, the first ever in this civil war. Simultaneously he was moving to privatize a lot of government services and open up the economy. There was a transformation in Sri Lanka. What I had found when I got there was an armed encampment and one saw literally and figuratively, as well, the lifting of all these security barriers, they were moved away and the city opened up. Commerce began to thrive again and there was a lot of construction, touristic infrastructure was being built, the country's exports were booming; things just began to look much better for Sri Lanka. The LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka under Ranil, brokered by the Norwegians out front and us behind the scenes, began to negotiate some sort of outcome to the civil war. Meanwhile, President Kumaratunga, a very virtuous person in many ways, I liked her very much, but she was jealous that he was getting all this credit internationally.

Another development that I should mention here is we had an election in this country and Colin Powell and Rich Armitage took over the State Department and whereas before as I mentioned the previous administration focused on India and to a lesser extent Pakistan. These two gentlemen kept a great deal of focus on those two countries but they were drawn to the situation in Sri Lanka. They admired what the government was trying to do; they liked our reporting. I had an excellent staff of people who were deeply involved in this effort. We tried very hard to engage everybody in the embassy and give them something to do that would serve this larger purpose that we'd set for ourselves. In fact, within a week of my arriving at post I called everybody together in the embassy for an off-site at my residence and we talked through what is it we were going to try and do here in this country. How are we going to make American diplomacy

relevant here? Washington is giving us leeway for whatever reason and so let's use it to be imaginative. We set some of these goals mainly dealing with helping bring about a cease-fire and the end of the war but also we had a lot of economic goals and public affairs goals. We had a small USAID mission; I was told when I was getting ready to come to Sri Lanka that it was going to close down, the small mission there, and I said, "That's not going to happen, we are going to expand our aid there." And indeed we did. AID was impressed with what we were trying to do so they sent in a very dynamic woman to be the AID director and gave her three or four times the budget that the previous AID director had had.

So it was a time of a growing mission, a very happy mission I believe and a very productive one, but there were things that got in our way. The rivalry between the president and the prime minister was the major obstacle. He couldn't stand briefing her on what he was doing with the LTTE through the Norwegians. He couldn't bring himself to brief her; she couldn't bring herself to let it happen even though she herself supported what he was doing or believed in the same goals that he did. That he, this rival, was pulling this off after she had failed to do it made her really upset. She was working to undermine him and in the end shortly after I left in 2003 she did a deal with the devil. Without going into a lot of detail about Sri Lankan politics there was a party called the JVP that was made up of Sinhalese nationalists. Only in South Asia have I found anywhere in the world left wing nationalist parties and these guys were Maoists more or less but tremendously nationalistic, tremendously hostile to the Tamils and trouble makers and not people of vision. I remember once that I was on a TV program, a debate with one of the leaders of this party and he spent the whole hour of the show attacking me and the United States for our various sins internationally. I was my diplomatic self and responded as calmly as I could to his outrageous charges. I got a little more forceful as the charges got more outrageous and finally near the end of the debate I turned to him and said, "Now you've been so quick to criticize capitalism and what the role of the United States has been internationally, exactly what would your model of economic development be? Which countries around the world do you admire? Which countries have made a success of it in your view?" He stuck his nose in the air and very proudly said, "Cuba." I broke out laughing on Sri Lankan national television and basically said to the guy, "You're a comedian if you think that's a success story, that's the last thing that I would call it." Well Kumaratunga who was by nature a tolerant, completely unbigoted person was so jealous of the prime minister that a few months after I left she went into an alliance with this racist party, left wing racist party, and moved a vote of no confidence in Parliament and by the way this happened while Ranil was in the United States meeting with President Bush for the second time. I'd arranged the first meeting while I was ambassador, my successor arranged the second meeting. I was at this point already at USTR and we were beginning to think about doing a Free Trade Agreement, the first one with any South Asian nation, with Sri Lanka which was reforming in all these important ways politically and economically. So he was getting all this international press. While he was in the White House not quite literally I think he was at his hotel here in Washington, she moved a no confidence vote and there was an election and because of this alliance she had she and this JVP party won and the peace effort, such as it was, it had already started to falter a bit for other reasons, was dead. What has happened since then, that was in 2004 I guess, the whole country has returned to war and fighting and it's a very unhappy situation. But there for a while from 2001 until late 2003 things began to look up in Sri Lanka.

Armitage especially paid careful attention. He came out to visit at least once, I think, maybe twice. I took him up to Jaffna, which is the cultural home of the Tamil's and where a lot of the fighting has occurred. As an ex-military officer himself he understood the dynamics of the campaign militarily and the cease-fire that was then pending and later it happened. So we had a high level audience in Washington, things went really well and I felt good about what we had done when I left in 2003. Through this unfortunate series of developments it's all been reversed and I'm left to wonder whether what I really did mattered.

Q: Well, you made the effort but in the first place what were the Tamil Tigers and this Tamil movement, what were they after?

WILLS: They wanted a separate state carved out of...well some of them wanted to go even beyond Sri Lanka; they wanted to incorporate the north and the east of Sri Lanka and Tamil speaking areas of India, which would be highly unpopular.

Q: The Tamil's speaking in the first place did they have much support in India in the Tamil speaking?

WILLS: They have some but not a lot. I mean their approximate goal, the one they maintained for years, is they wanted to create a Tamil Eelam, a Tamil homeland, an independent state out of Sri Lanka's north and east. The more radical Tamil thinkers in the LTTE and in the Tamil Diaspora internationally wanted to unite all Tamil speakers; there are Tamil speaking communities in Malaysia and Singapore, but that's all dreamy stuff. The real goal is to take Sri Lanka, about a third of it, and make it into an independent state. Nobody internationally, least of all India and the United States, supports this idea, it's preposterous. It's a small country to begin with, about the size of the state of Maryland, and to take a third of it and give it to an ethnic group first of all, I mean there are all kinds of reasons why it's a bad idea but no one has taken it seriously. The tactics used by the Tigers, as I mentioned earlier, have been deemed to be terroristic and so the group...it's never really attacked American interests but it was a Tiger suicide bomber who blew up Rajiv Gandhi because of that Indian intervention in the '80s and the desire to get revenge against this man. So they have attacked international figures but they've never really attacked the United States; I mean there have been American's wounded in bombings that were aimed at other targets. The day after I arrived in Sri Lanka there was a suicide bomber detected while he was making his way to some target but no one ever knew what that was and the police started chasing him. He ran out into the middle of an intersection in a commercial area of Colombo and detonated himself. It so happened that there was a brand new Toyota Land Cruiser sitting at a traffic signal waiting for the green light in that very intersection and in it were three wives of American AID contractors. They were hurt, one of them pretty seriously although she recovered eventually. When I heard about that, of course, I went to the hospital where they all three were. As I went into the hospital, the cops showed me the vehicle that they had been in which had been carried to the hospital on a flatbed truck. There must have been 200 holes that size where the ball bearings that this bomber had packed into his vest, had gone through the sheet metal of the vehicle and it was a miracle to me that the three of them and their driver hadn't been killed. The three of them, as I say, were injured and so was the driver but he wasn't, surprisingly, all that hurt. So there have been Americans injured but no targeting of American interests or of any other foreign interest other than this attack on Rajiv Gandhi, but

still it's a terrorist group and we've deplored their tactics while, as I said, having sympathy for their situation, for the Tamil people's situation.

There is no question that since just a few years after Sri Lanka independence, since the early '50s say, successive governments of Sri Lanka from then until the '80s enacted laws that discriminated against Tamils. The Sinhala people who form the majority of the country and whose interest were favored by these discriminatory laws would be quick to tell you that the reason for this is because in the days of British colonialism, this is so true of the British around the world, they would come in and pick out a favored minority to help them administer a colony. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Tamils were the minority that the British chose. So Tamils were way over represented in the colonial period in the professions, in the civil service and business. And the Sinhala who were the majority in the country found their language repressed and their culture; so all of these laws since independence, they would say, were putting things right after so many years of their facing discrimination. Of course, our view of that was you don't make it right by passing mean spirited laws; you are in this island together. This is the point I've tried to make to the Tamils when I would try to speak privately or in public. Not only is there no Tamil Eelam in this country there is no part of this country that should be reserved for any particular ethnic group; the whole island is a mix. There are more ethnic groups and not just those two groups. There is a big Muslim population for example, and smaller populations of other ethnic groups. So to divide up a country ethnically is as mistaken as dividing it along other grounds.

Q: Well here you are the American ambassador meddling in Sri Lankan affairs.

WILLS: Yeah.

Q: How did you get away with it?

WILLS: Because of our stature internationally, both sides wanted our approval, both sides wanted the conflict in a way to be internationalized not in a military sense but in a moral sense and a political sense. They wanted the international community's approval for their views. An American ambassador, as I said, I mean saying that I was a rock star trivializes it. It was that of all the ambassadors in Sri Lanka there were only two who were seen to be pivotal figures in the country's public discourse, the Indian High Commissioner and the American ambassador. Even the British High Commissioner didn't have anything close to that status. So because of our record on human rights, because of our support for human rights, because we had tried to mediate on so many other disputes around the world they gave us a hearing that they wouldn't give a lot of people. Now mind you Sri Lanka was a free society, they had free press and there were many Sri Lankan commentators who didn't like what I was doing and said so. But for the most part we were given a lot of leeway.

Q: Well in a case like this I mean I realize you are under constraints of talking to the Tamil Tigers I mean...

WILLS: Couldn't do it.

Q: ...you couldn't do it. You had to be able to I mean I don't want to...

WILLS: That's why I was using John as the Norwegian ambassador to communicate; I never sent a message directly to the Tigers. They sent a few to me through interlocutors but I was able to get my message such as it was to them through public means. I went up one time and gave a major speech in Jaffna, right in the middle of their territory, and the whole speech was aimed at the LTTE but it was a speech, not a diplomatic message.

Q: Was anybody telling you from Washington to cool it?

WILLS: No, Armitage became the Sri Lankan desk officer in effect back in Washington and he, as I say, admired what we were trying to do because it was in line with what he and Secretary Powell were trying to do elsewhere in South Asia, where there were many ethnic conflicts and in other parts of the world. They were looking for a success story where they could show the world that it is possible to reach an accommodation without military conflict. I think they were hoping that Sri Lanka could be an example for India and Pakistan for example, or for Nepal, which had its own civil conflict at the time to say nothing of other countries around the world. So that I think was the reason for their interest in this little place that most secretaries of State and deputy secretaries of State wouldn't pay very much attention to. They had an investment in it for that reason I think. Our national interests in Sri Lanka are minimal, we have no commercial interests really. I mean we have some interest and I'm happy to say we increased our exports quite a lot; we devoted quite a lot of attention to that. We have a humanitarian interest in seeing the end of the conflict. We have a political interest in seeing a democracy strengthen, solidify, made broader but nothing really I mean no vital U.S. interest. So why pay attention to Sri Lanka? Because of what it might symbolize for a world filled with ethnic conflict and there for a while we had hopes running high. Deputy Secretary Armitage took part in a multilateral donors group that we created to transfer tremendous amounts of aid to Sri Lanka if the peace could be sustained, if this ceasefire could be sustained. I mean he devoted, bless his heart, and he and I didn't necessarily get along all that well but he saluted what we were trying to do and I, of course, saluted him for taking an interest and he really did. He must have devoted more time and attention to Sri Lanka per capita, than any other issue he was dealing with in the State Department; it was amazing. Then it all came unstuck, as I say, in early 2004 he was dispirited as were the rest of us. I feel a deep sense of disappointment about what happened.

But let me make one other observation here. I mentioned earlier that President Kumaratunga aligned herself with these left wing racists for political gain and to insure Ranil Wickremesinghe's political loss. But there were other things that were working against him and the ceasefire. The LTTE in these talks proved to be obstinate and really not negotiable. The leader, a guy named Prabhakaran, gave the impression that he would forsake the idea of an independent Tamil Eelam if he got very substantial autonomy over the region that he wanted to control. Well that would have been a delicate negotiation in the best of circumstances. In these circumstances Wickremesinghe who was facing all this chatter from his opposition down south really couldn't cede to Prabhakaran so much autonomy. He wanted to be clear that this region was still part of Sri Lanka and that it wouldn't have its own military and it wouldn't have its own currency. It could have its own courts and many other instruments of power. There was no question that Wickremesinghe was prepared to give the Tamil's a great deal of autonomy but Prabhakaran wanted more. So the talks were really faltering by the time that I left. It was, I think,

mainly a reflection of the political instability in the south between these rival groups and Prabhakaran's intransigence. So there were other reasons why things fell apart than just the jealousy that President Kumaratunga felt.

Q: How did you find your embassy work as a team?

WILLS: I think pretty well. We had a very bright and talented DCM, a guy I had never met before. I selected him after talking to several people who had worked for him. I wanted a DCM who could inspire the confidence of his subordinates, having just been a DCM myself. I talked to several of them and they all admired this guy, his name is Lewis Amselem. He'd spent almost all his career in South America, although maybe he had one tour in Pakistan early in his career so he had some South Asian experience. He was a very good DCM, an excellent reporting officer, good writer, good listener and we made special efforts to motivate every section in the embassy; we tried to make it plain that everybody had a central role. It wasn't a big embassy we only had about forty some Americans or something like that and maybe 300 Sri Lankans. But we had success in getting people to think about this as a group, as a team enterprise. I also emphasized that I wanted everybody out and about traveling. Sri Lanka is, have you been there? It is a gorgeous country. There is a place in Sri Lanka if I had to pick one place on earth that I've seen that could have been Eden there is this one part of Sri Lanka that would have qualified. It's very rich history, unbelievable archeological relics, abandoned cities in the jungle, great wildlife, surprisingly high mountains although it's tropical around Colombo and almost all of the country. There is a part of the island that has got very high mountains and a quite cool climate. It would be a fabulous touristic destination if it had peace everywhere; even without peace there are a lot of people who go there. Most of the country is safe for tourism even now but in the meantime, it got whacked by the tsunami and the place is just suffering inordinately. It's got many more than it's fair share of problems. But anyway my wife made it plain there was some talk about my going somewhere else from Sri Lanka but by that point we had been overseas for 15 straight years.

Q: Yeah.

WILLS: And our kids, our older child had just graduated from college and our younger one was in college and here we were at the ends of the earth. So I talked it over with my wife and decided we needed to come home and being an ambassador once was a great honor and I didn't want to be one again. So I came back here and I began to think about what I wanted to do back here that I would try to find something that would make it easier for me to jump to the private sector. I didn't want to retire utterly; I wanted to do something for a few years in the private world. I heard that the USTR at the time, Bob Zoellick, was looking to establish an assistant USTR office dealing with South Asia; there had never been one before. So he and I got in touch with one another and he ended up hiring me to do that job. That was how I ended my career.

I came back and joined Zoellick's staff at USTR as an Assistant Trade Representative and I dealt with trade issues dealing in Southwest Asia as well. He gave me Afghanistan and Iraq to deal with as well so I traveled to both those countries just after the war. We were trying to help those two countries set up trade regime laws that would permit further trade than they've had in the case of Iraq under Saddam and in the case of Afghanistan under the Taliban. So we were helping

them write trade laws. There were huge number of trade disputes with India so for those two and a half years that I was there I learned a lot and got to do more negotiating than I'd ever done in my career really.

Meanwhile I began to look around for something to do outside of the Foreign Service and that's how I ended up being offered a job with this law firm where I am now.

End of reader