Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series

WILLIAM JEFFRAS DIETERICH

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Q: When and where were you born, and tell me something about your family.

DIETERICH: I was born on December 11, 1936 in Boston, Massachusetts, where my father was a student of theology at Boston University.

Q: How many people in your family?

DIETERICH: I was the first born, and I have twin brothers who were born about five years later. When I was less than a year old, my father finished his studies and was assigned to a Methodist Church in Brecksville, Ohio. We all moved West.

Q: It would not be the easiest of times in the middle of the depression. Where did you grow up?

DIETERICH: My first memories are in the little town of Millersberg, Ohio. The Pennsylvania Dutch country of Ohio, during the Second World War. I think I can remember Pearl Harbor.

Q: What was your father's background?

DIETERICH: My father was the son of a Methodist preacher in Ohio, various places in Ohio. My mother was the daughter of a Methodist preacher in Massachusetts. They met as students at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Q: What was life like in Millersberg?

DIETERICH: Gosh, that is hard. I don't remember much and moved not too long after that. I remember living in a big house across the street from the church. I remember some of the thoughts of the war, and I do have memories of or at least heard stories of, the fact that it was an Amish area and there were troubles in the town because Amish people spoke German, and didn't serve in the war. I can remember some tales of discomfort and worry about that. I also remember a very funny incident: when somebody got it into their head that somebody had poisoned the water tower and that it had probably been a German agent of some sort. The police went around town knocking on doors in the middle of the night and telling everyone to boil all their water. It turned out there were kids up there trying to paint "Class of 1943"or whatever it waon the water tower.

Q: Then where did you move?

DIETERICH: We moved to Wadsworth, Ohio. I remember the Normandy invasion very clearly, and that it happened while we were still living in Millersberg. I remember the death of FDR in terms of Wadsworth. So we must have moved in the summer of 1944. We stayed there until junior high school when we moved to Norwalk, Ohio.

Q: Talk about Wadsworth, where you went to school. What was school like?

DIETERICH: You know, I don't have very strong memories of school days. Except that I remember I didn't do well in the third grade. That may still have been in Millersberg. I remember I didn't do well, and I also remember not doing well in the first grade and having some problems with reading, so my grandmother came (who was an old time school teacher), and taught me by very traditional methods. My father claims she used a McGuffy reader. Somehow she made me break through on reading. I do have this memory of standing up in front of the class and being able to read for the first time. I had not been able to do it before. Wadsworth - it's hard to dredge up memories. I remember being in the safety patrol, and having the flag that you held down, and keeping kids from crossing the street. That's probably a key to my character. As I said, I remember the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I can remember that I was in the backyard of the house throwing a ball up on the roof of the garage and when it would roll back down the roof I would catch it in my baseball glove. That doesn't mean I ever became a good baseball player.

Q: Were you a sore example of a preacher's kid, or did you stay out of trouble?

DIETERICH: Oh, no, I can remember getting in trouble every now and then, but I didn't get into serious trouble. I've known a lot of preacher's kids in my life, and some of them were absolutely terrible and others became preachers. I was sort of in the middle.

Q: How about at home? Was religion a big thing as far as you were concerned? What did you talk about at the dinner table?

DIETERICH: Church was a big thing in the sense it was the center of my father's life and we were expected to go to church. So I spent a lot of time in church, and in church youth groups. Fortunately I learned early on that I liked to sing in the choir, which gave me a church activity that I liked doing. Otherwise it would have been more difficult. I can remember being proud of my father's position and liking part of it. Preacher's kids grow up in a funny way. You don't have a lot of money. On the other hand, you are very much a part of the upper class of the town. There are economic tensions in families, often, because you have to maintain a respectable middle class lifestyle without necessarily having the money to do it. In my father's case, he was usually furnished with pretty nice houses in pretty nice parts of town. Preaching may have been a better deal back then than now.

Q: What about when you were getting up to junior high? Your grandmother got you to read. Did you read much?

DIETERICH: Yes, reading was important. I can't remember in Wadsworth, but when I entered seventh grade we moved to the town of Norwalk, Ohio, which is really the place I consider my home town.

Q: Where is Norwalk located?

DIETERICH: Norwalk is just south of Sandusky; it is to the west of Cleveland on old route 20. It is a very old town, part of what is known as the Western Reserve of Ohio, which was

Q: Many people came from Connecticut.

DIETERICH: Connecticut and Massachusetts, mainly Connecticut, which is why it is named Norwalk. There is a tiny little town named New Haven right nearby. You mentioned reading. I remember the city library was just across a couple of back lots from our house, and I spent a lot of time there. Not only with books, but when LP records first came out, they began to stock LP records in the library and I was able to borrow them.

Q: What were your interests by the time you were in junior high and high school?

DIETERICH: In junior high and high school I was interested in reading. I think I was in Boy Scouts for awhile and liked camping. I was interested in model building, wasn't much good at sports, although I played tennis a lot. Not much into team sports. Kind of interested in the social life of the school.

Q: I found that two of the subjects a good number of officers whom I interviewed majored in, in high school, were girls and sports.

DIETERICH: No, I wasn't into the sports thing. Also at that time, beginning in 1945, I began to spend summer vacations in New Hampshire where my mother's parents had a place. We could take a month off a year and drive to New Hampshire, which was an awful drive in those days. It took two days on old Route 29, mainly a two lane blacktop. My grandfather himself had built a summer cottage right on a pristine lake on the New Hampshire Maine border. Up there we spent a lot of time boating and fishing, especially fishing. Lakes and boats became a big part of my life. I'm still a pretty avid amateur sailor.

I have two strong New Hampshire memories of the end of the Second World War. My grandfather had a cottage. Another older preacher had a cottage just to the left of ours, and an old man who wrote children's books for a living to the right of ours. I remember when the atomic bomb was dropped, my father, grandfather, and the old preacher who lived to the left of us were walking on the beach, and saying in effect, "We aren't any better than the Germans at this point. We aren't any better than the Japanese. We aren't any better than they are. This was a terrible, unnecessary thing. We had this war won anyway."

Q: This was August 1945.

DIETERICH: And I remember the end of the war in that same vacation period. It was funny because communications weren't so good up there. We didn't have electricity yet, so the only way to get any news was to go out at noon and start the car and sit in it. I remember sitting there with my father and grandfatheit was hoso we could listen to the car radio and get the news from WBZ in Boston. We knew the end was coming. In the evenings as usual, we went out fishing. Fishing was food during those vacations. Grocery stores were far away and I suppose it saved ration stamps. While we were fishing up a river that emptied into the lake, we heard church bells start to ring from two or three little towns and realized that must have meant the end of the war.

At the same time, when we were spending a month in New Hampshire, we would spend about a week at a place called Lakeside in Ohio, which is on Lake Erie, which is on old Chautauqua style resort that had its origins in Methodist camp meetingMy father's job would require at least a week a year there, and my other grandparents had a cottage there. That place was also kind of important to me.

Q: You might explain for the listener what the Chautauqua system was.

DIETERICH: Lakeside started as a camp meeting place, and that is the old Methodist tradition that goes back to the Ohio frontier. It fairly quickly allied itself with the Chautauqua movement, which started in Chautauqua, New York at the Chautauqua Institution. The idea was to bring culture and education to the countryside, to the small towns in the United States. People would go to a resort in the summer and sign on for a week or a month, and they were guaranteed there would be an uplifting, or educational, or entertaining program every night at some kind of an auditorium. And there would be other facilities. This one at Lakeside, where I now own a cottage and spend three months every summer on Lake Erie, still operates as a full blown Chautauqua. You pay an admission fee to live there and either rent or own your cottage and in return for that you get to go to the auditorium every night if you want to. It has a pretty good residential symphony orchestra and some other things going for it.

Q: One of our colleagues here goes to Chautauqua, New York every year.

DIETERICH: Well, Lakeside is sort of a cut rate Chautauqua. It's a lot cheaper than the one in New York, and its entertainment tends to be sort of off the "Prairie Home Companion" circuit rather than New York concert halls. On the other hand, the boating on Lake Erie is infinitely superior to anything you can do on Lake Chautauqua.

Q: You went to high school in Norwalk?

DIETERICH: Yes, I did.

Q: Did the outside world intrude at all?

DIETERICH: Norwalk was a pretty classical, pleasant, small town, perhaps a bit on the prosperous side. County seat, insular, smug, but with decent standards. The high school was okay. The library was pretty good. Norwalk thought of itself as a Western Reservkind of cut above some of the other towns in the area. Those were times when indeed the world intruded. It was the period of the Korean War. The world wouldn't leave people alone in towns like that. It was the post Edward R. Murrow erwhen the radio was insistently knocking at your door and bringing the world in. I can think of times when the world intruded in the sense of beginning to stimulate my interest. Maybe this is a good thing to talk about. I remembegoing back to Wadsworthaving a Jewish kid as a frienand remembering the foundation of the State of Israel. That was around '48. This kid told me about how he wanted to go fight for the State of Israel. I remember thinking, "What kind of a business is this? This is really weird, sitting here in Ohio, and Arnie says he wants to go fight for Israel." I also remember being at his house at the founding of the United Nations and his folks having it on the radio. We were pursuing a hobby we had together, which was electric trains. I remember we were down in the basement fiddling with a train layout and on the radio was the foundation of the United Nations. Right after the war, too, I remember havinno, not right afteprobably around '48, maybe '49, a kid came from Germana girto visit our school and the church. I spent a lot of time talking to her and getting kind of interested.

Then there was the church and missionaries. When I was very young an old Bishop of the Methodist Church named Smith who had been a missionary in India. He must have been an old style missionary because he used to tell me tales about hunting tigers. I don't think there are many missionaries left in the world who hunt tigers. Maybe the world is poorer for that. But he hunted tigers, and I remember he had a missing finger. I always thought probably a tiger got it. Maybe that stimulated an interest in me for overseas adventure.

Q: What about in high school? Do you recall any of the books that were influential in your life?

DIETERICH: No, I don't think I was reading books on foreign affairs at that time. If books were influential, it would have been more novels. I can remember an attraction for novels that were set in other places.

Q: Can you think of any novelthrough Nordhoff and Hall or Kenneth Roberts?

DIETERICH: Oh, sure, absolutely. Kenneth Roberts and The Bounty Trilogy, but that is all sailing stuff.

Q: Swallows of Amansville, did you ever read those?

DIETERICH: No, no. I'm trying to think of books that were interesting politically. Early oGeorge Orwell in high school. In 1984, the Animal Farm, and Koestler's Darkness at Noon. How I got into that I don't remember but I read them in high school. But, I don't remember being influenced towards the foreign service until I got to college.

Q: You probably didn't know what it was. This certainly wasn't something that was high on anybody's agenda.

DIETERICH: I think what does happen, though, for people that grow up in academic and preachers' families is that they are not really motivated toward the world of business. People don't talk about it. When my father would talk about things at home, he would be talking about the church more often than not, the politics and administrative problems of the church, rather than the high issues of theology.

Q: What about missionaries? This is more of an outreach from your background than from a lot of people.

DIETERICH: I think that's true. I remember a family in New Hampshire who were missionaries to China. I think their name was Harley. They had a couple of boys older than me. Good athletes, attractive, fun to be around, and they had all come back from China. I remember admiring them. What I don't remember is them ever telling me anything about China. I can remember the mother saying good bye to these boys. Leaving them at college and she was going back to China. My parents talked about what a hard thing that must be to do. That mother realized she wouldn't see her boys for another four or five years. I can remember other people from China staying at our house overnight. I can remember at church camps, hearing lectures about going to work to help missionaries in Latin America. I remember one particularly absurd happening where one of the lecturers, naive in a way that that you sometimes find among church people, telling the boys, "Now if you go down there you know you have to be very careful with the girls because they have easier standards of sexual behavior." You can imagine all those teen age boys thinking, "Sounds like the place for me."

Q: When you graduated from high school, did you have any idea of what you wanted to do? Baseball player, or president of the United States, or were you just interested in going to the university or college?

DIETERICH: I had been elected to class offices in high school so maybe I had a beginning interest in politics. There were probably the seeds of an interest in government at that point. I certainly knew what I didn't want to do. I didn't want to be a doctor, lawyer, or preacher. I knew I wanted to go to college. I probably knew even then my interests were tending toward the liberal arts.

Q: Where did you go to school?

DIETERICH: I went to Wesleyan - not Ohio Wesleyan - but to the one in Connecticut.

Q: Oh, yes, I went to Williams.

DIETERICH: Did you really? That led to a running family joke for years. Since my parents, and others in the family, went to Ohio Wesleyan, I have always referred to Wesleyan as the "Real Wesleyan." They insist on calling it "Connecticut Wesleyan."

Q: Why Wesleyan?

DIETERICH: I don't know. My parents were interested in it, and I have no idea who first suggested it. Ohio Wesleyan was an obvious application as waDePauw University, where my maternal grandfather had gone. A scholarship was a primary consideration. I had done pretty well in high school. As it turned out, Wesleyan offered a much better scholarship package than either Ohio Wesleyan or DePauw.

Q: Did you also have a feeling that you wanted to get out of the Ohio Valley and see more of the world?

DIETERICH: Yes, that did appeal to me. I had a friend from high school who was a year older than I was who had gone to Trinity. Actually I didn't really live in the Ohio Valley, but in the North, near the shore of Lake Erie.

Q: So you went to Wesleyan from when to when?

DIETERICH: From '54 to '58.

Q: What was Wesleyan like then?

DIETERICH: It was a wonderful place. Unlike some people, I have very positive memories of my undergraduate years. Wesleyan was a great place at that time. It only had 800 students. It was a men's school, with a very strong fraternity system that had been totally integrated into the school. Fraternities were the working housing, feeding and social units of the school and really didn't behave like the fraternities at big time schools at all. I enjoyed the life there; I had great teachers; I eventually ended up doing a tutorial and honors thesis with Carl Schorske. (Carl E. Schorske: Professor Emeritus of History at Princeton. Taught at Wesleyan in the fifties. Author of Pulitzer prize winning Fin de siecle Vienna.)

Q: What was your major?

DIETERICH: History. History with a lot of English Lit. I was a very thorough history major, except that I read a lot of novels and tended to write papers along the line oHow Pride and Prejudice can teach you more about England than reading history, which I still believe.

Q: I did the same using Gilbert and Sullivan. I was a history major too. What fraternity were you in?

DIETERICH: Alpha Delta Phi. It was an interesting place at that time, and there are very few people now who would understand how formative it was. Here were a bunch of students who were given the right to manage their own lives. Cleaning the house, feeding themselves, taking care of it, fundraising from alumni. I think it was good training. Wesleyan's Alpha Delta Phi at that time was in a very interesting stage. When I went in, the house leadership were Korean war veterans. Very hard drinking, very hard studying, harplaying, disillusioned people. They were disillusioned about everything but the academic life, but studying, the life of the mind. They were very interesting persons. The fraternity was interesting in that it was about half Jewish, and that was an issue. It was the kind of place that instead of having a jazz concert on Sunday afternoon, we figured out we could have a string quartet concert and attract as many people or more than you would with a jazz concert. A lot of people were into classical music. My interest in classical music had developed as a kid from my mother and singing in all those choirs, but it really blossomed there because there were a lot of people around me that were into it.

There were of course some silly pseudo Masonic rituals left over from the nineteenth century. They were carried out a basement room that had been gussied up to look like a Magic Flute set. But the ceremonial stuff was rapidly declining mainly because of brothers in the back row who were competing to produce the loudest fart during solemn moments.

Q: In history, what areas were you interested in?

DIETERICH: European history. Basically modern European history.

Q: At this time, the Korean War was just about over but the Cold War was really going strong and we had the Suez crisis, and the Hungarian revolt. Was that something people were keeping an eye on?

DIETERICH: That takes me back to pre college. I do have strong memories of thinking how awful it was that, after the Second World War, Russithis big country that everybody could like, that had been our allsuddenly in '47 and '48 becoming an enemy. How disillusioning this was. What a terrible thing this was. I don't remember the fear of the atomic bomb that everybody says we all felt. I don't remember feeling that, nor engaging in any "duck and cover" drills.

Q: I don't either. I'm eight years older than you are.

DIETERICH: I don't remember jumping under my desk at school. I do remember well the beginning of the Korean War. There was almost a feeling of despair among people we knew. I remember families in my father's church that had sons up around the Chosan Reservoir, when the Chinese intervened in that awful first winter of the war. We had church services that revolved around those events. I guess growing up during the war, and then watching what we thought we had won go bad, did influence me in terms of thinking foreign affairs were important. You couldn't grow up during the period of the Second World War and not think that America's relationship with the rest of the world was important. You had to believe that.

Q: While you were at colleg'54 to '58 periowere you feeling or seeing any reactions to McCarthyism?

DIETERICH: I did not. I remember the McCarthy hearings when I was in high school and my parent's reactions. Very strong anti McCarthy reactions. But I don't remember much going on at Wesleyan. I think McCarthy had basically been broken by then.

Q: Just about. I think he died in '55 or '56.

DIETERICH: I remember there was the beginning of a silly Left at Wesleyan at that time.

Q: Were there any sort of causes you were getting involved in?

DIETERICH: Sure, there were causes. I worked on the college radio station and, again, Israel came into my consciousness. I can remember working on the college radio station during the '56 Suez War, and having a lot of mainly Jewish students crowding into what we called the news rooit was a large closet with a teletype in ito get the news hot off the ticker and read it. Again, I was very conscious of America's engagement with Israel.

And another interesting one: I remember sitting in a room in the fraternity house with two naval officers from Argentina. They talked about the overthrow of Peron in Argentina and I thought, "Wow, that is very interesting and what an interesting place Argentina must be." In my mind, I guess Latin America had been sort of an endless string of Mexican border towns. I had very little idea of place like Argentina where things happened on as large a scale as they did in those days.

And of course civil and minority rights issues were beginning to grow in everyone's consciousness. In my sophomore year, the fraternity had a big fight over whether to extend full membership to a hearing impaired student. Some members, not without justification, found him obnoxious. Others of us felt that to deny full membership to a handicapped pledge who had been with us for months would reflect badly on the house. The fraternity had a "black ball" system which meant that one member could veto any prospective member. We took secret vote after secret vote and somebody kept dropping the black ball. Finally we were faced with a large group of members who were threatening to resign if he were not admitted to full membership. I finally proposed that we revise our bylaws in a way that mooted the black ball system. That was done by majority vote. The person in question was admitted and nobody resigned. A few months later, the national organization of Alpha Delta Phi sent a representative to tell us we had to reinstate the black ball system or risk our national accreditation. We told him to stuff it. Nothing happened.

The destruction of the black ball system turned out to be very important later on. I had become president of the fraternity and we admitted our first black member. I guess he was also the first black to be admitted nationally. He was an outstanding student from the Midwest named Jim Thomas. It is important to remember that fraternities are very dependent on alumni donations. We were scared that our money might dry up, so I spent time on the phone talking with big donors. Some of the biggest were very supportive and we did just fine.

I was proud of what we did. Later on, in the late seventies I guess, the Wesleyan chapter of Alpha Delta Phi became one of the first fraternities to admit women. I guess the membership is now about half and half and I receive fundraising letters from female chapter presidents. Instead o"brothers" they now refer to each other as "siblings." Good for them.

Q: While you were at Wesleyan, what was the source of that most important commoditdates?

DIETERICH: Oh, Connecticut College, Mount Holyoke, I mean in terms of my personal experience. Smith, even as far afield as Radcliffe, although you had to be able to travel on the weekends. I dated a lot of girls but didn't end up marrying any of them.

Q: As a history major, were you thinking about the future and what you wanted to do?

DIETERICH: Yes, I was, and I spent a lot of time looking at European history and ended up writing my thesis comparing Orwell and Huxley, the two, as I called them, inverted utopias. I saw a new word the other dayou can call them disutopias. But writing a thesis on that for Carl Schorske got me deeply into European intellectual history of the early twentieth century. You can't spend time with George Orwell without spending time with the Spanish Civil War and the basic issues of war and peace and politics of the century. I suppose out of those studies I became a pretty classic anti Communist of the period, except I wasn't really. The Orwellian road to not liking the communists is not the American way.

Q: Were you pointed towards anything?

DIETERICH: I don't know when it started, but certainly by my senior year I was convinced I wanted to go to graduate school in international studies, in foreign affairs, which is what I eventually did. Beginning sometime in my junior year, there was some idea that I might want to go into the foreign service.

Q: Did you run into anyone who had been in the foreign service who could give you any information about it?

DIETERICH: No, not until graduate school. I don't remember thinking anywhere near as much as I should have about what I was going to do for a living. I was enjoying being an undergraduate. You get pretty good at it, and then they made you quit. Like a lot of kids who like college, I thought about teaching for awhile. But I just sort of slipped into graduate school because I didn't have a career plan, thought that would be interesting, and got offered a fellowship that made it possible.

Q: Where did you go to graduate school?

DIETERICH: I went to SAIS (The School of Advanced International Studies) which is here in Washington but affiliated with Johns Hopkins University.

Q: You were there from when to when?

DIETERICH: I was at the Washington campus during the academic year '58 '59, and then I went to the school's Bologna Center in Italy for '59 '60.

Q: While you were at SAIS, what was the spirit of the place? Were these people who were going to get involved in Washington? Who were they?

DIETERICH: They were people who were headed for the foreign service or toward employment in government agencies in the foreign affairs field. At that point, SAIS was a big feeder for the foreign service, and especially a big feeder for AID (Agency for International Development), or ICA (International Cooperation Administration) as it was known at that time. There was a beginning interest in people going into international business, and SAIS at that time was doing some very heavy fund raising along those lines. Some people also did that. But it was very much oriented toward going into somebody's foreign service, whether it was the U.S. government or some multinational corporation. That is pretty much what happened to the people I went to SAIS with.

As to who went there, I remember noticing later when I was serving in Israel and we were very involved with our embassy colleagues in Egypt, that both Ambassadors and both of the heads of USIS were SAIS graduates.

Felix Bloch who was later accused of espionage was also there.

Q: Did you have the feeling the faculty and student body were any particular part of the political spectrum?

DIETERICH: More to the liberal side of center. Again, you weren't yet into the period of political polarization. This is pre Kennedy. I don't remember heavy politicization, neither as an undergraduate nor a graduate student.

Q: While you were at SAIS here in Washington, what sort of courses were you taking?

DIETERICH: I followed a course of Western European area studies. I did one year in Western Europe, but since then I have had very little to do with Western Europe.

Q: Up to this point you had never been abroad, had you?

DIETERICH: No, I had not. I had been to Canada once and that was it.

Q: Was this a considerable yearning to get out and see the world?

DIETERICH: Oh, absolutely, I was very anxious to do that. Had I not gone to graduate school, I think I would probably have joined the navy. (End of tape)

What was fun about being in Bologna was that it was Bologna. Academically, I don't think it was a particularly enriching experience. My undergraduate years were better academically than graduate school was. But being there was the most important thing, and being part of a student body that was half European at that time. That had huge advantages in terms of cultural enrichment and getting used to simply living in and with foreign cultures. It also had a big academic advantage in that the common language was English, and my English was better than theirs. Most American students in Bologna in those days could coast a little bit academically. And we did have some time to see things. I lived in an apartment with an Italian, a German, and an Austrian. We hired a maid to cook for us, and went to classes (which I don't remember very well). One of them was in a classroom that was so old that Dante could have studied there and it was cold. My memories are of being in Italy and having time to travel a bit. I remember very clearly going to Berlin and getting my picture taken in front of the Brandenburg Gate, which was THE place to have your picture taken in those days. That was where all the correspondents stood with their mikes on television. Academically, the biggest problem was that I had to pass a fairly tough language requirement, because I came in with German as an undergraduate. So I had to keep studying German and working at it pretty hard, even when I was at Bologna. At Bologna I was still studying German in order to pass a language requirement to get my masters degree.

Q: Did you get a feel for the politics of Italy? Did it sharpen your observation skills?

DIETERICH: Oh, yes, absolutely. I was also studying the politics of Germany at the time. I think in terms of courses that were influential to me, the one I really liked the best was a sort of trade craft course. It was taught by a senior Italian diplomat. It was really a good course. He, for the first time, began to give me a feeling of how embassies worketradecrafthe mechanics of foreign affairs. I thought it was a useful course and it did pique my interest.

Q: Had you made application to take the foreign service exam?

DIETERICH: I took the foreign service exam in Florence, Italy, and then took the orals back in Washington and didn't pass them. I don't remember exactly when, but it was some time after I had returned from Italy and before I actually went into the Navy.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that were asked at that oral exam?

DIETERICH: I can remember a question I bobbled. They were sort of American government questions, such as how many justices are on the Supreme Court. One of them I bobblesomebody wanted to know the relationship between Wagner and Hitler. In trying to give a complicated and sophisticated answer about an issue which I knew a great deal about, both Hitler and Wagner, I gave the impression I didn't think there was much of a relationship. I think the person thought I was kind of dumb. What I was trying to say was, you can't blame Wagner for Hitler. Basically, they said, "You're not ready yet." And the question of my military eligibility had come up, and I knew I was vulnerable. They sort of said, "Go do your military service and then try again."

Q: What was your military service?

DIETERICH: I got back from Bologna and went home to Ohio to find a draft notice waiting for me in the mail. Obviously, they were going to draft me. So I called the draft board and said, "Give me some more time because I want to try to get a commission." I had known a couple of people at Wesleyan who were going into the Navy OCS (Officer Candidate School), and one of them had come back to visit and said he was enjoying it. I had this interest in boats, water, so basically I said fine, I'll go into the Navy for three years or whatever it was. Eventually, I was accepted in the OCS program, but there was a delay and I was stuck in Ohio. One day I got really tired of it, got on a bus and went down to Washington. I was wandering around town trying to figure out how to get a job. I walked by the Democratic National Headquarters. It was the beginning of the Kennedy campaign; I went in and said, "Can you give me a job?" He said, "Okay, you're a messenger. Sixty five dollars a week, take it or leave it." I took it. In the meantime I got together with some friends and we rented an apartment that we could afford.

Q: Well, what was the spirit of the campaign? Could you talk about your experiences?

DIETERICH: A lot of it was errand running, taking things from one person to another, but it got to be pretty important, at least to me. I remember spending time in an office with Paul Butler (ex Democratic National Chairman), and he wasn't real busy, but I went to his law office and he spent a lot of time talking. I remember riding around with Sergeant Shriver, and not being sure of who the hell he was. I took drafts of speeches over to Mrs. Kennedy in Georgetown. I was told by people in Pierre Salinger's office that my job was to get her to look at them. And failing. I remember going over there once and having Mrs. Kennedy come bounding down the stairs with a towel around her head and a bathrobe on. She had just washed her hair. She thanked me but wasn't much interested in the speech. She made it clear she was willing to read it but that was about it. I delivered to her a package, a gift from somebody. She opened it and there were these little doily type things you put on the arm of a chair.

Q: Antimacassar.

DIETERICH: Antimacassar, yes. And she said, "These are awful, do you want them?" I said, "No thanks." Then I thought as I was taking a cab back to headquarters, "She shouldn't say things like that." Then I guess sort of breakthrough came when somebody had given me a latter that had come out of a box called "nationalities," in this big complex that was basically the public affairs office of the DNC. Somebody had looked at it and said, "I think the signature says Adenauer." It was a letter from Konrad Adenauer that had been dropped in this box and ignored. Somebody said, "Take it to the Library of Congress, get it translated and then take it to the DNC chairman's office. In the cab on the way over I could read enough German to realize it was a request to send some members of the Bundestag to the campaign to observe the last days of the campaign. I thought, "I don't have to take this to the Library of Congress, I can take it straight to the chairman's office." I did, and they said yes, but the upshot of it was nobody really wanted to pay any attention to these Germans in the last days of the campaign, so they asked me to sort of be their escort. This was based on the idea that I could speak German, which I really couldn't, but that did not become necessary. It got me into a lot of events that perhaps I wouldn't have gotten into otherwise.

Q: Sometimes campaigns have a spirit of their own. Did you pick up a feeling of mobilizing of younger America as a new generation?

DIETERICH: Oh, absolutely; it was really exciting. It was a whole lot of fun. Kennedy was a new generation, and he was very close to our generation. That old thing about Kennedy attracting people into governmenabsolutely true. The United States did have something to teach the rest of the world and we ought to teach it. I don't think I ever saw John Kennedy during the campaign. I remember I saw Bobby Kennedy once, who barked at me because his car wasn't where it was supposed to be. It wasn't my job to get it there. I remember sort of a blur, to, of just running around and being in the Mayflower or whatever hotel it was when he won. And being offered a job afterwards. I was sent over to Harrison Williams' office and offered a job as a something or other aide, working in the congressman's office. I had to say no because the Navy had me scheduled to show up in Newport, Rhode Island, in January. I have often wondered what would have happened if I had gone to work on the Hill instead of joining the navy.

Q: You were in the navy from when to when?

DIETERICH: I was in the navy from January 1961. I spent four months at Newport. When I took my physical the summer before, they discovered I was partially color blind. This meant I would not end up on the bridge of a destroyer in the North Atlantic; I was going to end up in the supply corps of the navy. I had a choice of either the supply corps or naval intelligence, and navy intelligence would have required me to waste a lot of time with increased security clearances and delay another six months. So I went to Newport for basic officer training, spent four months there, then went to Athens, Georgia, for six months as a commissioned officer for training in supply and logistics, personnel management and all the other stuff supply people are supposed to do.

Q: Where did you go after your training?

DIETERICH: Remember, I joined the navy because I really wanted to serve on a ship. In the first place, I was too color blind to serve up on the bridge where it really counts. Secondly, I'm one of the few persons in my class that got sent to shore duty. The navy was full of people who were ready to quit because they couldn't stand life on a ship, and I wanted to be there but I got shore duty. I went to the Naval Air Facility in Okinawa as the disbursing officer. If there is anything I never thought I would be in my life, it was to be the person in charge of all the accounting of a pretty good size activity. I went out there as the disbursing officer, an ensign in the supply corps of the U.S. Navy. In the first place, I found myself overseas; we ran Okinawa in those days but it was Japan's. Almost everybody who worked for me was either Okinawan mainland Japanese, or Filipino. I basically ended up with a bunch of third country national employees working for me. At that, time the supply corps ratings in the navy on the enlisted side were heavily manned by Filipinos who had come into the U.S. Navy as steward's mates. These persons had worked their way up from being waiters in officer's wardrooms into the supply ranks because it didn't require a high security clearance. In my disbursing office, I had about nine people working there running comptometer machines. Out of those, one was a mainland Japanese, one was an Okinawan, one was a skinny, middle western American. The rest were Filipinos, including my senior assistant. It was fun working overseas and it was fun supervising people from another country.

Q: Did it make you nervous being responsible for a lot of money?

DIETERICH: I don't remember being nervous about it. I suppose that is testimony that the training in Athens was really pretty good. I think the U.S. military is very good at training. You came out of the school in Athens, Georgia, thinking you knew enough to do the job. I'm not naturally careful and painstaking, so I had to make myself be careful. We were disbursing a hell of a lot of money. I was probably signing by hand something like 1200 checks every two weeks. All I accounted for was the money. I was the paymaster. I didn't decide what to bul just made sure that the procedures had been followed and that the bills were paid on time. At the same time, I also supervised the mess hall; that didn't require a lot of supervision. I sat on a lot of courts martial.

Q: Did you get around Okinawa and Japan?

DIETERICH: Yes, a lot. Well in the first place, I met my wife after a few months there. We were introduced by mutual friends. She was a draftsman in the office that planned and built new PXs (Post Exchange). She was from Okinawa, but had recently returned from two years of architectural studies in Japan. Her father a very prominent architect. My first few months there, my off time was mostly spent with navy buddies. The second half of my year and a half tour was pretty much dominated by Keiko and my courtship of her.

Q: How did a cultural courtship work?

DIETERICH: Hard! It takes a lot of work. In the first place, you have language difficulties. She had English but had never had much practice. I had no Japanese, so we had to work a lot on that. It requires a lot of time and patience. She learned English and my Japanese remained primitive, to say the least.

Q: How about her family?

DIETERICH: I met them early on. They were nice people. They were probably trapped like my family eventually wabetween what they thought was a good idea and what they had taught their kids to believe. Her father was a modern kind of person. Keiko used to say, "My father is the only person I know that thinks the emperor is a waste of money and should be fired." That was a very unusual thing for a Japanese to believe.

Q: You say "Japanese", was your wife's family Japanese or Okinawan?

DIETERICH: Okinawan, but you know, that's an interesting bit of history. It's very complicated. Japan took over Okinawa in the late 1860s and it was a no nonsense kind of occupation, in the sense that they said, "You are Japanese now and school in Japanese starts tomorrow." American policy, after the Second World War, found it convenient to emphasize the cultural differences of Okinawa and treat Okinawa as an independent country that had been liberated from Japan. It was not an absurd policy stance; it was just overly influenced by wartime propaganda, by genuine sympathy for all that Okinawan civilians had suffered during the battle, and at least a half century out of date. The Ryukyuan monarchy Japan overthrew had sustained centuries of relative independence by playing off, one against the other, the two regional superpowers, Japan and China. Okinawans became very good at sustaining their own cultural values, of which they are still very proud, while paying necessary tribute to the powers that were. I think there was probably a sort of generation gap which probably persists even today. Older people tended to embrace traditional cultural values, idealize the old days, and mistrust the authorities up north. Younger people with dreams and careers to pursue admired the dynamism of Meiji Japan.

The fact is, certainly by the 1930s if not earlier, most Okinawans considered themselves to be a loyal citizens of the Japanese empire. While they suffered social prejudice and economic discrimination on the part of mainlanders, they also enjoyed the full rights of Japanese citizenship. Okinawans served with distinction in the Japanese military, even in some senior positions. Whatever doubts they had about the military government and the war were probably similar to those of mainlanders.

So, in a sense we were kidding ourselves that we had liberated an independent country called Okinawa. The truth was we maintained an occupation regime in the islands until 197almost a quarter century after World War II occupations ended elsewhere. Tokyo's attitude was also complex. While continued occupation was a kind of national embarrassment, the American security umbrella was a great convenience and money saver. I don't think the successive Liberal Democratic governments were particularly interested in getting Okinawa back. Besides, U.S. governments were particularly helpful in coming up with face saving formulas. Early on we recognized that our occupation was temporary and that Japan held residual sovereigntwhatever that iover the islands. We also recognized that Okinawans were Japanese citizens. If an Okinawan were to go to the mainland, he could get a Japanese passport which would be recognized by U.S. consular and immigration authorities. If he were to travel directly from Okinawa, he could use a U.S. Civil Administration, Ryukyus (USCAR) document called something like Identification Document in Lieu of a Passport. It also worked although it was, of course, much less recognizable in countries other than the U.S.

At the beginning, in the wake of that horrible battle that killed more Okinawan civilians than combatants on both sides, there was little opposition to the occupation. People were traumatized by their own suffering and the defeat of Japan, and we were pretty efficient in feeding and housing people. Besides, the mainland was under occupation, too.

Kiel's family was particularly connected to the mainland, because a lot of the family lived there. There was never any doubt that they considered themselves Okinawan in culture but Japanese in citizenship and loyalty. If you ask my wife if she is Okinawan or Japanese, the question makes no sense. There are differencein culture, cuisine and folklorbut Okinawans considered themselves part of Japan. There were still people around that spoke the old Okinawan dialect. Keiko can understand it but can't speak it. Her younger nieces and nephews can't even understand it very welit is pretty much gone.

Q: When you got married, was the foreign service still something you wanted to do?

DIETERICH: Absolutely, and it complicated things considerably. I finished my time in the navy, finished my tour in Okinawa, and Keiko and I were engaged but both of us thought a year apart would be a good testing period. Both of our families knew of our intention and agreed. So I went on to my next assignment. I still wanted to go to sea, but my next assignment was the Navy Security Station in Washington, DC. They put me right in a town where it would make it easy for me to look for a job. I worked in the supply department there. They had an automation project that had gone sour and, if I contributed anything during that year, it was getting computer types to talk to supply types. I realized quickly they didn't speak the same language. I spent a lot of time as an interpreter between two cultures.

Of course, I remember very well the death of Kennedy. I saw armed Marines running by the window of my office and then the reports started coming in. I remember an odd reactioafter his death was confirmed, there was silence and almost everybody simply went back to work. It was as though they didn't know what else to do. Keiko remembers her father waking her up to tell her the news and saying, "You can't go to that country, it is a terrible place."

I suppose I had the same emotions everybody else had, but maybe a bit exaggerated because I was living by myself. The next day was a day off work without a lot to do. I remember wandering around Washington, and standing out in front of the church during the funeral.

When I finished with the Navwell, even before thaas I remember, and I think this is accuratl could not retake the foreign service exam at that point because of my intention to marry a foreign national. I talked to both State and USIA (U.S. Information Agency) about that. USIA said, "Well, take the management intern exam. It's a good job, you'll get the same pay, but you probably won't serve overseas." USIA had sort of been on my mind ever since graduate school. So I took the management intern exam and was accepted by USIA. I asked when they wanted me to start and they named a date. I said, "That is convenient. Now I have to go to Okinawa and get married." They said that was nice and they would see me when I got back. I got on a plane (this was the first time I had to pay for a ticket), and flew to Okinawa. We got married shortly after I got there, at City Hall, but then there was a church wedding scheduled for July 20th. On the morning of July 20th, 1964, somebody came from someplace and handed me a message saying, "Please come to the Okinawa Relay Station of the Voice of America at Chained Air Base."

I had time to get in a taxi and go out there. I didn't know what a relay station did exactly but I found the place. I walked in and they said, "USIA wants to know if you would be willing to go to work here, and we would like to interview you." I said, "Fine. I have a masters degree in foreign affairs." They said "Who cares? Do you know anything about supply or accounting or any of that?" And I said, "Yes, right here in Okinawa up to a year ago I was disbursing officer down at Naha Air Base." They said, "That's fine, just what we need. Are you willing?" I said, "I have to talk to my wife to be." I did. It wasn't too hard to convince Keiko that we might live there rather than in Washington. I went back and told them, "Yes, if you will give my wife and me a trip back to the United States so she can meet my parents. They said that was fine because I needed some training anyway. So they sent me back to Washington.

Keiko and I had a wonderful two months or so in the States. We moved into the efficiency apartment I had rented while I was at the Security Station. I reported for duty at the VOA engineering division, which was in the old tempos (temporary buildings) on the mall.

They had no idea how to train me so they have me a little office and a copy of USIA's manual of operations and told me to read it. They also arranged appointments for me to meet people involved in relay station administration, which was helpful. The rest of my work time was taken up with all the necessary in processing stuff and preparations for any overseas assignment. I think I had to be first appointed as a civil servant and the re appointed as foreign service staff. We also had time for basic sight seeing and a trip to Ohio to meet my parents and brothers. We had a great time there, too.

Then, in October, we went back to Okinawa. We were given a nice three bedroom house on Kadena Air Base in a housing area shared by VOA, the American Consular Unit (which was a consulate in all but name, and the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS.) I settled into the job and we had a marvelous three and a half years.

The function of a relay station was to pick up VOA short wave signals from the United States, transmit them by medium wave (AM) into China, the Soviet maritime provinces, and North Korea. That meant we broadcast in five languageMandarin, Russian, Korean plus a bit of Japanese and English. Imagine the size of that transmittemedium wave, and million watts. I think 50,000 watts is the statutory limit in the United States. This was a monster liberated from the Germans as a war reparation. It stood behind glass in a space about the size of three ample bedrooms and had vacuum tubes as tall as a small adult. We pumped gallons of sea water to cool it.

Q: I think this might be a good place to stop.

DIETERICH: All right. Except for one thinmy daughter was born a year or so later at the U.S. Army Hospital.

Q: That changes ones life.

DIETERICH: It does indeed.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point and next time we will start at 1964 when you got your scalled training back in Washington, you've come back to Okinawa with your wife, and we will talk a bit about what you were doing in Okinawa and then move on from there.

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This is the 26th of October 1999. Jeff, what are we up to? We are in Okinawa. Was your job a different situation there?

DIETERICH: Yes, it was. Let me go back a little bit to the military service, because I thought of some stuff over the past week. My duties were very routine administrative duties and the better you ran the office, the quieter it was. All you really had to do was keep the accounts straight and pay the bills on time. However, there were collateral duties. They ended up being the most interesting things I did in the navy.

All officers had to stand communications watches. I drew duty on the crucial night of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. This meant standing duty in the communications center, because only commissioned officers were permitted to decrypt the most highly classified messages. The decryption machine used adjustable rotors not unlike those I have seen in pictures of the famous German enigma machine. It was a complicated machine to run. I remember standing a very tense, nervous night thinking, "This is the night something is going to come in. Then I am going to see if I really remember how to run that machine because training was three months ago." But nothing came in.

Later I got tapped to sit on a court martial in a murder case. I had been on courts martial before, and served as a defense attorney at one time, but minor stufpetty thefts, drunkenness, general misbehavior. The Cobb case, however, was a much different, and one of the first cases that attracted a lot of attention in Okinawa. It was a precursor of some recent cases and involved the murder of an Okinawan. This was a particularly sad case in that it should have been avoidable. The defendant, Cobb, had been removed from a ship because of erratic behavior, inexplicable behavior, and was in Okinawa waiting for transportation back to the United States. He went out to a red light district one night, hooked up with a prostitute and during the course of the evening he killed her. He beat her to death with a bedside alarm clock. It was an awful case, covered heavily in the Okinawan press. It was difficult because there had been signs in the past that the person was a lunatic. But the old McNaughten rule came into play, and the question became, "Was he so incapacitated that he could not distinguish right from wrong?" He also had a very good defense attorney, Howard McClellan, an ex Judge Advocate General type who had settled down in Okinawa and had taken up the defense of service men in courts martial. We finally found him guilty and sentenced him to 20 to 25 years. His sentence was somewhat light in this case, because of suspicions on the part of the court martial board that the Navy had somehow failed for not putting this person under restraint or something to keep this from happening. Okinawans felt the sentence was way too light, and that he would go back to the States and be incarcerated and somehow or other be released. He served a good bit of his sentence.

Q: In 1964, you went back to Okinawa. You were there from when to when?

DIETERICH: I was there in the navy for 18 months, from early '61 until mid '63.

Q: Then this next tim'64 to when?

DIETERICH: Then I went back and served at the Navy Security Station in Washington, then ended up back in Okinawa as the Executive Officer for the relay station.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

DIETERICH: I was there from '64 to the spring of '68. It was a fairly long tour. We don't have the relay station anymore. It reverted to the Japanese government when Okinawa was returned to the Japanese on the grounds that it was not a defensive facility. It was closed up at that time and a lot of its duties taken over by other relay stations. I don't know whether I covered it before or nothe purpose of a relay station.

Q: You had mentioned that.

DIETERICH: I did talk about that? Good. It was kind of fun because I was the only non engineer there among the American personnel, which meant anything an engineer didn't want to do (because it didn't have to do directly with broadcasting), one way or another I either had to do or got to do. A lot of it had to do with keeping the accounts straight, making sure people were paid, making sure supplies were available, and running the supply system. The station employed a lot of Okinawan civilians and some mainland Japanese civilians. In the meantime, too, the political situation was getting a bit more difficult. I think it was predictable that eventually the larger diplomatic interests of the U.S., in terms of its relationship with Japan, would make the return of Okinawa to Japan inevitable. On the other hand, if you talked to people who ran the bases and to the Department of Defense people, it seemed unthinkable to them that the United States would give up this marvelously located base, which indeed it was, with all the advantages that attend to having effective sovereignty. The larger U.S. attitude was interesting, in that we never really took over; from the very beginning, for instance, education was in the Japanese language, and although run by Americans, it was modeled on the Japanese system. That certainly proved that we considered our tenure to be temporary. We early on recognized a weird doctrine of residual sovereignty as far as Japan was concerned. They had sovereignty but did not exercise it because they ceded administrative control to the United States. The administration itself was sort of British Colonial in the sense we never really wanted to run everything. We just wanted to control trade, foreign relations, military bases, and a few other things that made life easy for us. I remember one of my wife's family - either her father or her cousisaying to me, "You persons should not be surprised if you give up this place because you never really took it over. You never said to us 'We won, we are here to stay, school begins in English tomorrow and eventually you are going to be part of the United States.' " Had we said that in 1945 when they were reeling under the shock of the battle of Okinawa and feeling betrayed, perhaps the Okinawans, and the mainlanders, would have accommodated themselves to a new reality. Remember that as many as 150,00Okinawans were killed during the April May 1945 battlmaybe as much as one third of the population. (End of tape)

I was saying, I worked in a Quonset Hut when I was in the Navy, and I thought that was symbolic of the nature of the U.S. administration therserviceable but temporary. In the early days, we got pretty tough. In an early set of elections, a member of the Japanese Communist Party was elected, I believe, to be the mayor of Naha.

Q: Oh, yes, the mayor of Naha was renowned, sort of in and out all the time.

DIETERICH: Yes, Kamejiro Senaga, and we in no uncertain terms made sure that those elections did not count and he did not hold office. I think we even threw him in jail for little while.

Back to the Voice of Americmost of the people were engineers, and they were an interesting lot. I think understanding them makes it easier to understand the attitude of the Voice of America right up to the present. They were proud of the fact that they were probably the world's finest short wave broadcasting engineers. There was nothing as good as the U.S. system of transmission, this whole network they had set up. I think that explains, in a way, the reluctance the Voice has shown to give up short wave over the years, no matter what other technologies are available. These persons would rather have been, and would be, known as the greatest short wave engineers, rather than just regular engineers doing other kinds of broadcasting.

Part of that also had to do with the fact that almost all the alternatives that anyone came up with for the Voice of America made the Voice dependent upon retransmission of their signals by other, presumably foreign, broadcasting organizations. In other words, at that time, unless you built more megawatt transmitters, the only way you could get on AM or FM was by getting some local broadcaster to retransmit your signal. That meant you were counting on someone else to deliver your message. That became sort of an anathema to the VOA journalists and engineers. Almost anything would be sacrificed for independent control of the signal. Actually, VOA was, and is, rebroadcast all the time, usually through the efforts of local USIS posts. It always seemed to me that, except in denied areas like China and the Soviet Union or real boondocks like the Amazon, the only people who listened to short wave were either radio hobbyists or political loonies usually on the right side of the spectruneither of which rated very high on the U.S. government's list of priorities. If you wanted VOA to be influential you had to have it on AM or FM at drive time in major cities, which could be done if you were willing to trust your signal to local broadcasters. VOA accepted that reality, but they fought like tigers to protect their independent short wave signal.

As for the rest of relay station life, it is hard to come up with exciting moments on the job. Typhoons would blow down our towers and we would put them back up. We had a staff of maybe a dozen engineerboth radio and power plant typewho were directed by a station manager who was also an engineer. I was lucky enough to have had two very good bosseJohn Rowlett and Jim Miller. The work was pretty routine most of the time. We probably had another hundred Okinawan employees, as well as a couple of mainland Japanese. They were great to work with. Our main administrative support, interestingly enough, came form the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines where there was also a much largeRelay Station. I would make occasional business trips there and those were my first working contact with an embassy. I made contact with the USIS people and learned as much as I could about what they were doing. It looked like a lot more fun than what I was doing.

Q: Was the war in Vietnam beginning to affect your life?

DIETERICH: It made my life a whole lot noisier, because we lived very near the west end of the Kadena Air base strip. The sound of fully loaded B 52s taking off is about as loud as anything ever gets. We had to replace the putty in the windows of our houses about every three months and I think the first Japanese word our baby daughter learned was the word for airplane, hikoki, which the maid used to comfort here when the B 52s would wake her up.

Remember, we were living on a U.S. military base on a beautiful pacific island until 1968. So in a sense Keiko and I were kind of isolated from all the antiwar stuff that was going on in the United States. There was not a lot of American questioning of our Vietnam role in Okinawa, even among American civilians and the third country nationals who made up the FBIS staff.

But I think Vietnam did accelerate the movement for return of Okinawa to Japan. Demonstrations were beginning to clog up the streets. Some of us had a sense that our time was going to be limited, but it depended a lot on who you talked to. I remember one fairly senior State Department official attached to the civil administration telling me that Okinawa would be returned when Japan finally made a serious request for that to happen.

Q: Were you in social contact with the people at the consulate?

DIETERICH: Oh, yes, very much so. The Consul General, Carl Brower, Dick Finch, Joe Leahy, and a very close friend who was a consular officer there named Bill Walker, who I eventually ended up working for as DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) when he was ambassador to El Salvador. We became close friends during that time. As I mentioned before, we shared the housing area with FBIS. Their job was to monitor radio broadcasting from roughly Pakistan through India to Korea and China and you could throw in a few countries in between. So they had a wonderful group of people from all those countries whose job was to monitor and transcribe news broadcasts. They also had a club that threw great parties and served excellent Chinese and western food. And we had the luxury of my wife's family and her friends. So we really had, despite my failure to learn very much Japanese, a very nice life. We could shift from the convenience of the base economy into the fun of being in Okinawa.

Q: When you were talking to the American civilian side, was the attitude "yes, Okinawa is going to revert" and with the military side was it "we won it with our blood and we are not going to give it up" attitude?

DIETERICH: Yes, that's pretty close to the basic terms of the argument. Not only "we won it with our blood", there was also a less emotional attitude, "Hey wait a minute, it works well. It's good. We have a huge investment here. Don't pay attention to these people that say they want to go back to Japan, because they really don't. They really love us." Remember, I talked the other session about how we convinced ourselves that the Okinawans, because of a different ethnic identity didn't consider themselves Japanese. Also, we would always bring up the fact of Japanese discrimination against Okinawans, which was fact. It often did happen. That did not mean, however, that the Okinawans didn't consider themselves Japanese. They were perfectly capable of considering themselves Okinawans and Japanese. But you would trot all these arguments out, and the final argument would be "Japan doesn't really want Okinawa back," and there were a lot of senior people in the Japanese government who didn't much. They didn't want to have to ask those questions about where nuclear weapons are being stored.

But it wasn't exactly a military civilian argument. While I don't remember talking to any military people who favored giving Okinawa bacreversion was the term we usel also don't remember very many American civilians who favored reversion. There were a lot of U.S. civilians who lived in Okinawa without any formal connection with the U.S. government. They ran businesses that served the bases or provided professional services to military folks, or had retired from the military and decided to stay on. It was a nice island a life was relatively cheap. They became a lot like the "zonians" we used to talk about in Panama, which meant they weren't about to give up a cushy lifestyle. They were the ones who often used the super patriot arguments how we had bought Okinawa with our blood.

Ithink by the time I left Okinawa there was an almost total disconnect between what Americans thought in Okinawa and what they were thinking in Washington, or Honolulu or Tokyo. Policy makers in Washington had to balance the military value of our control over Okinawa against the damage the Okinawa issue was doing to a friendly government in Tokyo and to our long term relationship with Japan. Military folks and DOD officials in Okinawa were concerned with the nitty gritty facts of running important bases during the Vietnam war. To them it was inconceivable that we would give up Okinawa merely to please the Japanese government or because of highly theoretical concerns about future relationships.

Q: And there were a lot of social problems.

DIETERICH: Sure, but what was becoming obvious was that Okinawa was also becoming an issue in Japanese domestic politics. Opposition political elements could see right away that was a wonderful club to beat the government with. It involved the American role in Vietnam, Japanese nationalism and what many Japanese felt their country owed to people who had suffered more than any other Japanese in the Second World War. This led the Japanese public to be gin asking questions like, "How can we ignore what the Americans are doing in Okinawa? If we have residual sovereignty then we also must have residual responsibility." That meant that every social problem associated with the military bases in Okinawa, or its occupied status, took on a new resonance in mainland Japan.

Criminal acts by U.S. service people, that would have been ignored in earlier times, attracted new attention on the mainland.

Q: What does "Okinawa" mean?

DIETERICH: Something about the ocean, the horizon and a rope.

Q: There was something about "island of thieves" or something like that. There was something like "low grade pirates" at one time?

DIETERICH: Oh, I don't think so. They were good traders and pretty good maritime people. They developed pretty good shipping capabilities and carried a lot of trade between Japan and China, and at times became almost an entrepot. But thieverno.

Q: I don't know whthere was something that rang...

DIETERICH: There are some islands that were called the Ladrones (thieves in Spanish) in that area.

Q: It was the Ladrones.

DIETERICH: I guess they were down near the Philippines or Indonesia maybe, but I think the name is not used anymore.

Q: What about your wife's family, were you picking up a feel for where they thought they wanted to go?

DIETERICH: Sure, absolutely. My wife's family was very divided between the mainland and Okinawa anyway. A lot of her direct relatives had at various times moved to or studied on the mainland. Keiko's father for one studied architecture in Tokyo in the twenties and returned to become an eminent architect in Okinawa. During the battle for Okinawa he had been away from home in the southern Ryukyus working on an architectural project for the Japanese government. After the battle he returned and went to work for the U.S. civil administration building housing for displaced civilians. Keiko also studied architecture on the mainland before we met. Her great uncle had founded Okinawa's first newspaper, the Ryukyu Shimpo. The Government of the Ryukyu Islands issued a postage stamp with his portrait on it. One of her close cousins, and a friend of mine, was a writer who did both journalism and books. I think they clearly believed that Okinawa would and should return to Japan. There weren't very many people by the 1960s who were saying, "We should stick with the Americans." Remember, the we had promised nothing for the future. If in 1945 or shortly thereafter, we had told them they would be just like Hawaii, that mighand I emphasize mighhave been an attractive model, but we never offered that. In the meantime, Japan kept looking like a more attractive alternative. Then there were always the irritants to any civilian populations living very close to a military base.

Q: And young persons full of piss and vinegar, age 18 and all. Sometimes it has been fine and sometimes it has been bloody dangerous.

DIETERICH: Well, there is a pretty unattractive honky tonk base economy around the Kadena area and around Naha. In the meantime, too, there were more and more young Okinawans coming back who had studied in Japan or the United States. Neither one returned satisfied with the status quo. It was just not seen by the Okinawans as a viable long range alternative.

Q: Well, in '68, what happened?

DIETERICH: Well, in '68 I went back to the United States. In the meantime, I had been agitating to change my status in the agency. I decided that I did not want to continue as an administrative officer in relay stations. The first thing they offered me was to go to the Philippines where they were going to build a new station, saying " you are pretty good at what you do, and that is a great assignment for a young man to be an executive officer on a construction site." It probably was, if that had been what I wanted to do. I had been writing letters and talking to people that came by telling them I wanted to get out of relay stations and I wanted to get out of administration. I wanted to go into the foreign service and do substantive work in the agency. This was what I had wanted to do in the first place, and had been prevented from doing so by my wife's nationality. Nothing much happened, but they said I could go back to Washington. They said. "We will assign you to administrative duties and that would be a better base for you to try to make the change."

Q: Was your wife an American citizen yet?

DIETERICH: Yes, she had taken advantage of the waiver of residency requirements for people who were overseas on official assignments, and gone to Honolulu and become a U.S. citizen. Again, that was not an optional issue at that time. Your wife had to become a U.S. citizen or you would not get further overseas assignments. Did I mention last time that our daughter was born and duly registered at the U.S. Consulate? Born in the Army hospital right near our house. That was wonderful for Keiko to have her first child right there when family was still available.

A little bit more about the organization of the Relay Station, by the way. They had three sites. One was the administrative headquarters at Kadena Air Base. My office was very near my house. We had a receiver site at Onna Point farther north on the island. And a transmitter sitthe million watt transmitter was at Okuma. The U.S. Army also ran an R and R (rest and relaxation) resort for officers right next door to the relay transmitter. Even more conveniently, we had housing left over from the construction days. They had been maintained and we were able to use them as guest houses. I spent a lot of time, partly on official duties, driving up and down the island into the part of Okinawa that didn't have a military presence. We spent some wonderful weekends in the sand and surf of the Okuma resort. I was also able to travel a lot. As I said before our administrative support came out of the Philippines. When I was in the Navy, I had been able to spend a lot of time on mainland Japan and hitch rides to Taiwan and Hong Kong. I especially remember one trip to Hong Kong when I flew in what was called a P2V, an old antisubmarine patrol bomber. It was one of the last airplanes that had the transparent nose bubble, World War II style. I sat up there and flew over Hong Kong harbor. And once my parents had come to the mainland and the two of us had a great time with them showing off their year old granddaughter in Tokyo, Kyoto and the other tourist spots.

Anyway, Keiko and I got packed up and gave away our dog and moved back to Washington. Bill Walker and his wife had gone back about a year earlier, and they got us an apartment in the same building they lived in near Dupont Circle. A two bedroom apartment in that neighborhood was still cheap in those days. We had a used car, and I went to work in the personnel division of the Voice of America. Now if there was ever a job I hatethat was it!

Q: Was there a very clear distinction between the Voice of America and USIA (United States Information Agency)?

DIETERICH: Yes, there was. That has a lot to do with some internal politics that finally played themselves out now, with the total independence of the Voice. VOA was always very uncomfortable belonging to an agency that had as its mission propaganda, if you wanted to use the negative term, or advocacy of U.S. policy position and U.S. values, and telling America's story to the world. The Voice didn't like that. They considered themselves to be journalists who happened to be paid by the government but were operating under a charter that absolutely bound them to tell the truth like any other journalists. Now that attitude, stated in its boldest terms, would drive people nuts at USIA. They would there had to be some reason the American taxpayers to pay for radio broadcasting. Then it would drive people even more nuts at the State Department. They would say something like, "It's the Voice of America and I'm speaking for American foreign policy. I want to call those persons up and tell them what to say about this particular issue." You were apt to get treated very badly by the Voice if you tried to do that. But one of the things the Voice did was to always look for its own facilities and it got its own personnel division, which is where I worked.

Q: You were there from '68 to when?

DIETERICH: I was not there very long. Less than a year in that particular job.

Q: What was it that made it so unattractive?

DIETERICH: Well, to put it in a neat superficial package, I always thought the agency recruited badly. They always got people that liked to deal with people and they put them in the personnel division. They took people that liked to deal with figures and statistics and put them in the budget shop. The irony was that all the personnel officers spent all their time filling out forms and dealing with figures and statistics and very rarely met a human being, while the poor bastards in budget, who didn't like to do it, spent all their time negotiating with people trying to hammer out a budget. It's a theme I've often thought about in considering how we train. There are other instances in the foreign service of what you might almost call "perverse training." You train a person the wrong way, and the only reason it doesn't become a disaster is there are certain smart ass mavericks that rise above the training and go out and get things done. We try young political officers to write reporting cables and then, if they're good at it, we promote them into jobs where they have to deal with people, influence them, and negotiate with foreign government representativejobs for which they have really not been trained. ThanGod for the mavericks.

I continued my campaigning to try to get into some other line of work, and it was hard. In the first place, if the personnel people think you are any good they don't want to let you go. And they control the game. But finally I got a person that said, "Jeff, the only way you can do this is go out and get yourself a masters degree in foreign affairs." I said, "I already have a masters degree in foreign affairs." The person was visibly embarrassed that he hadn't read my folder before he came to talk to me and said okay, they would work something out. And they did.

They put me in a program they devised, which had to do with training mid level officers after they had done a couple of junior officer tours. It was like a lot of training programs in those dayit was more on paper than a reality, and it had to do with rotating people around to all different elements of the agency. Probably a waste of time for mid level officers, but pretty good training for me. During that six months, I wrote news on the night shift at Voice of America and wrote a pamphlet for the English teaching division of USIA, went out as a film crew producer to cover simple VIP (very important person) events in the Washington, DC area, including Nixon going to a diplomatic soiree of some sort in an embassy (I can't remember which). I remember that he stumbled over his wife in front of the camera, but we cut it out.

Then they called me up and said it was time to think about an assignment, and they would like me to think about going to Cochabamba. Despite the fact that I didn't know where Cochabamba was or even what continent it was on, I said I was certainly willing to consider it.

They told me to go see a lady in the foreign service personnel division and she would explain it to me. She wasn't there when I got there, so I sat down and realized there was only one map on the wall and it was Latin America. That cleared up at least one mystery. I was to be the director of a cultural center (what we called bi national centers in those days). It was a decent entry level job and I said I would do it, so they sent me off to FSI (Foreign Service Institutnow part of the National Foreign Affairs Training CenteNFATC) for five or six months of language training. In the meantime, there had been a change. I guess some State Department officer had been detailed to the agency, and they had given him Cochabamba for some reason and they wanted me to go to Santa Cruz.

Q: Cochabamba is in Bolivia, isn't it?

DIETERICH: They are both in Bolivia.

Q: But Santa Cruz?

DIETERICH: Santa Cruz de la Sierra is the Easternmost major city of Bolivia. It is in the Bolivian lowlands over toward the Amazon territory.

During the tour in Washington, I learned a lot about USIA and the foreign service. Also learned a lot about the United States. It was a turbulent time. I suppose I felt that our military involvement had been a mistake, but I also believed that a total U.S. defeat would be bad for us and for the world. I remember being tear gassed in a restaurant in Dupont Circle. One of my brothers was a theology student at Boston University and had come down to Washington with his wife to participate in one of the moratorium marches. A bunch of marchers had formed up at Dupont Circle with the intention of doing something silly like serving an "eviction notice" at the Vietnamese embassy. The police decided to stop them. My brother and I and our wives were having dinner at a Chinese restaurant on P Street. That is where we got tear gassed. The gas actually came into the restaurant. I remember the crowd on the street was still quite orderly and young women were passing out damp cloths to people. At another time tear gas came into our apartment. I had imagined that an occasional whiff of tear gas was part of the foreign service, but I had never expected my first taste to be in Washington.

Keiko and I finished our Spanish courses at FSI and headed off for Bolivia with our four and half year old daughter.

Everything they say about the altitude - roughly 12,000 feet -and how lousy you feel for the first couple of days is absolutely true. It was a big USIS post in those days. About 20 years ago my wife ran across a group photograph, taken just after we had arrived, of the USIS American staff, and there had to be 20 people. Twenty USIS officers in La Paz! Cochabamba had its own USIS post. It had a two officer post, plus two Americans assigned to the cultural center. We were to go down to Santa Cruz, which at that time was smaller than Cochabamba, and seemed much less important in Bolivia. There was only one other official American in the town, and he was a military advisor assigned to the Bolivian Air Force's aviation school.

Q: You were in Bolivia from '70 to when?

DIETERICH: I was in Bolivia from '70 to '72. I actually did get there early in the year of 1970.

Q: What was the political situation in Bolivia at the time you were there?

DIETERICH: The country was under a military dictatorship of a conservative stripe headed by a general named Ovando. It was barely stable at that time. We used to say Bolivia had had more governments than years of national existence. A very unstable country, the poorest country in the hemisphere, with the exception of Haiti. Bolivians spend time thinking about the fact that they are landlocked. In the war of the Pacific they lost their access to the sea to the Chileans. They have never reconciled themselves to it, nor forgiven Chile for it, and no matter what goes wrong in Bolivia, they tend to think, "Well, if we just had access to the sea things would be better."

The country also has some peculiar geographic views and where it is. In the Eastern provinces of Bolivia, when they talk about La Paz, they refer to it as the interior of the country. Now La Paz It is not all that far from the ocean in anybody else's geographic view. It is the capital and it is the closest to the coast. It is the Santa Cruz region that is the interior of the country. But nevertheless the people in Santa Cruz and the Beni province look toward the Atlantic because that is the way that part of Bolivia developed. Jesuit missionaries came up the Paraguay River and other rivers into Bolivia. La Paz and the highland region were settled as part of the early Spanish silver trade which flowed into the Pacific through the port of Lima. It also has to do with the travel conditions that prevailed until well into the twentieth century. Until some roads were built and air service initiated, it was easier, or at least more comfortable, for people of means living in Santa Cruz, or Riberalta or Trinidathe Eastern Bolivian citieto go to London, Paris or Madrid than it was to go to La Paz. You could float down the Amazon and get a steamer across the Atlantic, whereas going to La Paz required three punishing weeks on mule back.

The two basic regions of the country also had very different indigenous bases and that is very important in Latin America. In most of Latin America, the Indians could never get rid of the conquistadores, but the conquistadores could never get rid of the Indians. The indigenous peoples of the Andean highlands are the descendants of the Aymara and their Incan conquerors, and they speak Aymara or Quechua. (Some experts have estimated that only about thirty percent of Bolivians are real native speakers of Spanish.) The lowland Indians are very different. They relate to the Guarani speakers of Paraguay and follow tropical forest, river based life style. In the lowlands there is not much contact between people who live a basically European lifestyle and those who follow indigenous lifestyles. I think historically lowland Indians always had a choice of almost total assimilation into Spanish culturand many dior total retreat into the vastness of the Amazon and Parana river basins. Many groups are still there, living relatively undisturbed traditional lives in the middle of the continent, but always aware that their retreat never really ends.

So there is an historic and social background to the highland lowland regional rivalry that is so important in Bolivian politics. It works itself out in very classic ways. You almost see classic patterns of prejudice. People in the highlands tend to see the people in the lowland as sort of lazy, not very sanitary, over sexed, and they breed too much. They are also emotional and unstable. Whereas the people in the lowland tend to see the folks up in La Paz and Cochabamba, and especially those with Indian blood (which is a lot of folks), as being clannish, dishonest in their business dealings, and mean. You can see those patterns of prejudice play themselves out in lots of parts of the world. In a way, it is almost the same sad pattern we see in this country - classic anti black prejudice on one hand and anti Semitism on the other.

Q: Were there any repercussions from Che Guevara and his little escapade? That had happened a little before your time I think.

DIETERICH: A little before. You have a good grasp for dates. Yes, it had happened by the time I got there, but there were still a lot of stories about it. There was a very strong and, at times, a rather nasty streak of anti communism in what was called the Phalangist party of Bolivia. Those are persons that don't pay much attention to history, or don't know any, when they pick a name like that for their party. They were really proud of their roots in the Spanish Falange. The Falangistas really did have a lot of support among the peasantry of Santa Cruz province, and I think a lot of that came from their sense of having been invaded. They didn't know whether they liked Che Guevara or not, but they knew they didn't like the idea of Che Guevara as an invading foreigner. In the first place they don't like "carpetbaggers", especially Argentine carpetbaggers. They would see Che Guevara more as an Argentine than a Cuban. His accent was not right for a Cuban and they know an Argentine accent when they hear it, and they especially don't like it when it is telling them what to do. Also, Bolivia is a country that believes it had a revolution - the MNR revolution under Rene Barrientos.. It was a revolution that did change things. A lot of people say, "Well, it's not working like it should but it was a good revolution, it was a good idea, and maybe it will." To a foreigner who came in and said, "That wasn't a real revolution, you have to have a real revolution," they said, "What do you mean? Our revolution is just as good as your revolution. Get out of here." Probably the upshot of Che was to turn the Santa Cruz region to the right.

Q: Later, that whole area became a real problem with narcotics. How was it at the time you were there?

DIETERICH: Nothing yet. It was a region beginning to taste prosperity in the sense they had figured out that all you had to do was grow the right crop and you could make money. You could see them beginning to get good at shifting crops. Shifting from cotton to soy beans, for instance. There was evidence they had made some crop shifts already. The land was mostly in the hands of middle class landowners who were smart enough to know you had to pay attention, for instance in making a shift from cotton to sugar cane or vice versa. That does help explain what eventually happened. They figured out what the most profitable crop was.

Q: How about the writ of the government of La Paz, was that very strong there? We are talking about the '70 '72 period.

DIETERICH: In the first place, people in Santa Cruz almost always resent the government of La Paz. There is a history of bad behavior on both sides. At that time, Santa Cruz was not quite big enough to get much power in Bolivia, but they were too big to suppress entirely, so there was a sense in La Paz that Santa Cruz is separatist, troublesome, and needed to be kept in line. There was also a sense that it might be the economic future of the country, therefore had to be kept under control. This never extended to wanting to give Santa Cruz much political power. A governor has been imposed who was not from Santa Cruz. A big mistake. I'll get back to that later.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were there?

DIETERICH: Ernie Siracusa.

Q: How did the writ of the embassy run in Santa Cruz?

DIETERICH: This was after BALPA won. (BALPA was an acronym for a U.S. government to reduce the balance of payments deficit y cutting U.S. government expenditures abroad.) As early as 1967 it began to impact budgets. We were reducing our commitments Bolivia. There had been an AID mission in Santa Cruz and it had closed. There had been a Peace Corps office and it had been drawn back to La Paz. By the time it got there, there was a rump USIS post, but without an American officer in charge, only a national employee who handed out films and things. I was given supervision over him without being named BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer - a traditional USIS title) for Santa Cruz, because that had financial implications. I was named only as the Director of the Centro Boliviano Americano, a USIS accredited binational center.

All of us who worked for the government at times have had to listen to some private sector windbag tell us how we don't know anything about the real world because we have never had to meet a payroll. If you are the Director of a U.S. sponsored binational center, you had to damn well learn how to meet a payroll. Although we got ad hoc, occasional subsidies from USIS La Paz, basically we had to take in enough money from English teaching to support the building and to support the Center, including a program of cultural activities if we could find any. I went in and found a building that was in pretty bad shape. The administrator of the Center was a lady well into her '70s. It was a tough assignment to try to keep the place financially solvent. The building looked so awful, I decided we had to make it look better. The cheapest way to do that was to whitewash it because that was the cheapest stuff you could get. I did scrape together the money to have people come in and whitewash the place and then was absolutely delighted when a comment in one of the newspapers congratulated the American Cultural Center on its restoration of an historic building. All I had done was have it whitewashed.

And we found out, to our delight, that we had Okinawa connections in Santa Cruz. On my first day in the office, almost the first person to come to call on me was a very successful immigrant from Okinawa to Bolivia who had been a colleague of my father in law in the early days of the U.S. administration.

I was talking about the Japanese immigration. There were two programone on the mainland of Japan funded by the Japanese government and one in Okinawa funded by USAID. Both programs were based on the willingness of the Bolivian government to give generous amounts of land to people who would go down to Eastern Bolivia and farm it. The Bolivian government, of course, had the land because of the U.S. supported land reform carried out by the MNR government of Rene Barrientos.

Q: Was this in connection with the same program that was going in Brazil too?

DIETERICH: Yes, in a sense guess it was, although I don't think there was any USAID involvement in Brazil or any program specifically for Okinawa. Also the programs in Brazil and Peru, and perhaps elsewhere, predated World War II.

Basically, the USAID Okinawan model would provide a basic village infrastructure. There would be a community hall and some basic machinery, with a place to store and repair it, and some other things. I don't remember now how much land the Bolivian government was willing to give, but it was a lot by Japanese or Okinawan standards. I remember being in the port of Naha once and seeing a ship leaving, with a band playing, paper streamers going from ship to shore and people calling their farewells. Someone explained these were people leaving Okinawa as immigrants to Bolivia.

As I mentioned before, a Mr. Ishu came to call on me on my first day at the cultural center and we had discovered that he had known my wife's father. He had held a similar position to me father in laws in the U.S. administration, right after the end of the war, when my wife's father had worked on programs to provide emergency housing. Mr. Ishu had been involved in food distribution at that time. He had a fascinating history. He had first immigrated to Peru before the second world war. When the war broke out he returned to Japan. I don't know quite what he did, but toward the end of the war he managed to be captured by the British, maybe in Malaya, and somehow was turned over to the Americans. He finally found himself working in Okinawa, and once again decided to immigrate to South America. This time went to Bolivia. Keiko and I visited them a few times. The Ishu family was unusual in that they had left the agricultural business and moved to Santa Cruz. He had done well distributing films to the Okinawan and mainland Japanese colonies. He would import Japanese language films and get a projector, take them out to villages, and show movies.

The colonies weren't really very prosperous in the eyes of the people who had to live in them. But by Bolivian standards they looked miraculous and there is little doubt that the Japanese Okinawan colonies radically changed the diet of Eastern Bolivia (maybe all of Bolivia) by providing a lot of fruits and vegetables they had not had before. But for the colonists, in terms of making your fortune and a very good life, they didn't work very well. I suppose the Bolivian market was too small and too poor and transportation links to population centers in Brazil, Argentina or Paraguay too primitive to make anybody's fortune in truck farming. Keiko and I visited one of the colonies. It was basically a pretty tough lifhard farm work and very few conveniences. You had to wonder whether the immigrants had made the right decision about their lives when you thought of how they might be living in prosperous Japan and Okinawa. I also think the colonists lived with a constant wary tension about Bolivian politics. There is an old Japanese saying that the nail that sticks its head up gets pounded down. The Bolivian government also had programs to get Indians from the altiplanthe highland plain of the Andes - to move down to the subtropical lowlands. It was not an easy move for the highlanders. Some suffered from a kind of reverse altitude sickness and all had to learn new ways to farm. Bolivia had had a land reform and a tradition of campesinos occupying agricultural lands. I think the colonists may have felt that if they did too well, they might lose it all. As far as I could see there was virtually no Japanese or Okinawan presence in the political life of Bolivia.

Consequently, the colonies in Bolivia lost people to Brazil. The big magnet was of course, Sao Paulo, wherKeiko and I were to later to serve. By the 1970s there were perhaps a million ethnic Okinawan and mainland Japanese living in Sao Paulo state with by far the largest concentration in the city of Sao Paulo. And they were very successful in Brazil. They had done well in businesses of all kinds and were active in politics. In the mid seventies, the minister of mines and energy, Shigeaki Ueki, was an ethnic Japanese. At the same time a majority of the students at the University of Sao Paulo's prestigious medical school were Japanese Brazilians. And those young people, now at least into a third generation, were very Brazilian. A Japanese American colleague of mine at the Consulate General, used to joke that it took two generations in the U.S. to ruin a good Japanese while in Brazil it only took one.

Japanese were of course not the only non Hispanic immigrants to Bolivia. There were Germanboth prand post World War II, both Jewish and non Jewisas well as Levantine Arabs, overseas Chinese, and smattering of Serbs and Irish. These groups can be found throughout most of Latin America. The Arabs and Jews were particularly well established in retail commerce, a field traditionally undervalued by Hispanic cultures. In popular parlance the Arabs are still called Turcos since early immigrants from the had carried Turkish passports.

Perhaps the most curious of the immigrants to eastern Bolivia were the Canadian Mennonites. I first noticed them selling butter from horse drawn wagons in the streets of Santa Crumen in the bib overhauls of prairie farmers and women wearing long dresses and poke bonnets, accompanied by similarly dressed children. They were twentieth century immigrants from Canada who left to avoid such governmental outrages as compulsory education for their children. Keiko and I also visited one of their farmIn a land of Spanish colonial adobe and Floridian concrete block it was an amazing sigha one story farmhouse with a long, low front porch that looked like something of a western movie about sod busters. Although the residents were courteous enough, communication in Spanish was difficult.

Meeting the daily plane from La Paz at the Santa Cruz airport was an experience in diversity, although I don't think we used that word yet. On a good day you would see groups of highland Indians in their bowler hats and ponchos, Santa Cruz natives in guayaberas and sport shirts, Japanese with a young girl in a kimono carrying a bouquet of flowers, overhauled, poke bonneted Mennonites and maybe even a couple of young Mormon missionaries in their white shirts and black trousers. And top it off, the second best restaurant in town was Chinese.

I was the only civilian American official in Santa Cruz. There was also a U.S. Air Force major who was an adviser to the Bolivian Air Force flight training school at the Santa Cruz airport. This meant that when I made trips to La Paz, people in other parts of the embassy were more interested in talking to me than they would have been had there been a bigger U.S. government presence in the region. I would get a lot of phone calls and little jobs to do every now and then. Not exactly political reporting, but talking on the phone with somebody who was doing political reporting.

Life became fairly pleasanthe Center was fun to run, we had a nice house, Keiko had done a remarkable job in learning the local markets and hired a competent maid, and our daughter was in a nursery school sponsored by the local Club de Leonethat's the Lions Cluthe same one we have here in the States. We ran into one linguistic snafu with my daughter's name. We had given her the lovely traditional Japanese name, Mariko. We noticed some puzzled, if not horrified, looks when we introduced her. Somebody quickly explained that the name sounded very much like maricon, the popular Spanish slang term for a male homosexual. We quickly dropped the "ko" and settled for Mari, with the emphasis on the first syllable. It was not a difficult adjustment since many modern Japanese women have made the same deletion from their names. How I had missed the word maricon at FSI, I'll never know. Maybe it never came up. As someone once said, "At the Foreign Service Institute they teach you how to discuss the balance of payments but not how to ask for the rest room."

As was customary, the Center had a local board of directors. They were well established residents of Santa Cruz. The president, as I remember, was Fausto Medrano who was active in the Phalangist Party (Falange Socialista BolivianFSB.) Although the board didn't pay much attention to the Center and let me run it as I wanted, they were good friends, contacts and at times advisers. English teaching was the mainstay of the Center and the biggest source of funds. It was the only serious English teaching in town, but it was still awful. I was able to hire some native American speakers of English who knew the system that was being used at that time. By getting to know some of the Americans and hiring some American wives of Bolivians to teach for me, we made a bit of progress.

Shortly after I arrived I was visited by a group of young people asking me if I would direct the Santa Cruz municipal chorus, known as the Coro Santa Cecilia. Dumbfounded I asked them what made them think I could direct a chorus. They said, "Well, our last director was an American Peace Corps volunteer and he knew how, so we thought you might know, too," Funny thing was I had briefly directed a chapel choir while in the navy and after years of church choirs, high school and college choruses I knew enough of the repertoire that I figured I could fake it. The only trouble was they, understandably enough, also wanted to do Bolivian music, of which I knew nothing and lacked the training and talent to learn. Fortunately, the accompanist, the daughter of our friend Mr. Ishu, agreed to direct the Bolivian music il would do the classical stuff. So that's how a became a choir director. We had maybe thirty singers and it was fun. We did wedding gigs and prepared a full, formal concert that went just fine and got good reviews in the local papers.

I guess I got there in January. Sometime in November, or maybe December, I'm not sure, one of my friends on the board who was an avid hunter, "Jeff, we want to take this great trip. We want to get on the Amazon headwaters and float all the way down to Trinidad in Beni Provence. We are going to hunt and fish all the way down." At any rate this was going to be a major two week expedition, and I thought that sounded like just about as much fun as I was ever going to have any place. I went out and bought some basic equipment, including a shotgun, although I had never hunted in my life, as well as a bit of fishing gear and a good pair of boots. I asked USIS La Paz for and got two weeks leave. We took off in a couple of pickup trucks one day and got up to the Yapacani River where I saw one of the most astounding sights of my life. Near the river is a bridge, funded partly by AID, which is a bridge over nothing. After they started to build the bridge and got it almost completed, there was a big series of storms and the river changed course. This happens more than people realize in South America. It built up a big head of water coming down, and broke through some barriers, and decided to be elsewhere. The bridge was there but somebody moved the river out from under it.

Anyway we crossed the Yapacani and on the other side we picked up a guide in a big flat bottom wooden boat with an old Volvo Penta outboard motor and two 50 gallon drums of extra fuel. We took off on this marvelous trip. We were on the river in the mornings, then got out of the heat, rigged our hammocks and rested through the lunch hour, and then doing some hunting in the late afternoon before making camp. We were a bunch of Bolivians, me and one German. He was a school teacher at the German school. We ate all sorts of stuff that I never want to eat again in my life. We managed to bag a tapir which is a pretty big animal and good to eat. All you could take with you was dry stores, and we drank river water. Put tablets in it. My Spanish got a whole lot better.

About a week into the trip, I had a short wave radio with me, and we rigged up an antenna on our lunch time break and got the news from Santa Cruz. The lead item was - my Center had been bombed. The tail end of the broadcast, and I'm not making this up, was a little item saying a group of hunters that had been rumored as kidnaped had been spotted at the confluence of the Yapacani and Marmore Rivers. They had been seen by the Bolivian Navy, and were all right, and on their way to Trinidad. We were laughing saying, "Boy, what a pack of idiots, who are those persons?" Then all of a sudden we realized that we had checked in at a Bolivian Navy post and that we were the idiots. There had been disturbances on the other side of the Yapacani River when we left. Some peasants had gotten out of control. There was some politics involved in it, and somehow out of that, and us being in the area, the rumor had gotten started and believed by lots of people, that we had been kidnaped. This had gone on almost a week with none of us knowing this story was around. The embassy was very worried about it, not to mention my wife. The Air Force person in Santa Cruz had borrowed an airplane and flew out to try to find us. The trouble was he tended to fly during the middle of day when we were ashore under cover.

We decided we had better make tracks and get to Trinidad, which was the nearest city with any communications. However, it took us a couple more days to get there. Once there, I was able to call in. Of course the pressure was off by then because we had been spotted. I was able to call in and get a bit of a report as to what happened to my Center. Then it started raining, so it was about three more days before I could hitch a ride back to Santa Cruz on a private plane. The air strip was dirt and not usable during the rain. Air was the only way out. There was no road. People used to say that Trinidad had more planes than cars. Finally I got back to Santa Cruz. The Center had been bombed and occupied, and sacked by students. It had not reopened. We are now into the month oDecember of '70. The Center was basically closed down and not functioning.

Q: Who was doing this?

DIETERICH: The attack had been run by leftist students out of the university. They also had been circulating leaflets saying that any American official found in Santa Cruz would be brought to justice. La Paz decided I needed to be pulled out of there. We, very discreetly without saying good bye to anybody, got on the plane to La Paz.

On October 6, 1970 there had been a military coup d'etat. General Ovando, who had been in power only slightly more than a year, was overthrown by General Juan Jose Torres. Torres was a bit of an oddity, although not an unprecedented one, in Latin American politican ostensibly leftist general. This made a certain amount of sense in Bolivia, a country that believed that Rene Barrientos had already given it its revolution. Espousing populist doctrines, Torres came to power with considerable support from the Bolivian left. Although he had some good people with him, he eked out his eleven months in power trying to pay off political debts to far left elements who had supported his coup. Student groups would occupy university buildings, or our cultural centers, or campesino agricultural workers would take over farm lands and, in effect, dare the government to do something about it. The tactic was to radicalize the government by creating "facts on the ground." Given his political debts and his tenuous hold on power, Torres chose to do nothing. You have to wonder why we keep referring to military dictators as "strong men." Most of them are anything but.

There had also been another unpleasant incident shortly after the Torres coup. A U.S. military jazz banprobably out of SOUTHCOM (the U.S. Southern Command) in Panama had come to give a concert in the main plaza of Santa Cruz. These concerts happened from time to time and were very popular. During the concert somebody - I guess university students - shot off firecrackers and threw animal blood on the band. The band ducked for cover and the large audience looked around to see what had happened. When the perpetrators broke for cover in the university building which was right on the plaza, they were chased by some very angry music lovers who - I was told - caught them and treated them rather badly. The band continued with the concert.

So, with the leftist student groups thinking they had tacit support, or at least a certain tolerance, from the Torres government, our cultural centers became fair game. By mid 1971 all of cultural centers except Santa Cruz - that is La Paz, Cochabamba and Sucre - would be under occupation.

In the case of Santa Cruz center there had never been a real occupation. They had attacked the center with a bomb and then sacked it. We were quickly back in the building but essentially out of business because of security concerns, missing equipment, and damage to the building. With the center in our hands, the head of USIS in La Paz, Al Hansen, under pressure from Washington to reduce American positions and with the Ambassador's concurrence, decided it was time to close out the American presence at the Santa Cruz binational center. We would continue to support it but with a Bolivian director.

My job would be to move to Cochabamba, where they needed a new director anyway, and I would have about a year to work myself out of a job and turn it over to Bolivian management. I would retain some sort of titular directorship also at the Santa Cruz Center, because that gave us some administrative advantages with the USIA in Washington. We would send a Bolivian down from USIS La Paz to run the Center. The Bolivian chosen for the job was Raul Mariaca, an extraordinarily competent USIS national employee. He was an accomplished portrait artist who had served at the Bolivian embassy in Washington and wanted a breather from the unsettled political climate of La Paz. So Raul and I went down to Santa Cruz and put the center back in business. Then Keiko, Mari and I got in our 1968 Corvair and drove to Cochabamba. It was an adventurous, day long trip with the poor Corvair gasping for breath and barely making it over a ten thousand foot high pass nicknamed Siberia for its miserable climate.

Cochabamba was a very different town. Santa Cruz had been a frontier town (almost a cowboy style place) with a strong sense of all that empty land to the east and its links to the early Spanish colonization of Paraguay. Cochabamba is a classic Andean colonial city, on the model of Cuzco in Peru. A beautiful place with beautiful buildings, in a heavenly climate. It sits at about 8,000 feet which means that, unlike Pa Paz, there is enough air to breathe, and the climate is wonderful. Its cultural and political traditions look to the Andean altiplano and the Incan and Spanish empires. The Center was fairly prosperous.

Q: What was in it for the people studying English?

DIETERICH: Learning English. Look, this became important in Cochabamba. The real support for those Centers, I guess, was sort of middle lower middle class families who really thought part of their kids education ought to be to learn English. It was a very important thing. They could travel; and they could study in the States they were smart. All sorts of things. It was a very respectable, middle class thing to do to have your kids study at the American cultural center. The cultural center did offer other things. We had a library; we had a small auditorium; we showed films all the time; and when we could put something together we would have cultural events. A concert, an art show with local artists, and concerts with local people. Every now and then some sort of traveling attraction - an American pianist, or a U.S. military band - would come through, sponsored by USIS La Paz and they would send them down to Cochabamba to entertain in our center or to Santa Cruz. Those Centers really worked. They were seen as bi national and had a lot of local support. People liked them. That was soon to be proven to me in very graphic terms in Cochabamba.

I'm not exactly sure when this happened but probably in June or July. I had come back from lunch and gone into my office in the center when I heard a commotion out in the patio. A bunch of students from the university had come storming in and occupied the center. The students that occupied the center had been pushed out and told me they were going to keep the center because they couldn't let "this nest of spies and imperialist penetration continue to exist" in their city. They advised me to leave, and after thinking it over very briefly I did. In the meantime the center administrator, Raul Peredo, known affectionately as the colonel because he was a veteran of the Chaco War against Paraguay in the 1930s had contacted local authorities. They said, "We recognize there is a problem and the students have to leave, but the Americans can't come back, and we will take care of this Center until this problem is resolved."

I can't remember what I did first - probably called the embassy to tell them I had just lost another center . Probably the next day, I went to see the prefect, who was the presidentially appointed governor of the province. He was an army colonel, or maybe even a general, named Jaime Mendieta. It was an extraordinary interview because he basically said, "You persons have the support of the people in this town and everybody loves your Center. Why don't you put on a demonstration? Why don't you march in the streets?" Weird. Here was the senior representative of the government in the region suggesting to an American that he organize a demonstration. So I did. Given the fact that I was working with the center's excellent board of directors it wasn't hard.

Q: How did you go about that?

DIETERICH: First I met with the board. They were all for some kind of action. We put out the word that everybody was going to meet at a certain time. I of course did not participate in the march. We just put out the word among the students and their parents, and the soccer team we sponsored, and the other institutions we gave things to. We called in all our contacts. Individual board members helped a lot. There was a big rumor in town that this was the precursor of a move to outlaw private education. Personally, I think it was horse hockey. I don't think there was ever such an intention on the part of the government. But it made a good rumor and it certainly worked to our advantage. The march was held. It was big and got a lot of sympathetic attention in the press.

The president of the board was Enrique Huerta, a gentleman of great good sense and political savvy. In our meeting the next day, after flailing around a bit on trying to organize a delegation to go see the president of the republic, somebody, I don't remember who, came up with a much better idea. Even though we had been deprived of our building, there was no reason why we couldn't continue with the center. We would go out to the Plaza Colon, which was a big beautiful park right across from the center, have our classes out there, and do everything that we did in the building. We would have regularly scheduled classes, and the cultural events that were scheduled. The more we thought about this, the more we thought it was a very good idea. It would be our own form of student protest.

So the board president, the center administrator and I discussed the idea of holding outdoor classes with the teachers and they were enthusiastically in favor. We decided to go ahead and set a date for the first classes. All classes had always been held in the late afternoon and early evening to accommodate students in other schools and working people.

By that time Raul Mariaca had the Santa Cruz center up and running well so he came up to Cochabamba to help out. Although I had not given the embassy any advance notice of the earlier street demonstration, I did discuss the Plaza Colon idea with Al Hansen and, at some point with Ambassador Siracusa, since I thought eventually we were going to need some financial support. I was grateful for their support. I guess they both figured that while we might give up a center for budgetary reasons, we sure as hell weren't going to have one taken away from us. I was also getting a lot of help from John Maoist in the embassy political section, who had been one of my predecessors at the center and knew the territory and the players. As I remember he was in contact with one of the organizers of the takeover, who, ironically enough, we had sent to the States earlier on as part of a program for student leaders. I guess we sure could pick them. He certainly was a leader. But come to think of it, in those days the States was a great place to learn how to take over things.

On the day classes were to begin Mariaca, Keiko and I a couple of other had dinner at our house. Afterwards we decided to walk down to the Plaza Colon to see how it was gointo see whether this was working. I had purposely not been there for the beginning of classes because it was important that I not appear to be the organizer of this thing. We wanted to make it look very Bolivian. I remember going down there and realizing the Plaza was full, and this almost brought tears to my eyes. There were these kidmaybe a couple hundred of thesitting in circles on the ground spaced around the Plaza, and teachers running them through their English lessons. It was quite a sight.

Q: How did the leftists students react to this?

DIETERICH: Well, they began to threaten. They began to wander around muttering threats. I mentioned we had a soccer team. Our soccer team had been started by one of my predecessors who had worked with an American Maryknoll priest to get it started. It was from about the toughest, poorest, hard scrabble neighborhood of Cochabamba. We had sponsored this team for a number of years and they were a very good soccer team. I used to go to their games and hope they wouldn't win, but they almost always did. When they won I had to drink, what seemed to me, about two gallons of fermented chicha out of the trophy cup they had won. Drinking out of a trophy cup doesn't taste good to start with, and to my taste neither does chicha. They became our security guards in the plaza. More than once, they simply ushered the university students out of the Plaza. And as the threats became known, parents began joining their kids in the Plaza. That increased security, and also increased the size of the crowd. Parents were bringing their kids to class and staying there to keep an eye on them during the class, and then taking them home. This went on for six weeks.

Q: I would have thought this was really sticking it to the leftist students.

DIETERICH: Oh, it was. But they didn't have enough support. In the meantime, parents were joining their kids, and rumors of the end of private education are circulating. A couple of members of my board were writing scurrilous handbills and then paying the soccer team to distribute them at soccer matches. The bills said things like, "Sure, the spoiled university students want to close down the bi national center because that is where the people of this town have a chance to get some education. They want to keep the education for themselves." It was close enough to the mark, and written in extremely insulting terms, that it worked pretty well.

About half way through it the Prefect again got hold of us and said, "You persons have all those people in the Plaza Colon, why don't you take back your Center? Saturday would be a good time to do that." I had some reservations, but the board members wanted to do this, so on Saturday the people who usually studied there gathered, and went over the wall into the Center. Unfortunately, the police were waiting and kicked them out and not very gently. I had spent a nervous Saturday morning in my house getting reports over the phone. On Monday, I went back to the Prefect and said, "You told us to do this." He said, "Think of the great publicity you got. The police have expelled the rightful owners from their own house."

Anyway, we stayed in the Plaza for about six weeks. And remember the students were paying for the right to sit on the ground during fairly chilly Andean nights, although thanks to a subsidy from USIS La Paz, we were able to reduce tuition and still pay the teachers. Finally we got a call from the Prefect saying, "I have the keys to the center. Send a Bolivian and I will give them to him, and you are back in business." I sat on a park bench in the Plaza Colon and looked at the Center while Colonel Peredo marched down to the prefect and got the keys, came back and opened the Center. I was the first one to walk through the door. The next morning classes began again. The Cochabamba newspaper, Los Tiempos, wrote an editorial congratulating us.

So we got our cultural center back. But the occupation of the centers in La Paz and Sucre continued. There was an important difference. In Cochabamba, the local authorities had expelled the occupiers as well as the owners saying that they would maintain control until the "problem" was resolved. In La Paz, the government let the leftist students hold on to the building. The real credit of course goes to the board members, teachers, parents and students who were not going let what they saw as a bunch of snotty little university students take their English school away from them. The studentboth kids and adultas well as parents, had stuck it out during chilly evenings in the plaza. The middle class had won one in Cochabamba.

A few weeks later, in August 1971, the Phalangists and their military allies, sensing an opportunity in Torres' inability or unwillingness to control the radical left, launched a coup from Santa Cruz. Within a two or three days they controlled the country and installed Gen. Hugo Banzer Suarez as one more so called president of Bolivia. I got very involved in reporting because I was sitting in Cochabamba but knew some of the territory in Santa Cruz. Being a sort of radio buff, I was able to get a lot of broadcasts out oSanta Cruz that couldn't be heard in La Paz. So I spent a lot of time on the phone with Tony Freeman, who was the political counselor at that time. We were trying to sort out who was doing what to whom during that coup.

The Banzer government proved to be pretty durable. Some of my Bolivian friends thought the first blow of the revolt was the return of the Cochabamba cultural center. I think that was an exaggeration, although Jaime Mendieta, the friendly prefect, did become Banzer's defense minister.

Q: When the oral history of Ernie Siracusa was talking about a lot of death threats, I think he was talking about the time during the Torres thing. This was students he was talking about.

DIETERICH: Well, only in a very general sense. There was a certain specialization on the left. Students occupied university buildings and our centers; campesinos, logically enough, carried out land takeovers and urban workers would grab an occasional neighborhood. I guess I really don't know who specifically would have been responsible for death threats, but they were certainly in the air. It's not impossible that they could have come from the far right also. Just a word about Siracusa. When the Cochabamba Center was taken I think the PAO (Public Affairs Officer), who was under a lot of budget pressure, was ready to cut and take the losses and withdraw to La Paz, and I wouldn't have blamed him. But Siracusa, who like most ambassadors had never shown an overwhelming interest in cultural centers, was very supportive and encouraging of our efforts in Cochabamba to keep the center alive. He was very much in favor of our classes out in the Plaza. He earned my gratitude for being so helpful.

Q: Did you feel the students in Bolivia were having a great time being leftists until they got out into the world, at which time they turned into titans of industry?

DIETERICH: Sure. I mentioned that the person who engineered the takeover of the Center in Cochabamba had been up to the states for a few months as a potential leader in one of our old leader grants. We picked him pretty well in terms of leadership qualitiewe just didn't know he was going to lead people against us. He eventually ended up in senior positions in a couple of governments in the eighties. I think he even was a minister at some point. I guess that's being a titan or something or other, and there's not a whole lot of industry in Bolivia.

Q: When university students start playing games with the "town and gown" type thing and screwing things up, did you get the feeling they were getting desperate trying to do something? It was cute but it wasn't working out very well.

DIETERICH: I don't know whether desperatit wasn't working out very well but I think they knew that. I think they thought this was their chance to assert some power with the Torres government in charge. I mentioned before a Latin American political phenomenon which I think is important. Probably the most graphic and tragic example of it was in Chile. When people like Torres come to power with great support from the left, they start to do the sensible pragmatic thing, and begin to solidify their support in the center. This of course begins to alienate them from the extremes. The tactics of the extremists then is to do something, and dare the government to undo it. Then if you do something and the government doesn't undo it, you can say to the people you are trying to recruit, "We have the support of the government. They didn't do anything about our occupation of whatever. We helped them get into power and they are now helping us." Part of it is the act itself, to get a commitment out of the government. If the government lets them take the Cochabamba Center, why would they object if the students take some other private schools? Or, why would the government object if students want to do thus and so with the university? It's the committing act. It is what the Cuban American National Foundation has done with success to the U.S. government with stuff like TV Marti. The Prefect in Cochabamba was an appointee of the Torres government but one of the moderates who said, "I don't want to see these persons win this."

Q: He wasn't particularly taking action, but telling you what to do.

DIETERICH: He was trying to get me to take action. And I was trying to get someone else to take action because I felt making this an issue of Americans against Bolivians would be a loser. It was in our interest to present the center as a Bolivian institution, as a Bolivian private educational institution.

Q: Were you ever under threat personally?

DIETERICH: I suppose I was. There was a time when the embassy advised me in those last days in Santa Cruz to hire a bodyguard. It wasn't a very satisfactory operation. All I could get was an off duty policeman that I didn't much trust. He was supposed to follow me wherever I went. I don't think I was under any particular threat in Cochabamba. There was no bombing. There was no evidence of firearms. There was no violence. It was a 1960s sort of thing. People can be on the opposite side of a dispute but if they are coming out of a common shared political base, they can often carry out the dispute without having to kill each other. We were dancing a dance where we both knew the steps.

Q: What would you say our interests were in Bolivia at that time?

DIETERICH: In context of the cold war, geography was a lot. Okinawa was the keystone of the Pacific because it was in the middle of everything. Bolivia was the keystone of Latin Americit borders on more countries than anybody else. It has a lot of isolated border areas. It has poverty and a social system which is almost a western hemisphere kind of apartheid. There is a great gulf between those people who consider themselves to be whites of European ancestry, and those who consider themselves Indians and follow Indian culture and tradition. We, like Che Guevara, thought it was ripe for revolution and would make a great base for revolution to spread in all sorts of directions. The U.S. government had been in support of Rene Barrientos and the MNR in the sixties. This was their revolution. We liked him and it was a USAID revolution in many ways, and we were very supportive of it.

Q: Were you concerned about Nazi Germans? Were they around?

DIETERICH: I suppose so. I was much more worried about Phalangist Spaniards. There were a few Germans. We didn't get quite the same stories you did in Argentina. When Banzer came to power, his main support was the Bolivian Phalangist party, the FSB. After the coup there were some nasty anti Communists moves, with tinges of anti Semitism. I remember a publishing company called Los Amigos Del Libro, owned by a person named Werner Gutentag, who was a Jewish emigrant from Germany. He was running Bolivia's only publishing enterprise, as well as two or three book stores in the major cities. He had published some books under the USIS book program. That was a USIS program where you would get a publisher to publish a book and you would agree to buy so many copies to distribute to libraries, etc. One day Gutentag was at home and a bunch of police goons broke into his house, confiscated books, many of which had communism in the title because we got him to publish them. Those sub literate boobs couldn't tell the difference between a communist and an anti Communist book. They accused him of being a communist and put him under house arrest. The embassy was outraged. USIS knew Gutentag well and liked him. Many people in La Paz thought well of him and the fact that the government was doing this seemed outrageous. The Cochabamba police had gotten out of control. Like the center occupation, it went on and on. As a show of support from the embassy, Keiko and I would sort of ostentatiously drive to his house in a very recognizable U.S. official vehicle and call on him. I guess the guards were bright enough to figure out that meant the Americans liked Gutentag. It was sad to see this person confined to his house. It was a precursor of the situation we would have later on with Jacobo Timerman in Argentina. Eventually Gutentag was released and his work was given back to him.

Q: Did Allende's election have an influence in Bolivia?

DIETERICH: Allende was elected in September of 1970 and Torres staged his coup in October. Sure, I think that probably did have a kind of generalized ideological influence, but remember that Bolivians don't want to admit any kind of influences from Chile. They were the folks that took away Bolivia's access to the sea in the War of the Pacific.

Q: I was wondering if there was a concern that Latin America was going to go left and anti American? Was that sort of in the air?

DIETERICH: That was always there. Latin America was an ideological battle ground. The Soviets working out of their base in Havana were trying to undermine all of the somewhat vulnerable Latin American dictatorships. Depending on where you stood in your own personal politics, you either thought that the military dictatorships were a defense against communism or that they were creating the very conditions that would bring communism. That is another reason why the MNR revolution in Bolivia was important. The United States was trying to come down squarely at an intelligent middle. It didn't always work well. We gave a lot of support to land reform during the Barrientos period. First, AID spent a lot of money on land reform, then they spent a lot of money on forming cooperatives, because the land reform was too inefficient. Lots of folks had their little plot of land, too small to make a living from.

That about wraps up Bolivia. I left Cochabamba feeling real good. I had my Center back, and was given some nice farewell parties. And I was very happy with my next assignment in Argentina. General Banzer stayed around for quite a while. In 1977, after having retired from the military, he was elected president in reasonable free elections.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick this up next time and you will be off in 1972 to Buenos Aires.

DIETERICH: Right.

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Q: This is the 3rd of November, 1999. Jeff, in 1972, you are off to Buenos Aires, Argentina. You were there from '72 to when?

DIETERICH: To '74.

Q: What were you up to, and tell me about it.

DIETERICH: Sure. We took a nice long leave and arrived in Buenos Aires in January of 1972. We had actually taken a vacation earlier from Bolivia and passed through Buenos Aires, and discovered then that it was a town we liked very much, so we were delighted to be back there. As it turned out, it was getting towards the last days of the military governments. The economy was not actually in a shambles, but had just gone through a severe devaluation.

Q: Which government was this?

DIETERICH: This was the last days of the Lanusse government. The Argentine peso had just been devalued. I remember reporting for duty at USIS in the embassy building, and being taken out to lunch and discovering I had a wonderful steak and a salad with all the trimmings for $1.25. It made me think I was going to enjoy this tour very much. I went in there assigned as the Labor Information Officer, in the Information Section. But things were changing very quickly, and the PAO and some of the others figured out they didn't really need a labor information officer.

Q: What had been the origin of having a labor information officer?

DIETERICH: I don't know. The person I replaced had spent a lot of time in the labor movement. The idea was to maintain liaison with the labor movement, and to help foster ties with American labor groups. But that didn't seem to fit with the direction in which USIS was going, and I was assigned different duties, which were basically called the Press and Information Officer. This meant I was in charge of getting things published in the Argentine press. The USIS post was big by today's standards. The information section alone had four officers, including press attach?, who worked directly with the ambassador and was rather independent from the rest of the USIS operation.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

DIETERICH: The ambassador was Lodge, John Davis Lodge. A colorful character. He had been arounhe was in his sixties at that time. Yet, he became ambassador sometime later in Switzerland. He must have been well into his seventies. Still a glamorous kind of gentleman. He had been governor of Connecticut at one time, and lived an absolute mansion of an embassy residence. The old embassy building was still downtown in a very nice location.

Anyway, I started trying to figure out how to do the job. It was clear the times were changing. USIS in the past had traded on the economics of journalistic poverty throughout the world. It is hard to imagine now, but there was a time when most newspapers in most lesser developed countries didn't have wire services. Either they couldn't afford them, or the communications didn't work well, or they didn't want to be bothered with them. USIS' staple fare was what was called the wireless file. This was a wire service that tried to cover the news and U.S. policy, and provide feature services, and all sorts of things. Selected articles, and sometimes the whole service, was provided free to newspapers throughout the world. In a place like Bolivia it worked well. Newspapers all over town would pick up articles and use them as if USIS were a real wire service. It became clear to me was that that approach was not working in Argentina. They had some good newspapers, and they had some lousy ones too. The good papers had access to all sorts of wire services and weren't very interested in our wireless file, and it seemed to me there was very little point in working with the lousy ones. Our job was to have an impact, if we could, on the bigger, most influential papers. I spent time studying what our output was, and what we could do to be useful. I decided the wireless file was not going to serve us very well. But at that time, USIA also had begun to put out the text of speeches, and occasionally procure copyrighted articles. USIA would buy the coprights on an article published someplace in thU.S. press that reflected favorably on U.S. policy or illuminated an issue we felt was being misunderstood overseas. The article would ten be offered to posts for placement in the local press. I decided those two thingthe complete text of important speeches and copyrighted articlewould work for us. Soon after my arrival, I managed to meet Jacobo Timerman, who was the publisher oLa Opinion at that time, but later became a famous author and political prisoner. La Opinion was a young newspaper on the way up.

Q: How did you work with him, and how would you describe him?

DIETERICH: He kind of liked me, and I liked him. He was a very interesting person. I just started talking to him about what he would be interested in. He was interested in publishing the text of speeches, especially speeches by famous people. He said "If you can get me a Kissinger speech fast enough so that I can publish it before anybody else does, I'll be happy to do so." You can't promise on a speech by the Secretary, but you can work as fast as you can, and we worked out arrangements with Washington to get these things pretty quickly. I can't remember, we may have even done translations for him. He was also interested in the copyright idea, which was an important idea, not because La Opinion couldn't afford to pay for copyrights, but we saved them a lot of work. We saved them the negotiations. He did publish some Kissinger speeches, and some copyrighted articles, and these made USIS look pretty good. It was a good way to work and a way of getting USIS off its dependence on what I had concluded was a dying product at least as far as developed countries were concerned. The other paperthe big traditional ones, La Prensa and La Naciowere not particularly interested in publishing the full text of speeches, but they were interested in the copyrighted articles. Again, they could afford to buy the rights, but we could save them time and effort both in identifying articles and securing the rights.

Q: I would have thought in '72 to '74, when the attention of the White House focused on Latin America, which was seldom, that Chili would have dominated it. At least we were anti Allende. Did this cause problems for you?

DIETERICH: I don't remember that it did. I don't remember that people were so sure, at that point, that we were absolutely anti Allende. Argentina is a very self absorbed country. What Argentina was interested in was when the Lanusse government was going to wind down. People thought the end was in sight, and people thought they saw elections coming, and they thought they saw elections meaning the return of Peron. That was the topic. What Peron was doing in Spain was much more interesting than what Allende was doing in Santiago.

Q: At one point the United States had been strongly anti Peron but had times changed?

DIETERICH: Times had changed. While we still didn't think much of Peroand rightly swe couldn't be anti elections. That has often been what has gotten us into trouble in Latin America. We've at times paid lip service to the idea of elections when we were really interested in much more self centered short term political goals. That lukewarm support for democracy often plopped us into bed with dumb dictators. Fortunately, our cover story about democracy eventually saved us.

The lesson for U.S. policy is to be very careful of your cover story because it may well come true. When you have repeated the cover story enough, eventually the press, Congress and public opinioboth at home and abroabeat you into coming through on what you said you would do or support. That is why we had to support elections regardless of an almost inevitable result.

There is a corollary which has to do with how you react to the other person's cover story. If your adversary is saying things that you like and support, even if you know he is lyindon't call him a liar. Eventually you and your political allies and the press and public opinion may be able to beat him into coming clean on his cover story.

So we looked with some traditional reservations about the return of Peronism to Argentina, but on the other hand we had to be in favor of elections, and in favor of a government that had some popular support. And the country had its share of problems that needed to be addressed. The truth about military dictatorships is not that they are strong, but that they are weak. They can't solve real problems because they don't have parliamentary mechanisms to let them know when they are screwing up and when they are getting it right. A trial balloon doesn't tell you much if nobody dares shoot at it. So they spend all their time tending their offshore bank accounts and looking over their shoulders wondering what is going to happen to them. Therefore, they become profoundly conservative in the sense that they are actually afraid to try anything new.

Q: I spent four years in Greece when the Colonels were running the place, and you would have thought they might have come up with some social things. The Greeks are difficult to control, but what the hell, as long as you have a military dictatorship you would think they could do something. They didn't. While you were there, was the embassy getting any information about Peron and trying to figure out where he was coming from now that he was getting older?

DIETERICH: Sure, sure, there was a lot of attention paid to "what will Peron II be like. Who are the people around him, and what are they like?" Basically, we were caught in a machine. Elections were going to come, and that is eventually what happened. The political opposition in Argentina, the Radicales, and people more to the left, were also making peace with the notion of a return of Peronism. They felt you could not govern Argentina without coming to terms with the huge masses of people who still considered themselves Peron supporters. There was no way to govern the country without coming to terms with Peronism, and the way to do that was to let Peron come back. I remember asking Jacobo Timerman what would La Opinion do when Peron came back. He said "We will help Peron become what we think he ought to be." That's what political forces do.

Q: What about other papers? La Prensa?

DIETERICH: La Prensa was still very important. La Nacion was very important. La Prensa was beginning to look a bit frayed, in the sense that it had become a monument. The Gainza Paz family had very courageously stood up to Peron in the forties, but paid the price for it. They still enjoyed great respect in Argentina, but I think the paper was not quite "with it" the way La Nacion and La Opinion were trying to be.

Q: Were these responsible papers? I'm talking about the major papers.

DIETERICH: There were a slew of junky tabloids, but La Nacion and La Prensa were certainly representative of a very strong tradition in Latin America of family owned, moderately conservative newspapers. You can go through the big cities of Latin America and find this pattern repeats itself. They are conservative, but not crazy conservative. They sort of think democracy is a good idea, although they have doubts about it working in their country. They sort of like the United States. At least they like the idea of the United States; sometimes they don't like the practice of the United States. They like the American system of government, but they don't like American society very muctoo disorderly and just a bit vulgar. Nevertheless these papers and their like throughout Latin America deserve some credit for having kept alive democratic traditions. They are part of the reason why almost all Latin American politicians, no matter how brutally authoritarian, pay lip service to democracy. Remember what I said about cover stories coming true. I think that the fact that we are now looking at a democratic Latin America is partly due to the basic decency of those papers and the families that ran them. The countries of Latin America owe a debt to them for having survived just out of sheer stubbornness.

Q: In Argentina, was there much life from your point of view, beyond the boundaries of the city? One doesn't hear much about the interior of Argentina.

DIETERICH: That's a really good question. The truth is that Buenos Aires dominates the rest of the country and its a big country to dominate. All the railroad lines, for example, terminate in Buenos Aires. The British built them that way. Despite all that seacoast Buenos Aires is the only port that counts for anything. Maybe residents of Buenos Aires are called portenopeople of the porbecause there's no other port worth mentioning. There's an old joke that says a porteno is really an Italian who speaks Spanish and thinks he is an Englishman. To understand Argentina, you almost have to think of the southern cone of South America as a distinct entity that shares patterns of immigration and characteristic with the other countries of the temperate climate southern hemisphere. We are used to thinking of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa as products of late eighteenth and nineteenth century immigration. It's a little harder for us to see a similar process in the southern cone because we only see our own Hollywoodized version of Mexican history. First there was Indoamerica and then the Spaniards came and they were really tough so everybody had to speak Spanish. Mexico is of course much more complicated than that and what happened in the southern cone, including southern Brazil was even more complicated.

In the seventeenth century the Spaniards, and Portuguese took control of relatively weak native American cultures and imposed their own models of urban and agricultural life, as well as their own mining industries. But beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century while we were collecting Europe's huddled masses, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and even little Paraguay and impoverished Bolivia were attracting middle class immigrants from southern Europe and the middle east who came with education, modern commercial and industrial know how and capital. They were people looking for land and commercial opportunity and had, or could get, the money to finance it. As people of the Mediterranean basin they were attracted to the Latin, Catholic cultures of South America. There were of course some northern European immigrants as well but many fewer.

Those waves of immigrants basically transformed the cultures and economies of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and southern Brazil. If you were to draw a line across the continent from just north of Sao Paulo, Brazil to Santiago, Chile everywhere below that line is a part of southern cone culture that shares characteristics with South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. These are countries that are economically capable of feeding, clothing and arming themselves and are therefore the most independent countries in the world. Consequently, they have a tendency not to pay a great deal of attention to the rest of the world, nor to care much what the rest of the world thinks of them. Think of the outrageous, nose thumbing behavior oSouth Africa with apartheid, Chile during the Pinochet regime, and Argentina with the dirty war of the seventies and the invasion of the Falklands. Even New Zealand had its own mild outrageousness when it confronted the U.S. concerning nuclear weapons aboard U.S. ships, a question that other Asian nations or the Europeans never ask. I can't think of anything particularly outrageous the Australians have done except win the America's Cup, but I suspect their World War II trauma shocked them out of some of their sense of independence.

I think the notion that they don't pay attention is important. Under Peron, who admired Mussolini, Argentina initiated an experiment with fascism in 1945. That's a pretty good example of not paying attention to what is going on in the rest of the world. Buenos Aires had this weird, and often pleasant, sense of entrenched nostalgia which I guess came from the tango, the big old fashioned railroad stations and the 1930s quality of political discourse. It was a romantic place in a kind of Casablanca way.

So below that Sao Paulo Santiago line you have reasonably developed societies that regard themselves as essentially European. They are not as European as they think, but certainly more so than the rest of Latin America. As they say, Santiago is farther from Washington than Moscow and the U.S. influence is not as strong as in the Caribbean basin. We tend to forget that they did pretty well at least up through the great depression. While Mexico was suffering through its terribly destructive revolution, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and southern Brazil were entering what could almost be called their golden age.

Q: The Indians have been pretty well eliminated, haven't they?

DIETERICH: The Indians of the pampas were pretty much eliminated in the nineteenth century in wars reminiscent of what happened in the U.S., although the famous gauchos are their mestizo descendants. In the north of Argentina, the Salta region there are some of the same Andean Indian groups that are found in Bolivia and Chile. There are some remnants of Patagonian tribes in the far South of Chile, so there may be some in Argentina, but I don't really know. Indians simply don't figure in Argentina's modern vision of itself and neither do blacks although both Indians and blacks played historic roles in the nation's development. How did I get into all of these unsupported generalizations?

Q: I asked about the interior, in the '72 to '74 period, were we trying to do much there?

DIETERICH: Not much. There were the remnants of an AID program that had to do with housing guarantees, but nothing new. There was no Peace Corps. There was a story, probably apocryphal, that when Argentina was offered the Peace Corps during the Kennedy years, they had asked, "Do you plan to send your Peace Corps to France?" and then turned it down.

Q: Were we doing much in those days to reach out beyond Buenos Aires?

DIETERICH: Not much. USIS kept a small presence in Cordova, Rosario, Tucuman and Mendoza. I visited those cities occasionally. I don't think the United States government was reaching out very strongly into the provinces of Argentina. Our game was in Buenos Aires.

Q: Did you talk to the officials of the Argentine government?

DIETERICH: Occasionally, but not much. My bailiwick was the press. When I had contact with government officials it was with some American VIP visit, of which we had our share. I remember spending some time with the Argentine navy because I was the project officer for the visit of a naval ship.

Q: The university's system would supply the reporters and managers of the press, what was the university system?

DIETERICH: I didn't spend a great deal of time with the universities. We were probably too specialized. We were a big post and that tends to make you specialize. The cultural section of the USIS did that sort of thing. I occasionally talked to journalism professors and made some university visits, but I don't have a strong feeling for the universities themselves. Nor do I have sense that the press was particularly interested in the universities as a source of their training. It was more a "we'll get them young and train them ourselves" kind of thing.

Q: Were you all looking over your shoulder wondering what the military might do?

DIETERICH: The military was seen by the embassy at that point as having run out of energy. We could see they weren't going to be the government much longer. The higher ups in the Army had decided to get out of power and were looking for a way to do it. In the first part of my tour, terrorism from the left had begun a little bit. There were some kidnapings and bombings and you could see the reaction in the army begin to set in. My guess is that as the military began to wind down its governmental role, that's when the death squads and hard liners began to take on an extracurricular, non official, and very vicious approach. At least I think that at the beginning it was non official. The trouble with that kind of activity throughout Latin America goes back to what I said about the basic weakness of military dictators. Even when they know better, or are under serious international pressure, the last thing they want to do is take on the hard liners in their own institution, because they have very little idea of what kind of support they might have elsewhere. What makes it worse is that the longer they are in power the more dependent they become on support from their own military institutions and therefore all the more vulnerable to bone headed hard liners.

Q: I assume you had developed a social life with the press people. Were they looking at Europe or were they looking more at the United States?

DIETERICH: Traditionally, most southern cone institutions, including the press, looked toward Europe for their models. But by the time I was there, even before the excitement about the investigative reporting of Watergate, the press was beginning to look more and more at the United States. I think the model of U.S. journalism was beginning to look more distinctive and different from Europe, and perhaps more attractive. I think that was less true of La Prensa, but more true of La Nacion and La Opinion, although Timerman would tell you that his model was Le Monde.

There was also the question of how to cover the overpowering importance of developments in the United States. They thought they could not be really great newspapers unless the figured out how to cover the United States well. The questions for the papers was can we afford to keep permanent correspondents in the United States or is it better to pick up stringers? Or is it better to let the embassy let the U.S. embassy provide us stuff from the United States? The answer tended to be a combination of all three. I found them to be very open to us. A good press embassy press officer can actually help an editor determine if his correspondent is doing a good job, which means covering the right things. People up to the level of publishers, and certainly reporters, were more than willing to talk to us.

We also had a good press attach? who was covering the ambassador. Ambassador Lodge was a very visible kind of person. He had a lot of contact with the press himself, and the press attach?, Jack DeWitt, was very kind about sharing his contacts with me and referring people to me. We talked about things that might back up what the ambassador was trying to do so he could get a more effective package. My job there was not so much to follow political events as it was to get stuff into the papers.

Q: Did you have any problems with putting things in that would make you wince?

DIETERICH: I didn't have anybody looking over my shoulder and saying "Did you see that piece in the wireless file? That is really a good piece and I want you to go out and get that placed." Getting something placed was our term for convincing a paper to publish something we provided. I was given a lot of freedom and I didn't place things that would make me wince. I figured if it made me wince, it would make other people wince, so what would be the point? I think one of the defects of USIS over the years was to have had a lot of high powered, persuasive information officers who wanted to get credit for placing lots of column inches and would go in and browbeat an editor into publishing something the editor doesn't want to publish. To me, that is short circuiting a system you ought to make work for you. Unless you think the editor is an idiot, you ought to pay attention when he doesn't want to publish something from us. He may well think his readers, or his publisher, or his advertisers will not like it much. He will make judgments that help him keep his job and increase the circulation and profitability of his paper. Since we share at least a part of those goals we should pay attention to his judgment. If we don't share in those goals, why would be working with that paper? There are of course some very partisan publications that we may work with tactically, I suppose, but that really does involve a different set of calculations.

So, we were getting out of the days when the effectiveness of the USIS press officer was measured in column inches. It was a very tempting kind of measure because it was quantifiable and easily documented. It also gave the people in Washington who produced the Wireless File a way to gauge their product. The trouble was that it was not a good measure of success in the field. Lots of column inches in a lousy paper, an ideological rag, or low circulation newsletter could be quite meaningless or even counterproductive. I felt my job was to identify the papers with clout over issues of concern to U.S. foreign policy and concentrate my efforts on them.

At any rate we were still using the Wireless File in a kind of routine way. The chief national employee, an excellent journalist named Alberto Shtirbu and I would look at the file in the morning and decide which pieces should be distributed generally and which might be offered as an "exclusive" to a particular paper. We got decent results although no where near the column inches that could be racked up in a country like, just for example, Bolivia.

Q: Who was the head of USIA then?

DIETERICH: It was Jim Keogh

Q: It was the Nixon administration, so you think of Kissinger, but did USIA feel they had a heavy hand?

DIETERICH: Well eventually USIA and especially VOA felt that Nixon administration had a very heavy hand. But I don't believe we felt that way in Argentina during the time I was there. As for Kissinger and the State Department, if somebody aske"What have you done to support U.S. foreign policy?" I could say, "Hey, we got the whole text of the Kissinger speech published the next day in a major daily. What more would you want?" Or, "You know that great copyrighted article by George Kennan, or whoever the hell it was, we got that published in the Sunday supplement of such and such a paper verbatim." That stuff would make us look great. It not only was effective policy support, it was easy to convince people who were paying attention in Washington that it was effective policy. Fortunately, Gene Friedman, the head of USIS, and Jim Miller, the chief of the Information Section, understood that things were changing, and that publishing a nice little feature article on irrigation methods in the southwestern United States, or the wonders of the national park system in the United States, didn't mean a damn thing in Argentina. It didn't mean very much any place else, either. I never met anybody in Latin America who said I'm opposed to the U.S. because you don't know anything about irrigation or have crummy national parks. It was our foreign policy - especially Vietnam - that was the problem at that time, and that's what we had to work on.

Q: Did the major Argentine papers have a permanent representative in the United States?

DIETERICH: Yes, some, I think some part timers. They weren't persons who were zinging stuff down there every day but they did have people they could turn to. Occasionally they would send people up there and the USIA foreign press centers in Washington and New York were beginning to function at that time, I think. They certainly were a couple of years later when I was in Brazil. They were pretty good. For a person coming cold into Washington representing a Latin American newspaper, they really were extremely helpful.

Q: What were these?

DIETERICH: They were one of USIA's best ideas ever. The Washington center is located here in the National Press building. It was a place where a journalist could go and get a desk and a telephone, access to a teletype and telex, and help in making contacts. It was mainly staffed by USIS officers who had gotten to be pretty good in Washington and knew how to help. They were a major resource for people like me in the field.

Q: I would think coverage of Argentina or any place in Latin America would be a sometime thing by a major newspaper in the United States. You might have one correspondent who might roam the whole hemisphere.

DIETERICH: Yes, although some of those were stationed in Buenos Aires. Some were stationed in Chile. Actually the pattern at that time for major U.S. media organizations probably had one person covering South America and another handling Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. U.S. journalists were not particularly my responsibility. The PAO, IO and press attach? handled contacts with the U.S. press. We also had a Voice of America correspondent stationed in Buenos Aires at that time.

Q: Were there news magazines like Newsweek, Time, that equivalent? Were these important?

DIETERICH: Yes, and they also worked with us. Almost every country in Latin America at that time had a sort of Time magazine clone.

Q: Was there a segment of the press working on anti Americanism, or was that much of an issue?

DIETERICH: Extreme violent Anti Americanism was not a big deal except on the radical student left. Of course there was a sort of residual anti Americanism among the most militant old fashioned Peronists as well as the sort of resentful, cultural anti Americanism of right wingers. I was represented the embassy at some kind of parade in a Buenos Aires neighborhood. I was standing on the reviewing stand, and at one point a bunch of students came running down the middle of the parade yelling slogans and singing "Get the Yankees out of Latin America." The Argentines with us on the were a good deal more embarrassed than I was. There were a couple of kidnapings of American business men at that time; but those were mainly big money operations. Everything that happened after that in Argentina was really horrible. The death squads. You have to remember there was a left which was also very willing to do very nasty stuff.

Q: But this hadn't really developed while you were there?

DIETERICH: No, but it was coming. Eventually, the elections came and the embassy went into great embassy like spasms of covering the elections and trying to predict the elections.

Q: That always seems to be a game you play.

DIETERICH: Even if we could predict, 24 hours in advance, the outcome of the elections, what difference would it make? What would we really do about it? The answer during my career was just about nothing. So why all the effort?

Q: I can't tell you how many times I've talked to people who say, "And we predicted the election right down to where it was."

DIETERICH: It's not exactly a benign quirk of our culture though. It's a bit dangerous. It makes you look real nosy. I've been in embassies where people try to organize a pool to see who can predict the winners and/or the percentages. I've always counseled unsuccessfully against that because either the fact of the poll or the results would get out to the press. That could have awful consequences. Even leaving polls aside, I think we need to be very careful in our election coverage, because if you question too closely, too often, to many people it looks like manipulation. In Argentina that was the last thing we want to be accused of, especially if you go back in history to the famous election when the election slogans was "Braden o Peron,""Braden or Peron." Spruille Braden was the American ambassador. Peron won the election.

To its credit, the embassy in Buenos Aires, in my time, leaned over backwards to not take any position whatsoever. The fact is, in order to look like you are doing nothing, you really have to almost do nothing. You know, we like to talk about public vs. private or traditional diplomacy. The apparent distinction has been convenient to USIA over the years. But the distinction is really kind of phony, in that "private diplomacy" is a kind of retrofitted term like digital watch or acoustic guitar. We didn't need the term until we started talking about public diplomacy. The trouble with the notion is the implication that traditional diplomacy is always sort of a secret. Of course it isn't. Diplomacy is a public function which, only for brief periods, and for very good tactical reasons, can be practiced in secret. When you are keeping all those secrets you had better be smart enough to figure out what you are going to do when it all comes out. Unless you are dealing with something that nobody cares about, the end result of any diplomatic effort is public. We need to rid ourselves of the illusion that we have much secrecy to work with. I think in Argentina at that time, we did it pretty well. There were no really credible accusations that the U.S. government was messing about in the outcome of the Argentine elections.

Q: Did Brazil loom heavily at that time? Was there concern or not?

DIETERICH: Brazil always looms heavily in the Argentine consciousness. Argentina, however, does not loom heavily in the Brazilian consciousness. There is a great difference in size. I don't think there was much feeling in Argentina that Brazil was particularly concerned with, or of a mind to do anything about, the elections. I don't think anybody in Brazil was messing about in the Argentine elections.

There always were people on both of the political extremes that would claim somebody was messing around in their elections. The left claiming the Americans were messing about, or the far nutty right claiming the freemasons were trying to throw the elections, but it wasn't taken seriously.

The elections were held and the Peronists won. No matter what you thought about the result, you had to feel when the tallies were finally in, that Buenos Aires was a very happy city. There were people in the streets, there was a lot of good humor, and there was a certain feeling that maybe they could bring off a successful government. Maybe the Peronists wouldn't be all that hard for us to deal with. Eventually, that was the case. Now we are looking at the last days of the Menem government and a smooth transition to a person that really represents the Old radical party. Eventually, it was a nice outcome, but it didn't work that way right away.

Q: Were you there when Peron came back?

DIETERICH: Yes. Yes, I was. The best way to describe it is to tell an Argentine political joke. When Peron came back to Argentina he really suffered from three basic misconceptions. One he thought that Gelbard, who was his current minister of finance, was Miranda, who had been his first minister of finance. Secondly, he thought that Isabelita was Evita (his first and second wives). Thirdly, and worst of all, he thought that he was Peron.

It turned out to not be a very effective administration. But everybody was patient with that. He had some decent talent around him, but he had some very suspicious characters around him also. I don't remember how many months it was, but Keiko and I had planned to take home leave and return to Buenos Aires. After all I had season tickets for the opera at the Colon Theater, at a very reasonable price, and owned one of the best sailboats I've ever had in my life. We went on home leave and went to Ohio to be with my folks, and Peron died during that time. With the evolution of events it ended up with Isabelita taking over the government. In the meantime, I got a call from Washington asking me if I would be willing to go as the information officer at the American Consulate in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Q: Did the Malvinas/Falklands raise any eyebrows?

DIETERICH: Oh, it was there, but talking about the Malvinas in Argentina was like talking about returning to the sea in Bolivia. These issues are all over Latin America. It is easy to miscalculate because Americans basically don't take those issues seriously, therefore they don't think the local people really take them seriously, and we are usually wrong about that. The Argentines obviously took them very seriously. You would be careful to say Malvinas instead of Falklands when you talked about it to Argentines. The U.S. policy position was one of these absolutely inconclusive, "Well we think the two parties should reach a mutually acceptable solution." That's like saying nothing, which is what we intended to do.

I've also got to talk about a change in ambassadors in Argentina. Lodge eventually left under great protest. He really didn't want to leave. He was replaced by Robert Hill. A businessman, and now I can't remember from where. I also didn't describe the social life of the embassy under Lodge. It was quite extraordinary in terms of receptions. One of the first receptions I went to, I was told I had to help the ambassador in the reception line. The ambassador was famous for picking fairly tall people and having them stand near him in the line and ask everybody's name, then introduce them to the ambassador. Kind of a major doom kind of job. I was exceedingly uncomfortable doing that.

I also remember being the control officer for a visit by two astronauts. That's a wonderful term we use in the foreign service - control officer. I actually tried to get rid of the term in San Salvador, with no success. I always figured that the VIPs you are taking care of don't really like the idea of being "controlled" and would find that fairly objectionable. I always thought "liaison" might be a better term. Anyway, I was the person for a visit by the astronauts Jim Lovell and Deke Slayton. Lovell had been the Apollo 13 commander, and Slayton was the ex test pilot astronaut's astronaut who had missed a moon mission due to a heart murmur. We had a great time taking them around to air bases and meeting all sorts of people. Somehow they had left for Santiago, but got turned around and had to come back. I don't remember why, but Keiko and I ended up being invited to the upstairs dining room at the residence with the Lodges and the astronauts and their wives. It was an absolutely wonderful evening. Lodge, undeterred by the presence of two astronauts, monopolized much of the conversation. But he was a very charming and funny person, and interesting when reminiscing about politics. The funniest moment, though, was when Jim Lovell was describing the Apollo 13 mission, and talking about the disaster of the onboard explosion. When Lovell talked about having to turn the ship around on the other side of the moon, Lodge said, "Well, I don't know how you would do that, because that thing doesn't have a rudder on it." Lovell, using a model of the spacecraft, explained how the little jets on the module would turn the whole thing. Lodge did not seem convinced. Then they got all the way around the moon and they were back into getting ready to reenter the atmosphere, and Lovell was explaining how they had achieved the right angle to come in so they wouldn't skip off or burn up. Talking about how they had to orient the craft by looking at stars, and damned if Lodge didn't ask the same question again, "Well, how do you steer that thing? It doesn't have a rudder on it."

Q: Was there a change when Hill came in?

DIETERICH: Yes, he wasn't nearly as flamboyant and didn't speak the beautiful Spanish that Lodge spoke. Lodge was really good in Spanish. Sometimes you wished he didn't speak as good Spanish as he did, because you couldn't always be sure he would say the right things.

Needless to say, things changed quite a bit with Hill. But I wasn't there very long after he came.

Q: Well, let's go to Sao Paulo, 1974 to when?

DIETERICH: That was 1974 to 1977.

Q: What was Sao Paulo like when you arrived there?

DIETERICH: Sao Paulo is, and was, one of the biggest cities in the world. It is a really big, tough, and smart city. It is part of the southern cone phenomenon, the result of a huge amount of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Italians, Spaniards, Portuguesall sorts of folks plus about a million ethnic Japanese. Most of these people started down on the farm, but many now live in the big city and are lawyers and doctors. Sao Paulo is the industrial center of Brazil, almost to an embarrassing extent. You have the very underdeveloped northeast, tropical, with a heavy population of poor folks of African originbasically people brought as slaves to Brazil. Brazil abolished slavery even later than the United States did. Rio in the center; Great port, great entrepot, great international city.

But Sao Paulo state is traditionally where most of industrialized work gets done. Again, part of that Europeanized southern portion of Brazil. A lot of Japanese, huge number of Germans and Yugoslavs. Curitiba, to the South of Sao Paulo, is the only city I have ever been in Latin America where you can go in the airport and your luggage may be carried by some person that looks like he came out of a Breugel painting. A rather successful part of Latin America. High standards of living, high per capita income, a lot of money to be made, a lot of progress, a lot of big buildings, a lot of big newspapers. And then you have Brasilia, way off in the middle of nowhere, as the capital of the country.

As the Brazilian body politic, trying to center itself in Brasilia, worries about the overwhelming power of Sao Paulo state, I had the feeling that occasionally the American Embassy and USIS in Brasilia worried about the overwhelming power of the Consulate General in Sao Paulo where most of the money and most of the national press was.

Q: Well, it is a place where we have often assigned a consulate general there and then he became an ambassador elsewhere. I've been reading a book about the Brazilians, and it says that Sao Paulo is a business city, that there are no marks of cultural interest or beauty there.

DIETERICH: It's written by somebody from Rio, no doubt. We live in an unjust world. Anybody who has spent time in the third world has gotten very used to being patient with "Well, we don't have a lot of material progress here, but we have strong spiritual, esthetic, and intellectual values. The notion is, there is a bargain somehow. You can have one or the other but you can't have both. The cruel truth, which nobody wants to say, because it's so damned mean, is that, "Yes, you can have both." The truth is they usually go together. The fact is that Sao Paulo has most of the industry in Brazil; it has most of the money in Brazil; it also has the best art museums in Brazil; it also has the best orchestras in Brazil; it also has the best universities in Brazil. Too bad that isn't fair, but it is true. The Sao Paulo art museum is really very good. The symphony, and I've spent a lot of time with symphony orchestras and operas, is not quite as good as Buenos Aires, but they do quite well. Rio is an absolutely delightful city, and I enjoyed every minute I spent there, but it is a city where it is fun to play, but Sao Paulo, in terms of the substance of work, is a much more interesting place.

Q: Who was the consul general when you were there?

DIETERICH: Fred Chapin. Do you know Fred?

Q: No, I know of him.

DIETERICH: Fred died about two years ago. He had cancer. He was a good consul general and a good friend. The political counselor was Tony Freeman, who I had known in Bolivia. He eventually become the State Department's labor advisor, and now represents the ILO (International Labor Organization) here in Washington. The BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer, chief of any non capitol city USIS post) was Don Mathes. My duties expanded because there were now only about five officers at post. USIS posts were still pretty big in those days. There was a BPAO, an IO (Information Officer), and a CAO (cultural Affairs Officer), and a couple of assistant CAOs to help with educational exchange and things like that. I had the full range of press activities, meaning that whatever had to be done with radio, whatever had to be done with television, plus the printed press, plus minor spokesman's duties at times, was my job. The consulate was supposed to keep its public mouth shut and leave that sort of adult work to the embassy. That in itself presented a problem, because the papers that asked the questions weren't in Brasilia, they were in Sao Paulo, and to some extent in Rio. Again, I was lucky to make some good contacts early, at a couple of the papers that really counted. I continued to work along the lines that had worked well for me in Buenos Aires, and that was to work with the big, weighty, elite press. That was where the audience was that had any impact on decisions involving U.S. foreign policy. Right away I was introduced to a person named Rui Placido Barbosa, who was a young journalist, sort of chief of staff to Rui Mesquita, who was the owner and publisher of the Estado de Sao Paulo. Estado de Sao Paulo is probably the biggest, toughest, smartest newspaper in Brazil. Often known as Estadao, the big Estado, it was a newspaper, like La Prensa in Argentina, that had established its own milestones in the battle against censorship.

Q: How far were we into the military government at this point?

DIETERICH: About ten years. I think it started about '63 or '64. It was a well entrenched military government and we were into a period of heavy censorship of the press. The initial deal the military offered Estado was "We trust you persons to practice self censorship." Estado replied: "No way, we will not censor ourselves. However, we have to think of the practicalities of publishing a newspaper. We suggest that you appoint censors and we will make room for them in our newsroom. That way you can do what you have to do even though we don't like it, but we can still publish a timely newspaper." It was a very clever scheme because every time any even slightly important foreigner would visit the paper, the publishers would take them to the newsroom and say, "Here is our so and so editor and here is our censor. Stand up and say hello." They also developed a wonderful way of pointing out when they had been cut. When a censor would cut something out, they would publish in its place a few quatrains of Camoes Lusiadas, a classic of Portuguese literature. That is about like producing a few verses of Paradise Lost on the front page of your newspaper. It would look nutty. But there it was, and it was Estados' way of fighting back and saying, "There was something here you weren't supposed to read so you can read poetry instead." Estado kept chipping away at censorship and the censors, and finally, on some anniversary or another of the paper's, the government said that, as a gift to Estado, they were going to remove their censors. Estado and the Mesquita family basically won their battle against censorship. It was a great victory, and they won it by being smart. They had a sense of humor and a sense of irony. Nobody went to jail.

Q: What about the rest of the press?

DIETERICH: There was a very good number two paper called Folha. It was a good second paper. In most capitals of Latin America it would have been a good first paper. There was a Time Magazine style magazine called Veja, which was extremely good. They were equal to most European papers, and I think better than many European papers.

Estado for example, took great pride in publishing the State of the Union address of the American President, in Portuguese, at the same time that it was published in the United States. This required strenuous efforts on the part of my office. This was in the days when we were still operating on teletypes. We had to set up a system of actually taking it off section by section, four or five pages at a time, and motorcycling it to the Estado offices where their team of translators would go to work on it. They really did publish it the next morning in Portuguese. It was a great accomplishment, and illustrated Estado's commitment to covering the United States. Estado did maintain a permanent correspondent in the United States, a person that would come back to Brazil every now and then. Estado was also interested in some of the copyrighted articles that I had.

The main trick to working with them was speed. Speed was hard in those days. There was no system to get the information to us quickly, we were still operating on a 24 hour turnover cycle, but that wasn't good enough in Sao Paulo. You couldn't have 24 hour delay and be relevant, except of course in feature articles. We worked hard to get various papers the best stuff we could, and we worked hard to answer questions. Again, the game was to get them to call us up. When someone was working on a story, and had a question about the United States they didn't have the answer to - call us up. I had some fights with Brasilia over this, whether I had to go through them to get to the United States to answer a question. Brasilia would tap dance over the issue, but they finally recognized that I had to move fast and get information quickly if we were to have any influence. I think in terms of influencing the press, which was my job, I think it was a fairly successful time in Brazil. I stayed in Brazil three years.

Big political issues? You're not supposed to have big political issues when you're in a consulate general. Nuclear proliferation issues were up. There were concerns about nuclear reprocessing plants in Brazil. Drug issues were about to come up.

Q: I have a feeling the military rulers at that time would go off on tangents of trying to build fairly impressive things.

DIETERICH: Yes, I guess so, but of course the most impressive project of all was Brasilia, initiated under a civilian government. But, I suppose Brazil's biggest developmental dream of all was the Amazon, and you could already see the rising tensions between the desire to develop the Amazon and the desire to protect the Amazon as well as all the problems of the treatment of native people in the Amazon region. Those were very tough issues, and they are still around. They are not going to go away quickly.

Speaking of the impact of communications technology, I remember seeing a televised ceremony where the leader of a tribal group in the Amazon was meeting with a Brazilian official. They were talking about treaties and other things. What caught my attention that the tribal leader had a tape recorder over his shoulder. He was going to take the talks back with him in a way that would have a different impact than in the past.

Q: What was the attitude, where you were, towards the United States? Again, this book I'm reading said there was a certain amount of paranoia that there was an American plot to take over large parts of Brazil.

DIETERICH: I never heard that stuff. I suppose there are people who believe that on the fringes, but they are not the people I dealt with. Maybe they are the people I should have been dealing with. It's black helicopter stuff.

Q: We're talking about people in the United States who think that somehow the United Nations is going to come in with black helicopters and do Americans dirty. These are the survivalists and gun freaks in 1999 America.

DIETERICH: That's right, and I'm sure there are Brazilians who believe these things, that the United States has these great nefarious designs, but not anybody I ever talked to.

Q: Did anybody pay much attention to the United States - was it a subject of conversation?

DIETERICH: Absolutely, sure, but the Brazilian attitude toward the United States, I think, is much different from the attitude in the Spanish speaking countries of Latin America. Spanish speaking countries were more subject to dependency theories, even Argentina. You know, the litany that goes, "Oh, the United States is going to dominate us no matter what, and if we are poor and underdeveloped it is because they did it to us." All this kind of theory that is really out of fashion now. Brazilians never really thought that way. Brazilians see themselves in a different league. They are in the Indonesia, India league of emerging nations that are going to be something in the future. They do believe that about themselves. They see themselves as a big country and like the United States in some ways. They look somewhat with condescension on the Spanish speaking countries. It's almost an attitude that says, "Well, we Brazilians and you Americans, we really do have to keep an eye on these banana republics around us, but they are nothing we have to worry about too much, and we should have our own relationship."

Brazil runs hot and cold on whether it wants to be part of Latin America or not. There are two lines of thinking: One says, "We want to be part of Latin America but we are the center and the most important country and we really ought to run things." The other says, "No, no, we are in a different league, part of the emerging, big economies of the world, and that is where our future lies." That creates very different ways of thinking about the United States in Brazil. And Brazilians too, it is basically a very optimistic place, especially in southern Brazil.

Q: From time to time Brazil goes off on this inflation thing that sounds, from a distance anyway, incredible. Where were you on the inflation thing?

DIETERICH: The economy was running pretty well. The cruzeiro at that time was doing okay. Well, it was inflating somewhat. You didn't have a sense of economic crisis, but you did have a sense of poverty. One of the problems with Sao Paulo being where all the money is, is that it is also a magnet for people from the impoverished Northeast who are desperate for work and education. Part of the Brazilian government's answer to that over the years has been taxation schemes that try to encourage industries to locate elsewhere, presumable nearer all those people who need work...

Q: How was the military government viewed at this time? We have been accused of being too friendly with military governments in Latin America. How did this translate?

DIETERICH: We were friendly with military governments for two reasons: they were the powers that be, and they were anti Communist. You can't underestimate the extent to which anti communism motivated U.S. policy through the '70s. There were also a lot of nice middle class, liberal people with whom we were willing to work, spend a lot of time with, and liked, who were trying to democratize governments in Latin America. On balance we probably preferred democracies to military dictatorships. We certainly, however, preferred military dictatorships to the swing of the pendulum in the other direction. That was the one thing we were not willing to risk and would fight against. Democracy took a back seat.

Q: Did we see a threat from the left at that time?

DIETERICH: Well, I didn't see a particular threat from the left, but there were a lot of people who did and I suppose some of those people were in our embassy in Brasilia. Estado Sao Paulo was a very anti Communist newspaper. There were revelations not long ago that at one time the CIA was paying Estado de Sao Paulo to run anti Communist editorials. Maybe they were, but if so the agency was wasting its money. That's like paying a bear to defecate in the woods. Estado was going to run anti Communist editorials no matter what.

We did make our alliances, both personal and political, with folks of a conservative caste. And those people made their alliances with us. There were a lot of nice, well off, well educated, comfortable people in Latin America who were absolutely proud of their ties to the United States. But part of that bargain was that we were seen as the bulwark against having all their stuff taken away from them, or their parties crashed, by a bunch of disgruntled workers and campesinos. That was a role with which we had grown way too comfortable.

When during the seventieespecially during the Carter administratiothat traditional alliance between U.S. policy and wealthy conservatives began to weaken, they really missed us. And they were really mad at us. They felt betrayed. I ran into this even in Bolivia. Actually, all through Latin American conservative circles there is a sense of betrayal from two places. They feel they were betrayed by the United States, and they were betrayed by the Catholic Church. Both were supposed to help protect their stuff, and both failed them.

Q: We're talking about '74 to '77. Were you, as a member of the consulate general's team, aware of what the Catholic Church was doinliberation theology? Were we seeing the Catholic Church as a different instrument than it had been before?

DIETERICH: Yes, but we weren't quite sure what to make of it because it was a little hard to spot in Brazil. Liberation theology in Brazieverything gets blurred in Braziand if we look to the Catholic Church in its martyred form, it was in Recife I guess. But Helder Camara was such a reasonable voice for a responsible, social political role for the church. People in the embassy who knew anything about him thought he was pretty good. They thought he was a reasonable person.

And remember that in 1977, with the election of Carter, we had a new administration, a different kind of administration. We suddenly had a human rights policy. Some people in the American Foreign Service establishment were pedaling pretty hard to catch up at that point.

Q: How about terrorism, was that a threat?

DIETERICH: Not a big issue, as I remember in Brazil. Terrorism, in the sense of bombings, has never been a big issue there. Kidnaping, and the death squad phenomenon that was invented in Brazil. One of the first high profile kidnapings was our Ambassador Elbrick in Brazil. But those were not big issues in Brazil when I was there. I mentioned the drug issue before.

Q: Yes, what about that?

DIETERICH: Well, that goes back a distressingly long way. In Brazil, I began as the USIS information officer, working with the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency). That was the first time I was at a post that had a DEA presence. Brazil was not a producer country, and not a real big consumer country, but a big transit point. If you think about western Brazil, that's a big outback out there, and there are all sorts of ways to move drugs through that area. We were beginning to put together information programs that basically tried to say "Hey, if you are a producer or transit country, you are going to become users. Don't kid yourself, because you cannot have this stuff in your country and not end up with a drug problem similar to the one we have. All that money sloshing around in your political system is also dangerous." We are still trying to send those same messages, and they are still not working very well, but they are good messages and should make sense.

Q: There was a killing of an American military officer who was studying Portuguese in Sao Paulo. Was that on your watch?

DIETERICH: Not on my watch, no.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the Governor of Sao Paulo?

DIETERICH: Sure, I can remember meeting him, but I can't remember his name now. Again, I would sit in on meetings and we would talk a lot about politics. Occasionally, Tony Freeman and I would share a lunch with somebody we both wanted to talk to. Basically, my concern was reporting the United States to Brazil. I didn't feel a great obligation to spend a lot of time with politicians either, to tell you the truth. Some USIS officers would disagree with that. They think the function of an information officer is to communicate directly with people. I didn't mind doing that, but it seemed more efficient to be able to communicate through the press, and much more credible. And also through television.

Q: Television was also on your docket by this time?

DIETERICH: Yes, it was, but we were not really into the satellite era, so we were in an awkward stage of having film materials arrivthat were usually too late to be of much usand that was handled through Rio. They had more active television programming because Globo, the big Brazilian conglomerate was up there. My counterpart in Rio, Jeff Biggs, did some good work in television. Again, the relationship I was trying to cultivate was getting them to ask questions and trying to get fast answers. It seemed to me that who you had to know in the newsroom was not necessarily the person they told you had to know. You had to figure out who was the person they asked when they had a question about the United States. That was the person you had to know. You had to get him to say, "Well, I don't know, but maybe the person over at the American Consulate knows.

Q: We've straddled it a bit between Argentina and Brazil, but one of the most difficult stories in any country, to translate, would have been Watergate and the fall of Nixon. I thought you would have had a multitude of questions.

DIETERICH: I've glossed over that. I was in Washington when Nixon resigned. I mentioned that when they decided to send me to Sao Paulo, Keiko went back to Argentina to pack us out, but I went to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) to take the transition course from Spanish to Portuguese.

I happened to have gone out to visit a friend in the Voice of America newsroom on the day that it happened. I would like to report there was great solemnity in the Voice of America newsroom when Nixon finally made his speech, but you have to remember that the Voice of America prides itself on its independence as a journalistic identity, and the Voice of America also felt they had particularly been victimized by the Nixon White House. There may have been about fifteen seconds of solemnity followed by cheers, some ruder noises and a sense of "we're glad your gone, you rascal you."

I think a lot of people in Brazil thought Watergate was sort of nutty. In a way they weren't really interested in it. It seemed like an American feud, and I think a lot of Latin Americans were slow to pick up on how important it was. I think they thought it would blow over. I think a lot of Brazilians did have a "so what" attitude. One sector that did pay attention, however, was the press itself. For publishers, like the Mesquitas of Estado, the Washington Post's role was a fascinating example of the power of a big, privately owned daily. For working stiff journalists it was an invigorating insight into the power of investigative journalism. Watergate boosted the prestige of American journalism way high, and a generation of younger journalists lived on Woodward and Bernstein fantasies.

A lot of foreign service Americans were very confused by Watergate. When I was still in Argentina, I remember some very strong arguments within the embassy. Once at some kind of an in house party some place, I remember a colleague saying, "Well, you can't just have the president impeached. Who would run the country?" Unable to think of anything smarter, I said, "The country would be run by a bunch of people" to which he replied, "You can't have the government run by a bunch of people." So much for poor old Abe Lincoln.

As to how we tried to handle Watergate with the Brazilian public, there is an old unspoken USIS rule that says when the substance is really negative, talk about process. It's really a pretty good rule that worked well with Watergate. We went into considerable detail about the legal and procedural issues of the Watergate process. While the conservatives I mentioned beforthey really did love Nixowere further alienated from the U.S., political and academic folks in the center and to the left began to take a new look at the U.S. The power of the U.S. legislative branch and the press suggested ways to rid yourself of a bad government without resorting to revolutionary violence. They began to realize that the U.S. was much more complicated than the automatic anti communism to which they had grown accustomed.

Q: What about your wife, did she have any connection with the Japanese community?

DIETERICH: Yes, she did. We have always had a few Japanese friends everyplace we would go, even in Bolivia and some in Argentina, but it was particularly fun in Sao Paulo. There is a whole neighborhood calleLiberdadLibertwhich was a Japanese neighborhood in Sao Paulo full of Japanese restaurants and where you could go see a Japanese movie.

The movies were fun, because this was before VCRs really worked. We had them in USIS because USIA felcorrectlthat they were going to be important. But, they didn't work very well. They were the old reel to reel models, and USIA, always priding itself on being on the cutting edge of technology would ship us these machines, and we would try to make them work, but they would never work. USIA would suggest that we take it over to the offices of editors and play a press conference for them, but I think a lot of us in the field resisted because we lacked confidence in the machines. Imagine lugging the gear to a newspaper and them having it not work. I remember once we had a conference, all of USIS practically, in Rio, we got people from all over the country together to have the audio visual experts of USIS Brasilia, demonstrate what wonderful machines they were. They couldn't make them work either. The thing stopped working right in the middle of the demonstration. Anyway, we weren't into video tapes, so being able to go to a theater and see a Japanese movie was a wonderful break for Keiko.

Q: Did you see the Japanese community moving up into positions of influence?

DIETERICH: Oh, yes, absolutely. The minister of mines and energy in Brazil was ShigeakUeki, who was probably one of the most powerful Japanese in the world at one point. There was probably tension at times. I remember, when I was leaving, hearing a report that there was great concern at the University of San Paulo Medical School. They had discovered that 80% of their entering class was ethnic Japanese. If admissions are on merit, which they were, and you put Japanese in a studying contest with Brazilians, I can tell you who is going to win. Although one of my colleagues in San Paulo was a Japanese American, and one of the things I remember him saying about Brazilian Japanese was, "In the United States it takes two generations to ruin a good Japanese. In Brazil they do it in one generation."

More recently, there have been interesting stories out of Japan. After things began to turn downward in the Brazilian economy, and there were labor shortages in Japan, a lot of Brazilian Japanese returned to Japan. They found it difficult because most of them couldn't speak Japanese and they didn't really like Japanese stuff very well, either. They liked Brazilian stuff. There were some negative comments in the Japanese press about these noisy people and their strange music and stinky food.

Q: I think this would be a good time to stop. In '77 you left Brazil. Where did you go?

DIETERICH: I went back to Washington on loan to the State Department as the press representative for the ARE (Bureau of Inter American Affairs) Bureau of State.

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Q: Today is the first of December 1999. So in 1977 you went to ARA, American Affairs, is that right?

DIETERICH: Right. Inter American Affairs.

Q: Inter American Affairs. You were there from '77 to when?

DIETERICH: To '79. Just about an even two year tour.

Q: What were you doing?

DIETERICH: The main job was serving as the press representative for the bureau. It really consisted of getting there very early in the morning, working with my small staff and others to anticipate the questions that were apt to come up in Hodding Carter's noontime briefing. Remember, Carter was the one that instituted the notion of having the press briefing open to television, which made it a much different affair than it had been in the past.

Our job was to anticipate the questions, then either farm them out to others within the bureau to write a guidance, or to write the guidance ourselves, then to clear the guidance through whoever needed to clear it. A guidance was our term of art for a sort mini script for the spokesman which had been agreed to by the major elements of the Department interested in the question. This often turned out to be quite a job. I had a staff of three people besides myself but really only one other person who could write a guidance. You could anticipate six or seven questions, and work had to start before I got to the office by listening to as much news as you could absorb whill ate breakfast, took a shower, dressed and so on. Newspapers waited until I got to the office.

That part of the job made me aware of NPR (National Public Radio) in terms of agenda setting in Washington. I grew very dependent on it in terms of trying to anticipate the questions. It caused me to think a lot about the media and the fact that early morning radio news broadcasts in WashingtoNPR and to some extent WTOare the agenda setters. A lot of people were doing what I was doing, one way or another, including editors of newspapers and the editors of evening television broadcasts, and senior officials of the government. They were spending the first hour or so of their morning, including commuting time, listening to radio, and radio was telling them what stories were news for that day. That's power and influence.

So, we would arrive in the office early and come to as quick an agreement we could on what questions we could anticipate. The I would try to farm the questions out to the appropriate experts in the bureau, but I always had to leave time to get clearances. Clearance is another term of art. It means going to other concerned offices of the department with a written guidancthe answer to an anticipated questioand getting somebody, preferably a senior official, to sign indicating that office's agreement with the answer.

About 11:30, you had to be in front of Hodding Carter's desk with your guidances in hand, ready to turn them in and answer any questions any doubts he might have. Or if it was a really tough issue, to wait for him to make a few a calls around town, or to various assistant secretaries, or to White House spokesman Jody Powell, or whoever, to find out if it would really fly.

You had to get very good at figuring out who could be trusted to get you a guidance on time. Some people were good about it but others weren't. You quickly found that if you were dealing with a person that was slow in generating a guidance, you had to write it yourself and present him with a different, tougher transaction. It was basically, "If you don't come up with something, I'm going to go with this right here, as bad as it is." That often worked or at least scared slow writers into action. You would try to get it by 10:00 a.m. if you could, because you often had a lot of clearances to do. To put it in its baldest terms, when you were looking at issues that had to be cleared with Ambassador Terry Todman, the assistant secretary for Latin America, and Pat Derian, who was the assistant secretary for human rights, you realized you were going to be in a considerable negotiation. This would often require a couple of trips between the two offices to get it done. Needless to say, I got a lot of exercise. I spent a lot of time running up and down the halls of the Department.

Once the briefings were with the spokesman, most of the bureau press reps would attend the noon briefing. It wasn't required, but it seemed to me a good idea to get an real feel for how a particular guidance played. Besides, Hodding Carter's briefings were fun to watch. He had an actor's sense of how to play a particular question. Although I'm sure that the Department would prefer that all guidances be read word for nuanced word, the point is often better made with a paraphrase that sounds like it came from the spokesman's head. There are lots of ways to read a guidance. Tone of voice can signal what is really serious stuff and what is boiler plate we really don't care all that much about.

There were all kinds of journalists in the briefing ranging from the most seasoned big time pros through foreign correspondents just getting their feet on the ground to special interest pseudo journalists who used the briefing as way to attract attention to themselves and their various causes. I said various causes but probably should have said silly causes. There was a Lyndon LaRouche representative who kept trying to prove that the international drug trade was run by Queen Elizabeth, the second, I guess, not the first. There was another whose gig was to ferret out untruths told by the liberal media, by which he meant almost everybody in the business. These loons were treated with unfailing courtesy, which was the best way to put them down. Besides the were wasting the press' time as much or more than they were ours.

The briefing is a pretty good forum for professional gadflies. It not too hard to come with a questions for which there is no good answer. For example: "Does the U.S. have contingency plans for the invasion of Canada?" A yes answer might get you headlines saying "U.S. Prepares to Invade Canada," and a no answer could get "Administration Leaves U.S. Northern Border Unprotected." Once when faced with such a question regarding probably Nicaragua, I had told Hodding a dumb old dirty joke about the Pretzel Hold, a wrestling hold so twisted and ingenious that the only was the victim could escape was by biting his own privates. The term pretzel hold became a useful shorthand for a question we probably shouldn't answer.

By the way the answer to the Canada question is "We don't discuss our contingency plans." Trouble is, every now and then we do.

Q: We'll talk about issues in a minute. I've asked people the question from time to time, "You've served here and there and what was your impression about the bureaus?" One of the things that comes up quite often is that the European and Near Eastern Bureaus are both on top of things. But of them all, the American Republics Bureau usually ranks at the bottom because they didn't do their homework on time, or they didn't get things prepared. So when things got hot, they were usually ignored. I was wondering if you got any feel for the spirit of the place?

DIETERICH: I don't know. I didn't really see that, but then I can't compare since ARA was the only bureau I served in the Department. Part of what you describe may really be a reflection of the fairly low priority given to Latin America at the upper levels of the Department. We wait until there is a real flap and then try to apply quick, "magic bullet" solutions.

Anyway, maybe working with press issues is different. You are not dealing with questions where a person can very often or for very long say, "I just don't want to be bothered with it." You have to deal with it. And when you deal with other bureaus, especially the other geographic bureaus, they are under the same time pressures. Questions get answereor they don'but they don't wait around very long. What it does mean, thougand there may be something of what you mentioned in thiif a bureau is not in the habit of doing its homework or getting its policy positions nailed down before hand, the press guidance often becomes the policy document. That may not be the best way to make policy, even on minor issues, but I suppose its better than not making it at all.

Some of what a bureau press officer does in the afternoon is to research policy positions. Maybe you go to a briefing, as I usually did, and straightened out any little misunderstanding that happened to come up, then you spend the rest of the day talking to the press or the people in the bureau who may be working on longer range stories. Or dealing with questions that come from people other than the press. Or dealing with questions from the press that may be anticipated for the next day. Or trying to get a specialized factual answer for somebody.

Often you would get the question, "What is U.S. policy on X?" X usually meant some kind of an issue that wasn't really on the official front burner. Or maybe a human rights question that might be kind of peculiar or obscure. You grow conscious of the fact there is no golden book of policy someplace where you can go look these things up. Often you would end up going back to the basic texts like some old Biblical or Talmudic scholar. You would look at past press guidance, or past speeches or press conferences by secretaries or assistant secretaries, and so on to try and fathom what the policy was. It must be nice to do that now with computers and advanced search techniques. When I was doing it, it was leafing through guidances, speeches and other documents and racking your brain.

Q: I imagine you would have to get away from the easy tendency to make up your policy. But if you did that you could easily deviate from using "the" to "a", or something like that and you would begin to move away from what it really meant.

DIETERICH: That is a temptation. If you are dealing with the media, however, it is an easier temptation to avoid because the person asking the question often wanted a quote. When somebody in the media asks you a question, it is not out of idle intellectual curiosity. He has a hole in a story someplace that he is trying to fill. It was customary that bureau press representatives did not want to be quoted themselves. It was considered a discourtesy to the assistant secretary, and a discourtesy to the department spokesman, to have your name go out in front. Later on I'll deal with a situation where that broke down. Even if you sort of knew the answer, you felt you had to get back and get something that somebody had said on the record at some point.

Q: Jeff, we are talking about a process. Did you go to each country desk officer to try to get something?

DIETERICH: Often the procedure would start with the desk officer, although there were multilateral and other issues. I didn't go to the Panama desk for a Panama Canal issue, because that was during the Panama Canal Treaty negotiations. So I would go up to that office one floor above me, and I would talk to somebody up there, including Ambassador Bunker, to get the guidance. The average run of the mill issue would probably start at either the desk officer or the country director level. It depended on personal relationships, who you knew and who you thought could produce quickly. The time pressure was awful.

Q: You were making a quick and dirty judgment about who was going to do it, and those who couldn't produce were out of the loop.

DIETERICH: You had to get around them. The thing about people who can't produce, is they don't mind not being asked to produce. There were some issues where you would go straight to the deputy assistant secretary, and I don't know how to explain how you would sort those out. You would get a feeling for it. Some of the bigger issues you would feel the deputy assistant secretary would be the appropriate place to go, or you would go to the deputy assistant secretary and he or she would bring in the country director (title given to the head of a geographic office within ARA, e.g. Andean affairs, Central America and the Caribbean.)

Q: How about Hodding Carter? How did he use this, and what were his instincts and thrust drives and all?

DIETERICH: I think Hodding's instincts were very good. He was bright, had a good sense of humor, and had a good relationship with the press. He did a good job of working himself into the department bureaucracy. There is a dilemma when it comes around to naming a department press spokesman. You can go out and get a media person, which Hodding sort of was, and the press will be flattered and think that is a good thing. They think he will look out for their interests within the department. The trouble is that the department will see him as a journalist and will be very reserved. They won't trust him. On the other hand, you can appoint a good bureaucrat and the department will feel comfortable with him, but the press will be instinctively mistrustful. Both have been done, and both have worked well. But the person involved has to understand that he has homework to do. He has a job to do on the side of the equation from which he did not come. Hodding did that very well.

Q: I heard just yesterday, while interviewing Frances Cook, who had the job you had for African Affairs. She was with USIA, but she was saying that under the present administratioMadeleine Albrighthere is such tight control that the press feels constrained. Everything is controlled so there isn't much access to desk officers and the major networks have stopped sending their correspondents on a permanent basis. What was the feeling when you were there?

DIETERICH: Well, on the latter issue, the people who were covering the department at that time were fairly important journalists. We are talking about Bernie Kalb, Ted Koppel, and Bernie Gwertzman and a lot of well known people. Hodding had a good knack for handling guidance in a way that didn't sound "canned," and a lot of it is knowing how to do that. And some of spokesmanship may have to do with knowing when to do it. When to read it deadpan because you want the press to know it is just standard guidance and you aren't trying to make it more than it is. Then there are times when the slight pause, or the deliberate use of a word other than the one in the guidance, may be exactly the right touch to make it more convincing.

Q: You said that you would be talking to the press in the afternoons. How did that work?

DIETERICH: It would depend on all sorts of issues. If I had an issue where I thought we needed to ghow do I say thinot beyond the guidance, but where additional background maybe was necessary, and I knew who to asked the question in the briefing, I might give them a call and say "Let's talk about it a little more, because there is more background to this you may not have and that I can give you." Or often, I would be called. Bernie Kalb would call every now and then, and it was always the same conversation. "I don't know anything about Latin America, please tell me about it. Give me an idea of what is going on." So we would walk it through. Also, journalists would call with a question they planned to bring up in the next morning's briefing. That was almost always a welcome heads up. Occasionally, we would call a journalist and try to plant a question. It is not quite as sneaky as it sounds. In fact that is part of what a good press officer doetrying to engage the interest of journalists in an issue you would like to see get some exposure in the press. Sometimes that would take a considerable conversation. You also spent some time talking to your counterparts in other parts of the department or in other agencies. We all needed to know each other and know that we could make quick contact when an important guidance was involved. The trick was to make sure that your voice is well enough known over the phone so you can get through quickly. I also maintained my ties with USIA because I knew that was probably where my next assignment was coming from.

Q: Well, what about foreign correspondents?

DIETERICH: Sure, we also worked with them. The foreign wire services like Reuters, Agence France Presse, the Spanish EFE and the Italian ANSA were particularly important and were all used by the Latin American media. The major Latin American dailies as well as the big Mexican and Brazilian television networks also had permanent correspondents in Washington. It seemed to me that foreign correspondents were more apt to call my office than the American correspondents, especially if they were new. Many of them did attend the briefings and were treated courteously although they tended to be recognized for questions toward the end of the briefing.

Q: I would think you, as the ARA representative, would find yourself with a Brazilian correspondent who would want to know a lot about our stand on something that nobody else in the room knew about.

DIETERICH: That's why we got some of those questions where we had to go to old guidances and speeches to try and figure out an answer. As I mentioned the big papers, including the Brazilians, had correspondents in Washington. Estado de Sao Paulo sent my old friend Rui Placido Barbosa to be its Washington correspondent about the time I moved there. Since we knew each other already, it was a nice contact to have. The news magazine Visao as did the Globo television network also had people. I don't remember that the Brazilians were more prone to obscure questions than some of the others.

Q: I would think there would be a problem of being the contact person for people from Latin America, in that the news you would hear in the morning would probably not concern Latin America at all. Whereas, the Middle East and elsewhere, would have their own hemispheric interests so questions could more likely come out of the blue than they would from the standard journalists who were listening to the same broadcasts.

DIETERICH: Yes, I suppose that is true, and that takes me back to another afternoon activity, and that is trying to read as much cable traffic as you could cram into whatever time was left. Sometimes that would keep you until late at night. That was one of the ways you began to anticipate the questions that would come from journalists in various countries. Remember, some of the issues were big and global. For instance the Panama Canal was a big global issue that interested all of Latin America. Human rights issues interested all of Latin America, even when the particular issue was concentrated in Argentina. Other countries in the region were very interested. After all it was the Carter administration with a new policy that was as controversial in Latin America as it was in the United States.

Q: Well, Pat Derian had sort of focused on Argentina, and also some parts of Central America, too. Did you find a problem between the ARA line and the human rights line?

DIETERICH: Yes, but it was a problem of emphasis. The human rights policy survived into the Reagan administration and we are still making those reports. In some sense, nobody is against human rights. At least nobody wants to say it. But it is a huge question of emphasis and it becomes a kind of transaction by transaction analysis. In this issue, "What am I going to do or where am I going to put the emphasis?" It can get us into real contradictions at times. At some point during the Carter administration, we went to the Argentines and asked them to join us in some boycott of sales or something, but we got turned down cold. They said "You beat up on us everyday on human rights issues. What are you thinking of, coming down here and asking a favor." I think it was an agricultural boycott of some kind. Agricultural products, I think, and the Argentines make as much money out of that as we do. It is a big deal for them and they just said flat "no!" There really is a big contradiction in publicly flogging people up, calling into question the civilized values of their whole culture on the one hand and then asking them to do you a favor that is certainly not in their economic interest.

To go back to your question, in the first place, there is sort of an old fashioned instinct to protect at least some of the image of the country or region in which you served or will serve. Also, there is, I think, a kind of State Department instinct to follow the dictates of American policy written rather small. We tend to define our political, military and trade interests in rather short term, cash on the barrel head terms. That is the safer, down to earth approach that helps to mitigate the striped pants, cookie pushing image Americans impose on diplomacy. That tendency tended to come to the fore in the ARA Bureau, especially with Terry Todman, who is a conservative, traditional diplomat in many ways. I think he shares with a lot of folks, including myself, a great deal of pessimism about how much human rights behavior was going to be really improved in Latin America by us publicly trumpeting our disapproval. What I think is a very sound diplomatic instinct says you ought to deal with it privately before you deal with it publicly. That conflicted with the feeling of Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Pat Derian's bureathat dealing with it privately doesn't really do the job. You get polite treatment, but the people that are being mistreated don't get any better treatment. So it was a chore clearing those guidance(end of tape)

Q: You were saying it worked.

DIETERICH: And it worked because both sides were willing to compromise. Part of compromise, too, often in that kind of situation, is not dealing with the assistant secretary directly at the beginning. You figure out who at the deputy assistant secretary level has a bit more time to do it. In my case, Mark Schneider, who was the principal deputy assistant secretary at that time, was a good and reasonable negotiator who understood the value of softening the rhetoric every now and then in order to get the main message through. On the other side, ARA wasn't always necessarily opposed to the main message as long as it was stated courteously.

Q: Did you find as you were dealing with this, that there was a basic problem in the area where you were, because at this point it was getting ready to change rather quickly, but hadn't yet? The majority of the governments in ARA were run by military dictatorships. This must have caused a certain amount of disquiet and disdain within the system didn't it?

DIETERICH: I don't think that professionals working in the Latin American area felt disdain for the people running most of the countries they dealt with, nor did the people working in the Middle East Bureau feel disdain for the people they dealt with. There were of course some exceptions, especially in Central America. Disdain is something you feel when you don't know somebody. When you do know them, you begin to see subtleties and nuances and the possibility of improvement. Virtually all the countries of Latin American area still call themselves "republics" and they all pay a certain sort of lip service to democracy. "Well, we are not ready yet, but we're going to go there."

If I have one political secret to reveal out of this, and one piece of advice to anybody, it is this: Be very careful of your cover story, because it is probably going to become true. For example, U.S. policy in Central America during the Reagan period. It was pure anti communism in the old style during the first Reagan administration. Support for democracy was the cover story. When you get to the second part of the Reagan administration and the Bush administration, it really was a program of promoting democracy in those countries, often at the expense of some of our old fashioned strategic interests. If you are dealing with clever people on the other side, they will make you continually repeat the story, then count on the press and your own people, and all sorts of other folks to beat you into actually doing it. Be careful of your cover story.

The corollary of that is that when somebody is saying things you like, even when you know they aren't true, it is not in your interest to say, "Why, you hypocrite, you don't believe that and I don't believe you and you should quit saying it." The wiser tactic is to say, "What was that you said?" Make them keep saying it. The insistence of Latin Americans of always paying lip service to democracy had a lot to do with finally making them democratic. Their own citizens kept saying, "Hey, where is this democracy you've been talking about? Lets try some of that." You could develop disdain for Somoza, partly because he was cruel, but also because he was stupid. The thing about military dictatorships is they tend to get more stupid. We talk about military strong men but the fact is that military dictatorships are very rarely strong, and especially when it comes to any kind of innovation. They don't have parliaments, assemblies, and a free press. They have no mechanism to test their ideas. What they are always worried about are the persons behind them who want their job. This tends to make them conservative and they don't try anything new.

I don't think many of us ever felt like dealing contemptuously with the governments we had to deal with. That is not a creative or professional way to behave. Latin Americans are nice folks who speak a language that is easy for us to learn. They are part of a culture that is well represented here in the U.S. That makes us think we can deal with them on a basis of some shared values.

I think that drove a lot of the human rights people nuts in a way. In a way they wanted us, in some ways, to treat them with contempt. We really do share some things in common with Latin America. Part of it is a sort of frontier tradition. We are all "new world" folks and there are certain values that flow from the immigrant/pioneer experience that are common to Anglo and Latin Americans. Latin Americans would often complain during that human rights period, "Why do you beat up on us so much more on human rights than you do other countries?" The official answer was, "We are an equal opportunity bully. We beat up on everybody." The fact is, we did beat up on Latin America in some ways harder and I think some of it has to do with a certain amount of racism and prejudice on our own part. You know the old clich?s: "Human life is cheap in Asia and Africans are hopelessly underdeveloped. You can't expect much from them." At the same time we believed we ought to expect more from those Catholic Christian, European language speaking Latin Americans. They ought to know better, those countries that call themselves republics, where towns have the same names as some towns in this country and people go to church on Sunday. In short, we thought Latin Americans ought to know better; we weren't so sure about Asia and Africa.

I often tried that explanation with Latin Americans journalists, because I could end the conversation with "would you want it any differently?" We were basically saying to them "Yes, we beat up on you more because we expect more from you. Should we expect less?" And the answer was usually "no."

Q: What were the issues during the '77 to '79 period in Latin America, that caused you to stay up at night particularly?

DIETERICH: I won't remember them all. The basic overriding issue was the steady deterioration of authoritarian regimes, the beginnings of a transition toward democracy. The situation was already pretty bad in Central America. Somoza fell and the Sandinistas took over in Nicaragua. El Salvador was becoming more and more repressive. Panama was trying, not always successfully, to behave well because of pending ratification of the canal treaty. You had a deteriorating human rights situation in Argentina and Chile. We had just opened the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, which meant we had to contend with considerable hostility from the Cuban exiles in Florida and New Jersey and considerable opposition in the Senate. Mexico and our common border always require attention, and we were not helped by President Carter's famous "Montezuma's revenge" gaffe.

Q: I was going to say Mexico is different.

DIETERICH: Mexico is different. Not only because it borders the United States. I'm trying to remember which issues engaged us more and it was probably the paraquet issue. Paraquet was a herbicide and we were helping the Mexicans get it and urging them to spray marijuana crops in Mexico. There was concern that the leaves that had been sprayed with paraquet would be processed and sold in the United States, and because they were contaminated with paraquet they were dangerous to the health of marijuana smokers in the United States. The U.S. and Mexican governments were taking a lot of damage in the press and the Mexicans were saying, "You persons asked us to do that. All it gets us is problems. Can't you do something to make your press stop beating up on us?"

Brazil is was another big issue country where, instead of dealing with the fate of a nation, you are dealing with a bunch of practical problems that have to do with two countries working together. We were very concerned about issues of nuclear proliferation and the reprocessing of uranium in Brazil at that time. Also, we were watching a military dictatorship that was running out of steam and you knew a transition had to come and as much as you welcome transitions, you have to know when you look at a place like Nicaragua how dangerous they can be. You try to imagine something as awful as what was happening in Nicaragua happening on a large scale in a country like Argentina and Brazil, and you are talking about a very serious problem.

There were also small bore Latin American issues, which don't keep anyway up at night, but need to be handled with some carArgentina and Chile's squabble over the Beagle Channel islands, Bolivia's claims to access to the Pacific, Ecuador's border dispute with Peru, not to mention the hardy perennials like Haiti's poverty and the desire of Cubans to get the hell out of Cuba. There were also single country issues that didn't even get mentioned in the U.S. press, but could raise hell in a particular country. For example, the U.S. has a strategic reserve of tin it collected during the second world war. Every now and then somebody in GSA (the U.S. General Services Administration) decides the reserve is too big and we need to sell some of it. When we do that world tin prices are depressed and Bolivia takes the loss. In La Paz, its a serious issue and rightly so. It does seem kind of ironic that we would do that to a country that was a major recipient of U.S. AID funds.

We had a horrible situation in Chile which was in a way symbolized by the Letelier Moffat case, which of course involved, not only our concerns about where Chile was going, but some very solid American interests about what kind of crimes can be committed in our nation's capital.

Q: Yow, right up in Sheridan Circle.

DIETERICH: Yes, I guess it's Sheridan. It is the first circle after Dupont Circle on Massachusetts Avenue. Orlando Letelier and his assistant Ronnie Moffat were killed practically in front of the Chilean Embassy.

Q: A car bomb.

DIETERICH: Well, a bomb killed them in their car. During my time in ARA our basic goal was to get the Chileans to cough up the perpetrators. We wanted them here in the United States to answer for a murder committed in the United States. Chile of course wanted to hold us off by saying they would take care of it all in Chile without of course doing anything. That line played pretty well in Chile by wrapping it in the flag as a question of national sovereignty. The Chilean government was of course protecting the perpetrators for obvious reasons. I don't remember this as a particularly hard issue to handle in terms of generating press guidance. Our position was pretty clear and, leaving aside the fact that it wasn't working, nobody in the State Department or the Department of Justice had any particular quarrel with what we were saying.

I remember another murder as being much more difficult to handle. That was the Horman case. Charles Horman was a young man who was in Chile as a freelance writer, and was killed in the anti Allende coup. It became a movie - Costa Gavras' Missing - with Jack Lemon playing Charles Horman's father. Charles Horman's father was well known throughout the bureau. He and Horman's widow are still trying to find out what happened to his son. It's a heartbreaking thing to be with a father who has lost a son, but there weren't any good definitive answers to this as to how and why. There were a lot of journalistic versions flying around about trips to Valparaiso, secret naval installations, CIA involvement, and all sorts of other stuff that was not particularly convincing. Most of it came from people intent on demonizing Pinochet or the CIA or both. I don't have any particular objection to demonizing Pinochet, but the stuff just wasn't very convincing and tended to make poor young Horman look more important than he really was.

We knew pretty well how he was killed in a stadium where prisoners were being held, but we really don't know very much about why he was killed. That's sad, because families want to know. I guess that's what we have come to call closure. Families also want to believe that a loved one died for some reason, preferably some noble cause. All of us prefer heroes to mere victims. Almost all the versions that still circulate maintain Horman was killed because he had uncovered some dark truth about Pinochet or U.S. involvement. Well the truth about Pinochet was pretty dark and everybody knew it. Stories of U.S. involvement still suffer from chronic exaggeration. The family's understandable desire to believe Charles died for a greater cause played into the political agenda of people out to get Pinochet or the CIA, or both.

In a sense we all want to give some meaningful significance to the loss of a young man. I notice that now when the story shows up in the press Charles Horman is referred to as a journalist. That is something of a promotion. I don't remember anybody calling him a journalist at the time I'm talking about.. He was a young man like many others, excited by seventies politics and Salvador Allende's Chile, who wanted a role. I suppose he was indeed trying to establish himself as a freelance writer. Nothing wrong with that except that he was living in an extremely dangerous environment. Unfortunately, even in the most dramatic circumstances people still die for banal reasons - a wrong word, a fit of nerves or bad temper, or just plain human cruelty. Somebody says the wrong thing and somebody else pulls the trigger. Somebody doesn't like foreigners assuming a role in a national drama or just doesn't like Americans. I don't know.

Q: Cuba, did the Mariel thing happen on your watch?

DIETERICH: Yes, it did in 1980. Cuban issues are really hard. Well, the first big thing that happened in our relations with Cuba was the opening of the Interests Section. The Carter administration were the ones that took the first step toward the beginning of a restoration of relations with Cuba. The coordinator for Cuban affairs had the office next door to mine. That was Wayne Smith, who was an old friend from the embassy in Argentina. You quickly learned to be very wary of the Cuban American National Foundation because they thought the opening of an Interests Section was a terrible idea and they were afraid it might lead exactly where the Carter administration wanted it to go. That led to the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) getting together with a lot of other like minded folks and to the establishment of radio of Radio Marti.

Q: Was that during your time?

DIETERICH: Not during my time in ARA. It took a while for the CANF and its allies to bring it off. Radio Marti was finally authorized by President Reagan through an executive order in 1983 and began broadcasting in May of 1985. But Radio Marti was a very interesting phenomenon because its motivations were, to my mind, mischievous. I think the tactic of the Cuba lobby when dealing with a new administrations of either party is basically this: It gathers its forces to engineer a hostile legislative or administrative act, an action of considerable hostility, that would make an administration look silly if it were to begin some kind of positive engagement with Cuba. It is a way of getting a new administration to commit itself to a continuation of the embargo and the general isolation oCuba. Radio Marti was the first act of hostile legislation. The second one during the Bush administration was TV Marti. And for the Clinton administration it was the Helms Burton Act. They were all done for the same purpose - to set the tone, to commit an administration to a strong anti Castro stand.

The effect of the three acts in Cuba was quite different. Radio Marti turned out to be pretty good, at least for a while. I visited Cuba - in 1988 I think - when I was USIA's Latin America area director. I remember meeting with two young journalists from Prensa Latina, the Cuban wire service, who told me that because of Radio Marti they had a much freer hand than before in reporting the news. TV Marti, on the other hand, was a joke. I'm no technician, but there is a big difference between radio and TV signals - radio signals can sort of be muscled through with transmitter power, but TV signals are complicated and delicate. We simply could not get a watchable signal through to Cuba. We even tried transmitting from tethered balloons in the Florida keys. We called them "aerostats" so it wouldn't sound as silly as it really was. To understand how Helms Burton has really worked, you have to go back forty years to the original embargo. The embargo was based partially on the notion that if the U.S. didn't do something, or sell or provide something, nobody else would either. That is of course nonsense. Helms Burton was an attempt to enforce Cuba's isolation by sanctioning other nations who did business with Cuba. All it has done is annoy our allies and, so far as Cuba policy is concerned, isolate the United States.

Well, I've gotten way ahead of myself, but that's the way the Cuban American National Foundation has worked in the past. Whether they will continue in the same way is hard to tell. With the passing of Jorge Mas Canosa, the Foundation doesn't seem to be quite what it used to be.

Q: Like all these things, the old guard is dying off.

DIETERICH: Again, clearing a press guidance on any Cuban issue was a very delicate matter.

Q: Was there a Mr. Cuba? Was it Wayne Smith?

DIETERICH: Yes, and everybody knew where Wayne's sympathies were, but he was a smart enough operator to know it was not good to get up and get the assistant secretary and Hodding Carter in a heap of trouble by saying something stupid. So we were very careful.

Q: Were you all able to identify any members of the press corps who were asking questions to cause trouble?

DIETERICH: Oh yes, but not very many. There was a person named Les Kinsolving, who was with a group called Accuracy in Media, which was basically a right wing organization that pretended to be very interested in the media, and who liked to badger Hodding with all sorts of silly questions during the briefing. But he didn't pay much attention to Latin America. There were a couple of others, but we didn't have much of that. There was the person from Vision magazine.

Q: Vision came out of where?

DIETERICH: I'm trying to remember. I think by that time it was being published out of Miami, but I'm not sure. It was a good Spanish language Time clone. now which country it came from at that time. Their correspondent liked to trip up a spokesman every now and then, either me or Hodding. But provocative questions are not designed so much to cause trouble as provoke an interesting quote to fill a hole, or at least dull spot, in a story.

I found most journalists to be pretty serious persons who were trying to do a job. They liked to get into print. Remember, often among the Americans, these were State Department correspondents, not regional correspondents. The regional persons, of course, wanted the stories to go in their papers. They would ask me to dig out a quote from some place and it would be published in some paper in Quito or wherever, and I wouldn't know about it. Somebody would send me a clipping about it later. Another thing that would happen to me in the afternoon would be PAOs and political counselors and people from embassies calling me and saying, "What the hell did you say about my country today?" I tried like hell to get the bureau to authorize us to at least send press guidances out as cables. I could never bring it off.

Q: Why was there resistance?

DIETERICH: People would say, "No, those are for our use, and we don't know if they will use them the right way if you send them out there. And what if they are not used?" All these arguments were nonsense. Eventually, of course, the Department finally started sending them, but well after my time. Now it doesn't make any difference because anybody in the world who wants to watch the State Department briefing can do so. If you are in an embassy now, the problem is finding the time to do it.

Q: Did you mention earlier that there was a time when you got too far off on saying something?

DIETERICH: Oh, yes, I don't know whether you want to get into that or not.

Q: Oh, yes, let's hear it.

DIETERICH: That was in the Jonestown, Guyana thing, which was a big story. Well, all right, we can get into Jonestown. I remember it better than anything else I did, because it was the biggest, most awful thing that happened on that job.

Q: I have a long interview with Richard Dyer, who was the DCM and who was wounderight in the butt. He is now dead. It's here.

DIETERICH: I remember that. I would love to see it sometime. Well, to put it into context, I had been out sailing and had a great day on the Potomac. I used to keep a boat at the Gangplank Marina. I had come back tired, taken a shower, and was getting ready to have supper, I guess. I got a call saying, "We think a congressman has been shot in Guyana. We don't have many details, but you better come in." After making a few other calls, I decided I had better call Tom Reston. Tom was Hodding's deputy. His father answered the phone, James Reston of the New York Times, and he said Tom wasn't there and could he take a message. I gave my name, then he asked if he could tell Tom what it was about. I said "No, I'd better talk to him." And he said, "Oh, yes, of course. I shouldn't have asked." Of course I could have told him but I didn't know what I was dealing with at that time, and he was a journalist.

I got to the department as quick as I could after making that call. Brandon Grove was there, he was the deputy assistant secretary responsible for Guyana matters at that time. Also Dick McCoy, a fine consular officer, who became a deputy assistant secretary in the consular bureau. It was essentially the three of us that first night as we kept getting bits of information about this unfolding tragedy. We were trying to figure out what we were going to do about it the next morning, when the department began to come to life. Information was coming in pretty slowly. We knew pretty much who had been killed and we knew what had happened to the party and where they were.

Q: We're talking about the congressional party.

DIETERICH: We're talking about a congressional delegation, Congressman Leo Ryan, the aides, journalists, and embassy people who were with him. They had gone and visited, spent time with people looking into the question of whether people were being held against their will at Jonestown. Upon their departure, as they were loading the airplane to fly back to Georgetown, they were attacked, shot at, and some were killed. We were playing a lot of "catch up ball" at that time. We hadn't spent a lot of time thinking about Jonestown, Guyana. I had heard about it a little bit, Dick McCoy knew a lot about it because he had been there. He was our main resource on this. Brandon of course had a lot of other countries on his plate. A lot of what we were doing that night was getting reports in, various phone conversations, cables, or whatever. And, through Dick, trying to interpret them. I don't know how it came up, but the possibility of suicide came up that night. I said "No, that is just too much." Dick McCoy said, "What about Masada?"

Q: We're talking about the Jewish revolt during the Roman times.

DIETERICH: It was not inconceivable, was what Dick was saying. It was conceivable.

Q: This was the first of these mass suicides in modern times. There have been several since, but not on this scale.

DIETERICH: No, not anywhere near this scale. Nothing has approached that. We were dealing with an issue that was getting worse and worse. The next morning we had to face the question of what to do about the briefing. I can't remember how this worked. This may have been on the first morning after the killings, or on the second morning. But at some point we realized that the situation was eroding very quickly, and that we were going to have a an avalanche of press interest and that we weren't going to be able to use the traditional methods of preparing the spokesman. At some point we decided we had better put on somebody from the bureau. John Bushnell, the principal deputy assistant secretary for ARA, introduced by Hodding, began to brief on the Jonestown issue.

It was a strange issue because there wasn't much classified information to be protected. We were of course interested in protecting the Department's reputation, in terms of how we had handled the whole problem of the Jonestown settlement. That is not an issue to which classification applies and you better not try to do it that way. It is one thing to make a cable L O U (Limited Official Use) when you are washing a little bit of dirty linen, but you can't do it on a major story like Jonestown. It came down to the fact that we could put out any information we had, when we had it, as long as we put some caveats on it that it was preliminary and as long as we were pretty convinced it was true. The other set of constraints we dealt with had to do with the consular rules regarding the death of American citizens overseas and our desire that families should be informed before their names of the victims appear in the press. Other than that, we were dealing openly with the press.

However, there were Jonestown people in Georgetown who became very active in putting out stuff to the press that wasn't true. One series of stories they tried to sell were about Dick McCoy. Dick had visited Jonestown as a consular officer of the U.S. embassy, and he was one of the few people, maybe the only one, who had a memo on record saying, "There is something wrong out there." I had a feeling that the rest of the embassy really didn't want to get involved in Jonestown. I think they were telling themselves, "This is a religious group, and we are just going to get nothing but a heap of trouble. The government of Guyana says these people can be here, and they are religious folk, and we don't want to mess with them. But Dick had a memo he had written to the ambassador saying something was not right, Jonestown wasn't what it appeared to be and that people were perhaps being held against their will.

The Jonestown staffers in Georgetown who had manned a sort of liaison office for the community of course wanted to show that everything was just fine and that Jonestown had been somehow victimized. They began to circulate rumors that Dick had an affair with one of their members. They obviously didn't know Dick McCoy.

Q: There is an interview with Dick .

DIETERICH: Oh, good, good. We decided to go proactive and thought our best resource on this was Dick himself. He just looks so good, and comes across so sincere and down to earth. So, I arranged an interview with Ted Koppel. Koppel is a fine, no ax to grind journalist and Dick came across as the serious dedicated professional he really is. The interview worked just fine. It was a minor triumph on the media front. I was really touched months later to find that Dick had written a letter to State Magazine, thanking Kate Marshall and me for the support we gave him during that time.

Within a day or to after the event, we had to go to a task force configuration up in the Op Center. Meanwhile, the story was just about out of all control. Journalists from newspapers all over the world and the United States were calling the State Department for information but there was so little information for us to offer. We laid on extra press people to handle the inquiries. I was in charge of the press operation, but mainly it was a matter of keeping people on the phones handling as many inquiries as possible and, of course, making sure that the people taking the calls had the latest available information.

There were already journalists in Georgetown, but there was a big problem in getting them to Jonestown. There was no overland route to go there and virtually no planes available. The poor embassy had something close to a press riot on their hands. There is nothing more testy than a journalist sitting in a bad hotel unable to get to a story he or she's been assigned to cover. Pretty soon the less experienced - and you get those when smaller papers start sending people overseas - begin to interview innocent, and uninformed, bystanders and, worse yet, each other. That is a perfect formula for spreading rumors and rank speculation. The lone USIS Public Affairs Officer had probably never had more than one journalist at a time in Georgetown and even that infrequently. There was no way he and his small staff could help dozens of reporters covering a worldwide, front page storFortunately, USIA agreed to send some experienced press people down to help. We, of course by then had some air assets in place, mainly of course to get our own consular and other people in and out, but were also able to accommodate some of the journalists. The USIS and USIA people did a good job of organizing transportation and keeping those the couldn't get transport as well briefed as possible.

And now we are coming back to your original question, which was "where did we start to break the rules on attributing things to ourselves?" These are rules that have been bent before in special circumstances. I remember we were sitting in this big room, and by that time there were probably six or seven other press types working for me, and we were taking calls as fast as we could. I got a call from somebody in Iowa or Missouri or Alabama, I don't remember, but I answered his questions and he said, "And what's your name so I can quote you and spell it right." I said "I prefer that you not use my name." He said, "I'VE SPENT ALL DAY ON THIS TELEPHONE TRYING TO GET THROUGH TO YOU PERSONS AND YOU'RE TRYING TO TELL ME I CAN'T USE YOUR NAME?" So I said all right, he could use my name. At that point we all started using our names because we were dealing with papers that neither knew those conventions nor thought they were very serious, and who could not see any reason why they couldn't use the name of the person they talked to. They were right about that. As far as I know, no one in the Department ever complained.

The two worst issues we had to deal with both involved numbers. The one that played mainly in the Department's press briefing was how much the whole rescue and mortuary operation was costing the U.S. taxpayer. That's a good example of an easy to ask, hard to answer question. The fact is we couldn't really come up with a good answer very quickly. I'm not sure we ever did. It involved the budgets of too many department's and agencies. Virtually every organization that ever had a role in foreign affairs was involved, with major chunks of Department and Pentagon money going into the hopper. But, the press in the briefing kept asking for the number and when we were going to get it. The situation was not helped when one Department official, in a monumental flight of insensitivity, asked the press to remember the intangible training benefits that were accruing to the U.S. Army by picking up more than nine hundred decaying corpses and shipping them to Delaware.

The other numbers issue was of course the number of dead. They just kept growing. From the first over flights, they thought there were two or three hundred people at the most because they were looking from the air.

Q: There was talk about "they must be out in the bushes hiding."

DIETERICH: Yes, all sorts of things. Actually there were a few people out hiding in the bush. But what we really didn't know early on was that there bodies piled on top of bodies. To finally get a count, you had to go in and move bodies. A horrifying job. I think some people in the press were a little suspicious of how the numbers kept growing. They may have thought that somehow we were trying to minimize the disaster by holding back the full count from them, and then getting beaten into revealing what an awful tragedy it had been. It is that amateurish, post Watergate assumption that somehow the government must just be lying to you no matter what. Other, wiser, journalists figured out that we had no particular reason to minimize the disaster. They understand the real story was the human tragedy and the awful job the government had of caring for the bodies and dealing with bereaved and suspicious relatives.

Sometimes we had to deal with journalists who were simply mad because the figure they had presented as right and final simply wasn't.

Q: Were you having any problems with the Jonestown office in San Francisco? They were trying to defend the church and the Reverend Jones.

DIETERICH: I remember the Jonestown office in Georgetown being more of a problem to us. I don't think the San Francisco office was very effective in trying to defend him. Where I ran into trouble in San Francisco was with one of the San Francisco papers. This was after the crisis, probably after Thanksgiving. I don't remember the exact date it started, but it was November and a list of the dead had surfaced. I don't remember now where the list came from, but it was pretty good. One of the San Francisco papers had it and they were going to publish it. It was my job to try to talk them out of it, based on the fact that we hadn't had time to inform the next of kin. I think I got accused of harassing and threatening the newspaper. We felt that families should not find out about the death of a loved one by reading it in the paper or hearing it broadcast. The paper felt it was a public service to publish the list because there were people living in a state of uncertainty and the kindest public thing to do was to let people know what had really happened and what the truth was. You always wondecould we have done a better job? Could the department have moved more quickly? But that is hindsight stuff.

Q: Even looking at it in hindsight, as a practical measure I'm very dubious. You are talking about a religious organization. What would you do, send in attack helicopters? We had all the time in the world to deal with the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, and they ended up essentially killing themselves.

DIETERICH: Yes, we screwed that up, too, though. We the federal government.

Q: Once they are committed, it's a little hard to stop people.

DIETERICH: Yes, I don't know what you do about it. There were people being coerced into staying there, but they were being coerced by psychological methods that are hard to sort out from religious practice.

Q: We've had the trouble abroad of trying to extract peoplthis was earlier on but it is still pertinenfrom Scientology, which is a cult religion. People don't want to go.

DIETERICH: I was talking to a friend not too long ago who happened to stumble onto some extreme American Evangelicals having a meeting for youth where they were standing them up, pretending to talk in tongues, and yelling at them about how dirty and foul they were if they weren't saved. He referred to it as child abuse. He has a point. But I don't know what we would have done either. We would have had to deal with the government of Guyana and what on earth would we have been able to do?

Q: You would have had to deal with the black establishment to begin with.

DIETERICH: But we did have a consular responsibility that was nol guess I'm saying that maybe lives could have been saved had we done things we didn't do. One of the questions in the Horman case, going back to Chile, was did U.S. Intelligence Agencies, or did the U.S. Embassy, did somebod(end of tape)

Did we unwittingly finger Charles Horman in his case? Did somebody pass a list, at some point, to the Chilean government that said "These are people you really ought to look at, they are leftist types?" This could have been done, in the spirit of the cold war liaison by somebody that really would have been horrified by the idea that he was producing a hit list. He was just saying these are folks you should watch out about. I don't know that is what happened, but there was suspicion that it could have happened haunted us all through that case.

Q: When there is a tragedy, the public and press look for someone to blame, and the designated fall people are usually the government. Even though Jim Jones and his followers did this to themselves, it had to be our fault. In later testimony, it came out that Dick McCoy and others discovered they got pretty lonely after awhile, because the ARA was not sending their top people out to back them up. Did you get any feeling of this?

DIETERICH: I was gone by then, so I don't know much about any follow up on it. If that is the case, that is unfortunate because Dick was the major asset. If your job was to say, "Hey, the U.S. government and the U.S. embassy in Georgetown did what it could," Dick was our major asset. What would have been better, of course, if there had a memo or cable from the ambassador to Washington saying something was wrong, or if there had been a memorandum of conversation with the foreign minister of Guyana saying something was wrong.

Q: But even then, it wouldn't have changed things.

DIETERICH: It might not have changed much, but it would have helped us. And who knows, it might have changed some things. There might have been more caution, had you felt something was really wrong, maybe Ryan could have been prevailed on to not go, or to structure his visit in a different way.

Q: Of course, nobody was ready for the enormity of this thing. Today we are more sensitive because it happened.

DIETERICH: Who the hell would think that more than 900 people would kill themselves. And of course people tend to make the government the fall person, especially in a country like the United States. It is like asking the Latin Americans if they really mind being held to a higher standard. The U.S. government gets held to the highest standard because it is supposed to be a competent government that can keep people from getting killed. We believe in a free enterprise economy, but we sure as hell believe the government better intervene to keep us from entering into economic disasters. Again, I'm not sure I would want to live in a country where people didn't hold the government responsible when people died.

Q: Jeff, one last thing on this particular phasthe Panama Canal, how did that go? That was a very hot issue.

DIETERICH: That was a hot one, and I'm not as good on that issue because I was new when it was happening. The treaty was signed in September of 1977 just about the time I was arriving in ARA. Consequently, we had a lot of press guidance around that was still pretty good. I didn't have to craft things to say why the Panama Canal Treaty was a good idea. It was more a matter of recasting things we had said before and getting them cleared by Ambassador Bunker's people. Richard Wyrough was Bunker's number two and he always knew what to say. Our main concern, of course, was ratification. We eventually got that in April of 1978. A lot of the action tended to be more in Congressional Liaison than it was in ARA at that time. I know my own personal feelings and the feelings of the bureau were that the treaty was a damn good idea, because it removed a needless irritant in U.S. Latin American relations. One of those automatic irritants that could be used to our detriment in almost any situation. No matter what we tried to do in Latin America, those who did not wish you well could pick up the big stick that Teddy Roosevelt created and beat us with it. Again, there was no need to keep it. Commerce was going to flow anyway. We knew the military bases, as convenient as they were and as pleasant as they were, could be moved elsewhere.

Q: Well, Jeff, this is probably a good place to stop. When you were moving in 1979, where were you going?

DIETERICH: Oh, I was on my way to Tel Aviv as press attach?, information officer. As Ambassador Sam Louis once said to me, "As a professional press attach?, you are now in center court Wimbledon."

Q: Absolutely. I'll be fascinated. So we are off to Israel in 1979.

DIETERICH: Right.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

DIETERICH: From '79 to '82.

Q: Okay, great.

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Today is the 14th of December, 1999. You had never served in the Middle East, had you? What baggage did you take with you when you went to Israel?

DIETERICH: Sure, I took with me the baggage that most middle class Americans, and especially those with a Protestant upbringing, all took to the question of Israel. You go back to the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, I can remember it, and I think I mentioned once before how peculiar I thought it was when one of my close friends at that time was telling me how he wanted to go fight for Israel. That had made an impression on me. Although it is popular now to talk now about how Evangelical Protestants feel a certain attraction to Israel, the fact is probably all American Protestants feel that attraction or carry some basically positive psychological imprints in their mind toward Israel. Especially those who went to church. Protestant pastors, including my father, tend to preach as much or more out of the Old Testament as they do out of the New. I think the stories are better. I probably went to Israel with a positive balance toward the State of Israel but not much of a tendency to question the legitimacy of the State of Israel, nor much of a tendency to dwell much on the plight of the Palestinians. I think that was where I stood when I got there.

Q: In 1979, when you arrived there, what were your impressions of Israel?

DIETERICH: Pretty positive. I saw Tel Aviv as a nice, Mediterranean style city and saw right away it was a place where I was going to enjoy living. I was certainly looking forward to the job. It was a great job for a someone who had spent quite a bit of time involved with day to day press operations. That is an important distinction within a USIA context, because a lot of what USIA does is long term stuff.

Q: Will you explain the difference?

DIETERICH: USIA did a lot of stuff that had to do with the future of U.S. foreign policy, and I hope that continues under the present circumstances. USIA was very interested in long term information about the United States, explaining U.S. culture, explaining the U.S. political system. All that goes back to educational exchange programs and other things. I consider it as almost the preventive maintenance of foreign policy. You've got to do that well to keep the machinery that runs day to day diplomacy working. I feel that as strongly now as I did then. But that did mean that a lot of USIA officers did not have experience in dealing with day to day press operationanswering those questions that come up from journalists every day. I was fortunate enough to have had a big dose of that in my State Department assignment and because of that assignment, I was suggested for the job in Tel Aviv. I know that Sam Lewis had done some investigation and looked around for somebody that was serving in one of the press positions in State. He was probably wise to do so. That was good, because the Ambassador was positively disposed towards me before I got there, because he had made the choice.

Q: How did the press officer fit in the embassy?

DIETERICH: Well, that's a good question. In some big embassies press or information officers sometimes had a problematic relationship in that if a PAO, the senior officer, the person in charge of all of USIS, wanted to maintain an exclusive personal relationship with the ambassador, if he wanted you to go through him to the ambassador, it probably wasn't going to work very well. I was fortunate when I got there because David Hitchcock, the PAO, was wise enough to see right away that the advisability of a direct, day to day relationship between the press attach? and the Ambassador. Although he kept his hand in, in terms of giving advice and long term goals, he was quite content to see direct relationship between the ambassador and me. One of the first meetings we had, where David Hitchcock and I went to see Sam Lewis, he asked me what I needed to make it work well. He indicated he hadn't been entirely happy with past press relations. I said I needed a daily meeting. We discussed it and finally agreed on the middle of the morning. This gave me time to get into the office and figure out what questions we ought to deal with. That became institutionalized, and the PAO usually joined me in those meetings, but if he couldn't, I went by myself.

Q: Why the daily meeting?

DIETERICH: Because in Israel there were questions that would involve the press every day. It was really hard there because I didn't have any Hebrew, although the original plan was for me to leave State and take Hebrew for a year, then go to Israel. My predecessor's wife got very ill and he had to be pulled, so I got called and told I had to be ready to go in a few weeks rather than a year.

To know what was going on in the Israeli press, we had to wait for a national employee to prepare the media reaction cable for Washington. We had a person who was very good and could get it done by midmorning before the meeting. Hitchcock and I could then go through that cable and figure out what the likely questions were. And decide what we wanted to say, both in terms of any press encounter Sam Lewis might have during the day, and to offer whatever advice we could to Washington as they were preparing guidance for the spokesmen. We did both those things.

Whenever the ambassador would have a meeting any place on a senior level in Jerusalem (and that was often) he would be seen by the press, and the press would try to ask him questions. The easy way would have been to suggest that he say, "I don't answer questions." But that is also the dumb answer. If you are good, you can do yourself some good by how you answer those questions. Sam Lewis often did, he was good with the press, had good memory, and kept things in line. He also was very open to the press. We usually accepted requests for appointments from journalists. I would usually sit in, and he made good use of those, both in terms of getting the U.S. governments point of view across to the journalist and getting the journalist to share information and opinions with him. About three quarters of the way through the interview he would say "All right, you've had your turn, now I get my turn" and talking to them for their perceptions as to what was going on. There was a lesson to be learned from that. Done properly, our relationship with the press in diplomacy is a two way street. In many ways they share some aspects of our business. They are often good at it. While they have their professional imperatives that can impede objectivity, so do we.

Q: We will go through the major events during this time, but first let's talk about overall impressions. What was your impression of the Israeli media?

DIETERICH: They are real good. Before I do that, I have to lay out more of what the situation was, because in a way it is a very peculiar place, and especially in traditional USIS terms. I hadn't been there two days before somebody said "We all have to get in the car and go up to Jerusalem because Bob Strauss is coming in for the first of a series of talks." These were of course part of the follow up to the Camp David agreements. You asked before about the baggage I took with me to Israel. Part of it was my impression of the Camp David agreements. While I was still at State but knew I was going to Israel, I watched the White House signing ceremony on television. I remember thinking "Wow, this is big, big stuff."

I had also been interested in Anwar Sadat and his impact on the relationship between Israel and the U.S. He was the first Arab who was intelligible to us and seemed like a major player. King Hussein had been intelligible, but never seemed a major player. To most Americans, all other Arabs had seemed exotic beings on the fringe of our ethnocentric view of world history. Israel had produced a series of leaders who were perfectly intelligible to uBen Gurion, Meier, Aba Eban, Rabin, Perez and so on. Even Menachem Begin, while different in style from those Labor party stalwarts, was a recognizable figure to most Americans. They spoke English well and looked like big timers. So, except for a few lonely voices among academic and State Department Arabists, the Israelis had a virtual monopoly on interpreting the Israel Arab dispute to Americans. Then along came Sadat and the all important interview he did with, I think, Barbara Walters. His English was good and he was charming. He had the wise habit of slowing down when he had to search for English words which often made him sound more profound than foreign. From that time on the Israeli monopoly was broken. They still had a substantial lead, but they were going to have to share U.S. fora with Arab voices.

So there I was checking into the King David Hotel. I went to the embassy control room to find out what the hell is going on and looked out the window. There was the city of Jerusalem laid out in a panorama with lights on the walls. It is a stunning sight. It sort of bangs you right between the eyes in terms of what kind of history you are looking at. I didn't learn as much as I should have, because there was an emergency message that my mother had gone in for emergency surgery and wasn't expected to survive. So before that visit was over, I was on a plane back to the United States.

My mother did not survive. It was a sad time in Florida where my parents had moved after my father's retirement. I was there through the memorial service and few more days to spend time with my Dad. I then went through Washington for a couple more days of consultation. So it was ten days or so before I got back. I remember being very impressed at how solicitous David Hitchcock and the rest of the post were in helping my wife. After all, we had just arrived and Keiko was pregnant with our second child, our son as it turned out. We had moved into a modest, but pleasant furnished U.S. government owned house. Due to a large amount of counterpart funds, and true to Israel's socialist tradition, the State Department had built lots of identical houses throughout Tel Aviv's pleasant northern suburbs. There were two types of houses, larger ones for embassy department heads and smaller ones for the rest of us. The larger ones were what the department calls "representational housing"large enough to accommodate a reception for a couple hundred tightly packed people and fancy enough so we are not out shown by the Europeans. If there were extra bigger houses they went to lower ranking officers with big families.

Wen I got back and began to settle into the job, I realized was different from any other information officer job I had ever seen. I began to figure out that a great deal of my time was going to be taken up with VIP visits. I think probably the American in Israel developed the best VIP team in the foreign service. We got very good at it because we did it all the time. Since almost every VIP visit generated questions from the presbefore, during and afteand because almost all visits brought along a press contingent, the press section was an important part of the team. It sometimes seemed I spent half my tour living in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. That's an exaggeration, but during a couple round of the talks on Palestinian autonomy the talks were extended and we ended up sending cars down to our homes in Tel Aviv to pick up clean clothes.

We also had a large resident U.S. press corps in Israel, mostly in Tel Aviv, which meant almost daily questions from them and from Israeli and European journalists which had to be taken very seriously. USIS officers by trade, training and temperament are inclined toward serving the local press first, but in countries like Israel, and a few other big players, you quickly learn that what the U.S. press says plays first in Washington and can get you in hot water very quickly. You also learn that the big American dailies, the networks and the international wire services have a great influence over the local press in the country where you serve. Getting it right with AP, or Reuters, or the New York Times may also be the best way to get to local dailies and broadcasters.

Anyway, the U.S. and international press was there in impressive numbers and for the most part they were very good. Has great influence over the press in your country. It seemed to me we had as many as any embassy in the world. Maybe there are more U.S. journalists in London or Paris, but they don't have as many questions to ask the American embassy.

Q: Well, there, they are concerned with American policy. And in London they go all over the place.

DIETERICH: In a way, our policy toward Israel is absolutely a given. It has been remarkably consistent. But the Israelis don't think so, therefore many Americans didn't think so either. The Israelis are constantly taking the temperature of the relationship. The major Israeli papers had good reporters who were almost as active in asking us questions as the American press was. And pretty much the same questions. If you are serving in Equador, you will get journalists asking questions about what we think about the Peru Equador border. Or if you are in Bolivia, they would ask about access to the sea, or GSA (General Services Administration) sales of tin. Those are questions that no American reporter would ask. That doesn't happen in Israel. The questions you get asked in Israel are the questions that any American journalist would ask, and almost all of them have to do with the constant probing for the current state of the relationship.

That, plus the frequent VIP visits left little time for the traditional, long range information activities that would be done at other posts. I didn't have time to try to hunt up a copyrighted article and take it out to get some newspaper to publish it because I thought it was a good enlightening article. And I suppose there was less need for that in Israel. The Israeli press also maintained correspondents in the United State. Wolf Blitzer at that time represented the Jerusalem Post in Washington. Maariv, Ha'aretz and Yediot Aharanoth also had full time correspondents in the United States. On of the sure signs that we were not like other USIS posts was that we never dealt in Hebrew. When we had a press release to put out, it was in English. Later in my tour, I thought I would put out a press release in Hebrew just to prove we could do it. The first thing I found out was my best people weren't all that good in Hebrew. They were Israelis who really spoke English and otheEuropean languages or Arabic somewhat better than they did Hebrew. I probably only had two people who could write Hebrew well. Next, I found we didn't have a Hebrew typewriter until somebody went down to the basement and found one.

We dusted it off and gave it to a brave volunteer typist. It must have taken her three hours to prepare the press release. She kept almost falling out of her chair every time the carriage would zoom off in the wrong direction.

Anyway, the Israeli press was very good, and free, although subject to influence like all newspapers are, even when they don't admit it.

Q: What about the political orientation? One hears about all these different parties - was this a concern. Would the correspondent from such and such a paper ask you some question that had very strong religious overtones?

DIETERICH: We didn't get a lot of those kinds of questions. This goes back to history too. Begin had come to office when Sam Lewis was on the plane on his way to Israel, about a year before I got there. Begin won the election, and that was a big surprise to a lot of people; Washington did not anticipate that it was going to happen. Sam Lewis got there, and to USIS' credit, the one person that knew Begin and could arrange a meeting was the PAO who had had some contact with Begin. Begin represented a different kind of political power in Israel, and a different kind of person. It is a dynamic that still works in Israel. The Likud Party proceeded from East European political origins, but had as political campaigners a natural affinity for the Middle Eastern Jews who felt they were on the downside of Israeli society and were not getting a fair deal. I think a lot of the Likud leadership was especially sensitive to that, because they had come out of societies where they felt that way. The Labor Party had had its origins among the Zionists of Western Europe. It was one thing to be a Jew in Vienna, no bed of roses, but it was better than being a Jew in Poland. So the Western European founding fathers of Israel were people who knew what anti Semitism was about and knew less violent levels of persecution, but didn't know pogroms first hand. Those in Eastern Europe did. Begin often liked to tell people how he had imprisoned by both the Nazis and the Russians. He came to power with a coalition of conservative, European Jews, and a lot of support from the Sephardic, or to be more accurate, Jews of Middle East origin, as their major supporters. That was a new political game for Israel. At the same time, the Jews of Middle Eastern origin were beginning to wield real political power in Israel and beginning to become the majority of the citizens of the State of Israel.

But to go back to your question, we did not get a lot of questions with a strong political slant to them. In Latin America, for example, you often get questions trying to ferret out whether the U.S. government is favoring one political party or another. Israelis do not ask exactly those questions. I think there was a general assumption that the U.S. had grown fairly comfortable with the Labor Party over the years, but was now doing its best to get used to Begin and a new style of leadership. Israel is too confident a country to waste time worrying about whether the U.S. is going to land the marines or throw the next elections.

Actually, I think we did have to learn a new style. I remember once sitting in on a meeting of embassy officials with senior Israeli government officials and noticing the Americans were all wearing Ben Gurion style open collared sport shirts under their suit jackets, while the Israeli government people were all wearing ties. Those were power ties worn by people who felt little need to identify with trade unionists or kibbutzniks. We learned to put our ties back on.

I also don't remember questions coming to us at the embassy with a particular religious slant to them. Israel is always concerneone might even say obsessewith such questions. This was the period of the "Who is a Jew" debate. I guess most people probably did not consider the American Embassy particular relevant to such issues. The National Religious Party was in the hands of Yosef Burg, who was a very sophisticated orthodox Jew, certainly not a fundamentalist zealot in any way. He was very well educated, very sophisticated, and a very wise gentleman. There was nobody trying to trip the embassy up on some theological issue. On political issues relating to the peace process maybe, but not on religion.

Unlike some other countries I know, there were no journalists in Israel relying on the U.S. Embassy or USIS for the answers to generalized questions about the U.S., its culture, etc. They came to us with questions about the U.S. government and its policies. It was a very day to day operation in the press section. Of course there were scholars and others using the USIS library for research on broader issues, but that stuff was not coming to the press section.

Q: How did you find the press as far as its ability to deal with you in a legitimate way? If you would say something was off the record, would it stay off the record? Would quotes be checked out? In other words, they wouldn't abuse relationships.

DIETERICH: In the first place, I never used the term "off the record" because off the record is a bad deal for everybody. You are saying to the journalist "You can't say this." What if he gets it from another source? Then you are putting him in an unfair position. Also, it implies a level of protection that you should never count on because you are not going to have it. "Deep background" would be as far as I would go. "Deep background" means you can say this, just don't attribute it. "Background" means you can say it, but attribute it to a formula that we will agree upon. I don't ever remember being screwed in any way, but I always tried to deal as much on the record as I could. A press attach? is in a difficult position at times. Remember, he is always the first person that is suspected when there is a leak. In reality he is probably the last person to leak, because he knows he is the first person to be suspected. I did not do that with very many journalists, and when I did do it, it was with journalists, mainly Americans, who I trusted. Frankly, we trusted certain members of the American press more than we did certain members of the Israeli press.

Q: Who were some of the American correspondents who you particularly liked?

DIETERICH: Oh, gosh, it's hard to remember names now. Jay Bushinsky, but I can't remember who he worked for now. Bob Simon was there with CBS.

Q: Did you draw a difference between the television and print journalists? Was there a difference in dealing with them?

DIETERICH: Oh yes, there is a lot of difference. You have a whole different level when dealing with television, which is often on a very technical level. Where can I get my cameras, and what can I film? My memory of it is that we tended to do more background type stuff with print journalists. Television copy is pretty truncated. There is not much room for a lot of speculation, and I think one of the things you have to remember with all press is they are not scholars trying to gain a global understanding of the issues. They are persons who have a story in their mind and they have places in the story that need to be filled with something. They have questions that need to be answered. There is another reason to be careful of the ground rules - if this person has a real good story going, and he really needs that piece, he probably won't totally screw you, he will just open the F stop a little bit. He'll change "deep background" to "background" or do something like that. I don't remember getting stung with anything too badly, nor do I remember Sam Lewis getting stung too badly. U.S. policy in Israel is complicated. As many people have observed, it is not exactly what the State Department says it is. It is a very complicated, shifting baseline that has to do with what the Department thinks and what the White House thinks and what congress thinks and what some lobby groups of people think.

Q: With all these visitors, did you find yourself dealing with people who were running for office in the United States, and came to Israel in order to have their picture taken there to show support for Israel in order to gain Jewish votes or money? Did you find yourself running a campaign facilitation program?

DIETERICH: No. I wasn't dealing with congressional delegations as much as I was dealing with official negotiating groups. This was the period of the autonomy talks. So you had personalities like Bob Strauss who was there as a negotiator. Walt Stoessel came out, and most notably, Phil Habib. And of course Kissinger had been there before my time, So a lot of those things were the kinds of visits I was talking about. And Secretary Haig came.

I do not share, nor do I like, the foreign services' prejudices against congressional delegations. Maybe I've not served in the right places, but I haven't seen much of the electioneering and tourism that some people talk about. I've seen some delegations where some people don't work but other people do, and I guess I was always in the position of not getting stuck with taking care of the people that didn't want to work. I felt that in Israel, and also in El Salvador. If I were a congressman on a committee with foreign affairs responsibilities I would travel, and I would do it holidays and weekends. I doubt that I would care much about some FSO whining about the extra work.

Q: I would think that in Israel, there would be a constant flow of congressmen who wanted to get his or her picture taken.

DIETERICH: But that's okay if they are willing to do some work in the meantime. What I mean by work is: showing up, paying attention, being patient with briefings, being courteous.

Q: We have a long account of Sam Lewis, and I just finished a long interview with his DCM, Bill Brown, a part of that time, and it sounds like the ambassador and the DCM spent most of their time driving back and forth to Jerusalem. Or being called in the middle of the night, sitting in on cabinet meetings or the immediate aftermath. It sounds very hectic, very personalized, and the sort of thing you don't want the press to know every move because it interferes with the process.

DIETERICH: It does, but it doesn't. In the first place, you have to assume the press knew of every move. Usually when Sam Lewis would go up for a meeting with the prime minister, or the foreign minister, I would usually go with him because the press stakes out the prime minister's office in Jerusalem so you can't get in and out without them seeing you, especially when you go in with the kind of security package that American ambassadors have. Secondly, because we never knew when the Israelis were going to have their spokesman in the meeting, it was my job was to go up there, and as we stood around waiting for the prime minister to be ready, I would see if the spokesman was going to the meeting. If he went in, I went in.

Q: Was this understood or were you sort of using your elbows?

DIETERICH: No, it was understood. Certainly those were the ambassador's instructions. We got friendly enough so I could go ask him if he was going in or not. Even then, you didn't know whether he was going to brief anybody. Usually, if I asked a question he would say, "Oh no, I'm not going to talk about this." But then maybe he would or maybe he wouldn't. Then it would be important that I had also been there to do any repair work that might be necessary. It didn't happen often that we got caught by surprise, but more often than not I would end up in some important meetings that press attaches in most countries never got to see. The first meeting I went to, I didn't go in, so I was hanging around all by myself out in the foyer of the prime minister's offices. Some nice lady came and offered my a cup of tea and some cookies, and it was Mrs. Begin. This was heady stuff for a younger officer. I met the prime minister within a week of coming to the country.

Q: How would you describe the relationship between Sam Lewis and Menachem Begin?

DIETERICH: Most of these meetings were big with around 20 people in the room, and that doesn't give you a very good feel for what the relationship was really like. I never saw any indication of any kind of rancor or annoyance. There seemed to be a relationship of mutual respect. Begin was not a person who trusted people easily, but I think he trusted Sam Lewis. He trusted his honesty and truthfulness, and he trusted him as a pretty accurate representative of what U.S. policy was. Ambassador Lewis certainly had unimpeded access to the prime minister.

Q: What were your impressions of some of the other players? Let's see, Moshe Arens.

DIETERICH: Moshe Arens was in the cabinet at that time. I think he had agriculture. I had this impression of a person who spoke English like an American. I remember when he became foreign minister, we had to figure out a way to say discreetly, "Pick up the passports" for his children. He had to quietly give up his American citizenship in order to serve in that post. That was toward the end of my tour. I'm trying to think of the other impressions I had. Sharovolatile, extremely funny, a lot of fun to talk to at a cocktail party. Once there were three or four of us around, and at that time we were in the first blush of people from Israel being able to visit Egypt. So a lot of people were taking trips right away. The means of transportation were not very well established, and there were a lot of stories about how to find the best way to get there. Sharon had recently visited Cairo, so I asked him how he got there. He said, "Do you mean the first time or this time."

Q: Of course, the first time he had gone there he was the commander of the army that crossed over the Suez Canal and reached the outskirts of Cairo.

DIETERICH: But he was volatile, and certainly seen by us as dangerous. He was a hawkish right winger, who was convinced in his mind that he was going to have to fight everybody. Most likely he thought he would have to fight the Egyptians again. Most certainly he was convinced he was going to have to fight the Syrians. His was the policy line that says that Israel should never give up an ounce of territory for anything, that settlements ought to be built, that Israel's security is bound up in the idea of yielding nothing and taking every opportunity possible to expand Israel's security perimeter. He was not a man of compromise when it came to the defense of Israel. ShamiShamir had been named shortly before I got there. My memory is that he was not Begin's first foreign minister, but now I can't remember who preceded him. I remember going to one of the first meetings, probably with Strauss, and it was pretty painful because he couldn't speak English very well. It was difficult for him to communicate. Eventually he got better at it, which was a remarkable accomplishment. With Shamir, you had the feeling that Begin was running the foreign policy that he wasn't a great creative, independent voice.

Q: Did you get involved when you sat in on these meetings, particularly American delegations; did you notice the first 45 minutes would be a lecture on Judaism and the claims to Sumaria?

DIETERICH: It depended on what the meeting was about. If there were visiting VIPs that Begin felt needed the lecture, you better believe they got it. The one I remember most vividly is Habib's first meeting. Begin did what he often did with American newcomers to the game and that was to lay a mild guilt trip on them. He talked about his own personal history, the holocaust museum, and all the things he had suffered and the things the Jews had gone through. Habib was a tougher, smarter customer than most, so he countered with stories about when he was a little kid growing up as a Lebanese immigrant kid in New York and being the gentile who lit candles in the synagogue.

Most of the time, Begin was an extraordinary performer. He was masterful at using his own emotions and his emotions were genuine. He did feel genuine rage at the holocaust. He did feel genuinely that it is very hard to trust a non Jew when it comes to Jewish issues. He was very good at being convincing because he rode on his own emotions, he let them go, and he showed them. He could also turn them off when it was time.

Q: Did you have the feeling that you were being tested to find out whether you were friendly to Israel or not?

DIETERICH: Yes, from time to time in conversation that would happen. A lot of Jews, especially European Jews, do think that most non Jews are anti Semitic. Sometimes it is hard for Americans, because even when their minds are tinged by anti Semitism, they certainly don't think they are anti Semitic. And they certainly don't think they are anti Israel. If you look at it, the people I think are anti Semites in this country, many of them are very pro Israel, but I think they are often pro Israel about the way some racists in the 19th Century were pro Liberia too. They thought if those folks had a place to go they would be more likely to leave. A lot of far right evangelical types in the U.S. are very pro Israel because they think some kind of goofy Book of Revelations prophecies are being worked out, but many of their other attitudes are shot through with anti Semitism.

Q: Did you have the feeling that you were on the cusp of a generational change? This is a new group that would not have the same ancestral memories.

DIETERICH: Absolutely, and in the first place we had already seen a certain generational change, not so much in absolute chronological terms, but rather in terms of the role played in the foundation of the state of Israel. That was the change from the leaders of the Labor Party, the founders of Israel, to the leaders of the Likud who represented people who fought the British mandate tooth and nail as well as many of those who had been rescued by Israel. The people of the Likud may have owed a debt to the founding Zionists, but that did not mean they shared their political values. I'm dealing in very broad generalizations here, but I like broad generalizations. A privilege of retirement.

The Likud victory also brought oriental Jews more solidly into Israeli politics. Begin won partly because he got lots of votes from oriental Jews. I am using the term oriental instead of Sephardic, because I think Sephardic more properly refers to Jews whose diaspora took them first to the Iberian peninsula and other Mediterranean locales. To me, the term oriental Jews refers to those who in a sense were not part of the Diaspora, those who had remained in the Middle East and who immigrated to Israel after 1948, often because they were the victims of heightened anti Semitism. They were certainly not attracted to Begin on purely ethnic grounds; culturally and politically he was very much a product of his East European upbringing and political fortunes. He often pointed out that he had been imprisoned by both the Germans and the Soviets. I think the Israelis of Middle Eastern origin, who were close to a majority in Israel, were attracted by his outsider status. Since they had never felt really accepted by the westernized leadership of the Labor Party, or by the rank and file trade unionists and kibbutzniks for that matter, they somehow identified with Begin. Perhaps they saw him as a fighter who had contributed to the foundation of Israel, but who, like them, had always been rejected by the establishment.

The election of Begin and the rise of the Likud to power had two effects on Israeli policy: It toughened attitudes regarding Israel's security and the Palestinians and it created new difficulties for their lobbying efforts in the United States.

The new Israeli government didn't have that English accented (either American or British) parliamentary patina that we were accustomed to. The generation who had learned their politics in the reasonably polite Zionist circles oLondon, Paris, Vienna or New York and had successful lobbied international opinion for the partition oPalestine were replaced by a government of people who had learned their politics in the ghettos and death camps of Eastern Europe, or in Cairo or Damascus or Amman or even Teheran. The common experience that brought them together was their service in the Israeli army, where as lower ranking people they had done at least their share of the bloody work of war. Begin and a lot of his inner circle had even got a head start as anti British terrorists during the mandate - the bombing of the King David Hotel and all that.

We Americans sometimes like to think that somehow those who have suffered repression or prejudice will know better than to ever inflict it on others. I wish that were true, but I think it rather goes the other way. Victims become desensitized and find it distressingly easy to mistreat others, especially if they perceive them as enemies. It's like the victims of child abuse becoming abusers. It happens all the time. What this meant for Begin is that his core supporters were even tougher than he was on issues relating to the Palestinians and Israeli security. Especially after Camp David, he found himself in the anomalous position of having to prove that he hadn't given away the store.

The second effect was on the American public. All of a sudden here, is Menachem Begin who doesn't really fit the American image of an Israeli leader. You have to remember how attractive people like Rabin, Dana, Ever Weizmann, Golda Meir, or Aba Eban were on the American circuit. They fit our image of distinguished foreigners and were easy to relate to. I'm getting into some unpleasant areas of our own prejudices now, but the fact is to many Americans those leaders seemed much more Israeli than they did Jewish. Then here comes Begin. He is small and unprepossessing looking and his accent is central European. He doesn't seem like this European sophisticate so much as he seems like the person who ran a candy store on the corner of an American city. He seems more American than say Weizmann or Eban; he doesn't quite have that distinguished foreigner gloss. And, given the latent anti Semitism of many Americans, he seems more Jewish than Israeli.

Its an important image shift. On the one hand you have the Ben Gurion, Meier, Dayan image of the heroic little democracy, that just happens to be Jewish, defending itself against evil Arab armies. On the other hand, you have the Begin, Shamir, Arens image of a militantly Jewish ghetto plunked down in the Middle East and refusing to yield anything to the at least somewhat reasonable concerns of its neighbors.

Then you factor in the Camp David agreements and Anwar Sadat. He becomes the distinguished foreigner. Sadat's English was not all that good, but he had mastered the trick of speaking very slowly, which made him sound like he was wise and pondering every word. He came across as the good Middle Easterner we could all relate to. The unreasonable and mysterious Arabs had been replaced by Anwar Sadat. The Arab side of the equation now had an effective spokesman.

At that point opinion in the United States began to evolve in the direction of the Palestinians. It could have gone much worse for the Israelis had it not been for Arafat. He was not handsome or suave and came across worse than he deserved to in the American media. Every time Began would say something outrageous to appease his most militant supporters, Arafat would counter with something equally outrageous to his Palestinian public. The couldn't have been more coordinated and mutually supportive had they been on the phone every morning.

So, Israel's support in the U.S., while still strong, was showing signs of erosion. That was also happening in the embassy. There was increasing sympathy for the Palestinian cause, or at least increasing sympathy for the Palestinian people. And eroding sympathy for the government of Israel. Begin knew that and it really annoyed him.

Q: In a way it was bound to happen, having the characters who were portrayed. These people are appealing to a broad audience, particularly in the United States. Many of the actions could no longer be portrayed the way it used to be. It was Golda Meir who would say "There is no such thing as a Palestinian, they are desert Arabs." That didn't play anymore.

DIETERICH: That's right, and somehow the Begin people made themselves look much more intransigent than the early generation of leaders had looked. Part of it was Camp David. There was a perception on the American side that Begin was not living up to the Camp David agreement. The issue of West Bank settlements came to the fore very quickly.

Q: What was the feeling there in the early stage of Camp David?

DIETERICH: The feeling was that Camp David was U.S. policy and it had to be implemented. I don't remember people in the American embassy spending a lot of time in breast beating over whether it was a good idea or whether we were paying too much for it.

Q: Was there an active watching to see how Camp David was being implemented?

DIETERICH: Oh, absolutely, sure. Remember we had these negotiating missions coming in all the time. It started with the autonomy talks. One of our big issues was keeping autonomy talks going.

Q: Autonomy being what?

DIETERICH: Autonomy for the regions of Israel where Palestinians lived, the West Bank and Gaza. Some kind of self government for those places. The other issue was the staged withdrawal from the Sinai. Those were things we were concentrating on all the time.

Q: Various groups, like Phil Habib and others like Strauss, would come in - what was your role? Would they come in with their own spokesperson or did Sam Lewis or you have to sell yourself each time? Would you explain what I'm talking about?

DIETERICH: Well, Bob Strauss, Sol Linowitz, Phil Habib and Walt Stoessel came in. I may not have the order exactly right. They would not come with their own press apparatus. It is not like a big VIP or Secretarial visit. Sam Lewis would introduce me to whoever came and tell them I would be going around with them, and sometimes going into meetings, and, at other times, not going into meetings, depending on what the Israelis did. That was pretty much it. I would either go into a meeting or I wouldn't, and if I didn't go into the meeting I'd stand by with the press and shoot the breeze with them. It often was time well spent in terms of getting to know what was on their minds without having to cope with a lot of office and deadline pressures, and a lot cheaper than paying for lunches.

When it was time for the principal to come out, I would try to intercept him while he was still inside the building to find out if he wanted to talk to the press or not. If he did want to talk to them, I'd rush out and say let's go to the press. The visitor would usually do the pretty standard "yes, we had a good meeting with the prime minister, the foreign minister, and I am confident we can achieve progress." The extraordinary thing about the American press in Israel, was that they never gave up trying.

Now, with Phil Habib the mission was different. Remember there were a lot of problems with the security zone the Israelis were maintaining in southern Lebanon. If we are going to get into the Lebanon issues, I have to tell you an anecdote beforehand.

Because Habib was in and out for a number of missions, and because his negotiations concerning Lebanon were even more delicate, he made it clear to me that he was happy to have me around, but there could be no leaking to the press. He said to us one time, "This job is hard enough to do without being able to control my own agenda. I have to be able to go to the Syrians and Lebanese and say 'Here is what the Israelis said, and here is the message I am bringing to you, and here is what I need your reactions to.' I need to be able to stick with my agenda and raise issues in the order I want them. It really hurts if I have to deal with leaked versions that got there before I did." I absolutely sympathized with that and we ran a very tight ship up until the point when he wanted to talk to the press.

Q: We talked a bit about Camp David. What about in November 1979, the taking over of our embassy in Teheran? Did that have much of an impact in Israel?

DIETERICH: It certainly was a major story, but it didn't have much of an impact on the embassy or my office because the story was elsewhere. Had I been in Brazil, for example, when that happened, somebody might have come to me to get a reaction. The Israeli press was sophisticated enough and had enough correspondents to rely on Washington for U.S. Government reaction to events happening elsewhere. It was not a major concern during office hours, although it was a hot topic of conversation at cocktail parties.

Q: When you were there, the Iran Iraq war erupted. Did that change anything?

DIETERICH: Yes, it did, because we were pretty concerned early about Israeli support of the Iranians. But it was nothing we talked about. And it was nothing the press came and asked us a lot of questions about. They probably figured out that we weren't going to talk about it. I don't remember ever taking any questions on that subject.

Q: Was there a subliminal problem of the military relationship between the United States and the Israelis? I'm particularly thinking that the Israelis were a drain on our professional fighting force. Did this come up?

DIETERICH: I don't remember that as a matter of much concern, or as a sentiment expressed by U.S. military reps in Israel. What I do remember is going to a ceremony when the first F 16s were delivered to the Israelis. They flew all the way across, nonstop, with aerial refueling, because none of the countries en route wanted them to land.

Q: Can you imagine sitting in the cockpit of an F 16?

DIETERICH: Sitting in the cockpit of an F 16 for that long, yes. It was one of these big occasions in Israel when everybody was invited. They sent up an Israeli Air Force F 4 Phantom to escort them in to the field. The announcer pointed out how long after you had seen the Phantom it would be before you could see the F 16s. They were that much smaller.

Q: Lets talk about the invasion of Lebanon.

DIETERICH: Now I have to tell you what led up to it.

Q: Before we actually get to that, you have the Carter administration who brought about the Camp David agreement. How was Carter perceived after Camp David?

DIETERICH: Since Sadat was much more beloved in the United States than Begin was, I think Carter was much more beloved in Egypt than he was in Israel. The Likud government was a conservative government and I think that, despite the fact that they had signed at Camp David, there was a feeling that he wasn't really sympathetic to Israeli security interests. There was a slight feeling of mistrust; his instincts couldn't be counted on to protect Israel the way the instincts of some other presidents had protected Israel. There is something to be said for that, too.

Q: What about the advent of Ronald Reagan?

DIETERICH: They liked him, a friend of Israel. He was not going to ask them to make sacrifices of their own security. One of the things about peace making is that it is based on compromise, and compromise is made by giving something up. There are lots of people who say they are peacemakers but basically they just want to win. Jimmy Carter's message to Israel was they had to give things up and had to take risks for peace.

Now that is a tough message. It may be tougher for Jews than other folks, especially for the very orthodox. The origins of kosher cooking, for example, come out of a biblical injunction to not cook a kid in the milk of its mother. The need to avoid this fairly simple scenario evolved into a complex set of rules and customs designed to eliminate even the slightest risk of a violation. So, you have a people whose whole cultural background is not big on risk taking to start with, and then you put that together with a horrifying history of people who took the risk of staying in Nazi Europe and died in the process. Or of people in other places taking risks to get along with gentile society, and then finding their windows broken or worse. In many ways, many Israelis are liberal in their politics, but not liberal when it comes to taking risks. Carter was asking them to take risks, to take a chance on peace.

Q: Did the Soviet Union play any role at this time?

DIETERICH: Not much on the issues I was dealing with. Begin was uninterested in relations with the Soviet Union, beyond badgering them over treatment of Russian Jews, and the release of Russian Jews, and increased immigration of Russian Jews.

Q: From your perspective, were there problems with our consulate general in Jerusalem? Did they have a different press to deal with, and how did that work?

DIETERICH: Sure, they had a whole different press to deal with and a whole different job. From and embassy point of view, I suppose it kind of annoying to have a consulate general in the country that does not report to you but reports directly back to Washington. But is that a daily annoyance? No, it is a fact of life. We knew the East Jerusalem Consulate has as its primary job getting along with Arabs.

Q: Did press relations come up with that?

DIETERICH: I can't remember any of the Arabic language Palestinian papers or stations ever directing a question of any kind to the embassy in Tel Aviv, or to me during my long stays in Jerusalem. It was simply understood that their diplomatic contact was the U.S. Consulate in East Jerusalem. But I think beyond that their journalists hadn't really developed the knack of running down stories by buttonholing people. They just waited for press releases. For instance, if they had been asking questions about Linowitz' or Habib's activities, I think the Consulate would have relayed those questions to me. I don't remember that ever happening.

Q: How about the Egyptian press?

DIETERICH: . I actually can't remember any Arab journalist ever asking me a question, not even the Egyptian journalists who covered some of the autonomy talks. But that may have simply meant that I wasn't doing my job very well. Actually what I have said is not quite true. I did have some conversations with Israeli Arab and Druse journalists. As you know there are Arabs who remained in Israel and have Israeli citizenship - about half a million of them when I was there.

I do remember well the Egyptian Ambassador, who cut quite a figure when he first arrived. We all knew him on the diplomatic circuit. I may have forgotten, but I cannot recall a single instance of any substantive conversations with Egyptian journalists in Israel.

Q: Well, now let's go to Lebanon. You wanted to say something.

DIETERICH: Before we go to Lebanon, I have one more story to tell. About half way through my time in Israel, my old friend from Argentina, Jacobo Timerman, showed up. During most of my time in Brazil and as the ARA press officer he had been either in actual prison or under house arrest. His book, Cell without a Number, Prisoner without a Name, of course came out of that horrible experience. During my time in Washington I had written a number of press guidances for Hodding Carter urging the Argentine government to release him.

The Argentine government was having none of it. They couldn't stand the Carter government, and had particular dislike for Hodding Carter's wife to be, Pat Derian, who was of course the Assistant Secretary for human rights. One of the dumber stories on the streets of Buenos Aires, a city that has more than its share of urban legends, had it that Pat Derian was interested in Timerman because she was his cousin or niece or something like that. I think they simply could not fathom the idea that a government - any government - actually cared about human rights.

Timerman's decision to come to Israel after his release from house arrest attracted a lot of attention. We had lunch shortly after his arrival and his reaction to Israel was fascinating. There were too many military uniforms around for his taste and too many military people with influence in the government. Eventually he ended up at odds with the Israeli right and returned to Argentina, despite having told a lot of people he never would. His son attracted some notoriety by refusing Israeli military service. I guess even very bright people see what they are conditioned to see. We learn from our nightmares. For Timerman the greatest internal danger to Israel was a military coup; for me it was too many years of Likud government.

Now for Lebanon. I was thinking of my early days in Israel and my introduction to the delicacy of Lebanon issues. Somebody on my staff suggested I needed to get out and see some of the country. We had a visiting group of journalists coming in on a program for publishers and editors of small newspapers. My staff thought I should travel with them. I agreed. The visiting journalists were being hosted by the Israeli government, so I went up to Jerusalem to pick them up, and joined the party and their Israeli military guard. We were going to northern Israel, the town of Metula on the Lebanese border. I noticed out guide, an Israeli army officer, was insistent on rushing us through some things we were looking at, because he wanted to get to lunch at a restaurant in Metula. I wasn't particularly suspicious, it just seemed to me he was worried about his schedule.

We got to Metula and were having lunch when all of a sudden our guide said "Well, aren't we lucky. Look who has just arrived. What a coincidence. There is Major Haddad." Some coincidence.

Major Saad Haddad was the head of the Israeli sponsored Southern Lebanon Christian Militia, and a person with whom the U.S. government would have no dealings. All I knew at that point was that I was not supposed to have any contact with him. So, Haddad came over and the Israeli introduced everybody to him. I hung back so I wouldn't be caught near him. Then they got to talking and the Israeli said "Gee, Major, couldn't you take these people over to visit area? Major Haddad said he would be delighted and most of the journalists said they would like to go. I thought, "Oh, Lord, these people are going to leave Israel and go into Lebanon. Now what do I do."

I got the journalists off to one side and said, "Look, you are not supposed to do this and I certainly cannot go with you, and if you go there you are outside any protection the American Embassy can offer you. What you are doing is contrary to U.S. policy." That had no effect whatsoever on anyone but one very nice older lady who was the publisher of the Baltimore Afro American. I would like to think that my pompous little speech convinced her that it was unpatriotic to cross into Lebanon, but I suspect she just needed a little rest.

So they all took off with Major Haddad, and the lady from Baltimore and I sat and had a very pleasant visit, drinking Coke in the Metula restaurant. Finally, they all came back and we finished the rest of the tour. I reported the whole thing to the Embassy the next morning and was told I had done the right thing. The point of the story was that we had an understanding from the Israelis they would not do that, before this group toured. They broke that agreement.

Q: One of the things I get from people talking is that the Israelis are pushing things to the ultimate, did you get that feeling when you were there?

DIETERICH: Yes, it's history and culture again. I think there is a mindset that says you are being irresponsible if you don't do the most you can to benefit your own people. It's a hard thing to explain, but it is the real thing and it is not confined to Israelis either.

Q: Listen, I served in Korea and this is the Koreans, too.

DIETERICH: It's the reaction of people who have been pushed around. If you had the luxury of being raised a nice secure, mainstream American WASP, you are kind of embarrassed to push too hard for your own advantage and the advantage of your family. But I think people who grow up in disadvantaged circumstances, and their children, develop a different kind of morality. People who have had to fight to survive learn to take care of those closest to them first. We feel bad when we have engaged in some act of nepotism, which we do anyway every now and then, but a lot of Latin Americans and Israelis may feel bad when they don't take care of their own first.

Q: I mentioned the Koreans. The Japanese tried to wipe out the Korean language and the Korean culture. When you deal with the Koreans, they are plain pushy. Did the subject of the Arabs in Israel or on the West Bank come up much in the embassy?

DIETERICH: Yes, and it came up very early. You find when you go to Israel, Israelis keep telling you how many Arabs live in Israel - the Israeli Arabs, the good Arabs and the Druse, who enlist in the army and live here with full rights like everybody else. There are about a half a million Arabs and Druse who live in Israel. It is all true, but it doesn't mean what some Israelis think it means. What it means to most Likud supporting Israelis is roughly this: those people on the West Bank, those people in the camps, those people who left when they didn't have to, should have stayed because it is perfectly feasible for an Arab to be a loyal citizen of Israel and to receive all the benefits of being in this country. And the people who didn't take that offer from the State of Israel should stop complaining, get out of the camps and go live in some Arab country.

Q: Was it pointed out that Captain Sharon was blowing up Jewish homes at that time?

DIETERICH: That doesn't usually doesn't come up in the same conversation, unless you bring it up. It depends on who you talk to. Sure, there are Israelis that will tell you, "Yes, we have five hundred thousand Arabs, but they don't have the same rights, it doesn't mean anything, and we have behaved badly with this problem."

There are a bunch of Israelis that we sort of think of as the left, but really aren't, who believe Israel should trade some territory for security. They also believe that Israel has not treated Arabs well, that injustice was done. There are many Israelis, maybe even a majority, who believe that Arabs live comfortably in Israel with full rights of citizenship, and that means to them that the problem isn't exactly as most of the world sees it. It is true they live there in peace, but if you talk to a lot of them they don't think they have the same rights in practice.

Q: I thought we might leave the Lebanese thing for another session. What about the nuclear business, was that something that we pussyfooted around? (End of tape)

I don't remember ever dealing with that subject as press attach?. There were just some things you didn't talk about because there was nothing of certainty that my world, or the press, could deal with in any effective way. Everybody knows what the truth is, it's like dealing with the old incident of the USS Liberty. There wasn't anything left to say about it that could be said. There are certain topics in the U.S. Israeli relationship that you just don't want to talk about, and we've not talked about them for so long, nobody bothers to push very hard either.

Q: At that particular time, did you get involved in the briefing on the care and feeding of the American Jews who came to Israel in groups? You must have had them once a week.

DIETERICH: I didn't do much of that, those were not considered to be press issues. The ambassador and some others in the embassy would meet with prominent groups that came in. I just didn't have time for anything but the press stuff. It often depended on what kind of group it was, and if they came with academic credentials or academic interests, the cultural attach? would brief them. Sally Grooms was a very distinguished counterpart in the cultural section (and someone you folks should intervieSally Grooms Cowal).

Q: Grooms?

DIETERICH: Yes, the last name is Cowal. You really ought to get her.

Q: Is she retired?

DIETERICH: Yes, she is here in town. She was head of Youth for Understanding, and she was in Geneva on a United Nations assignment. Before that, she had been a DAS and was also the ambassador to Barbados. She will soon be the president of the Cuba Policy Foundation.

Q: Oh, good, we'll go after her.

DIETERICH: She is really something.

Q: I'm keeping the Lebanese off to one side, but can you think of any issues that came up where the embassy was portrayed as being off base or unfriendly? In other words, you had to do some damage control. Were there any problems you can think of?

DIETERICH: I don't remember any major situations where we were accused of being out of sync with policy. They probably occurred, but never to the extent that they engaged my office in a big way. But that raises another interesting technical issue.

We had no way of reading the U.S. press. I got up early and listened to the Voice of America, which was quite helpful. Since most embassy people listened to BBC which is available in Israel on medium wave, I often I knew more about what was happening in the U.S. than others did. There was no way for us to get advance copies of U.S. newspapers. There was no way for me to find out what the hell the State Department spokesman had said, except to sort of sense that something had gone wrong and to call George Sherman, who was the press person in the Mideast bureau, and find out what the hell the spokesman had said. That was not something you could do every day.

Q: When you serve there, you certainly feel the intensity of life. The work was hard but the Israelis were a lot of fun. It was not like being at an Arab post.

DIETERICH: It was great fun. I had a wonderful time. I worked like hell, and sort of neglected my family. When my son Robby was born in the Assuta Hospital in Tel Aviv, my wife's obstetrician said, "The Assuta Hospital is a great hospital but it is a bad hotel."

Q: What was that?

DIETERICH: It had very primitive rooms and services. I remember being surprised when the nurse, who was examining my wife during labor, was wearing flip flops and smoking a cigarette. That was kind of cute. I was supposed to stay and be there at his birth but, as usual, I went out to make a phone call. We had just realized we had left the house without leaving a note for our daughter. I had to stand in line to get to the pay phone. By the time I made the call and contacted our daughter, our son had already been born.

Q: Well, Jeff, why don't we stop at this point. We will pick this up - what did you call it there, the invasion oLebanon?

DIETERICH: It finally became an invasion oLebanon. This was mainly in '81.

Q: We will pick that up. You mentioned that, when you were avoiding Major Haddad with a group. Anyway, we will pick that up next time.

DIETERICH: Great.

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Q: This is the 6th of January 2000. Jef- Lebanon.

DIETERICH: Right. The roots of the Lebanon issue go back well into '81, when the Israelis did some strikes beyond what was known at that time as the "red line", which was the line that defined the zone that Israel was controlling through Major Haddad and his Christian militia. Then that led to the Syrians putting in some antiaircraft missiles in the same area. In the meantime, the PLO saw its chance to get both sides to escalate. The United States began to see a great danger in this and brought Philip Habib in on a series of missions to deal with that particular issue. His technique was to shuttle back and forth, in sort of on a tripod type shuttle - Jerusalem, Beirut, and Damascus.

Q: Did you get involved in this?

DIETERICH: Yes, I did. Again, it was one of these things where we never knew for sure what the Israelis were going to do in terms of publicizing the events at meetings. They were very situational on this. If they felt there was something to be gained by making public the contents of the meeting, and making public their position, they would do so. Ambassador Lewis and Phil Habib felt it was important that I be along to counter, if they should do that. We would be unlikely to be the first to go public with something, but we had to be there to defend ourselves if they did. Again, it was sort of the rules we had established between Ambassador Lewis and Prime Minister Begin. I would show up with the delegation, and if the Israelis ran in one of their press people into the meeting, I would go in, too.

Habib made it very clear to me at the beginning that he would have nothing to say to the press. He said, "It is difficult enough to do this mission when I have to shuttle between here and Damascus, or here and Beirut, and to take Israeli positions to the other parties. In order to do that effectively, I have to be able to control the agenda. What really drives me crazy is, if I go, and before I can say what I want to say, I have to contend with versions that have been leaked to the press." I think that was absolutely correct; I think it was absolutely sound technique. I did my best to ensure there were never any leaks. He would occasionally ask me what the press was thinking, what their concerns were, and eventually use the press. It was mainly a lot of standing around. There would be a meeting and Habib would come out and the press, in a good humored way, would try to get him to say something. At one point he came out and said, "You know me - old silent Phil." The press misheard what he said and thought he had said "silent film," which shows how they were thinking, sincethey were mainly television journalists. The phrase "silent film and silent movies" had a lot of currency among the press at that time. Of course, I never told them anything. I would stand around outside meetings and talk about other things and do pretty good contact work with people and made a lot of good friends. That's the way it had to be - always with Habib, but never talking to the press.

The meetings at times were a lot of fun. Often we would gather at the Jerusalem Consulate, which Brandon Grove was in charge of at that time, as Consul General, and had some wonderful evenings. Brandon was an excellent host, and Habib held forth at the dinner table, more often than not about what was wrong with the foreign service. "This modern age of sissy diplomats who are overpaid and under worked." That was happening during 1981.

Q: Was this when the Israelis went into Lebanon?

DIETERICH: No, this was before. The Israelis didn't go into to Lebanon until June of '82.

Q: Did you have a feeling that Sharon and company were cocking the rifle, ready to do something?

DIETERICH: Eventually, yes. But we are not quite there yet. As I remember, it was in the fall of '82 that Habib finally achieved a minor miracle diplomatically, in that he got a de facto cease fire between the Israelis and the PLO, as far as southern Lebanon was concerned. This was done by Habib making a statement which neither side denied, which is the way you dealt with the fact there wasn't going to be any kind of a joint document between the PLO and the Israelis, nor any kind of joint statement. When that was finally achieved, Charley Hill and I were hanging around the consulate, and Habib was off some place, but I don't remember where. Not with the prime minister, probably at the foreign ministry, and for some reason I hadn't gone along. I got a call from Habib's party saying he wanted to talk to the press right away. I'm sitting there at the consulate thinking, "How in the hell am I going to get in touch with the press and put them with Habib?" Charley and I talked for about 15 seconds, and it finally occurred to us that we had to figure out a way to get to the prime minister's office because that is where the press was. We decided to call up Begin and say Phil Habib wants to come by and say good bye to him, because he was leaving. That is exactly what happened. Otherwise, I think I would have been screwed. So we all went to the prime minister's office. I'm proud of the fact that I was standing there with Phil Habib as he announced the cease fire and took some questions.

Q: What did the statement say?

DIETERICH: The statement basically said both sides had agreed to stop shooting. There were some questions about what geographic area this actually entailed. It was a good moment for U.S. diplomacy. The cease fire lasted for awhile, it bought some time, and it established an important principle that de facto arrangements between the PLO and Israel were in fact possible.

Q: How was Habib dealing with the PLO?

DIETERICH: I don't know. He was dealing with them through the Lebanese government and the Syrian government. The trick was to read a statement and let it stand with no denials. It worked, it worked.

Q: How was the Israeli press coming around? Were most of them hoping for a peaceful solution or was the press so politicized that you could almost write the news or editorials of each paper?

DIETERICH: Your question sort of contains the answer. It is a pretty politicized press. I don't mean it is a dumb politicized press. It is a smart politicized press. Most journalists are probably more inclined towards the peace side than the war side in Israeli politics. We often misunderstand the Israeli attitude toward war. Let me explain that. I remember once I talked about going on that trip where I almost met Major Haddad. One of the standard stops on that tour was to go up to the Golan Heights. We were among a huge number of tourist groups and others who had been taken to the Golan Heights to look down on Tiberias and see how vulnerable Israel is, and how narrow Israel is, at that point. While I was up there one of the Americans said to me, "But why are the Israelis so worried all the time? They always win." The more I thought about that question, the dumber I realized it really is. After all, at the end of a war when you win, the people that died aren't resurrected. Besides, it was a pretty near thing in '73. Israel could have lost that one, had it not been for massive shipments of arms from the United States.

Going back to your question, Israeli journalists are pretty professional. They don't wear their ideology on their sleeve. You have to worm it out of a lot of them. That is especially true of those journalists that were covering the American Embassy, covering foreign affairs. They were sophisticated types who spoke English well, were educated, and really understood both the questions and the answers. I found them a pleasure to deal with, and equally the U.S. and European press. They were all pretty good. It's kind of like what Sam Lewis said to me about being press attach? in Israel, "It's center court Wimbledon." Israel is a hell of a good assignment for an American journalist who wants to make his career as a foreign correspondent. Israel has been a surefire front page story for the last half century.

Q: A number of the press representatives (I'm talking about media, not just press), had Jewish backgrounds. Did that make much of a difference?

DIETERICH: That is a hard thing to assess, because it depends on the individual. There are American Jews in Israel'm not talking about only the press corps, but sometimes among American diplomats too, who buy into the Israeli story excessively, in my opinion. There are American non Jews that do the same thing. In a sense, they lose some of the objectivity they should have. There are also American Jews who go the other way. They almost overcompensate and sort of become remarkably suspicious of what the Israeli government says. At times they gloomily pessimistic about the future of Israel and the nature of its society. You also have to remember there are a lot of Israelis who are pretty pessimistic about the nature of Israeli society, and are absolutely opposed to the government. Elections in Israel are close run affairs. If you were on the side of peace, you didn't feel you were isolated in Israel, there were a whole lot of Israelis who were with you.

Q: During this period, while Habib was working on a cease fire and up through the time the Israelis went into Lebanon, were we monitoring the Begin Cabinet to see where they were going?

DIETERICH: In early 1981 there were elections, and Likud barely squeaked through. Out of that they lost some support in the coalition they had prior to the elections, that is they lost some moderate support. The second Begin cabinet was a lot tougher than the first, mainly because Moshe Dyan had resigned before the end of the first cabinet. He felt he was getting nowhere with Begin and did not have enough influence over Israeli policy. He was eventually replaced by General Ariel Sharon, who was a hard liner, very tough, and absolutely convinced that Israel was going to have to fight another war at some point. Personally, I think he relished the prospect.

In the meantime, relationships with the United States weren't going very well. There were a number of irritants, among those were the sale oAmerican Naval AWACS Aircraft to the Saudis. That drove the Israelis crazy. They envisioned these planes up there capable of monitoring everything that happens on Israeli air bases. They felt that maybe the Saudis weren't very anxious to be in another war with Israel but, if there ever was another war, the Saudi resources would be used somehow or other. The other factor was the end of the Carter administration. The Israelis were never really fond of Jimmy Carter. I think there was a feeling that they had been pressured at Camp David. There were some genuine misunderstandings about what had been agreed to at Camp David, especially on the issue of settlements.

I think Carter believed that Begin had undertaken not to build any more settlements during the time that negotiations were ongoing. Begin's contention, I think, was "that was during the Camp David negotiations, and I didn't do that." Carter's interpretation was that it meant during the period of the negotiations of all the things that were implicit and written into the Camp David agreement, such as Palestinian autonomy, and the final withdrawal of Israel from Sinai.

At any rate, Israel immediately began building settlements again on the West Bank. Carter felt betrayed by Begin, and Begin felt he was being held to something by Carter that he had never agreed to. With the beginning of the Reagan government, the Israelis felt they had a person who was basically sympathetic to them, and an administration in the United States that was not going to push them on things like the autonomy talks. They believed that Reagan was not going to expect Israel to make sacrifices, because this would be an administration that would recognize the great contribution Israel had made to the U.S. Crusade against communism. The Israeli contention was that they had been a real asset to the United States and it was about time the United States recognized they were a strategic allThe hope of the Begin government was to get some kind of recognition of the Israeli contribution out of the Reagan administration.

Initially, the Reagan administration was not very interested in the autonomy talks, but after awhile they began to come around. Haig began to realize this was a good idea so he began to lean on the Israelis to get going. The Israelis didn't like that very much. Then there were other irritants, little scandals would come up. Somebody would say the wrong thing in a meeting someplace, and the Israelis would pick it up.

Bring me back to where I'm supposed to be - how did I get on this?

Q: We were talking about the Reagan administration coming in. It is not just foreign diplomats who are trying to figure out what the Americans are up to, the American diplomats were probably wondering where they stood.

DIETERICH: The most immediate concern in the embassy was - will the ambassador be re appointed? Fortunately, he was re appointed, as were the other ambassadors in the region, which was a very sound decision considering what was in play. I tend to remember in terms of specifics - what was going to happen with the autonomy talks.

As I said before, being a press attach? in Israel was very peculiar, we were very event driven, so I might try to meditate on the broader implications of policy, but what really was in play was who was going to replace Saul Linowitz, and how was he going to be to deal with. The sooner we would get some information on these people, the sooner we could get it out to the press and start preparing the way, because everything gets harder when you have to do it cold. What are new traveling delegations going to be like out of this administration? What is the new secretary of state going to be like? What is the administration of USIA going to do in terms of our resources? Will we get better communications than we had before, or are we going to sit and fight with antiquated systems as usual?

The autonomy talks were interesting and frustrating. You would end up with these big meetings with big delegations from Israel, Egypt and the U.S. Although I might accompany the principal U.S. Negotiator to preliminary courtesy meeting with senior government officials, I don't believe I ever sat in on an actual negotiating session. There was a sound understanding that press people were not to be included. It worked.

There was a fair amount of backgrounding of the press after the sessions. People would come out of the meetings and say, "Well, it's 80% done." That got to sound pretty hollow after a while because that 80% depended on how you counted things. The 20% that was left was the stuff that wasn't going to get done. It was like you have a building all built but no roof, and you have no idea how to build a roof.

We went to a meeting at the defense ministry and I guess the defense spokesman was in because I ended up in the meeting. This was the meeting where Sharon came on with maps and outlined what he characterized as his plan for the invasion of Lebanon.

Q: You are looking like "shock".

DIETERICH: A kind of "What on earth are you talking about?" reaction. Well, it caused a lot of excitement. There were a lot of cables that went flashing out after that, and Habib and everybody were stunned. Our military attaches were with us, it was a fairly large group of people that was there. It was an amazing briefing. I don't remember that the ambassador was there, I guess he was off someplace.

Q: I think Bill Brown mentioned this. These things aren't done in a vacuum. What was the reading of why he was doing this? Was he setting up his own policy, or trying to force an issue? What was the feeling?

DIETERICH: I think the evidence was that this plan had not been vetted through many other places in the Israeli government. I'm not even sure he had gone through the prime minister. If he had gone over this with the prime minister it probably had been in the most theoretical terms. I'm pretty sure a lot of folks in the government didn't know about it. If the foreign minister knew, he probably had no idea of the extent of Sharon's planning. I think Sharon was trying to do two things. I think he was trying to get us used to the idea and gauge our reaction. And maybe he used this as leverage to get it through his own government. He could say, "I've already told the Americans about this." Sharon had this alarming capacity of not listening to arguments that went against what he wanted to believe. The trouble with dealing with people like that is it is very hard to warn them, because if you tell them they have a terrible idea and we are not going to support you, and his reaction will be, "Oh, yes, I hear you, but that is just rhetoric, what are you really going to do?" Unless what you said was accompanied by some kind of catastrophic threat, he would kind of toss it aside.

Q: Like what led up to Saddam Hussein, he didn't realize we really meant what we were going to do.

DIETERICH: I think that is right. I don't think he really believed we wouldn't stop them, and he was probably right too. But on the other hand, you don't make catastrophic threats when dealing with Israel because the press will pick it up and you will face all kind of hell in both the U.S. And Israel.

Q: After this did you say, "Boy, if this person is defense minister we really have problems?

DIETERICH: After that briefing, even before, we knew this person was going to be hard for us to deal with.

Q: When Sharon went and talked to Haig and came back and claimed he was given a wink, or a green light to do this - was this before that?

DIETERICH: No, I believe it was after. Sharon went to Washington, and has some sort of conversation with the Secretary. Maybe Haig was overly diplomatic because lots of people believe Sharon took it as a wink and a nod.

Anyway, that is the problem with Sharon. We were caught in a terrible dilemma because whatever happened was going to become public. If Sharon didn't make things public, Begin did. They both really believed in using the press and using foreign opinion to their advantage. Sometimes that tactic would backfire and work to their disadvantage but they had a hard time recognizing when that happened. Here is your dilemma - if you make a statement mean enough and tough enough to get Sharon's attention, it would be absolutely offensive to friends of Israel all over the place. To put it bluntly, a statement tough enough to move Sharon is going to offend the hell out of the Jewish community in the United States. That's the problem. The tone with Israel always has to be, "We are trying to be helpful to you, and we can help you better if you don't go ahead and do this." The language of diplomacy doesn't deal much in ultimatums and nasty language, but anything short of an ultimatum would not have been understood by Sharon.

Q: It must have been difficult for you all, particularly on the press side, if the Begin government was using aimed press releases all the time which always involved the United States one way or another, this meant you were having to react all the time. You couldn't be giving out press statements to preempt this.

DIETERICH: It was not so much a matter of formal press releases as it was backgrounding to individual journalists and thinly disguised leaks. We were not helpless. We could and would and respond at least in terms of backgrounding. There were a number of techniques we would use. Occasionally we would make a statement through Washington, and occasionally we would get part of what we wanted to say out through the department spokesman.

Sam Lewis did a lot of backgrounders with the press, both one on one meetings with the press, plus in meetings open to almost all the U.S. Press, or meetings with selected members of the Israeli press. We rarely mixed the Israeli and U.S. press in one meeting, because we felt there was a different understanding of the traditional guidelines regarding attribution. I would arrange meetings in the USIS Library, where Sam Lewis would take questions and do very well.

But you are partly right, we never could respond with the kind of punchy quality that the Israelis used. Part of it because it is not in our nature and partly because it wouldn't be accepted in terms of our own domestic politics. Also because the whole time I was there we were in a kind of mediator role which meant you shouldn't be punching back at the person or you would destroy your effectiveness. Sometimes we had to swallow it and couldn't respond very well. I once described my tour in Israel as like a permanenRoadrunner cartoon where you get to be the coyote.

Q: Did you notice any difference between what was coming out of The New York Times, which was owned by a Jewish family, and The Washington Post, which did not have the same constituency?

DIETERICH: No. I really didn't. It was an interesting time to serve in Israel, in the sense that it was a period of increasing skepticism. The bloom was off the Israeli rose, it was no longer a matter of "poor little Israel." Golda Meir, Aba Eban, Moshe Dyan, and the almost larger than life figures were very good in communicating with Americans. It was a different kind of Israel, a period of increasing sympathy for the Palestinians and a certain amount of impatience with Israel. The old answers wouldn't work anymore. That old dialog the Israelis had going, when you would say, "Well, don't you think you're being kind of mean to the Palestinians?" And they would say, "Look what happened to us in the Holocaust" didn't work anymore. You had a new generation of Americans who would say "so what, the Arabs didn't do that." You were getting toward an era of more pragmatic politics dominated by the horror of the Second World War. Israel, from the outside, was beginning to look more and more like a bully. I must say when you live in Israel you become more conscious of the vulnerability of Israel in military terms, and at times the fragility of the Israeli political system. It's a very difficult, very personality driven system, run by a small group of people who know each other altogether too well.

Q: What about the orthodox parties? I would think it would be very hard for an American to have any understanding or feeling about them. They have the word of God; they don't participate in the military side of things. A real problem for the development of modern Israel. How did you all feel about that?

DIETERICH: There are sort of two ways of looking at it. There are the ultra, ultra orthodox, the Mea Shearim crowd, folks who think history stopped someplace in the 18th Century, and dress accordingly. Some may occasionally throw stones at passing cars on the Sabbath, but most of them are very withdrawn from every day political life. They in themselves are not terribly important in Israeli politics. I remember one very secular Israeli friend of mine who said, "You have Indian reservations and we have Mea Shearim, and neither society is willing to do anything about them, because we sentimentalize thethey are part of our past."

The national religious party, however, is a party of very sophisticated orthodox Jews. These are people who do not shun politics. They are very good at politics, and they have been the swing party in most elections, the coalition maker. They have exacted their price almost every time in terms of making sure reformed Judaism is not really recognized in Israel; making sure that Israel shuts down for the Sabbath on Friday nights; doing things like trying to get all flights grounded out of the airports during the Sabbath. No buses running on the Sabbath. All sorts of things which are the result of coalition politics which drive most Israelis absolutely crazy. Probably a majority of Israelis are really quite secular people who see their roots in Judaism as cultural and terribly important, but are not very observant Jews. On the other hand, you can't form a government without taking into account the sentiments, feelings, and political goals of orthodox Jews.

Q: Let's move up to when things were heating up along the border. The Lebanese invasion was when?

DIETERICH: In May of '82. By that time I was nearing the end of my tour.

Q: You were out before it happened?

DIETERICH: No, I was out at about the middle of it.

Q: Well, what was the feeling at the embassy? Were we at all concerned about what Sharon had done when he went to the United States and got the so called green light?

DIETERICH: I don't think we ever believed that he really had. He just thought he had. The question is one, I'm afraid, that divided counsels within the U.S. administration, too. I think there were certain people who thought we couldn't blame the Israelis because they were subject to constant artillery attacks. They retaliate, but who wouldn't? After all, those people they are protecting in Lebanon are Christians and we ought to be sympathetic with them. I suppose it is true that the Reagan administration came to power owing something to evangelical groups in the United States. Haddad and his people knew how to appeal to right wing evangelicals and had contact with them. So did Begin and his people.

We in the embassy knew, in fact, that an invasion of Lebanon was terribly destabilizing in terms of long term U.S. policy in the region. But there were a lot of people in the Reagan administration who weren't really willing to come out absolutely against the Israelis in this thing. There were also Reagan insiders who shared the Israeli notion that Israel deserved U.S. support because of its contribution to our cold war concerns.

Q: During this time when rockets would land in Israel, then there would be air strikes, was anybody toting up how many Israeli civilians were killed as opposed to how many Palestinian civilians were killed?

DIETERICH: Very few Israelis were killed in those raids. Anybody in a war is pretty much trying to make sure that he doesn't take many casualties. The Israelis got very good at building shelters, the Katusha rocket was just a piece of artillery. It had no real guidance system. They could figure it might hit a particular town, but that was the best they could do. The Israelis got used to spending nights in shelters. I'm sure Israeli retaliation took many more lives than they lost, bul can't imagine anybody's national policy being based on "as long as they don't kill more of our people than we kill of theirs, that will be okay."

Q: No, no, but I was wondering if this was of concern.

DIETERICH: It was a concern, but the Israeli answer was always, "Look, we are trying to limit civilian casualties. We are doing the best we can" I don't think the Israelis ever deliberately targeted some civilian area that didn't have some sort of strategic interest. The Israelis were, after all, interested in killing PLO, not in killing Lebanese.

Q: It seemed like the event that precipitated this whole thing was the sad attack on the Israeli ambassador in London.

DIETERICH: There was the attack on the Israeli ambassador in London, followed by an Israeli air strike on the PLO headquarters in Lebanon, followed immediately by a major barrage of artillery of Katushas from PLO sites into northern Israel. That is what did it. There really was an outbreak of real shooting going on. It was funny how I found out about the actual move into Lebanon. At the end of May, our daughter had a date with an Israeli student at her school to go to her senior prom. On the day of the prom, late in the afternoon, she got a call from the kid saying, "I'm calling from Lebanon and I'm sorry I can't make it back for the prom." I got on the phone right away. It was one of the first confirmations we had that they were really that far up into Lebanon. I think young man was calling from Tyre or Sidon. Mari, now a foreign service officer herself, has been lunching on that senior prom story ever since. It's the kind of foreign service childhood story that makes it all worth while.

Q: Sometime ago I interviewed Bob Dillon, who was still livid years later about how he and the attaches would be reporting what was happening, and they would get something back saying they were off because the embassy in Tel Aviv told them they really weren't doing this. Were you active during the early part of this?

DIETERICH: I'm trying to remember when I left. The invasion happened in late May and I left very shortly after that. As press attach?, I might not have been seeing some of that stuff, although I saw a fair amount of the outgoing traffic.

Q: I was just wondering whether you were trapped into using Israeli reports of what was happening.

DIETERICH: My reporting responsibilities had to do with the media. In some ways that means it would have been our job to report what the Israelis were saying about what was happening. You are doing your job as long as you identify the source.

Q: Early on, were you skeptical about what the Begin government claimed was happening?

DIETERICH: In terms of the progress of the war? I just can't comment on that. I was almost gone, probably by mid June. There were a couple of other things I wanted to cover.

Q: Let's talk about Sinai.

DIETERICH: As you know, the Camp David agreement called for further negotiations to bring about a staged withdrawal from the Sinai. In terms of background, we already had the Sinai field mission out there, which had come in after '73 as an early warning peacekeeping operation. This basically put seismic sensors and television cameras into the Giddi and Mitla passes to make sure that neither Israel or Egypt would be subject to a surprise armored attack by the other. I visited that operation once. It is a really bleak and strange operation, run by foreign service officers and some military people, plus a contractor, E Systems, who provides most of the logistics. E Systems was also eventually involved in the Sinai Multinational Force also.

I have a story I love to tell out of that visit. I went out with one of the people from the mission to a remote site in one of the passes where there was a remotely controlled television camera. He was showing me how this television camera could move, could be directed from their central operation. He said, "There is this Bedouin that comes by every now and then and we've got him believing that he controls the camera, because when he stares at the camera and moves his hand to the right, we move the camera that way. Then when he moves his hand the other way, we move the camera accordingly. He loves it and thinks he controls the camera." I think there is a lesson in Middle East politics in the story, because in a sense he really was controlling the camera.

The Israelis and the Egyptians both, as we came down to the deadline for withdrawal from the Sinai began to get cold feet. Sadat was having second thoughts because he was getting beaten up by the Arabs all over the place and he was tired of it, and because he feared the limitations he had accepted on Egyptian military activities in the Sinai would only buy him more grief. The Israelis were deathly afraid, in retrospect, of establishing a precedent which would then be applied by somebody to the Golan and the West Bank. After the death of Sadat, and Sharon coming to power, it came down to "I know we have to give up most of it, but we can't give up everything, we have to keep something. We have to renegotiate this somehow. We just can't give up the whole Sinai."

This led to a whole bunch of really dumb disputes. The most egregious being Taaba, which was down on the Red Sea, just around the corner from Eilat. And there were other kinds of trial balloons - "Can't we hold onto the air bases? Why should we give up all this oil?" The department sent Walt Stoessel out, who was the undersecretary for political affairs, I think, to negotiate and to work with the Egyptians and Israelis on this. He did a fine job, and again it was one of those missions where I spent a lot of time cooling my heels in offices, waiting to see if anybody needed the press. It was finally worked out. An agreement was signed under somewhat strange circumstances due to considerations of who was to sign and where. On the Egyptian side I think it was signed by the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, which is where he lived at least.

The withdrawal came to pass with a number of results. I think, in some ways, what Israel gave up has not been fully appreciated in the rest of the world. The Sharon tactic of trying to hold on to little enclaves was just silly. All it did was take away from Israel some of the international credit it should have gotten for a remarkable sacrifice. Who has ever given up a lot of territory without being beaten?

Q: I talked to some of the people who had been on the early peace missions who said there was a lot of Israeli testing, trying to take more in than they were supposed to. When you look at it, it was almost kid stuff - just testing - and it got everybody mad.

DIETERICH: So much of this was Sharon driven, in my estimation. A little bit Begin driven too. What history should remember is that Israel gave up oil resources and air bases. Now they have a couple of new air bases in the Negev built for them by us. Those aren't as good as having the whole Sinai. The Sinai was a great training area for the Israeli air force, and they don't have the space they had. There aren't very many examples in history of people giving up that kind of territory.

Q: Did you have any experience with the Egyptian press?

DIETERICH: A little bit, yes. I made one trip to Egypt after Camp David when travel to Egypt became possible. I worked out a deal with the PAO in Cairo to send a car down to meet me at the border. I rode in the car all the way through the Sinai seeing the hulks of burned out tanks along that road into Cairo. It was a marvelous trip and I did talk to some Egyptians while I was there, sort of the guest of USIS in Cairo. I don't remember running into Egyptian journalists on a regular basis. They would come when you would have the autonomy talks delegation, when an Egyptian delegation would show up. One of the jobs to be done during the period of negotiating withdrawals from the Sinai was setting up the Multinational Force and Observers, which is a fascinating story in itself. Again, these were negotiations the press was interested in, and I had to follow and got to know the people that were involved in that operation too. I don't know whether this is the time to tell how it works or not.

Q: Oh sure.

DIETERICH: Part of the deal from the very beginning was that the United States would try to get the UN to put a peacekeeping mission into the Sinai. To get the agreement signed, we basically had to say "and if the United Nations won't do it, we will do it." Well, guess what! Of course the United Nations wouldn't do it. There was no way we were going to get the Security Council to approve a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the Sinai. Remember, the Russians had been cut out of the Mideast peacekeeping, peacemaking process - the Camp David process - early on, and they were always unhappy about that. Not nearly as unhappy as the Israelis would have been had they been brought in.

Anyway, as it turned out, we had to do it by ourselves. Basically, we had to go out and find countries willing to contribute. Early on we got the Colombians and the Fijians in because they are perennial peace keepers. They had been doing this for quite a while. Then we had a flurry with the Israelis when we wanted to get some Europeans in. The Israelis were doubtful about having the Europeans in. Doubtful about the British, because of the Mandate history. Doubtful about the French, because they felt the French were too close to the Saudis, and the French history in Lebanon had complicated things a lot and for the region also. They were also somewhat suspicious of the Italians and I could never quite figure out why, since everybody likes the Italians. But maybe one of the clues is that those Israeli oil fields that were given up in the Sinai were run by ENI, the Italian governmental hydrocarbons conglomerate. Finally, the Israelis consented, and the French, Italians, and the British agreed to come in, as well as Australia and New Zealand. We got a Norwegian General, Frederick Bull Hansen, who agreed to be the commander of the outfit. The director general was an American, a retired State Department Senior Administrative officer named Leamon R. Hunt, known as Ray Hunt, who was later killed in Rome. Ray Hunt and Vic Dikeos, who was his deputy, asked me if I would consider going to Rome as the public affairs officer for the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO.) Rome was a big temptation, since I had studied in Italy as a graduate student and I liked Rome a loloved Italy. I talked to some people about it, including Sam Lewis, and we all came to the conclusion that it would be a great press job, because this thing would never work. It was going to be helthey were going to be screwed up all over the place, and the Israelis and Egyptians were going to be all over each other. It was going to be a very exciting time. So I thought maybe I would go.

In the meantime, I wasn't getting much I was interested in from Washington anyway. I was a little bit out of touch with Latin America by then, and not well enough known in the Middle East, nor was I an Arabic speaker, so of nothing was coming up that really turned me on. Nor did I relish the idea of studying Arabic or trying to be a PAO in a country where I didn't speak the language.

So I decided Rome might be fun, plus it was a great deal financially because it was an international organization and you didn't have to pay any U.S. taxes, while you still collected your full foreign service salary. So I agreed to go to Rome, and that is when I left Israel and came back to the United States for about two months, since the MFO had not yet made its official move to Rome. I worked out of the MFO headquarters in the Washington suburb of Landmark, Virginia. It was really quite interesting helping to invent a brand new organization.

In the first place - why Rome? The agreement itself stipulated there had to be a headquarters and it had to be outside the treaty area, so we had to find a place to go. Washington seemed unsuitable because it was too far away. It came down to western Europe, and hopefully a place with good communications and good air connections. We talked to the British, French, and the Italians and the best deal came from the Italians. It was particularly attractive to us because the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN was already in Rome, and that provided a model for us to use with the Italians in order to establish what our status would be as a foreign organization. We basically said to the Italians, "Just give us the same deal and perks you gave to the FAO and we will be fine." The agreed.

Q: This was '82 to when?

DIETERICH: This was '82. I only served in the MFO from '82 to '83. So I worked at Landmark for awhile, and then Keiko and I, with our son Robbie, flew off to Rome. Our daughter, who had managed to coincide with our Israel tour by graduating from high school in three years, had just started at Harvard.

In the meantime I had gotten a warning. They said "part of our negotiations with the Italians was that we had to employ some Italians, and one of those people is a lady named Marilena Andreotti, who is the daughter of Giulio Andreotti. We don't know what else to do with her, we don't know anything about her, but she is a woman, and probably knows about politics, so she should probably work for you." I said, "Fine, delighted."

She actually had gone to work before I got there, had become about the most valuable person on the staff. She was the only person who knew how to do anything in Rome. You had all these State Department admin officers, Australian colonels, New Zealand sergeants, and one Italian diplomat, but the only person who knew how to rent a room in Italy was Marilena Marri Caciotti. Not only was she the daughter of Julio Andreotti, she was also married to an Italian foreign service officer. She was very smart with a wicked Roman sense of humor, had all the right connections, and was a delight to work with.

I got to Rome and began to set up an office. I had Marilena as an assistant public affairs officer, and a Frenchman who had worked for the OECD office in Washington as my deputy, as well as an Italian secretary who was also married to a foreign ministry official.

There were some important relationships within the organization be sorted out. As part of the deal, the MFO headquarters had taken on an Italian political counselor, an ambassadorial level Italian diplomat. I'm not sure he was used to the idea of a separate public affairs office reporting directly to the boss, nor that he liked the idea very much. He may have suspected that as an American with some kind of "political" credentials and experience in the region, I was going to become the de facto political adviser to the American Director General and his deputy. In addition, I think he was a bit uncomfortable with having Giulio Andreotti's daughter working in my office. He may have had a point. Andreotti, in one of his many political reincarnations, became foreign minister about halfway through my year in Rome. I tried to make him as comfortable as possible by assuring him of full coordination and explaining as clearly as possible what I thought we ought to do in public affairs terms. It was also clear that Ray Hunt and Vic Dikeos didn't need a whole lot of advice about the political dynamics of the MFO. We eventually sorted it out and had a good working relationship.

The military command in the Sinai, under General Bull Hansen also had a public affairs officer, an Australian army officer, who clearly preferred that any dealings with the general be handled through him. I had no particular objection to that, although the general liked to talk public affairs and MFO matters in general with me and didn't much care whether his PAO was present or not. Reasonable observance of chain of command protocol does help big organizations functions, but should not be allowed to interfere with organizational information sharing. Again the principle of transparency is the best solution. I made sure that the Australian was aware of any conversations I had with his boss and that any statements or releases form the Rome headquarters were thoroughly coordinated with him. He reciprocated although I don't remember any press materials being released from the military command.

I did make a couple of trips back to the region, which meant visiting MFO offices and embassy officials on both Cairo and Tel Aviv as well as various installations and units in the Sinai. I made one trip on my own and accompanied Ray Hunt on another.

The trips were interesting. We would go into Cairo on a commercial airliner, and consult with the embassy and with the people in the little office that the MFO kept in Cairo. Then we would get on a French military puddle jumper airplane (they ran our fixed wing "airline") and fly out to the main headquarters base. Then I would consult with my Australian counterpart, the public affairs officer for Bull Hansen. We would spend some time together, and would also consult with other military folks and the U.S. foreign service officers assigned there as observers. They were the diplomats assigned to accompany patrols and sort out any apparent violations. When the Sinai portion was finished a jeep or truck would take us to the Israeli border checkpoint, where we would be met by a jeep from the Israel side and would drive to the hotel in either Tel Aviv or Jerusalem.

Due to various political sensitivities involved in that itinerary I carried four passports - two diplomatic and two civilian. For some reason we were supposed to use civilian passports when we were with the MFO, diplomatic passports otherwise, and we needed passports that did not have Israeli stamps in them in case we needed to go elsewhere in the region.

On the trip I made with Ray Hunt we went all through the Sinai. It was an interesting organization. The northern sector of the border area was patrolled by Fijian troops, the central section by Colombian troops, and the southern sector by U.S. troops out of the 101st or the 82nd Airborne. They would rotate on six month deployments. The U.S. also furnished the fifty person civilian observer unit. Those were the diplomatic types I mentioned before. They were mainly U.S. foreign service people, although civilians could also be recruited. The Australian and New Zealand armies, combined into an ANZAC unit as they had been in World War II, provided helicopter transport. The Italian navy contributed three patrol vessels which operated out of Sharm el Sheikh at the southern tip of the Sinai. The Netherlands ran communications and a military police unit, while the British provided a headquarters company. Uruguayan soldiers drove the trucks and, as I mentioned before, France provided the fixed wing aircraft.

The MFO maintained its main base at El Gorah in the North and South Base near Sharm el Sheikh, which housed the U.S. Battalion, as well as a series of observation posts and check points. The construction of the bases had been carried out under U.S. supervision on a fast track basis in about seven months. As I remember, the cost of operation, exclusive of construction, was somewhat over 100 million dollars a year, which was shared evenly between the U.S. Israel and Egypt. I think the fact that the Egyptians and Israelis were paying a major part of the bills had a lot to do with their commitment to making the whole thing work.

The two trips to the field were fascinating. I remember traveling with the Director General in a helicopter and landing, apparently unexpectedly, at a mountain top observation post manned by the Colombian battalion. The relief of the Colombian officer in charge when I greeted him in Spanish was palpable. I translated while we toured the facilities and met the lone Dutch communicator assigned to the site. While he spoke English well, there seemed to be no Colombians who did. I sort of wondered how it all functioned, although the Dutchman was picking up Spanish. The main problem was boredom, I guess, since there had never been much to observe beyond an occasional, presumably civilian, camel.

On one of the visits I accompanied a patrol which consisted of military personnel and a civilian observer. It was all very routine, a long ride in the desert with some stops at Egyptian military outposts. Talking with some of the people on the patrol, and more of the observers later in the day, I got the impression of a certain affection for the Egyptians and annoyance with the Israelis. The Egyptians were sticklers for military courtesy and apparently respectful of the foreigners running around in their recently recovered desert, while the Israelis, never much on formalities in the first place, gave the impression of constant game playing, trying to see if they could fool these observers trying to function in a desert they, the Israeli army, knew very well. I can understand the attitude - its both fun and pragmatic - but it makes little sense to piss off the umpire.

During the Cairo, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem portions of the trips I would talk to journalists, usually one on one, about the MFO and its mission. These meetings were pleasant and journalists were theoretically interested in the MFO, but my efforts did not result in much coverage. As long as things were going well - and they were - there was not going to be much press coverage. There were, of course, occasional feature stories in the media of the participating countries, but these were done by interviewing recent returnees or by visits to the Sinai handled by well by my counterpart on General Bull Hansen's staff. Nobody was going to come to Rome to write a story about soldiers and diplomats in the desert.

We did work the predictable, fire fighting type stories that usually result from a foreign presence - minor confrontations with the police or border guards by MFO people on leave in either country, traffic accidents involving Bedouins in the Sinai, and so on. We also had a couple of tragic land mine incidents and a diving fatality among the U.S. troops in the South. The Sinai is a wonderful place, it is one of the few places in the world you can still be maimed by a World War I mine. We maintained contact with journalists in Rome who represented media in the contributing countries, as well, to the best of our ability, monitoring the press for any MFO stories. We also did some small presentations for academic people interested in the study of peacekeeping. Our major product was the first MFO Annual Report a sixty page or so, fairly glossy English language pamphlet aimed at the Israel, Egypt and the contributing countries. We did the writing ourselves and brought it in on time for the first anniversary of the force. It was okay, I guess.

The worst thing about the job was that the crises I had thought would occur in the Sinai, the confrontations between Israel and Egypt, never materialized. The Egyptians and Israelis had decided it was going to work, and therefore it did.

There would, of course, would be screw ups. Often an Egyptian truck or military vehicle would be in the wrong zone at the wrong time. There were three zones with various rules for each one. The typical Egyptian mistake was not to know where the hell they were in the Sinai because those soldiers who grew up on the banks of the Nile were as lost in the Sinai as somebody from Kansas. Israeli aircraft coming out of the new Negev air bases on training missions would miss their turn by a few seconds and be halfway into the Sinai. We ended up chasing down a lot of those, and movements of camels. But they were resolved almost immediately by both countries.

The MFO was working like a charm. So I ended up with a four person office, and not a very interesting mission. I guess the moral of the story is: peacekeeping is only interesting when it doesn't work.

Q: They were used as a training exercise mainly, weren't they?

DIETERICH: Well, I'm not sure how good training it was for the troops on the ground. Their main job was to occupy high points and watch for movement. It is also kind of weird duty for the foreign service officers assigned as observers. I don't it really relates much to anything else they will do in their careers. But living on the bases offered time to pursue hobbies and the pay was very good.

I finally had decided that one of the jobs that was going to be important for the MFO in the future was keeping the nine countries in. Vagaries of Mideast politics, the relationship with the United States, and sheer boredom setting in, and whatever else would create pressures to leave the MFO. The Italian political counselor thought he was supposed to worry about that too, so we worried about it together.

After about a year in Rome I got a call from Ambassador Sam Hart, who had been a colleague as the Economic Counselor in Tel Aviv. He asked if I would like to be PAO (Public Affairs Officer, title of the chief of a country USIS post) in Equador. He had just fired his PAO. I called back to USIA in Washington and told them about the call and they knew he would be calling me. So I asked if it was all right with them, and they said it was fine. I had not been a PAO yet, so I decided if I stayed on in Rome too long I would end up retiring there. I had better get out and become a PAO. My wife, as much as she loved Rome, was very understanding. She had always heard, correctly, that Quito was a lovely city and a nice place for kids.

So that closed off my time in Rome and my on the job involvement with Israel.

It was an interesting and maybe an important transition. I had never served above the junior level in what you might call a typical embassy. I had been with the Voice of America, I had been in a very peculiar consulate general in Sao Paulo, and then an extremely peculiar embassy in Israel. I had never really come to terms with much of what USIS did. Even in Buenos Aires I had gotten very specialized into press stuff, in one particular aspect of the press. In Israel, everything was driven by the big imperatives of U.S. policy in the Middle East, and this whole mission was designed around that policy. We had a MIL group and an AID mission. The AID mission was two persons who handed out checks twice a month. That's all they did. What I was going to learn in Equador was what it is like at most American embassies. If you think about it, most foreign service officers either serve at one of the big almost regional, embassies, or they serve in places that are more like Equador than they are like Israel.

Q: You went to Equador in '83 and you were there until when?

DIETERICH: Until '86.

Q: Do you think this might be a good place to stop?

DIETERICH: Yes, it probably would be.

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Q: This is the 24th of January 2000. Jeff, Equador, 1983. How would you describe the situation when you arrived in Equador?

DIETERICH: Equador is an interesting country. It is very much an Indian country, which means it has the disturbing social aspect of the Andes. That is very much on our minds now because of the coup attempt they just went through in Equador. The country lives under social system that is almost a kind of unspoken apartheid. Although most people in Ecuador have Indian blood, those who either by choice or tradition live an Indian life style and identify with their own indigenous culture, are people out of the political system. They rarely, and usually cannot, aspire to positions of political influence. Most of them make their living in a subsistence agricultural economy.

That having been said, what is different about Equador in the region is that while it has a tradition of political instability, it does not have the tradition of violent nastiness that haunts the politics of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Politics are played very hard, but there is not same fear of reprisal and thirst for vengeance that has cost so many lives in the rest of the Andes.

I think that fortunate difference stems from the fact that the political forces in Equador are sort of evenly balanced. You have two major citieQuito up in the mountains and Guayaquil down on the coast. Neither city has ever been able to dominate the political life of the nation, as has been the case in Peru, where Lima dominates, or in Bolivia where La Paz dominates. Guayaquil is just about the same size as Quito. Although the people and the political culture are very different in the two placethere is a very definite highland lowland dichotomy throughout the Andethey have managed to alternate power from one region to the other. Since they know the other persons are going to get power eventually, they tend to treat each other badly verbally, but in terms of physical repressioit rarely happens.

Q: Do you have the situation that has prevailed in some other places where you have the ten or thirty big families who have won parts of the country where the peasants are so downtrodden, has that system developed?

DIETERICH: I don't know how many families it would be, but there is clearly an upper class that draws its power from two places. One is land itself, but the other source is influence and power over people. There is also a newer class of younger people who are the sons of people who made a lot of money from land or even of European immigrants who worked for people who owned land. They have been fairly well educated - often in the U.S. - and tend to make their money out of commerce and industry. By providing services and imported goods to the landowners they became as rich or richer than their customers and a whole lot more capable of dealing with modern economic issues. It may be more important to have a Chevrolet next to your pharmaceutical company, than it is to own a big, not very efficient, hacienda someplace. A case in point would be the man who became president while I was there, Leon Fibrous Corridor, whose father was the overseer on one of the big estates. He was a man who made a good living and changed the nature of his family by being the top person, working for somebody who owned a lot of land.

By the way, Equador was the model for Joseph Conrad's Nostromo. Conrad was stranded in Guayaquil for awhile and took the country for his Latin American republic in that very good novel.

Q: What was your job when you went there?

DIETERICH: I went there as the PAO, my first experience as the head of a USIS post. I was delighted to have that job, because that is what you aim for.

Q: We were talking off mike a bit, but having come from Israel, which is in continuous crisis, and go to Equador, didn't you find that to not be very challenging?

DIETERICH: No, I didn't feel that way at all. Remember, I had been in Bolivia and lived through two coups d'etat in Bolivia, and served in Argentina in a very exciting time, with the return of Peron after all those years of exile. I had been in Brazil at a time when issues of nuclear power and the drug trade were becoming very serious, so I didn't have that feeling at all. I didn't know what was going to happen in Equador, but I had never been in a boring Latin American country.

Secondly, it is a lot more fun working in a country where you can speak the language. Truth be told, one of the interesting things about working in Latin America is that we really do The foreign service may think it does that worldwide, but it is not really true. We think it is a good idea but we don't really do it much outside of Europe and Latin America. Most of our hard language speaking people are still not good enough to really do business in the local language and we still don't have nearly enough of them. Given that Spanish is an easy language, given that we have a base of native Spanish speakers in the United States, you very soon get to the point where you do almost all your business in Spanish. It never would have occurred to me in those countries to speak English unless the interlocutor insisted upon it. Latin Americans don't insist on it very often. Their attitude is, "I struggled and learned your language up there in your cold and awful country, and you can damn well struggle down here in mine."

And the truth is I was happy to get my own post. That would have been hard to do in the Middle East area because I didn't have Arabic, and I wasn't really very excited about serving in another Middle East country. Remember, I had had three tours in Latin America and I liked it.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

DIETERICH: I had two ambassadors: Sam Hart was the ambassador when I arrived. He was later replaced by Fred Rondon.

Q: I've interviewed both of them, but I was wondering... Sam Hart had come away from Israel with a rather jaundiced view of our relations there. He was chief of the economics section and would draw Israeli requests, only to find that his professional opinion was never accepted because it really depended on the political powers in Congress. I was wondering how you found him to be as an ambassador.

DIETERICH: I think Sam probably also left Equador with great disagreements with U.S. policy. I think he probably left every post with great disagreements with U.S. policy. That's a hard question to answer.

The fact is, I think he got along well with Osvaldo Hurtado, the president who was moderate left and replaced Jaime Roldos who had been killed in an airplane crash. But, I don't think Sam had a lot of fun being ambassador. I don't think he enjoyed it near as much as he thought he would. It is a hard adjustment coming from a country like Israel, where people don't trust us but act like they do, to a country where people do trust us but act like they don't.

Maybe, trust is too strong a word. They have confidence in us to do certain things and protect certain interests. He came to Equador at a time when there were no particularly big problems, although elections were in the offing. He had fired my predecessor. Sam had asked him to do something and the person said he wouldn't do it, or at least he told the staff he wasn't going to do it. I don't remember what the issue was. But I came in at his request. Sam had been a friend in Israel and has remained one. But, he is an officer who believes excessively in the "kiss up, kick down" style of management, except he kicks in both directions - he is not very good at the kissing part.

He had a strong feeling that press was very important and that I was a good press officer. He also had a great fear that USIS, if you didn't watch them very carefully, would go out and hire a "nose flute player" as he always said, to come and put on some sort of meaningless cultural event. In all my years with USIA I had never run into a "nose flute player" nor anything resembling that. What we did have was a pretty good piano player or two under Charlie Wick's artistic ambassador program, which was a program to help young American struggling artists. It worked pretty well. We also had the Twyla Tharp ballet. Now that was a big deal.

I'm not sure Sam knew or appreciated how big a deal it was to get somebody as important as Twyla Tharp to get her company to come and do a performance in Equador. That took a lot of my time. I think the performance was during Sam's time, although it may have been later. Certainly, we began working on it during his time. I was scared to death that somehow I would screw up and we would have to come up with some of the financing ourselves, and I wouldn't be able to figure out a way to do it. Eventually, we were able to get the big municipal theater downtown, which wasn't a bad venue, and talked American companies into providing a lot of support by the simple expedient of suggesting they buy tickets in blocks and either donate them to their staff or for public relations purpose. We sold out the house.

On the day after I got there, we invaded Grenada and I found myself in front of the press trying to speak Spanish again, getting chuckles all over the place because it kept coming out sounding like Italian. The other big problem, of course, was we had elections coming up. Latin Americans always assumed that Americans have some strong opinion about how their elections are supposed to turn out.

The truth is we didn't have very strong opinions about how those elections should turn out. But it is very hard to convince people of that. It is even more difficult if you say nothing, because everybody assumes you are sulking and are mad because the right wing might not win. If you try to reach out to the opposition, then it's "Oh my God, you've switched sides and you want the left to win (or whoever is the opposition), and this is a big change, and Lord knows what you are up to, but it can't be good for us." We approached that problem lots of ways, mainly by taking every opportunity to talk about our objectivity. It didn't always work.

Q: Could you describe the media in Equador at that time?

DIETERICH: It was a typical Latin American construct. You had a couple of big conservative, but not reactionary, dailies, one in Guayaquil and one in Quito, that were pretty good and members of the Inter American Press Association. They were run by people who basically believed in the free press ideas we have here in the United States, although for publishers it is less of an idealistic stance than a free enterprise stance. In other words, "It's my newspaper and I'm entitled to have my opinions and they don't have to be the government's opinions. My opinion is that free enterprise is a neat thing." There is a lot of tension between publishers and journalists, as there is in the United States. Of course, the journalists tend to be more to the left of the political spectrum than the publishers. But, it works for Ecuador, and the country would be much poorer without those big conservative dailies.

Then you had tabloids in both cities, and you had a vociferous but not very well funded political press. Lots of radio stations. A.M. radio transmitters are cheap, and lots of people have radios, but there is very little variety - all play pretty much the same music and have the same ads. I remember only one television channel at that time, government run but not ridiculously so. Fairly decent news broadcasting and inexpensive American reruns, plus Mexican, Brazilian, and Venezuelan soap operas and comedy shows.

Q: In '83 to '86, we were at the height of our involvement, under the Reagan administration, in Central America. How did that play in Equador from your perspective?

DIETERICH: You know, it's funny, I would like to say I spent a great deal of time worrying about that stuff, but I really didn't. Ecuadorians really didn't care very much about that. It was far away. They were interested in their own dispute with Peru, and interested in the fact that they had their own homegrown guerrilla group called Alfaro VivCarajo. It translates something like "Alfaro still lives, by God!" Alfaro being a populist national hero of sorts. But that group did not represent a particularly dangerous threat to the government. I think what really happened with Central America is that it had only a symbolic value. What you thought about what the Americans were doing in Central America had to do with how you felt they ought to behave towards your own country. If you thought there was a danger that the United States would intervene to crush the guerrilla group, then you would be against that. Or if you were scared of the guerilla group, then you were afraid the United States wouldn't intervene to crush the guerrilla group. I don't remember being asked many questions about Nicaragua or El Salvador, and I certainly did not think it was in our interest to stimulate those questions. Also, the questions were hard to deal with because we didn't get a lot of guidance from the department or USIA., and it is not the kind of issue where you want to wing it very much. The problems were very complex, and there is an unwritten rule in the foreign service, and really a pretty good one, that a press attach? in one country does not generate stories about events in another country without coordinating with his counterpart in that country. Communications were not yet good enough among posts so that you really knew how you could be helpful to your counterpart in San Salvador or Managua.

Q: How about drugs?

DIETERICH: Drugs were an issue that took a lot of my time. There was a lot of press work on publicizing what the DEA wanted, and what U.S. drug programs were in Equador and why we did them. Also a lot of work on the cultural side on encouraging local anti drug organizations in Equador.

The absolutely correct theory behind much of the information work we did is that if a country begins to participate in the drug trade, even as a transit point, it would end up being a consumer. You not only become consumers, you become consumers of the industrial detritus of the trade. That is why young Colombians were killing themselves smoking basuco, which was made from the leftovers of the cocaine trade, laced with all sorts of chemicals, might well kill you before you became an addict. We were beginning to see that sort of stuff in Equador.

Also, we had people important in the government whose kids picked up drug habits, often in the United States. I remember doing some work with a nonprofit outfit which was running drug clinics, mainly for children of the middle class who were in trouble. I thought it was a good thing to do because you were hammering home that message to people, "This is not something you are doing to the Americans, it is something you are doing to yourselves."

Q: Did the media pick this up?

DIETERICH: Yes, we had help. The media was very receptive to what we said. The old style of USIA, the USIA that existed when I joined, was an organization that as far as its press relations, and in a sense its cultural relations, dealt with the economics of media poverty. It was easy to place the wireless file in little newspapers that couldn't afford a wire service and had no sources of international news. That worked fine for us through the '50s and '60s. The trouble is, it began to not work for us as conditions improved around the world, particularly in Latin America, where there was already a tradition of fairly prosperous big family owned newspapers. What I had figured out in Argentina and Brazil was that the only way you could get any attention from the big papers was to make sure that you were the source for what the U.S. government was saying. Not ersatz wire service stories, but the raw materials, the text, the official statements. What I tried to do in Equador is what I tried elsewhere - to be the source for what the U.S. government is up to and not spend so much time trying to convince them of the virtues of U.S. society. A lot of Latin Americans believed in those virtues anyway.

I think also, there had been a big change after the Vietnam War. Before the Vietnam War, many of the people we most worried about trusted the U.S. government but did not trust U.S. society, it was too disorderly, too democratic, too vulgar, or whatever. After the Vietnam War you had a different dynamic, where people on the moderate left often tended to trust U.S. society. They didn't trust the U.S. government. Therefore, the problem became the government. So you had two levels. You speak for the government because that is where the problem is; and you provide the raw materials of journalisthe things the government is sayinbecause that's what the best journalists want from you. So finding out what the State Department spokesman had said was difficult to do but very important. Paying a lot of attention to speeches that came across on the wire, the secretary of State, the president, or whoever, getting them out to people quickly. Pointing out the sections where it was relevant to the local situation. You can't always count on a busy editor to read an entire speech, every now and then you have to highlight the relevant parts and get it to him. Get the ambassador to do his own versions of things the government is saying, to restate the proposition in his words. Getting journalists to see the ambassador.

Q: What about person to person relations with the United States? I'm thinking of Ecuadorian students going to the United States and studying, and others on a visitors program. Were the Ecuadorians pretty well plugged into the United States?

DIETERICH: Yes, they were. In the first place, they were not very far away. Second, as the New York Times had pointed out many years before I went to Equador, Miami had become the capital of Latin America. It was like Buenos Aires or Rio had been to an earlier generation - the places you had to visit every now and then if you had money and wanted to stay ahead of the game.

There were a whole lot of old school connections in Equador, people who had gone to universities or graduate school in the United States. Hurtado had been partly educated in the United States. Febres Cordero, the new president, had been educated in a small college in the United States. Many people in both of their cabinets had studies in the U.S. I am a big believer in those educational exchange programs because they make a whale of a difference. Not only in politics but in commerce too. A person who has studied his discipline, whether its medicine, engineering, or computer science, in the United States, has a predisposition to buy American.

That brings me to the Fulbright Program. We had an active Fulbright Program in Equador. Equador is what is known in the educational exchange trade as a commission country. That means there is a bilateral agreement that governs the functioning of the Fulbright Program in that country, through a binational board of directors that meets and makes decisions on the awarding of scholarships. In most countries, the Fulbright commission also serves as an educational advising office, which is helpful because an Ecuadorian who does not come from a rich family that already has a tradition of studying in the United States, who may be the first person in his family to want to study in the United States, needs help; he needs a place where he can go and figure out how it works in the United States. He needs a place that has university catalogues; he may need help in filling out forms; he needs advice on financial aid. All sorts of things. The Fulbright commission in Equador did that. They maintained their own offices and had a lot of kids who got advice on how to get to the States to study. I don't think it is possible to overestimate how important that is.

Q: Was there a pretty good cadre when you arrived and did you continue to cultivate the people who had the American experience in the upper circles?

DIETERICH: Yes, but it had to be handled with care. That is a very subtle relationship. How do I describe it? A person who has studied in the United States, comes home and takes a governmental position, must constantly show that he has not sold out to the Americans. This means he has to be handled by the American Embassy with patience and a certain amount of subtlety, otherwise we are going to burn him. Some colleagues may be suspicious. It is an attitude that says "Well, yes, he studied in the United States; he goes and sees those Americans all the time and God knows what he is telling them. God only knows whether he is going to sell us out to those foreigners." That is an attitude that is encouraged by people that did not study in the United States or people who may owe their allegiance more to European political influences.

The United States political and cultural influence, as opposed to economic clout, in Latin America is fairly new. I think now most people would say that New York, Miami, and Washington are "where it's at." That was not true until the '60s. Most influential Latin Americans took their political sustenance, did their shopping, and looked for their cultural tastes more to Europe than they did to the United States. That follows traditional immigrant patterns and language, and all sorts of things. You have to remember what a big language island Spanish is. It stretches from Madrid to Manila. So traditionally, most Latin Americans have looked to the Spanish and European political spectrum for their political ideas - rather doctrinaire leftists parties and phalangist right wingers on the extremes whose only common ground had to do with so called dependence on the U.S.

Now dependency theories have gone out of fashion in Latin America. After all, democracy really does rule in Latin America, and I do believe that has to do with the change in how Latin Americans view the United States. It probably does represent a triumph of American foreign policy. Like all triumphs, you have to share the blame and credit with a lot of other influences, but the fact is, for the last ten years or so it has been our goal in Latin America to encourage democracy when we could. It has happened.

Q: How was Ronald Reagan perceived? You were there early on.

DIETERICH: Of course, he was inaugurated while I was still in Israel. The fact is the Ecuadorian elections produced a president who considered himself very much a Reaganite. Febres Cordero believed what Ronald Reagan believed. I would guess he believed what Ronald Reagan believed before Ronald Reagan believed it. So that brings us to the elections.

Q: The elections were when?

DIETERICH: The elections were in '84, I think. It was the first time I had seen how an embassy handles elections on a more senior level. It seemed to me the embassy's first priority was to figure out who was going to win the elections and that seemed a little silly to me. It was going to be a hard to call election, and all this energy was going into being the first to report election results - a task force, people sitting around in rooms together, and rigging up radios together and all sorts of things - seemed silly in the sense that it was focusing way too much embassy attention on the election, and this worked against our goal that we were neutral in the election. I kept asking myself what we would do? What is the action that flows from this intelligence? Suppose we figure out an hour before the rest of the world that so and so is going to win the election and we report it to Washington, then what happens? The answer is "nothing."

Q: Well, this is a self generated test. Sort of showing they are smart.

DIETERICH: But to me it is self indulgent and dangerous. When that political officer starts sitting across the desk from somebody and starts interrogating them on what the results of the election are going to be, he may be sending, inadvertently, terrible messages. If there is any advice I used to give political officers when I finally became a DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) it was, "Remember, your questions are somebody else's answers every time. That's not a clever turn of phrase, that is a fact. He is sitting down with you because he wants to know what you are up to. If you sense you are sitting down with somebody who doesn't care what you ask him, find somebody else, because he can't be important - you are wasting your time with him."

I was especially disturbed by attempts to organize a pool in the embassy on who was going to win, because I was convinced it would be leaked to the press. If a story leaked about who won the embassy pool, it would take no time at all for a journalist, even a fairly honest journalist, to turn that into an embassy prediction as to who was going to win. The second round of that story would be disastrous for us. Now, I'd like to tell you I talked the embassy out of having a pool, but I didn't. All I could do was not participate in it myself. I think it is a dangerous thing and show offy and self indulgent. The days are long past when the United States would intervene somehow to keep an election from coming out the way it was going to come out.

Q: On this election, how did we see the issues as far as American interests were concerned?

DIETERICH: We had not done badly. The main interests were, "Will American investments be treated well? Will they follow our lead on drug issues? Will they behave reasonably on human rights?" We did have a modest AID program in Equador and wondered if we would be able to continue those programs. All these are issues that occupy the thought of foreign service posts throughout Latin America.

The fun of dealing with Latin America is that it really is important to the United States and in ways that are fairly immediate. When Ronald Reagan said all that silly stuff about the tanks rolling into Harlingen, Texas, he obviously didn't know much about Mexico nor much about tanks, and he certainly didn't know much about Nicaragua. But behind that, like a lot of things that Reagan said, was a real truth. What happens in Central America affects Mexico, because Mexico by nature is vulnerable, and what happens in Mexico affects the United States right away. Whether it is drugs going over the border or people going over the border, or sewage spilling into the bay in San Diego, or whatever, what Mexico does really is important to the United States and vice a versa. Our interest in Latin America, and especially in Central Mexico, are not some theory about dominoes, it is stuff that happens every day. Now how did I get off on that tirade?

Q: Well, I'll go back to my original question. Did we see any American issues in the elections?

DIETERICH: Yes, we wanted good government and stability, good behavior on human rights, progress toward democracy because if we didn't get those things we couldn't pursue the more down to earth programs we really needed to pursue. Otherwise, our commercial interests, fishing interests off the coast of Equador, even environmental interests in the Galapagos, and the drug issues could not be handled efficiently.

We wanted the cooperation of Equador to help us stem the transit of drugs out of Bolivia through Equador into Mexico and into the United States. It is in the nature of American politics that if you are going to cooperate with somebody financially, if you are going to help him pay to solve problems that we cause, you have to have a certain level of acceptance on the part of the American body politic, and to get that you have to have a pretty good human rights record and you have to have a reasonably democratic political system, and you've got to have a military that is efficient but under civilian control. Those are issues upon which we can't very well compromise. Oh yes, and you don't beat up on religious folks. Those were our interests.

We were not particularly worried that either new government would be opposed to those interests. So we could look at that election in a fairly relaxed way because neither side was going to do great damage to our interests. What we wanted to see was a clean process. We pretty much got it. This was a little bit before the great armies of election observers and things like that. Febres Cordero won it fair and square and this represented one of those periodic sea changes in Ecuadorian politics where the center of power moved to Guayaquil.

Q: Did you find a problem of the type you saw in Rome, where you sort of hop back and forth and make sure people weren't picking up the snobbery of Quito versus Guayaquil?

DIETERICH: Absolutely. I had a branch USIS post, at Quito, at the consulate in Guayaquil. It was never very well staffed, to tell you the truth. I had to go to Guayaquil often, but I liked it and didn't mind going there. My experience in Santa Cruz, Bolivia sort of helped. I don't mind what the Latin Americans refer to rather disdainfully as "tropicalismo" - I kind of like tropicalismo and feel very comfortable with it.

I suppose it was a problem, and I don't think it affected our relationship with Febres Cordero. No matter how much you do on it, the Guayaquil people will say that the embassy doesn't do enough in Guayaquil.

Besides I had to be careful with time and resources. We had an old tradition of working in the city of Cuenca. Cuenca is down to the south, very much in the mountains, a city of great charm but tremendous isolation. I don't think there was a road into Cuenca until the 1960s. I remember going to the cultural center, being shown an old piano and being told "We are proud of the piano because it came up on the back of a mule." It must have been one hell of a mule. Cuenca was this very old, very traditional city that always felt neglected. But they felt they had very strong cultural traditions and the cultural attach?, or head of USIS should pay much more attention to Cuenca than we ever did.

One of the tricks you use, and we used this in Mexico also, is when you have a Fulbright Commission meeting, quarterly meeting, you have it in another city. You would be amazed how important you can make the Fulbright Commission look when you are out of the capitals. In most of those towns and cities, the city fathers would turn out to greet us and put on entertainments and dinners, and everything else. So we did regional stuff. I even remember going down to see the oil fields in the jungles of Equador.

Anyway, Febres Cordero won. I guess he was convinced that Hart's embassy wasn't the embassy he wanted to work with. I guess he thought we had been too close to Hurtado, but you know, that's that old dilemma in the foreign service. Of course we had been close to Hurtado, he was the government and an interesting person, who was seen as a progressive you could work with. He was well respected in the rest of Latin America, so there was every reason in the world why we should have had a close relationship with him. I thought we had done fairly well in reaching out to the opposition. (End of tape)

Q: You were saying it was a new government?

DIETERICH: Yes, Febres Cordero may have thought "Hey, it's a new government, I won, a new party, I'm from Guayaquil. The least the Americans can do is send a new ambassador." We may see that as undesirable, but I have a feeling a lot of Latin American politicians see it as sort of a logical thing.

Q: Fred Rondon came in?

DIETERICH: Yes, Fred Rondon came in. Sam Hart left, I think rather unhappy. I had known Fred for quite awhile, and it was fun to have an ambassador about my age. I had worked with him before as a colleague in Washington. Until I went to Equador ambassadors had been rather Godlike, distant figures, and all of a sudden ambassadors were persons I had grown up in the service with.

Q: How did Rondon operate?

DIETERICH: I think he was in a pretty ideal position, and his first job was to solidify his relationship with the Febres Cordero government. This he did pretty well. It was right after the elections, so reaching out to the opposition wasn't a really high priority at that point. You would still have time to do that, the opposition is licking its wounds anyway, and most likely will reorganize itself. The human rights situation wasn't bad. We weren't in a human rights violating country, so you didn't have the concern of, "Gee are we being nice enough to the dissidents?" When it came to reaching out to Indians, I just don't think we knew how to do it.

Equador is a small country, but it is really a big country. There is a whole lot of countryside area out to the east, going down into the jungles, that we don't know much about, and there aren't very many towns down there. That is where a lot of folks live, but we don't have much contact with them. Every now and then they get mad and come roaring into Quito and raise hell. Then they go home. That is what happened in this last coup. The problem is, they go home, and there is almost no way to get a handle on the political organization because there is no place to go. If you send a political officer down - where does he go? Where does he paddle his canoe? Ambassador Rondon did a good job in getting in tight with Febres Cordero. I think Febres liked him. I don't remember big problems coming up, but I do remember doing a lot of work on drug stuff.

Q: What about relations with Peru? Was this an issue while you were there, or is it always an issue?

DIETERICH: It is always an issue, but I talked about the map and Equador being a big country. An Ecuadorian map would show it being a lot bigger than it would be on our map. There were a couple of dustups down on the frontier in the 1940s, and the United States is one of the guarantors...

Q: Right at the beginning of the war.

DIETERICH: We are one of the guarantors, along with Brazil and Venezuela, so we have a role to play. I can remember that there was a dustup and some shooting back and forth. Military attaches went down and looked at it and we made recommendations. But our recommendations were always the same. We think the parties should get together and solve the problem. Well, gee! There's a ringing policy to hang your hat on!

Q: I don't know what it is we are guaranteeing.

DIETERICH: We'll guarantee that we will have the same policy. I don't remember much coming from that. The trouble is, it is a source of instability, and when a dustup occurs you get people on the right in both countries, and people within the military in both countries who see that as an opportunity to attack the government. They then say, "Dammit, we didn't do what we were supposed to do. We should have been a whole lot tougher and we weren't tough because the president isn't tough." That stuff really works because they believe it. Just like there are people in this country who think we ought to be a lot tougher than we often are on certain issues because they aren't running things. That led to the Vargas affair and what was a coup attempt.

Q: Was this during your time?

DIETERICH: Yes.

Q: Can you talk about what the Vargas affair was?

DIETERICH: Frank Vargas was an Air Force General and an inveterate coup plotter. I first met him at a Marine Corps Ball, because my information officer was dating an officer in the MIL group who was known for his bad judgment. He took it upon himself, without clearing it with anybody, to invite Frank Vargas as his guest to the Marine Corps Ball. I ended up sitting at a table with them. I realized Vargas should not have been invited. Everybody knew who he was, and it looked like we were being nice to Frank Vargas. Frank, by the way, wasn't a nickname, he was named "Frank" and there were American connections in his family, but I'm not sure what they were. He did speak English very well. You know, a swaggering macho type military officer.

The details are a little foggy now. He tried something of a coup nature but it didn't work, and Febres Cordero had him arrested and thrown in the clink. Then days later Febres Cordero flew down to the air force base outside Guayaquil, and was himself taken hostage by the air force. They said he had to release Frank Vargas. Then there was an attempt of a semi takeover of the military portion of the airport in Quito also. We got pretty worried and there were the usual phone calls back and fortU.S. military to their military, and others saying, "Bring this to a halt, it is no good." an"If you do this, you will never get one more cent of U.S. military aid and we won't sell you anything." Basically, it worked. Febres Cordero was released and Frank Vargas was put on a plane and escorted out of the country. Nobody got hurt, but it shook Febres Cordero. I think he felt we had done pretty much what we ought to have done but he was never as secure in his presidency after that.

Q: I'm thinking of events in January 2000 where there was an Indian revolt, then the military came in and within three days after phone calls of this nature, they turned the government over to the vice president. Was there a feeling of, "Gee, we can't go too far because the Americans are giving our military all this aid and if we mess around they will call it off?" In a way, this creates a dependency.

DIETERICH: We control their stuff. Well, that's good.

Q: At the same time, it means a mindset. From our point of view, and the people's point of view, it's probably not bad. It means you are not going to have military coups coming one after the other which are not for the benefit of the people.

DIETERICH: If I could make the trade where people in Latin America believe their military is dependent upon the United States but their economy is not, I would make that trade every time. That's good stuff. That's what happened this month. He proposed to dollarize the economy, which makes a lot of economic sense. I can understand how a person who has been educated at Harvard and has studied some economics might think this was a really great idea. Panama has done well with it.

The poorest of the poor in Equador said, "Wait a minute, this means prices for everything are going to go up and we are going to be screwed." They reacted accordingly. Pretty much unable to grasp the idea, to embrace the idea that, "Yes, it will be tough for a while but in the long run we'll all be better off." It's the old argument - in the long term we are all dead anyway, so this doesn't count. They were joined by junior officers in the military, who are also among the poorest of the poor. They don't get much money either, and if they start looking at a situation where the stuff they buy is going to be four times more expensive, they can't live with that. So they joined the revolt, the president went to ground someplace, and a junta was formed which included a military officer who was sort of the leader of the younger coup types, and he joined with the Indians. Then I think the phone calls started. Then the head of the military replaced the younger man on the junta, then dissolved the junta which had ruled Equador for three hours. That seems ridiculous and that is always very funny, but I've seen that same thing in other countries.

Q: It happened almost in that same way in what was at that time the Soviet Union.

DIETERICH: We always think it's funny but that is actually fairly normal.

Q: Going back now, what about the issue that used to dominate our relations - tuna fishing?

DIETERICH: Tuna, oh big deal.

Q: We're talking about the '83 to '86 treaty.

DIETERICH: The issue there was one of territorial waters. They claimed a lot more territorial waters than we claimed, but we sort of recognized their right to claim those waters as an economic zone and advised our fishermen, mainly out of San Diego, not to fish in them. We were constantly worried about situations where a U.S. based tuna boat would stray into the Ecuadorian economic fishing zone, and would be apprehended, escorted into Guayaquil, and then it would take a lot of time to get the boat and the people released. Sam Hart worked out a pretty good deal, if I remember it correctly, with the San Diego tuna fishermen's association or somebody, whereby we would work our contacts with the Ecuadorian Navy and get word they were tracking somebody in the water. We would then get on the horn to the tuna fishing association (or whatever it was) in San Diego, and they would get on the radio and say, "You are busted, get out of there. They are on their way to get you." Everybody was happy with that.

Q: At one point, the American tuna fleet was saying "screw you" going into the zone and getting arrested, then getting compensated. We had gone beyond that point by this time.

DIETERICH: I guess so. Compensated by the U.S. Government? I guess so. You see, that doesn't really work, because the Ecuadorians (the person doing the capturing) can put that boat out of commission for longer and longer periods of time. That merely creates a motivation for them to lose the papers and keep them locked up in the port by saying it is all in the paper work. The longer they can tie up that tuna boat, the better for them - the worse for the tuna fishermen.

Q: By the time you had come there, it was really working at the edges?

DIETERICH: We were working pragmatically by saying to a government that was willing to hear it, "We don't want these problems, because they aren't helping anybody. So let's make them go away." That was distinct from some of the tuna problems we have now. That was not the tuna dolphin problem, which is a later issue.

Q: But that was not during your time.

DIETERICH: I had to work with the tuna dolphin problem later in Mexico.

Q: What about the Galapagos?

DIETERICH: Well, in the first place, I went to Galapagos, and it's a wonderful experience. It showed how nice it is to work in an embassy. Our accredited diplomats are treated as Ecuadorian citizens when it comes to paying for a trip to the Galapagos, which means it's a whole lot cheaper - about one third the cost. So my wife, daughter, and son (he was just a little tike at that point) all took a cruise to the Galapagos. We sailed out on a ship that took about 90 people, a small North Sea passenger vessel, and spent about six or seven days touring the Galapagos, then flew back. They have this great routine where you pull up to a nice site in the morning, have your breakfast, then load into a motorized whaleboat to go ashore. You look at whatever beast is on that island, wander around, load back up and go back to the ship for lunch and a siesta. In the meantime, they have cruised to someplace else and take you ashore once again to another location. It was absolutely charming, and we had a particularly good trip.

We had booked late and were assigned a cabin down below the waterline, an undesirable cabin. When we went aboard I noticed this man I had met someplace before, went up and said hello. It turned out he was the owner of the ship and I had met him at a reception some place in Guayaquil a few weeks before. I think he was an American, but a longtime resident of Equador, and he asked where we were staying and then said, "That's not good enough for somebody from the embassy, take my cabin." His cabin was a virtual motel room right behind the bridge.

The Ecuadorians do a really good job in the Galapagos. They are extremely serious about avoiding ecological damage to this very special place, and they control who goes there. It appears to be very successfully controlled access, and the behavior of people is also controlled. The guides were young Ecuadorians, and some foreigners, who knew what they were talking about and would jump all over you if you dropped a candy wrapper or something on one of the islands or did something you shouldn't do. There are a couple of small settlements where people are doing light agriculture on a couple of the islands, just enough to maintain an Ecuadorian presence there.

I also got involved with Bill Buckley. He called the embassy and said he was coming down. Remember, he did those sailing books for awhile. He chartered a yacht called the Sealestial out of the east coast of the United States. He was flying down to Guayaquil and the yacht was sailing down; he was going to join the yacht at Guayaquil and go out to the Galapagos. He asked us to make sure Sealestial had permission to visit the Galapagos. I got the action on it because he was a journalist, I guess.

Q: Bill Buckley was quite a famous conservative journalist and well known.

DIETERICH: We talked with the Ecuadorian Navy and made sure everything was all set, then I went to Guayaquil and met him at the plane. We had a nice evening together, mainly talking about sailing, then he went out and had a nice cruise around the Galapagos, came back, and we talked him into coming up to Quito, just because it was a nice place to stay and Sam Hart wanted to meet him. We spent an evening at the residence and the next day we toured churches in Quito. The worst thing he ever said to me was, "You know, we really had a good time out there in the Galapagos, you should have come with us." I thought, "WELL, WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK ME?" That was after I had been there anyway.

Q: Are there any other issues we should cover in this '83 to '86 period?

DIETERICH: I guess not. Personnel issues were hard. I don't know whether you want to get into that.

Q: Why don't you go into it a little.

DIETERICH: Remember, I lost my information officer because she decided to get married and go off with the military attach?, the same dope that had invited Frank Vargas to the Marine Ball, and the agency told me they couldn't get me anybody. I was also told I couldn't get a secretary, we still had an American secretary to help us with classified stuff in those days, and they couldn't do that either. I stumbled across hiring spouses before it became very fashionable to do it, so I hired a spouse to act as a secretary, which worked out well. Then I hired a spouse to be my acting information officer. She was a lady who had some passing experience with the press, I trained her for the job and she got pretty well at it. We also worked out a deal whereby the Fulbright Commission would share some spaces with AID, which resulted in some money being saved.

AID had an academic scholarship program and we were able t combine the educational advising service into one operation. I was kind of proud of that, but one of my successors killed the whole thing because he said it was more trouble than it was worth. It seemed to me that for the customer to do one stop shopping was a good idea, and what we didn't want was to have people who wanted a scholarship shopping around among USIS, AID and even the MIL group at times. I made an attempt to put it all together.

Q: Well, in '86, whither?

DIETERICH: In '86 I was asked by the then USIA area director to come back as her deputy in the Latin America office in USIA Washington. I was happy to do that, so in the summer of '86 we came back here.

Q: You were doing this from '86 until when?

DIETERICH: Until '89.

Q: What was your job?

DIETERICH: The deputy director is the alter ego or the number two for the director, but it has a lot to do with personnel management, getting people assigned to places. It has to do with liaison with the State Department and other government agencies. You write a hell of a lot of OERs (Office Efficiency Reports). Also there are a lot of budgetary issues. It had to do with the management of posts throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, and required a lot of training and travel. It was incumbent on the director and the deputy director to make sure they visited every post once a year in order to write a more credible efficiency report on the PAOs involved. That was a complicated process. Remember in the old system, PAOs got at least two efficiency reports every cycle, one from the ambassador and one from the area director. Like any headquarters office, we were charged with personnel, budget, supervision and fire fighting. Also, we represented Latin American interests to the executive office of USIA, Charlie Wick was director.

Q: Would you talk a bit about your impression, during the '86 to '89 period, of Charlie Wick, as director of USIA. He was quite a strong personality, a friend of Ronald Reagan.

DIETERICH: Charlie Wick took a whole lot of heat early in his tenure. The agency was really down on him. He said things he shouldn't have every now and then. There were all sorts of jokes and graffiti around. He was picky; he was trying to impose a sort of conservative Reaganite agenda on USIA, and it wasn't good for USIA. USIA is a fairly liberal group anyway. USIA started out in 1953 recruiting people out of academia and the press.

My experience with Wick was somewhat different. He had learned a lot. He had been burned now and then in the press and he had gotten more accustomed to the bureaucracy, and more secure in his own leadership of USIA. He had a lot of success in terms of funding that sort of endeared him to people at USIA. Whatever you say about Wick, we got the money and we have clout at the White House. I found him pleasant to deal with. I didn't find him particularly difficult, and I also found that I didn't like some of the criticism of Charlie Wick. Frankly, I found there was a touch of genteel anti Semitism about some of the attitudes that I didn't like at all. I don't like people getting beaten up because they aren't like us and I don't like people being beaten for style. The trouble with a lot of USIA people at that time was they were too much like the rest of the foreign service, kind of reserved, slightly snobby, and at times not very effective in their snobbism. Plus, I think it is the duty of the federal bureaucracy to reflect the policy priorities of the administration. I know that is annoying to people every now and then, and I know some people see it as requiring them to violate their principles. But I think there is a principle of democracy that says the people that win the election get to call the policy. It is the principle I follow, and it is the duty of foreign service people to implement those policies to the best of their ability.

Charlie Wick will be remembered most in USIA for having done what he did with television; for inventing World Net. Now it is going to be easy to forget, because of integration of USIA into the State Department and because World Net is already kind of pass?. To Charlie's credit, he got us into World Net when it wasn't yet pass?, when real time transmission by satellite really meant something. There were times, not always, when it worked pretty damn well. When we could take a group of journalists, put them in a room, and let them have a background session with an assistant secretary of state, or a deputy assistant secretary, or some cabinet level official. That was creating electronically for them an experience they weren't going to get any other way. They didn't have a chance in hell of making everything come together so they could get to Washington and interview this person one on one. I thought that was perfectly good press work, and I thought it was a creative use of technology.

I don't know whether you read Peter Galbraith's critique in the Foreign Service Journal a few weeks ago of having disastrous election coverage through World Net because it wasn't very timely. That was the kind of thing where we could never competUSIA did not have the resources to be better than CNN. But when it came to putting responsible journalists or responsible leaders with their counterparts in the United States without requiring a whole lot of travel, World Net did that very well. It saved time and money.

Q: When you left in '89, did you feel that USIA was a pretty strong agency and doing the right things?

DIETERICH: After a year as deputy I became the area director, which gave me more access. The answer is no, I didn't feel the USIA was a very strong agency. There were already a lot of problems. I could talk about this for quite awhile. Maybe it is something you would want to talk about, and it is a hard topic, because we are still in the period of integrating USIA with State, and still in a period where a lot of my colleagues, especially the ones in the USIA alumni Association of which I am the president, are grieving the loss of an agency in which they spent their careers. Those who are grieving the hardest are those who were there close to the beginning. You have to remember the reason for having a USIA had to do with very strongly held ideological opinions about why the State Department couldn't be trusted with public diplomacy. Those earlier USIS officers really believed this. By the time I was working in USIA some of us had already recognized that it was a hell of a lot easier to do your job if you worked out of the embassy instead of in your own offices or someplace else.

But if you looked at an earlier generation of USIA officers, they had an opposite view. USIA had to have its separate quarters in order to distinguish itself from the embassy, and that USIA's job was a very different kind of diplomacy, a very educational kind of function that could only be done if you had your own turf and that should not be contaminated by the day to day narrow policy considerations of the embassy. But at the same time most PAOs in the field were beginning to figure out that they really did owe something to the ambassador. But it was often kind of standoffish relationship, but PAOs were probably models of cooperation compared to their counterparts heading up AID missions, Milgroups and CIA stations.

I guess things got better with the Kennedy administration, when the "country team" concept was initiated. It basically said that all U.S. government agencies in a given country were under the direction of the American ambassador. It did not address the fact that those same agencies got their funding from bureaucracies in Washington that did not report to the Secretary of State. Now the theory is that ambassadors represent the president and not the Secretary of State but the fact of the matter is that almost all ambassadors get their marching orders through a regional assistant secretary. So there really was a disconnect.

I think most people from other agencies thought the country team notion was a good deal for ambassadors. I don't really see it that way. I may have been somewhat of a good deal for the State Department, k it was less of a bargain fro ambassadors. What the Kennedy administration had really said to ambassadors was, "We are now going to hold you responsible for activities over which you don't have sufficient control?" That's being delegated responsibility without authority. That's what they tell every ensign in the navy to never do, but ambassadors got stuck with it.

As I said before, some of us began to believe that it was easier to do the job well when you worked out of an embassy. On the press and information side, we began to learn that U.S. policy itself is what is interesting to the most important news organizations, and what we are seen as being a credible source of. It is with policy materials that we have an advantage over the wire services and international radio and television. It is what we have that other sources don't have.

On the cultural side of USIS, more and more people began to get into the act. More people could afford to study in the U.S. on their own and more organizations, including universities themselves, were running exchange programs and offering scholarships. As economies improved in Europe, the Far East and Latin America, major U.S. cultural attractions were touring with very little or no help form the U.S. government, and in the very poor nations we didn't have enough money to help anyway. But we did learn that some of government programs, like the Fulbright scholarships, had prestige because they were government programs. In many countries, the involvement of the U.S. embassy in a particular program added prestige to a program rather than making it less credible. Sometimes Americans have a hard time believing that governments have prestige programs. We need to remember that in most of the world, for example, the prestige universities are the government ones, not the private.

So we were beginning to learn to use our governmental nature as an advantage and to identify ourselves with U.S. diplomacy rather than to distance ourselves from it as had been traditional with USIS.

As the media and as the academic world began to become more international, as newspapers around the world began subscribe on own to wire services, as general levels of prosperity meant increased travel, and academic interchange was going to happen anyway, we were left without the central role we had in the years after the war and the early years of the cold war. We had traded on the economics of poverty for a long time, but it became clear to me in the '70s that we couldn't do that anymore. If we continued to do that, we were going to be irrelevant and we had to find alternatives. To me, the alternative was becoming an impeccable and lightning fast source of policy information and of trading on the prestige of our exchange programs. To Charlie Wick, the alternative was to get again on the cutting edge of technology, and he jumped on the early television stuff. He recreated the advantage we had held before when the wireless file was the only wire service in town. We were the only direct satellite feed in town for about ten years, which worked well for us.

In the meantime, academic exchange was doing pretty well in the sense there was more and more of a market for it. More and more U.S. universities, instead of taking a few foreign students as a matter of duty, suddenly realized there was a whole market out there and we want part of this pie. We want foreign students because they represent a resource. We want Fulbrighters because that is prestige. USIA still had a central position in sort of being the broker, the people who could most efficiently help you find some students for a university, or help you locate your professor teaching in some other university, because that was also good for you. They were the key to the Fulbright process and the key to a lot of other educational exchange processes. Our cultural affairs officers, who have often been dismissed as persons who will bring in "nose flute' players, in fact were playing a very key role in educational exchange. That is money, big bucks.

I have spoken to trade missions and successfully said, "Get your state university to offer some scholarships. That's investment; that's a loss leader. Get a few people from this country into your state university and, believe me, they will bring others with them." I could see in El Salvador that there was a whole club of people who had gone to Louisiana State.

My experience as area director for USIA taught me a couple of things. One thing, I didn't think the agency was very healthy. I thought we were losing the technological battle in ways that couldn't be recouped. I thought the Voice of America was so far out of it and so basically institutionally crazy that they were going to be no help at all. Remember, the Voice was about one third, almost one half of the resources of the agency. I sat on a committee, which was the modernization committee, and you could NOT talk those people out of short wave radio broadcasts, no matter what.

Q: Who listens to short wave radio anyway?

DIETERICH: Not very many people in LatiAmerica. I think there were two kinds of people who listened regularly to short wave. First there were DXerthat is short wave hobbyists more interested in how many stations they could get than any kind of content. Second there were old right wingers who thought it was kind of a duty to listen to the Voice. They were holdovers from U.S. policy in the fifties. Neither of those groups fit within any target audience I could identify, and neither of them had any particular influence in the politics of their country. So, as far a short wave audiences were concerned, the Voice was totally out of it, at least in Latin America.

Where we could stay in it was by placing Voice of America materials on local stations, because if you don't get into drive time in any city in the world, you aren't on the radio anymore. That's what radio is for. That's what you do when you are driving in a car. If you are a fanatic, that is what you do when you eat breakfast. So what we kept trying to do was to make it easier for a local station to take VOA and use it as or in its prime time news broadcasts. There were always a few that did in every country. But not the biggies. For instance, the Latin America Division of the Voice, the news service, would support us on this because they wanted the audience, but the engineering division hated it because all they wanted was short wave, and the higher ups felt that placing things on other stations could compromise their reputation for objectivity, and could compromise the Voice's reputation for real journalism. If you wanted to get into the soul of the news room of the Voice of America, you were dealing with a bunch of persons whose worst nightmare was that they would snubbed by the New York Times person at a cocktail party; that they would not be seen as real journalists, which by the way they were. I have no criticism of the quality of the VOA news broadcasters, they are damn good. They were sounding like NPR before NPR sounded like NPR. But they had a big inferiority complex which they bolstered by being super partisans of press freedom.

I came to the conclusion that the Voice was out of it, except perhaps in denied areas like China. When they failed to take over television and let the rest of the agency take it over, when nobody ever said we need Voice of America television, I knew they weren't serious. I realized the engineering division, who I had worked for early in my career, had really made a career choice which was nerdiness to the ultimate degree, "We would rather be the world's greatest short wave broadcasters than relevant." In the meantime, I saw the department becoming more and more aware of public affairs and getting better at it. This is something you often didn't say in USIA, because if you said "the department is getting better at public affairs" (which was true), the official ideology of USIA was, "No that can't be, because if that is true, what are we doing here?"

Q: The Department of State's spokesman has become more and more the bell ringer. This is where your news is often made.

DIETERICH: Well, it is where the news is often made, and the secret is, policy is often made in the process of press guidance and speech writing. That is where policy is made because on certain issues - often by accident - because it is where the department is often forced to take a stand on issues it would rather avoid.

Well, at any rate I could see changes, maybe because of pretty good work at a lot of USIS posts and a lot of embassies over the years, where ambassadors were increasingly aware of the fact that the press really counted and was important - that it was very difficult to do your job in a particular country if the press was hostile to you. It seemed to me there was an evolving situation in the department. At the beginning of my career, it seemed the attitude was, "Public affairs is not important. If we don't do it, it can't be important, therefore to hell with it." But another mindset began to show itself in the Latin American Bureau with the Central America problems of the mid '80s. That was a sort of silver bullet mentality. Somehow there was some kind of magic in public affairs that would make flawed policy work if you just made the right videotape or pamphlet.

That attitude was almost more troublesome than the earlier attitude of, "We would just as soon ignore it." A lot of it was naive. The trouble with that naivet? was that it worked into the naivet? of some people in USIA also, so that if you had a deputy assistant secretary of State saying, "Let's make a videotape to tell the truth about Nicaragua," you would have a bunch of persons in the television and motion picture division that would say, "Yes sir, we can do that, we make those all the time." Of course, no videotape was going to change what people thought about Nicaragua, so I found myself in the uncomfortable position of being the person that says, "No, that won't work." I knew a lot of those high flown schemes and white papers were not only not going to work, but were also going to have a negative impact. They would reflect badly on the department and USIA.

I also grew increasingly pessimistic about USIA's ability to influence policy. One of the stories that every USIA officer knows was when Ed Murrow said, "We have to be in on the takeoffs as well as the crash landings." That is absolutely true. Anybody who makes a policy and doesn't think about public affairs at the beginning is a fool. Secrecy doesn't really work and the end of policy is almost always public. If it isn't public, it was probably a bad policy and won't make any difference anyway. But you better have people thinking at the beginning about how it's going to play at the end, because the worst disaster in diplomacy is an agreement negotiated with a country which won't fly because the people in that country hate it. It produces a reputation of failure for the department within the U.S. government, and it produces a sense of betrayal in the country we were trying to influence.

Q: Something I learned at the beginning was, "There is no such thing as a diplomatic victory." This implies your side has put something over on the other side. Of course diplomacy continues, so a victory means you have put something over which means it is going to sour relations the next time it comes up.

DIETERICH: That's right. Why would you ask somebody to do something you wouldn't or can't do, unless you are out to get him? I came out of my experience in the headquarters of USIA somewhat pessimistic about the future. That view left you no place to go except back to an embassy.

Charlie Wick had access to the president, but he didn't have any great influence on policy because he didn't think much about policy. That wasn't his thing. Charlie's thing was technique, funding, and producing. He was a producer, and a good one, but he was not a man who thought a lot about policy.

Q: I'm told that he had a very short attention span and that people who dealt with him made a point of having charts and going in with five sentence presentations.

DIETERICH: The world is led by people with short attention spans. In defense of Charlie Wick, I'm not at all sure his reputation for not paying attention and doing whatever he wanted to do was really deserved. I accompanied him on a visit to Mexico. People has said to me, "Oh boy, you're going to hate that, it's going to be awful." That reputation certainly didn't show in Mexico. He was absolutely perfect, charming, and stuck to the script. He said what he was supposed to say; he was patient, he listened, and he was quite charming. I sat in a meeting with Charlie Wick and Bernardo Sepulveda, the foreign minister of Mexico, and if you know Bernardo Sepulveda at all, you can't imagine two more opposite characters in their approach.

Q: Sepulveda was not a great friend of the United States.

DIETERICH: No, he wasn't, he was very Europeanized, but Charlie Wick and he just went at it, they had a wonderful hour and a half conversation. I'm not sure they actually understood each other, but it went very nicely.

Anyway, I thought the mission, in a sense, was beginning to evaporate within the U.S. government in ways we didn't have much control over. We could not regain control of technology; that was lost to us. We could not slow down the flow of information in the world. We could not have a great influence on policy because we weren't big enough. Some of those factors, whether USIA liked it or not, argued for the consolidation of USIA and the department. If people with public affairs expertise need to be in at the takeoff you have to do it in the department. The theory at USIA was that if you got on the NSC (National Security Council), if you got into NSC meetings, then you could influence policy. I'm probably wrong, but the theory I developed was that the NSC doesn't really work very well. You have to remember when I was there in Washington. It was Ollie North time.

Q: It's personality driven in the NSC.

DIETERICH: Well the NSC is supposed to be a coordinating mechanism, but I don't think it coordinates very well. Out of frustration at not being able to coordinate very well, it occasionally conceives its own policy and becomes its own agency, which is what happened in Central America during the Reagan administration.

Coordination really is difficult. I sat in on a lot of interagency meetings during my time at USIA, and came to realize how unproductive they can be. Everybody gets together in a big room at the department with a principal representative of each agency and a couple of other people from that agency sitting behind him against the wall. Then you go around the table, every representative sets out a ritualized position, and very little negotiation takes place because the people sitting there have the two outriders behind them, one of whom is going to tell on him when they go back to their agency.

So the mechanism doesn't really work well. That means the only effective coordinating mechanism in the US foreign affairs establishment is the country team at an embassy overseas. There you sit down with people who know each other well, without folks sitting behind. The people at the table have some resources in their hands and are authorized to horse trade. This sometimes works well at least at the country level, but it may account for a certain bilateral inclination in our policy.

Q: One thing I haven't asked you about. You were in USIA headquarters during the surfacing of the Iran Contra affair weren't you? Did that have any effect on you all?

DIETERICH: Sure. It is one of those events that I can remember where I was when it surfaced. I was at the department in the Latin America Bureau with people who were involved in the whole thing. There was a stunned reaction at the department. How do you deal with things like that?

What you do in a case like Iran Contra, from the USIA's point of view, is what you did at Watergate. You explain the process. You no longer can defend the people. There are two jobs: first, you explain the process ad nauseam and you find ways to say "the policy is still a good idea anyway even though these people really screwed it up in their zeal. And the screw up will be dealt with by the process." Secondly, you point out that the basic policy is still a good idea, given of course that the policy survives the scandal. In the case of Iran Contra that meant saying that the United States would continue to support those people opposed to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and why.

Those are the two things you can do. I'm not sure how effective they are but it does help to explain the process and I think with both Watergate and Iran Contra, the process ended up being rather admired overseas. People liked it. They thought, "That wouldn't happen in my country," but a lot of people thought it might be nice if it did.

As the USIA person, I spent a lot of time in the department in those days, so I knew the principal players in all this stuff, including the political appointees. It was a rough time. Ollie North's excessive zeal was not a surprise but there was some "oh, shit, it finally happened" reaction and almost a feeling that it had to happen because there were too many people in the process who were willing to salute and go ahead and carry out a bad idea that appeared to be good in the short term but was obviously stupid in the long term. There were too many people who didn't think there was a long term. In diplomacy there is always a long term.

Q: Isn't this one of the problems of almost everybody from the professional, but certainly from the political side, that most people are in a job for the short term?

DIETERICH: That is true and it means you have to have some principles somehow. Those things we call principles - a certain regard for truth, and human rights, for example - are also very pragmatic stuff, because you have to be there when the current crisis is all over. The long term isn't that far away. If we overthrew the Sandinistas, what would replace them? I think the fact that we really didn't overthrow them was probably a good thing for Nicaragua, because eventually you had an electoral process. I know the fact that we didn't overthrow anybody in El Salvador, despite all the money over those many years, ended up being good for El Salvador. It is fairly easy to overthrow a stupid authoritarian government. What is hard is to get something to replace it. We proved that in Guatemala.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point and we will pick this up in 1989 whither?

DIETERICH: El Salvador.

Q: Okay, so we'll go to El Salvador in 1989? You were there from when to when?

DIETERICH: From '89 to '92.

Q: Good.

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Today is the 15th of February 2000. Jeff, in 1989 you are off to El Salvador. You are there from '89 to '92 - what was your job and who was your ambassador at that time?

DIETERICH: I went there as the deputy chief of missions, on loan to the department from USIA. As I was winding up my tour in USIA as area director for Latin America, my old friend Bill Walker, who had been the DAS for Central America, came over for lunch. We had served together in Okinawa in the '60s, when he was a vice consul in the consular unit in Naha and I was the executive officer of the Okinawa relay station of the Voice. We went to lunch and he asked me if I would consider being DCM and I said I would think about it. We talked about where things were going in El Salvador. I wasn't particularly interested in going to El Salvador and helping to preside over a slogging kind of guerilla war, in which we were major funders, for three more years. Bill and I both felt that some kind of peace agreement, and a peace agreement favored by U.S. policy, was in the offing. It was an interesting illustration of a phenomenon I learned working in public affairs. That is that you need to be very careful of your cover story because it is most likely going to come true. The cover story in the early Reagan administration was, "We're not only there fighting a war against the communists, we are fighting a war in favor of democracy." That wasn't exactly true when it was said. Our major motivation was the evil empire, as anyone could see. Because we kept talking about democracy and the elements that needed to be in place to make democracy work, by the time of the second Reagan administration, and certainly into the Bush administration, democracy had in fact become the policy. The reason you have to be careful of your cover story is that the press, and other political forces, both national and international, will eventually beat you into coming clean on what you said your policy was.

Anyway, Walker and I were both convinced that we were into a pro democracy policy and also into a "bring the war to an end" kind of policy.

Q: At the period you are having lunch, this is early '89?

DIETERICH: I don't remember exactly, but it was probably was late '88.

Q: So Bush was in?

DIETERICH: We were well beyond the Iran Contra thing, which had put in some elements of change in the Central America policy. There was another cover story there that we had to come clean on.

Q: What were you seeing that looked promising?

DIETERICH: Well, it is a kind of nice story. As Area Director for Latin America, I used to get invited to a lot of seminars. I got invited to one, which I think was sponsored by Florida International University or the University of Miami, but I think it was FIU. The person in charge called me up and said Freddie Cristiani was going to be there. By that time Cristiani, was president elect of El Salvador. I thought, "This is a wonderful chance to depart from my habit of not going to seminars and get a chance to hear what Cristiani had to say about his plans for El Salvador." I did go and had some very interesting conversations with him. It seemed to me he was also committed to a policy of bringing the war to a negotiated close. That, coming from the president elect, convinced me that it was a wonderful time to go there. I got back to Bill Walker and told him I would be glad to go, and set the machinery in motion at USIA to arrange for me to be on loan to the department. That wasn't hard to do because it is always hard to find jobs for old area directors.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the Ollie North types had sort of faded from the scene after the Iran Contra thing?

DIETERICH: Some had faded from the scene, some had lost interest, and some had been sort of nudged into rethinking the policy. The mood had changed. You could see from what was happening in Nicaragua that eventually the Sandinistas were not going to be overthrown but they were going to be eroded, which is what really happened. What eroded them was being in power. It is easy to overthrow - it is hard to govern.

Q: Did you have the thought that the Sandinistas in Nicaragua might depart the scene or would they have to get tougher and turn into a Castro like regime?

DIETERICH: I think the feeling was that they would have to get tougher and turn into a Castro type regime if they were going to stay in power forever, but they weren't going to do that. A lot of folks in Latin America resent U.S. supervision and intervention and fiddling around, but they don't much like Sandinista type regimes either. The fact is that there were good reasons to be concerned about Nicaragua. Beyond the nature of the regime itself there were real regional concerns. The Sandinistas were severely out of step with the rest of Central America. Central America is a region that has always enjoyed a certain amount of unity through good times and bad. It is very destabilizing in Central America to have one of those governments out of step and out of sympathy with the rest. I think some of the feeling was too, that eventually Nicaragua was going to evolve back into the Central America system. That doesn't mean that it is all to the good by any means. There are huge things wrong with the way Central America is governed, but at least you have removed an element of instability in the region. The way Nicaragua evolved, with the Sandinistas eventual electoral defeat, would influence the war in El Salvador also.

Q: Before you went out there, what was the reading on the war in El Salvador?

DIETERICH: I think the reading was - nobody is going to win. Bolstering the government would require an expenditure of U.S. funds and a level of commitment in El Salvador that wasn't going to happen. On the other hand, after ten years it became clear to us and to the guerillas that the United States wasn't going to let them win and could afford not to let them win. Preventing them from winning was well within the level of U.S. resources and the level of U.S. commitment to El Salvador. I think one of the reasons the guerillas came to feel that was the length of our commitment and the fact that they had done everything they knew how to do in terms of trying to influence public opinion, and had become good at it. They spent a lot of time raising support in the United States. Perhaps even a majority of their financial support came from the United States, but it still wasn't enough to win because El Salvador appropriations kept passing in the U.S. Congress, not by much, but they kept passing. I think after ten years of that, the guerillas began to see the hopelessness of it. In fact, I remember one of the guerillas telling me this, that after the late '89 offensive, which stretched into January of '90, they came to realize the United States was not going to let them win.

Q: Who was our ambassador to El Salvador when you went out there?

DIETERICH: Bill Walker. He went out before I did. No, I've got the timing wrong on going to El Salvador too. He and I talked about it a year before I actually went to El Salvador and he went out shortly after that and he had been there almost a year before I got there.

Q: But you went there in '89?

DIETERICH: I went there in the late summer of '89.

Q: Was there a feeling in Washington that the Bush administration was going to take a less doctrinaire approach towards Central America?

DIETERICH: Yes. I'm not sure what the doctrine was.

Q: I mean, particularly the early Reagan period. I mean, we are going to beat those evil empire people and we're not going to tolerate any of this. It was not very nuanced.

DIETERICH: No.

Q: Had you been in El Salvador before?

DIETERICH: Yes, I had. In fact a couple of times. As area director I was obligated to visit. Either I had to visit each post every year or my deputy did. We divided them up for the purpose of writing efficiency reports. I made sure that I went to El Salvador twice. The second time I went there, it was a strange visit because I hadn't been officially named yet, the rumor mill had already decided I was the next DCM there. I got a great deal of attention that USIA directors didn't usually get. I had been in the country, and it was certainly high on the list of countries that I had to keep an eye on as area director.

Q: When you got out there in the summer of '89, what was the situation? What were your impressions of the situation on the ground?

DIETERICH: My impression was that the war was kind of at a stalemate where both sides could continue to kill each other but that the lines weren't going to change very much. The guerillas weren't going to be able to expand their area of operation. They weren't going to be able to get into any major cities. They were going to continue to live out in the eastern provinces. They could continue to blow up light poles and engage in sabotage and in small scale offensives. Also, that the army was not willing to suffer the losses necessary to go out and take them on in major operations, and that we weren't really going to encourage the army to take on major operations. It would result in very negative human rights consequences for U.S. policies. When they did that we ended up with massacres on our hands.

Q: Did you feel that you had a regime in El Salvador that was working to gain control of its army?

DIETERICH: Yes, I did. We had already gone through the Duarte government, which was a Christian Democratic Government, that had already begun the process of peace negotiations. The Cristiani government really did represent a return of the right wing to power in El Salvador, but with a different kind of candidate. The difference in that candidate was in itself extremely important, as was the fact that you now had one party that had been in government, a major party, and had worked toward a peace agreement, followed by the other party which was coming into power also with a commitment to a peace process.

It is important to understand Freddy Cristiani and people like him. To put it in overly simple terms, whatever the number of families was, there had been a wealthy landowning oligarchy that had run El Salvador. What you were seeing with people like Freddie Cristiani were the sons and grandsons of people who had not been exactly a part of that old landowning class. They were instead immigrants who had come to El Salvador from Europe and, to some extent from the Levant, much as they had in Argentina around the turn of the century. They came with reasonable levels of education and financial capital and a different commitment. They knew that land was only one way to make money. You could also do it through commerce and services. They were the people who sold Mercedes and farm equipment and home appliances to the oligarchs. And, as more modern people, they ended up with more money than the oligarchs.

Freddie Cristiani's political generation were the sons and grandsons of these successful immigrants. They were young men of great local privilege but had been educated abroad, mainly in the United States. Freddie Cristiani at Georgetown. They adhered to the conservative values of their fathers in that they believed in free enterprise and the sanctity of ownership and all sorts of other things, and certainly believed in the right of their class to run the country. But they also had fairly modern ideas about democracy, social progress, and fairly modern ideas about the obligation of government to provide opportunities for everybody in the country. Ideas most of them had learned in the United States dictated to Cristiani that a peace agreement had to be found. The war was simply not to be won. It wouldn't be worth the cost of Salvadoran lives to win it.

Q: What about the army, the death squads and that whole thing?

DIETERICH: The army was also beginning to benefit from some different leadership. I'm really not sure why, but the army was evolving. The leadership of the army, at the time I was there, were persons probably in their '40s or early '50s. They had seen ten years of the war and they were young enough so that they had seen the war on the battle lines. I think they were tired of it and I think the very senior officers were tired of going to funerals. They were tired of soldiers getting killed, and I know this doesn't fit the image a lot people have of the Salvadoran Army. I certainly don't deny that the death squads existed, although, in my opinion, were not necessarily institutionalized within the army but were a pernicious combination of wealthy reactionaries and like minded army cohorts. The army death squad members were acting at the behest of their wealthy patrons. In that sense, they were extrofficial. I don't think the leadership of the army felt strong enough to just to kick out these death squaders, nor do I believe they felt particularly motivated to do so.

Q: When you got there, were there any situations festering? I'm thinking of the killing of nuns or other things?

DIETERICH: Oh, there was a huge festering legacy of massacres, El Mozote and the nuns case, and the marines who had been gunned down in the Zona Rosa, and the Hilton Hotel assassinations. Those last three cases all involved American casualties. There is a small monument in the courtyard outside the embassy to Americans who lost their lives.

There was a legacy of atrocities on both sides. The government could come up with horrible things that had happened to its people. People blown up in buildings. People killed when the guerillas blow up a light pole as they happen to be walking by. People who could have been captured but were shot on the spot. Terrible things happening in villages where the guerillas wanted to enforce some kind of support and participation on the part of villagers.

Q: Will you explain what the nuns case was, and had it been settled?

DIETERICH: It had been settled only superficially. It certainly had not been settled to the satisfaction of the people in the United States. People had been caught and tried.

Q: In the first place, how did Walker use you?

DIETERICH: Walker and I went back a long way, and his description of my role was as an alter ego. I was there to run the embassy, substitute for him when he couldn't be there, to take as much of his burden as I could to allow him to deal with the reality of U.S. policy and to spend as much time as possible in contact with the upper levels of the government and the rest of Salvadoran society.

Q: Before we get into some more of the details, what about the security aspects there at that time?

DIETERICH: Fortress Embassy.

Q: Is this the new embassy?

DIETERICH: No, this was the old one, and it had been bombed and lost part of its central tower, and we had all been crammed into a smaller amount of space, much of which was either one story or underground. There was a wall all the way around it, the ambassador's office had no windows in it. My office had one which was always curtained and shielded. Our offices were terrible. The ambassador's office was probably no bigger than the room we are sitting in.

Q: We are talking about something that is about 25x10 feet.

DIETERICH: These were not luxurious quarters for anybody. But it was pretty secure, it never got hit while I was there.

Q: How about going from hither to yon?

DIETERICH: Big, big security packages. The ambassador had an armored Cadillac, a follow car, a lead car, probably four American security agents with him and another six Salvadorans riding in both of those cars. I always traveled in an armored Suburban with local guards.

Q: How about your family?

DIETERICH: My family was with me. My daughter wasn't, she was in college, but my wife and son were. We lived in a beautiful DCM residence. Housing was quite lovely, but with lots of walls around it and a lot of security precautions, with guards there all the time in control of the gate. The DCM residence probably had four local guards at all times. I hardly ever drove a car the whole time I was there, but you get used to that kind of security after awhile. It also has some advantages, you don't get stuck in traffic jams, with the guards there are always people around to run errands for you. It is a luxurious but dangerous life because you forget some of the realities of how folks have to live, including your subordinates who don't have that protection.

Q: How did things develop?

DIETERICH: I got there in mid 89, the ambassador was there for a day then took off for a vacation, so I was really thrown into it immediately. I sort of felt like I was floundering a little bit but I had good people around who kept me going in the right direction. I remember that after a couple of days we were sent a dipnote (diplomatic note - an official communiquï¿½ from one government to another) to hand over to the president and I began to learn something about El Salvador right away. As I mentioned, I had met the president before in Miami.

President Cristiani was at his weekend retreat, which is on a volcanic lake outside San Salvador. The only way I was going to be able to deliver this note within the designated time frame was to go up there and visit him. We made the calls and I loaded into a Suburban again, this time with another car with a full package. Keiko, my wife, went with me, so we went up to call on the Cristianis at their weekend place. It's kind of fun when you make your first call on the president of a sovereign nation, even a small one, and you are greeted by the president and his wife in bathing suits. It was the first time I had ever felt overdressed in my life, and I only had a sport shirt on.

Q: Well, were we pleased with Cristiani as president? I think there was concern at the time because he had come out of a fairly right wing thing. Did we become comfortable with him?

DIETERICH: Yes, we did become comfortable with him. The concern was because of the party he came out of. Remember, I discovered when I visited him in Miami that he is a very convincing guy, and we believed that he was sincerely interested in finding a way to end this war and he was willing to negotiate to make that happen.

Shortly after the ambassador got back, we went to call on Padre Ellacuria, who was the rector of the Universidad Central Americana (UCA), which was the Jesuit University in El Salvador. He was later assassinated in the early days of the November offensive.

I remember the visit clearly because one of the things we wanted to know was what he thought of Cristiani. His message to us was fascinating. He basically said, "Remember that all the enemies of peace are not necessarily on the right in this country. I have been received by President Cristiani, had talks with him, had much more courteous treatment and interest from him, than I ever had from President Duarte. I believe he is committed to peace." We came out of that meeting feeling that the chances for a negotiated settlement were better than we had thought. He had influence, and the people he had influence on had influence on the guerillas. A lot of people don't like to hear an American say that, but it is true. Much of the guerilla leadership had been at the UCA, many of them had been influenced by the liberation theology that came out of that university.

That, by the way, was another reason peace was possible. Liberation theology and its attendant dependency theories were rapidly falling out of style during this period.

Q: At the time, did the two sides talk to each other through intermediaries?

DIETERICH: I think at that stage it wasn't really a matter of talking to each other in the sense of negotiating. It was more a matter of sending messages, or sort of basic communication. Dialogue is the issue when you start getting into negotiations. That is when it is important who you talk to.

We had lots of ways of getting our thoughts to the other side without direct talks with the principals involved. We did not have direct conversations with any guerillas at that point but we talked to a lot of people who did. We knew how to use the media also. The guerillas listened to the radithe Voice of America for exampland watched television. It was not a major problem to deliver messages to guerillas saying the United States says it is interested in peace. Convincing them we were telling the truth was a different and more difficult problem.

It was also difficult to convince the right wing in El Salvador that we were really interested in peace, as was convincing the Salvadoran military. In some ways maybe it was more difficult.

Many Salvadorans worked closely with us through ten years of war. During most of that time the American government was not very interested in peace but had a policy o"let's win this." The reaction you tended to get from them was, "Yeah, yeah, we know why you are saying all this stuff about peace. But come on now, we're among friends, let's talk about what the real thing is." We had to convince them this wasn't just propaganda and window dressing, that we were serious about it.

You can go back quite awhile to the situation at the time of the nuns massacre when Bob White was the ambassador and was absolutely convinced he had been lied to. He was absolutely furious with the government and the Salvadoran military. They had lied to him, but I don't think they really understood how justifiably furious he really was or why. They really didn't believe that we would let a few murders here and there get in the way of winning the war. And I believe there were more than a few Americanboth official and unofficiawho shared that belief and encouraged them in it.

So, we had a double job on our hands. One was to convince the military, and the other was to convince the guerillas that the U.S. was serious about peace negotiations. There was, of course, a similar problem on the far right of the political spectrum, but by that time we had pretty much read D'Aubuisson and his nitwit cronies out of the equation. We didn't talk to them and they thought we were about as bad as the guerillas and the Jesuits.

We had a job to do within the U.S. Mission. It was a very subtle issue, not a matter of loyalty and disloyalty, but is a matter of the human tendency to keep doing the job you have always done. After all we had sent American soldiers out there to train Salvadoran military units. Their job was to train people to fight a war, to do it well, and do it aggressively. At the same time they were to be mindful of human rights and not expose themselves to any more hostile fire than absolutely necessary. Big job.

Now we had to convince them that It. wasn't exactly like that. We wanted them to be in position, we wanted them to be sharp, we wanted them to keep training. But we also wanted them to start living with the frustration of not being very big offensively. They were usually not going to go out and get the enemy. They were in more of a defensive situation. That is not very comfortable to a lot of soldiers, especially very good ones. So we also had to convince some of our own people that peace negotiations were a serious business and not just something we were saying. It is not only convincing leadership, you have to monitor all the time to make sure that you and the embassy, whether it is in the MIL Group or the AID Mission or whoever it is, are not sending signals that are contrary to policy.

Q: Did you feel that the CIA was on the wagon with you?

DIETERICH: Yes, sort of, but again it's a little bit of the same problem. The tendency to do what you have always done. In the CIA and the military, the guys who understand war and are good at it, if left too much to their own devices tend to keep doing it. That tendency to keep doing what you are good at also occurs in other organizations. It's quite human.

Q: This is really one of the few places that the CIA could be operational with fun, getting out there and doing what a lot of these guys like to do.

DIETERICH: That is true, although one of the things we had going for us was that the war wasn't as much fun as it used to be. It had gone on too long.

But subtlety is difficult. You have to be so damn careful. Instead of going out there and stomping on the commies, you have to nuance everything politically. Our advisors were good soldiers, they didn't want to screw things up, they wanted to follow policy, but it wasn't easy. How do you maintain military morale and the sharpness in training, and the kind of training that keeps people from violating human rights, when peace is in the offing? It is the old "nobody wants to be the last guy to die in this war," so how do you keep the edge without acting, that's the problem.

Q: At that time, the left wing, movie stars, rock people, and writers who tended to go for leftist causes had sort of adopted the Sandinistas and the guerilla movement in El Salvador. Had this died out by the time you got there?

DIETERICH: Yes, the political activists in the United States on the left were still very active but the glitterati had lost interest by that time. The offensive and the Jesuit case sort of rekindled their interest but we did not have that kind of visitors. Bianca Jagger didn't come and I don't remember any Hollywood movie stars coming down there during my time. We certainly still had the professionals in the church groups who would still bring delegations of church people down. It is important to remember that the Salvadoran guerillas were the second largest recipient of American aid in El Salvador; the Salvadoran government of course was the largest with its U.S. government funding.

Q: Where did the aid to the guerillas come from?

DIETERICH: A lot from church groups. My guess is that a major part of it came from church groups. It's hard to count it since they were not particularly anxious to have it counted. I think most of it was donated by people who really felt that if you said, "This is only going for humanitarian stuff, it is not going for military stuff," that that would happen. Of course it is a nonsense proposition. If you give the money to the FMLN (Farabundo Marti Liberacion National), it is really stupid to think they even have the accounting skill, let alone the will, to segregate the funding. Money is money.

I think what happened in U.S. politics is instructive. Those people who hated the U.S. government's Salvador policy because we were supporting a government they didn't approve of, and because we were supporting a war which they didn't approve of either, concluded that since they had failed for a long time to defeat the policy and the aid in Congress, they would countervail with their own contributions to the other side. But countervailing did put them into a morally ambiguous situation because they were funding some of the violence that they so hated. Nevertheless, they would come down in groups, they would come down as individuals, and we would receive them in the embassy.

I have to talk about those visits because it was a conscious part of our strategy. There was a lot of history that said that the embassy had sort of blown it from time to time with a lot of groups that came down and were opposed to U.S. policy. We either wouldn't see them at all, or we would send out a defenseless junior officer to see them, which would often mean that the group felt insulted, and the officers sometimes were neither experienced enough nor well briefed enough to be able to handle it well. Walker and I decided that virtually anybody who came down would be seen by someone at the senior level, we would push it up as senior as we could get it, and we would not waste a whole lot of time trying to figure out "is this group important or is this group not important" because, frankly it was more efficient to see everybody than to try to sort out which group was important and get it wrong. Our perspective, and our sources, either on our own or relying on the department, weren't very good at figuring out who was important in Colorado. So we would see them all and we spent a lot of time at it. I think it was very important just to see these people and to talk them through the policy, and to keep hitting on the fact that we were in favor of peace negotiations, but that peace negotiations meant that neither side was going to win. Americans concerned about El Salvador were going to be faced with choices, just as the U.S. government had been. If you are for peace negotiations, then you have recognized that side you favor is not going to win. We found a distressing number of groups who said they were in favor of peace negotiations but basically they weren't because they wanted their friends to win. Remember, too, there were also groups that came down supporting the government also.

We saw some of the same attitudes congressional staffers. People from Chris Dodd's staff came down. The fact is, they wanted the guerillas - even a particular faction of the FMLN - to win, if not outright to at least gain a powerful position in postwar politics. People from Jesse Helms staff came down and they wanted the right wingers - both military and civilian - to win.. Both sides would come and talk to us in the embassy, then go out and talk to people outside the embassy and say, "Don't listen to guys in the embassy, they haven't really got it right. What do they know? I'm telling you what it is really like." This means the Helms people would come down and tell the military to "hang tough" because the peace negotiations weren't really going anyplace. Others were telling the guerilla leadership the same thing at times. This made it hard to do peace negotiations, but not impossible.

How did you find the reporting aspect of our embassy at that time?

DIETERICH: I had a particular philosophy on reporting, which I think drove the first political counselor I worked with there absolutely nuts. He was one of these guys that wanted to do big think pieces, big major cables that would seek to influence policy, and I felt that in the Salvador situation, and in modern times, what really counted was spot reporting. Getting the facts out, getting them out quickly, in a way trying to truth squad the press. If the press gets it right don't worry too much about it, just keep the details going. But be alert for those situations where they have gotten it wrong, and if they have gotten it wrong in a way that is going to damage policy, you have to get to the Department quickly. Don't worry about the big think pieces, because nobody is going to read them but the desk officer anyway. Besides, Washington had made up its mind about policy in El Salvador and none of us in the leadership at the embassy had any quarrel with that policy. We basically like it. That frustrates a certain kind of political officer and it pleases others. Some people like digging into spot reporting and keeping two or three fast cables going every day and thinking that is a good job, but other people are driven nuts by that kind of routine. Basically, it was reporting designed to keep us looking alert, and looking like we were paying attention (which we were), and not getting blind sided by all the other reporting.

Q: How was our liaison with Nicaragua, our embassy there?

DIETERICH: We infoed each other on all our cables, all Central American countries did, but we didn't spend a lot of time talking to the embassy in Nicaragua. A couple of times we had meetings with the country team in Honduras, Ambassador Chris Arcos and three or four of his people came over and sat down with our country team and talked. Remember, that's a longer border. There were a lot of irritating issues with Honduras. I don't remember spending a lot of time worrying about what was going on in Nicaragua at that point.

In February of 1990 Violetta Chamorro was elected president. The Sandinistas had been beaten in a free and fair election. That was important. It influenced the peace negotiations. The Sandinistas were no longer what they had been and the Soviet Union was in decline. That did influence the guerillas. Suddenly they were left with nobody but Fidel Castro, and they weren't dumb guys. They knew Fidel Castro was a pretty weak reed to rely on.

Q: You talked about the November attack of '89. Where were you?

DIETERICH: When it all started, I was at home. We did not have real hard intelligence that anything was coming. It started on November 11th, as bad as I am on dates I can remember what we used to call Armistice Day. The night before that, we had the Marine Ball and much of the embassy leadership was at a hotel ballroom have a pretty good time. There were lots of Salvadoran guests also.

Of course as usually happens we read reports after the fact and thought that maybe if we evaluated them the right way, maybe we would have guessed something was coming. But the fact is we didn't. I don't think the Salvadorans did either.

The next day, the 11th, nothing in particular had us worried and we had gone home at supper time, as we usually did. I was in my residence and the ambassador was in his, and around 8:30 or 9:00 one hell of a fire fight broke out close my house.

We were used to hearing gunfire every now and then during the night, or hearing a telephone pole get blown up, so when it first started I thought that it was closer than usual but was not very worried. But it just kept going on and on. They had attacked all through the city and the guerillas around my house were trying to get at President Cristiani's house. He didn't happen to be there at the time, fortunately. They really came close to getting into his house, but were finally driven off by a patrol of the Salvadoran army.

It was pretty tough. We had one wounded government soldier take refuge in the kitchen of our house. I went down to the kitchen and found our cook bandaging this guy, who had been shot through the hand. We had fighting during most of the night. We weren't sure of the extent of it until we all got to work the next morning. We all did get in to the embassy the next morning and began to gather intelligence and get the reports. Then we realized that something major had happened. We didn't know how long it would last nor how serious it was going to be.

As you know, it didn't go away very quickly. It got a little bit worse every night. It then became evident to us that this was a major push. It is hard for me to sort out particular events but we sort of settled into a routine which meant that we would all consult each morning with our own security people to figure out when it was safe to go to the embassy. Often we would be late getting there because we would have our own security patrols out and through liaison with the army and everybody else, figuring out whether the routes we would have to take to work would be reasonably safe. So we would all wait for a call and then usually get into the office around 9:00 or 9:30. Then we would get everybody together and try to assess the night before and try to figure out what the military situation was. We found that much of the eastern suburbs of San Salvador were in guerilla hands.

Just about the time we had settled into that routine, the guerillas attacked the Sheraton Hotel which created a very difficult situation for us. We had a group oU.S. Army special forces trainers who had been going through some routine, previously scheduled training exercises with the Salvadoran army and were staying in the Sheraton Hotel. They had all their weapons with them.

The guerillas occupied the hotel. We were told they looking for a special Organization of American States negotiator who had come to town. He was the target, but they went into the wrong tower of the hotel and ended up occupying the side with this group of American green berets barricaded into one end of a corridor, heavily armed and not about to give up. There were also some American civilians - some AID people and some commercial people - who were in the same tower. So we were faced with a situation of the guerillas occupying the building, a group of armed Americans who were certainly not going to be captured without a fight, and various civilians scattered around in other rooms around the hotel.

Our very aggressive, Spanisspeaking admin counselor, an immigrant from Latin America himself and a can do kind of guy, managed to get through on a telephone to some of the guerilla leadership. I then got a call on the radio from the ambassador saying, "This guy is trying to talk to the guerillas and I can't get him on the radio. You have to get him and tell him 'don't do that'." So I had this absurd conversation on an open radio saying, "Stop it." He said, "BUT I CAN GET THEM OUT. LET ME DO IT." I had to tell him, "No, you can't do it. As an embassy official, you CANNOT negotiate with these guys. Now let it go." And he did.

So the Sheraton occupation created some exciting moments. We ended up with Delta Force in the country that night.

Q: Would you explain what Delta Force is?

DIETERICH: Delta Force is an elite group of the U.S. army which is trained in hostage rescue. It was all very hush, hush, and secret except President Bush mentioned it the morning after they had left the country. We were never, ever to tell anybody that they were there or had been there, but the President did mention it on radio and television. They flew into the country, I don't remember the size of the force but it was a lot of people, and they had been positioned around the hotel. The commander had been to the embassy and we had a meeting late into the night the night before.

Eventually, we got the people out. The guerillas sort of disappeared after they decided they had gotten into the wrong place and didn't need this fight. They escaped through the back doors and down through a ravine. San Salvador is cut through by a lot of ravines and they make good guerilla routes since they have a lot of vegetation at the bottom and people don't live down there. They quietly slipped away from the hotel, then it became a matter of getting those people out of there and getting our own military people out of there without them shooting anybody on the way out. There had been a big fire fight at the beginning of this thing. It was not a peaceful occupation but a contested occupation. I had awakened the morning of that occupation to the sound of a terrific fire fight.

Q: Did it come as a surprise that they were able to mount such a thing?

DIETERICH: Yes. Not only that they were able, but that they did it. The offensive was their last hurrah. We were afraid for awhile that it might be only their first final offensive, but it proved to be their final. A couple of years later we had a peace agreement. At some point I have to deal with the evacuation of our own dependents. Also the Jesuit murders, I have to deal with that too.

Q: Let's talk about those.

DIETERICH: OK. The offensive started on November 11, 1989. A few days later we awake to the hideous news that there had been a group of people murdered at the Central American University, including Padre Ellacuria and some other priests, their housekeeper, and one child.

We didn't know who did it. Although much of the world was willing to jump to the conclusion that the army had done it, the fact was, nobody really knew. Some of us, including me, entertained the idea that it also could have been the guerillas. Eyewitness accounts identified men in army uniforms, but that on its face did not exclude the guerillas. Remember, we had had conversations with people at the university who indicated they favored the peace alternative. It wasn't entirely beyond my imagination that someone on the left had decided to get rid of these people.

As it turned out, it was the army that did it. However, the army has never accepted the notion that it ordered the murders and that has never been proven. It may or may not have beel don't know the answer. I'm inclined to think that it was not ordered by the high command of the army but was the act of a particular colonel named Benavides, who thought he had authorization from a more senior level of the army but may not have actually had it. It was a stupid, murderous act that complicated everything and made it more difficult to bring the war to an end. It cost a lot of support in the United States for a negotiated settlement. Remember, our job was to convince people that a negotiated settlement was better than the bloodshed it would take for either side to win. Negotiations mean that some people aren't going to get punished. That's what peace negotiations are aboupeople on both sides were going to escape punishment. A lot of people understandably hate that and think that crime ought to be punished, that there should be retribution for atrocities. People who like vengeance as a political principle, hate the idea of negotiated settlement. Well, the murder of the Jesuits made negotiations all that much harder.

Q: Were we all over the Salvadoran government on this by now?

DIETERICH: Sure, we were. I headed an embassy task force on the Jesuit case which met daily trying to figure out what we knew and trying to use all our resources to get at what the evidence was going to be. We were under increasing pressure from the local Jesuits, who were convinced we knew things that we didn't know. They were convinced we knew who did it, but wouldn't tell them. The fact was, we didn't know. The Salvadoran government knew things that it wasn't telling us. They began to suspect right away their people were involved in it. It took them sometime to sort it out, and it took more time before we got enough wind of it to go to them and say, "All right, come clean, let us know." When it all came out, it was a very complicated story and I would just as soon not deal with the individuals involved.

Eventually, it came out; I think we found out within a few days what the real story was. A lot of our problem in the Jesuit case was dealing with people who had an institutional stake in not trusting us, or saying they didn't trust us. The whole Jesuit case was a classic example of the moving shoreline that we could never reach. The first things we heard was, "Well, we will never find out. We'll never really see the evidence of who did it. We know who did it, but we'll never find out, we'll never see it." Well, we did, so then it was, "Well, there will never be an indictment." Well, there was. So then it was, "Well, there will never be a trial." Well, there finally was and it took a huge amount of pressure and intervention on our part to make sure there was a trial.

One of my jobs was with the president of the Salvadoran Supreme Court, who was a difficult guy to deal with. I spent a lot of time jawboning him on how there had to be a trial and what had to happen for transparency, and trying at the same time to learn the Salvadoran legal system and understand that it had to follow the norms of their system also. At any rate, we finally got the trial and then the shoreline jumped again and it was, "Well, there will never be a conviction." Eventually there was a conviction.

One day, toward the end of the trial as it became evident there was going to be a conviction, I remember thinking I was seeing a sea change among the American critics of our Salvador policy. I was waiting around in the lobby outside the courtroom waiting for the trial to begin. All these people I had gotten to know over the years from various church groups and other groups that monitored the Latin American human rights were there, but they were all there talking about Guatemala. I suddenly realized they were losing interest in El Salvador.

Q: In a way they were motivated by causes.

DIETERICH: Yes, the peace agreement was coming; the Jesuit case was going to trial, and they could see there was enough momentum going there. You would never get anybody to say they were satisfied with the results; there was going to be a result that would be hard to present as a triumph over evil. I think they had decided that Salvador was no longer their cause, but Guatemala would be. Salvador was no longer going to provide these great examples of Central American misbehavior and the misguided nature of U.S. policy in encouraging that misbehavior. Guatemala was still there and it was going to get worse.

Q: Of course, many of these people had learned their trade of protesting in the '60s, and essentially the United States is the evil empire in their estimation.

DIETERICH: It was, but there was self interest involved too. It's not so much individual self interest, as it is institutional self interest. These people are people who like to work in the field of foreign affairs, and because they like to work in the field of foreign affairs and because they want to be influential, to satisfy themselves in career terms and also to raise the funds to keep their organizations going, it is really important for them to somehow illustrate that the U.S. government cannot be trusted with U.S. foreign policy. If the U.S. government suddenly got it all right, then there would be less need for these groups who monitor performance and make policy recommendations. But the people who are staffers for these groups have a stake in convincing everybody, and especially their donors, that the U.S. government can't be trusted with U.S. foreign policy.

So, the shoreline moved one more time, there was a verdict, the accused were convicted, and they did go to prison until basically the UN and its truth commission made their final reports on the war and sort of let them out. But they all did some time. Oh, I have to deal with the peace negotiations.

Q: Let's talk about the dependents.

DIETERICH: Again, I don't remember which day but it was a few days after the Sheraton takeover. We woke up to fighting all over the city. A senior member of the embassy had been trapped in his house all night. The guerillas either knew who he was or they had decided they wanted his house for its strategic location. They tried to take his house and he, his wife, and a guest ended up barricaded in the house returning fire. They were rescued at the last minute by the army. One member of the embassy had been captured by the guerillas and was being held. We knew where and we knew his situation. There had been fire fights around a number of houses where embassy people lived.

Earlier on the ambassador had said, "I've got to concentrate on this war and morale in the embassy, and everything we do, so I want you to take responsibility for calling an evacuation when it is necessary."

During periods of combat we would gather at the ambassador's residence and among other things decide whether it was safe to go to the chancery. That morning we realized it was going to be hard to get to the chancery. It was getting worse and worse. I told the ambassador it was time to evacuate dependents and officials who really did not have to be there.

We got our administrative people on the phone told them to begin to arrange for a flight. We were looking for about 24 hours later. We decided to call all dependents into the chancery right away. We told everybody to pack a bag and bring sleeping bags, just in case, and to go to the chancery because we were probably going to stay in the chancery overnight. We figured that when we got the plane in there, we would already be a step up by having everybody camping out in the chancery.

Then we began to wrestle on the phone with the issue of mandatory vs. voluntary departure. Mandatory departure means the ambassador orders all dependents and nonessential embassy people to leave. Voluntary means that evacuation is available but individuals may elect to stay. Mandatory departure achieves the maximum drawdown, but takes away flexibility and can have a pretty bad effect on morale. Voluntary departure is great for flexibility, but risks leaving to many people in a risky place. The paid transportation and per diem allowances are the same in either case.

We had a particular problem - a number of wives in the embassy who, although they were there as dependents, were professionals and didn't have any kids with them. They were saying, "No, we want to stay. In the first place, we can be useful, and secondly we have no kids and we want to stay here with our husbands." The ambassador and I were very sympathetic to that point of view. Washington was urging us to go mandatory on this. We were basically saying, "No, we don't want to go mandatory because we can talk them out, we can reduce, we can get everybody out, but there are some of these people who want to stay and we are sympathetic with them. Besides, we can use them." We finally got away with that and we were able to get everybody out that we really couldn't use, but we didn't do it by making it mandatory. We did it by talking people out. We got people into buses and out to the airport and told them they would all be coming back.

Also, I had had conversations on the phone with the American Republics Bureau at State saying, "Remember Jeff, get people out of there sooner rather than later; remember that politics don't count; the only thing that counts is safety." I know why they were saying that, but anybody who says that politics don't count in a situation like that just isn't paying attention. An evacuation of the American Embassy, handled badly, could have had a devastating effect on the morale of that government and people, and at a time when the people of San Salvador were furious at the guerillas for what they were doing to their city.

The FMLN were suffering a hemorrhage in terms of public support for their cause. People were really angry at them. But if we had had this huge mandatory dramatic evacuation of the U.S. Embassy, it would have been awful. Remember, we had already had UN agencies pulling people out before we did. We did not declare it mandatory, we tried to explain it to the press and the government by saying, "No, you know, it is war but it is getting close to Christmas anyway, and we are sending wives and kids home." It helped a lot that it was Christmas time, that the evacuation was not mandatory and that we had told people they would be coming back.

Eventually, we would have a hard time getting them back because even though the offensive wound down and ended about mid January, the department had some understandable reluctance to have people go back. They just spent a whole lot of money to get all these people out; the offensive was over but there was no peace agreement yet. So the tendency was to not let the people go back. At the embassy, the ambassador, a lot of other people, and I felt very strongly that it was essential to get people back because this was an embassy that was going to have to support the peace negotiations. So the symbolism of having our families there was very important, and embassies without dependents attract "cowboys", the people you don't want there during peace negotiations. The personnel system will never be clever enough to protect you against that.

Q: I served 18 months in Saigon.

DIETERICH: So you know. That is precisely what we did not want.

Q: You might explain what you mean by "cowboys."

DIETERICH: I mean persons, people, who are more comfortable in a wartime, high security situation. I don't want to sound disrespectful to those people, because I don't feel that way.

Q: They seem to be hard drinking, womanizing, kind of like living by themselves and living a garrison life. It gives a frame of mind that is not conducive to a diplomatic mission.

DIETERICH: Certainly not, and not in the kind of period we were going into. Eventually, we just jawboned and jawboned and about six weeks later our families all came back.

Let's see - what else do I have to talk about? ARA (Bureau of Inter American Affairs, at that time, I guess it's called WHA now), urged the ambassador and me to take a break. We had been under a lot of strain, so Walker took a little bit of time over Christmas. When he came back I went back to the states for a couple of weeks. I went through a period of consultations in the department, talked to a few visitors. It was a tough time to be out of there, because the morning I arrived in Washington there was a big mortar attack on San Salvador and I felt terrible. There is a funny feeling when you leave and things are still going on. You feel guilty for not being there, but once I got out of Washington and took some vacation and went up to Ohio where my wife and son were, I felt a little more relaxed about it. It must have been the middle of January when I got back to San Salvador.

In terms of feelings - go back to the evacuation, I remember a great sense of relief when my wife and son left because that was one less responsibility, and it was getting increasingly difficult to go back and forth between residence and office. Since I had taken a sleeping bag with me when we brought everybody into the office, I ended up staying in my office for the rest of the week. It was four or five days before I finally went home. I decided to go home and see if my dog and cat were still with us.

Q: It would be 1990 by this time.

DIETERICH: It would have been January 1990. The offensive ended. As those things often do, it just sort of petered out but it was evident that the FMLN was withdrawing their people from the city and the feelers for negotiations began to trickle in. Various factions of the FMLN began to talk to people who talked to us.

I'm going to studiously avoid which faction was doing which, there were a lot of differences. Some of them were on board earlier than others, and it was important to play those differences. But I can't remember the sets of initials anymore. Except, there is one reason why the factionalism was important. Each faction had its own set of supporters in the United States which only added to the silliness of the whole thing.

The peace negotiations went on for almost a year. The peace agreement was finally concluded on the last day of 1990. Eleven months after the final offensive had ended (they had done a great deal of damage to the country and the city), they finally got a peace agreement. It's a very complicated thing to talk about. Day to day we were working on it - feelers here, feelers there - and trying to defuse the Jesuit case.

Q: Why were we there? Why wasn't this between the Salvadoran government and the guerillas? What was our role?

DIETERICH: Our role was to convince the Salvadoran government and, more particularly, the Salvadoran military, that negotiations were possible and could be done. Also to convince the guerillas that we really were in favor of peace negotiations. On the guerilla side, there was an understandable suspicion that the Americans were only talking about negotiations but were going to screw them in the end, as usual.

Remember, Central Americans are Americans too, and suspicion of metropolitan outsiders is deep in the character of New World people. It's like North Americans saying, "The United States has never lost a war nor won a treaty." Well, the fact is, the United States has lost wars and has done pretty well on treaties. We're pretty good negotiators actually.

Central Americans and Latin Americans have a lot of those same frontier attitudes, except the people they think will really take you to the cleaners in a negotiation are not necessarily those slick Europeans, but rather are those sharp Yankee traders from up north. There is a lot of history that says those "sharp Yankee traders" have time and again taken them to the cleaners.

In Salvador, this sort of rude fear of negotiations that the Americans were in on was contradictory. On the one hand, if the Americans were in, they would turn it to their advantage and you would lose, but on the other hand, if the Americans were not in the negotiations wouldn't be worth much. On the far right, we were also mistrusted for some other reasons. The logic went something like this: "The Americans are a bunch of turncoats who used us because we were good anti Communists for years and now that they have lost interest, they are going to betray us. Once again we'll have been screwed by our so called friends."

If you delve into the Latin American right wing, you can find two real hatreds based on that sense of betrayal. They hate the United States because the United States betrayed them when it counted on them to protect their interests and property against the left. We did it time and again. And they hate the church. Liberation theology in the Catholic Church in Latin American created a wellspring of hatred on the far right. "These people that we had counted on for generations to protect our interests have betrayed us. Their job was to protect the status pro, that was what they had always done in Latin America since the time of the conquest and in the '60s they betrayed us; they became traitors; they joined the communists against us." I know that sounds crazy, but that is the way they think.

Q: Were the Cubans a factor in this at all?

DIETERICH: Oh, I think with lip service and minor kind of supplies and services, but Cuba is too poor and the Soviets had lost interest by then. I don't believe the Cubans were a factor. I don't think the Cubans have enough surplus to contribute anything to anybody. If you're a guerilla type, you can go there and visit if you want a safe haven. If you can get to Havana you can be safe. They were not a factor.

The real factor was the increasing isolation that the guerillas sensed with the decline of the Soviet Union. The bloom was off the ideological rose. The smart ones among the guerillas could see that. I guess they thought, "Wait a minute, we are alone. This is all done. The days of Che Guevara are long gone. The tide of revolution in Latin America is gone. Latin America is changing and we are sitting here playing a dumb old game that isn't going to get us any place." I guess I knew that negotiations were coming when we began to get feelers about scholarships to the United States. "What are the chances that, if there is a peace agreement, some of our folks could get fellowships to go study for an MBA? We have to learn this world of free enterprise that everybody is talking about." I'm not kidding, we did get those feelers.

Q: Were you able to give a positive response?

DIETERICH: We were able to give a positive "maybe," and I felt pretty good with that. I didn't have to get a Fulbright for everybody. There would be people who would be willing to fund that sort of thing.

Q: The world is changing and you are getting these international or private groups that go out and negotiate, like the Jimmy Carter Institute. Were any of these people beginning to come in on this?

DIETERICH: Not so much those people on the Salvador negotiations. The UN was the Godfather of the negotiating process. They gave it a certain legitimacy and security. I remember the Carter Center people were interested. Bob Pastor was there. He is an old Latin America hand. The NGO (Non Governmental Organizations) activists on the periphery were the more specific Latin American groups, like the Washington Office on Latin America and the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.

Q: OAS [Organization of American States]?

DIETERICH: I think the UN sort of co opted what would have been an OAS role.

Q: That is not an OAS thing particularly.

DIETERICH: Not at that time. In a way you are talking about what we've lumped under the generic term of NGOs (Non governmental Organizations). They were very important in the more general Salvadoran equation. We were talking to them all the time.

I haven't talked about congressional delegations. A lot of congressional delegations came to El Salvador. Maybe that is a subject I need to get into. We had two kinds of congressional delegations; the ones that were there to look at the general conduct of the war; and the ones that came to look at the Jesuit case and the conduct of the embassy regarding the case. Whatever I say about congressional delegations, I'd like to preface by saying that I didn't see any delegations that came for tourism and didn't work. I hear about those at other posts, but we didn't get any. Maybe it's just that El Salvador was not a great vacation spot at that time.

They often came on holidays, which annoyed our over stretched staff no end. When you've had people working 60 hour weeks and then you tell them you don't get a weekend either, it is kind of tough on them. On the other hand, if I were a congressman and going to get on a plane and leave the office, you better believe I'd do it on a holiday weekend. I need to mention one Congressman who was extremely helpful to us in very smart ways. That was Congressman Joe Moakley.

Q: Who is he?

DIETERICH: Congressman Joe Moakley of Massachusetts. A Democrat, with close ties to the Catholic church, a man of good liberal conscience, who nevertheless believed the war could come to a negotiated end. The kind of man who knows that you don't get negotiations going by declaring one side of the equation - the Salvadoran military - to be a bunch of beasts. He knew that was a nonstarter, and did a lot of things just to help us help the negotiations get along, and took a lot of heat off us.

We were under pressure from people to solve the Jesuit case, no matter what, and as we had people among the Jesuits in El Salvador saying we were keeping things from them, they had their allies in the United States who were accusing us of the same thing. You had people, Catholics and Protestants, who remembered the nuns case and all sorts of things, who couldn't resist the opportunity to beat up once again on the Salvadoran government or on the American Embassy for crimes, both real and imagined. We got beaten up a lot we did not hold back information. We told people what we knew, when we knew it. I've gotten off the subject again.

Q: As the negotiations went on?

DIETERICH: Sure. The other thing we had to do was very interesting. As negotiations began to look more and more inevitable we began to find out that people didn't know how to negotiate, so we took on an interesting and peculiar role. We began to train the Salvadoran government and military to negotiate. We held sessions at my residence. I don't know why they were always in the DCM residence. I guess it just seemed to make sense somehow. Probably a less visible place than the ambassador's residence. Joe Sullivan, then the DAS for Central America, and Pete Romero, the Central America office director, often came down from Washington to join the sessions. We got together the senior people in the government and military who were going to be the negotiators. We sort o"gamed" it through with them, and talked to them about how to organize their negotiation team.

In the United States we have a lot of experience with negotiations, but in smaller countries like El Salvador they don't have experience with big governmental organizations. Negotiations are two businessmen talking to each other, or a businessman talking to some of his employees, or talking to a straw boss who really provides his employees, and that is about it.

We felt that the FMLN would come to the table pretty well prepared to negotiate because they had their advisors too. We felt we had to spend enough time with the government to bolster their confidence in their own negotiating ability, and to make sure they didn't get taken to the cleaners either. It was also a mechanism to get the military and civilian members of the government to work together. They didn't talk to each other very well, either.

On the government's side, it wasn't hard to convince them it was time for negotiations. They were ready to follow Freddie Cristiani's lead on this. His cabinet people were loyal to him. It took more convincing to get the military confident enough to sit down with these civilians and begin to negotiate. There is a tendency on the part of a lot of Americans, and on the part of people who sort of don't like the military, to think of the military as very monolithic. People who don't have much experience with the military, are fond of humor about military people always blindly, and stupidly, following orders. They believe, naively, that if the General says so, everybody will do it. Chain of command discipline may be more prevalent in military organizations than among civilians, but the fact is the senior leadership of the Salvadoran army could not simply order army participation in the peace negotiations. They had to convince their people to go along with them, and we had to help do it.

If there was any favorable fallout from the Jesuit case it was that it further discredited some of the reactionary senior officers in the Salvadoran military. That left it to people in the military we knew pretty well. We didn't know some of those recalcitrant right wingers very well anymore. They had separated themselves from us.

We were convinced the chief of staff of the Salvadoran army favored negotiations. That was General Rene Emilio Ponce. Another officeGeneral Mauricio "Chato" Vargaa member of the major opposition party, Fidel Chavez Mena's Christian Democrats, and a few other people in the military, were also convinced that negotiations were a possibility and that the war needed to end. At any rate, we got these sessions together where we would sit them all together and we would sort of play the FMLN.

In the first session we spent some time on how to organize negotiations. We found the only people capable of doing the staff work for negotiationpreparing position papers that were really thought through and vetted throughout the organizatiowere the military. The foreign minister just didn't enough staff, nor the right staff, to do that kind of job. The military had enough of a general staff concept to make them capable of preparing position papers. So by default it was the military, basically under the leadership of General Vargas, who really took on the task of doing the staff work for the negotiations.

We had a number of these sessions and I think they did help. In the first place they helped solidify both the military and civilian units into a team charged with the negotiations. Secondly, they developed the government's confidence in going into negotiations. Again, these are New World folks who go into negotiation situations thinking they are going to get screwed by the other side. At some poin(it's almost four o'clock) I have to talk about the role of the U.S. Mil group, because it is a story in itself.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? Do you want to make a summary of where we were?

DIETERICH: I'm beginning to talk about the peace negotiations themselves, and our preparations for those negotiations. An important part of that story is how the U.S. MIL group related to the Salvadoran military during this period.

Q: Something else, not on this, but in the generic thing, I would like in our next session to talk about Salvadoran migration to the United States. Okay, we'll pick this up then at that point.

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This is the 5th of February 2000. Jeff, why don't we talk about the role of the U.S. MIL group as these negotiations are going on?

DIETERICH: The MIL group, I felt, was going to be a problem as we began to ease out of combat into negotiations. I need to go back a bit. When I arrived in El Salvador it was a period of transition in U.S. policy from one of military support for the Salvadoran government, the prevention of a guerilla victory, into one of encouraging peace negotiations and getting a settlement as soon as possible. We have to have sympathy for the MIL group.

Q: You had better explain what a MIL group is, as opposed to attaches.

DIETERICH: The attaches are part of the traditional military representation at embassies. They maintain liaison with the military forces to handle joint issues on a diplomatic level. They are our prime contacts with the military as a force in local society, and they also fulfill an overt intelligence function. Their job is to report back to Washington on the affairs of the military, just as political sections report on the government's political life and USIS reports on the press and public opinion.

MIL groups, however, are set up with a specific mission of administering military aid programs, both in terms of financial and material aid, and in terms of advising, if that's in the package the United States contemplates for that country.

The MIL group in El Salvador, for obvious reasons, was very big. It had been limited by an agreement between the Reagan administration and Congress to 55 military advisors, but this certainly did not mean the MIL group only constituted 55 advisors and a boss. It had a whole lot of other people - I don't remember the numbers now - who were in support functions. In other words, the persons who ran the supply system for the military advisors and the command structure for the military advisors, and the people who ran the military aid portions and the military sales portions of the program - A big important group - were in addition to the advisors. The advisors were the people who actually trained and advised the Salvadoran military on a unit by unit basis in the field.

As I said, going in there, I felt there would be a problem of transitioning these people from a combat mode into a peace negotiation mode. That was going to be a complicated thing. I think you have to have sympathy for the advisors - these are combat soldiers who were out there to train the Salvadoran military in what they needed to know to more effectively pursue the war. One hoped they also trained them in how to decently pursue the war. Sometimes they did but not always. I felt the job for us - by us I mean the front office of the embassy - would be to get them actually into the peace negotiations. In a sense there were two alternatives. One, you could simply say, "We are now in a peace negotiation period, and you folks are pretty much out of business, so just stay there and don't do anything until we need you." Or the other was to involve them in the process.

That second alternative was, of course, the best. In the first place, we were in a negotiation situation while the war was still on, so the need for them to continue training the Salvadorans toward more effectiveness was still there. On the other hand, you had to cut down on the level of aggressiveness to a point where it didn't impinge on the peace process. That is a very subtle thing and a very subtle system to try to run with 55 persons who are at remote locations and have only sporadic contact with their own headquarters.

We were fortunate when we got into the period when negotiations really began to get serious, to get a new MIL group commandea full colonel named Mark Hamilton.

The ambassador and I saw a lot of possibilities in Hamilton. He understood the peace process and why it was important. He understood that war had run its course and there was not much more to be gained by either side. The tactics the ambassador and I used were those of saying, "Okay, Mark, and okay, you people who work for him, you are not out of the process now. You are very much in the process. The military is a part of the negotiation and you are part of the negotiation." I think that was the key. It's not a very American way to do things. In our history we either do diplomacy or we do war, and when we are in a war the State department shuts down in the theater of the war and the military runs it. Anyway, we tried for a more sophisticated approach. To make a long story short, as we got down to the "end game" in the peace process, the Col. Hamilton and the MIL group began to play a key role in the negotiations.

More importantly, the effective senior level of the Salvadoran military, led by Colonel Ponce, really became partisans of the peace process. They became negotiators, they took risks. The peace negotiations were not popular among the Salvadoran military. Many of them still had the feeling they could win and felt that their honor was bound up in winning. It took a lot of leadership for people like Ponce and Vargas to begin to turn this thing around and to in effect start to convince the people, to get them to say, "There is honor in bringing peace to this country. That's our job now." Mark Hamilton had a lot to do with influencing these people toward that goal.

After the November '89 offensive the peace negotiations became much more inevitable. At that point the guerillas were convinced they could not win at any cost they were willing to pay. The military were convinced they could not wipe out the guerillas at a cost they were willing to pay. Some of the senior people were getting pretty sick of going to funerals and the commitment of the Salvadoran government, led by President Cristiani, became even stronger after the offensive finally ended. This had to stop - El Salvador had to find a new way to do things.

It's too long ago for me to go into details on negotiations, but a lot of it had to do with "how does El Salvador absorb all these people who had made their living fighting a war" on both sides? That required a very sympathetic understanding of that problem. There were too many people in the United States that said, "Oh, they were just soldiers anyway, and they shouldn't have been soldiers in the first place, so if they are miserable now they are getting what is coming to them." That is not a way to achieve peace; it is also inhumane. A lot of peace negotiations have had to do with finding ways to assure demobilized people on both sides that they would be able to make a living. That kind of transaction requires good leadership on both sides.

To sort of symbolize how important the MIL group became in those negotiations I have to go to the end of it all. In December the negotiations moved to the United Nations in New York. Big delegations from both sides went up. Tom Pickering was at the UN at that point and he was an ex U.S. ambassador to El Salvador, but, nevertheless, things were not going well.

I have to go back. I have to flash back to another story. Sometime, I guess probably in the late summer of '90, Ambassador Walker decided we needed to make some symbolic gesture, and I don't like the word gesture because I am talking something more important than a gesture, but we had to find a symbolic way of signaling to the guerillas our support of the peace process and a peace agreement which would insure a decent well being for them. He decided to visit the FMLN at their headquarters.

He got agreement from Washington to go. It was not easy, because such a visit was seen as very risky by some and by others as something you never should do until after a peace agreement or at least at a much later stage in the process. But the department and the White House wisely decided this was the time to use such a visit to jump start the negotiations.

So, Bill Walker made his trip to visit the guerillas. I would have given a lot to go along, but DCMs stay home under those circumstances. He did take Mark Hamilton with him. Mark did good work, both in terms of his liaison with the Salvador military and by developing ties with military leaders during that visit on the guerilla side. He was the classic big, tall, physically fit, gringo colonel that everybody thinks soldiers are supposed to look like. He was very articulate and a good talker and he brought it off. He was very helpful in convincing military people on both the government and guerilla side that a peace agreement was inevitable and that the United States would be supportive of people involved in the process.

The visit was a big success. It allowed us, especially Ambassador Walker, to establish contacts on both sides of the negotiations.

Now we can go back to December. These very difficult negotiations had moved to New York with the show being run by Tom Pickering, who was himself an ex ambassador to El Salvador. At one point during the negotiations, getting close to Christmas time, we got a call from Pickering saying, "I've got problems with the military folks on both sides of this thing. I need Mark Hamilton up here." Mark was up in his office and I got him downstairs and we went to talk to the ambassador and told Mark he had to go to New York. Mark's reaction was the usual, "Yes sir, I'm ready to go." I think we had a plane ready to go in about a half an hour, and Mark was out of the door and on the way to the airport. It was only later, when Walker and I were talking, we realized that Mark had taken off for New York in December wearing khaki trousers and a short sleeve sport shirt. I don't really know the details of the role he played in New York. He described it as spending a lot of time talking to people when asked to do so.

On New Years Eve of 1991, we got an agreement. I was at a big New Years Eve party with a lot of prominent Salvadorans and the news came through during the party that a peace agreement had been achieved.

This is probably the time to look at an assessment of ten years of U.S. policy. It had started as a policy designed to prevent a Marxist takeover in yet another Latin American country. As I mentioned before, our cover story took over and the policy morphed into a search for a democratic solution for El Salvador. After ten years we finally had a formula, by no means perfect, but one that might work.

The people who had fought on the rebel side were guaranteed a place in the political life of the country. The country, out of the crucible of war, had in a sense reorganized itself in ways that would make it unlike everything that had gone before. There was a different political setup - not perfect, not capable of solving the country's economic problems but a system that involved a great deal more participation by the citizens of that country in their own political life. The differences between the political El Salvador at the end of that war and at the beginning were marked. El Salvador was changed. People are still poor, and people still treat each other badly every now and then but, believe me, it is not the same country it was before.

The policy experience for the United States was also interesting. If you look at it and compare El Salvador and Nicaragua, there is a total difference in way the U.S. policy was pursued in the two countries. The Nicaragua policy, especially in its Contra manifestation, was one that tried for quick solutions by trying to manufacture things in the Nicaraguan political situation that really could not be supported without the Americans. It required a great deal of covert action and support of inappropriate allies over which we didn't have much control. There was a lot wrong with it, mainly because it relied too heavily on covert activities and tried for a quick transformation that, at best, would have been superficial. In the end, Nicaragua solved its own problems through its own elections.

The Salvador policy was very expensive, but it was essentially a public policy. Everybody knew we were giving military aid to El Salvador. Everybody knew how much it was. It was debated at least once a year, and sometimes twice, in the U.S. Congress. And it barely, but consistently, received the support it needed. In the end, it worked better. I don't want to say there weren't any covert activities in El Salvador; there were some, but they were mainly in the category of intelligence gathering and not in political manipulation and dumb dirty tricks. Where I come down is that public policy, acknowledged policy, and public commitment over the long term, works. Clandestine, quick fix, James Bond type solutions really don't work. Even when they appear to work, they backfire on you. We got away with it in Guatemala in the fifties and then we paid the price for years and years after.

The Guatemala coup was the second worst thing we had to cope with in Latin America in terms of bad policy. The first one was holding on to the Panama Canal too long. As things began to wind down in El Salvador, the target country of those people in absolute disagreement with U.S. policy in Latin America then became Guatemala. I think Salvador/Nicaragua contrast shows where U.S. policy worked well and where it doesn't work well.

Q: What was the estimate you and Ambassador Walker were getting about the El Salvador leadership? You get the leadership where people have learned to live by the gun.

DIETERICH: It is very much a leadership phenomena.

I think you have to understand that the attraction of war, and particularly in Latin America. Think of the alternatives available to an 18 year old from the countryside or the urban underclass. If he sees his alternative is selling chewing gum on the streets of San Salvador or washing car windows, or petty theft or working the fields, he may well conclude that joining the guerillas or the army is a good choice. The guerillas seems kind of fun for a young person. He gets to go on a permanent camping trip. He gets to play with guns. He gets to do a lot of things that are fun and, in some ways, life in the guerilla camps was probably healthier. It was a better life for young people than living on the streets of the city.

Or if his choice was the army rather then the guerillas at least he had security and a minimal living and he got to play with guns. In both cases, with the army or the guerillas, there was a sense of identity, of belonging and a channel for youthful idealism. I am not ignoring the fact that in both cases he stood a pretty good chance of getting killed. I guess kids really do think they are immortal.

Also take the case of a lower middle class kid with some education, but little else going for him. He may well see a commission in the army as his ticket into the upper middle class. The pay isn't very good, but the opportunities for a little, or a lot, extra on the side are there for everyone to see. In much of Latin America, the military is a path to upward mobility and there aren't very many others. And the guerillas too had their appeal for the educated poor.

When you start saying to these people who have been soldiers for all their adult lives, "There is a better civilian life ahead for you that can come out of a peace agreement," you are facing a hell of a problem. In the first place, they have no precedent for it. And secondly, the message is coming from people they instinctively don't trust - civilian politicians and the American embassy.

It took a lot of commitment and a lot of leadership on the part of the Salvadoran government, the Salvadoran military, and us to convince people that there was a possibility that things could be okay. I don't think we ever convinced many of the military people on either side that things would be great, but they were probably getting pretty tired themselves of risking their lives and even more tired of seeing their friends blown away and going to funerals. I think both the army and the guerillas were getting tired of the alienation from their own society that was setting in. The stories of massacres, the human rights violations, did alienate the people from the military of both sides. You have to remember, the guerillas also indulged in their human rights violations and did things like shooting down unarmed American helicopter crewmen and all sorts of other things. There were a lot of victims on both sides.

I think you have to give Bill Walker a lot of credit for having managed his relationship with the senior level of the Salvadoran government with great skill. You also have to recognize that President Cristiani came into the process with a commitment to peace, and did not waver from that vision. He was building on a base laid down by Duarte who also had a vision not only of peace, but of transformation in the politics of El Salvador. I think Cristiani was the better politician and the better leader of the two. Duarte really didn't fulfill the kind of promise that he held out for a while. I think Cristiani succeeded even better than we thought he would. His accomplishment was a leadership accomplishment. He came out of a party that was trusted by his social class, but not trusted by the rest of the country, a party with an unfortunate heritage, which he transformed.

Q: He also had the American press, which was important in this effort. They were highly skeptical because of where he was coming from.

DIETERICH: We were, too. I mentioned that I had to actually meet him before I was convinced there was substance behind him. What you are always afraid of is that a new Salvadoran leader would say good things about the peace process because he thought that was what the Americans wanted to hear, but he wasn't really going to do it. I think a lot of hard liners in Cristiani's ARENA party were comforted by the thought that he was just kidding about peace.

You have to give credit to people on both sides of the war for having gotten aboard the peace process, and in doing so, admitted a lot of the things they had done in the past were wrong. You had to give that kind of credit to General Ponce and some others. There is a certain irony in the Truth Commission process that was part of the peace agreement. The leaders in place got burned. They got burned because, in the interest of the peace process, they talked about their own past and talked about past mistakes. That happened to some of the guerilla leaders, too. A lot of the people who had done many worse things just kept silent because they could since they weren't leaders anymore.

Q: Was there concern on Walker's and your part that, knowing the way the American government works, once a problem is supposedly solved, interest, finance, support - the whole thing goes away and we are off worrying about something else. Were we making promises in this peace process that might atrophy it over time because of lack of American interest?

DIETERICH: We knew that was a risk. In 1994, I happened to meet with a subsequent Salvadoran president in Mexico, and he certainly felt the United States had not provided the aid it should have and that had been promised. We are not so dumb that we just pulled out. We did keep up aid levels and we did support the peace process. A lot of what I did after the peace agreement - Bill Walker left shortly after things were signed and I was charge d'affaires for about five months, from January through June - a lot of it did have to do with getting a lot of people in contact so we could fulfill those promises. Getting entrepreneurs to sit down with guerilla leadership and talk about employment, jobs, education, scholarships, and getting all sorts of counterpart groups to meet with each other. As is often the case, the American embassy is a good venue for that sort of thing. People tend to accept our invitations and tend to show up. One of the things that surprised me was the extent to which military to military relations went off very quickly and easily. There is something about soldiers that makes them like the idea of getting together with their ex adversaries and talking shop. That happened quickly and became very cordial.

The two groups that were most difficult continued to be the church leadership, who I think still felt that somehow total justice had not been achieved in the Jesuit case and a kind of think tank type group called CONACIT that kept refusing to meet with anybody from the FMLM no matter what. The churcor at least the local Jesuitremained somewhat hostile to the settlement. Both those groups had their followers in the United States, which made it difficult. The CONACIT people often had support from ultraconservative Americans who had been saying all along, "You don't have to go along with this peace process, you people can win." The church received constant support, also from people in the United States, who felt the other side should have won. A lot of American liberal opinion didn't like the peace process very well because they thought their friends should have won. A sense of justice meant that the guerillas should get to run things now and the people who had supported the government should be on the outs.

Peacemaking has to do with compromise, and there were too many so called friends of peace in the Salvadoran equation who really weren't for peace at all. They were friends of peace only based on their side winning, and that wasn't going to happen.

I've gotten off the track again - your question was? Oh yes, I remember. It was about the U.S. policy commitment. We worked hard on making the connections and using what aid we had to get people jobs and to demobilize the military forces on both sides decently. It certainly hasn't worked to perfection. El Salvador still has too many unemployed ex combatants, and has had a major problem with crime because there are too many people who were used to making their living with guns. They continue to do so. If you learned the trade on the army side by extorting support from villagers by intimidating them, or if you had earned your living on the guerilla side by doing pretty much the same thing, it wasn't too hard for some to transition into kidnaping, blackmail and theft. However, I remain convinced the country was transformed into something better than what it was before.

Q: We're talking in Arlington, Virginia, right now in the year 2000, and within five miles of us is a very large workforce of immigrants from El Salvador. This is a new phenomena and concentrated in this area. Spanish seems to be the language in most work sites. A lot of people who look like Central American Indians are out there in hard hats. During the time you were there, could you talk about legal illegal migration flow in both ways. How did this affect you; how did you see it?

DIETERICH: I probably have to go back to the demographics of El Salvador. El Salvador is an intensely overpopulated country, and that is uncharacteristic of the rest of Latin America with the exception of Haiti. So there would have been a major flow of immigration, legal and illegal, to the United States whether there had been a war in El Salvador or not. But surely the war changed the equation a lot. It increased the number of people who wanted or needed to leave and it gave people who wanted to come anyway a pretty good case to be made that they were escaping extreme danger and persecution. And because of that, understandably enough, a lot of those people have figured out a way to stay. I don't mean to be callous - there were many people who were genuine refugees from the war, but there were also many who came for essentially economic reasons. When you consider the terrible poverty of El Salvador, I personally find both motives equally justified. The law however makes distinctions.

It was a hard issue for the Salvadoran government to deal with. On the one level you deal with a certain level of national pride and you don't like the idea that your people are leaving. On the other hand, local economic pressure is relieved and the emigrants send back lots of dollars.

The problem for the Salvadoran government is that emigrants also represented a major source of foreign exchange. Salvador did reasonably well as a coffee exporter, but they probably earned more foreign exchange through remittances than they ever did through coffee of any other export. The prospect of those people being sent back, especially in large numbers over a short period of time, was absolutely terrifying to the Salvadoran government. And absolutely terrifying to any American official who had anything to do with the development of the economy of that country. It would have been a disaster. The remittances would stop and somebody would have to pick up the burden of trying to reintegrate these people back into Salvadoran society.

In the longer term I think it is economically damaging to the country. El Salvador, like a lot of Latin American countries, probably has all the lawyers it needs, and probably has all the engineers, and probably all the doctors it needs, but what it doesn't have is all the nurses it needs, or all the electricians it needs, or all the plumbers it needs, or all the airplane mechanics it needs. Those people are hard to find. The problem of emigration to the United States for many developing countries is that it filters off the best of the folks who will become your nurses and technicians and mechanics. They are the ones with the energy and guts, and maybe even the tiny amounts of capital that need to be accumulated to make the move, so it is filtering off their best and most useful workers. Thoughtful people in Latin American countries and El Salvador understand that.

That's as good a policy dilemma as the U.S. government can be confronted with. In a way it's kind of a lose lose proposition for us, and when we have a lose lose situation, and when we have immigration that is motivated by the fact that we have economic need in this country of these people, we end up trying to do both things at once.

Q: Were you under pressure to say that a particular person was actually certified as a political refugee, did that get into your operation?

DIETERICH: I'm probably going to show I didn't pay as much attention to the consular section as I should have. Yes, I think we had to make that decision, but when you have conditions of war prevailing all over the place, it becomes kind of hard not to make that decision. If we had been very tough on those kinds of decisions, we would have come under all sorts of pressure from various groups in the United States. They would have taken us to the cleaners.

Q: As the peace process went, did you foresee and worry about all these refugees coming back - which was the last thing you needed - you had to absorb all the military on both sides and you didn't need a bunch of villagers coming back who were sending solid remittances in.

DIETERICH: Yes, that was a worry, both for us and the Salvadoran government. You had things like the amnesty provision that really were designed to keep that from happening. The United States government took a number of administrative actions, and some legislative ones too, that basically said, "No, that won't happen to you and certainly not all at once. We've got to follow our laws and some of these people are no longer going to be qualified as refugees and will have to come back, but we will do it gradually."

Q: This was something you were working on. What about the upper class, were they getting the hell ou- the doctors, dentists?

DIETERICH: The Salvadoran rich always hedged their bets by keeping funds in Europe or the United States and having property other places. The upper class in El Salvador were the kind of people who are very at home in Miami if they need to be. A large number of them study in the United States. I don't want to give the impression that the upper class abandoned El Salvador during the war, because they pretty much stayed there. There were some people who fell into particular danger, either from guerillas or their own politicians, or from the right wing, who did go and live in the United States. There were some who came back during the negotiations and peace process.

The Salvadoran upper class has had it good enough in El Salvador that they are fairly motivated to come back, and part of the peace process was assuring them that their lives would not be disrupted.

Land reform had already been done - was already a fact of life and people had gotten used to the fact that they had lost big haciendas. They had also gotten used to the idea that having a big, inefficient hacienda wasn't the way to prosper in the world anyway. You had to turn your resources toward industry, commerce or services, or you had to learn to do modern agriculture. Again, education was really important, because the U.S. education of the sons of the early twentieth century landowning class was exactly the window that opened on better ways of making a living. I give credit to that new generation of young U.S. educated Salvadorans. They had a different vision of how the country could progress and maybe this explains a lot of their politics.

It was a vision that was acceptable to their parents. They are not persons who rebelled against their families and all their traditions, but had modified everything in ways that were acceptable and made sense to them. Ultimately, this is the way most human beings treat their forefathers. You do things that are sort of what they had in mind, but not really.

The immigration issue was a big part of the peace process and had to be solved, and within the possibilities of our laws the United States government got it pretty much right by avoiding any kind of precipitous repatriation of Salvadorans. I tend to believe now there never will be a precipitous repatriation of Salvadorans. Basically, they are here, and in my estimate in the long term will be good for us. That, of course is too bad for El Salvador, because they could use a lot of those people. From Salvador's point, they should get back all the energetic, ambitious Salvadorans that are here and send us some of the ones they still have.

Q: During the time you were there, did you see church delegations - particularly Catholic Church delegations - were they coming in all the time?

DIETERICH: Both Catholic and Protestant. I've talked about the policy of the embassy and how delegations got received. Whatever the delegation, they were received by the embassy and we spent a lot of time with them. Church delegations, both Catholic and Protestant, were a staple.

Q: How about during the peace process, was there a different tenor to them?

DIETERICH: A lot of the church people really bothered me during that period, because there were too many of them who wanted the side they favored to win. They would say, and believe, they were for peace, but the formula they saw for peace was one that could only have been achieved through a guerilla victory. So a lot of them were a little sour on the peace process because they saw it as a "selling out" of values they felt were very important.

I guess some of them thought the Salvadoran economy ought to be reorganized along lines that would take most of the wealth away from the folks that had it and give it to other people. They didn't seem to quite understand that the Salvadoran rich, and the not so rich, would fight to keep what they had, just as people would do in this country. Wanting your side to win, no matter how noble the motives, was not the way to achieve peace in El Salvador.

A lot of people, especially outsiders, expressed their desires with the formula "peace with justice." In the long term, it's a good slogan. The two words belong together; you probably cannot have one without the other. But in the shorter term, achieving peace with justice required compromise on justice. And a higher level of justice would have meant compromising on peace. In war weary El Salvador peace was the priority. Salvadorans and, for that matter, most Americans who cared about the country more than political abstractions, wanted the killing to stop.

Whether they like to admit it or not, church people and American and European liberals provided a whole lot of military aid to the Salvadoran guerillas. I think many of them sincerely believed that aid was only going for humanitarian purposes. But since they filtered their aid through the major guerilla organizations, it defies all human logic to say that it didn't go for military purposes. The guerilla leadership would had to have been saintly, and they certainly weren't, to avoid the temptation of using it to support their military operations. They would also have needed sophisticated and expensive cost accounting systems.

The fact is a lot of people had an investment in the guerilla side and had been deliberately trying to countervail U.S. aid. Having failed to influence congress to cut the aid off, they decided to countervail.

There was also a great deal of naivet? on both sides, if naive means you are unacquainted with how things really work. One of the statements that used to drive me nuts was when somebody would come and tell me some horrible thing that had happened (sometimes true we would find out) and then they would say, "This must be true because a poor person told me." I have never understood that logic. Surely they don't believe poor people can't shade the truth like everybody else does when it is in their interest. They should understand that the downtrodden of the world are really good at verbal manipulation of people who don't know very much about their situation. It is often the only defense they have against exploiters.

I think maybe the idea was sort of "these people have been so badly mistreated that at least we owe them the courtesy of believing them." The people of El Salvador are owed great courtesy, but that is no way to do politics, nor organize a society. That kind of attitude and that kind of reporting made sometimes made it difficult for the embassy to sort out what really had happened. And bad facts will trump compromise every time.

Q: By the time you left, how was the guerilla leadership? Were they in town and working? I'm talking about the top echelon now.

DIETERICH: They were there for the negotiations which happened in various places, usually not in San Salvador. They were certainly in town right after the peace agreement. I remember a number of occasions when Ambassador Walker and Phil Chicola, the political counselor, and I as well a couple of other people from the embassy, would sit down for quiet face to face sessions with members of the guerilla leadership, even before the peace agreement. We would sit and talk and reminisce about old times, and talk about the future and try to bolster their interest in the process.

Q: How did you feel you were supported, in the last year of the peace process, by the Bureau? You had a pretty hard line bureau at one point because of domestic politics but things changed.

DIETERICH: We were well supported by the bureau. There was no question of Bernie Aronson's commitment to the peace process, nor his understanding of it and how it would work. When we had disagreements with them, they were tactical disagreements. After all, they weren't talking to the same people in Washington that we were talking to locally. They had to respond to pressure groups in Washington, too. Bernie Aronson is the one who had to deal with Helm's staff on one hand, and Chris Dodd's staff on the other. He had to deal with the Jesuits at Georgetown, who had a legitimate concern about the Jesuit case. I don't fault the bureau at all in this.

Q: After the Ollie North business, there was a disengagement of the NSC (National Security Council) from being as much of an active participant in this as it began to wind down. Did you see any of this?

DIETERICH: Yes, I think so, but I wasn't in a very good position to see that. I think the NSC had reverted to its traditional mode of being a not very good coordinator instead of trying to be its own agency. I wouldn't want to leave the impression that the Ollie North scandal kick started the peace process - peace in El Salvador as a U.S. policy. That had its origins long before the Ollie North got caught, bit its implementation was complicated by the fact that we were trying to run much of the logistics for Nicaragua out of El Salvador.

Q: During this latter part we are talking about, what was happening in Nicaragua?

DIETERICH: Well, we were into the period of the elections. The Contra adventure was over and they were scattered in various places. They were still there as a political force but not much of a military force anymore. The elections in Nicaragua were held in late '91, and guess what. Violeta Chamorro won. That tells you something about democracy and the power of the press. She was an important person because of what happened to her husband - he was important because he was a journalist. Of course the defeat of the Sandinistas electorally in Nicaragua was one more element telling the Salvadoran rebels that it was time to sue for peace.

Q: Towards the end, did you feel the Cubans were a factor?

DIETERICH: I don't think the Cubans have ever been the factor in Latin America that we thought they were. No, they weren't a factor. The Latin Americans know if a leftist gets into trouble he can go live in Cuba. It is a place of refuge. Cuba has probably had more influence on Mexico that it ever had on any Central American country.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss before we move on?

DIETERICH: Let me go back to immigration policy. There was one really sad thing where U.S. policy did not jibe very well with Salvadoran policy. There was a case when the Salvadorans intercepted a ship at sea and took off 30 or 40 Chinese that were headed for the United States and incarcerated them in El Salvador. (End of tape)

Q: You were saying something about Cristiani's chief of staff.

DIETERICH: Cristiani's chief of staff said, "Here are these Chinese, would you please take them because they were headed for your country anyway." I said we would have to talk to Washington about it. I don't think we ever did take them. We kept telling the Salvadorans that it was their problem. An annoyed Arturo Tona would come to me and say, "Look, we're getting tired of feeding these people, this is really terrible. Next time we are just going to let them go." To tell you the truth, I don't know what finally happened to the Chinese.

Q: In '92 you left. Whither?

DIETERICH: To Mexico. I had been negotiating on this, and the department had discussed another DCM job with me. I finally decided, after a lot of thought, maybe I would just as soon go back to USIA because I had also been offered the PAO job in Mexico. The DCM assignments involved were Argentina and Brazil, both countries I had served in, and I decided I would like to go to a country I hadn't served in. I could see the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) thing coming. I decided Mexico might be an interesting country to be in, and it was one of the biggest USIS posts. I thought with the coming integration of USIA into the State Department it was time to be back there. Frankly, in those days, running a USIS post offered you a lot more independence than being a DCM again.

My family, always an important consideration, my wife especially, was very enthusiastic about going to Mexico. She had been in Mexico City a couple of times and had liked it a lot. Certain family considerations, aging parents and our involvement up on Lake Erie, where we had our summer place, also made the idea of being close to the United States very attractive.

We left El Salvador in June because my wife needed some surgery. She had gone through routine physicals, the doctor in Salvador had discovered a tumor and recommended that we get back to the States quickly. I probably would have left in July anyway, but I ended up leaving in late May or early June. It was scary. It was not something we had ever had to face before, and it turned out to be a fairly routine. You are never really confident until you get back to doctors in the States, so I left Salvador a little earlier than I had intended.

I was kind of sad, because it had been fun being charge for five months (Bill Walker had left in Late January or early February) and I had liked it a lot. There was a wonderful farewell party in the new embassy residence. That's another story I never got into - the building of a new embassy.

Q: Why don't you talk about it?

DIETERICH: Oh, that's a big story, a big embassy. It was interesting in how we worked. But just let me finish up on the farewell.

It was very touching because there were people there who represented everybody we had dealt with. The guerilla leadership was there. Certainly during the first part of my tour at least, I never expected the guerilla leadership would turn up at my farewell party. Important military people were there, plus the government was well represented. It was a nice farewell and I think it was a way for Salvadorans, at five or six months into the peace process, to recognize the role the United States had played.

Q: The thing that keeps coming through to me as I do these interviews, is how important the role of the United States is. If we aren't the engine in certain areas, acting as a facilitator, nothing will happen. With all our blunders the world would probably be a hell of a lot more chaotic than it is today without American participation and a certain amount of leadership.

DIETERICH: I think so. As president of the USIA Alumni Association, I had to write a letter to the White House on Sunday and I used the phrase "the world often requests, and always expects, American leadership."

The mechanism of an embassy is particularly useful. There is still considerable and broad respect for the traditions of diplomacy. Even if we have policies that are not particularly neutral at times, the embassy often represents neutral ground where you can get people together. If you have people so hardened that they won't accept an invitation to the American embassy, don't worry too much about it - they probably aren't going to negotiate anyway.

Oh, back to the new embassy in El Salvador. We probably took a snapshot somewhere around the mid '80s on what would be needed for an Inman standard embassy.

Q: You better explain who Bob Inman was.

DIETERICH: I hope I've got that right. Robert Inman was - I don't remember what he was.

Q: He was a brilliant military man, who was head of the National Security Agency for sometime. At one point he was nominated to be secretary of defense. A brilliant sort of engineer type.

DIETERICH: He had done a study of what would be necessary for embassy security. If there was ever a place where you had to think about building a secure embassy it was El Salvador.

There was a shooting war of very serious dimensions going on at the time the Department did its initial surveys. In essence, they took a snapshot of the situation that prevailed at that time, and planned to build what we needed. This involved a huge campus like setting on the edge of San Salvador. The location itself eventually became a mini problem because someone discovered that, technically, it wasn't in the capital city, and the U.S. embassy, according to the U.S. El Salvador treaty establishing diplomatic relations, was supposed to be located in the capital city. But in good Central American fashion somebody said, "Oh, to hell with it, don't worry about it."

We ended up with this huge campus like setting. The embassy and its out buildings ended up looking like some well funded Bible college. The huge lot had two big super reinforced towers going up six or seven floors each and various outbuildings - marine barracks and various other things - and all sorts of fences around it. It was a fairly generous facility for things as they stood in '83 and '84 when they took the snapshot. It wasn't completed until early '92. By that time we had a peace agreement, and it was already evident that it was a lot bigger than it needed to be. It also included an ambassador's residence; so you had the two towers, the two chancery buildings, one being AID and the other being everybody else, plus the ambassador's residence pretty close by, close enough so that people began to worry about folks working in the embassy being able to look into the ambassador's back yard.

At any rate, it was a whole lot of work for the embassy. We were supervising a major construction project as everything else was going on: dealing with contractors, getting them into and out of the country, which was a major concern when we had to evacuate people during the offensive. A lot of the work had to be done by American contractors. It was done to a super standard. As somebody said, "It will never fall down during an earthquakit might capsize, but it won't fall down." It was bombproof, with lots of separation from the street.

When we finally got it built, it was evident that it was too big. It certainly was going to be too big if American policy was to be successful at all in El Salvador. Even with hindsight, you can look back and ask how we could have turned it off. In any construction project there is a point of no return where you may has well go ahead and finish it, and that had long passed before we got a peace agreement, so the only big mistake in the construction is the two towers are so close together that you couldn't sell off one of them without violating the standards for separation from other facilities. I guess what it really shows, and something to think about as we deal with Admiral Crowe's and other admirals' recommendations on embassy security, is that it isn't quite as simple as simply setting standards and then adhering to them. Construction of buildings has to be guided by political considerations, like everything else we do.

It is really a nice facility and very nice offices. On last day on the job in Salvador we dedicated the new building. I guess we had one later on when the VIPs came down, but we had our own because it was the day the last elements of the embassy were moving in. I made a little speech, the marines were there with flags, and a couple of other people made speeches. The day before, all my household effects had been packed out and I went in there as charge, plopped myself down in this sort of very luxurious and essentially empty ambassador's office and sat there for about half an hour, thought about El Salvador and everything else. Then I figured I didn't have a hell of a lot more to do there, so I decided to go home and pack my suitcase and I left the next morning.

Now Mexico. Well, I went back for a long home leave, and my wife's surgery happened in July and was fine. My son was then just about to enter junior high school, and that had been a consideration too, on going to Mexico because the school in Mexico was fine. Anyway, we went on a long home leave and there was an additional delay, because my medical clearance got screwed up by a local technician in Ohio who had done the lung capacity test incorrectly. If there is anything they worry about when they send you to Mexico, is your lung capacity. It was well into September before we got to Mexico City.

Q: This would be in '92?

DIETERICH: Right.

Q: And you were there from '92 until when?

DIETERICH: Until December of '95.

Q: You were going as public affairs officer?

DIETERICH: Yes, as public affairs officer which made me the head of one of the biggest USIS posts in the world.

Q: Do you think this would be a good place to stop?

DIETERICH: Yes.

Q: That way we can concentrate on Mexico. What did you do after that?

DIETERICH: After Mexico (we are close to the end) I came back and worked on pickup jobs in the agency for a year and then I retired.

Q: I think it is better to do it in one piece. We'll pick this up as public affairs officer from '92 to '95 in Mexico.

By the way, one of the questions I like to ask about is - here you came back after a very fruitful time, after a major peace negotiation and other things - did you get a feeling of people patting you on the back and saying "job well done, Jeff ", or anything like that?

DIETERICH: No, not at that time, but I wouldn't emphasize that. The fact is there any great sense o"hey, job well done," but you have to remember that El Salvador isn't very far away and there was a lot of interchange. Joe Sullivan and Pete Romero were in and out of the country a lot. We were up in the States fairly often. It only took us two or three hours to fly to Washington, it was no big deal.

I don't think there was a need for extensive debriefings. They knew everything I knew already because we had been talking to each other all the time. The great advantage of Latin America - same time zone. That makes a huge difference.

There are two factors that make doing diplomacy in Latin America absolutely different from the rest of the world. One is easy language, one that we do pretty well. Second, real time. I don't remember any extensive sessions. I went in and touched bases with everybody and I had been up here many times. One time I was angling for some sort of job in the department, and either didn't get them or I didn't want them. There was no need for consultations at that time. I had no feeling that I was not appreciated in the department.

Q: So we'll put at the end here that we will pick it up in '92 to '95 when you are public affairs officer in Mexico City.

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This is the 9th of March, 2000. You were in Mexico City from when to when?

DIETERICH: I was in Mexico from '92 to '95.

Q: What was the state of our relations, as you saw them at that time, with Mexico?

DIETERICH: It was a pretty good period. The Salinas government was interested in an economic change in Mexico and interested in change in the way Mexico viewed itself. There was a turn toward free enterprise and also a turn toward good relations with the United States. The most important single fact, and one that encouraged me to go there, was that we were in the NAFTA period, specifically the period that led up to NAFTA being submitted to the U.S. Senate for approval.

Q: Could you explain?

DIETERICH: The North American Free Trade Agreement.

Q: Which was what?

DIETERICH: It was an agreement between Canada, the United States, and Mexico that would do away with the major economic barriers of trade among the three countries. It was an important concept; an important event; one that recognized a fact of absolutely basic geography that a lot of Americans sort of slide by, that Mexico is indeed a part of North America, as well as being a part of Latin America. The decision to go to Mexico was in some aspects a very good one, from my point of view. I discovered, somewhat to my surprise, that I liked Mexico a lot and I hadn't expected to.

Q: Prior to that, you were in El Salvador weren't you? Had you picked up southerner's concepts of their big neighbor to the north? Mexico stands off to one side in the Latin American circle.

DIETERICH: Yes, to some extent. Mexico in a sense, sees itself too close to the United States. You know the old joke about poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States, which is a reference to the anti-clericalism of the Mexican revolution. I don't think the rest of Latin America sees it that way. They see Mexico as a serious regional power; they see Mexico as a major provider of those services that relate to the fact that it is a part of Latin America and it also speaks Spanish. I guess Mexico, in terms of population, is the second, or the largest Spanish speaking country in the world. It has a great influence in the rest of Latin America, especially in media terms. Mexican television is a major producer of entertainment programing for all of the Spanish speaking world. That gives it a great deal of influence. The same is true of publication; Mexican newspapers are influential in the rest of Latin America.

Q: In 1973 or '74, I watched a dubbed version of a Mexican soap opera that was showing on Russian television. This was in Kyrgyzstan of all places. It was about a peasant girl that went to the big city and her problems there.

DIETERICH: It's a curious thing because Mexican, as well as Argentine and Brazilian soap operas do pretty well in Europe. Also some places in Asia too, it's a curious phenomenon. If you go back, Dallas was one of the big, big American successes in terms of international distribution of dubbed versions; I think it had to do with family structure. The extended family structure of Mexico looks familiar in much of southern Europe and eastern Europe, and looks familiar in much of Asia.

The Mexicans, as well as the Brazilians, are very good marketers. Early in my stay there, John Negroponte and I went to call on the Director of Televisa and as we were waiting in the lobby to go in and see the great man, a Russian came up to the ambassador and greeted him like a long lost brother'. It turned out he was the ex Russian ambassador in Mexico, who had returned to Mexico and gone to work for Televisa in charge of marketing their programming to Russia.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

DIETERICH: John Negroponte. He was then replaced about mid tour for me by Jim Jones, ex congressman from Oklahoma.

Q: What was the USIA apparatus?

DIETERICH: The USIA apparatus was big, it was one of our biggest posts in the world, which included three branch posts, Guadalajara, Monterey, and Tijuana, although we didn't call the one in Tijuana a branch post for bureaucratic reasons, but at any rate we had an office in Tijuana. We also were in charge of the Benjamin Franklin Library, which is the United States' oldest overseas library. It is an important institution in Mexico City.

We had a very large cultural program, based on the fact that the Mexican government is, by tradition and by inclination, very heavily into cultural affairs of all kinds. The foreign ministry has a large cultural division and even runs its own cultural centers in other cities of Mexico. Mexico heavily subsidizes orchestras, theater groups, and literary activities. It also a large cultural center in San Antonio, which is really a branch of the UNAM, Mexico city's autonomous University. It is a very serious operation.

What this means is that Mexico was very interested in cultural relations on an official level with the United States. That is difficult because we often don't see much of a governmental role in our cultural heritage. Nevertheless, in many ways, over the years, we have adapted to the Mexican model through mechanisms like the Fulbright program.

Mexico is one of what USIA in those days called a "commission country," which means that the Fulbright program is run through a governmental bilateral agreement and governed by a board of directors appointed by both governments. It was a big program and Mexico contributed half of the funding. That involved a major amount of my time. It also meant that, in addition to a board of directors to run, there was a separate Fulbright Commission office with its staff of 6 or 7 people and an executive director named by the board. The Fulbright Commission staff administered the Fulbright program, which meant nominating and preparing Mexican students to go to the United States and nominating and preparing Americans to come to Mexico, assigning them to various universities. It also served as the student advising organization in collaboration with USIS. If a Mexican student was interested in studying in the United States, the Fulbright Commission was a place where he could go to find a collection of catalogs and to get advice on what he or she would have to do, what it would cost, and how to apply.

Q: When one thinks about it, the American higher educational system is incredible for an American to understand but for a foreigner, I mean all of us have gone through this. There isn't a university or state university - you have hundreds, probably thousands - all different, all with strengths and weaknesses.

DIETERICH: That's why student advising services are terribly important, and I hope after the merger of USIA with the department we can find ways to continue those services. In the first place, you are absolutely right. Most countries find it difficult to fathom the U.S. university system because it is more highly privatized than any other system in the world. There is no system, no set of rules you can count on; no central place to apply. There is not even a clear cut definition of what is prestigious and what isn't. A lot of what people advising students would do would be to say, "Look, you don't have to go to Harvard or Yale to study in the United States."

Q: What was your impression of the flow of Mexican students to the United States? Were there characteristics?

DIETERICH: The first characteristic was in the last decade or so, there was an increase in the flow. Mexico, like much of Latin America, by tradition tended to look more toward Europe for cultural and educational models. Academics lived in a universe that said if you wanted to study engineering or another hard science you might go to the United States, but if you were interested in the arts, literature, history, or political science you ought to go to Europe. That was changing in all of Latin America, but it had notably changed in Mexico. In addition, NAFTA was changing the equation.

Q: Why would NAFTA make a difference?

DIETERICH: Because it made clear to people that Mexico's most important relationship was a positive one. Mexicans always knew their relationship with the United States was overpowering, but they tended to see it in negative terms. The Americans would do things to you like start a war, and occupy your capital, and take part of your country away. The Americans were sort of arrogant. They would do what they pleased on the border and didn't much care whaMexicans thought about it. I think the NAFTA context gave Mexico a way to begin to see positive sides and benefits to their relationship with the United States. It became possible to say, "Now wait a minute, this being so close to the United States and so far from God might not be such a bad deal after all. We really ought to benefit from this special relationship we have with the United States."

Also, Mexico is very much a part of the intellectual life of Latin America, a leader in that intellectual life, and has also been affected by the decline in the credibility of the dependency theories. In intellectual and political terms, that is probably the most important development in Latin America in the latter half of the 20th Century.

Q: Could you refresh my memory - the dependency theory was what?

DIETERICH: Dependency theory - I can't give a really competent definition - means whatever bad has happened in my country was caused by the foreigners and probably the United States.

Q: Which tends to take away responsibility too.

DIETERICH: It certainly does, and it was a movement that was tailor made for the Marxists, and tailor made for a lot of the devotees of liberation theology. I don't mean to identify those two with each other, but they shared this stake in dependency theories. It is nice for governments to be able to blame somebody else, but it is also comforting for a society to say "it isn't our fault and if we are disadvantaged economically it is because of our virtue," and at the heart of liberation theology in human psychology is the notion that you buy economic progress at the expense of spiritual and moral values. You can have one or you can have the other.

Q: That is a little bit Jeffersonian too.

DIETERICH: That's right, and it relates to a whole set of societal values that separate northern Europeans and those of the Mediterranean basin, as well as their New World descendants. Take the sense of family, for instance. Latin cultures tend to believe that northern Europeans prospered because they are cold and calculating, don't care very much about their families, and are not very good at human relationships. They buy economic and technical progress by sacrificing human and spiritual values. The leads to the comforting thought that "We may not be rich, but that is because we adhere to higher moral, intellectual and artistic standards. The gringos got rich because we let them exploit us since we are concentrated on higher things." It is a comforting thought because it lets you off the hook for the lamentable condition of your own country.

The trouble with the argument is that it isn't true. You don't buy one thing with the other. The same countries that win Nobel prizes in sciences also win them in the arts and literature. A country with bad philosophy more often than not, ends up with bad plumbing.

Q: By being in Mexico and seeing their cultural strengths, did you find it was a little hard to keep one's eye on what we were doing, such as explaining the United States as opposed to letting people in the United States know about Mexico?

DIETERICH: Actually, we had to do both and both were in the USIA mandate. We were very active dealing with groups on both sides of the border that were interested with NAFTA; dealing with groups on both sides that were interested in cultural relations; dealing with people that were interested in everything in the relationship.

We dealt with great numbers of Americans who had come to Mexico, and with great numbers of Mexicans who were traveling to the United States.

There certainly was no problem in getting people's interest. Mexicans know a lot about the United States because they watch U.S. television. Sometimes not as much as they think they know, but a lot. They know much more about the United States than Americans know about Mexico.

Although, if truth be told, there are a lot of Americans in the southwestern United States who do know a lot about Mexico, speak some Spanish, like to be in Mexico, and are interested in the relationship.

NAFTA was a major part of our job, but in broader terms the main message was democracy in the United States and how it functions and relates to democracy in Mexico.

Q: Let's talk about NAFTA. I'm familiar with the problem in the United States, particularly unions, but what about Mexico? What were we trying to sell, and was there a problem?

DIETERICH: Mexico had a lot of the same problems, but the general opinion in Mexico was more favorable to NAFTA than in the United States. There were Mexican unions, too, that felt this would be disadvantageous to them. There were Mexican business people who could see a combination of benefit and risk in the whole thing. There were a lot of Mexican industries that had gotten used to a high level of protection from the Mexican government and were worried about what would happen to them when they didn't have it any more.

The great majority of Mexicans, however, did believe that it meant they could buy U.S. goods at lower prices. That was very important in Mexico, because a lot of things that make life easier for Mexicans are imported from the United States. If you go to Mexico you see a good many American cars on the road - many of them are manufactured in Mexico, but nevertheless American cars.

I think the balance of opinion was more favorable to NAFTA in Mexico than it was in the United States. Favoring NAFTA was part of the official policy of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), the eternally ruling political party of Mexico. I think we had a slight balance on the Mexican side and a very "iffy" proposition on the U.S. side. Many of the things that would absolutely haunt us on a day to day basis were the terrible things politicians in the United States would say about Mexico as part of the debate. It was fair game to say that Mexico was a country ruled by a pack of environmentally insensitive, human rights violating, labor union bashing morons and the Mexican press rarely missed the story. That's not a nice message to deal with when you had my job.

What you do when the message is absolutely terrible, when there is no way you can make it look good, is you talk process. That worked in a sense because the process itself is seen as sort of admirable by a lot of Mexicans. We were really saying, "This is the way debate happens in the United States. People are going to say these things and you know they don't mean them. This is something we have to live through. INAFTA is to prosper, it will prosper because there is consensus in the three countries in favor of it. Even iNAFTA could somehow be shoved down the throats of the people of the three countries, it wouldn't work."

I think that message worked.

Emptier part of the message, which related back to our cultural affairs programs, was to say that NAFTA was a big concept and it had its corollaries in other areapolitics, culture education and society in general. All the movement associated with NAFTA will bring lots of changes in the three societies themselves. If you had been dealing with a lesser country than Mexico, the last part of that messagchanges in societwould have been scary. Argentina or Guatemala would have found the prospect of change influenced from the north to be frightening. But Mexico did not to the same extent, and I think that was because Mexico has a very strong sense of itself, its own society, and its own strength.

That sense of self goes back at least to the Mexican revolution. Out of the absolute horror of the Mexican revolutioa horror based on the extreme divisions in the society between those of Hispanic blood and those of Indian blood and culturcame a realization that the contradiction had to be reconciled in some way.

The country developed something that went beyond mere ideology, a consciousness, that Mexico was not a transplanted European country in the new world but was a new society, a new race. What we call Columbus Day, Latin Americans call "the day of the race," which is basically a Mexican concept.

The idea that out of the conquest came an amalgamation of peoples and cultures that produced something entirely new under the sun. Jose Vasconcelos, an early 20th century Mexican educator, called it "the cosmic race." Mexicans have a very strong sense of that, and Indian elements plat a strong role in the way Mexico behaves and organizes itself. It's a great source of strength to Mexico.

Q: Did you find Mexicans bragging about their ancestors, like a great grandmother? Or were there so many people with straight Indian blood that this didn't work?

DIETERICH: No, but it works in strange ways in Mexico. You reminded me of a conversation I once had with the conductor of one of the Mexican symphony orchestras, Enrique Diemecke. We were talking about Mexican composers and Mexican music, and during the conversation - you have to remember this person is blue eyed, blonde, comes from Eastern European immigrants to Mexico (probably early 20th century) - and he said to me, "We are all Indians here in Mexico." I don' t think he meant that all Mexicans can claim Aztec, Toltec or Mayan bloodlines. What he did mean was something more important - that everybody shares in an Indian culture, in a new world culture that is unlike others.

Now that is really strong stuff when you start to compare it with the rest of Latin America, and especially with the rest of highland Indian region along the spine of Andes. Culturally and geographically, Mexico, in many ways, belongs to that spine of mountains and those societies, but Mexico has learned a lot in comparison say with Peru and Bolivia, where the system is still almost apartheid.

If you live in a country like Argentina or Uruguay, or even southern Brazil, which are totally dominated by their European consciousness, who consider themselves transplanted Europeans, then you realize the Mexican solution is really strong stuff and it has really worked because Mexicans think differently about themselves. Although they complain about U.S. power and influence, they aren't really scared about us transforming Mexican society in ways they don't want it to be transformed.

Q: While you were dealing with this in this '92 to '95 period, what about the influence of immigration and flow back? How did this play from your perspective of USIA?

DIETERICH: Sure, there was a lot of flow back. A lot of the illegal or undocumented immigrants do come back all the time and they do bring back influences from the United States. Somehow that doesn't bother Mexicans very much. Whereas Mexico is very protective of its own culture; they believe more than other people believe that they have a culture that is worthy of export, that is worthy of examination that has a lot of good things about it, and they tend to think more in terms of presenting and projecting that culture abroad than they do in terms of protecting it in Mexico.

Q: Well, let's talk tactics. I assume that to a person our embassy was sold on NAFTA. This was not something that was crafted in Washington and begrudged at the embassy in Mexico. Am I correct in that?

DIETERICH: I'm sure there were people who had their individual doubts, but I didn't think we had much of a problem of people in the embassy in Mexico City being lukewarm on NAFTA.

There were probably some people on the law enforcement side of the embassy who might have thought NAFTA was a bit too generous, in the sense that maybe we should hold out for more cooperation from the Mexicans on the drug enforcement side than we were getting. That was probably balanced by other people in the same community thinking enforcement might improve under NAFTA.

Tactics? The tactic that I followed and believed in was to emphasize the benefits that would accrue to Mexico. The economic benefits were pretty clear. Mexicans were already convinced NAFTA was going to lower prices. They were already convinced it would increase job opportunities for Mexico.

Just like Americans were afraid of the great sucking sound Ross Perot so colorfully described. But some Mexicans also saw that it was better to be the sucker than the suckee. They have already seen jobs flowing south.

A lot of our tactic was to convince people that there would be collaterals all over the place, especially in the area of education. The whole time I was in Mexico we worked on various schemes to create a sort of educational NAFTA. There ought to be a free flow of educational and intellectual resources among the three countries. It ought to be very easy for a Canadian to study in Mexico or an American to study in Canada, or whatever. The three ought to go together. There wasn't a great deal of funding for this activity, but a lot of what I did had to do with big, often overblown meetings of educational authorities from the three countries who would get together and try to come up with schemes, try to talk each other into offering scholarships. The meetings were extremely interesting, produced a whole lot of talk and a lot of meaningful low level activity, individually and university to university. but they were not able to create any big chunks of funding for particular trilateral initiatives. I suppose the contact work and jawboning really did have some effect, and I think it was worth doing. There is more cooperation among universities in the three countries now than there was before we started all that.

My days had to do with that sort of education stuff, and a lot of them had to do with being the person that supervised the people that wrote the speeches for the ambassador. Both ambassadors had heavy speaking schedules.

Also, I had to deal with individual press flaps and a lot of time dealing with delegations from the United States that wanted to talk to embassy people.

The performing arts side of cultural affairs was also very important. It was almost an irony: whereas the United State, then and now, was willing to spend almost nothing on American performing arts being presented in other countries, the Mexicans were extremely interested in it and felt that high culture should have the patronage of the government. A lot of American performers did come to Mexico. I found that using my representational funds (which were pretty good) and my residence, which was nice, that I could sort of piggyback and get listed as a cosponsor of a whole lot of important American cultural events by simply giving a reception. I'm not a big fan of big receptions, but the one place I sort of changed my view on that was in Mexico City. Every time any American of any importance in the cultural world would come to Mexico, I would be asked to give a reception at some point and be listed as a cosponsor. I was glad to do it and the price was right, considering the money I had.

We also funded some programing that had to do with how the arts are supported in the United States, because Mexico was in a privatizing mood and the Salinas government had gone around to the official arts organizations in Mexico and said, "Hey, the old days aren't coming back, we are going to keep reducing your funding and what you need to do is find out how to raise funds to support your organizations out of the private sector. So symphony orchestra number two, get out and do some fundraising. Art museum number three, get out and get to the private sector and find out how to do this because the government funds are going to dry up eventually."

Q: This is very difficult because unless you have a population that is brought up in a philanthropic mode, as the United States is, how would this work?

DIETERICH: Part of it was easier because Mexicans live close to the United States and have experience with this. They don't do our kind of fund raising but they have seen it. Part of it had to do with the decline of dependency theories, the concomitant rise of the notion that we have to take responsibility for ourselves. Part of it was a consciousness that it might not be right that all the taxpayers in Mexico should have to support an opera production when very few people in the country really like opera. We found a lot of people coming to us and saying they were interested in how we finance arts in the United States and they wanted advice on how it was done. They thought that was what they wanted to do, because government funds were going to dry up and also because it would increase their independence.

When people came to us we used different kinds of resources. Sometimes it would be educational exchange resources to get people up there to look at how it was done in the United States. We brought the chief fundraiser for the Cleveland symphony down to Mexico City to hold seminars and talk with the administrators of various symphony orchestras. We worked out arrangements with the Ohio Arts Council where they came and visited Mexico and talked about how they worked with the state arts council in the United States. They invited representatives to come to Ohio and spend a couple of weeks with them to see how they did it.

There was another positive aspect. We finally began to get another message through to Mexico, which was hard. Mexico had always wanted to deal on a sort of official government to government level in cultural affairs. They wanted to have cultural talks every year; they want to have an omnibus cultural agreement. People in various ministries who were in charge of cultural affairs wanted to deal with their counterparts in Washington. We kept saying there no real counterparts up there. We don't have a culture ministry. We have a department of education but it doesn't really run the schools. It has some influence on public schools, but almost none on universities that we have been able to detect. We began to try to get the message through to them that often their counterparts are at the state level in the United States. If you want to talk about how a public education system runs you have to talk to the states in the United States. If you want to talk about cultural programs, a state art council is going to know much more about how you distribute grants to various people so they can put on a show. If you want to talk to a museum, there is no department of museums that you can talk to, you have to go to Denver or to San Francisco.

Although there was a certain attitude among Mexican officials that said "I don't want to deal with state or local officials because I am a national level official and I should have a counterpart," I think we did make progress in getting the message through. By making things happen and making sure people were treated well, we licked part of that protocol problem.

Q: Did you find that by breaking their rice bowl, by breaking this down they felt challenged? A bureaucrat at the central level felt challenged by going down to the state level?

DIETERICH: I think a little bit, but their rice bowl had already been broken. If anybody was breaking their rice bowl, it was their own government, it wasn't us.

Q: Did you see a growing regional way, as in the United States, we have our states and they have their states, did they play much of a role at this point?

DIETERICH: Less so, but it depends on the state. I mean the states that have big cities in them could begin to relate to big cities in the United States. In cultural affairs it is almost more city to city relationships.

Q: Sister cities - was that big ?

DIETERICH: Yes, yes, there was a lot of that sister cities stuff going on in Mexico, but I can't remember who was with whom. It worked at all sorts of levels. There is a lot of private, non governmental cultural exchange between Mexico and the United States. In many ways we at the embassy were merely responding to a Mexican notion that there ought to be governmental involvement in culture rather than paying for a whole lot of exchange ourselves.

For example, there were a lot of Americans playing in Mexican symphony orchestras. They got hired because Mexicans know how to get into the trade publications in the United States and hire musicians. They were rapidly disappearing by the time I left Mexico, because the Russians had come on the market and they were able to work for much lower salaries than the Americans were. You can go to relatively small cities in Mexico and find a symphony orchestra with a lot of Americans in it, playing the season for a couple of thousand bucks. I wish Mexico luck in transitioning to more private support.

Q: It's a different society. I watch in the United States and this is in our bones, that you are supposed to do things on a local level and tithe yourself. Even in Europe this is kind of alien.

DIETERICH: It is, although that was a lot of the message we were working and the Mexicans to some extent were absorbing. Individual responsibility and giving are the hardest part, but that is only part of the game. A lot of it is corporate charities, it's foundation charities, it's grant writing, it's proposals.

The idea that corporations might support culture is not alien to Mexico or in the rest of Latin America. Banks have art museums; big individual industrialists often think they should own a newspaper and that newspaper ought to have a cultural page. There are a lot of things that push the very wealthy into hobbies that frankly eventually can redound to the cultural benefit of the country.

What was most important about that period was that the Mexican cultural officials were getting accustomed to the idea of private support and beginning to like it. I think they began to see that they could vary the portfolio. They could have donations coming in from enough different places so that nobody would have a preponderant influence over them.

Q: Did you have a constant battle with Canada? I guess it's not quite the same because Canada is one language, but a spillover of our culture, special magazines, I mean the Canadians really fight the Americanization of their media outlets. Was this an issue with you all?

DIETERICH: I think it was an unspoken issue in our tripartite education deliberations. I think the Canadians had the notion there was a common cause to be made with Mexico that national governments ought to protect the national culture. This was especially pronounced on the French side of the equation in Canada, but not unknown on the Anglo side of Canada either. The Mexicans weren't really very interested. As I have said, at least on an official level, Mexico is much more interested in projecting its culture than protecting it.

Q: So you weren't having to deal with protests?

DIETERICH: No, we would have protests, but the biggest one I remember was generalized international issues; the remnants of the Mexican left. Then the California initiative to severely limit immigration and to keep kids out of public schools - that produced some big demonstrations because it was insulting to Mexicans.

The Mexican attitude toward immigration is very complicated. They don't particularly like the fact that their economy doesn't produce enough jobs to gainfully occupy the people it needs to. On the other hand, they really do believe that Mexicans have a perfect right to go and work where there is a job. They do believe that the Americans are hypocritical, in a sense, because we try to keep them out on one hand but then we provide the jobs on the other. It's not hard to imagine what might give them that idea.

Deep in the Mexican psyche is the idea that if a Mexican goes to work in Texas, New Mexico, or California why the hell shouldn't he? "We were there long before the Gringos were and it was only our mistake that we invited the Gringos in and we shouldn't have done it." The Mexican official attitude is an interesting one, too, because they are very much into consular protection of their people. And they are often pretty good at it, although the task is daunting. And their potential constituents often do not come to them. They may not trust the Mexican government much more than they trust the U.S. government.

Q: Once, when I was with a senior seminar, I interviewed various consuls in the United States and the Mexicans said they often had a problem because their citizens would be arrested but they would not want their government to know about it.

DIETERICH: Exactly. There is a lot of that. Our local police are no more aware of the rules on consular access than are the police in most other countries; they may even be somewhat less informed. And often when they are aware of the obligation to inform a foreign consulate, they think it's a bad idea and don't do it. This means Mexican consulates, and others, have to proceed on an almost political basis - monitor the media and try to identify the problems and go after access.

There are some real irritants in our consular relations with Mexico, capitol punishment being one. Mexico does not have it and we do. There are a number of Mexicans sitting on death row in the United States, and it creates a problem every time it happens.

Q: How did you handle it?

DIETERICH: There isn't much you can do about it except remind them it is the law in the United States and that ample appeals were available. It is difficult to make the death penalty look good to a country that doesn't have it.

Those are the irritants of countries that share a long border. The other issues that are very irritating to Mexicans were the measures we would take across the border to prevent illegal immigration and the drug traffic also. The Mexican government was very clear. They understood our right, obligation, and duty to protect our border. They understood people came across that weren't documented; they thought our standards of documentation were way too high and that we should have more open access to Mexican workers.

However, they react very negatively to symbolism, to measures that seem to have symbolic value, that appear to them to reflect a generalized notion that the United States has to protect itself from Mexico. They especially object to walls and fences being put up.

They also object to bad treatment of Mexicans by American immigration officials - and there is a lot of that going on. There is also a lot of bad treatment by Mexican officials of Americans trying to come over, too. Those are difficult problems to deal with because you have to have sympathy for the border patrol people. They have been given an absolutely impossible task.

I think if there were ever an example of a woefully disgraceful, irresponsible, unfunded mandate, it has to do with U.S. immigration policy. The principle shortchanged institutions are the U.S. border patrol and the U.S. Department of State. The border patrol is no more capable of controlling the traffic over the Mexican border than the U.S. consular service is of giving visas in a rational, thoughtful, humane way. It simply cannot be done. Our consular sections are overwhelmed and the border patrol is overwhelmed. There is a terrible negative effect on the morale of people being asked to do a job they can't do well, and to do it day in and day out. Our consular officers know they can't interview 60 people a day and do a good job of it. The difference is however that our consular people don't have to work that visa line forever. They go to other assignments. But a lot of the border patrol people are there for the duration. Sometimes they get cynical; sometimes they get lazy; sometimes they get mean.

The irritants are never going to go away in that situation, and the Mexican consciousness that the border shouldn't be there anyway is never going to go away. I hadn't thought too much about the Mexican war before I went to Mexico, but it looms large in Mexican history. In American history, it is a dumb little rehearsal for the Civil War, but for Mexicans it is a major, major event.

In some ways, the impact of it came home to me once fairly early in my tour, when I was leafing through a big coffee table book on Mexico and there was a painting of the central square in Mexico City and the cathedral with an American flag flying above it. That is a shocking image to somebody living in Mexico. After all, I lived in the shadow of Chapultepec Castle and Chapultepec Castle was where young cadets fought to the death against American troops. What really hurt Mexico was the loss of territory. Any human being in the world understands what the loss of national territory is.

You can rationalize it all you want but the fact is, neither Mexico nor Spain had any success at all in convincing Spanish speaking people of their own nation to go and live in those places. Almost by the same token, no Latin American country has ever been really successful in getting people to go live in the interior of the country. It's tough in there, and you don't have the same culturally based pioneerism in Latin culture that you have in Anglo Saxon, and especially in Scotch Irish, culture in the United States. The fact is, the United States went to war and bit off a huge chunk of Mexican territory; Mexico was humiliated by its inability to defend itself. The Mexican war is probably characterized in world terms by a not very good army beating the tar out of a really terrible army.

Q: How did Santa Anna come out of this? He was a pretty despicable general.

DIETERICH: Well he was a better politician than he was a general. Not many Mexicans see Santa Anna as a particularly positive character. The only good thing they see about him is he stood up to the Americans for awhile.

Q: How did you find the media there?

DIETERICH: Well, the media was really interesting in Mexico. You have a number of big powerful, traditional, family owned newspapers which are quite good. They are conservative and pursue their own economic interests. There are also papers affiliated with political parties that pursue partisan interests. Nevertheless, many of the papers are better than what I have said sounds. No matter what interests you pursue, you still have to sell papers. If the perception of your paper is that it is too much in the hands of the party or the owners, folks probably won't buy it and it will cost you even more to run it than it does already. A lot of papers don't make much money anyway, but they are owned by people who have other interests.

Televisa is an entertainment conglomerate owned by the Azcarraga family. It is a major, major media organization. It may, as a network, compare almost in size with U.S. networks, in the sense of the number of outlets it has, and especially in the sense of how its programing is sold in other countries.

Televisa is very interested in the United States. As Azcarraga once told me, the United States is the third largest Spanish speaking country in the world. This is a big deal for them because they know they can sell a lot of programs in the United States. The Spanish speaking market is here, and the United States can afford it. They also have a major interest themselves in Univision, the U.S. Spanish language network, so they are really a big deal. They are fascinating to watch.

Their news broadcasting is okay and it's technically very competent. They have correspondents, satellite access, and they can put on a perfectly respectable news broadcast by anybody's standards. Their journalists, in my opinion, are not as good, nor as free of corporate influence as they ought to be, and not as free as television journalists are in the United States.

Their entertainment production is fascinating because they run on the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s. This is a system that Azcarraga knows very well, which he remembers and admired. Their superstars are people they identified as kids, kept in the studio, and who they made into household names around Latin America, and around the world. Televisa sees these major personalities as members of their stable, and if they don't do as they are told, by God, they will be fired in a country minute.

Televisa produces a huge number of soap operas. They also produce mini series type historical spectacles and variety show style entertainment. To see what Televisa produces, just turn on Channel 30 in Washington, DC. It is all there. The worldwide reach of Televisa productions was brought home to me during a visit Ambassador Negroponte and I made to the studios. As we entered the waiting area a European gentleman rose from his chair and greeted the Ambassador as a long lost friend. It turned out he was the ex Soviet ambassador in Mexico City who had gone to work for Televisa marketing their productions in Russia.

Televisa is a big money earner, a very profitable operation.

Q: Did you find any particular outlet of the media to be a place where the left settled and hit home with the United States whenever possible?

DIETERICH: Oh, some of the tabloids do, but they tend to be more "right nationalist" than they are "left" papers. Again, it's not quite as fashionable to keep hitting the United States as it used to be. That is an important development because many of the people who were in the classic left probably don't even consider themselves left anymore. What they tend to do now is criticize their own society. They think bad things happen to them because they are doing the wrong things. Sometimes I was really surprised by some of the things that were said.

The line sort of goes like this: "Our own heritage made us dependent. It is the legacy of Spanish misrule. Or it is the fact in our society we only like priests, soldiers, and bureaucrats. It is our inability to develop our own private sectors. The only people who know how to be entrepreneurs in our society are the Indians who we have kept down and never allowed to get much money, and the foreigners who come in and run our businesses for us."

Like the dependency theories that preceded it, this "the problem is our society" theory is based on kernels of truth. I remember Richard Henry Dana's, Two Years before the Mast. He describes a port of call in Mexican California where the ship trades New England industrial goodshoes for examplfor the hides of California cattle. They load the ship by throwing the hides off a cliff to the beach below. Very picturesque. Dana and his shipmates visit the town of Santa Barbara for a parta fandango Dana calls it. His description of the town, how it was organized and how it worked, sounds a lot like what I saw in 1970 in Santa Cruz in the interior of Bolivia. Here was this society of nice people, very stratified with a few folks on top. Almost nothing resembling modern, or even not so modern, industrial goods were being made locally. Hides from California were being shipped to New England to be turned into shoes which were shipped back to California. And the only store in town was being run by an American.

At any rate, some of pressures to automatically blame the United States for the economic woes of the country has sort of petered out. That doesn't mean some folks won't continue to blame the United States for immigration problems, or mistreatment Mexicans in the United States, or a lack of respect for Mexico. Many cultural factors still play, but are not as important as they used to be.

Q: Did you feel you were dealing with left wing intellectuals at the university?

DIETERICH: No, well, look, because of the kind of stuff we were working on - the NAFTA, tripartite, education stuff - I was dealing at a pretty senior level at the universities and had very cordial relations with some of the rectors and others. The feeling I had with most of the rectors was, that I was dealing with fairly conservative people who would have liked to be more conservative if their university would have let them. Smart people do respond to their constituencies.

Not too long ago they broke up a strike at the Autonomous University in Mexico City. That goes back to a dispute I talked to the Rector about when I first visited him at the beginning of my tour in Mexico. He just wanted to charge a little bit - I don't know what the price was, maybe 76 cents a semester - to go to the University. He could see funding beginning to dry up. And I guess maybe he thought ti wasn't fair that all taxpayers pay to educate a kid whose old man has lots of money. Some kid who drives a BMW to class everyday shouldn't be funded by tax payers. I found that a lot of the university administrators hoped to move toward something more like some private funding for university education, but were being absolutely stymied. The student organizations just weren't going to permit it.

Student activists did shut the Autonomous University down, and there was very little authorities could do about it because of the memories of the clashes in 1968 before the Olympics. The military intervened in student demonstrations and a lot of people got killed. It was a seminal event in Mexican history. It really horrified Mexico. When Mexico gets horrified, they do something about it. They say, "This will not happen again. We are going to work our way around this." Sometimes that attitude can have some paralyzing effects on things. It is still difficult to deal with university resistance. On the other hand, the Mexican government still funds the Autonomous University very generously. That is a big deal. They do a lot of serious research, and they try to do a serious job of educating the undergraduate. All in all, an admirable institution. I think I have to stop here.

Q: Let me put the usual thing at the end here. You were noticing the change in the political process in Cuba, the collapse of the Soviet Union, any Clinton presidential visits while you were there, and were we pushing studies of American history and American culture? Then a bit about the embassy itself and the coordination with all these multitudinal things.

DIETERICH: Yes, we have plenty for another session.

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Q: Today is the 17th of March 2000, the first St. Patrick's Day in the new millennium. Jeff, let's take some events. Did you see changes in the political structure, or was this becoming apparent and were we watching or doing anything?

DIETERICH: Absolutely, but being it's St. Patrick's Day, that means it's time to remember the San Patricios. The San Patricios were Irish soldiers (mostly deserters from the U.S. Army), who fought on the Mexican side during the Mexican war. After the successful storming of the Chapultepec Castle, a whole lot of them were captured and hanged by the U.S. Army within sight of the castle. A very sad event.

Institutional change in Mexico, and an opening of the political system was very much the order of the day during the time I was in Mexico. The best of those aligned with President Salinas were very aware that the PRI hadn't changed. We started to develop some new terms in the way people talked about the PRI (Spanish acronym for the Institutional Revolutionary Party.) The term "the dinosaurs," came into vogue. The dinosaurs were those members of the PRI who saw no need to change and thought things could run on the same well greased skids of patronage that had always moved the party.

But Salinas and his people were certainly committed to at least some level of change, to an opening in the political process, and to democratization of the political process. This was accompanied by a sense that you also had to open the economic system. The old system of well supervised state capitalism wasn't going to work well in Mexico any more. The economy had to open up, and the state had to divest itself of the overwhelming influence it had had on the economy in Mexico all during the sixty years of PRI rule. Nevertheless, while It is relatively easy for the leadership to decide that things have to change, but it is very difficult to get that change down to the working political level, and especially outside the capital city.

Q: Of course, this is where the political leaders can maneuver, but when you get farther down in the party they don't have wiggle room.

DIETERICH: That's right, and I think the equation that constantly occurs is somebody on the provincial level says, "Well now, what is it you want? Do you want to open up the system or do you want to win the election? Which is it, because they don't really go together ? If we open the system and begin to abandon the chain of patronage that kept this party in power all these years, then we may not win the election. It is no good you telling me you want it open, fair, and democratic, and you still want to win, because that's not the way it is going to work."

A lot of times those people may well be right. Those politicians who had a provincial rather than a national base, were the most resistant to change. You had two poles of opposition to the PRI, one in PAN (the National Action Party) and the in the PRD the Party of the Democratic Revolution.) The PAN was centered mainly in the north around the city of Monterey, rather conservative but dominated by modern pro business types, who were very heartened by NAFTA, and felt they could see a future for Mexico as a major player in the world economy. In opposition to that you had a large number of people to the left of the PRI around Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, who had already lost one presidential election, but who believed in a more classic third world stance for Mexico, and that the government had to intervene in the economy to assure fairness to the great majority of Mexicans who, after all, are poor.

It would be easy to be cynical about efforts to reform the PRI. My judgment is, those efforts were genuine and sincere, even though we now know about Salinas and the troubles he came into - the inordinate involvement of his family in the economy, the bad behavior of some members of his family (particularly his brother), the fact that he was into all kinds of dirty money, and that there were heavy irregularities in campaign financing. Nevertheless, Salinas' perception that change was necessary if the party was to survive was absolutely genuine. He really believed in it and he really worked at it.

Q: Was there any call on you to say, "Here, I can get State leaders of the Democrat and Republican parties to talk with you, and that type of thing to get a better feel for how it works?"

DIETERICH: The answer is yes, although not a lot of calls on us in USIS or the embassy because the contacts were already there.

Every year the border state governors get together and have a meeting. One year in Mexico and the next year in the United States. The border governors conferences are big deals. Governors show up and their staffs show up. These are people that know each other, and work issues across the border all the time.

You also have the annual bilateral consultations between the two national governments, held alternately in Mexico and the United States - either in Washington or Mexico City - which come down to a fairly well attended joint cabinet meeting. Secretaries and ministers from both sides tend to show up, and you have a very complicated agenda with plenary, and breakout sessions dealing with the whole range of governmental issues. It is easy to say this is a lot of hot air and talk, and a lot of times we don't communicate very well because the two governments do things in very different ways. However, it tends to open up the political section of both countries to scrutiny by the other.

Our Americans sort of do understand how the PRI operates, because it operates like American political parties really did operate before the era of massive primaries. It is not an exotic system that we can't fathom, nor are we that exotic to the Mexicans. That is what is so unique about the U.S. Mexico relationship. We understand each other rather well. That, of course, begins to fall down the farther you get from the border, and I guess it would be true that people from Ohio find people from Chiapas or Oaxaca pretty exotic and difficult to fathom. By the same token, folks in Mexico City also find people in Chiapas pretty hard to fathom.

Nevertheless, we don't deal with Mexico in terms of a great deal of misunderstanding. I suppose that is an important thought because in our rhetoric, certainly Mexicans and Anglo Americans, tend to deal with disagreement by pretending that it is misunderstanding. We often say, "No, you didn't really understand what I was trying to tell you." Of course the other person understood, he just doesn't agree with you. Mexicans tend to understand better than we do that we simply disagree and, at times, have different interests.

Q: There is a movement toward a multi or dual party system in Mexico, did you find you were doing any adjustment to your operations to facilitate or respond, or was this just not in our purview?

DIETERICH: We understood very well that we had to deal with people from the PRI and the PAN, as well as with people from the Cardenas' PRD. That was not strange to us and American embassies figured out quite awhile ago that you have to be able to show that you deal with the opposition or you are going to get beaten up. Probably not by the Department of State but by everybody else. Again, we are not dealing with Paraguay. We are dealing with a Mexican government that understands the reasons for our contact with the opposition. Their own foreign ministry understands perfectly well that it has to deal with the opposition in the United States.

It's a very intimate relationship between the two countries, and not very restrained by diplomatic niceties. I think the U.S. Department of State and the Mexican Foreign Ministry are both inhabited by very old fashioned folks, who really believe that relationships between the two countries ought to be run out of the respected ministries, but they know deep in their hearts that is not true and will not happen. Think back to the phenomenon of the bilateral consultations. This is not the Mexican foreign ministry and the State Department talking to each other. It is almost all ministries of the Mexican government talking to their departmental counterparts in the U.S. government, and working out their own bilateral relationships. The foreign ministries in both cases handle the formalities - they do the hosting. They dot the Is and cross the Ts, but they both know they better not get in the way of the working relationships or they are going to have problems.

Q: We had a new president in January '93, William Clinton, traditionally, the first or second State visit is either to Canada or Mexico. You were there in '1995 so you must have had a Clinton visit sometime.

DIETERICH: Yes, we did. Wow, you know visits wind up being a big blur in memory because the preparations are so intense. What can I tell you? I hadn't worked even a cabinet level visit in a sizable country since Brazil in the mid '70s. There had been big changes - a lot of them technology driven - and some of them ruled by the fact that visiting parties kept getting bigger and bigger.

The big technological changes were the speed with which print, thought, and text could be transmitted. It was instantaneous, so there could be a lot more consultation on what various people were going to say, and what the essence of the visit's central message was to be. The fact that there was a great deal more consultation didn't necessarily mean that what the embassy wanted to say necessarily made all the cuts.

In terms of coordinating events, the impact of the cell phone was really important. Working visits in Brazil in the '70s, we were beginning to us"walkie talkies," and we had those with everybody on one network, where everybody heard what everybody else was saying. People tended to lose them and leave them someplace. That had all changed when we were working in Mexico 20 years later. We had some cell phones and the first thing we did was go out and lease, beg, borrow, steal, or rent a whole lot more. Anybody that was out of the building had a cell phone and could talk discreetly. That was a big difference, a big help, and saved us a whole lot on things like transportation.

The Clinton people arrived early. The main impact on USIS of a big visit that the press section is thoroughly engaged and probably needs more people, so you rob out of the cultural side to get people to the press section. You also use your cultural section people to take up escort duties at various times. But you have to keep your press people focused on issues of the press itself.

There was a huge events in the big national auditorium. A major speech with a lot of complicated calculations on who would be in an audience of thousands, with the right mix of old people, young people, opposition, labor unions and business representatives.

Q: Moving from that to Cuba, did Cuba play much of a role?

DIETERICH: No, Cuba as a nation played almost no role in any practical issue. But Cuba as symbol is a touch stone of Mexican policy. It is almost the way that Mexico distinguishes its foreign policy from that of the United States.

Q: Canada has been using it too.

DIETERICH: Absolutely. I remember once saying, in a fit of cynicism, that diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union was what Latin American countries did instead of land reform. It makes you look moderately progressive, but has few tangible domestic consequences.

Cuba, to the Mexicans, is a way of saying, "Our foreign policy is different from the United States, it's a way of showing solidarity with the rest of Latin America and the third world." That having been said, they don't trust Cuba and they certainly don't trust Castro. They don't want him to have any influence in Mexican politics.

Mexico also has a tradition of offering asylum to political dissidents of which it is justifiably proud and which was greatly strengthened during the Spanish Civil War. That is a tradition with which we should have some sympathy, because we share it. Exiles from Spain during the Spanish Civil War still have a lot of influence in Mexico, and are accorded a lot of honor and respect. That sort of extends to Cuba and what it comes down to is that Mexico will maintain its relationship with Cuba and present it to the world as a sympathetic relationship. It will champion some of Castro's causes as does much of Latin America and Canada.

That policy is quite acceptable to the Mexican public which finds U.S. policy toward Mexico to be unduly harsh, and unduly influenced by Cuban exiles in the United States. Gee, go figure, what would give them an idea like that? On the other hand, the Mexican government does not want Cuba messing around in Mexico, and Castro understands that very well.

Q: Were we doing anything to promote American history and that sort of thing?

DIETERICH: I think the bloom had sort of gone off that rose. That was a major part of USIA activity ten years earlier. The idea was that you went around and established chairs of American Studies or tried to get some university to build a building and call it, "The Center for American Studies." That seems superfluous in Mexico, although it really is not.

There is a European academic orientation in Mexico that has to do with the fact that its universities, led by the Autonomous University of Mexico City, tend to follow European models. Mexican Universities are a collection of faculties around a major urban center, rather loosely controlled by a central administration that doesn't have very much clout. They tend to have campuses in the sense that there is a center where the buildings are - often some very nice buildings - but in many of them there is not much in the way of dormitories and places for students to live.

There are also some American modeled experiments that have been pretty successful and are heavily endowed by counterparts and patrons in the United States. The Universidad de las Americas in Puebla is a prime example. It has a lot of American students and a lot of U.S. citizens serve on the board, who have a great interest in how the school is run. It is a very attractive college with dormitories and a campus that looks and acts like an American campus.

The Technological University in Monterey tends to see itself as the Mexican MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and keeps its contacts with MIT, Caltech (California Institute of Technology), and other major institutions. It is stunning in its modern architecture, its technical facility, its use of computers, and has satellite links all over the country. They do very impressive stuff.

Q: Did you see a change in business, political, and other cultural climates as the computer was coming on the scene while you were there?

DIETERICH: Oh, absolutely. In the first place, you can do technological leaps. We've seen that in other countries, and we see it in the media. If you have never managed to develop a very good telephone system, which is the case in much of the world, you may jump over that by having cell phone systems that really do work. The cell phone system in Mexico is very impressive. If it takes you eight months to get a telephone, and then it doesn't work and costs too much, you are going to be very tempted toward cell phones. If you have never developed broadcast television very well, or you have a crappy government run network, video cassette recorders and tape rentals - as well as pirating - are going to do really well in your country. Big dish satellite systems for those who are in the footprints of the U.S. domestic satellites, or even international satellites, are going to proliferate. How did I get on that subject?

Q: I was asking about technological change.

DIETERICH: Technological change, often is more impressive as an engine of change in the less developed countries than it is in big countries. It is very hard to overestimate the power of technological change in Mexico. When the rebellion broke out in Chiapas, all of a sudden the guerillas had no problem with communication. They grabbed their cell phones and would be talking to their friends and funders in the United States, or wherever in no time. If they didn't have a cell phone at hand, they could use the solar powered installations that the Mexican government had put in all through the rural areas of Mexico in order to get telephone service to people. Internet? Absolutely! The transmission of information is no longer a problem, but that doesn't mean reaching agreement has stopped being a problem.

Q: What was your impression about USIA and its response to technological changes?

DIETERICH: Not great, but pretty good, and stunningly effective when compared to the State Department. USIA and State started about even on computerization and dealt with it in different ways. I think the only reason USIA eventually did it better, had to do with not having a strong, centralized administrative structure in place. To explain that, you start with the premise that the Washington administration of both organizations fell into the trap of saying, "No, we're going to wait to buy this new computer equipment because something new is coming up." They had a bureaucratic instinct that said they had better get one system - that meant Wang. They didn't anticipate that eventually the IBM computer would become adaptable to all systems, and that they wouldn't have to buy all their computers from the same company.

State stuck with Wang way too long. They stuck with Wang after Wang went belly up. USIA didn't. Mainly, because there was a successful revolt on the part of senior PAOs overseas, who said they couldn't get along anymore without computers, and would buy them from funds in their post budgets. That is essentially what happened. USIA central administration didn't know how to stop it, and didn't have the budget structure to make it stop. Maybe that's the big object lesson, that PAOs in the field tend to control their own funds which enable them to decide to not hire another person and buy computers instead. Unfortunately, State did not have that flexibility, nor did it have enough senior people involved in communications overseas to see the need. Too much of State's use of computers was seen in terms of typing and not communication.

Q: Also, I think they got caught up in the correlation side, rather than transmitting.

DIETERICH: But you can start with a more profound problem. The State Department was the only organization I had ever seen where the senior officials still dictated to secretaries taking shorthand. Nobody in USIA did that. I guess because, initially in the fifties we recruited people out of academia and out of the press, and they all had learned to use the keyboard. Every now and then we would get old PAOs who would complain because they couldn't get a manual typewriter anymore instead of an electric, but at least they could type.

IState didn't see the need for computerization in political sections they certainly should have, because if there was anything that could make the clearance process faster and smarter, it was the word processor. Suddenly you could make a change because it was a good idea to make the change and you didn't have to say, "But I don't have time to make the change. Who the hell is going to retype the whole page?"

Q: You could type your own letters and you didn't have to wait for someone to be ready. Things moved faster.

DIETERICH: Yes, but I think what may have gone wrong - an overreaction - was the assumption that everybody ought to start typing their own letters. It still may not be a good use of time. In embassies now, too many high paid officers are spending time doing routine things on word processors that could be done by somebody less expensive, and we lost all the other things that our secretaries did, like organizing and coordinating the functions of the office, not to mention screening phone calls phone calls, and all those other things that make for efficiency.

You know, if the senior officer is trying to decide what copies he really needs while he makes the copies, that is a different equation and may even make sense. But if he is just standing there watching a copy machine, it doesn't make sense.

Q: You're right.

DIETERICH: A whole lot of time is still wasted. Another thing that happened in State that actually slowed down technological change, I think, was that we always had the comm center and they were people who we counted on to manage the change for us. What we didn't foresee was that they were going to begin managing the change against us. They became the arbiters of what technology we ought to be using, and they became the only people who understood it. That allowed them to shift work to other people and make life easier for themselves. I'm being a little unfair because communications is a tough job.

But let me give you an example. In Tel Aviv in the press section, we had to turn out a summary of the Hebrew press in English by about ten in the morning both for Washington and our own use. That was a press summary that was read all over the place, including the Pentagon and White House. At that time the comm center was on the TERP system, which was an optical scanner system. It used sort of funny shaped letters and a special IBM Selectric ball. Since everything had to be perfect on the page it was virtually impossible to make a correction. You couldn't erase a character and put a new one in because it wouldn't line up perfectly and that would screw up the optical scanner. That meant we had to let typos go or retype an entire page to correct one character. Before TERP, when comm center people still keyed texts themselves, almost any correction would work.

TERP would have been wonderful if we had had word processors. Nobody did. We were still using electric typewriters. That is a good example of badly managed technological change, because somebody should have said to our comm centers, "No, you can't use TERP until we have word processors, because it doesn't make any sense." What they were doing when they said they would not process a message unless it was on the TERP system was shifting part of their workload down to the sections that generated the telegrams. Time and money were being saved in the comm center, but the saving to the government was phony - probably even a net loss - because all the sections and agencies generating cable traffic were spending much more time. That sort of thing should not happen. That's a bad management failure.

At any rate, USIA did it better. Driven by the need to keep ourselves current in media terms, we got into satellite technology really early. We installed our TVROs, big satellite dishes that enabled us to do interactive television broadcasts. We could Secretary X up on the screen, with a two way audio circuit that was just phone lines. We really could stage long distance press conferences. If the Mexican press needed to have a session with Doris Meisner of INS, we could do it.

Once we got that technology into place, we began to figure out that we could, at reasonable cost, keep the satellite circuits up all the time and could embed other signals within the video signal. Imagine a big circle - a big information rich stream - and around the periphery of that circle you can put in audio circuits or data circuits that don't require a whole lot of space within the spectrum. We were quickly receiving the wireless file through the satellite system. That made it a lot more efficient, much faster and a whole lot cheaper.

When I was press attach? in Tel Aviv, we were haunted by the specter of the noon briefing. The noon briefer, usually the State Department spokesman, at least two days out of five, would say something about Israel, and we would have a hell of a time finding out what it was he said. About the only way I could do it as press attach? was to get on the phone with somebody I knew in the press office who would tell me what the spokesman had said. That depended on whether they had been paying attention or not. Did they have time to take the phone call? How senior could we get? It required a new negotiation every time to get the information. By the time I was in Mexico, we, and every other USIS post, could tune into the State Department briefing and watch it. We could even get a transcript in a couple of hours.

Q: What about the embassy as a structure? What was your impression during the time you were there?

DIETERICH: It was an annoying embassy. Of course, it is very big and it has all sorts of folks in it. But it is not an encouraging place to work. I don't know quite how to describe it. I noticed that every time something would go wrong, somebody would say, "Well, this is the biggest embassy in the world, you know." That may reveal something of our mentality in that we offered that as an excuse for not being able to do something. I could just as well have served as a reason why we should have been able to almost anything.

Also, the embassy is home to a lot of agency heads who had a lot of clout, and that is a great frustration for the Department of State. When as the head of a constituent agency you hear this complaint ad nauseum from State colleagues you begin to feel that you would like to get the person by the lapel and say, "Well for heaven sakes negotiate with us. That's what you are supposed to be good at. You are the Department of State. You are diplomats. If you can't deal with the relative power of agency heads within your own government, what on earth would make you think you are at all capable of dealing with a bunch of foreigners who don't even share that level of interest with you?"

When I arrived in Mexico there were a lot of people in my organization that were absolutely convinced that we were getting screwed, that embassy admin was sort of hostile to USIS, that we would get the substandard housing and that the Admin counselor was working overtime to take over the USIS motor pool because we had more cars than he did. None of this was true, with the possible exception of housing.

Housing was very tight in Mexico and the new housing standards were in, which made it difficult. Being the housing officer was an unwelcome duty that got foisted on one of the more junior Americans in the section, and it was a problem. I am convinced that the best housing was held back for State Department people, unless somebody really screamed. That's a dumb philosophy because you are going to hear a lot of screaming. One convincing instance will become anecdotal evidence that will create resistance all through the system.

There was sort of split in the embassy between the people who did diplomacy and people who did law enforcement. As I said before, I have sympathy for the enforcement people, because it was damn difficult to enforce laws across the Mexican U.S. border.

Q: I went up to the border one time and spent a night there. My God, it is an eye opener.

DIETERICH: Oh, it's a fascinating world up there. We kept a USIS officer in Tijuana. For administrative and budgetary reasons, we didn't want to call it a branch USIS post, but we stationed an officer there with basic resources of a USIS post and called it a Border Affairs Office. I had people point out how crummy the town was and wonder why we kept people there. That was where the real problems were, and it was also where a lot of the energy was. The creativity that results in making the U.S. Mexican relationship better, often comes from the border areas. It's in San Diego and Monterrey you are going to get some of the good ideas that might make things work.

But anyway, it's a tough embassy and I don't think anybody really likes working in those great big embassies. You had a lot of people who had uninteresting jobs. The visa section is about as tough as it gets. I had a window on it because my daughter happened to be stationed there as a junior State Department officer on her first tour abroad. She had some awful stories to tell about the visa section - even the physical arrangements were bad. We finally had got away from making people wait outdoors by building this shelter, a roof over one of the parking lots with benches in it, that gave people a place to wait for their turn to get up to the window. In a display of stunning insensitivity we habitually referred to that as the "visa barn." What kind of mentality does that reveal? We could have called it the pavilion, or something else, anything, but we persisted in calling it the visa barn. That's terrible. I couldn't get people to stop doing it.

There are some terms we are fond of that make us feel better but surely must have negative effect on the other person. What did we do when we had a Congressman coming to visit the country? We assign somebody to take charge of that visit, and we call them the control officer. Do you think that Congressman likes the idea that he has somebody controlling him? Do you think we really are in control? The term also gives ridiculous expectations to this junior officer who has the job for the first time. "Oh, boy, I get to control a Congressman." In your dreams you do! Why can't we use terms like "liaison officer" or whatever? I guess because we use the terms that make us feel better, regardless of the effect on the job at hand.

Citizen services in Mexico is a really weird business. This is the country where an indigent, crazy, homeless, American can get on a bus and arrive in Mexico City. You deal with problems in Mexico involving American citizens that are almost unimaginable. It is unlike other countries with the possible exception of Canada.

Part of the embassy's problem is, of course, under funding, but part of the problem is also that the Department doesn't make the best use of what it has. I reluctantly have come to the conclusion that our political sections are too big, and our consular sections way too small. I'm reluctant because political stuff is really hard.

Q: You don't need as much reporting as before, just a couple of good reporters to make contacts and report.

DIETERICH: We start from a philosophy that says the reporting should be comprehensive. The fact is, I think, we should reorganize our reporting around two poles, maybe three. One is, you report on those issues concerning which there are ongoing negotiations between the two governments. Second, you try to be alert to places where the press has gotten it really wrong, where you may have to do some reporting to correct wrong impressions within the department or in the host country. Third, you organize your reporting around the mandated stuff, the human rights report, whatever.

Q: And a certain amount of contact work.

DIETERICH: The contact work is hard, but that should be shared. There are a lot of people doing contact that don't think very much in reporting terms. Maybe part of the job of political sections ought to be spending more time with other people in the embassy than they do. That sounds contrary to popular wisdom, but in some ways political section people spending more time with DEA people, USIA people, AID people, and other folks like that might be a good idea. I am afraid the impression at a lot of embassies, on the part of people in the other agencies, is that the political section holds itself aloof, as if too much contact would be contaminating. You don't want to fall into the trap where your political people are spending all their time hobnobbing with other Americans in the embassy and not getting out there where they ought to be, but a certain amount of time incorporating what people in other sections and agencies know into political reporting would be well spent.

Q: Had the unrest started in Chiapas when you were there?

DIETERICH: It started while I was there. That was that funny January of 1992, right after the elections. Mexico got a double whammy, with the beginning of a rebellion in Chiapas, and a terrific slide of the peso in relation to the dollar. When you think back, you remember the prime PRI candidate was assassinated. Then they fixed upon Ernesto Zedillo, the education minister. This was a man who had not been groomed to run for the presidency; a very good education minister; educated at Yale, and a very sound economist. A good man who has made a good president in Mexico. He has carried on the Salinas legacy without the Salinas burden. Nobody laid a glove on him when it came to the kind of accusations of corruption that ruined Salinas' reputation and life. Salinas lives in exile in Ireland, which is an absurd fate for a Mexican president. Mexican presidents usually live in honor and dignity in Mexico, without huge amounts of influence, but that is the way it is supposed to be.

The election itself was observed to the hilt. I talked about how in El Salvador during the last days of the Jesuit trial, and my perception that the NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) were rapidly shifting their focus to Guatemala. I think during my time in Mexico it had begun to shift out of Guatemala to Mexico, because of NAFTA. All of a sudden the nature of Mexico, and Mexico as a proper ally of the United States became a debatable thing, and the NGOs could see a lot of the things that were wrong in Mexico, a lot of things they didn't like. That meant the Mexican elections were filled with observers. The Mexican government started out, especially under the naive influence of the foreign ministry, trying to control who was going to be an election observer. I think a major accomplishment of the embassy, in which USIS had a role, was convincing the Mexican government they didn't have to control everybody.

If you cannot control it to the point where you only get the observers you want, what is your next best course? The next best would be to throw it open to everybody, then you could say you didn't control the observers. That serves you well there, and also here, because you don't have to take responsibility. All you have to do is offer the facilities you offer to the press, and you already know how to do that. I attended a number of briefings for NGO and election observers where the Mexican government very patiently laid out a very complicated electoral system, and it was unassailable. The elections came out looking pretty good all over the country. There were a few instances where people could say the lines were too long, and some people didn't get to vote down in Oaxaca, but nearly everybody said it wasn't on purpose. Mexico came out of that looking pretty good.

Chiapas? I guess it's another one of those classic intelligence things. I would like to tell you that there were those of us in the embassy who saw this coming, but that would not be true. We didn't.

Q: Well, it is not a place you would particularly go to either, is it?

DIETERICH: No, I had been there occasionally but it is pretty far away. We don't understand it very well down there. Chiapas is more like Guatemala than it is like most of Mexico. That official Mexico City based ideology that says, "We are all Indians and we are part of this cosmic race that occurred in the New World, this wonderful mixture of Indian Hispanic tradition" doesn't penetrating down into the Mayan country of southern Mexico.

There were a lot of local irritants, and a lot of the Chiapas revolt focused on Mexico City not paying attention, but the real issues were a dispute between absentee or foreign landlords and local folks that hadn't been resolved. Landlords claiming more land than they really owned, and people of indigenous culture claiming land that maybe they didn't really own. A lot of irritants were land based and culturally based. These local irritants in the hands of some fairly ambitious political operatives resulted in a minor armed revolt, and if you toted up the battles and the gun fire, there had never was a whole lot to it. Much of it has been a war of press releases, a war of television coverage, and a war on the Internet.

Some of it was made possible by the fact that there was excess guerilla talent coming out of El Salvador and Guatemala, that could be applied to the game. There were people who knew how to fight guerilla wars and there were people with a lot of guns. Anybody that thinks we have picked up all the weapons in El Salvador, has not been paying attention. A huge amount of armament was also available in Guatemala in a war that was entering into more of a negotiation stage than it had been before.

The Mexican government is in the same dilemma most governments are. No matter what your military people tell you, the human rights and political cost of totally stamping out a rebellion like that simply isn't worth the game. It's way too high. Despite the fact that a few telephone poles get blown up, the Mexican government is smart enough not to turn Chiapas into El Salvador.

The slide of the peso was much more disastrous in Mexico, because it took the bloom ofNAFTA right away in terms of what expectations on both sides of the border had been. It made it harder for Mexico to benefit, and it also made it harder for the United States to benefit. Remember, the big issue while I was in Mexico had been ratification in the United States.

Q: You left in '95?

DIETERICH: In '95, yes.

Q: What did you do then?

DIETERICH: I came back to Washington and understood that retirement was getting pretty close. I was unassigned for awhile, and then they asked if I would sit in as the Deputy Director of the Far East Division of USIA. About a year later, in May, I retired.

Q: What since your retirement?

DIETERICH: Since my retirement I have been dividing my time between my summer place on Lake Erie and here in Arlington. I am now president of the USIA Alumna Association. That job has gotten more interesting since the incorporation of USIA into the State Department. We are active, and hope influential, in getting the Department to adopt the best practices of what USIA did in the old days. We have a membership of about 600 people and new members coming in because now everyone is an alumnus of USIA. We are concerned that ex USIA people receive equitable treatment in the Department. We work closely with ASFA, much more closely than we did before. The summers are sacred. I am up on Lake Erie sailing.

Q: Well, I think we will stop at this point.

DIETERICH: I think that's it.

End of interview