Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

GEORGE G. B. GRIFFIN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is April 30, 2002. This is an interview with George Griffin. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by George?

GRIFFIN: Sure.

Q: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

GRIFFIN: I was born on October 22nd, 1934, in Istanbul, Turkey, at the Admiral Bristol Hospital.

Q: How come? Istanbul is not the normal place.

GRIFFIN: My father was a businessman. He was in the tobacco business in Turkey. He was originally from North Carolina, and my mother was from South Carolina. He was in Turkey for 40-plus years in that business. He started in Greece, in Salonika, and then moved to Turkey, after which he got married.

Because my mother had lost her first baby in Samsun, which is where they were living first, they decided she should go to a proper hospital to have me. After that, we lived in Samsun until my mother, my little sister, and I left in the summer of 1939. She was about to have another baby and thought there was a war coming, so we left. My father left Turkey in 1941. He was almost captured by the Japanese. Because the war had blocked shipping in the Mediterranean, he and two colleagues had to go through the Pacific, and he managed to get out. They went first to Cairo, where they knew Chargï¿½ d'Affaires Ray Hare, who had served earlier in Istanbul. He helped them get passage to Bombay, where they were stuck because of events in the Pacific, and they soon ran out of money. I don't know how long they were there, but they stayed at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay, which was the top of the line there at that time. Eventually Liggett & Myers, my father's parent company, wired them money for a PanAm Clipper flight to Manila via Singapore, and enough to pay their hotel bill, but nothing else. My father always told a story about their departure from Bombay, saying that as they opened the door to their room they saw most of the hotel staff lined up outside with their hands out for bakshish. The three huddled to figure out what to do. Finally one of them said, "All we can do is to thank them profusely and shake their hands." So that's what they did.

When they got to Manila in December 1941, things got even tighter, with chaos and panic. Apparently they were bumped from their Pan Am flight, and all other flights were rerouted away from Manila as Japanese forces approached. Finally they located one deck passage ticket, on a ship headed for Australia. They drew straws, and my father was the lucky one. The other two didn't get out, and became prisoners of the Japanese for the remainder of the war, enduring miserable concentration camp conditions and a "death march." After my father got to Sydney he found a plane to, I think, Chile, and from there up to Miami. I remember that my mother managed to get some extra gasoline ration coupons, and we drove to Miami to meet him. I hadn't seen him for at least a year and wasn't too sure what he looked like. That was a traumatic time for me. My father returned to Turkey in 1945, by freighter, in an international convoy accompanied by U.S. warships.

Q: Let's get a little about your family. What about your father's background?

GRIFFIN: He was the eldest son of a school administrator, school superintendent, in North Carolina. He grew up here and there, as his father was transferred from one school district to another. He went to Davidson College briefly, and then to the University of North Carolina, where one of his classmates was the actor Randolph Scott. For whatever reason, when he heard about a job offer in Turkey, he seized it and went there in 1928. On his first home leave, he met my mother. They were married in Turkey. I wasn't alive so I don't remember the details. They would have been married in 1931 or '32.

Q: Were the Griffins a long-time Carolina family?

GRIFFIN: Yes, as far as I know. I can go back two generations before my father, but that family Bible didn't have very good records. They were certainly North Carolinians. Before that, I don't know, except that they came originally from Ireland.

Q: Your mother's maiden name was...?

GRIFFIN: Mary Carroll Byers.

Q: Was she a South Carolinian?

GRIFFIN: She was a South Carolinian.

Q: Where did she go to school?

GRIFFIN: Well, she went to several places. Her family was from a small town called Gaffney, where her father and grandfather were business partners. By the time she met my father, the family had become quite prosperous and owned most of the businesses and much of the land in and around the town. She apparently was a good scholar. She studied in Gaffney at Limestone Girls Academy (now College), and went on to Shorter College in Rome, Georgia, and then to Boston College. She taught briefly at St. John's in Annapolis before she went off to Turkey and got married.

Q: After your mother and father were married, did your mother continue teaching?

GRIFFIN: She taught me when there was no formal school. I think she taught kindergarten for a while in Turkey, but most of the international communither Turkish was rudimentary at firswas French, so she concentrated on learning those languages. She learned both pretty well over the years.

Q: You were about five when you left Turkey. Do you recall anything about it?

GRIFFIN: Not really. I have some vague memories, but they are probably based on family photos. Apparently, to help them fit in with their friends, my parents practiced French at home and didn't want me to rely solely on English. I had different nannies; over time there was a Greek, a Syrian, and an Armenian. The cook and maid were Turks, and so I learned a little bit of all those languages as a youngster. I'm told that I began speaking English with a British accent, much of it picked up on the way to America on the ?I can't remember?was it the Gripsholm?

Q: Well, the Gripsholm was the Swedish one that sort of went back and forth particularly during the war for repatriation.

GRIFFIN: Well, I'm not sure which ship, but apparently our cabin steward was a British man who talked to me a lot, which helped improve my English. During my first summer in South Carolina, my mother sent me to a boy's camp to help me integrate into American society. There I learned American English. Camp Le Conte was in Tennessee, in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I went to grammar school in South Carolina.

Q: How did you find elementary school? Did you enjoy it?

GRIFFIN: Yes and no. I got beaten up by the class bully about the third day there, so I quickly learned who was in charge. I've still got a split tooth from that incident. But I liked to read, and was a pretty good student. By the time I reached the third grade, I had read more books than the rest of the class put together. At first my teacher didn't believe that I had read all the books I listed, but after testing my memory of the contents of several, she gave me top marks.

Q: What sort of books did you like to read?

GRIFFIN: Anything. My parents kept a good library. Of course I read children's books, but quickly began reading some of the books they would leave about. One book I remember reading at an early age was Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, which I found extremely funny. By the end of the third grade, I had read some 300 books; something my teacher said was "remarkable."

Q: As you finished elementary school, you were still in North Carolina?

GRIFFIN: South Carolina. No, I didn't finish there. We went back to Turkey in 1946 before the end of grammar school, which in those days went through the eighth grade. We lived in Istanbul at that time, and my sister and I attended an American community school at Robert College. Then I moved up into the high school (that wasn't the terminology used by the school). After a couple of years, my parents saw me struggling with mathematics and other courses in Turkish, and decided I needed a proper American education. I was sent to boarding school at Darlington School in Rome, Georgia; the same town where my mother had attended Shorter College. After I was there a year, my grandmother died, and my mother came back to South Carolina to settle the estate. She wanted me there with my sister and brother, so I went to high school in Gaffney for a year. Then she took my sister and brother back to be with my father in Turkey, and I returned to Darlington, where I finished high school.

Q: All this going from school to school, did it work to your benefit or to your detriment or what?

GRIFFIN: I probably got a better education outside of school than I did in formal classes. I wasn't the world's greatest scholar, but I absorbed a lot. When the time came to decide about college, I took various tests, two of which brought me to the next step. My SAT scores, or whatever they were called in those days, were quite high, and I won a Naval ROTC scholarship, which offered me a couple of choices. I wanted to go to Renssaeler in New York because they had a good soccer team and I had become rather proficient in that. But that school didn't have an opening under the Navy program, so I ended up going to Georgia Tech to study mechanical engineering. But in the middle of my sophomore year, I had had enough. Analytical geometry and calculus were getting to me, so I decided to try another field. I headed for my father's old school at the University of North Carolina, to which I could transfer and keep the scholarship. But then I got stuck in a snowstorm in Columbia, South Carolina, where I had stopped to see some friends. After a good party, they talked me into staying there. I finished up at USC, studying political science and economics.

Q: Where?

GRIFFIN: The University of South Carolina.

Q: Were you able to keep the Naval scholarship?

GRIFFIN: I stayed in the program and went on midshipman cruises every summer.

Q: How about your reading habits? Did they continue?

GRIFFIN: Sure. Still do.

Q: When you were with your parents, your mother, when she was back here in the States, was there much talk about the world situation, or when you were in Turkey? Were you kind of aware of the world around you?

GRIFFIN: Yes, because many people knew that we lived in Turkey and were affected by the problems at the time. It was just after the waWorld War land people were sensitive to anything that might flare up again. There was concern about the possibility of Turkey having a war with Greece, and there was unrest in Turkey, so people would ask for my parents' opinions. I guess I first heard it from my fathenamely, that news accounts often make things sound worse than they seem when you are on the spot. When you live in such places, things don't seem so dire. But we paid attention to the news because we knew something about the situation; particularly my father, because of his experience in leaving Turkey. Certainly, I paid attention to what was going on in the world.

Q: At the University of South Carolina were you looking at any particular area of political science?

GRIFFIN: No, my courses covered domestic and international politics. I'm not quite sure why I got into it. Maybe I should have stuck to engineerinI was a mechanical engineer at Georgia Tech. But I took some aptitude tests and one of my friends convinced me that political science was interesting and pertinent to my expectations in the Navy. I assumed I would spend a full career in the Navy, since I was obligated to it for sending me to college, and I had to go into it. My political science professor said I ought to consider the Foreign Service. While he was persuasive, I wasn't particularly interested in it. If anything, I became more interested in American domestic politics, local politics. I served briefly as a page at the State House in Columbia, which exposed me to what was going on politically. The professor talked me into taking the Foreign Service exam when I was a junior and, to my astonishment and his, I passed it. I couldn't do anything about it immediately because I hadn't finished college. That wouldn't have been a bar, but I still had my obligation to the Navy. So when I went for my oral exam, they told me I did all right but that, since I was asking for a deferment, I would have to take the oral again. I did so years later when I began thinking of leaving the Navy. At Carolina, I found economics equally interesting, and had a minor in that subject.

Q: You graduated from the University in what year?

GRIFFIN: 1957.

Q: Right into the Navy?

GRIFFIN: Right in the Navy.

Q: How long were you in the Navy?

GRIFFIN: Counting my midshipman and reserve time, something like ten years, but the active duty part was a couple of years. They gave me an early out after I was accepted into the Foreign Service. After being commissioned in the Navy, I was selected for flight school. While I was waiting for a class opening, they assigned me to a personnel office at the big base in Norfolk. The Korean War was winding down, and the Navy was letting pilots go, saying they didn't need so many anymore. One of my boss' chief chores at that time was to deliver the bad news to those who were being released. Most of them had temporary commissions in the Naval Reserve. One day a chief petty officer came storming into the office and asked me, "Where is that son of a bitch?" I said, "Excuse me, Chief, who are you calling names?" I thought I was pulling rank on him. He said, "Commander so-and-so." I said, "He's in his office, but he's busy." He said, "Like hell he is," and shoved me out of the way and stormed in. It turned out that the Chief had been a captain until two months before, and once had been the Commander's boss. It was an unpleasant scene.

Q: What happened to you then? Did you get in trouble?

GRIFFIN: No. I went on to flight school. Then, a few months into it, they changed the rules on me. I was told that, instead of the three-year obligation I signed up for, I would have a five-year obligation. While I was trying to decide what to do, I fell ill and couldn't fly for about a month. I finally decided that I didn't want a five-year obligation, had other fish to fry, and dropped out. My exit consisted of being chewed out by an admiral. He reminded me how much my training had cost Uncle Sam, and said he would ensure that I could never again fly for the U.S. Government. He had me transferred to an aircraft carrier, just to rub it in, I guess.

Q: What carrier was that?

GRIFFIN: The FDR.

Q: That was about the newest one we had, wasn't it, at the time?

GRIFFIN: No, it was a sister ship of the Midway, and was built in about 1945. It's been turned to scrap now.

Q: '51 wouldn't it have been? The Midway class came out after the war.

GRIFFIN: Was it after the war?

Q: Yes, because it had an angled deck.

GRIFFIN: That's right, but the angled decks were added long after the ships were launched...

Q: But at least FDR and the Midway weren't in World War Two.

GRIFFIN: I guess you're right.

Q: The Essex class, I think, was newer.

GRIFFIN: No, my class at Pensacola did its first carrier landings and takeoffs on the USS Antietam. It was only used for flight training.

Q: So what were you doing on the FDR?

GRIFFIN: They made me a communications officer. The head of the communications division was a lieutenant commander who took a shine to me. After a senior LTJG was transferred out, he put me in charge of organizing the watch schedule and supervising the watch standers. My title was Traffic Officer, which was a notch ahead of my peers. I set up their watches, and critiqued their performance. I had to correct their mistakes, which they made with great regularity.

Q: That must have made you very popular.

GRIFFIN: Indeed. It was my first editing job. Mistakes were sometimes big mistakes. For example, a division would order 1,000 screws. If the clerk put in a wrong digit, it might turn out to be 1,000 tractors. Clearly, there's quite a difference. Our communications in those days were too abbreviated in telegraphese, so there were lots of foolish mistakes.

Q: Was the Foreign Service hovering in the background?

GRIFFIN: Oh, I had almost forgotten about it. I had done well on the law school entrance exam and was thinking of becoming a lawyer and going into politics, because friends had talked to me about that when I was on leave. But one day my boss' bosthe Operations Officefound me in the wardroom. He had just reviewed my fitness report, looked into my personnel file, and learned that I passed the Foreign Service exam. He asked me why I was staying in the Navy. I said that (a) I owed the Navy, and (b) I thought it would be a good career. Besides, I liked it, and found it a lot of fun. He asked if that were so, why didn't I stay in flight school. I said I was happier, to which his reply was, "But the Foreign Service!" I told him what I thought of the Foreign Service, which wasn't much. He said he had tried for years to pass the Foreign Service exam, but never could. He said, "You passed it. Get out of the Navy. You have no business here." So I took the oral again to see what would happen, and passed it. The examiners told me I could expect to be appointed an FSO by August 1959, so I asked for an early discharge, which was granted.

Q: Do you recall the oral exam, either one, some of the questions you were asked?

GRIFFIN: I remember a bit. One question was, "Whom do you admire?" I was supposed to come up with three names and explain why I admired them. I was asked about things I had studied in college. One question focused on the situation in Indonesia, something I happened to have written a paper about in college. I thought I knew everything about it, and started pontificating. Jacob Beam was the chief of the panel. I don't think his career took him to Indonesihe was more of a Russia hanbut he started asking me detailed questions. At the end of the exam when asked if I had anything more to say, I noted that I had said "I don't know" more times in three hours than ever before in my life. But I added that I could find the answers to their questions, and would do so right then, if they would allow me. That seemed to impress them.

Q: So then you came into the Foreign Service?

GRIFFIN: Well, I still had months, or a year maybe, to go in the Navy, so I went on a Mediterranean cruise. Shortly before that was due to wind up, I was told I could depart immediately. So I flew back to Norfolk in May or June for a few weeks of processing-out. I got my discharge papers and headed for Washington, as the State Department gave me a date in August to appear. Of course, the minute I got my discharge papers, the Department said, "Oops, sorry, we're full up. Wait around." You've heard this before.

Q: Oh, yes. So what did you do?

GRIFFIN: I had a nice three-month vacation seeing lots of friends up and down the East Coast of the United States.

Q: You were fortunate you weren't married by this time.

GRIFFIN: Well, I came home expecting to get formally engaged and, yes, get married. But it turned out that my so-called fiancï¿½ had gone back to her childhood sweetheart and told me to take a powder. So I arrived single at FSI in November of 1959.

Q: Do you remember sort of the composition and your impression of your A100 course, the basic officers' course.

GRIFFIN: Sure. There were 25 of us. There were four women, one of whom I'm still in regular touch with.

Q: Who was that?

GRIFFIN: Lois Haase. Her married name is Mares. She lives here in Washington; almost a neighbor of another classmate who stayed in the Service and became far more prominent than Tony Quainton. There were four Ph.D.s in the class, and two people with only bachelors' degrees, namely David Biltchik and me. David resigned relatively soon, after about 10 years. I stayed the longest of the whole class. Lois and Tony have hosted reunions for us, so we all see each other from time to time.

Q: While you were taking this orientation course, did you have any idea what and where you wanted to go and do?

GRIFFIN: Yes. The location was wide open, as far as I was concerned. On my wish list I wrote that I would like to go anywhere in the world except Naples, Italy. I had been through Naples dozens of times growing up. Every time we went back and forth to Turkey, the ship would stop in Naples. It was a filthy, dirty place, and I wanted to see other places. So, of course, they sent me to Naples.

Q: Oh, naturally. There is someone out there looking out for you.

GRIFFIN: I don't know if they meant to teach me a lesson, or whether it was a mistake.

Q: Somebody probably said, "Well, he mentioned Naples." So you went to Naples. This would about 1960? And you were there...?

GRIFFIN: From May of 1960. I was there two years. Of course I did want to go to Turkey, but I was told right off the bat that I would never be posted in Turkey. When I asked, "Why not?" they said, "Because you were born there." My protest that I was born an American cut no ice. This was in the McCarthy era, when there was a lot of suspicion - just the opposite of what we have right now.

Q: Naples in 1960 - I have to put a caveat here: I was Consul General there in '79 to '81. Who was Consul General when you were there?

GRIFFIN: James Henderson. It was his last post. He had had, I think, a career mostly in Latin America, though he may have had another post in Italy. He regaled us with tales of his first post, which was Guadalajara, Mexico. There, he found a factory making dirt-cheap glassware out of discarded Coca Cola bottles. They could make anything he wanted for next to nothing, so he ordered a huge collection of everything he could think ofrom shot glasses, to brandy glasses, to highballs, to iced tea; you name it. He bought something like 100 of each type of glass. For his last fling in Naplein a lovely villa that we no longer own on via Posilliphe invited the entire staff to come drink the last of everything. We drained what was left in the bar and, as he insisted, smashed the last of the glasses in the fireplace. It was a giddy time.

Q: What were you doing there?

GRIFFIN: I was one of the newest vice consuls on the block. Three or four of us arrived at about the same time. I was assigned initially to the immigrant visa unit. On the first day, everybody else was on leave or out sick, except for the chief of the consular section, Jean Zimmermann. He said, "Mr. Griffin, you have 200 visas to issue today." When I mumbled that issuing two hundred immigrant visas sounded impossible, he said, "Do it!" Fortunately, we had a good Italian staff, headed by Alberto del Grosso. They had all the stacks of paper nicely tied together with red ribbon and sealed, with several places for me to sign. All I remember doing in rudimentary Italian was saying, "Raise your hand and swear that everything you say is the truth, and sign here." Eventually, it got easier. All us junior officers were rotated, so I did some of everything. After a year, I was made chief of the congressional correspondence unit, which was instructive. Congressional correspondence in that district, as you well know, was enormous.

Q: Immigration from there has just fallen off down to practically nothing.

GRIFFIN: We made it easy, so they don't come, or...

Q: Well, the Italians, those that wanted to do something, were heading up to Germany or Switzerland or northern Italy.

GRIFFIN: Sure, to Milano, or Torino. One of our dirtiest chores was to implement the so-called Montreal filing system, which was developed at that consulate. It meant that applicants had to keep their own files. Several of us spent our Saturdays schlepping files. We almost had a revolution in southern Italy because, when people started getting these enormous fileand they were enormous; the basement of that building was one huge file roothey thought they were being rejected, and didn't like it. But we managed to send it all to them and to convince them that, when they brought the papers back, we would honor them.

Q: We were no longer hanging onto these files for 30 or 40 years.

GRIFFIN: Correct. Our citizenship files were also enormous, as were the Social Security and other benefits files. As I recall, there were something like 600,000 American citizens in southern Italy, and we kept files on most of them. It was the visa applicant files that we got rid oan enormous number.

Q: Did you get any feel for Italian life over there?

GRIFFIN: Of course. I'm still in touch with a Neapolitan who lives about five blocks from the Consulate. He came to the Consulate to learn English where, several evenings a week, some of my colleagues and I would teach classes. Sometimes, we would go out to eat or take trips together, switching back and forth between English and Italian. Their English was pretty rudimentary, and our Italian was somewhat better; let's put it that way. So, yes, we did.

Q: Was the Camorra or the local Mafia of concern there?

GRIFFIN: When we arrived, we stayed in one of the waterfront hotelthe Royal. The concierge pointed me to a restaurant around the corner that served American-type breakfasts. But someone in the Consulate warned me to be careful going there because it was a hangout for a gentleman called Lucky Luciano, to whom I was not to be seen talking. Taking that under advisement, I went anyway. Sure enough, there he was. After awhile, we spoke a few times. I didn't report it to my bosses, I fear. It was not as if we were getting friendly, but we had a nodding acquaintance. Then Luciano died suddenly, and all hell broke loose. His mother was still alive and living in Brooklyn, where she wanted her baby buried. The Bureau of Narcotics, which is now DEA, was run by Harry Anslinger. We were told that he declared that over his dead body would Lucky's dead body come into the States, because it would be pumped full of narcotics and would be another drug shipment. At the request of a New York politician, Attorney General Bobby Kennedy intervened and overruled Anslinger.

I was ordered to go to the funeral, which was at a church high up in the city. It was a grand Neapolitan funeral. Did you ever go to one? There was an enormous black hearse drawn by huge black horsemaybe a dozeand a man with a stovepipe hat on top of the hearse driving them. The more horses, the more expensive the funeral. I was told to expect some Mafiosi to show up, to be very careful, keep my eyes open, and take notes. Well, I didn't see anything except mountains of big, enormous wreaths. One was from Joe Bonnano, or "Joe Bananas," which said "So-long Lucky!" We had crossed the ocean on one of the American Export Lines ships with his family. They went back and forth regularly. He was in jail, or having trouble with the authorities, but his family could go back and forth. There were other wreaths from equally flamboyant Mafia characters. It was quite funny. I returned to the Consulate and told the DPO that I really didn't have much to report; there was no family, nor recognizable Mafia dons. Later, I was invited into a room at the back of the Consulate, which I hadn't seen before. There was a Consulate officer and two senior Italian officerone a Carabinieri, and the other from the Guardia di Finanza. It turned out that they all sent observers to the funeral. They all had movie cameras and took pictures of each other. We looked at several movies, and finally decided nothing had happened. Everybody was satisfied, and eventually off the body went to Brooklyn.

Q: Did you get involved with Americans in trouble or anything like that?

GRIFFIN: Oh, there are lots of good stories. As you know, consular stories are usually the most interesting. War stories.

Q: I wouldn't mind hearing one or two.

GRIFFIN: Perhaps the most interesting one was when Roy Davis, the Deputy Principal Officer, summoned me. He told me to retrieve a passport from a Mr. Gold at the Excelsior Hotel and bring it back to him. He said I had to go because the Protection and Welfare Officer, Vernon McAninch (who later became quite infamous), was not in, and we needed to get the passport before Gold could get away. So I jumped in a taxi and went merrily off to the Excelsior. I went to the front desk and asked for Mr. Gold. The clerk said that the Golds' keys were there, so they must not be in. He rang the room anyway, and there was no answer, so I went back to the Consulate and up to Mr. Davis. He said, "Thank God you're back." When I asked why, he said, "We just got another telegram from the Department saying this guy is armed and dangerous."

It turned out that Mr. Gold was part of a gang that had robbed a bank in the U.S. and fled to Canada. They got away with about a million dollars, which was said to be a record at that time. Three members of the gang were captured by Canadian Mounties, but they didn't have the money. Mr. Gold got away, and now seemed to be in Naples with his wife. Just then, Mr. Davis' secretary came in with another telegram, reporting that, for political reasons, the Canadians were refusing to extradite the other three men. Apparently Secretary Rusk was battling the Canadians over a seamen's union problem, so the Canadians didn't want to cooperate. I can't recall all the details, but the Department said it was urgent that we get his passport so Mr. Gold wouldn't disappear. The Italian Government was being asked to arrest Gold while his extradition was negotiated. Mr. Davis sent me back to the Excelsior Hotel, this time with Mac McAninch, which made me feel better, as he was a John Wayne-type, about 6 feet 4, with a strong build.

At the hotel the desk clerk told us Mr. Gold had just gone up to his room. We went to the room and banged on the door. When Gold appeared, we said we were from the Consulate and needed to see his passport. When he asked why, we said Washington told us that there was something the matter with it. He said, "There's nothing wrong with it. I've got it here." He disappeared for a moment, and then returned with a passport. We took it, thanked him, and left, patting ourselves on the back.

Later, I went back to the hotel. While talking to the desk clerk, I saw another passport in Mr. Gold's mailbox, and asked to see it. It was made out to another name, but had Gold's photograph. So, we informed the Department that he had at least two passports. Washington was feeding us information in dribs and drabs, but we never got the whole story. They did say he was dangerous, because someone had been killed in the robbery. Mac and I asked why Italian police were not involved, and were told things were being worked out by Embassy Rome. The Italians finally agreed, so the next time we went to the hotel it was to accompany police as they apprehended Gold. But when we got to his room, the Italians with guns drawn, there was no Mr. Gold. There was Mrs. Gold, who said, "Oh, he went out for a walk. He'll be back in a little while." She told Mac and me they were leaving the next day by ship for Haifa, Israel. So, we stayed at the hotel, and the Italians stationed a policeman outside the Golds' room, but he never reappeared. The next day Mrs. Gold said she had to catch the ship, even without her husband. After some frantic consultation between Rome and Washington, she and her luggage were allowed aboard the ship. The ship's departure was delayed for most of a day while it was searched, but they didn't find Mr. Gold. When the ship sailed, the Naples chief of police sat in Mrs. Gold's stateroom as the ship crossed the Bay, until the harbor pilot was offloaded. We learned later that Mr. Gold arrived in Tel Aviv at about the same time the police chief got off the ship. He was welcomed there and made an instant citizen of Israel, where I presume he remains. The rumored deal was that the Government of Israel would get half of whatever he had. We speculated that the police chief was probably sitting on the money, in a large trunk, while he was waiting.

Then there were others. Did you see that television program called "The American Embassy?" I didn't think much of it.

Q: I saw a couple of them.

GRIFFIN: In that, they had a naked man. In Naples, we had a naked woman. She was with a group of peace marchers headed for Moscow. Somewhere along the way in northern Europe it got cold, so they came south. Some of them camped out in our lobby for about three months. One woman kept stripping so we wouldn't push her outside, but we did finally manage to get rid of her. It got boring after a while, and flea-infested, too.

What else happened there? I got my first awar$150. It was for suggesting that we abolish an unnecessary visa form. I got my first efficiency report, which did not please me, but Mr. Davis advised me to calm down. He said, "This isn't the Second Coming. Your report is better than most, so just be patient." That gave me ulcers, which I eventually conquered, and developed patience.

There was another Mafia incident. Washington needed the original birth certificate of a major boss of "Murder, Inc." So three of uCal Berlin, John Crawford, and went to Calabria to get it from authorities in his mountaintop home village. For cover purposes, we went as tourists in my new, fire-engine red Fiat Spider convertible, though the back seat was a bit cramped, to put it mildly. We got to the village and found some very unfriendly officials. They didn't want to talk to us. Finally, using our charm and their phone to call our bosses to prevail on their bosses, we managed to get what we were after. As we were leaving the village, I saw some women, all in black, washing clothes in a stream, and thought it would make nice picture. I pulled out my camera and began snapping away, which brought a hail of stones around our ears and on the car. They were very superstitious about photographs, and probably still are.

We also had lots of VIP visitors. One of the first was a Congressmal can't recall which onfor whom I was designated control officer. That was the first time I had heard of that function. I thought it would be a good occasion to talk about important things. I went to the airport on a weekend to pick him up and bring him to the Consulate. He said he was tired from his flight, and didn't want to talk or go to the Consulate. He was on his way to Capri, and all he wanted was the money. In those days, we still had excess currency funds from the PL-480 program, which Congressmen were allowed to use for any purpose they desired. I was quite upset at what I considered a waste of taxpayer money, but my boss told me to calm down and get used to it.

Then, Jacqueline Kennedy came on a family vacation with her sister, Lee Radziwill, and her husband, the Prince. I don't remember the exact date, but it probably would have been in August 1962. The President did not come. There were children there, but I don't remember much about them. There were others, one or two other family friends. I think Mrs. Lawford was there, and somebody else - I don't recall.

Q: Peter Lawford

GRIFFIN: ...and a Secret Service contingent. They had rented a historic villa in Ravello, over on the Amalfi coast. It was a private visit, so we were told that we should be aware of it, but were not to take any official action. Then things started happening, like handwritten letters from the President to the First Lady. They appeared in our pouch, with no real indication as to how we were supposed to get it from the Consulate to Mrs. Kennedy. At some point the Consul General asked if one of us would like to volunteer, on personal time, with no compensation, to take the letters to Ravello. A couple of us raised our hands, and I was picked.

And so I went, and it turned out to be fascinating. It was not just letters, but medicines and other odds and ends, which came almost on a daily basis. The group was in Ravello for almost a month. I went over several times, and was accepted as one of the household after awhile. The first time, the Secret Service guys were very protective, especially when I insisted on handing the President's letters personally to Mrs. Kennedy. On the other hand, she was very gracious, delighted to get them, and invited me to come in for a drink. After that, they often invited me in. There were other people coming and going, and there were parties. I didn't attend any parties, but was never asked to leave when one was going on.

One evening I got there late, to find the Secret Service team very tense. Mrs. Kennedy had gone off with Gianni Agnelli. Later they told me they located them on his yacht off Capri. The Secret Service and their Italian counterparts commandeered other boats and stayed nearby all night.

Q: While you were there, were you thinking of getting out and finishing in '62? What did you want to do? Were you putting down other places you definitely didn't want to go to?

GRIFFIN: When the call came for bids for my next assignment, there were lots of possibilities. My then wife thought Paris sounded wonderful, but I explained to her that in Paris I would be a very small fish in a very large pond, so I preferred to aim for a post where I might be a slightly bigger fish in a smaller pond. In the long run, I wanted to go to Central Asia to satisfy one of my fascinations as a kid in Turkey. When I was 12, I went on part of an expedition to Mount Ararat, and thought the world would be more fascinating the further East I went. Of course the Central Asian republics weren't open to us in those days, and what was available was mainly a big post such as Tehran. Finally I found a slot in Colombo, Ceylon, with part-time political officer work, which sounded better than anything else, so I put in my bid and got it.

Q: You mentioned your then wife. Had you gotten married when you were in the Foreign Service?

GRIFFIN: Yes, we were married in South Carolina just before leaving for Naples. It didn't last, but our fine son Sean was born in Naples. I can't complain, as that part was good. That marriage lasted about seven years, and I've been married a second time for 32 years now, and have a terrific daughter as a result, so things worked out very well in the end.

Q: You then went to Colombo in '62?

GRIFFIN: Yes.

Q: And you were then till when?

GRIFFIN: 1965.

Q: Was it called Ceylon then?

GRIFFIN: It was called Ceylon.

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

GRIFFIN: It was tense because in late 1959 Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike was assassinated. A few months later, in 1960, his weeping widow Sirimavo was elected his successothe world's first female prime minister. She and the socialist Sri Lanka Freedom Party men who put her in power declared that rapacious foreign capitalists were ripping off the good citizens of Ceylon. They nationalized foreign oil distribution companies, mostly American and British, without paying compensation, which brought into play our so-called "Hickenlooper Amendment." It mandated that Washington cut off our aid program. For Ceylon it was actually the second, or maybe the third time our aid had been cut off. I think Ceylon may hold the record for the most times our aid was cut off.

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

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

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

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

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

GRIFFIN: Yes, the Soviet Embassy was huge. It certainly was among the five largest embassies there. The Indians probably had the biggest one, the Chinese had a big one, the Brits did, and we did. When aid was cut off, ours dropped, or cycled down, because people left. When it was turned on again, they came back. Colombo is where I first encountered the Soviets, to my detriment. I think it stemmed from an incident at a reception. I had on my political officer hat, and represented the chief of the Political Section at a reception at the Galle Face Hotel, very near our embassy. The host was the Publisher/Editor of the Ceylon Communist Party newspaper, the name of which I don't recall. In any case, I talked to him for awhile. He had had a couple of shots too many of something to drink, and started bragging about how much money he was getting from the Soviets. He said they paid for publishing his paper, and many other things. He described how they infiltrated the school textbook market, the movie market, and other sectors with Soviet propaganda. It didn't cost him a cent, so he was having a good time, including vacations in Crimea and other goodies. I had the sense to go back to the office and stay up half the night banging all this out in a report. The Ambassador's praise for that in my efficiency report helped get me promoted.

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

The Soviet invited me to dinner at his house. I said sure, assuming it included my wife and son. But he wanted just me, saying he wanted to talk alone. So, after a nod from my boss, I agreed. I arrived to find a table the size of two put together, groaning with food, and thought it was going to be a big party after all. But there was only one other guest: his boss, the KGB station chief. They spent the evening trying to convince me to defect to the Soviet Union, pouring Scotch down my throat, and asking me to chase it with vodka. I can't drink vodka and told them so, which seemed to upset them, but they finally agreed I could do beer. Soon, things were moving right along. The station chief was a Georgian who had been the equivalent of a Golden Gloves boxer as a young man. He had been assigned to Rome and then Paris as cultural attachï¿½, and claimed to be an opera singer. He proved it loudly, running around the room, on the back of a sofa, onto tables, leaping here and there, singing various Italian and French opera roles. He was very good.

They tried hard to convince me, going into deep, embellished detail about how great the Communist Party was, and how well one could live as a member. They said I could be a member as a foreigner and get special benefitblah, blah, blah. Afterwards, I went to the Embassy and reported as much as I could remember. Our station chief was excited. He was convinced that the younger officer tried to cover his tracks by saying that I wanted to defect, but actually wanted to do so himself, and asked me to keep after him. He suggested that I try again to get him to come to my house for a return visit, and said that if I could get him there, his people would be outside and get him safely away. I was to make sure he brought his wife and child. I tried. The Russian sounded excited over the phone, but said he had to check with his boss. The next day he called me back and said he couldn't do it right away, but perhaps a little later. I said it was up to him. The following day he showed up at the pool with his boss, the KGB chief. They walked around a bit and generally ignored us. My wife went up to him and asked about his wife. He said she had suddenly left for home, and seemed sad. So, his wife and kid vanished quickly, and a week later he was gone too. I never saw him again.

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

Q: I'm in it, too.

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

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

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

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

GRIFFIN: I still have my copy.

Q: It was an East German publication, disinformation.

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

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

GRIFFIN: USAID had some rather large projects in Ceylon in those days. They were doing reclamation work in eastern Ceylon, and funding some power plants, on the order of the Aswan High Dabig stuff. Our aid programs have changed since then, but in those days it was considered the thing to do. When they expropriated the oil companies without compensation, all this came to a screeching halt, and most of the staff was pulled out. Of course, the rest of us still went about our business. The Peace Corps remained, but there was talk about shutting down the program because the Soviets and their allies, seeing that it was a success, were mounting a propaganda effort intimating that it was a cover for more nefarious activity. Sometime during that period, I was asked if I wanted to help start a Peace Corps program in the Maldive Islands, which were part of our territory. Even though the Ambassador was duly accredited to the Maldives, we couldn't go there during my posting because the British were trying to hold down sometimes violent political turmoil in the southern atolls. They wanted to wiggle their way out of their mandate, and didn't want anybody else, including us, coming in and upsetting things. So we didn't go, but I put my name in the pot in case a program opened up. It sounded like something that might be fun. A friend of mine who worked with Arthur Clark, the author of 2001, A Space Odyssey...

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

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

Q: It was the Peace Corps thing.

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

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

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

Q: To give talks on the Foreign Service?

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

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

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, very much so.

Q: What was the situation at that time?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q: The Nonaligned. The NAM.

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

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

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

Q: You left there when in '65?

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

Q: What about Vietnam? How was that playing?

GRIFFIN: That was almost beneath our radar. It must have been talked about, but it certainly was not something I remember being part of many conversations there. It certainly was later, in other parts of South Asia, but not at that time.

Q: You left there when, in '65?

GRIFFIN: I was transferred back to Washington in March, 1965, to the Operations Center.

Q: So you were at the Operations Center from '65 for about two years, or a year and a half?

GRIFFIN: The tour duty was one year. But I want to go back to Ceylon for just a moment. I don't think I mentioned my second Ambassador. I did talk about Frances Willis who was the Ambassador most of the time, but in the last six months of my tour, she was succeeded by Cecil Lyon, who had been DCM in Paris and, prior to that, Ambassador to Chile. He was quite a fascinating character and deserves some mention.

Q: Oh, absolutely. He is also the son-in-law of Joseph Grew, isn't he?

GRIFFIN: Exactly right.

Q: And his wife goes back to Admiral Perry or something. Talk about something like a diplomatic, military dynasty. Anyway, go ahead.

GRIFFIN: Ambassador Lyon was quite a character. When he arrived in Colombo, he hit the newspapers with a huge splash after his first night. He had been told that robbery was a big problem in the neighborhood around the Residence. He didn't have a dog, and decided that his best bet for a burglar alarm would be some geese. He was told that geese would make more racket than a dog if somebody sneaked into the yard. Sure enough, he was awakened by geese in the middle of his first night, and he went running downstairs. Cecil slept in the nude. He encountered a man, whom he threatened with something he grabbed along the way, and ran the fellow off. He called the police, and the story got into the newspapers, with headlines blaring "Nude American Envoy."

Professionally, he helped improve the bilateral relationship. Personally, he taught me some good lessons. It was probably an old saying of his, but I used it to good advantagnamely, that any Foreign Service officer worth his salt can keep two secretaries busy full time. We didn't have computers in those days, and he was right. He also said any Foreign Service officer worth his salt can do better than any covert agent in finding out what is going on. I would agree with that, too.

Before Lyon arrived, I had extended my tour in Colombo to three years. But then my wife fell ill, and we left early for medical reasons. By that time, I had been assigned to the Operations Center, which was supposed to be a great honor for a junior officer. The Operations Center was brand new. It had been created as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In any case, I wasn't supposed to report for duty until June, but I then I suddenly curtailed to March. So I applied for a new program which used grants from the Ford Foundation and the Wally Byam Foundation to give free trips around the country to FSOs. The price to FSOs was to make speeches and do television and radio interviews along the way. When I learned that I had been accepted, I wrote Lew Hoffacker, the Director of the Operations Center, and asked for his permission to do it. He agreed, saying it was a great idea. So we went around the country for six weeks in a big Mercury sedan, pulling an Airstream trailer. We had never been west of the Mississippi River, so it was an adventure for us.

Q: What was your impression of the questioning you got, the receptivity or interest in what you were doing?

GRIFFIN: It was different in different places. We started in Washington, and ended in Washington. We first went south because our families were in South Carolina. From there, we kept going south to New Orleans, and then across the southwest to the West Coast, up the coast and then back to Washington. It was at time of the march on Selma, Alabama, and other race problems. Because the car and the trailer had Washington, DC, tags, we were not exactly welcomed when we drove into gas stations, for example. Although we were not black, we got lots of crude remarks. Very few of those who said such things ever learned that my wife and I were Southerners. We decided early on that our best defense was to mind our business and leave.

I started out with interviews in Gaffnemy mother's home towand Greenville, South Carolina. They were very interested, and the Gaffney paper did a whole page on me. I did a television interview in the much larger city of Greenville. In New Orleans I had a radio interview, and made a speech to a Rotary Club. That process continued throughout the trip in many other places. I also did a little bit of recruiting for the Foreign Service at some universities. Not as much as I did in later years, but it was part of the drill. Sometimes I seemed to make an impression, but at other times I wondered why I bothered. In one Las Vegas radio interview, I was sandwiched between a bunch of ads and some racy gossip news. I kept getting interrupted by the disc jockey who was conducting the interview. He was less than interested. He put on his Big Think cap, and asked what was going on in Washington. But before I could say anything, he would interrupt himself and play ads. In the course of half an hour, I got all of maybe three minutes on the air before the show was over. On the Coast, it was more "responsible," I suppose. I had an interview in Anaheim near Disneyland, and a better one in San Francisco, where I had some connections. A friend in the Asia Foundation helped set up that and a couple of other events. But, after all, I was a junior officer, and nobody was going to pay an awful lot of attention to me. Things like the Non-Aligned Movement and Vietnam were more on their minds than the comments of a fellow coming from Colombo.

We had a couple of close calls. After a television interview in Salt Lake City on the way back East, we headed north into western Wyoming. After about 50 miles, we ran into a blizzard. This was in May. It took us ten hours to do the next 50 miles to Rock Springs, where we knew we could find a trailer park. I was pulling a trailer, watching trucks slide off the road and turn upside down. Somehow, I managed to hold it on the road. We pulled into the trailer camp and the owner told us he had one spot left, and guided us in, and hooked us up. The next morning, we couldn't open the trailer door because it was blocked by snow. We had to stay there for three days because there were eight, nine, and ten-foot drifts. On the second day, the manager came and dug a path to our door. Until then, we were stuck in the trailer. No telephone; no way to communicate. We did have a radio and a little TV, so we knew something about what was going on, but we couldn't get out of the trailer.

We made it back on time, and I reported as an assistant watch officer to the Operations Center in June. At the time, Dean Rusk was Secretary of State and Bruce Lancaster had arrived to take charge of the Operations Center. His deputy was Doug Coster. They made me feel right at home as we searched for a house. Soon, we rented one from another FSO who had transferred abroad. In Arlington, not far from where we are now. At the Department, there was a lot going on. It was the beginning of the notorious Rolling Thunder campaigthe bombing of North Vietnathat was a daily topic in the Secretary's Morning Summary. And Cambodia, I might add, although the Pentagon denied it. During one of my watches in 196I don't remember the datthere was a big uprising in Hue and Da Nang.

Q: Was this a Buddhist?

GRIFFIN: I think it was part of Nguyen Cao Ky's fight against Ngo Dinh Diem. He rose in power at about that time. I remember getting a phone call from Sam Thompson, who was in Hue. He was trying to report what was going on, but about all I could hear was him yelling into his phone, "I'm getting shot at." You could hear guns going off and bullets zinging past him. Secretary Rusk asked us to call in Henry Cabot Lodge, the Ambassador to Saigon, who was on home leave at the time. We found him in Washington, but he was utterly at a loss. He didn't know what to say. He told me to get Political Counselor Phil Habib, who was also on home leave. I found out that he was traveling somewhere in New England. So I called the state police, who tracked him down and got him to a phone. He seemed to be the only one who knew what to do. He cut short his home leave and came in to the Department. I can't recall exactly what happened, but the shooting died down. The situation was just as tentative as things are in Iraq right now, if not more so. Of course we had less troops on the ground at that time, but the numbers rose dramatically in a couple of years.

Shortly after that, Secretary Rusk decided to show off the Op Center, an operation no other agency had around the clocnot even the White House. He invited President Johnson to come over and take a look. He came in one afternoon after delivering a speech up on the 8th Floor, accompanied by USUN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg. I was picked to show them around. At the time we had a bank of teletype machineabout five of them in a row. There was a similar setup in thPresident's office in the White House. The President started reading an FBIS report from North Vietnam, and asked me if it was true. I told him we got such material all the time, and that it was essentially disinformation. He seemed satisfied, but after he left, I got a call from Bob Komer, the Deputy Executive Director of the Department. He said he wanted a full report on the storcomplete background. He wanted an inter-agency report to the White House by 5 o'clock that afternoon. I said, "Look, I just told the President that it is baloney." He said he didn't care what I had said; it was important to get an accurate analysis to the President. I protested that it was a waste of our time, and that we had other, more urgent things to do. He started yelling at me and got my boss, who told me we had to do it. So we did it, but I still thought it was a waste of time.

Watch officers at that point were essentially glorified telephone operators. We channeled action to the bureaus and watched the telegraphic traffic. Later, I was shifted to be an editor, drafting the Secretary's Morning Summary, which was more interesting because we put together the most important news of the past 24 hours, writing up, or at least synthesizing the reports that came in. That could be quite fascinating. For example, there was a communist uprising in Indonesia which threatened that government. It got pretty hairy.

Q: That was when Suharto took over, wasn't it?

GRIFFIN: Yes, it was.

Q: Oh, yes, Marshall Greene was our Ambassador.

GRIFFIN: He certainly was. Then Kwame Nkrumah bit the dust in Ghana. He was a big troublemaker at that time. But, for many of us, the scariest things that happened while I was in the Op Center were the race riots in the U.S. One of our editor's cubicles had a window, from which we could see smoke rising over northeast Washington. I drove around one day through groups of National Guard troops and burned out buildings. We didn't know what was going to happen. It looked like this country was going up in flames.

There was a huge snow storm in February of 1966. I was at home in Arlington when it started, and was supposed to report for the midnight watch. I went out and shoveled snow frantically, but it was coming down faster than I could shovel. I got in my car and tried to bulldoze out of the driveway. But I kept running into a wall of snow about four feet high, and climbing. So I called up the Op Center and told the Senior Watch Officer there was no way I could get there. He agreed, but put on Ebbie Dane, whom I was supposed to relieve. He said it didn't look so bad to him. I said, "You're not in Virginia; I am." He asked where I lived. I told him and, after he learned that a major streePershing Drivwas about 50 yards from my house, he said he would come get me. That road was being cleared, so it wasn't so bad. Ebbie took me to the front door of the Department, and took off. But then he spent the night in a gas station because he couldn't get home.

Our watch team was stuck there for three days and nights because we couldn't get out. Washington was absolutely closed. On the third day, we were getting desperate. Fortunately, there were no major external events going on at the time, because we were too tired to deal with them. There were two cots in a back room where people could get some rest in the middle of a crisis. There were eight or ten of us on duty, and we took turns sleeping, but the cots weren't enough. So, some of us ended up going into Rusk's office, which had some nice sofas. On the third day, he called to say he wanted to come in, and asked us to find a way. He lived in Northwest Washington on Quebec Street in Spring Valley, which was deep in snow. Finally, through a combination of a helicopter and a jeep someone managed to get him out and in to the Department. He came in wearing a sort of lumberjack shirt and a pair of brogans, and stayed for a couple of days. By the time the Secretary called, we were desperate for food, and the cafeteria was shut down. We raided the kitchen and found some stuff in some fridges, but it wasn't enough and ran out pretty fast. We and the telephone operatorthree of them were stuck towere the only people in the building. We broke into several candy machines. We found out later that there was a huge emergency supply in the basement, in case of nuclear attack. There were tons of food, and the key was in our custody, but we didn't know it. So, on the third day we called the nearest restauranHoward Johnson's across from the Watergate. They said that their kitchen was going so they could feed the hotel guests, but their dining room was closed. In the storm, a big sheet of plywood had blown off the Watergate, which was under construction, through the plate glass window in the restaurant, and the place was full of snow. So three of us waded several blocks through chest-high snow, loaded up, and brought back food for everybody. Then the weather cleared. Anyway, it was an interesting place to work. I think I learned a lot because it showed me a wider view of the world.

Q: I think it was sort of the nursery school for people who moved up in the Foreign Service.

GRIFFIN: It was supposed to be.

Q: Well, I mean there was a rigorous selection process.

GRIFFIN: I had thought I should go to the India Desk, or maybe the Italy desk. When I mentioned that one day, Bruce Lancaster told me, "Quit complaining. You were chosen because it looks like you have a bright future. You're one of the favored few, so shut up."

Q: Did you get any feeling of competition or collegiality with those coming out of the CIA at that time?

GRIFFIN: Not at that time. Some of that arose when I was in INR in the 1970s, when we had some problems and bureaucratic tussles. But at that time, because we were about the only organization going around the clock, people would come to us for help. The Morning Summary was considered the best document in town. It also went to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the CIA.

Q: Well the President would read these things. I interviewed Jim Jones, who was his appointments secretary, and later ambassador to Mexico. He used to say you should prepare the reading file for Johnson at night about six inches tall.

GRIFFIN: We were told that he would take our stuff to bed and read it. We had a couple of problems with Vice President Humphrey and his staff. Once in Australia Humphrey made a statement that the President didn't like. We tried to help erase it from the airwaves but it was too late; it was broadcast everywhere. Another time, Humphrey made a speech on the 8th Floor at some dinner. One of his staffers asked us to record it. So I got one of the tape machines from the Op Center. We used them to record telephone conversations when something important was going on. I took it up to the 8th Floor, complete with a tape that hadn't been fully erased. It contained some classified material from a conference call we had earlier in the day, but we couldn't find another tape. I told the staffer I would have to stay by the machine and take it back the minute the Veep was through. He told me I couldn't stay as it was a private meeting. So I left. Of course, when they left they took the tape with them. It took a call from a friend at the White House to get that thing back. I was not enamored of that staffer, to put it mildly.

Q: What was your impression of your colleagues all working with Secretary Rusk?

GRIFFIN: Rusk was a workaholic. He didn't take vacations, and was criticized for it. He had been in Washington for several yearat DoD and in the Department. He lasted eight years as Secretary. By the time he left, I suspect he was so tired he didn't know whether he was coming or going. I had no problem with him personally. He was a reasonable guy, and would ask intelligent questions about what we produced. He was interested in it, and paid close attention, but he worked too hard, and didn't take any time off. He wasn't a relaxed sort of person.

When I got there, Alex Johnson was the Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, or P. Most of the principals were interesting, and were grateful for what we provided. The included people like Nick Katzenbach, Averell Harriman, Bill Crockett, Foy Kohler, Tom Mann, and Eugene Rostow. Several came into the Op Center to ask for things. It was my introduction to the politics of the Seventh Floor. For example, Chester Bowles wanted to be Under Secretary, or even Secretary of State, and was sent off to India instead. He would fire in massive telegrams advising the President what to do about almost any issue around the world. The President, especially Johnson, did not want to see them, and we were told they were not to be distributed to the White House. Rusk certainly didn't want to see them, unless it was the end of the world, or that Ambassador Bowles knew something that he didn't know, which was unlikely. We had a little list of who got what, and who didn't.

Q: Well then in about '67?

GRIFFIN: No, 1966. In June again, a year after I came to the Op Center, I went to NEA as Desk Officer for Ceylon and the Maldive Islands. That was of course the way political officers were supposed to progress; start out as a desk officer or as a political reporter abroad. It was a good job. At least I knew something about it. That was also about the time when the idea of cones was invented. Until then, most of us were generalists. I was summoned to Personnel, where Dave Zweifel and Dennis Kux told me I would make a lousy political officer. Why didn't I become an admin officer or consular officer? I said, "Huh? My bosses say I am doing great work. What do you mean?" What they meant was they needed people in those other cones, and there were too many who wanted to be political officers. So they tried to talk everybody out of it. That just made me want to stick with it. They said, "The competition is fierce." I said, "That doesn't bother me," and I did stick with it.

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

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

Q: She was a Foreign Service officer.

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

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

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

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

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

When I was in Colombo, the Maldivian merchant marine consisted of five ships, mostly coastal steamers, which brought fish to Colombo, and a couple of larger ships which sailed as far as Bombay, Karachi, Singapore, and so forth. Then all of a sudden the merchant fleet expanded, and one day they had 15 ships. Now they may have 6I don't know. Anyway, a huge expansion for a country with almost no money. So I asked Sattar about it over lunch one day. He giggled and said, "Piracy." I asked him to explain. He pointed out that the Maldive archipelago sits squarely on a direct line between Singapore and the Suez Canal. Any ship that tries to go straight can run into one of the atolls, especially careless sailors. Some of them are under water, but very close to the surface. He said the first time it happened, a Norwegian ship came barreling along and ran aground. Some of the natives went out in their canoes to take a look. The skipper asked if there was a tugboat nearby. They told him no, but added that the ship wasn't so badly aground that it couldn't float off at high tide in about 12 hours. They advised him to relax until then, and invited him to come ashore and have a cup of tea with the island's headman. When the captain agreed, they suggested that he bring along everyone; they would have a feast. So, the whole crew clambered down a ladder and were rowed ashore in the little boats. But meanwhile, on the other side of the ship, a group of men was climbing onto the ship. They commandeered it, and said it belonged to them because it had been abandoned. They hoisted a Maldivian flag, and put the captain under house arrest for a few days before allowing him and his men to fly home. Sattar said that was just the beginning.

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

Q: Such is diplomacy.

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

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

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

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

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

I had my own problem at that time. My wife left me during my tour in NEA, so I was not a very happy camper. In due course, I was transferred to IO, the Bureau of International Organizational affairs. I went to IO/UNP, United Nations Political Affairs, as the officer in charge of dependent area affairs. It was a hot potato at that time and seen as a step up for me. Our main issue was in Southern Rhodesia, where Ian Smith had made a unilateral declaration of independence in his effort to retain white majority rule. We had imposed an economic embargo, and tracking that was the biggest part of my job. My beat also included the Portuguese ex-colonies of Mozambique and Angola in southern Africa.

Q: There still were colonies. Up to '74 they were.

GRIFFIN: Yes. The Assistant Secretary in IO when I got there was Joe Sisco. My office director was Elizabeth Brown, who had been running UNP for years. My immediate boss was Don McHenry, who was a division chief. It wasn't my most fascinating job. My predecessor Tom Carolyn had set up the embargo mechanism, so my job was to monitor it. Monitoring was not mentally challenging, though parts of it were mildly engaging, namely the long hours I spent on the so called "gray areas" and on dual use items. I'm sure you worked on some of those yourself. As you know, fertilizer is good for making bombs, and good for growing crops, so we sell it, unless someone can prove that it's being used to make bombs. There were endless arguments about what sort of guns we could export for the police.

Q: And the boots. Are the boots for police or are they for farmers?

GRIFFIN: That's right. The job included trips to New York for General Assembly meetings and working with various UN committees. Joe Sisco, a Foreign Service officer who never had a foreign post in his entire career, moved over to NEA. He was succeeded in IO by Sam De Palma. I never saw much of him while enforcing the embargo at endless meetings, trying to trying to decide what could and couldn't be shipped, arguing about what constituted an embargo, and listening to standard arguments about whether embargoes work.

My colleague Howard Schaffer had moved from the South Asia office to personnel. He decided that I needed to get back out in the field where I could get my teeth into more challenging work. So he had me curtailed in IO and sent to Calcutta, using NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Chris Van Hollen to twist my arm. I didn't particularly want to go anywhere because I wanted to be near my son. But they finally convinced me that it was absolutely necessary. I was needed there. I guess my brother was headed for Vietnam at the time. I argued that I ought to go to Vietnam like everybody else. Chris and Howie said no; I was really needed in South Asia. They prevailed, and I left for Calcutta about a year after I reported to IO. Both Van Hollen and Doug Heck had served there and said it would be one of the best jobs I would ever have. I would be head of the Political Section, which was a step up, and looked pretty good.

That job turned out to be a turning point in my career and in my personal life in many ways. It was a very good job, though it didn't seem so at first. I was primary reporting officer for ten of India's then seventeen states, though some of the states were small. Plus, I had Bhutan and Sikkim, which were semi-independent at the time.

Q: Excuse me. You were in Calcutta from when to when?

GRIFFIN: I got there in September of 1969, and left in August of '72, so I was there for three years. I'll talk about the Bangladesh war later, but now want to get into what preceded it. In 1969, there was lots of ferment in India, especially in the northeast, which was my territory. There was the rise of the so-called Naxalites. They were extreme communists, supposedly faithful to Beijing, as opposed to Moscomuch more extreme than the Trotskyites. Murder was their program of choice. If they could get to Indian officials, they would kill them. And they certainly didn't like American officials. It was essentially terrorism, but they had a fair amount of support in the countryside among poor people. They were a huge movement, and got along with the communist parties.

Bengal was the headquarters of the Communist Party of India-Marxist, as opposed to the Communist Party of India. There were at least five communist parties in West Bengal. So I decided to make a study in depth. I used to go see the head of the CPI-M, Jyoti Basu, who wouldn't talk much to other Westerners. I would go to his house at about five o'clock in the morning as he was having what they call "bed tea." It was the only time he would see me; maybe he didn't want anybody else to see me with him. He eventually became Chief Minister of West Bengal, as I predicted. Everybody else had doubts because he is a Communist.

Anyway, the Naxalites became such a huge problem that Mrs. Gandhi finally sent in the Indian army. Sam Manikshaw was Chief of Staff of the Indian Army at the tima four star generaand was given a fifth star during the Bangladesh war. He is a Parsi, and a really interesting guy. I saw him often during his visits to Calcutta, as I had made good contacts with the head of the Eastern Army Command, his deputy, and other Indians who were friends of his. He taught me a lot, taught Mrs. Gandhi a lot, taught many people a lot about how an army does security work on its own soil. He made a speech to a big crowd in Calcutta warning people that he was coming with force. He said we are the Army. We don't know how to do police work. We won't arrest you; we will shoot you. If you get in our way, you are going to be dead. Make no mistake, it is not going to be pretty. We will not waste time arresting people. If you stand up against us, we will shoot you with whatever firepower we can muster. He marched the army through Calcutta, which is a hard place to march because it's so crowded, but he did it. Literally, in two months he broke the back of the Naxalite movement. It still exists. It still exists in the countryside, but is being handled mostly by police now.

Manikshaw was clever, and he mounted an effective campaign. There may be some lessons in that for us today. Several human rights people complained. Some democrats in India were upset about martial law. Mrs. Gandhi's response was that it certainly was martial law, and that the army was put in charge because the police couldn't hack it. But the Naxalites still exist in both India and in Nepal, so they are not totally under control.

In the period leading up to the 1971 Bangladesh war, we got to know the Chogyal and Gyalmo of Sikkim. The Gyalmo was an American named Hope Cooke from New York, who happened to be an acquaintance of my wife. We used that tie to wangle an invitation up for?

Q: You are remarried by this time.

GRIFFIN: Yes, I should have mentioned that. I did remarry. A lovely young lady from Washington came to see me in Calcutta, and stayed. We were married in Kathmandu.

Anyway we were invited to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, for a New Years' celebration in January. We were personal guests of Chogyal and his wife. The price of admission was an American turkey for their family New Years' dinner, which I managed to import from Denmark or someplace. The traditional ceremonies in the celebrations were very colorful, moving, and fascinating in a sort of Himalayan way. Unfortunately, the Chogyal was a nice guy who was beginning to fail. Hope Cooke wasn't much help to him. I don't know if you ever met her, but she leads tours of New York these days. She had learned a tradition that says one may not speak loudly in the presence of the king, so she whispered. I couldn't hear her very well, and had the worst time trying to figure out what she was talking about. It was made worse by the fact that she would whisper behind her hand. But the Chogyal was into the sauce. He would start with brandy at ten in the morning and, never quit. He eventually was thrown out. The Indians essentially marched in and took over the country. They said the Chogyal was a dictator, and that Sikkim couldn't be run by Sikkimese. Now, he's dead. It was a sad story. It was a beautiful little spot.

I also worked on Bhutan. Ambassador Keating had been to Bhutan a year before I got to Calcutta. He had been flown up in an Indian Army helicopter. The capital of Bhutan moves, according to where the king is. Thimpu seemed to be used most. The next yeathe year I got therKeating asked for the same facilities to go back to Bhutan. The Indians replied that they would assign another helicopter to take him, but that it would not be free. They said it would cost $7,000. The Ambassador didn't have that much in his travel budget and couldn't get it out of Washington, so he decided not to go, hoping to shame them into offering it free. It didn't work. So the Embassy decided to send three of us by the cheapest means available. Political Counselor Lee Stull, Harmon Kirby, a second secretary in the Political Section, and I went by USG car. Actually we flew to Siliguri, where we were met by a Consulate vehicle that took us the rest of the way.

At that time, there were no tourist facilities in Bhutano hotels, no inns, nothing. The only way to go was by royal invitation, which meant staying in a royal guest house. They were quite charming to look at from the outside but they had no heat. It was cold. I think it was in the spring or fall, but we are talking 6-8,000 feet. They did have running water, and servants to build a fire under the boiler. The best way to get warm was to take a shower and leap into bed under a big quilt. It is a friendly, beautiful country, totally unspoiled, rather like 16th century Switzerland.

The first night, we got only as far as the border village of Phuntsholing, where there was a royal guest house, with four Swiss men already there. They were all entomologistbug chasers. They explained that nobody had ever catalogued the bugs in Bhutan. They were invited under the special relationship between Switzerland and Bhutan. It is called the Switzerland of the East for very good reasons, including high mountains. They had special permission to catalogue Bhutan's insects.

Phuntsholing is down in the lowlands, in the terai part of Bhutan. After supper, the Swiss asked us to let them turn on all the lights, open all the windows, take down all the screens and see what they could catch. We were invaded big time. Stuff whizzing around. They were the happiest Swiss I have ever seen. They had big barrels of cotton wool and gallons of formaldehyde. Ever bug they caught was thrown into a barrel. They filled up four the first night. We crossed paths with them for the next week all over Bhutan. Everywhere that we went, they went.

Q: Was there any political concern about Bhutan? Were we looking at any relationship?

GRIFFIN: Yes. We wanted the Bhutanese to vote favorably on issues of concern to the United States at the United Nations. We were there in 1969 or maybe '70. Memories were still very fresh of the Chinese invasion of northeast India in 1962. We were guests of the King, though the Queen was the one whom we met, and who organized our itinerary. The King never made himself available to us, perhaps because we weren't the Ambassador. We stayed in her guest house in Paro, and in his in Thimpu. Our escort officer was a young foreign service officer. He took us to an isolated village to show us some old stone fortifications, rather like Rumeli Hisar in Istanbul. There was a wall that went down to a river bed. He said this was where the Bhutanese had stopped the last Tibetan invasion. We looked rather surprised, so he went on to describe the invasion, and to stress that the Bhutanese were tougher and stronger than the awful Tibetans, who were egged on by the Chinese, of course. He said the Tibetans had guns, but the Bhutanese only had bows and arrows. Now the Bhutanese at that time were world famous archerand still are. Anyway, he claimed that their bows and arrows in this fort had stopped the Tibetans, though they did torch the village. He showed us some of the damage. I asked him for the date of this battle, assuming it was a couple of hundred years ago. He replied that it was only ten years before the Chinese incursion in 1962. Nonetheless, the Indians were concerned that the Chinese might march through Bhutan, though they know that marching through Bhutan is a whole lot easier said than done. It is really almost impossible because of the Himalayan terrain.

One morning we watched some archery contests. The contestants were hitting bulls eyes literally a hundred yards away. I don't know how they did it. We called on several ministers, including the Minister of Tourism. He asked us for advice, noting that the only foreign exchange Bhutan was earning was from the sale of postage stamps. The postage stamps were all made in Philadelphia, which cost foreign exchange, so the net gain was not very much. He said the King wanted to bring in tourists. I jumped in to advise him to study the different experiences of Nepal and Sikkim. I argued that Bhutan should not follow the Nepal model. That would bring in nothing but very low-rent tourists. I said, "You don't want that." Secondly, I advised against Sikkim's example in road building, in which the Indians used too much dynamite, causing massive rock slides and killing hundreds of workers. I urged him to charge their tourists lots of money. That way, they could afford to build hotels. I said Bhutan is a beautiful country, which could attract plenty of tourists, but they should make sure that the quality of those tourists is high and that they are people who will spend lots of money. He said, "Good point." So, instead of having a free stay at the royal guest house, we were socked with a steep bill as we were leaving. He took my advice to heart, and Bhutan's tourism has done exactly what I proposed. You can't spend less than $2,000 in the country, even for two days. And they have preserved the quite spectacular natural beauty of the place.

One evening, we were invited to the home of the Indian Political Officethe equivalent of an ambassadofor dinner. One of the guests was an Indian mountain climber. He was an Army colonel, who commanded the Indian Army Mountain Warfare School in Kashmir. He bragged that he had just climbed Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world, east of Everest, on the China border. He showed us some slides of the climb, which was supposed to be secret. The mountain is considered sacred by the Bhutanese, and the official line remains that no one has ever climbed it. Moreover, the Chinese didn't want Indians climbing it because it overlooked Tibet. The mountain has a cliff face on the north side, which is considered unclimbable. The Chinese wanted to climb it themselves, but that is possible only through Sikkim or Bhutan, and the Indians wouldn't let them. The colonel said that, if the Chinese had learned about his expedition, they would have considered it a spy mission. Two Chinese military basean airbase and an army bascan be seen from the peak. We decided not to publicize it.

Just west of Bhutan in Sikkim is the Natu La Pass, a place that General Westmoreland visited when he was in Vietnam. He was trying to develop programs with the Indians to spy on China. He was driven up to Natu La, which is at 14,000 feet, because helicopters can barely make it and the weather was bad. Westmoreland was worried about the narrow roads where, when two vehicles met, they had to stop and inch by each other, with a cliff on one side and a long drop on the other. He asked his host if they ever lost vehicles. The Indian general slapped him on the knee and said, "You ought to see it! Bloom, bloom, bloom! Trucks make a bigger noise than jeeps. Every day we lose some!" He said that part of it was altitude acclimation. At 14,000 feet, some troops can't function.

Before the Bangladesh war, our Consulate General was already watching over the border into then-East Pakistan. Archer Blood was our Consul General in Dacca, and his political officer was Scott Butcher. We made jokes about Blood and Butcher as things began going badly wrong there. In 1971, the East Bengalis were up in arms because they had been robbed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the elections. Their man Sheikh Mujib had won the election nationwide by the numbers, but Bhutto convinced Ayub Khan and other West Pakistanis not to give Mujib a chance to run Pakistan. The idea of a Bengali as head of the Government of Pakistan was something they really couldn't tolerate. They are really rather racist about Bengalis in West Pakistan. So things were in ferment, to put it mildly, and the Pakistan Army was rather stupidly cracking down. In mid-1971 we started getting waves of refugees into northeastern India. At one point it reached a figure of ten million, according to the Indians. We tried to check that figure several ways, and I must say I couldn't argue with it. Huge numbers of people. I went many times to the border area, where there were enormous refugee camps. I took several American politicians there, including Senator Ted Kennedy. He and Republican Congressman Peter Frelinghuysen from New Jersey were the most interested and involved at the time.

When things really got bad, we began to see American refugees as well. They realized it was unsafe for them as well, especially the missionaries. Some had been there so long that their teenaged kids had never been outside of East Pakistan in their lives. They weren't sure what to do, but Arch Blood and his staff advised them to get out because the way things were going it looked like there was going to be blood everywhere, so they agreed to leave. We had our hands full helping refugees, but I still had to report on the situation. As the crisis grew, a lot of American reporters began to arrive. By the time the war broke out, there were well over 400 of them in Calcutta. My boss assigned me as the chief Consulate briefer for them. That was quite useful to me, because we shared information. Some of them remain friends today.

I should mention that my Consul General at the time was Herb Gordon. He had been Political Counselor in New Delhi, and then was transferred directly to Calcutta. My first Deputy Principal Officer was Slator Blackiston, an Arabist who had transferred from Qatar. He came to India because several posts in the Arab world were closed after the '67 war, leaving less assignments available for officers who had spent most of their time in that area. Slator was not a happy camper, and his first efficiency report on me was not a good one. I complained because I watched the Consul General sign it without reading it. He was getting into a car to go to the airport on home leave and didn't read it before he signed it. So I filed an official grievance. I was advised by a friend in Washington who worked in that office not to do that because it would identify me as a trouble maker. Maybe; but I was right, and the result was a special inspection team from the Inspector General's office. By the time they arrived, the war was getting hot. I was up to my eyeballs in alligators, as they say, trying to cope with frantic reporting and briefing. One day an inspector stuck his head in my office and said, "Mr. Griffin, we've been trying for four days to interview you." I said, "I'm busy. I have to get out a Flash message." He insisted, telling me that their whole purpose was me. He said if I didn't talk to him, I would soon be out of a job. I got the message. I not only stayed and was promoted repeatedly, but the CG lost his career. So I was vindicated, and it was good for me. But not for him, I fear.

Q: Did we talk about Bengal, I mean the consular district of Calcutta. You mentioned your contacts. I was wondering because I would think that as overwhelming poverty is around you, it has to gnaw at your soul.

GRIFFIN: It does. And yet, let me make a broad observation. India gets two kinds of visitors, including us foreigners who live there for a few years. One type is people who are so put off by poverty that they really get ill and can't stand it, and want to run away from it as fast as they can. The other is those who see it, but say well, maybe something can be done about it. They see the other side of that coithe more colorful India, the hospitable India, the friendly India. I fall into the second category. We have many Indian friends. Indians and Americans have almost the same image abroathat is, arrogant and not very nice, until you get to know them. Anybody who comes to America and spends time, especially in the middle of the country, will say, "Oh, Americans are so friendly. Everybody says hello to you. Everywhere you go, people are friendly and say hi." It's rather similar in India.

Before I forget, I should say here that our daughter Schuyler was born at a very nice hospital in Calcutta during the lead-up to the Bangladesh war. She has returned to India a few times over the years, and enjoys it as much as Chrissie and I do.

Now, about the poverty there. What do you do about it? Well, for one thing, we have official programs trying to do something about it. We did make a huge difference a couple of times in India. There was a famine in 1966 in eastern India, especially in Bihar, the state just west of Bengal, and in Orissa, just south of therboth grain growing areas. They had a long drought, and people were starving by the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. We mounted a huge PL-480 grain shipment program, which saved lots of lives. People were still grateful for it when I got there in 1969. There were many other programs. But things got reversed during the Bangladesh war when Mrs. Gandhi shut down our USIS libraries and said she didn't need any more PL-480 aid, thank you very much. That situation was eventually cleared up by Ken Galbraith when he was Ambassador. He managed to strike an agreement which absolved the Indian debt of nine billion dollars to the U.S. That turned attitudes around. So we have done a lot for India over time. The USIS libraries didn't come back, but I think you can see that in today's India, it hasn't stopped Indians from finding out about American culture.

Q: What about sort of the standard parties, the congress parties and the other parties?

GRIFFIN: Well, as I said, Calcutta was a hotbed of communism. If you lived in Calcuttthat goes back to your question about povertyou would know why. Most people are very poor. Estimates of the number of people sleeping on the streets varies from three to seven hundred thousand every night. Some of them have another place they could sleep, so they are there by choice. But the choice may be a hot-as-hell little room, or the much cooler street. This means that they also do what you would call toilet functions on the street, with no privacy. Yes that gets to you. But, on the other hand, we knew that begging was a racket in Calcutta huge racket, and some of the beggars live very well. I wouldn't call them wealthy, but they certainly have homes off the street. There was a guy with no legs and no arms on a little cart every day at the main intersection in Calcutta. He went home to a nice house and family every night. He spent his days on the street begging, and collected a fair amount of money. So there is that, but after awhile you start to ignore that part of it.

Yes, we had what my wife thought was an inordinate number of servants. But when you stop to think about it, we had two full time servants, and then when she had a baby, we got a third. When you figure how many others those people were supporting, we were the sole income for 36 people. The sweeper, who was from Orissa, didn't have his family in Calcutta. He sent money home, rather like Hispanic immigrants do here today. We led the charge in raising salaries, to the consternation of some people in the Consulate who thought we were already paying too much.

Of course, poverty led to some of the politics. But the Communist Party was also strong in southern and western India. As was the Congress party, which lost Bengal to the CPI-M. They thought it would come back, but they lost in Bihar and the next state west, Uttar Pradesh, which are the biggest Hindi-speaking states. They were the core of the Congress Party for years and years. That has changed. They have become BJP supporters. The Communist Party may have won because one of its tenets is secularism. The BJP is promoting Hinduism. That won't fly with most Indians. They don't want their politics to be religious. They have watched Pakistan, and say they don't want to be like it. There are many Muslims in Calcutta. Some of them are people who didn't want to live in East Pakistan. They may be on the low end of the economic scale, but they are there nonetheless.

Q: So what was going on in East Pakistan?

GRIFFIN: Archer Blood, the Consul General in Dhaka, got in trouble for honest reporting. We heard that he ran afoul of Ambassador Joseph Farland in Islamabad, a political appointee and former Coca Cola Company executive. Arch was accused of going native and siding too much with the Bengalis. But then things began to snowball. Refugees started coming across into India, fleeing from the fighting. In the monsoon season, which would have been in June, July, and maybe August of 1971, hundreds of thousands of refugees streamed into West Bengal and Assam, as well as further north and east into Tripura and Burma. I went out to the West Bengal border one day, and found the land flooded as far as the eye could see. On the water were hundreds of rowboats loaded with people and their belongings, piled as high as they could without sinking, all looking for dry ground. At about the same time, resident Americans began to leave East Pakistan. The families of Consulate General personnel in Dacca were evacuated. Political Officer Scott Butcher pouched me all his biographic files for safekeeping.

At some point, it was evident that the Indians were planning a military move into East Pakistan. They closed air corridors between East and West Pakistan, so the Pakistanis had to fly around the southern tip of India to get from one side to the other. Tensions kept building up. A large group of American missionaries was evacuated by ship from Cox's Bazaar and Chittagong to Calcutta, where we helped them find temporary lodging and onward transportation. Then the American press began to appear. The first one was a journalist with whom I'm still in toucBarrie Dunsmore. He was an ABC TV News correspondent stationed in Rome, and came out to see how big a story was developing. His trip led to others and, eventually, at the height of the war, there were something like 800 American correspondents in Calcutta. So as these events mounted, I dropped my scheduled tasks and focused entirely on the East Pakistan crisis.

The outflow of refugees increased steadily in the Fall of 1971, climbing to an estimated total of ten million people at one point. Several Senators and Congressmen came out to check on the situation. One was Republican Representative Peter Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, who was Chairman of the Near East/South Asia Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Another was Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts. I took them out to refugee camps, as far as we were allowed to go. We weren't allowed into Assam or Tripura, so they only saw what was in West Bengal. More journalists came, and started getting in trouble. And then things got even more interesting for me.

Among the refugees was a group of politicians...

Q: Who would be Bengali politicians?

GRIFFIN: That's right. East Bengali politicians. They got together in Calcutta and formed a Bangladesh government in exile. In the midst of this, in early July 1971, Henry Kissinger made his secret trip to China to prepare the way for President Nixon. He came first to India and then to West Pakistan, where he disappeared for several days. We heard that he had fallen ill, but thought he was trying to talk sense to General Yahya and address other urgent problems of South Asia. Later we learned that he had other things on his mind.

In any case, it was decided in Washington (after a proposal by the Indian Ambassador there, and with the concurrence of Ambassador Farland in Islamabad) to respond positively to a feeler from the East Pakistanis in Calcutta. The Department instructed the post to give them a message, and I was selected to do it in secret meetings with a representative of the Bangladesh government in exile. The Department said it would be too official if the Consul General did so. This caused me instant problems with the Indian police tasked with keeping an eye on us. They may not have been fully briefed by New Delhi, and began to track my every movement. I almost couldn't go to the bathroom without being followed, which got to be very irritating. I found a way to evade them and meet the Bangladeshi the first time, which they didn't like. At the same time, I was building better access to senior Indian officials. That included all the military commanderfrom Indian Army chief General Sam Manikshaw, to Eastern Commander General Arora, to his deputy Lieutenant General Jackie Jacoand the governors and chief ministers of West Bengal and the other states, plus Calcutta Police Chief Ranjit Gupta, whose men were assigned to follow me.

Q: Did New Delhi have a problem?

GRIFFIN: I have never tracked this down fully, but the East Pakistanis in exilthey thought up the name Bangladeswere probably, if not put together by, at least facilitated by New Delhthe Government of Indiwhich didn't want an American diplomat nosing around their handiwork. I wasn't authorized to negotiate with anybody; I was essentially a messenger. I carried messages to and from the Bangladesh exiles. Henry Kissinger wrote about all this in his book "White House Years." Years later, he autographed my copy and wrote "Thanks for your help, George" in the margin.

Meanwhile, the war drums kept pounding. The Indians were playing a cat-and-mouse game with us. They wanted us to know certain things, but not others, so we played along while trying to find out what we were missing. The journalists were all over me too, realizing that I knew some things they didn't know. I encouraged them, because they knew other things I wanted to know. For example, they would sneak across the border during or after Indian military activities, and then come back and tell me about it. So I had a fair exchange of information with some top American and British reporters that you know or have heard of. It got to be quite a mob scene. My office wouldn't hold them all. I had to give them appointments to see me in small groups. It was the only way I could get my other work done.

Q: As you were doing this and acting, as you say, as reporter and as messenger, were you getting any feel for what the State Department was doing? It had this kind of opening which was the apple of the National Security Advisor's, Henry Kissinger's, eye.

GRIFFIN: Well, there are several ways to say it. We were at the end of the food chain. From our perspective, the Department, Embassy New Delhi, and Embassy Islamabad were squabbling about what our stance should be. In particular, Ambassadors Farland (in Islamabad) and ex-Senator Kenneth Keating (in New Delhi) seemed to us to be snarling at each other. We kept adding free advice to our reports that we should all cooperate, as we're on the same team. But differing views has been a problem between those two embassies ever since Pakistan was created. Embassy New Delhi finally arranged a meeting, asking Islamabad to send its political counselor. He didn't come, but his deputy dimy friend Bill Simmons. I was invited too, so I went to Delhi and sat in a series of meetings mostly chaired by Lee Stull, the Political Counselor. Dick Viets was the Ambassador's staff aide at the time, and Galen Stone was the DCM. They and lots of others, including the CIA station chief, got involved. But we ran into a buzz saw. Bill Simmons said Ambassador Farland was upset because we didn't grasp that East Pakistan was internal Pakistani business. He suggested that we shut up and do our jobs tracking India, which seemed primed to attack our CENTO ally Pakistan. We said, "Wait a minute!" I'm still a friend of Bill's.

Frustrated, I went back to Calcutta and kept doing my job. One evening my wife and I were invited to supper a trois by the deputy commandant of Eastern Command, a fascinating gentleman named Major General J. F. R. Jacob. After the war, he was promoted, and became the highest ranking Jew ever in the Indian Armsomething he is rightly proud of. He's from Bombay and is now a senior member of the ruling BJP. Jackie and I got to be pretty thick after a couple of false starts. At supper that night he showed us some of his prized Chinese artifacts, and we talked a lot about art. Finally, he said, "Don't you have to go to the bathroom? Go through the bedroom." It took me a few moments to understand, but once in his bedroom I found a huge map of the region on his wall?

Q: A large map, yes.

GRIFFIN: ...on which all of the Indian military formations were carefully plotteall of them. I didn't have a camera, but I had a pretty good memory. I studied the map for as long as I dared, then raced to the Consulate and filed the news that there were troops where we didn't know there were troops, and many more than we had thought. Jacob was a disciple of the storied German General Heinz Guderian, who revolutionized armored warfare in World War II, and what the Indians did was rather remarkable. They took over East Pakistan almost without firing a shot. They did it by transporting an entire division across the Brahmaputra River by tank. Tanks that could swim. Soviet tanks. They did it covertly. Nobody tracked them. I guess we didn't have good real-time satellite imagery in those days, and didn't pick it up until I saw his map. It showed a whole division east of the Brahmaputra River that we didn't know about. They just rolled into Dacca one day, and that was it. The Pakistanis surrendered or fled in various ways. The Indians let some of them go without shooting them, but most were sent back to the West Wing, as it had been called before, by ship and plane.

Q: Was there concern on our part about the brutality of the West Pakistani troops in the East?

GRIFFIN: Quite a bit, and every time Embassy Islamabad said it was an internal Pakistani affair we sent in a report showing how those "internal" problems had spilled over into India. People were fleeing in all directions from the nastiness, including several million refugees who came in India and into our consular district. We couldn't count them, but we certainly saw refugees as far as the eye could see on the many occasions we went to the border in West Bengal. There were many Americans and other foreigners who came out of East Pakistan to Calcutta and spoke to us. There were lots of photographs and enough other evidence to document the brutality of the West Pakistanis. Later, when I was transferred to Islamabad, I met some East Bengalis who had been in the government in West Pakistan. They were locked up during the war and eventually repatriated, but they had some horror tales of their own to tell.

Q: The whole time you were there was a time of great concern about Vietnam. How was this playing in Calcutta and with the Indians?

GRIFFIN: The Indians didn't like our involvement in Vietnam. One of their top diplomats was a representative on the international observer group.

Q: ICC or something.

GRIFFIN: Yes, so they were paying close attention. Now, as an asidremind me to come back to the USS Enterprismy second marriage took place in Kathmandu.

Q: I don't want to go into details obviously about the separation from your first wife...

GRIFFIN: Yes, and divorce.

Q: So were you in Calcutta by yourself?

GRIFFIN: Initially.

Q: That allowed you time to go out and do all this.

GRIFFIN: That's right.

Q: In times of crises, this is very handy.

GRIFFIN: Until a very pretty American girl showed up several months after I arrived and decided to stay. I won't get into all that, although it's quite a funny story. After a couple of months, we agreed to get married, but that proved not to be feasible in Calcutta, so she took off. She went first to Kathmandu, where I gave her an introduction to my old boss in NEA, Ambassador Carol Laise. When she told Carol that we wanted to get married, which seemed impossible in Calcutta, she said, "You can get married here. Tell George to come up." So I did, and we tied the knot in Carol's living room, where she and Ellsworth Bunker were married. The reason I mention this is because you asked about Vietnam. You may recall that, as a wedding present, President Johnson gave them an Air Force plane to visit each other, which they did with some frequency. The Government of India insisted that every flight stop in Calcutta on the way to and from Kathmandu and Saigon. So, partly because they had been so helpful to us, I made sure I was at Dum Dum Airport each time the plane landed. So I saw quite a bit of both Ambassadors Bunker and Laise in Calcutta. He had been Ambassador to India in the 1950s, and was well known in New Delhi. The Indians often wanted to talk to him officially, and sometimes sent a minister from New Delhi to meet with him at Dum Dum. So sometimes the extent of my conversation with him was, "Hello, Mr. Ambassador. The Minister here wants to talk to you." So yes, New Delhi was paying attention. Moreover, there was speculation that, if the Indians invaded East Pakistan, it would become their Vietnam because there was no way they could control it. But they were clever enough to go in, throw out the West Pakistanis, and then get out themselves.

Q: As you were seeing this develop, was this a scenario that India may annex the whole thing?

GRIFFIN: Yes, some people expected that would happen. But to me, it was clear that the Indian military did not want to do that, and was advising its political leadership that it wouldn't work. It would be far too difficult to control the East Bengalis. One Indian general, probably the head of Eastern Command, General Arora, who is a Sikh, told me, "If the West Pakistanis, who are also Muslims, can't control those people, we surely cannot, and we shouldn't try." There were no Bengalis at the top of the Indian military; the generals were all from other parts of India. But even the West Bengalis were saying, with some dismay, "Well, you know, they're Bengalis like us. So they're hard to control."

Q: Bengalis within the state of India were sort of a difficult lump to digest?

GRIFFIN: And proud of it. Calcutta was the capital of British India until 1911, and some Bengalis think it still is. I was given a crash course in Hindi a few weeks before I went to Calcutta. Once there, I was accorded a teacher to continue lessons. I quickly discovered that it was useless, because the only state in our consular district where Hindi was spoken was Bihar. Even there, they preferred Bihari. And Bengalis absolutely refused to speak it. English was fine, but not Hindi; no. So I saw no reason to keep learning it while living in Bengal, and dropped the Hindi lessons. After awhile I didn't have time anyway.

At the time, the population of West Bengal was somewhere around 46 million. Now, it is probably close to 90 million. The population of East Pakistan was close to 80 million at that time, so the Hindus would have been outnumbered by Muslims, something they certainly didn't want.

In any case, the war was over and done with very quickly. It began on the 16th of December 1971, and was over by Christmas Eve. Christina and I had invited some of the American journalists over for Christmas, trying to make them feel at home, but they realized the war was over, and they were gone. Only a handful stayed around to report on the mopping up.

Q: Was there fighting along any of the other borders of India and Pakistan, or was it pretty well...?

GRIFFIN: Yes, in the West there was some reciprocal bombing, and a few tank and artillery battles, especially in Punjab, in the southern deserts, and some in Kashmir. But most of the activity was in the East. The Pakistanis could not fight a two-front war, as their supply lines were too extended to reach their troops in the East Wing.

Q: It's an impossible situation.

GRIFFIN: The Pakistanis sent all their warplanes to Iran when things got hot because they didn't want them destroyed by the Indian Air Force. They were far outnumbered and, while they consider themselves better pilots and dogfighters than the Indians, they knew the Indian equipment was more massive, some of it was newer, and they couldn't afford to lose their best equipment. Basically, the Pakistanis were armed by us, and the Indians by the Soviets. When we suspended our military assistance program, the Pakistanis turned to China.

Q: When this was started, did the Indians make their intentions known that they were going to help create a state, or was this sort of up in the air?

GRIFFIN: It was certainly not clear to me at first. But evidently someone in Washington thought it was in the cards. In the midst of the war, I got a call from one of the generals at Eastern Command asking why we were sending an aircraft carrier into the Bay of Bengal. I asked Embassy New Delhi what was going on. Ambassador Keating in turn called the State Department and, in much more colorful language, asked if it were true. It turned that the USS Enterprise had been ordered into the Bay of Bengal without informing the Ambassador. He was livid.

Q: This was, of course, Henry Kissinger trying to send a signal. It's one of those stupid diplomatic moves that didn't do anything, but it sounded like a guy who was trying to manipulate things.

GRIFFIN: It was supposed to be a show of force. To warn the Indians that if they invaded we would do something. Well, we didn't do anything. The ship went a short way into the Bay of Bengal, then turned around and left. That was it. They didn't fly a plane off it, as far as I know. But nobody told us about it until it was almost over with.

Q: Did that tilt towards Pakistan that came out later, did that hit you while you were there?

GRIFFIN: Yes, and Kissinger argues that that was the only thing that saved all of Pakistan from being invaded by India. There certainly was talk at that time that the Indians would go all the way, just as there is right this minute, with the Indians growling again at the Pakistanis for the latest shoot-'em-up in Kashmir. It always comes up. They have fought two and a half wars, so it's not unusual for the idea to come up. But most of my Indian contacts would argue what I said earliethat Pakistan is indigestible. India is already the world's second largest Muslim country and has a big enough problem with it. Do they want to absorb more? No.

Q: It doesn't make any sense. While you were there, because it's still hanging around, what was your feeling, and your colleagues' who were sort of Indian hands and South Asian hands, about Kashmir, the equity of this? How did you feel about this?

GRIFFIN: In Calcutta I was paying little attention to Kashmir, except in the context of the eastern mini-states in my territory. That is, Nagaland Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya, and the other small, money-poor states up there. Some of them had a status similar to Kashmir, though Kashmir is an entirely different case. But no, I didn't get into that issue until I was transferred to Pakistan, where it was almost topic number one.

At a Congress Party meeting in Patna, the capital of Bihar, I was brought over to meet Prime Minister Gandhi. I asked her about the status of those northeastern territories. The subject was fresh to me because we were dealing with a request from Billy Graham, the evangelist, to go to Assam to preach. I knew that, in Mrs. Gandhi's eyes, American missionaries were responsible for a lot of the troubles in those parts, pushing people to agitate for independence, or at least self-governing status within the Indian Republic. Some of our contacts were bemoaning the fact that some of the tribal languages, costumes, and customs were disappearing. I asked her what she thought about that. She said, "It is part of India, and must be fully integrated. Everybody there is an Indian; not a Naga; not an Assamese. They must have loyalty to the nation first." She didn't tell me that that should include learning Hindi, but she certainly talked that way in public speeches.

However, she did add, "If you are arguing for keeping these people clean or pure tribals, then why should an American missionary go there?" She said he would be doing the same thing that any Indian political officer would do. She meant that both would try to change the tribals, something I couldn't argue with. During the same period, there were some incidents in Orissa, which have been reflected in recent news. Do you remember last year when an American missionary and his son were killed along a road in Orissa?

Q. Yes, I do.

GRIFFIN: Well, we had some similar problems there. I remember Consul General Herb Gordon lecturing one of the missionaries who came to see him. The missionary said the lives of his group were in danger, and asked my boss to send officers there to check on the situation and protect them. The CG asked exactly what they were doing, saying he presumed they were proselytizing. The missionary said, no, they were helping the poor, and sometimes told people a bit about the Bible and about what God can do. The CG said that proved his point. They were proselytizing, which they knew was prohibited in India. He said there was not much we could do to help them. The man was furious. He wrote back to his headquarters in the U.S., and his church complained to the Department, but nobody ordered us to do anything, and I don't think they should have. This is something that will come up again and again, given the beliefs of some of our major politicians today. Moreover, the Department now has people working on these issues.

Q: How did you find dealing with the people in Calcutta, the officials and all? Were they a different breed of cat from what you, I guess, experienced later on? The New Delhi bureaucrats who were sort of superior? American and the Indian officials don't seem to mix very well.

GRIFFIN: At a personal level, all over India, we still have lots of friends. Most Indians are very hospitable and warm, and we still stay in touch with many of them. Indians in general, and especially Indians abroad, are like Americans. They appear arrogant, they know everything, they are not always very nice people, so you don't think you want to know them. But if you do get to know thethe same with Americanyou can find good friends. Of the officials and politicians that I encountered, I found the Bengalis the easiest to deal with. For example, Jyoti Basu, the leader of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), a supposed Maoist offshoot of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of India. He eventually was elected Chief Minister of West Bengal, a job he kept for 20-odd years. As Country Director for India, I went back to see him a couple of times. He was a typical Bengali politician. Okay, he had a Communist label, but he was a politician in the same way that any of his counterparts, the governors of American states, is. I may have made a mistake in arguing that he was a nationalist a la Ho Chi Minh. He knew his people, came from there, and dealt with them accordingly. I said we should almost forget the party label in the case of someone who knew what was best for the people of Bengal. He certainly did. He cleaned up much of the mess in the stata mess left to him by the Congress Party, which had gotten old and tired and corrupt. I wrote a long airgraa useful format that no longer exists, thanks to computerdescribing the underlying causes of the rise of the communists and the decline of the Congress Party, that Tony Quainton, then India Desk Officer, tried to help me publish in a scholarly journal.

Q: Were we sort of observing the atrophying of the Congress Party?

GRIFFIN: I think so. They have kept going. The Congress Party still exists. But when you have to turn to an Italian stewardess to head the Party, something's wrong, it seems to me.

Q: This is Rajiv Gandhi's wife, Sonia.

GRIFFIN: Yes, Sonia Gandhi. While she has not become Prime Minister, she has become head of the Congress Party. I still don't think she will be elected Prime Minister. Back to Calcutta: of course I knew the local Congress Party leadership too. One of them, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, eventually came here as Ambassador when I was Country Director in the early 1990's. While at first he wasn't happy to see me, we became decent friends and got along fine. Yes, the Party had gone to sleep, and was getting ossified.

Q: Did you feel you were a different breed of cat in Calcutta than our political officers in Delhi?

GRIFFIN: I guess I always behaved a bit differently from some of my colleagues. Maybe that's what got me in trouble and got me the CIA label. I can be a bit pushy when I try to meet people and get information. For years, I prided myself on the number of people I knew, and among them the relatively large number with whom I could have fruitful conversations. That said, there were excellent political officers in New Delhi. I knew and dealt with them all, and some I still see. Harman Kirby, for example, came to lunch last Sunday. In 1970, he had the eastern India bailiwick, and some external affairs, such as Pakistan. That is why he was in that meeting in New Delhi, along with his boss, Lee Stull, the political counselor. That's why I went with both of them to Bhutan. I haven't mentioned those sidebars.

Q: Well, why don't you mention Bhutan.

GRIFFIN: Ambassador Keating was accredited to Bhutan as well as India. He had made annual visits to the mountain kingdom by Indian Army helicopter. The Consulate had a watching brief for Bhutan and Sikkim, so I knew the Bhutanese and the Sikkimese official representatives in Calcutta. They both had offices there, as each Indian state, for example, has an office in New Delhi and a guest house where the chief minister stays when he goes to the capital. The Ambassador was planning to go to Bhutan again in 1970 until the Indians, who flew him there before gratis, told the Embassy it would cost $7,000, or something like that. Apparently there wasn't that much in the Ambassador's travel budget. He didn't want to go by road, and asked the Bhutanese for help, but they didn't have a helicopter. When he decided that somebody needed to go, Lee Stull volunteered, and asked Harman Kirby and me to go with him. We flew to Siliguri, where we were picked up by a car from the Consulate and drove the rest of the way. It was hysterical. The first night we stayed in a government guest house just inside the Bhutanese border in the terai, the lowland part of Bhutan. There were the three of us and four Swiss entomologists. Bhutan was called the Switzerland of the East by some, but this was the first time to anybody's recollection that serious entomologists had been allowed into the country, and they were happy as pigs in mud. They turned on all the lights in the guest house and insisted that we leave all the windows wide open. There were no screens. They hung netting all over the place, and readied big 100-gallon barrels to be stuffed with insects, formaldehyde, and cotton wool. When the bugs started flying in, there were repeated shouts of "I've never seen one of those!" We had to dodge beetles as big as your hand half the night until they filled up one of the barrels. We crossed paths with them throughout our stay in Bhutan. They were everywhere catching bugs.

Q: What was the status of Bhutan at that time?

GRIFFIN: As it still is. It's an independent kingdom, considered to be under the hegemony of India. The Chinese thought about seizing Bhutan when they invaded India in 1962, but chose not to. It is on the border of Tibet, which is very sensitive to the Chinese, so they pay close attention to it. We were taken to see a sacked mountain village, said to be the result of the last Chinese invasion. When I asked if that was 100 years ago, I was told it was in 1963, or something like that. Our guide, a young officer from the Foreign Ministry said, "We fought them off with bows and arrows." Obviously it was not the main Chinese army, but the Bhutanese are quite proud of their archery skills. I used to be a pretty good archer myself, but I couldn't compete with them. Since our trip, they have moved to high-tech like everybody else, but in those days we saw things that would have been at home in medieval Europe. They had short ones and long ones, including a five-foot bow with probably close to a 200-pound pull. They could send an arrow what seemed half a mile with incredible accuracy.

Part of the purpose of our trip was to seek Bhutanese support at the UN, which meant trying to distance them from the Indians. We weren't very successful, but we tried. We also wanted to see as much of that very exotic country as we could. There are not very many shops in the country. Most were on the main streea dirt roaof Paro. It is one of the capital cities; there are multiple capitals, depending on where the king is, or was. I almost bought a bedspread for my wife until I found out the pric$6,00so I said they could keep it. The shopkeeper said, "Senator Percy bought three of them last year." I replied that the Senator was a bit better off than I was.

When we went to see the Minister of Tourism, who was looking for help in developing that industry, I offered to put him in touch with some experts. They were no hotels in the country, so we stayed in royal guest houses everywhere. Bhutan's primary foreign exchange income then was (and may still be) postage stamps, most of which were printed in Philadelphia. I suggested that they could do much better. I was amazed by one stamp with a 3D picture of American astronauts, until I learned that they were made in Philadelphia. I cautioned the Minister about two things: (1) to avoid the example of Nepal, which just invited the world in, and was overwhelmed by hippies and so-called world travelers; and (2) to prohibit large-scale dynamiting in building roads, which killed too many workers and caused landslides. I said, "Charge an arm and a leg." Well, my God, they moved quickly. They immediately sent over a rather pricey bill for our stay in the royal guest houses. Their prices are still very high, but it's kept most non-spenders out.

Bhutan now has other problems which were not so evident in those days, though you could see it happening next door in Darjeeling and in Sikkim. That is the large numbers of Nepalese who have moved in. According to our guide, slavery was abolished in Bhutan around 1960; one of the last places on earth where it was officially abolished. Many of the slaves were Nepalese, which has caused some bilateral problems, though the issue has quieted recently.

The other interesting place was Sikkim. My wife had known Hope Cooke, the Chogyal's wife, when she was a teenager. They invited us up for their New Year's celebrations one year. The price of admission was an American frozen turkey. That was just before the Chogyal went into a physical decline. He was eventually removed by the Indians and died, and she moved back to New York. It was an idyllic little existence, but he was probably not cut out to be a king. Certainly he was not able to deal effectively with the Byzantine political moves of the Indians and the Chinese. He talked a good line and tried to walk a fine line, but he drank too much, which made him fuzzy-headed. He was a nice gunot a take charge type. After I left Calcutta, the Indians de-throned him, creating a bit of a stir, which died down pretty quickly. It was a bit like Goa and the other small territories India took over, and the Chinese didn't react.

Q: While you were in Calcutta, did you have any dealings with the students? Universities are often difficult places to penetrate.

GRIFFIN: They are. I was a little long in the tooth for hanging around campuses, but I did make contact with a few professors and secondary school teachers. Most of the students I met were crypto-Naxalites or real Communists, who were writing newspapers and pamphlets, some of which eventually became official party organs. I had "discussions" with some of them. They tended to yell at me that I was a representative of murderers and butchers, so I would call them muddle-headed and other names. We didn't much see eye to eye. Many of them had left school and gone into street politics to become known and effective. So, it wasn't so much on the campus as it was away from the campus.

Q: What about Mother Theresa?

GRIFFIN: Mother Theresa mounted a refugee relief effort during the Bangladesh war. She had Indian and expatriate ladies making bandages and putting together packages of things, especially for babiemilk and other things. My wife was involved in that effort during the war, and stayed on to help in Mother Theresa's work with abandoned babies and the dying poor afterward. During the war, she found that the way many Americans and Europeans "helped" the refugee effort was to empty their medicine cabinets and donate mostly expired medicines, or diet and birth control pills! There were literally shiploads of things like that to be sorted out. Some of it was extremely dangerous. People had literally just dumped...

Q: I know. They did this with medicines and everything else.

GRIFFIN: So that took a lot of our time. Then the Indians made things more difficult by slapping import duties on shiploads of blankets and tents. These were brand new and well packaged, so we went screaming in to complain, pointing out that it was not commerce, but a donated relief effort. It didn't get sorted out until the whole thing was over. Meanwhile some of our USAID people were upset when refugees came into town and sold donated blankets and tents on the street. My argument to theand I remember that Senator Kennedy and Congressman Frelinghuysen agreed with mwas, "Look, if that's a way they can get money to buy something they really need, what's the matter with it?"

I took an American automobile to Calcutta, which was not the cleverest thing to do, but I was relatively broke and didn't know what else to do. Eventually I sold it for a fairly decent profit to a young fellow who fancied himself a race car driver. Since I wasn't allowed to keep the profit, I decided to donate it to Mother Theresa, as the rules allowed. Chrissie took me to see her, and she gave us a personal tour of her establishment. She explained how her nuns took in people off the street in their last throes. She added that she was trying to ensure that such populations would not increase, by promoting the so-called "rhythm method." Years later she disavowed that position, and became just as insistent as the current Pope about doing nothing to interfere with the reproduction process. But at that time she showed us in detail how it worked, so I thought my money was going to the right place.

Q: Both with your family and others at the Consulate General, the extreme poverty that surrounded one in Calcutta must have had an effect.

GRIFFIN: It does. It is everywhere. I guess you develop kind of a blind eye to it. Since I grew up in Turkey, I was not unaccustomed to poverty, and it certainly exists in America in Washington and elsewhere. So, it wasn't really new to me. In Turkey, my father would hand out a few coins here and there to outstretched hands on his way to his office. Many Indians do the same. For awhile I did too, but then decided to give to recognized charities, and stop handing out money to people on the street, unless it was a kid to "guard your car." Basically a bribe to keep him and other kids from ripping off your...

Q: And keeping him from ripping you off.

GRIFFIN: Right. So a few paisa there would do. Then there were the rackets. The main drag in Calcutta is called Chowringhe. It is a street lined with big hotels, restaurants, and so forth, and also full of beggars who know where the money is. Especially those who mutilate children to induce you to give them money. I learned to close my eyes to that and ignore it. I was proud of the fact that we had official programs to try to help poor people. I knew that on my pitiful salary I couldn't do that much by myself, so I was proud to work for a government that was trying to help people. That was my attitude, but as far as Americans in general go, there are two attitudes when faced with India. One is "Oh, my God, this awful! I can't stand it. Get me out of here." The other is "I love it! It's so colorful! Life is vibrant." I tend to be in the second category. I found India a wondrous place and enjoyed most of it. Now, the population of India has trebled in my official lifetime, which is saying something. When I first went to Colombo in 1962, the population of India was less than 400 million. It is over a billion now, and you can see it everywhere. It's not only the crowds on the streets everywhere, but the pollution, which is getting seriously worse. It's amazing how close people can live and survive in all that, but India needs to do something about its population growth rate. The Chinese did. Many people have complained, but it has worked fairly well. The Japanese did. The Indians have not, and they're paying a price for it, and will continue to pay a price. In Pakistan and Bangladesh the populations are increasing at an even more rapid rate than in India. Some people say so they can be of equal size some day, able to stand up to India, but that's a sad attitude.

Q: Then you left there in 1972?

GRIFFIN: I left Calcutta in '72, yes.

Q: Okay, we'll put at the end here whither. Where did you go in 1972?

GRIFFIN: Directly to Islamabad on a nonstop SAS flight.

Q: It's really unusual to play both ends.

GRIFFIN: Well, I asked for it. I wanted to see the other side to find out if I was all wet. I had been accused of clientitis, or liking the Indians more than I should, so I wanted to see Pakistan from the other angle. The Department seemed to think it was a good idea, to broaden my scope and make me a switch hitter. The same thing happens in the Middle East. Arabists go to Israel. So Pakistan was different. My wife loved Calcutta. The '60s were winding up, and it was a good time. Miniskirts were in, which upset nobody in Calcutta. She would walk to the main market, which was probably a mile or so through crowded streets, and nobody paid lewd attention to her. That changed in Pakistan.

Q: What was her background?

GRIFFIN: She's a Washingtonian who likes to travel. She had fairly recently finished college when I met her and was working at a stock brokerage firm here in town. After a few years of that, she decided she wanted to see more of the world. She had a ticket, an around-the-world ticket, a PanAm ticket. I think it was 900 bucks or something like that in those days. She decided to stop in Calcutta to see me, and stayed. She comes from something of a diplomatic family. Her grandfather was the Swedish ministein the days before they had an ambassadothe Swedish Minister to the United States, and she's always been fascinated in the life.

Q: Okay, you were in Islamabad from 1972 till when?

GRIFFIN: 1973, only one year.

Q: What was your job there?

GRIFFIN: I was a political officer. In the bidding process, I discussed going to New Delhi to take Dick Viet's place as aide to Ambassador Keating, who wanted me, or going to Pakistan. I chose Pakistan because I wanted to see both sides of the conflict in South Asia. As a political officer, my beat was essentially domestic politics. It was an interesting time after the war changed East Pakistan into Bangladesh. While Sheikh Mujibir Rahman won the overall popular vote, Bhutto won in the west, refused to tolerate Mujib's victory (which triggered the war), and was in an unchallenged position with the disappearance of East Pakistan.

Many East Pakistanis, or Bengalis, including some senior government officials, military officers, and so forth, were stranded in West Pakistan. I got word from one of thea diplomat I had met elsewhere; probably in Ceylon. He was under house arrest, but managed to get a message to me asking me to come see him. I made it a point to go, despite the Pakistani Government. They didn't try to stop me, so I went several times. He was eventually repatriated after a year or two.

To learn about the country, I made several trips; first to Karachi, then Peshawar, and other places. I had an interesting trip with the regional geographic attachï¿½, a gentleman named Coke Held. I don't recall his real first name, but his nickname was Coke. He was stationed in Dhahran.

Q: An odd place. There's no geography there.

GRIFFIN: Oil is there. That's one reason he was there, but he also had the geographic beat for all the Middle East and South Asia, so he came to Pakistan. We traveled together to Quetta. He gave me a quick primer during the flight, noting that flying over land not covered with greenery enabled one to see the features clearly. He could figure out the geology, in other words. He may have started out as an oil engineer, but had worked in the Geographer's office in the Department for years.

That way, I got to see a fair amount of the country. I went to Swat and tried to go up the Karakoram Highway in the northernmost part to the Chinese border, but ran out of time. I spent most of my time covering the newly formed Parliament and tracking Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. We had a large USAID mission headed by Joe Wheeler. He asked for a political officer to attend his staff meetings to help his people understand the politics of their situation, so I did that. I went to Lahore to buy a car from a departing officer there. Then suddenly the Deputy Principal Officer in Lahore was transferred out.

Q: Who was that?

GRIFFIN: Jim Hataway. He had medical problems, and family problems, and left suddenly. Two other things happened about that time. Gordon King, the Consul General in Lahore, met a Department officer on an orientation trip, and within a very short time married her. This was Marguerite Cooper, whom you may have heard of. Just before the wedding, his daughter, a 20-year-old, wrecked her car, killing herself. Gordon was miserable of course, and wanted Marguerite to be his deputy in Lahore. The Department, after much debate, said no, creating the principle that a spouse cannot work directly for another spouse, setting up the system of tandem appointments that are so well known today. That was basically Howie Schaffer's work. He was in Personnel at the time.

Anyway, it was then agreed that Marguerite would come to Islamabad in my job, and I would go to Lahore as Deputy Principal Officer. King wanted me there ASAP, but there was a gap between Hataway's departure and my arrival because I had to finish up some work in Islamabad. The Embassy was in the throes of moving from the USAID building, a big, barn-like structure that had been a bank, to its new compound. I think I spent all of a month in the new digs before heading for Lahore. It was monsoon season, and I sent my wife and daughter on a train. Our household goods went by truck. I went first in our car, packed to the gilland I mean that. There was barely room for our house boy to squeeze into the shotgun seat. It rained the whole way. He and I got about 40 miles out of Lahore, and came upon a sheet of water. Several cars were stuck, but a truck roared through spraying water in all directions. So I decided, well, if he could make it, I could make it, and took off. When the water started coming in the doors, the servant got very nervous, saying, "We're not going to make it." But I gunned it, and we did make it. That was the beginning of a major flood season. The road was washed out an hour after we left, and my wife and daughter were turned back because the train track washed away.

It was a flood of historic proportions, which of course gave me plenty to do immediately. I began filing reports before going to our new home to unpack the car. We got the embassy's attention, which got Washington's attention, which officially declared it a disaster, which triggered funding. We mounted a disaster relief effort that was huge by any standards. U.S. Army teams came from as far away as South Korea, with boats, tents, and helicopters. The Air Force flew in fuel on C-141s. They stationed huge rubber bladders at the airport into which the C-141s would unload fuel and drinking water. The Air Force also brought in some helicopters and some smaller aircraft, including some old DC-3s that were used to spray pesticides on rice crops. Hundreds of thousands of people were washed out of their homes, and fled to high ground. It was perhaps Pakistan's biggest flood on record. Lahore is the capital of Punjab, which in Hindi/Urdu means "five waters" or "five rivers," which include the four big ones that are tributaries to the Indus. They tore up central Pakistan for several weeks.

I was the Consulate liaison in this effort. One day I was out flying with one of the Army helicopter crews to check on a claim from the Punjab government that there were serious problems other than roads, railroads, electric, and water systems. The flood came at harvest time for the rice crop, which was a major source of food for the country. Unless the rice could be saved, there was a real prospect of mass starvation. It wasn't a question of the rice being flooded or washed away; it was a question of insects that focused on the rice as the things they regularly ate vanished under the flood waters. The regular insects were being pushed aside by a swarm of locusts which had flown up from the inundated desert country in the south. I went out and took a look with, I seem to recall, the provincial Minister of Agriculture. We stopped on a road near a rice field and got out. It was plain even to ml'm not a farm experthat the crop was crawling with bugs. The Air Force flew in some malathion and mounted a spraying operation using the C-141s and the Army helicopters. Only one of the pilots had done crop dusting before, but the rest learned quickly. They dusted for several weeks and saved the crops. After that operation, the Army left six helicopterthey were Hueyin Lahore as a gift to the Pakistan Government. The Air Force left a DC-3 and another aircraft; I don't remember the type. These were old aircraft, refitted with new tubes and spray tanks. That was the beginning of a rather fascinating tour.

The flood relief effort took about three months from start to finish. At the end, there was a small Army helicopter team left. I wanted to invite them all to a farewell party, along with the Pakistani military with whom they had been working. I checked with the Consul General, who checked with the Pakistani military commander. Everybody thought it was a fine idea, so we had a party at our house, in the garden. (I don't remember why, but the CG said he couldn't do it at the residence, and didn't come.) We invited several other people, Pakistanis and Americans, mostly from the business community. Only two or three Pakistani civilians showed up. At first there was no military representation, but finally a Pakistan Army captain who was the protocol officer at the military headquarters roared up in his Jeep. He said he was sent to represent the entire command, as everybody else was "busy." When I offered him a drink, he declined, saying he couldn't drink anything cold because he had a sore throat. So I made the mistake of offering him a hot toddy. He asked what that was, so I made him one. He thought it was swelthe best thing he ever had. He promptly downed it and asked for another.

Q: You might explain what a hot toddy is.

GRIFFIN: A hot toddy is whiskey and water with lots of sugar in it. It's the basis of what my grandmother called a sugar tishe said that sugar in a sock dipped in whiskey would cure babies of anything. It was an epiphany for the captain, who soon became the life of the party. We had set up tables on the patio for a buffet. My wife was about to announce that the food was ready when, all of a sudden, somebody said, "Look at that guy!" I turned around and there was the good captain standing in the middle of the lawn, urinating. As I was trying to digest that, an American woman asked me to light her cigarette, saying she couldn't find her own lighter. Another woman overheard us, and said the same thing had happened to her. They both began digging in their purses, and then one said, "Hey! My wallet's gone too!" Pretty soon all the ladies were checking their purses, and found that lots of things were gone. Then my wife came up and asked if I had taken some silver salt and pepper shakers off the table. It was dawning on us that we had a kleptomaniac among us. Trying to figure out what to do, I grabbed the major in charge of the US Army contingent and said, "Look, who do you trust the most? Somebody's robbing people here, and I want someone you trust to block all the gates and doors while I try to shake somebody down." He agreed and spoke to a couple of his men. I made a big scene, collaring my chief bearer and loudly accusing him of doing it all. He, of course, was terrified and protested that he had nothing to do with it. I pushed him into the kitchen and told him to stay there. By that time I had pretty well concluded that it was the Pakistani Army captain. One of our Army non-coms went out to his jeep in the driveway, and ran back to report that he found a driver, some stuff we knew was missing, half our booze supply, and several other things, including a transistor radio.

At that point the captain started for the gate to the driveway. I stopped him, saying I needed to talk to him. He said he had to go, as he was not feeling well. I shook his hand and jostled him. He clanked because our silverware was in his jacket. Well, the troops held him while we cleaned out the Jeep. I called the duty officer at Army headquarters. He sent over some MPs, who took the captain away. The next morning, the CG and I were invited to Army headquarters by four-star general. He offered a mild apology, but basically defended the captain saying that he hadn't done anything wrong. I objected, saying I had many witnesses. Finally, the general let us know that the captain was married to a woman who was well connected to the government in Islamabad. He indicated that, if I made trouble, he would have trouble. He didn't want trouble, so would we please shut up and go away, accepting his apologies for anything that happened, and let it drop. After some reconsideration, we did just that. I found out later that the captain specialized in going to cocktail parties where he could indulge his habit. That was when I saw him steal some silver in the house of another diplomat. I got word to the host, who quietly got it all back.

Lahore was the headquarters of WAPDthe water and power authority for Pakistan. They do everything in the way of dams, power plants and electric transmission. It was also the headquarters of the railways and the military pension authority. Checking out possibilities with those entities was my first success as a commercial officer. I discovered many sales possibilities, sometimes financed by PL-480 money, and sometimes straight commercial deals. In the end I calculated that I had facilitated some 3 billion dollars worth of sales, which in those days was a huge amount of money. It got the attention of the Commerce Department and the Commercial Attachï¿½, who was stationed in Karachi, not Islamabad. He and I worked together well, so he came to Lahore quite a bit.

At the same time, there was a lot going on politically. Prime Minister Bhutto was a Parsee and a Sindhi, without much of a base in Punjab. From Islamabad he was trying to put his allies in top positions in Lahore, the capital of the most populous province in Pakistan and the base of most power brokers. Punjab is also the economic heart of the country, though people in Karachi dispute that because of the banks there. But what Bhutto used to call the "20 families" those he claimed had raped the country and stolen all the monemostly came from Lahore. I got to know most of them, in all sorts of business, from textiles to you-name-it, with a fair amount of success in promoting American business.

In dealing with the local politicians, it became clear that there was a disconnect between "democracy" and the way that Bhutto and company were running the country. This has been a Pakistani disease since the country was founded. Lahore was also where I first met George H. W. Bush. At that time he was our representative (I think that was his title) in Beijing. For whatever reason, he wanted to meet Bhutto, who agreed to receive him. But he and Barbara were first shunted off to Lahore by State House, apparently because Bhutto had a sudden, more senior visitor. So they were asked to enjoy the lovely scenery in downtown Lahore for a while. They were hosted by Punjab Governor Mustafa Khar for a couple days. Because I was at that point Acting CG, my wife and I went to lunches and dinners with them, and found the Bushes charming. Mrs. Bush and my wife are both alumnae of Smith College. We have met them several times since.

During my time as Acting CG, we got funds to paint and refurbish the Consulate, which had become a bit dreary. This was probably between the departure of Gordon King and the arrival of his successor, Bill Spengler. I decided to be a little imaginative, and ordered a "modern" dï¿½cor for our consular waiting room. It was a sort of 1960s style, shall we saPeter Max style. Fanciful. I found an artist at USIS who liked that sort of thing, and we had a good time. It was the kind of decor that USIS was doing around the world at the time, and the local people seemed to enjoy it. But then we were inspected. The senior inspector hauled me on the carpet and told me it was outrageous. Not appropriate for a diplomatic mission. It had to be replaced before the next CG showed up, because he wouldn't like it. He certainly didn't. I waited till Bill Spengler arrived, so he would at least have a glimpse of it. When I asked if I should paint it over, he said, "Please do."

That time was the beginning of the downfall of Bhutto. You could sense it in the Punjab. I made several tours around the province; first to see the aftermath of the floods, which was terrible. The roads and railways remained washed out everywhere. The roads were in pretty bad shape before, but the flood made things seriously worse, with lonI'm talking 50-and 100-mildetours. One of the causes given by some Pakistanis for the magnitude of those floods was an enormous USAID project in the '50s in which huge canals were built. Or that canals already there were lined by USAID with concrete. I remember talking to the central Minister of Irrigation. His comment was, "Well, it was a good idea at the time, but, when you start fiddling with Mother Nature, she will bite you back, so it's rarely a good idea." Later I wrote a formal recommendation that USAID critique what had been done in the past.

Q: This is a debate that goes on in the United States on aligning the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. It means the waters don't spread out and gain velocity. Many consider it to be harmful.

GRIFFIN: One of the byproducts of the flood and of the canal system was that it brought much-needed irrigation. I also learned about precision land leveling; something I'd never heard of before. The idea was that, in that land, if you didn't level the field precisely, it would develop humps of salts that would kill crops. So you had to make sure it was absolutely dead-on. It was a program that took the Pakistanis a while to accept, but they finally did, and I think it still goes on. As for the canals, they're still there and I presume they still function as they're supposed to.

I met three Chief Ministers of the Province. Of them, Haneef Ramay, was the last one put in by Bhutto. He was a socialist professor, not much liked by Washington. But I figured that, as long as he was in charge, he was the one to talk to, so I made it my business to get to know him. I had a very small Fourth of July party that year. Again, it was between CGs and the guests included the Chief Minister, part of his cabinet, a couple of important resident Americans, community leaders, a religious figure or two, and some businessmen. Certainly not more than 50 people, including the Chief Minister's bodyguards. The Governor didn't come. It was featured in the newspapers, and taught me several lessons about hosting Fourth of July parties. It was my first as the officer in charge of a post. The first thing it did was to irritate almost the entire American community, who felt left out. There was also a community picnic in which our Consulate General staff participated, but the private Americans expected to be invited to the official event, so I heard from them loudly. I also heard from dozens of Pakistanis, who promptly called to say they were insulted to see in the newspaper that there had been a party to which they hadn't been invited. They wanted to know why. Among other things, I was trying to cull the CG's contact list, convinced that we didn't need to see some people any more. For example, the army Captain who liked to take things off tables and walk out the door. Anyway, the new CG soon arrived and said he thought I had done well, so I thought I was justified.

Shortly after that, there were political stirrings in the country. Some of my lawyer contacts and journalists were arrested. There were allegations of corruption, torture, and other evils on the part of the Bhutto regime. That began to take up most of my time; reporting that the government seemed to be falling apart. Because of the importance of the Punjab in national politics, I had a heavy load of political reporting. My reports were cleared by the Embassy, but went out to Washington as Consulate reports or telegrams. I thought that showed wise leadership by the Embassy, as I found the situation different later, in other posts.

When I first arrived, the Chargï¿½ d'Affaires was Sydney Sober. He was succeeded by Hobart Luppi, who became DCM to the newly-arriveAmbassador Hank Byroade. It was Byroade's seventh ambassadorship; a remarkable man. He came from Manila, from which he imported a motor boat and a couple of vintage cars. We became friends after a funny incident. Shortly after he arrived, he learned that his motorcycle had been lost in transit. He called me to say he heard that several Harley-Davidsons had been given to the Punjab police under the USAID police program. He wondered if there were any that had been scrapped. He liked to work on them himself, and wanted to buy one if there were any the police didn't want. I found out that they had quite a few. After I made arrangements with the chief of police, the Ambassador came down for courtesy calls. Afterward, he came over to my house, where we had about 20 Harleys lined up, most of them in perfect working order. He rode two or three around the block, declared them to be "swell," and then picked out the worst one. He actually got two, or maybe three, so he could cannibalize them. The police agreed to ship them to him in Islamabad and, of course, said it would cost him nothing. It took months of negotiations to get them to accept the Ambassador's money. He knew our rules and wasn't about to get in trouble, but the cost was minimal. After he rebuilt one, he roared all around Islamabad, and years later wrecked it in Saudi Arabia. But that's another story.

Q: Going back to when you were in Islamabad the first year, this was really just after Pakistan had lost East Pakistan, wasn't it? What were you getting? Was it sort of in a way a relief - 'We got rid of those Bengalis; now we can get down to business' - or was it a sense of loss?

GRIFFIN: It was both. Many West Pakistanis looked down on the East Bengalis as inferior beings. There was a "good riddance" attitude on the part of some people, who saw them as troublemakeralways causing problems. Bengal was too far away; to get there, one had to go around India. But there was also enormous resentment among West Pakistanis, who argued that they were being blamed unfairly for all the problems. They said it wasn't their fault, and that they were done in by India. If you read today's news, you see that they remain prickly neighbors.

Yet, at that timthe period from 1972 to '75, one to four years after the Bangladesh Wamany of the top generals in both the Indian and thPakistani armies knew each other, and some still do. Many had gone to school together at Dehra Doon or at Sandhurst in the UK. The old-line handpre-Independence or pre-Partition handare gone now. Pervez Musharraf went to military school in Pakistan, and had little contact with his Indian counterparts, so they don't understand each other as well. At the time of the 1971 war, most of the soldiers on both sides tended to be Punjabis; Muslims on the Pakistani side, Sikhs on the Indian side. They sometimes had civilized meetings in the middle of battle, inviting their counterparts over for tea, and then going back and shooting at each other again. That's probably died out by now.

While we were in Lahore, the border between India and Pakistan was opened to diplomats. We decided, what the heck, we're diplomats, let's visit some friends in India. We had a dinner party the night before we were scheduled to go, and slept late. We suddenly woke up and realized that, oops, the border was going to close in half an hour. It was 18 miles to the border from my house. We jumped in the car, threw the kid in the back, roared off down the road, and managed to get to the Pakistani side just as they were shutting down. They said, "We'll let you through, but we're not sure the Indians will." Somehow, the word got across. We got through, and with a big sigh of relief started driving on the Grand Trunk Road. Then suddenly I had a flat tire. It was pouring down rain, and I got soaked as I fixed the flat. As I was getting back into the car, I looked up and saw a sign that said "Jammu, X kilometers ahead." Not Amritsar, where I thought I was headed. We were in the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, halfway to Kashmir. Then I reached for my wallet. No wallet. I started the car and the yellow light came on: no gas. What else can go wrong? Our daughter was screaming in the back seat.

I turned the car around and coasted as much as possible, looking for an Indian Army base I knew was in the vicinity. I figured that somebody there might speak something besides Punjabi and help me out, despite our Pakistani diplomatic tags and American passports. I would have to risk that they had gotten over our position toward India during the war, and wouldn't know me by name. Finally, I saw the gate to a base and, at the same time, a gas station. I decided to try to gas station first, and went inside. In halting Hindi, I tried to get across my problem to the attendant, who was not interested in the least. Then, a gentleman who was paying his bill turned around and said in English, "You seem to have a problem." I said, "Yes," and explained our problems. He said, "Not to worry." He said his name was Singh, and that he was the President of the Jullundur Rotary Club. He was going to a meeting where he had to introduce the speaker, and he was late. He told the attendant to give me a couple of liters of petrol and told me to follow him to a hotel. He told me to go in, and that after his speech her would come back to check on us. He repeated, "Not to worry. Everythinwill be fine." I didn't really know what to say, but agreed. The attendant put some petrol in the car, which Mr. Singh paid for, and I followed him to a hotel. Singh drove away immediately, leaving us there.

I walked up to a desk clerk and started explaining what was the matter. He stopped me in mid-sentence and said, "Mr. Griffin, where are your wife and daughter?" I said, "In the car." He said, "This is nonsense. Get them in here immediately. They can't stay out there in the rain." I went out and brought them in. The clerk, who turned out to be an assistant manager, took us to the presidential suite, and sent up a very fine dinner. The next morning he had my flat tire fixed, filled the tank with gas, and declined to present me with a bill. The Rotary President never returned. When I asked how could pay, the clerk said, "Well, you said you are going to Delhi, and coming back this way to Lahore." I nodded, and he said, "When you come back, stop by here and pay me. That's easy." So off we went. On our way back, having borrowed money from a colleague in New Delhi, I repaid the hotel. I didn't see the President of the Rotary Club, but did have his name. After returning to Lahore, I wrote to several Indian newspapers, describing all this. I wanted others to know that, even at a time of high tension after a bitter war in which the Indian government viewed the United States as siding with Pakistan, a U.S. Government official was treated with kindness and respect by ordinary people, far from the capital. The letter was printed in several newspapers, omitting all the names except mine. It said something about the way things are done in South Asia.

Soon thereafter, I got a call from Dean Howells, who was the Division Chief for South Asia in INR, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. He had been selected for senior training at Harvard, and wondered if would I agree to take his job. I hadn't thought that far ahead, but readily agreed, so I transferred to INR as South Asia Division Chief from Lahore in 1975.

Q: Okay, I'd like to go back now. How did you operate as a political officer in Islamabad and Lahore?

GRIFFIN: In Islamabad, I was the basic Parliament watcher. Ed Ingram was the Political Counselor. Sid Sober was the Chargï¿½. Sid had all the top contacts to himself, including Bhutto, when Bhutto would see him. Sid had known Ayub Khan when he was in power. Ayub was under house arrest when I first arrived, but the government didn't object when Sid wanted to go see him. He made a point of doing so. Ingram did the ministers. I'm trying to remember who else was there, covering external relations. Our organization mirrored that of the Embassy New Delhi. I met as many lower-level politicians as I could, as well as journalists, academics, and other intellectuals and leaders. There weren't thousands of those in Islamabad.

Q: Bhutto was getting increasingly autocratic. What sort of political life was going on? Was the parliament...?

GRIFFIN: Yes, in the beginning. Oh, I remember who else was therBill Simmons. Bill was the deputy to Ed Ingram, but he didn't write my efficiency report. Ed did that, and it was reviewed by the acting DCM, Sandy Sanderson. Bill had been there for several years. He took me in hand and introduced me to many politicians from around the country. Most of the ministries at that time were headquartered in Rawalpindi, 12 miles away from Islamabad, though they were starting to build offices in Islamabad. We too were building an embassy compound, to include the ambassador's residence.

There was an interesting event, pertinent to today's news, on which I did some reporting, although I wasn't covering external affairs. At first we lived a block away from the Iraqi Embassy. One Sunday as I was out for a stroll with our daughter, all hell broke loose. The Iraqi Embassy was suddenly surrounded by police and soldiers, with helicopters roaring overhead. As we watched, the Pakistanis charged into the Embassy over the strident objections of the Iraqi Ambassador. After about an hour, troops started hauling out case after case after case of small arms, submachine guns, rifles, and ammunition. I'm talking about truckloads of such stuff. That evening Bhutto declared the Ambassador persona non grata and accused him of smuggling arms to "enemies of Pakistan" in Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier regions. Clearly, the Iraqis have been doing such things for a long time.

Q: Was this to stir up insurgence against the government?

GRIFFIN: That's what Bhutto said was going on. I can't remember his precise rationale but, if I'm not mistaken, Saddam Hussein had not yet come to power in Iraq, though it had a Baathist government. That was in 1972 or '73, when Baghdad was close to Moscow. I think the Iraqis were accused of acting on behalf of Moscow's friend New Delhi by fomenting insurrection in the tribal areas in the Northwest Frontier, in Baluchistan, or perhaps in Indian-held Kashmir. Maybe the Pakistanis were given some information about it by our intelligence people. I was never told.

About two blocks away in the other direction was the residence of the North Korean Ambassador. This was not long after the North Koreans kidnaped a U.S. courier with a classified diplomatic pouch in Romania. You may recall that they stole the pouch and got away with it. I had been warned that going anywhere near that residence would not be appreciated. But I guess I forgot one day and walked my daughter in that direction. I had a camera. I didn't want a picture of the residence, and quite honestly had forgotten what it was. I just wanted to get some shots of our neighborhood, and was passing the Korean residence when two guys with submachine guns jumped out of the bushes. They didn't point them at me, but were holding them at the ready and came directly at me. Then I realized where I was, grabbed my daughter's hand, and got out of there. That was part of my early education about President Bush's "axis of evil."

Q: Was the parliament an active parliament, or did it mean much?

GRIFFIN: Certainly it met, and Bhutto, who fancied himself as the first real democrat in Pakistan's history, didn't quite treat it as a rubber stamp body. Parliament didn't meet regularly, but when it did, we would hear from the members. Oh sure, Bhutto and his lieutenants sometimes had fun and games with people who disagreed with the ruling party. At times some members didn't appear at the sessions, and others had bad things happen to them. Some of the most colorful politicians would tell us the details. Nonetheless, most of the members insisted that they were really doing the people's work in Parliament. Even when outnumbered or placed in difficult situations, they would brag about it.

Q: Was there a feeling that your phone was tapped and you were being watched and all that sort of thing?

GRIFFIN: Like many of my colleagues, I always assumed that my phone was tapped in every post. I was sure of it in India; it was a given. And I presumed it in Pakistan. Since I had transferred directly from India to Pakistan, I probably was under more suspicion than some of our other people. It was proved later on when Howie Schaffer and Dennis Kux were tapped. Bhutto played a tape recording of one of their conversations on the air, claiming that American diplomats were making fun of Pakistan and were not real friends. That was long after I left, but it created quite a stir. So, yes, one presumed.

Watched? Of course. They tracked me around. They always knew where I was. The Northwest Frontier was a bit like the northeast in India; you had to have a special permit to go there. There was a DEA agent in Islamabad who got in trouble because of that. He came to Pakistan directly from being a deputy sheriff in West Texas, and hadn't been overseas before. I'll never forget his namHarold Leap. He sported a 10-gallon hat and cowboy boots, and liked to strap on a six- shooter and have a good time. Once he chased some drug runners into the Northwest Frontier. The Pakistan police would never do that, but Leap did. He was lucky to be alive. He got shot at and then rescued, I think, by Pakistan Army troops. The Ambassador sent him away before he could be PNGed by the Pakistan Government. Yes, they knew where you were.

Q: How were we seeing Bhutto when you were there? How was Bhutto seen?

GRIFFIN: Bhutto was a charismatic charlatan, I guess a lot of people would say. He certainly was perceived as having stolen the 1970 election, and a lot of Pakistanis blamed him for the breakup of the country. So did a lot of other people. But most Pakistanis probably were not too upset about it. Some shrugged and said, "What else did you expect? We couldn't have East Pakistanis running this country." That seemed to be Bhutto's attitude. No way was Sheikh Mujib going to be the leader of West Pakistan. He had the wrong agenda. He didn't understand. Bhutto convinced President Yahya to block the results of the elections, and eventually took over himself. He was seen as an opportunist, and his wife was considered something of a foreigner. She was not, she was born in Karachi, but since she was a Parsee, or, let's say, of Iranian background, she wasn't considered entirely "one of us." She had too many Iranian connections, but that didn't seem to affect the later success of their daughter.

Q: That was Benazir.

GRIFFIN: In Islamabad I was urged to get to know the Bhutto kidBenazir, and her brothers; Murtaza and Shahnawaz. I was one of the younger political officers and, while my wife and I were a bit older, they were expected to become important politically, so it was deemed worthwhile. The Embassy gave us tickets to a spectacular Chinese gymnastics show. We were seated behind the Bhuttos, and we chatted a bit, but the kids were not the least bit interested in us, so we never really connected.

Q: Was Kashmir a focal point at that particular time?

GRIFFIN: Yes, it always is. Some people hoped that, after the war, since neither side had managed to take all of Kashmir, and the Chinese kept rattling on about their claim to part of it, that maybe it would die down for a while. But, no, it was still very sensitive territory. For example, if I had kept going up the road that time I told you about when I had the flat tire in India, I could have been into trouble with the Indians, who would have assumed that I was on some spy mission, no matter how absurd. I went to Kashmir when I was stationed in India, but if I were coming from Pakistan, that's different. Unless I had told Embassy New Delhi that we were going, and gotten their ok, but I would still assume that they would look at me with great suspicion. We did that at another time, with some Lahore friends, but it was set up properly after things calmed down. We also got close to that border on the Pakistan side. Some friends had a weekend place in Muzafarabad practically on the border, south of Srinagar. It was a lovely spot amongst orchards, where we went for brunches. But if you went beyond the village, you ran into border guards and checkpoints, and were quite firmly told to go away and not come back. But Kashmir was not part of my portfolio. That was done by others in the political section. I just did local politicians.

Q: How about the Islamic fundamentalist movement?

GRIFFIN: There were a couple of Islamic parties, whose leaders are still heard from; still pushing for an Islamic state. There were also several pirs who were important politically. Pirs are religious and tribal leaders, but seem to be less religious than some of the preachers. They are often large traditional landowners, in a rather feudal sense, who have inherited religious titles. They are looked up to as community/religious leaders and landlords, but some were mostly playboys or even crooks, in a word. Without naming names, we met several of them and, over time visited some of their farms and country houses. The scene when they arrived in one of their villages was quite feudal. The whole community would start bowing and kissing feet, asking to be blesseamazing. More broadly, there were rabble rousers among the Islamic types who preached that Bhutto was not a religious ma"a socialist" who should be ousted.

Q: Was there any problem with Afghanistan? There was that loose area between the two places, sort of tribal areas.

GRIFFIN: There are always problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan, one of which is the so-called Durand Line. It was proposed by Sir Mortimer Durand, then Foreign Secretary of the Indian Government, as the boundary between Afghanistan and what was then British India. It is laid out along mountain peaks, is not a straight line, and has several peculiarities. It was intentionally drawn to cut through the Pakhtun or Pashtun tribes. So, yes, there was a constant undercurrent of "Let's see if we can't settle this thing, but what were your people doing on my side last week?" When I got my orders to INR in Washington, I realized that there were two places where I hadn't been that were going to be in my territorAfghanistan and Iran. So I cadged a ride with the Defense Attachï¿½ in Islamabad, who regularly drove up to Kabul. My wife had already gone with several ladies on a bus tour to Kabul. But my trip was curtailed. I didn't want to fly because I wanted to see the lay of the land, and anyway neither INR nor the Embassy wanted to pay my way at the end of the fiscal year. So we drove up through the Khyber Pass and the Kabul Gorge and spent a couple of days in Kabul. Ted Elliot was the Ambassador, and he and his staff took very good care of me. I didn't have time to go to Mazar-e-Sharif or Herat, but planned to drive down to Kandahar and return to Pakistan through Quetta, in a big circle. But then the DoD vehicle broke down and the only other ride I could find was on a USAID truck that went, unfortunately, straight back to Islamabad. So I didn't go to Kandahar. On my way home, I stopped in Tehran and had a couple of day's consultations there. Just my first taste, but that changed when I got back to Washington.

Q: Before you went to INR, just at that time when you were leaving Pakistan, you'd been in India and you'd been in Pakistan. Can you sort of compare and contrast the two states?

GRIFFIN: Sure. Before I do that, though, I forgot to add that my son and a friend of hiboth teenagercame to Pakistan just before I left, and went on a round-robin with me. After Kabul I flew with them to Karachi, Bombay, Colombo, Calcutta, Kathmandu, New Delhi, and back to Lahore before leaving for Tehran. That was my quick consultation tour to get up to speed before reporting to the Department.

The difference between India and Pakistan is quite stark in some ways. India is much larger in terms of population and land area. South Asia as a whole is roughly the equivalent size of Western Europe, and has even greater geographic contrasts. That is, it has everything from deserts and the tropics along the equator, to the highest mountains in the world, not to mention everything in between. It has as many languages as Western Europe. In fact, it has 13 major languagemajor languages being one spoken by more than 50 million people. They are mutually unintelligible, by and large, which is why English works among educated people in both India and Pakistan. India has several major religions, with a majority of Hindus, but it also takes pride in calling itself the world's second largest Islamic country, after Indonesia. If Pakistan and Bangladesh had stayed together as Pakistan, it would rival India for the number-two slot, but Indonesia would still come out ahead.

India is a more relaxed place, in part because it is bigger and doesn't have to worry as much, I suppose. It is also a more colorful place. These are the first things that impress you. Indians dress far more colorfully than Pakistanis do. There is more apparent art and culture in India than in Pakistan, though the Pakistanis would fight you over that. They would argue that their art and culture is just as good as India's and, "by the way, please look at the best monuments in India, which are very Muslim, such as the Taj Mahal." The two cultures have lived together for a very long time and have strong emotions about each other.

My wife thought Calcutta was neat in the late 1960s and early '70s. As I said before, it was the time of miniskirts, and she could walk to the main market and back without attracting stares. In Pakistan she very quickly learned to cover up everything. The first time she went to a market she was stared at, pinched, and touched. She has never wanted to go back to live in Pakistan. She has gone back to India. Women are treated somewhat differently in each country, but often in pretty much the same way. South Asia has a history of matriarchal societies. There have been female leaders in virtually every country. The world's first female prime minister was in Ceylon, don't forget.

Q: Bandaranaike.

GRIFFIN: Yes. Then there was Indira Gandhi, and then Benazir Bhutto, Khalida Zia, Shiekh Hasina, and so on. So you can't say that women are excluded, but they are mostly widows of major politicians or other elites.

I'm not sure that Pakistan should ever have happened. You can say that in India, but not in Pakistan. Once I was told by a Pakistani politiciaShaukat Hayat: he was present at the creation of his country, but is no longer with us; an interesting and elegant mathat he, Jinnah, and the other founders did not want to create Pakistan as an Islamic state. He said the prime motivation was to escape the Hindu caste system. If you study history, the Muslims of South Asia, by and large, came largely from the so-called untouchable caste in the Hindu system. (I'm leaving Buddhism out of this because Buddhism, except long ago, doesn't figure anywhere but in Sri Lanka.) So Pakistan and Bangladesh ended up with the poorest and least educated elements of Hindu society. Less economically advanced and, I would venture, more prone to making mistakes than the more highly sophisticated and much larger Indian elite system. That is not to say that Pakistan is rife with stupid people. It certainly is not. Some of them are brilliant. But, by and large, they came from the underclass and started with a handicap, and haven't really overcome it. This may be why commentators today often talk about the dangers of mistakes being made in another, perhaps nuclear war between the two. This has been on the news the last couple of days. They talk in a bit of code, generally saying that the Pakistanis are liable to bumble things. Not that the Indians aren't capable of making the same kind of mistake. Either side could begin a violent conflict, without considering all the consequences. It may be insulting to Pakistanis to say that, but history does bear out the argument that they miscalculate more often than the Indians. Given the makeup of the present government of India, that may have changed. Vajpayee's government is growing in popularity among rabble rousers, but it got there democratically, so you can't argue about it.

Q: This is one that has a Hindu nationalist core.

GRIFFIN: The BJP. It certainly does. It got there basically because the Congress Party fell apart. But, by and large, in India you feel more comfortable and freer to talk and do what you want, than you do in Pakistan. Indians are not as obsessed with religion. That's another generalization.

Q: It seems that in India one is aware, at least until quite recently, that the British roots are still pretty strong there. I'm talking about at the elite level, people getting educated...

GRIFFIN: But that's changing.

Q: At this time, but in Pakistan you didn't get - I've never served there - quite the same feeling.

GRIFFIN: Well, you did and you didn't. Historically, the top officers in the military and in the civil services, some businesspeople, academics, jurists, and other elites in both countries, by and large were educated either in British-founded local schools and universities, or in the UK itself. That has changed dramatically in both countries, and what you have now is a different system of education in both countries. Indians, for example, have come up with a system of technical institutes, which has driven what is today their computer industry to world class status, along with the scientific industry, which includes missiles and nuclear weapons. Indian minds are good at mathematics. Higher education has slowed in Pakistan over the last few years, in part because our relations haven't been that friendly. But if anybody is going abroad for education, the destination of choice is the United States of America right now. More and more South Asians are coming here, especially for professional training, medicine, and the sciences.

There was another point I wanted to make. Other differences remain. Pakistan has become more inward looking and more susceptible to the rise of Islamic extremism over time, and there is a certain amount of that in India as well. It's kept relatively quiet. Indian Muslims tend to be poorer, and some are kept that way by their Hindu neighbors, who still view them as untouchables.

Q: In a way, this was the origin of how you get out of this untouchability; you convert to Islam.

GRIFFIN: That's right, convert to Islam. That's what they did. Some of them have stayed in the same place for centuries, living side by side with Brahmins, at the top of the Hindu caste system. Often they are treated like dirt, as ex-untouchables, even though they are Muslims now. It sometimes breaks out into the open, as it did recently over Ayodhya, the site of the demolished Babri Mosque. About 30 years ago a professor in Lahore named Qadir wrote a fascinating article headlined "The Mind of the Pakistani." I didn't believe what I was reading until something happened to me one night in Lahore. He basically said that Pakistanis assume that the end justifies the means. He added that Pakistanis are not as slimy as the Persians, who have no principles whatsoever.

Q: You're paraphrasing.

GRIFFIN: Yes. He didn't talk about the Indians, but in fact Indians are a bit more open than Pakistanis. More comfortable in their skins. Why? Because they're bigger and stronger. They're like Americans in that sense. We can all be obnoxious, especially as perceived abroad, and many Americans certainly consider Indians to be obnoxious. We got to know many people in India, and some of our best friendthat's not a clichtoday are among them. We stay in touch with a few Pakistanis, but for us the Indians are easier to deal with. The incident that I was about to mention was at a dinner party. I had been talking to a senior civil servant, who confirmed something I had been trying to check. I thanked him and walked away. A little later, I was standing around a corner from him and overheard him talking to one of his Pakistani friends. He recounted what he had told me, and said, "He actually believed me. Ha, ha, ha!" I put that lesson to good use later on.

Q: Was there the feeling that Pakistan - I'm going back to the '70s when you were there - that Pakistan was not a state that could survive?

GRIFFIN: People said that from day one. Some argued that Pakistan never should have been allowed to happen. They said it was a mistake by Lord Mountbatten and the British Government, who just wanted out of a deteriorating situation, so they cut and ran. Before things settled down in 1947, an estimated 10 million people died. It was a bloodbath which many still remember vividly. Leaving that aside, since you can't change history, Pakistan does exist and there will continue to be trouble. It is a situation as intractable as the Middle East problem between the Israelis and Palestinians. There are ways to make peace for awhile, but not short of sorting out Kashmiand it's difficult to see how that could happen. Asking the Indians to give up Kashmir is like asking the Israelis to give up Jerusalem. It isn't going to happen, so they have to find other ways to keep things quiet.

Q: When you were sitting around with whiskeys and sodas or so with Pakistanis, were any of them putting up what they felt might be a solution to Kashmir?

GRIFFIN: Yes, everybody has a solution all the time. There have been many attempts made. Much later, when I was briefly in charge of the South Asia Bureau, and Tom Pickering was Ambassador to India, I convinced him that I had a proposal that might work, but only if the U.S. became involved, addressed it seriously, and put its influence on the line. He took me to Secretary Jim Baker, who agreed that it might work, and said he would get involved personally and get the President on board. Then he was snatched away to run Bush's election campaign and I never saw him again, so it didn't happen. Yes, many of us made efforts. I think there is an analogy in Jerusalem. One solution is to create an international zone: internationalize the place. Many Kashmiris will tell you, including Abdul Ghani Lone, who was killed last week, "Just make us independent and we will survive." I had long conversations with Mr. Lone about that subject. He was considered a moderate among Kashmiris, and yet the Indian central government, and its agent, the Kashmir Government, for that matter, treated him like dirt. As Stalin was supposed to have asked about the Pope, they would ask, "Where are your divisions, Mr. Lone?" I tried to point out to him that, Kashmir, like Afghanistan, would be a landlocked country and have a tough time, especially if its neighbors suspected it of making trouble. Kashmir's main access routes are through India. The roads and other links through Pakistan are less well developed. It's much easier to get there through India. From China, you have to cross the Himalayas, which isn't very feasible. It can be done, but it's very difficult.

Is there a solution? There is, and I have preached it, gone out and tried to do something about it, made innumerable speeches, talked to innumerable people, basically telling the Indians something they don't particularly want to hear. That is, "You need to be more magnanimous." I tried sometimes, for example, to draw an analogy between our relations with Canada and Mexico, and India's with Pakistan and Bangladesh. I argued that it's like what Pierre Trudeau said. Living next to an elephant isn't easy. I suggested that if they could see their way to being a little kinder, and not insist on having their way every time, they might have better results.

The Pakistanis have consistently, since the first war they got into, and certainly in the second one in 1965, sought American intervention, just as the Palestinians have. They want us to help them deal with the big guys. The Indians have consistently taken the opposite approach, saying it is a bilateral matter. They argue that no one else has the right to get involved. Since 1947, the Indians have also ignored United Nations' resolutions calling for a plebiscite in Kashmir. They don't want to hear about it. In other words, it would take the direct, focused, difficult, intense involvement of not only our governmenmeaning the Secretary of State and the President of the United Statebut also a major effort by other interested parties, such as Russia and China, to move the process.

Q: In a way it sounds almost more intractable than the Palestinian thing. I think most people who've been involved with this know where it's going to come out. It's just how do you get there, and that is getting the Israelis out of the West Bank and that the Palestinians aren't going to go back to Israel and work out some sort of maybe internationalization of Jerusalem. The lines are pretty well apparent there.

GRIFFIN: There would have to be an interim hand-off of Kashmir, and it would have to include all of Kashmir. We've approached this from time to time. It has been talked about a lot, and both the Indian and Pakistan governments have come close to at least a partial solution a couple of times. They have sat down at a table and come close to talking seriously about it, in other words. It would take the collaboration and agreement of India, Pakistan and China, not to mention the Kashmiris. The Kashmiris themselves are not agreed on the issues, to put it mildly. Then you have everybody else and their brother messing around. In other words, those who can't successfully do much in Afghanistan right now are probably having a good time in Kashmir.

Q: You're talking about what we would call terrorists, Islamic fundamentalists.

GRIFFIN: Musharraf says he stopped them; the Indians say, "No, you haven't. We see them." This is going to go on. There are more ways than one to skin this caspending money, for example. But the history of Kashmir is not a simple one. You can't roll back the history; you're stuck with it, so how do you get there is the problem. It would take a combined, intense effort on the part of all those interested parties, and it won't happen, short of sorting out the Middle East first, because it is a serious flash point. Then, they might decide to start slinging nuclear weapons at each other, which is possible within weeks. If they do, then others might try to step in, but my guess is it would go back to the status quo antnothing particularly new, unless the Indians were really damaged somehow, and I can't see that happening. I don't see the Indians taking over all of Kashmir. It's too difficult even for them, with a much larger army. I certainly don't see them trying to swallow Pakistan. They can't swallow that pill. Bangladesh is not a part of the equation this time. China hasn't opened its mouth, but...

Q: Well, there isn't much it...

GRIFFIN: Oh, they can make trouble for India, and have done so in the past. In the '71 war, they growled, but didn't do anything. I doubt that the Chinese want to get themselves mixed up in another war at this time, so I think they would probably sit back, as would the Russians. So the Indians, thinking that we usually end up on the side of the Pakistanis, made it their business to strike a deal with the Soviet Union before the '71 war, and then the Pakistanis felt betrayed by us because we didn't send in troops. We would not send in troops now. I don't think our present Administration is so concerned about an imminent war between India and Pakistan. But they are concerned about losing Pakistan as a platform to do what we need to do in Afghanistan, in part because we no longer have access through Iran.

Q: At the time you were there, did you feel that, because of power politics and Kissinger was in an all, we were supporting Pakistan more than India?

GRIFFIN: I knew something about the history of the 1965 war, when we didn't cut off military supply to Pakistan until hostilities began. The Indians expected it would be the same thing in 1971, which is why they made a deal with the Soviet Union. The Chinese were growling and threatening to fire missiles into New Delhi and sending their army over the Himalayas into India, so the Indians concluded that they needed a strong ally. Their preference is to sort it out all by themselves and tell the rest of the world to take a hike. But in 1971 they probably figured they needed help because we might step in, and so might the Chinese, to help the Pakistanis. In fact, in both cases it was a lot of bark but not much of a bite. Yes, we cut off assistance money to India and that sort of thing, but that was about it. We took no military action, except to send the USS Enterprise up the Bay of Bengal, and she didn't fire a weapon, so it didn't have much effect.

I was in India, of course, when that happened. We tried to get attention to what we thought was going on in eastern India and in East Pakistan. But it was clear from the attitude of Embassy Islamabad officers, especially Bill Simmons, with whom I went to work later, that we "just didn't understand that Pakistan was an ally, and specifically a CENTO and SEATO ally," in terms of East Pakistan. Neither organization exists any more, and neither had much impact at that time, but the Embassy insisted that our historical and treaty ties were still valid and that, if we didn't understand, we better shape up.

There has always been, as there is between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, tension between the embassies in New Delhi and Islamabad. It's something that virtually every ambassador tries to overcome. They go to visit each other, and have reciprocal meetings of country teams and other bodies, but it rarely works. I encouraged the utilization of SAARthe South Asian Association for Regional Cooperatiowhich has as members all the countries in South Asia, including the Maldives and Bhutan. It meets a couple of times a year. But if the Indians don't want to play ball, nothing happens. The others can talk themselves blue in the face, but it's water off a duck's back as far as the Indians are concerned. When they do want to play ball, okay, but that's been the exception, rather than the rule. So it isn't simple.

Many people have written books about the impending breakup of India, saying that the diverse subcontinent that I've described can't survive in its present form. They argue that it will break up into ethnic, religious or other groups. But at the same time that Western Europe seems to be coalescing, South Asia (in one of its more famous terms) has "fissiparous tendencies" meaning to break apart. I never subscribed to that theory, even when the Naxalites were in their heyday and New Delhi sent in the Indian Army to put them down. To some it seemed an inevitable breakaway, but it didn't happen. No more than Abraham Lincoln letting secession happen here will any Indian prime minister let it happen there. All Indian leaders have understood that the country's only hope for survival is to stick together. It is sort of remarkable. India was not a single country before the British came along and stuck together 621 principalities. Its strength lies in unity, and the politicians understand that, if they lose that, things will fly apart. I don't see any of them letting that happen in my lifetime. It may happen later ol don't know.

Q: Okay. Well, we'll pick this up later. When you went to INR that was what year?

GRIFFIN: 1975.

Q: What was your particular piece of INR when you got there? What were you doing?

GRIFFIN: I took over the South Asia Division, which covered ten countries, stretching from Iran to Bangladesh to the Maldive Islands, including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim. My immediate priority concerns were Pakistan, where I'd just come from, and India, but then things began to change very quickly. The Indian nuclear explosion in 1974 concerned everybody.

Q: This was the first...

GRIFFIN: It was their first underground test. India was in a state of emergency during the time. Mrs. Gandhi had lost power, but eventually came back. There was growing insurrection in Sri Lanka. Then there was the fall of Bhutto in Pakistan and his eventual hanging. Embassy Islamabad was attacked and burned, and violence in places like Kashmir kept increasing, and in Bangladesh the usual floods and cyclones. Soon it became evident that things were going sour in Iran, and that began to eat up more and more of my time because I had no Iran analyst. I took over from Dean Howells, who went off to Harvard for a year of advanced study. He had rights to return to his job when he came back, so I was concerned that I might be there for a year and end up being the deputy. I didn't think much of that, but anyway it didn't happen.

Q: You were there from when to when? You got there in '75?

GRIFFIN: I stayed for four years. It was a two-year assignment like all Department assignments, but I asked for an extension when I couldn't find a follow-up job that I wanted, and my bosses agreed.

Q: I can't think of a more tumultuous time. You had a lot on your plate, as you said. I think we'll deal with the individual countries, but before that, what was your impression when you arrived of the role of INR? There it is, it's analysis and all this, but did it go anywhere?

GRIFFIN: I was hesitant at first because the Bureau didn't have that great a reputation in the field. I had already been a desk officer and it didn't seem to me that the backwaters of INR were the way to get ahead, but Howells and others twisted my arm. When I arrived, the Director of INR was Bill Hyland, but he left pretty soon?

Q: He was only there a year.

GRIFFIN: ?and was replaced by Hal Saunders. Hal had been at the NSC and was a Middle East/South Asia expert. Hal brought quite a bit to the job. He imposed rigor on our writing. He brought access to Secretary Kissinger that his predecessor hadn't had. He had a tough bureaucratic mind that enabled him to get along with and stand up to other assistant secretaries. Pretty soon we realized that we had a going concern, and it took off. His deputy, Martin Packman, who had been in the Bureau for a long time, reinforced it. My bosses in the Near East/South Asia Office were Phil Stoddard, as Director, and George Harris, as his Deputy. They focused most of their attention to the Middle East, and were not much concerned with my neck of the woods until things started heating up. The good part of that was that I was pretty much my own boss. Phil and George let me guide the substance of my division's work, but they insisted, or Hal insisted, that our writing be at a level that would be both comfortable to and convincing to the Secretary. Hal had worked for Kissinger in the White House, which made a huge difference. We began to be listened to, which apparently was unusual for INR, as our products were quite good.

Q: We will come to individual countries, but I'm trying to get a feel for the overall thing. Did you feel you were in competition with the CIA for people's ears or analysis at that time? This was a pretty hot time.

GRIFFIN: Yes, we were, as things heated up in one part of the territory or another. The difference between the CIA and other parts of the intelligence community and the Department is that State has no covert intelligence collection capability. INR's sole capability is analysis. The analysis wing of the CIA collaborated and competed with us, but it was much bigger. Our most constant contacts were at the CIA, DIA and NSA, in that order. We tried to reach out and cooperate with them, and went often across the river or up to Fort Meade, including to this campus.

Q: We're now in Arlington Hall, which was the former...

GRIFFIN: It was the headquarters of DIA.

Q: ...Army Security Agency, wasn't it?

GRIFFIN: Defense Intelligence Agency. That process worked pretty well. There were disagreements, of course, but we tried to get to know our counterparts in those bureaucracies, so when we disagreed we could reason with someone we knew. We would call them on a secure phone and try to resolve disputes, rather than having to resort to what we call footnotes in documents that went to the President. Footnotes indicate disagreement between elements of the intelligence community. Our system worked reasonably well. At times, we would go to meetings chaired by the NIthe National Intelligence Officefor whatever region we were talking about. That was usually a CIA officer, so the meetings usually were at CIA. The biggest disagreements tended to come between State and DIA. That caused two NIENational Intelligence Estimateprepared for the President to be aborted, because our disagreements were so deep that we couldn't agree what to say even in the first line which outlined the general situation in bland terms.

Q: What were the situations?

GRIFFIN: The principal one concerned the downfall of the Shah of Iran. DIA, presumably representing the Pentagon, said that our estimate in INR that the Shah was falling were overdrawn. They argued that the situation could be saved by the top generals in Iran. We also differed on the presumed nuclear power policy of the Indian government. DIA was convinced that India's program was strictly for weapons development. We saw the possibility, if effectively lobbied, that they would use some of their assets to civilian nuclear power, with the help of the Soviet Union. In the end, CIA and NSA tended to support our view, but DIA stuck to its guns, so we had continuing disagreements. That situation became more pronounced when the head of the South Asia Division at DIA retired. He was replaced by an officer who shall remain nameless, but who just wasn't up to speed, in my opinion.

Within the Department we also had disagreements with the NEA Bureau, the geographic bureau parallel to our organization, and sometimes with other bureaus in the Department. One of my predecessors and my first immediate boss in INR, Tom Thornton, moved to the Policy Planning staff, and we collaborated on some thought pieces. One on future trends in India came back from the Secretary (Kissinger at that point) with a notation in the top right-hand corner "Good paper." Well, my immediate superiors in the Bureau went silly after Hal Saunders and Tom told them it was the first time they could recall that Kissinger had written such a compliment anyone's analysis. We flaunted that accolade to NEA for quite awhile.

Q: With the CIA and all, one of the things I've noticed in the field - I didn't have really much time in Washington - on country teams and all, the CIA would often pull out its confidential, secret source or whatever you want to call it, people they'd bought and all...

GRIFFIN: Covert source, yes.

Q: ...covert source, and this always seemed to carry great weight. We're reading the papers and talking to really the movers and actors, and a covert source may be somebody who's got a bone to pick or is burrowed somewhere in the bureaucracy, who might be absolutely right, but the weight given to a covert source seemed to kind of be - I won't say dominant - much more weight than probably would have been given if you knew who the person who was saying at it and looked at it in the cold light of day.

GRIFFIN: That's true. I can recall at least two such instances at an extremely high level during my tenure at INR. And it reminds me of what one of my ambassadors in Ceylon, Cecil Lyon, used to say. Namely, that any Foreign Service officer worth his salt can keep three secretaries fully employed. Over the years, I became convinced of another concept: most information worth having is more easily obtained by a capable overt State Department Foreign Service Officer than by some spook skulking around and paying money for dubious information.

Of course, those are both extreme generalizations, but I think I proved in the course of my career that information gathered overtly by talking to the right people, by getting to know those people, putting it into context, and good follow-up analysis, produces the best results. I don't remember the specifics, but in at least two instances, I learned that the President and the Secretarwe're talking Kissinger days at this poinseized on particular sole-source, covert, raw intelligence reports, and used them as the sole basis for taking action on major policy issues. The intelligence community, the regional bureaus, and the Policy Planning staff deemed them inaccurate, and worked hard to reverse course.

Now, I also happen to remember another sole instance of intelligenca communications intercept; I don't want to get into any more detail than thawhich was so clearly valid that it made a difference, that I used to very good advantage. There was no other way to check it, but it was undeniabllet's put it that waand caught the Shah of Iran lying through his teeth to people at the top of our government. It made a difference in the way things were finally done. So, you have to balance it out.

Q: That's, of course, where the analysis comes in. I am told that INR, when its under good leadership, probably comes in with more balanced accounts, mainly because we're talking about people who are dealing in the real world. I would assume that in the very large analysis section of the CIA you end up with a bunch of people where it's much more academic.

GRIFFIN: Yes, and there's a difference between the two cultures. In its favor, the State Department is mostly in one building where the various players work together. INR, when I was there, was about 50 percent civil service, and 50 percent Foreign Service. For example, my chief records keeper and executive assistant was Eleanor Pelton, who had been doing that for over 30 years by the time I got there. When I asked her for a particular document, it would be on my desk within 20 minutes. She knew where all the bodies were buried. That was very valuable. Perhaps the most valuable part was easy access to the country desks and offices, where, even if we disagreed, we could at least discuss the issues and thrash out various interpretations. Those could be mingled in our daily newspaper, which went to the Secretary and the President. We often took intelligence reports and combined them with regular Foreign Service reporting in our articles. There were two parts of the Secretary's Morning Summary. One was the daily foreign affairs news, with analyses. The other was an INR version of the National Intelligence Daily, or NID. They were kept separate for classification reasons, but we could combine such information. But at CIA, we would talk to analysts who didn't even know the names of the people in the DDO. If they got any name, it would be a first name, maybe a real first name, and sometimes a pseudonym; they never knew. But I could go to the CIA, to both sides of the building, talk to the analysts, talk to the operations people, by real names. Once I asked, "Gee, don't you guys talk to each other?" The response was, "Oh, no, no. This is compartmented. We can't do that." That's not true in the State Department, and I think we had an advantage.

Q: Let's pick up the countries, going to the one that began to absorb so much of our time, Iran, and then we'll move east. In '75 when you got there, what was the situation in Iran and did you know much about it?

GRIFFIN: When I arrived, the situation in Iran was fairly routine. As I was transferred from Lahore, on the way to Washington, I stopped in Tehran. I had never been in Iran before, and knew I had a lot to learn. So I spent a couple days there, staying at the residence of Political Counselor Hawk Mills. I found things extremely relaxed. It seemed, as Jimmy Carter once said infamously, "an island of stability in a sea of turmoil."

But once I got to the Department and saw what was known there, things didn't look so good. The Washington angle was very different from that in downtown Tehran. That said, I didn't pay too much attention to it in the beginning, for two reasons. One, we didn't have an Iran analyst at that time, so one of my chores was to find one, which wasn't easy. Two, things were popping in India and Pakistan at the time, so I was paying much more attention to that, and to Afghanistan, for that matter. Soon, things began to go more and more sour in Iran. Things began to happen that made the Shah less sure of himself. He probably went too far in modernizing his society, for one thing.

Before I say anything else, anybody who follows Iran knows that there is a lot of literature on this period, and an awful lot of disagreement as to who struck John. So whatever I say is going to find disagreement from somebody. There are whole books on the fall of the Shah.

Q: I'm trying to capture a person sitting in Washington dealing with the problem, your perspective.

GRIFFIN: I think Iranians became uncomfortable with the excesses, particularly in the royal family. The Shah's twin sister, Ashraf, whom I happened to meet a couple of timeonce in Bangkok of all placewas considered egregious by many people. She spent too much money; liked to party too much. There were many stories of corruption in the palace, especially by the sister and others in the family. Including the Shah, although most of the time his name didn't come up. At least until he began to have health or psychological problemI'm not sure whicwhen things began to unravel. The first big problem that I can recall was a demonstration in Qom, the city which hosts an important religious school and is the headquarters of most ayatollahs in the country. At that time Ayatollah Khomeini was not in Iran; he was camped out in Najaf, in Iraq. This was in 1978, though I don't remember the date offhand.

Q: This was during your time?

GRIFFIN: Yes. Things started to come unstuck, and Khomeini began broadcasts complaining that Iran was going to hell because there were too many evil things going on. It's the sort of thing fundamentalist leaders, religious leaders, all over the world complain aboutoo many parties, too much exposed flesh, too many dirty movies, wild music in nightclubs, and so forth. His messages sparked some open discontent, which was put down very quickly by SAVAK, the Iranian secret police. But that prompted increasing turmoil.

Q: When you arrived there and during this time, what were you getting? Were we looking at Khomeini at all? Was he a particular factor from our perspective?

GRIFFIN: Well, he was considered the most important ayatollah and was sent into exile to Turkey by the Shah and then moved on to Najaf. I don't know why Saddam Hussein let him carry on such subversion, though the Iraqis and Iranians are natural enemies, and the secular Baathists in Iraq didn't get along with the Shah. Of course, there's a very large Shiite community in Iraq, centered around Najaf, so Khomeini would have been comfortable there, while he continued to watch and comment on events in Iran.

Q: Were we tracking him, from your perspective?

GRIFFIN: To my knowledge, probably very few people were paying any attention to him in the U.S. Government.

Q: When you arrived on the desk, somebody wasn't saying, "Hey, keep an eye on this guy"?

GRIFFIN: No. There were some American academics who were following his activities, but it was some time before I met them. Eventually I brought several of them together to pick their brains and exchange ideas. Thankfully, they were willing to share their knowledge. Until Khomeini began to preach on the airwaves calling for the overthrow of the Shah, we didn't pay much attention to him. Then we heard that the Shah warned the Iraqis to shut him up or he would do it for them. There were also other ayatollahs speaking up, one of whom is the head of state there todaAyatollah Ali Hoseini Khamenei, spelled differently from Khomeini.

It was a steep learning curve for me, and I had to learn fast. Fortunately my boss, George Harribasically an expert on Turkehad tracked Iran a bit, as had his boss Phil Stoddard, who was a Middle East expert. I learned a lot from them while I searched for an analyst to cover Iran. Finally, as things really started to blow ubut it took two yearan outsideFrank "Pancho" Huddlapplied. He had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Iran, spoke Farsi, and knew a lot about the country. He went to work quickly and was a big help, but I was pretty exhausted by that time. For his sins, he's now our Ambassador in Tajikistan.

Things kept deteriorating and the Shah was increasingly unable to cope. In early 1978 after Qom and several other events, I wrote an analytical piece for the Morning Summary, basically saying that we were seeing the beginning of the end of the Shah's reign. It took a long time and many arguments to convince my bosses, including Hal Saunders, that I was on the right track and to let the article appear. They eventually approved it, which brought an immediate reactioa strong negative reactiofrom Ambassador Sullivan at Embassy Tehran, and an even stronger negative reaction from the White House, which didn't want to hear that.

Q: How about the desk?

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, we had disagreements there as well. Sometimes we were out on a limb by ourselves in INR. The first Country Director for Iran when I arrived, Charlie Naas, and I disagreed on almost everything to do with the stability of the Shah. He went to Tehran as DCM and was replaced by Henry Precht, with whom I found myself more in agreement. Henry understood the White House's position and tried to be supportive. But he soon found, as did Hal Saunders (who at some point in all of this moved from INR to NEA to be Assistant Secretary) and I, that there were undercurrents and secret working groups working around us. The principal players in the White House were David Aaron and Gary Sick. I think both of them have written books about all this. Sick said that we helped bring the Shah down.

Q: If I recall, Henry Precht has done an oral history for us and was saying at one point he was told, "Don't come to these meetings, because we don't want to hear."

GRIFFIN: That too. There are several elements to all this. At one point they brought in George Ball, who had been Deputy Secretary of Stator was he Under Secretary?

Q: He was Under Secretary. The title changed, but he was number two in the State Department.

GRIFFIN: That's right. Anyway, they brought him in, and I went to talk to him at some length. He had an FSO working for him, so I thought, okay, here's an opportunity. Ball seemed open to rational analysis and solid intelligence, and I met with him several times, as did many others in the Department. He wrote a report that I saw and did not disagree with. It was rejected immediately by NSC Advisor Brzezinski and the President. I'm not 100 percent sure of the latter, but it certainly was ignored. Then there were other groups to which we were never invited. At one poinand this is a story Hodding Carter has in his boothe President summoned every assistant secretary in the Department and their counterparts at the White House. He said he knew some of them went to cocktail parties and dinners and talked loosely about Iran. He told them that the policy of his government was to support the Shah of Iran, and no disagreement would be tolerated.

Q: Which President was this?

GRIFFIN: Carter. He apparently added that if he heard any such thing attributed to any one of them, they were fired, and walked out of the room. Pat Darien, Hodding Carter's wife and Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, who knew Carter well, tried to ask him a question. According to Hodding, he ignored her and left the room. I wasn't there, but I don't doubt the story at all. We soon suspected that our special analyses and Morning Summary pieces recording the decline of the Shah were not being read, or even being shown to the President. Clearly there were those in the NSC who disagreed with them. Gary Sick called me regularly to say, "This is wrong. You guys don't know what you're talking about." In the end, of course, we were proved right.

Q: You're the new guy on the block, which often has an advantage because you don't have a mental vested interest. Here you are looking at a new country, typical Foreign Service thing, you read up on it and all, and you begin to form your own judgment. Was there a point where you were looking at this and saying, "Hey, the Shah's not going to make it, or at least it's dubious that he's going to make it"? Did you reach that?

GRIFFIN: Yes.

Q: Talk a little about that.

GRIFFIN: Well, I watched and listened carefully. Of course, my expertise was further east and I knew little about Iran, so I had to learn from the paper trail and by listening to experts. That's why we organized several meetings, reaching out especially to the academic community. We found lots of experts on Iran in this country. I brought them here to meetings in that conference room in the Operations Center and elsewhere, and found them very good. Naturally, there was division of opinion among them as well. Some of them had vested interests in the Shah's survival. Some got grant money from the Government of Iran, for example. Then there were those who thought the Shah was anathema. We would bring them together to hear both sides in a dynamic setting. Some officers at Embassy Tehran tried to report some of the growing problems, especially on the human rights side. It was not something that ambassadors to the Shah wanted to hear. Long before the 1978 crisis, Ambassador Douglas MacArthur sacked Stanley Escudero, a Consul in Shiraz or Isfahan, for suggesting that the Shah had some serious opposition. That approach was not uncommon in Iran. The careers of several FSOs suffered for disagreeing with the front office in Tehran. Stan survived the blow, and eventually became Ambassador to Tajikistan.

An old friend from Pakistan was CIA Station Chief during one of my visits to Tehran. He had great experience in the region. I talked to him there, expecting him as Station Chief to be thick with SAVAK and the Court, and to reflect the Ambassador, but he complained to me that things were falling apart, and that none of his superiors understood. He was upset that neither the Embassy nor his own headquarters could see it his way. So, there was a lot of disagreement. For one who came in with a tabula rasa and little background knowledge, it seemed to me that, on balance, the people who were predicting gloom and doom were right. In the end, it turned out that they were.

Q: Did you feel the pressure of writing? When they said, "We don't hear any talk outside the building," did you feel the pressure to start writing cheerful things about the Shah or something?

GRIFFIN: There was quite a bit of resistance to the notion that the Shah was in trouble, but I kept pushing. That did a couple of things for me. One, it got the attention people higher up who helped me get my next job, and it got me a couple of awards. My bosses were fully supportive, I must saall the way up the line, at least through the Director of INR. I had no problem with them. In my last year, Director Hal Saunders was replaced by Bill Bowdler, who knew little about my part of the worlhis background was in Latin America. So my office had pretty free rein in what we did because his attention was directed elsewhere. At the same time, he was getting negative vibes about our output from the Seventh Floor and the White House, and didn't seem to know what to do about it.

Things became so tense that there were almost violent disagreements among us. We were getting nowhere in issuing a National Intelligence Estimate. I was saying that the Shah's collapse is imminent. Finally, it was agreed that some of us would go to Iran to double-check things. My boss said, "All right. You think you're right and the embassy is wrong. Go take a close look." So I went out to Iran on a special mission in late '78, along with Steve Cohen, one of the academics I had been consulting, and who had been brought in as a Deputy Assistant Secretary in HA, the Human Rights Bureau. Steve still works the territory. Also Carl Clement from the NEA Desk was along to keep us honest. It was a strange trip, beginning with our stop in Frankfurt. We were on a PanAm flight from New York, with a refueling stop in Frankfurt. We didn't plan to get off the plane there. But we kept sitting at the gate, and finally the pilot announced that we were not going anywhere, so all the passengers had to debark. I went to the cockpit and flashed my diplomatic passport, saying I needed to know the facts, and asked the pilot what he could tell me. He said there were riots in Tehran and the airport was closed.

I ended up going first to Kabul on an Ariana Airlines flight, because we couldn't get into Tehran. I had planned to go there anyway, to check with Spike Dubs, who had asked me earlier to be his DCM. I also needed to see what was going on in Afghanistan. It was a surreal visit, especially at the Marine Ball, where I went as Spike's guest. He made a very emotional speech, saying he owed his life to the Marines, who had rescued him when his plane crashed in the South Pacific in World War II. The Ball started at 4:00 p.m. because of the nightly curfew, which began at about nine o'clock. I spent the night with Fred Turco and his family, who had been with us in Pakistan and India. We sneaked out to the Marine House, which was a couple of doors from the Turcos, to wind up the evening in great style. We were challenged by a soldier on the way back to the Turcos, but Fred talked him out of shooting or arresting us.

And then I went to Tehran, where the other two had already arrived. We stayed there for a week, during which we met the head of the opposition party and lots of other Iranians, and visited every U.S. Consulate in the country. Then we went back to the Embassy and talked with Ambassador Sullivan, DCM Charlie Naas, the station chief I mentioned, and other senior officers. Only two of them said there were serious problems in the country. Most didn't want to hear such talk. It was clear to us that the Shah had serious problems, and that they were growing. We saw plenty of evidence. For example, soldiers on duty on the streets of Isfahan were so nervous that they aimed their guns at me if I looked too intently at them. The carpet markets in south Tehran were closed, both because they were afraid of riots, and because SAVAK kept shutting them down, charging that the merchants were funding the ayatollahs and some anti-Shah politicianwhich was probably true. Rich Tehranis were still having big parties, behind locked doors and shuttered windows. George Lambrakis, the Political Counselor, took me to one. We needed a secret code to get in, because the hosts were afraid of being found out. There was no evidence outside of the party, and inside it was all rather forced gaiety, with no servants. It was like that everywhere we went, so we came back to Washington and said, "London Bridge is falling down." After a tough fight and some yelling and screaming, our estimate was finally published. It didn't say that the Shah was finished, but it did say that his days were numbered, in the absence of a miracle.

Q: Did you find sort of a split in the embassy...

GRIFFIN: Yes, there were splits everywhere.

Q: ...as in Saigon, you know, towards the end, the ambassador hanging on and the more junior officers...?

GRIFFIN: Stanley Escudero, who was kicked out by MacArthur, but there was another officer in Isfahan or Shiraz, I don't remember which.

Q: Well, Victor Tomseth and Mike Metrinko, I don't know if either of those...

GRIFFIN: Yes, they were around, but they weren't the one I was thinking of. Someone else was in deep trouble with Ambassador Sullivan. Years later, just to wind this part up, Charlie Naas retired. Then he came back as a WAE to work on declassification projects in the Department. He saw me in the cafeteria one day and said, "George, you know, I argued like crazy with you at the time, but I've been going back over all our reports and your papers. I have to say you were dead right. I agree with you. And we were wrong." That was a very magnanimous thing for anybody to say. He said that, in retrospect, he and the Embassy staff couldn't see the forest for the trees. They were all too close to the palace, having a wonderful time. They were convinced that everything was well, and believed anything the Shah would say. He said, they missed it entirely and didn't want to hear what I was saying. I said, "Neither did the President." So the President and the Shah got tear-gassed in the White House garden, and then the Shah left Iran.

Q: Do we have anything else before we move to some of the other countries that you were dealing with?

GRIFFIN: We ought to talk about Iran a bit more during that very hectic time. I just re-read some material I have. One is a book called The Eagle and the Lion by James Bill, Professor at the University of Texas. It discusses Iranian-American relations since World War Two. Another is an article in the Washington Quarterly just after the Shah fell by a couple of people I knoMichael Ledeen and Bill Lewis. I don't agree with much of what the latter had to say, but it was interesting to go back and read it. Re-reading that material brought back to me all the controversy around town. There were struggles among various elements of the Department; between the Department and the NSC; between the Department, the NSC and DOD; and so forth. Things began to come unstuck in 1977, with violent demonstrations in Qom and Tabriz, and really became unsettled after the burning of a movie theater in Abadan.

Q: That was a major incident.

GRIFFIN: It certainly was. Things became very dicey for the Shah. My division in INR had lost our Iran analyst, who was transferred out, and I was left holding the bag. Fortunately, I had good people working on India and Pakistan, so I could leave most of that work in their capable hands.

Q: Would you explain about the movie theater and what happened and why it was important.

GRIFFIN: In August 1978, more than 400 people died in a fire at the Rex Cinema in Abadan. There were all sorts of conflicting rumors as to what sparked it. Some of the Shah's people claimed it was deliberately started by religious students. The opposition in turn spread the word that it was the work of SAVAK agents, which was probably what most Iranians saw as the truth. Some of the doors were locked, as happens in such places, and a lot of people died. It created an uproar among Islamic clerics. Ayatollah Khomeini's headquarters originally was in Qom, along with the country's most prestigious religious schools. The clerics preached that it was yet another indication of the way evil Western culture was killing Iranians, which didn't seem to bother the Shah. Riots broke out all over Iran. SAVAK and the police put them down, but things began to heat up.

That's when I picked up the Iran portfolio and soon realized I was in over my head. I didn't have enough background on the country. Fortunately, I was working for people who had paid attention. As I mentioned earlier, they were George Harris, Phil Stoddard, and Hal Saunders. They were all very helpful and encouraging to me, very, and their help was crucial. All three of them were rigorous in their approach to analysis.

Q: Stoddard's first name was...?

GRIFFIN: Philip Stoddard.

Q: And Harris?

GRIFFIN: George Harris. George is a widely recognized scholar on Turkey.

Q: Were they both in the Foreign Service?

GRIFFIN: Both were Civil Service. Phil Stoddard may still be doing some work for the DCI. After he retired from the Department they picked him up over there in the...

Q: George Harris, has he...?

GRIFFIN: George has retired, but he does a lot of scholarly work. He teaches at a university.

Q: They're here in town?

GRIFFIN: Yes, they're both here in town.

Anyway, as I said earlier, I was probably the first one to say in a Federal Government official document that the Shah was going to fall. It was certainly not a popular position. As mentioned in some of the articles that I referred to, it quickly became the contentious issue. The bottom line was that the President and his National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, decided that, as a matter of policy, they had to support the Shah. They decided to stand behind him, no matter what. Any contrary view or analysis that said that the Shah was in trouble and could fall was something they did not want to hear. And they made sure that they didn't hear it. This was President Carter.

While I was actively searching for an Iran analyst, I had to do most of the work. I figured that the best way to learn in a hurry was to consult my colleagues in the NEA Bureau, starting with Iran Country Director Charlie Naas. Then I went to the academic community. I had already been active in the academic community, mainly on India, and was a member of the Association for Asian Studies, focusing on South Asia studies. I realized that there was much knowledge out there that could help us understand the situation, so I began to invite academics to give us their views about what was going on in Iran. I don't remember who came first but we had one session with Professor Bill and Professor Marvin Zonis of the University of Chicagtwo of the best known in that field. They came to a session with other scholars and representatives of all the agencies I could round up in Washington for a discussion at which they presented papers. There were broad differences of opinion among the scholars. Zonis was probably the first one to argue that the Shah was in deep trouble. He had good contacts in the opposition and among the clerics. He had met and talked with the Ayatollah Khomeini for years, and had a good idea of what was going on. Part of our problem was that, as a matter of policy, the CIA didn't gather much intelligence on the Iranian opposition, and none at all on the activities of the secret policSAVAor other elements of the Iranian government. That was something they would normally do in most countries.

Q: Was this quite evident to you or were you told this?

GRIFFIN: Both. I wasn't told right away, but I probably got my first inkling when I came through Tehran on the way to the assignment in INR from Pakistan. I talked to Political Counselor Hawk Mills, who may have been the first to hint at it. Later, I met with a CIA officer I had known in Pakistan who was working on Iran. He made no bones about it, and was very frustrated because he wasn't allowed to collect intelligence he thought was critical.

Q: It sounds in a way almost incredible.

GRIFFIN: It does. So, he spent his time writing Persian poetry. Moreover the State Department reporting officers were not gathering certain types of information, or they just weren't interested. I remember twl want to try to leave names out of thia political officer and a pol-mil officer, who told me, "Oh, there's always rumors of troubles around here." That may be where Jimmy Carter got the line about Iran being an island of stability in a sea of turmoil. That was a general feeling among Embassy officers of all stripes: everything's okay, so we don't have to worry. But it was pretty evident to this neophyte sitting in Washington that, by mid-1977, things were getting bad. By early '78, things began to pop, with huge demonstrations, and violent police reactions. This led the Shah to ask the Government of Iraq to deport the Ayatollah Khomeini from Najaf. Saddam Hussein agreed, so in the Fall of 1978 the ayatollah went first to Kuwait, where he was rebuffed under pressure from the Shah, and then to Paris, where it was thought he would be less troublesome. They were wrong. He had kept relatively quiet, in fact, in Iraq. But once he got to Paris, he opened up and everything came tumbling out. He had access to communications and media that he never had before, and used it.

Back in INR, I began to produce and forward lots of reports and analyses. Academics offered us some papers, which we circulated. It was quickly clear that the White House didn't want to hear it. Several books have been written about this, so I don't need to get into all that. My memory of it is mostly of fights with Gary Sick and others in the NSC, and a few disagreements with NEA, although in the end we ended up agreeing. Henry Precht and Hal Saunders tried to soothe Bill Sullivan and Charlie Naas, the DCM in Tehran, who got regularly upset by what we produced in INR. It was sent out to them in a daily cable, and they regularly shot back messages saying we were misreading the situation. To their credit, my bosses stood right behind me. We approached it very carefully. We raised issues based only on what we knew. For example, there were a couple of pieces of very sensitive intelligence that made it very clear to us how shaky the Shah was, and how grave the overall situation was. I won't describe them in any more detail, except to say they were rather incontrovertible pieces of intelligence.

Then there was a big fight within the Department. According to some accounts I have read since that time, then-Secretary Cyrus Vance was cut out of what Brzezinski and the President were up to. Oh, he would go to meetings at the White House, and he certainly read our analyses in INR, which didn't always agree with what NEA had to say. The Shah was complaining over and over at the end, and even louder after he left Iran, that he was getting mixed messages from Washington. He certainly was; we all were. At one point the President seemed to be telling the Shah that he understood his problem, so maybe he should crack down. At the same time human rights was at the very top of Jimmy Carter's agenda, and he argued against arresting people or muzzling the press. The Shah clearly didn't think he could do both at the same time. There were also some mixed reactions in the Department. I gave intelligence briefings to Pat Derian, the first Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, and to her husband, Hodding Carter, who was the Department Spokesman. They didn't see eye to eye on Iran, but I found both of them open to the items I briefed separately, so we seemed to get somewhere. As I told you earlier, in November 1978, Steven Cohen, then a Deputy Assistant Secretary in HA (and a scholar from Illinois), Iran desk officer (and Farsi speaker) Carl Clement, and I went to Iran to check out our findings on the ground. We came back with a report they certainly didn't want to heathat things were worse than we had imagined, in terms of the stability of the regime.

Q: When you were wandering around the country, whom were you able to talk to?

GRIFFIN: We insisted on talking to a leader of the oppositioMehdi Bazargan, at that time. His was the secular opposition, not the clerical. We also talked to non-politicians and a couple of clerics. Although it was closed in protest against the regime, I managed to get into the bazaar in South Tehran on the excuse that I wanted to buy a rug. I talked to rug merchants who were some of the main sources of finances for the religious movement. They knew better than most what was going on. They detested the Shah, and I got an earful from a couple of them.

Q: What were they hoping to get out of the religious side?

GRIFFIN: My analysis was that the modernization, or Westernization of the population in Iran went too fast for most people, who couldn't handle the pace. Many Iranians were upset by the crass materialism, overt sex, wild music, movies, and all the other things that Americans are good at, and the kids were having a ball. They were also turning to drugs, something that hadn't happened before. Sure, for centuries Iranians have grown opium poppies and smuggled some of it out, but by and large most Iranians didn't use it until the 1970s, but then many started. On another level, most people were sick of the extravagance of the Shah's palace, and sick of SAVAK, and wanted to be rid of it all. I think all that was what upset people. The rug merchants stood for the equivalent of right-wing conservatism in this countrfamily values, national traditions, and so forth. They funded the clerics, whom they saw as keepers of the country's morality.

On another level, most young men were drafted into the military. They didn't understand much about what was going on, and were easy targets for the preachers. They did know enough to be worried for their safety while in the regime's uniforms. I saw dozens of nervous police and soldiers on street corners in Isfahan, clearly scared out of their britches. They didn't know what to do. They had guns, but people would still taunt them. They were extremely jumpy. Everybody was.

Q: What did you find at the embassy?

GRIFFIN: We got the same line: "Everything is fine."

Q: So often in an embassy you have the junior officers being out and around and so you have different views.

GRIFFIN: There were three of us, and among us we heard from dozens oEmbassy officers of varying ranks, from the counselor level down, who told us that things were really bad, and that it was being covered up in the front office. The front office, of course, denied it. A couple of months before our trip, we held another session with academics and senior government officials, including Dick Helms, who had been Ambassador. At one point, there was discussion of the safety and integrity of the post. Someone recalled that a mob had briefly invaded the Embassy, and wondered if the Iranian security forces would stop the next one. Helms said, "You're worried about a mob taking over and a few hostages for a few hours? That's what Foreign Service people get paid for. It's ridiculous. Why are you worried? The nation won't care." Well, he was proved very wrong much later on.

When I first went to Tehran in 1975, Helms was the Ambassador. I went to one of his staff meetings at which he jumped a Country Team member harshly for saying something that didn't fit the party line. It was clear that his people didn't want to rock the boat with City Hall. In 1978, Bill Sullivan was equally tough. He'd never been in Iran before, but he had a lot of experience in Southeast Asia and seemed pretty savvy. He began to push political officers in particular to go out and broaden their contacts. But some of them were lazy, some of them didn't think they should, and others never developed the contacts. There were many reasons, but the bottom line was that it wasn't done. Sullivan told us he tried, but we didn't find any officer he had put on the carpet personally. Neither did the various DCMs, as far as we could tell. They were too busy running the Embassy, and not gathering information. So, in a way, the Embassy had become blind to what was going beyond their official palace contacts, which was a big part of the problem.

We came back and reported, first to Under Secretary David Newsom, who seemed quite concerned. He sent us to David Aaron in the White House, who listened, but didn't like what he heard. During that meeting, Aaron asked Henry Precht, who accompanied us to the Situation Room, "Just who is the 'opposition.'" He laughed when Henry said, "The people, David. The people." After that, pressure on the White House to do something prompted the President or Brzezinskl'm not sure whicto call in George Ball. Ball had been Under Secretary of State when it was the number two position at State. He was asked to do a quick policy study on Iran and give them recommendations. Ball set up shop across from the White House in that building...

Q: Widner Building or something like that?

GRIFFIN: It was near the new Executive Office Building in that area behind Blair House. Ball tried to reach everybody that he thought might have something to say. He summoned me, and I told him what I knew. Then I also took over a couple of the scholars I mentioned earlier so he could hear from them. Eventually he put out a report, the thrust of which was that there should be a government of national unity in Iran with "wise men" in charge. As far as I know, it was rejected by the White House, despite its support from many others at the time. It all ended up with the Shah being tear gassed with Jimmy Carter, things quickly going to hell in Iran, and the Shah going into exile. He was not well at the time.

Q: The knowledge that he was not well, that didn't come through for some time, did it?

GRIFFIN: It was getting to be common knowledge. Some of us knew a fair amount. Without getting into some sensitive things, he had, like a lot of foreign leaders, American doctors who would go to Iran to examine him. One of them told us what they found. I don't remember the exact diagnosis, but he was having a problem copinprobably some sort of manic depression. He also had a physical ailment of a type I can't recall, of which he eventually died. He was having disagreements with his wife, and with his sister, who was another problem. She was his twin sister and was perceived by the public as a party girand corrupt as they come, even venal. She wouldn't take orders from her brother, and often tried to give them to him. So, the man was surrounded by people who were not helpful to him.

Analysts in INR are proscribed from proposing policy. That is the function of the geographic and other bureaus. We were just supposed to do analysis. But of course a concerned reader of our analyses would likely come to the conclusion that one course of action was better than another. Whether the U.S. should have stepped in more vigorously is a question that probably will never be answered, but my opinion was that a better way to handle it was to withdraw support from the Shah. In other words, step back, not step in, and let the chips fall where they may. If things had moved quickly enough, other, more publicly-trusted elements of the Iranian elites might have taken over and calmed things down. On the other hand, the Shah, as he kept saying thereafter, wasn't sure what America wanted him to do. He even had suspicions that we were supporting the Ayatollah Khomeini at one point.

Q: Were you dealing with Iran after the Shah left?

GRIFFIN: Yes. The Shah left in January 1979, and Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran later that month. I didn't leave INR until that summer, when I went to FSI to study Dari. Those few months saw a lot of turmoil in Iran, including the fall of Prime Minister Bakhtiar's government and the takeover by the Ayatollah.

Q: Our embassy was taken over on February 14th, Valentine's Day, of '79 for 24 hours. How did we read that?

GRIFFIN: Scary. The security officers were strongly criticized, but their reaction was that our worldwide system at the time was not secure. It was over fairly quickly, in part overshadowed by the assassination that same week of Spike Dubs, our Ambassador in Kabul, and the attack and burning of Embassy Islamabad, in Pakistan. So, we had our hands full, with lots of things popping all at once. It was a very confused period.

Q: Well, let's then move over to Afghanistan during this '75-to-'79 period. How initially were you looking at Afghanistan?

GRIFFIN: Well, it looked pretty quiet at the beginning. In 1975, when I started in INR, Afghanistan was the site of our largest USAID mission in the world. It was busy with major projects; building dams, highways and so forth. It was also working on crop substitution programs, trying to wean Afghan farmers from opium poppies. Many of our programs were designed as competition against the Soviet Union, which was building dams and highways elsewhere in the country, closer to the Himalayas and the Pamir Range. We went east-west and they went north-south, for military reasons, more than anything else. Things were relatively quiet until the assassination of President Daoud in 1978. He had overthrown his cousin King Zahir in 1973 and abolished the monarchy, saying that the regime had become corrupt and that the country needed democratic government. He was replaced by a Communist regime, which probably was helped by the Soviet Union behind the scenes.

At that time, the competition was very much between the U.S. and its allies, and the Soviet Union. The CENTO organization had pretty well collapsed after the 1971 Indo-Pak war, when the Pakistanis saw that they weren't getting much out of it. They were also members of SEATO, but that died with Vietnam. Moreover, the Iraqis were sliding out of it, as were others. Our perspective on everything was colored by what the Soviets were up to. For their part, the Soviets seemed to think we were trying to make allies of Islamic militants opposed to Communism. That scared them because it was the main reason they went into Central Asia in the first place. They feared that what they had seen in the 1920s was coming bacthat a rise of Islam would threaten the Soviet federation and the political structures they had built over the years. So I think they saw us coming along with a new sort of threat, and that's probably why they moved into Afghanistan. Moreover they saw the Shah crumbling and hoped they could pick up the pieces there. They had tried it once before and failed, and perhaps thought this time it might work.

Afghanistan was becoming a source of trouble in the Soviet Central Asian republics, especially in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. They were not only the same ethnic peoples, but also families had been divided by the Soviet incursions in the 1920s. The Soviets feared that, saw an opportunity to put a puppet on the throne in Kabul, and did so. That triggered all sorts of other reactions, but it was still fairly quiet when I took that trip in November of 1978. I went first to Kabul told you all thibecause our plane couldn't land in Tehran because the airport was closed. So I caught an Ariana plane out of Frankfurt to Kabul. Among other things, I wanted to check with Spike Dubs to make sure he really wanted me to be his DCM. He did. Then I went to Iran, and eventually on home.

Then, in February 1979, the time you were talking about, he was assassinated. The situation in Afghanistan was beginning to look very ugly. I assumed that my assignment to Kabul would be broken, buPersonnel and the NEA Bureau said I must go, and the sooner the better.

Q: How did we read the assassination of Spike?

GRIFFIN: It was, and still is with some people, a subject of controversy. On his way to the Embassy in his lightly armored car, his chauffeur was flagged down on a Kabul street by a couple of policemen. The driver said he opened the door a crack to ask the cops what they wanted. The car was one of those armored in a way in which you couldn't open windows. One cop jerked the back door open wide and jumped in, waving a gun. The second one jumped in the other side, surrounding the Ambassador. They ordered the driver to the Kabul Hotel, and took Dubs to a room. The driver managed to get the word out, probably on the radio to the Embassy, and police were callearmed Afghan and Soviet security forces. I wasn't there and couldn't tell you exactly who they were. Maybe Bruce Flateen could.

Q: I've interviewed Bruce, who thinks they were KGB.

GRIFFIN: Yes, he says he knew it because a KGB man from the Soviet Embassy that he knew well was there, so there is no doubt in his mind. But some of it is still unclear. I don't think we have the forensic evidence to say which bullets actually killed Spike, because both Afghans and Soviets were shooting into the room. Bruce said he tried to stop them, but that they claimed they were being shot at from inside the room. The door wasn't open, and they were shooting through it. By the time Flateen could get in, everybody in the room was dead; by whose hand was unclear. Afghan, Soviel certainly don't know.

Q: Now we're trying to figure it out. This kidnaping then going to a hotel in the middle of the city didn't make any sense at all.

GRIFFIN: And for whatever reason, we never found out. The entire incident took very little time. It was just a few hours, perhaps only two or three, with no messages from the abductors, as far as I know.

Q: From all accounts the one or two that were captured alive were killed.

GRIFFIN: I heard that most of the abductors were killed in the hotel room, although Bruce did tell me that he saw one man being led out of the room and away, never to be seen again. During my tour, we also tried to find out more, but we found no good intelligence on the event. The Soviets certainly were suspected of having a role in the matter. Spike was basically a Soviet hand in the Service and had served there.

Q: Yes, he'd been DCM, I think, in Moscow.

GRIFFIN: Yes, he had. So maybe they were concerned about him for some reason beyond Afghanistan. It's hard to imagine even the Soviets assassinating an American ambassador.

Q: It's been sort of a rule of thumb that the Soviets didn't go around and kill...

GRIFFIN: Not like the North Koreans.

Q: Sort of with the KGB and the CIA, we don't kill each other, because if you start doing that there's no end to it, and, as far as I know, that held pretty much. Spike was not of any caliber. It's not conceivable.

GRIFFIN: Well, his expertise was probably one reason he was sent there. He knew that the Soviets were increasingly concerned about the place, and Washington wanted somebody there who knew the Soviets. He had traveled extensively in the Soviet Union and relished the opportunity to see it from another side. He wanted me there because of my South Asia background, as he had no experience in the region. So yes, I did try to follow up on the assassination, but in two or three months I was on another track. I had to come to FSI to learn Dari.

Q: We can pick up Afghanistan later because you were concerned with that, but you had Pakistan and India on your plate?

GRIFFIN: Yes. Several important things happened during my tour. INR was still exercised over the 1974 Indian nuclear explosion, which the intelligence community had failed to predict. The Indians kept denying that it was a nuclear weapon, saying they were just testing the science to see if such explosives could be used to dig canals and that sort of thing, but it was clear that such arguments were phony. At the same time, the Pakistanis began to build their own capability. Whatever India does concerns Pakistan directly, and we found that they were seeking help from many quarters, particularly the Chinese. Beijing is Islamabad's natural ally against New Delhi. Then there were the North Koreans, who were willing to sell the Pakistanis practically anything if they paid cash, including missiles and some technology. The Pakistanis were ready to buy, sell, and barter, so that became a focus for several parts of INR. Other divisions of INR dealing with nuclear matters followed this more closely than mine, but we certainly did watch and analyze, especially the political aspects.

Several things happened almost simultaneously, including one in India in 1975. Mrs. Gandhi was getting less and less popular, in part because she tried to find a way to restrain India's population explosion. This was not a new problem, but it was getting huge. USAID, in that period, was passing out condoms all over India. They had great shows, with people riding on elephants throwing condoms to crowds. It seemed to be having an effect. But then Mrs. Gandhi's son Sanjay appeared and was given a government position, in which he started a vigorous program to induce men to have vasectomies. He argued that the condom programs weren't working, and seemed bent on forcing compliance. The Congress Party was losing popularity because it had gotten fat and lazy, and wasn't doing a very good jolosing elections all around the country. Mrs. Gandhi finally got so frustrated that she declared a state of emergency.

One of the triggers for her action had my name on it. She was about to take a trip abroad when mechanics found something wrong with her official aircraft. At an Air India facility in Bombay, where the plane was maintained, inspectors found some control wires sawed halfway through. As the communists' favorite "killer CIA spy," my name got attached to this. Allegedly, I had somehow sneaked in and done this in the dead of night. They had to blame somebody, and I was convenient, if nowhere near India. So, I was one scapegoat to prove that somebody was out to get her. In the end, Mrs. Gandhi's imposition of the state of emergency cost her the prime ministership, and she went to jail. Then in 1980 she came back.

It was a period of rather great turmoil in India and Pakistan. I watched the downfall of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was Prime Minister when I was stationed in Pakistan. It was his own fault. A potent populist, he miscalculated and overreached. He tortured members of the political opposition, jailed them, and became more and more like the military dictators he had railed against, as things deteriorated. The economy was in a slump, and he angered enough people to prompt demonstrations. Perhaps the beginning of the end for him was when women took to the streets in Karachi and Hyderabad, where some were shot by security forces. That triggered a violent uproar, which spread and, in the end, cost him his job. He was overthrown by Zia ul-Haq, an army general, in typical Pakistani style. He was eventually hanged, after being convicted of murder, which was not typical. Pakistan has seen domestic trouble ever since. Then, when our Embassy was attacked in 1979, the police didn't do much to stop it in the beginning, despite urgent pleas from the Embassy. It was a low period in our relationship.

Q: Events in India sort of almost for the most part happened kind of in a vacuum. Here's a very major country, and yet our policy towards it hasn't been very positive.

GRIFFIN: There were attempts to make it positive. You may recall that Jimmy Carter's mother Lillian went to India as a Peace Corps volunteer. The Carters wanted to be different from the Kennedys, who had gone to India with what looked like a royal entourage. Carter would have none of that. Remember how he used to carry his own hanging bag over his shoulder when he went on trips? He wanted to be seen as the people's president. But you're right. Things were not going well for us in India. There was concern that the communists would gain even more power. They did eventually in West Bengal, but they also lost power on the other side of the country in Kerala, so it was a mixed bag. The Indians were coming awake technologically and economically.

One of my analysts, a specialist on India, used to stress, especially after the underground nuclear explosion, that the Indians were fundamentally and energetically after new technology. This concerned the Department, so we directed some of the national intelligence collection efforts to try to find out what they were up to, focusing on nuclear development. The Indians claimed to have invented their nuclear device on their own, saying they had enough brains and research capability to do so. I would argue that that was not 100 percent true. We were watching the same things in Pakistan. The Pakistanis were behind the Indians in terms of research and capability in that field, but they tried hard to become equal. Pakistanis were more likely to buy equipment and technology than the Indians, who wanted to develop their own people and programs.

One of the positive things that Mrs. Gandhi pushed the mosand her son Sanjay was involvewas the development of the ITIIndian Technical Institutes. It was an attempt to strengthen technical education in the country, which had become bogged down in a miserable system of rote learning and memorization, with the result that most people were not getting much of an education. A huge information technology industry developed around the ITI in Bangalore, where every important American company in the fieldIBM, Hewlett Packard, Texas Instruments and otherhas a facility. The manpower is highly skilled, motivated and cheap. Technicians cost about a tenth what they cost here. So things were moving in both positive and negative directions.

My INR Office covered both the Middle East and South Asia. Most of the time, despite all the activity in my South Asia Division, the Near East Division had most of the action. President Carter was trying to make peace between Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat. He brought them to Camp David, which took Iran, India and Pakistan off the front pages, but not off of my front page. At the same time, the Tamil insurrection or civil war in Sri Lanka was in full tilt, and extremely worrisome. At about that time we discovered ties between Islamic militants in the Middle East, the IRA in Ireland, and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. It was a worldwide effort, and probably still is, and we were trying to track it. We were not hugely successful.

Q: Was Qadhafi at all involved?

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, from the evidence I saw. He set up training camps in Libya for all sorts of revolutionaries and terrorists. There also seemed to be a Soviet connection somewhere. In any case, there was a worldwide conspiracy, according to some analysts. It may not have been that well organized, but various parties certainly had ties and communications, and people swapped information. Money, guns, and bomb materials flowed around the world.

It was also the periofrom 1975 to 197which marked the beginning of the end of tourism in Kashmir. There have always been problems in Kashmir, as there are today. But it used to be an idyllic vacation spot for some of us in South Asia. Now it's a place we tell people not to go. First the Embassy staff, and then we began advising all Americans not to go. Some went anyway, and got captured by guerrillas and held for ransom.

There were continuing difficulties in trying to make something work in Bangladesh, but it was on the back burner. The period also saw the end of the Chogyal of Sikkim. He was ousted from his throne by the Indians, who took over the country, despite protests that it was independent. He died shortly thereafter, and his wife, Hope Cooke, returned to America. The precedent was the earlier takeover of Goa and the other Portuguese and French colonies which Krishna Menon and Nehru called "canker sores in the flesh of India" Goa being the biggest and most controversial one. There were stirrings of trouble in Bhutan as well, although that was about the quietest place in my bailiwick.

Q: Were we seeing the Chinese poking or prodding or doing anything?

GRIFFIN: The Chinese did make some statementthey usually don Kashmir, because they claim part of it as well. But their reaction to the Indian takeover of Sikkim was very quiet, even though it's on their border. The same with Bhutan.

Q: From the INR perspective, how did we perceive Sanjay Gandhi?

GRIFFIN: He was like many sons of big leaders, I'd say. Too big for his britches, thought he had the power of the throne, and threw his weight around and upset people. He had some good ideas and some bad ones. He didn't much favor freedom of the press. He started a car factory, which many people said was only to make himself rich and not, as he asserted, to help the country modernize. However, those cars have taken a big share of the Indian market, so he had vision and started something that produced results. But the perception that he got his way because he was the Prime Minister's son angered people. He was killed in an airplane crash (probably his own fault), which brought his elder brother Rajiv to the fore. He eventually became Prime Minister himself.

That family tradition still goes on. Rajiv's Italian widow Sonia is head of the Congress Party. I don't think she will ever be Prime Minister; it's too much of a foreign thing. But to answer your question, we did report the rise of Sanjay. I had an Indian friend who worked with him on some of those things, especially on the role of the press, his PR firm, and the car company. So I learned some things about him almost from the horse's mouth. I didn't spend a lot of time on it, until I thought he might bring down the government, which he eventually did, in effect.

Q: Were we seeing India as a potential enemy, a potential problem, or just sort of an elemental Third World country?

GRIFFIN: Good question. Historically, our relations with India have been best when a Democrat was in the White House, and worst when it was occupied by a Republican. The mirror image has been true in Pakistan. We kept preaching that it is not a zero sum game, but few believed it. That's the way people behave. I doubt that Jimmy Carter had a romantic view of India, but he did work to bring back the friendship. However, as personalities, Carter and Indian leaderany one you want to picare not going to fall in love with each other.

Q: Each one preaches to the other.

GRIFFIN: That's right, so it doesn't work. Each preached over the other's head, in a fruitless dialogue. Carter claimed to be a nuclear expert, since his time as a submariner in our nuclear Navy, where he had worked a bit for Admiral Rickover. He was very interested in India's nuclear program. He read our material on that subject, but not the stuff on the Shah.

Q: Were you picking up any prejudices on Brzezinski's part? At this point the Soviets were supplying a lot of military equipment and there was a sort of unlikely alliance between India and the Soviet Union.

GRIFFIN: It was longstanding and continues so far with Russia. There is a useful friendship there, partly on philosophical grounds. Most Indians look favorably on the concept of socialism, and many of them are really communists. Not the same kind of communists per se, but they talk about it as if it were the same. They find many areas of agreement, but the main Indian interest was staving off American support for Pakistan and Iran. The Soviets had a natural enmity toward the Chinese, whom the Indians also considered an enemy, especially after 1962, when they marched into India. In India's view, a good way to bolster its defenses against those countries was to be friends with the Soviets, so they made sure that they were. That isn't likely to change with Russia. The Pakistanis will look to the Chinese for the same reasons.

Q: I was thinking of the time of Brzezinski. The Soviets were the enemy, coming from his background and all. Did this play at all into the Indian relationship that you saw?

GRIFFIN: Not that I can recall. I don't remember Brzezinski having much to do with the Indians.

Q: I can't think of any instance either. He saw Soviet influence countering us all over, and I would think that this would somehow set him off, but I can't think of it.

GRIFFIN: Well, that notion certainly used to set off Dean Rusk. It set off Henry Kissinger. Lots of people saw the bipolar world that way. But I don't recall Brzezinski focusing on the Indians. He probably did have plenty to say about India, but it wasn't his main focus.

Q: What was our reaction in Pakistan on the downfall of Bhutto? Bhutto was no friend of the United States.

GRIFFIN: No kidding, though Kenneth Galbraith would differ with you on that. That's in part because they got to know Bhutto's daughter, "Pinky," or Benazir, when she was studying at Radcliffe. Their son Peter was at Harvard at the same time, and "Pinky" sometimes was a houseguest. I saw Mrs. Galbraith right after Bhutto was hanged. She was distraught and said she thought that could be the end of Pakistan, as things were going to go to hell. I said I wouldn't be surprised if the kid grew up one day and followed in her father's footsteps. She said, "Oh, no, she's not political at all." Obviously she misread Benazir. Many Americans were upset, and uttered sharp words condemning the new Pakistani leaders. I don't recall what we did about our USAID programs, but executing a democratically elected leader was, in Jimmy Carter's eyes, anathema. So, yes, we would have been very stiff, which may have accounted for the lack of police protection at the Embassy when the mobs came. It was not a warm and friendly time in bilateral relationwhich is something that happens over and over again. It's hard to keep that relationship close, so I'm sure this Administration is having its own problems right now.

Q: Sri Lanka you had, too.

GRIFFIN: Yes, the Tamil Tiger revolt was in full flower. It had started in the mid-1970s, but wasn't well organized then. It began to take off in the late 1970s.

Q: Were we looking for somebody's hand in this, Indians' hand, or...?

GRIFFIN: Yes, of course. That's one reason I stopped in Madras on the way back from Colombo in 197to get a better feel for Indian support for the Tigers. Some of them had moved into Madras State, which is now called Tamil Nadu, and set up headquarters there. They were funneling money, guns, and other support into northern Sri Lanka. So, yes, there was a connection, and the Consulate was watching it carefully. That seemed to dry up after I left INR, because in 1987 India sent the IPKF, or Indian Peace Keeping Force, to Sri Lanka to help Colombo stop the violence. They probably had tried to stop some of the cross-channel movement of people and money and guns, but were not very successful, and decided to send in troops. After a couple of years in which hundreds of Indian troops were killed and their units lost several battles, New Delhi withdrew the IPKF. It was the Indian Army's worst day in recent history. They had prided themselves, after retreating from the Chinese in 1962, on building a very strong military force. It was tough, ethnically diverse, skilled in fighting in the world's highest mountains, deserts and jungles, and had considerable experience in United Nations peacekeeping forces around the world. They thought they could do anything, but in Sri Lanka they walked into a hornet's nest and got blown away. Their soldiering was terrible. Any military analyst could tell you chapter and verse about the things they did wrong. I heard that they couldn't make anything work, and finally tucked their tails between their legs and left. I think there was a degree of reorganization of the Army after that. I don't know how effective it was.

Q: Well then, we'll move to Kabul. You went to Kabul?

GRIFFIN: Yes. Before going to Kabul, I came to FSI to study Dari, which is supposed to be a 12-month course. After three or four months of it, NEA told me that the situation was wearing down Embassy personnel. They needed to transfer people, and wanted me to go at once. I managed to convince them to let me stay through Christmas so I could be with my family. The day after Christmas, as I watched the packers drive away with all our household goods, I got a call from the Department saying, "There's a problem." I think it was Howie Schaffer again. I said, "What's that?" He said, "Don't you pay attention to the news?" I said, "Actually I've been quite busy with Christmas and packing. No. What?" He said, "The Soviets invaded Afghanistan the day before yesterday. You may not be going after all." I was shocked, but told him I wanted to proceed because I would be needed more than ever in Kabul. What was really on my mind was that I no longer had a house. It was rented out. What would we do?

We moved to a hotel. After two or three days, I learned that the Secretary was going to London and Brussels to consult with our allies on reaction to the Soviet invasion. I asked to be put on his delegation. That actually happened after the delegation had left, but I went to London anyway.

Q: So you were in London?

GRIFFIN: Yes. Messages were flying back and forth to Chargï¿½ Bruce Amstutz in Kabul. With considerable difficulty, I managed to get orders for my wife and daughter to come to London with me. After a few days there, I argued that I at least ought to go to New Delhi, where I might be of some use to Embassy Kabul, and better able to see what was going on. That was finally agreed to, after getting White House approval. We got to New Delhi, where people were starting to stream in from Kabul. The President ordered the evacuation of the entire mission staff and broke relations with the Government of Afghanistan. At first they didn't seem to know what to do, but soon it was decided to keep a very small staff there. Not under a third-country protecting-power, but as a mission with no official status. I wasn't in Washington, so I don't know how it was all worked out, but the President decided to keep the Embassy open with a staff of 12 people.

I flew to Kabul the day after my wife's birthday, which is on the 8th of January. As I landed, Soviet MiGs were strafing and bombing near the airport and buzzing the city where people were shooting at Soviet troops. This terrified Amstutz, who had come to the airport to meet me. We raced to the Embassy, which is on the main road from the airport. In my first meeting, I concluded that cutting the staff to 12 people wasn't going to work. There was a contingent of some 15 Marines at the time, and Washington said we had to keep 6 of them. That left 6 Americans to staff the operational part of the Embassy. So we argued with the Department, and finally got them to agree to a staff of 18. In the end, we were able to have an operational staff of 13, by keeping only 5 Marines at post at a time. One Marine was always on rotation in New Delhi, where he had to stand regular guard duty. Since they normally could get back to Kabul in a few hours, the President finally agreed. So my arrival was rather exciting. But soon I had a bit of a row with Amstutz.

Q: Who was the DCM at that time?

GRIFFIN: He was Spike Dubs' DCM.

Q: Bruce?

GRIFFIN: A M S T U T Z. He was getting worn out. Ambassador Dubs' assassination had hit him hard, as it had several others who were being transferred out but he stayed on as Chargï¿½. I think that was why the Department wanted me to get there as soon as I could, because Bruce was so tired.

Q: You were there as Chargï¿½ then?

GRIFFIN: Not yet. The day after I arrived, Bruce and I discussed staffing, and had some immediate disagreements. As we went down the list of who should stay and who should go, I said the RSO should go. I could see no use for an RSO, and would rather have a political officer. Bruce disagreed, and apparently asked Washington to send me back to New Delhi while the staffing was sorted out, saying there were too many people in the place. Political Counselor Bruce Flatin agreed with me, but was soon evacuated. After a few days I was sent back to New Delhi, and began cooling my heels. I was given a small office at the Embassy and tried to follow what was going on in Kabul and stick my nose in where I could.

But a lot of time was spent trying to sort out my family's situation with Embassy New Delhi. The head of the housing board was the Political Counselor, whom I figured would eventually be my principal interlocutor in India. My wife and I went to see him, in an effort to make sure she got a decent place to stay. But the first words out of his mouth were, "You're another one of those Kabul refugees we don't need around here," and Chrissie broke into tears. The Embassy eventually found a place for her and our daughter to stay, but it was done in a rather grudging way. The post seemed to view them as just more mouths to feed. Except for the PAO and the Station Chief, the Embassy staff essentially ignored my family during my tour in Kabul. Then suddenly, when I got orders to replace that same fellow as Political Counselor, they all became very friendly to my wife.

Q: Amstutz was staying on then, was that it?

GRIFFIN: Briefly. He convinced the Department that he shouldn't go until the Embassy was properly organized under the new staffing plan. I was excluded from those discussions. Then, Ambassador Doug Heck in Nepal, who had been my boss in NEA when I was Ceylon Desk Officer, noticed my plight. He called me to say that his DCM had gone on home leave for three months, and he needed some help. He asked me to come to Kathmandu and be acting DCM while the Kabul situation was sorted out. I agreed, and he pulled the right strings in the Department, which sent me TDY orders to Kathmandu. I went up alone, because we didn't want to take our daughter out of school. I drafted the Embassy's first goals and objectives papedo you remember those things? knowing very little about Nepal. That kept me occupied for two or three weeks.

My wife and daughter did come up briefly, just as the Department sent me an immediate telegram saying, "Get to Kabul at once." So, I jumped on another plane and went on permanent transfer to Kabul. Amstutz and I consulted for a couple of days, then he departed and I was left holding the bag. Three or four months later the Department sent out a more senior officer. So Hawthorne "Hawk" Mills arrived as Chargï¿½, bumping me down to Acting DCM for the next year and a half.

Mine was supposed to be a three-year tour, so I asked that my family be given orders to join me. The Department said, "No." I pressed, insisting that they check with the White House. They claimed to have done so, and said the very firm reply from Jimmy Carter himself was, "What did I tell you the first time?" So I asked for a change of orders to something less than three years. It had become apparent that, while I was getting to Delhi about every six weeks, our situation was not good for family ties. My daughter was having sleeping and other nervous problemshe was nine or ten years old at that time. Finally, Personnel cut my tour to a year and half, and made that the standard tour for everybody else.

Q: You arrived in Kabul. Let's start when you arrived there after Nepal. What was the situation like? How did you see it?

GRIFFIN: Well, there was monumental confusion. We were trying to do everything at once. We literally evacuated 1200 people from that mission in six weeks, and that was...

Q: These were mostly AID, weren't they?

GRIFFIN: Yes, and they were scattered all over the country, with a big concentration down south in the Helmand Valley near Kandahar, but the chancery in Kabul also was rather large. Soon we had a fleet of over 200 vehicles parked on the baseball field next to the chancery. Our whiz of an Admin Officer, Bernie Wertz, declared a huge fire sale and invited everybody with money to come. He accepted afghanis, the local currency which was considered worthless by most people. At the end of each day he went to the money bazaar with literally trunks full of money, and changed it all into dollars, which he got out of the country. It was an amazing feat. He also got some of the vehicles out. The last vehicle out was the embassy ambulance. The post had the first in-house clinic in the Service. It was headed by Elmore Rigamer, who eventually became Director of MED. He was a psychiatrist. He was sent there because mission kids were having problems, in part because there was a lot of dope coming into the schools.

Q: It was part of the circuit for the hippies and all that.

GRIFFIN: Right. Elmore had been transferred to New Delhi, and he came up and got the ambulance, put his operating table in the back, and drove it himself down through Jalalabad to New Delhi. That was very brave of him, because bandits and emerging "freedom fighters" along that road were popping off at almost anything they could see. Anyway, we got rid of a lot of stuff and closed the school. The school had just built a brand-new gymnasium, which the Marines and the rest of us used to get some exercise. In winter we played tennis in it.

Before all the old American staff disappeared, I tried to meet as many of their contacts as possible, to keep abreast with what was going on . We dismissed much of the local staff, but tried to keep the best, especially those who had good contacts. Cleaning out the chancery was another fun chore. It was abandoned in such a rush that I kept finding classified documents in every section. They were supposed to have been destroyed before I arrived. It was amazing where I found Secret documents, but we finally got it cleaned up. We decided to move the Marine House into the chancery, and gutted the administrative section to make room. We put in a kitchen, bathrooms, and separate bedrooms. I think it was the first time that's ever been done anywhere.

I made the chief FSN in the Econ/Commercial office weep when I told him to burn his card files on companies and people doing business with America. We also destroyed all visa applications, which upset the FSNs in the Consular Section. I finally convinced them that if the Soviets or their local allies got into the building and found those files, all those people would be dead. We did manage to ship out some files, and made photocopies of others before burning them, though getting our pouches through was more and more difficult. We soon ran out of burn barrel igniters, and our shredders broke down repeatedly. We learned the hard way what our colleagues in Tehran and Islamabad already knethat document destruction is a tedious and dangerously slow process.

Q: When you were there as Chargï¿½, who were the core of your people, reporting officers and so on?

GRIFFIN: I don't want to get into too many sensitive things, but of the 13 non-Marine staff there were four administrative typethe admin officer, the GSO, the RSO, and one American secretary. That leaves nine others who were substantive people of all kinds. In the beginning we had a two-man military attachï¿½ shop because that was considered by some in Washington to be our primary missioto see what armaments and forces the Soviets were bringing into the county. They often tested the limits, so the Soviets soon told us we were all restricted. They said we could not go outside Kabul, though we managed to get a few exceptions. For example, we were told we could not travel on a certain road. So we argued that it went to the only golf course in the country. We said that, like all Americans, we must play golf, and protested that the golf course was not a dangerous place, as there were no bandits nearby. We finally convinced them, but some Soviet officials and a busload of Afghan troops went with us the first few times. After that it was all right, as long as we told them when we were going.

We were also allowed to go to a couple of other places, such as the King's country retreat at Paghman, but that was about it. If we tried to go elsewhere, an AParmored patrol cawould appear with its guns trained on us. The British Embassy was outside of town, so that was another road we could use. It was a palatial, movie-set sitalmost unbelievable. Something out of the days of the Raj. But a fine place to go when we were invited. One evening, coming back from there, I was shot at. The nightly curfew had been relaxed a bit, and I guess a Soviet soldier at the checkpoint thought I was coming at him too fast. He fired off a round, which nicked the top of the car. I stopped and yelled at him that I was a diplomat, then slammed the door and kept going. I had to open the door to be heard, because the armored windows were sealed. That lit up the interior of the car, which satisfied the soldiers.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect was how much information we were able to collect, and how many people would find ways to bump into us and pass along information. We devised many ways to meet people. I did a lot of shopping and repeat shopping, and went to every social event I could. In a way, it was a lot of fun.

We dealt fairly regularly with the Soviet Embassy. We had business of sorts with the Afghan Government, but mostly did it through our FSNs. We refused to talk to them on substance, but if something had to be done, for example on a consular matter, or to get visas for new arrivals, I would go to the ministry and get it done. We closed the Consular Section, as there were no visa applicants and dealings with Americans could be handled on an ad hoc basis.

Q: A big question today still is, and one that I guess you all must have wrestled with was, why the hell did the Soviets do it.

GRIFFIN: I think they were concerned that militant Islam was rising up in Central Asia and they saw an opportunity to block it. Another theory was that things were falling apart in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and the Soviets saw that as a chance to get what they had wanted since Peter the Greanamely a warm-water, year-round port of their own. Ideally, that could have been one of the existing ports in Iran or Pakistan, but that would mean taking on potential enemies who would react, including the U.S. I suspect that they didn't think we would react to their adventure in Afghanistan, which they described as "responding to the pleas of the duly elected government in Kabul." They claimed that came from Hafizullah Amin, who had seized power from the Soviet puppet Nur Muhammad Taraki. But Moscow clearly didn't like Amin, who was not good at following orders. So, they invaded, killed Amin, brought Babrak Karmal, the exiled Parcham leader, back from Czechoslovakia, and helped him become Prime Minister.

As for the warm-water port theory, there's the bone-dry desert along the Makran Coast, between the Straits of Hormuz and Karachi. There is nothing there except a few fishing villages, so it's a rather ideal place for an oil pipeline, if you were so inclined. But in reality, I don't know what was on their minds. We probably haven't seen enough literature coming out of Russia yet to tell us the real story.

Q: You had such an elderly crew in the Kremlin that one can't help thinking that this may have been a last gasp of 'we'll show them' or something.

GRIFFIN: Could be. I do think that they were seriously concerned about the steadily deteriorating, unsettled situation to the south of them, especially the rumblings in the Central Asian republics. They may have seen this as another opportunity to expand the Soviet empire a bit.

Q: Let's talk about the situation that you were able to get. Right now we have troops in Kabul, of all things, as we speak and we're concerned about the warlords and the fragmentation of Afghanistan. What was the situation that you were able to get from your contacts and all?

GRIFFIN: As I said, amazing numbers of people would come talk to us. For example, I met Abdul Kadir, who was assassinated the other day on the streets of Kabul. He was from Jalalabad. We were both invited by an Afghan to lunch one day, presumably to meet each other. He didn't like the Soviets or their puppets in Kabul, and talked about what was going on in Jalalabad. I had no way to check his story directly or immediately, but over time what he told me turned out to be true. We tried to confirm every report we sent in, though we forwarded some without corroboration when they fit a pattern or came from a source we had found to be reliable at all times. I probably was at my most prolific in Kabul, which is saying something. We transmitted ten-page reports daily of any information we collected. We destroyed our originals as soon as they were successfully transmitted, and kept incoming classified messages no longer than 24 hours. That meant we had nothing to refer to, so if the Department or another post sent a message saying "reference Number 1234," we would have to send one back saying we had no idea what they were talking about, and to ask them to give us the context.

Confirming information wasn't as impossible as it might seem. We would talk to people, and then to others, and often hear the same thing from people who didn't know each other. Some real information did pop up in the press from time to time, and some came from other diplomats. There was a large diplomatic community, whose memberincluding the Poles, the Czechs, the Bulgarians, and other Soviet Bloc representativetalked to each other. The Indians probably had the largest embassy, aside from the Soviets. Because of my India connections, I got pretty friendly with the Indian Ambassador. There's a story there that I'll tell you later.

If I got one confirmation of a story, I would report it. I didn't wait for three or four. The process was also helped by, shall we say, national intelligence assets.

Q: You're referring to the NSA.

GRIFFIN: There were other interesting events, such as the time one of the Bhutto kidMurtaza, the eldeshijacked a PIA airliner as it landed in Kabul. After almost a week, the hijackers and their hostages flew on to other airports in the Middle East before they were stopped. When the plane landed in Kabul, there were four Americantwo coupleaboard. An Afghan negotiator eventually convinced the hijackers to let women and childreincluding the two American wivego. We helped behind the scenes, working through the Soviet Embassy. The Americans were grateful, but remained fearful about what would happen to their husbands. They were eventually released, unharmed. In the process, we learned a lot of other things we wanted to know, such as how secure was the airport.

Q: Just to get the picture, we were under instructions from the President, "Okay, we're going to be a presence there but we're not going to recognize the government." Were we the odd person out on this?

GRIFFIN: Not entirely. All our NATO allies except Turkey had recalled their ambassadors and reduced their representation to a chargï¿½. But my recollection is that they did deal with the Karmal regime. The only other embassy in a situation similar to ours was the Pakistani, which was an embassy in name only. They were surrounded as much as we were by Afghan secret police and the KGB. The Chargï¿½ told me he couldn't go anywhere except home and office. They could hardly get food. They did meet the PIA plane that flew in and went back to Peshawar once a week. That's how they got some household items, but they had real trouble with pouches. We were more successful with that. I think the Soviets decided that, while the main reason we were there was to spy on them, in the broader scheme of their relations with the United States, the Kremlin knew we must be tolerated. But the Pakistanis were seen as supporters of the Pushtuns, who were leading the campaign to drive the Soviets out, and were not accorded much tolerance.

Most embassiecertainly all the Western ones and the Japaneshad chargï¿½s d'affaires. All the Soviet Bloc and the Indians had ambassadors. The Saudis and the Iranians had chargï¿½s. That was because none but the Bloc countries and India officially recognized the Karmal government. But few were as standoffish as we were. Most had regular consular ties, and some had commercial ties. The most glaring exception was the Turk, who stayed after the Soviet invasion. He was a very senior, career officer who hadn't been offered another job by Ankara. He refused to leave and convinced his government, over the vehement objections of ours, that he could be of more use to both governments if he stayed in Kabul. I got to know him well because I was born in Turkey, and made sure he knew it early on. He and his wife were very nice to me. He even offered me a Turkish diplomatic passport, in case I wanted to "go into the countryside." Silly, because he couldn't do that either.

Q: While you were there, what was happening?

GRIFFIN: Well, in general, I got there at the beginning of reaction to the Soviet invasion, so there were all manner of fun and games. There were two attempted coups while I was there. After I left, Babrak Karmal was finally ousted by the KHAD chief, Muhammad Najibullah. I'm sorry; your question was?

Q: The Soviets came in in December of '79, and you got there in about the spring of '80.

GRIFFIN: I first arrived in January of '80, then went out, and returned in February, and was there until August of '81.

Q: What were the Soviets...?

GRIFFIN: The Soviets kept bringing in more military equipment, which we often watched from the roof of the chancery. Our embassy was next door to the main television station, and the Soviets didn't like us to be up there, but we went anyway. They often buzzed us with helicopters and other aircraft, to reinforce the message. From the Intercontinental Hotel over on a hill to the north, we could better see a huge Red Army camp under construction. One road along its perimeter was not prohibited to us, so we sometimes went there to check out the latest arrivals. They included self-propelled artillery, tanks, APCs, BMPs, rocket launchers, you name it. Most of Kabul was like part of a Red Army camp, which got bigger and bigger. The Soviets took over many buildings, established their own hospitals, and had multiple headquarters here and there. It was a real military occupation. In terms of numbers of troops, that occupation was probably bigger than ours today, and we have put in more troops lately.

In addition to trying to track all that, we wanted to know if any part of the resistance was being successful. We pretty soon heard about Ahmed Shah Masood, the "Tiger" of the Panjshir Valley. He was assassinated by fake photographers earlier this year. We got pretty accurate word about what was going on there. Sometimes the Soviets themselves would ask us, "Why are they resisting? We came here like brothers, but they keep making problems." Does that have a familiar ring today?

To get a flavor of what was going on, all we had to do was stand outside at night and listen, especially at the Intercontinental Hotel and other high vantage points in the city. From there, we could see the airport and, just beyond, the Shamali Plain. Almost every night we would see flares and helicopter gunships buzzing around, firing tracer bullets. There was rarely a day or night that there wasn't some sort of military activity in or near Kabul itself, much of it visible to us first-hand. We got believable reports about what was going on in the rest of the countryside, especially around Bagram and Shindan Air Force bases.

While we were trying to track any successes of the resistance, we could see that the government in Kabul itself was failing. It was made up of a miserable group of people who couldn't cope with the situation, and often didn't get along very well with the Soviets. They certainly weren't getting along with each other. Tribal and ethnic divisions, which have always been a huge factor in Afghan history, kept getting in the way. I suspect they will continue to do so. We began to see that the Soviets were not settling in well or getting a good grip on things. It seemed that they had bitten off more than they could chew. I was debriefed when I returned to Washington at the end of my tour, and I said quite firmly that the Soviets could be driven out. I got fairly specific about how it could be donessentially a covert operation at the outset, if we didn't have the guts to take on the Soviets with our military in that setting. I can't claim credit for starting it all, but I think what I said in my debriefing was a big factor in the eventual enterprise. I wasn't there to do anything about it, but I didn't think much of the way it was handled by the CIA. It was certainly my contention and impression that the Soviets were hanging on by their fingernails. I said they could and should be shoved out of Afghanistan, and that ordinary Afghans could make life so miserable for them that it would happen. This was met with a fair amount of disbelief but, in the end, my basic idea was adopted.

Q: How did you deal, one, with the Afghans themselves, the so-called government, and then with the Soviets?

GRIFFIN: Officially we didn't deal with the Afghans at all, but for example when we went to a function at the Soviet Embassy, Afghan ministers, sometimes including the prime minister, would be there. The Soviets often guided Western diplomats to one room and "friends" to another, so we didn't always mingle. But once in a while we did. Most of the time we only shook hands and said "Hello," but some of them wanted to talk to Americans. One or two gave us some of our best information, whether by design or mistake was hard to tell.

The Admin Officer and I, sometimes together, sometimes separately, went to Ministries on paperwork businesbut never to engage in substantive conversation. If we ran into problems, or the Afghan bureaucracy would not deliver, we would go to the Soviet Embassy and demand action. They of course would say each time that they didn't run the country, as it was not theirs. We would reply that they had influence where we didn't. It usually worked.

An incident that became a crunch point in that process came one day when I arrived for work to find one of my officers in a high state of agitation. I was Chargï¿½ at the time. He told me that a Soviet soldier on guard outside the Embassy had marched in with his weapon, handed it over to the Marine Guard, and seemed to be asking for political asylum. We pulled out the consular "walk-in" handbook, which had a few helpful phrases translated into Russian, but the man seemed illiterate. None of us could talk directly to him because we had no Russian speakers on the staff. I called the Op Center immediately and asked for guidance. I was told to sit tight, and not do anything until they got back to me. I urged them to hurry, because the Soviets were bound to find out. Sure enough, by the time I hung up the phone, we were surrounded by a large contingent of Soviet military power. As the hours and then days wore on, the noose got tighter and tighter.

The soldier turned out to be a 21-year-old infantryman who was miserable in the Army, and especially unhappy with his bosses, one of whom had slapped him. He later told us he wanted out of that god-awful Army where the officers got everything, and the enlisted men got nothing. He told us a lot about life in the Red Army. We kept him for a week, under increasingly tight pressure. We were surrounded by tanks and sharpshooters perched on our perimeter walls. They wouldn't let us take vehicles in or out, so we camped in the Embassy. We kept cars parked outside, and went out only to get food. They allowed us to walk out, but didn't want us trying to smuggle out the soldier in the trunk of a car.

We feared that the Soviets would try to pop him off, so we hid him as best we could. We didn't want him in the sensitive part of the Embassy, so we kept the blinds drawn and moved him around the ground floor at odd hours. He was near my size, so I gave him some cast-off trousers, a shirt and a couple of sweaters to wear. It was winter and very cold, but when he came in, he had no socks, and claimed they were not issued in the Red Army. When we seemed to doubt that, he said Red Army troops were supposed to be tough, and were issued no gloves either. He turned out to be an ethnic German from western Siberia. I brought the German Chargï¿½ over, hoping he could talk to him, but all the boy could remember was a couple of nursery rhymes in German, so that didn't work. Finally, Embassy Moscow sent us one of their political officers to translate. I guess we became a worldwide laughingstock in the press. Here we were, in the middle of a Red Army installation, and nobody spoke Russian.

Hawk Mills was out of the country on R&R and came back about five days later. The Soviet Ambassador had been pestering my secretary, getting more and more insistent, but I had orders not to talk to him. When he returned, Hawk did talk to him, and took in his demand to see the soldier under Geneva Convention rules on consular matters. Finally, the Department agreed to allow him to see the soldier, on the condition that our officer from Moscow do the translating, that Chargï¿½ Mills be present, and that the soldier agree to speak to the Ambassador.

So the Moscow Embassy officewas it Bob Ober? and I had a long go-round with the soldier for a couple of days. He kept refusing to listen to our explanations. He insisted that he would not return to his unit, and that we had to get him out of Afghanistan. He didn't want to talk to any Russian, or to go back to the Soviet Army, where he was sure he would be mistreated and beaten up again. I told him repeatedly that there was no way we could get him out of the Embassy. I reminded him that he had been on guard outside our gate, and ought to know how it was. At one point, I asked him if he really thought we could sneak him out. That slowed him up a little, but then he asked, "What about the CIA?" I told him it doesn't work like that; it won't happen. At last he realized he was stuck, and said that if we would guarantee that he could stay if he didn't like what he heard, and it was his only real hope, he would talk to the Ambassador and see what he had to say. We told him we would not force him to leave the Embassy.

The Soviet Ambassador couldn't have been more charming, and really did a snow job. He called the soldier "Sasha," saying his mother missed him desperately. He promised "Sasha" everythinback to his mother and family, God, apple piyou name it. He would a have a fabulous home to spend the rest of his days in, and would never have to serve in the military agaion and on. The kid fell for it, and went off in the car with the Ambassador in my clothes. I had slipped him phone numbers of Embassy Moscow, including Ober's. We never heard from him again. God knows what happened to him.

Q: You mentioned the story with the Indian ambassador.

GRIFFIN: When the time came to submit bids for my next job, there were two good slots coming open, and I was told I could have my choice: either political counselor in New Delhi, or DCM in Colombo. I thought going back to Colombo would be good, and I liked the DCM title. There were only two of us being seriously considered for those jobs. The other guy was Herb Hagerty. I don't know if you've ever run into Herb.

Q: Yes, I have.

GRIFFIN: We were told that we could have our choices, and Herb first said he wanted to be political counselor in New Delhi. He had already served there as second secretary, and he wanted to return to his old stomping grounds. Then I went to Delhi and talked to my wife about it. She pointed out that she was already living there, was beginning to like it, and our daughter was settled in school there. She had visited Colombo once, and didn't think it was the greatest place she had ever been. Then Hagerty called again and said, he had changed his mind, and thought he ought to go to Colombo. So we agreed, and I told the Department I wanted Delhi. The Indian Ambassador got wind of it, and became more and more friendly. At a luncheon he had for me, he noted that I would need a proper visa, and asked for my passport. His staff gave me a multiple-entry diplomatic visa, to save me from a bureaucratic run-around in New Delhi. When he gave it to me, he wished me well in New Delhi, saying he would look me up when he came home, so we could continue to be good friends. I was very happy about the future.

As the time for my transfer drew near, Embassy New Delhi informed us that our future residence would be that of the departing commercial counselor, as the political counselor's residence was being taken by the DCM. We thought we were getting a better house, so my wife was happy. With so much to do while I was winding up my tour in Kabul, the minute school was out in Delhi, Chrissie moved their stuff from their flat to that house, and left for the States with our daughter Schuyler. A few weeks later, I flew down to Delhi, dumped some my things there, and jumped on a plane for Washington and home.

During our home leave, we were invited to go sailing in Maine with some friends. The day before heading north, I went to the Passport Office desk in Main State to ask for the insertion of some accordion pages. Because of all my trips back and forth to New Delhi, the passport was full, with no room for immigration stamps. I stressed to the clerk that I didn't want anything else because the passport was valid for several more years, and I already had a visa. I said I would be back in a week or so to pick it up. Well, as the fog finally lifted a bit and we were sailing happily somewhere off the coast of Maine, I got a radio-telephone call from good old Howard Schaffer, saying there was a problem. When I asked what it was, he said it looked as if I might not be going to New Delhi after all. I had just been declared persona non grata by the Indian Government. Howie always did deliver good news. Our radio-telephone hookup was being listened to with growing interest by others on nearby boats, some of whom began to make comments about spies and diplomatic intrigue.

We returned to Washington to find that I was news and that, yes, I had been PNGed. What happened, as far as I could reconstruct it later, was that, either the clerk got it wrong, or the Passport Office messenger on his own took my passport to the Indian Embassy and asked for a visa. I presume that when they looked at it, they saw a valid visa already in it, and wondered why the Department had sent it over. Perhaps in doubt, they asked New Delhi, and were told that, actually, the Government of India didn't want to see me, ever again. After all, Mrs. Gandhi saw me as a major enemy of India. So I was PNGed, thanks to a messenger.

I was front-page news for a few days. Secretary Haig was quoted as saying, "Griffin is not a CIA spy," which cheesed off the Agency because we're not supposed to confirm or deny such things. I've been told it was the only time a Secretary of State has ever said that. Then Haig himself promised to show the Indians by giving me a good joby inference, a DCM-ship, or my own post. There was some talk about going back to the earlier plan, sending me to Colombo, and Herb Hagerty as Pol Counselor in New Delhi. But Herb was already in Colombo, and NEA didn't think that was quite far enough from India for me. By then it was September, and most jobs were gone. I went to every bureau to remind deputy and assistant secretaries that the Secretary said he would find me a job. I got a rousing reception everywhere. They had all heard about me, and were very sympathetic. Without exception, they suggested that I go elsewhere. I got nowhere.

So, I wandered around, twiddling my thumbs and walking the halls for three or four months. The hotel price was killing us - the Department quit paying for thaso we rented a house, at great expense. I did some odd tasks in NEA and other bureaus. One day somebody told me that Tom Pickering was headed for Nigeria and was looking for a good commercial officer. So I went to see him and told him I was a political officer, but that I had done quite a bit of commercial work in Pakistan. He quizzed me a bit, said I sounded like what he wanted, and asked me to come with him to Lagos.

This was shortly after the creation of the Foreign Commercial Service, and Commerce didn't want to hear much from State. They already had Erland Higginbotham, a State officer, as the first FCS Director General. It was probably important for Commerce, or at least the Assistant and Under Secretaries in ITA who supervised FCS, to have a USDOC officer in their top position in Lagos. Nigeria at that time was the source of our largest trade deficit, because of our oil imports. They may have seen it as State trying to recapture the commercial function (which it should do). The pain was especially acute in Lagos, where Pickering said he would make me Counselor, supervising the Commercial Attachï¿½ and other Commerce officers already there. They were really bent out of shape, putting it mildly. It took some major arm twisting, but in the end, Commerce agreed, and I went to Lagos as Commercial Counselor.

Q: This was when?

GRIFFIN: November 1981. By the way, this afternoon I'm going to the funeral of Rick McIlhenny, who died two days ago. He took over from Higginbotham as Director General of the Foreign Commercial Service. He came to see me in 1981 in Lagos on his first trip abroad as Director General.

Q: Did you get any kind of a briefing or read your way into the post before you went there?

GRIFFIN: Yes, a bit. There was a long time between leaving Kabul and going to Nigeria. Most of that time was spent trying to find a job. Once I was picked by Tom Pickering, it took some bureaucratic tussling to get the Commerce Department to agree. I spent much of that time boning up on the Nigerian market, and talking to people in Commerce and State.

Q: It's interesting to get some of one's preconceptions and all. Before you went out, what were you getting? Nigeria was sort of a mess, wasn't it, actually at the time?

GRIFFIN: Actually it was in its best shape for some time, and even since. General Olusegun Obasanjo, who had staged a coup in 1976, organized elections in 1979 in which he did not run, and then stepped down. He's now President agaielected this time. Thanks to Tom Pickering and Political Counselor Walter Clarke, I got to know him when I was there. So there was a democratic government, which Washington liked. A huge cement scandal had been cleaned up. (At one time there were 200 ships full of cement sitting in Lagos harbor. The stuff was ordered by people who expected kickbacks, but most of it had not been paid for. Many of them eventually sank.) The U.S. is Nigeria's largest export market, but for the U.K. We take some 40 percent of their oil. At the time, that made Nigeria the source of our largest trade deficit. Quite a challenge for me!

Being picked by Tom Pickering was flattering, so I thought I could make it work. But there were immediate housekeeping problems. There was no counselor's house because the position was new, created for me. The Commercial Attachï¿½, Ed Rojas, was to stay in his residence. I was to be his boss and Minister Counselor. I liked that, because at the time I was a mere FSO-1, so the title gave me a standing which I wouldn't have had otherwise. But finding a house turned out to be a serious problem. The Commerce Department wouldn't pay for it, so State finally blinked and paid. We first moved into the former residence of the Political Counselor, which was about to be demolished and replaced by several townhouses. We stayed there for the better part of a year, longer than we anticipated, because of a dramatic and scary event. On what was supposed to be our last night in the house, we had a party. The house was to be torn down the next day, so we invited friends to scrawl on the walls, knock holes in it, and do anything else they wanted, to start the destruction process. But that night the Embassy almost burnt to the ground. The next day it was decided, since my office was destroyed, that the FCS front office would be in my house. So we stayed there, holes in the wall and all. It was quite a sight.

To answer your question, I was fully briefed at the Commerce Department and at State. While I was seconded to Commerce, I was not rated by Commerce. I was rated by the DCM, with the Ambassador as the reviewing officer, all in the State system.

Q: What was Commerce telling you, and you were picking up elsewhere, about how things stood commercial-wise?

GRIFFIN: Well, for once Nigeria had a lot of money. Oil money was pouring in, and they wanted to spend it. Pickering wanted a more senior officer as commercial minister counselor because he foresaw lots of sales possibilities and wanted some oomph behind FCS Lagos. He convinced Commerce about that, and agreed to add another FCS position at that level. Of course, Commerce wanted one of its own in that slot and was not very happy with his choice of me. They had a candidate for the slot, who applied before my name arose. He eventually came to Lagos, by the way, as economic counselor. Tom Pickering didn't want him, and he is a very persuasive, forceful gentleman, who got me there. He introduced me to several American business leaders who were familiar with Nigeria, and I went with him to New York for a full BCIU briefing.

Q: BCIU?

GRIFFIN: The Business Council for International Understanding. It gives briefings to ambassadors, DCMs, and commercial officers, and sets up meetings with American companies doing business in their host country. We went to New York for a couple days and had some excellent briefings. That furthered my education on Nigeria immensely. Pickering looked at the commercial function as one of the more important aspects of his job. He really was the senior commercial officer there, and told everybody so. He liked what I had to say in my first interview with him, especially what I had done in Pakistan years before. Because as Deputy Principal Officer in Lahore, I facilitated deals worth over $3 billion for American business. He said that was the kind of officer he wanted.

Q: To put this in context - please correct me if I'm wrong - we were going through a time when oil was king, wasn't it?

GRIFFIN: Well, prices had shot up in the 1970s, thanks to OPEC. It was important to keep the oil flowing to our industries through that crisis. A lot of Nigerian oil goes to Europe, so it doesn't buy much from Venezuela, which is where we buy a lot of ours.

Q: But also in that context the whole idea was that the United States, as other states, wanted to absorb as much of the money that was being generated by this, getting it back to the United States.

GRIFFIN: Yes, that was the idea. Our trade deficit was enormous, so my job was to convince the Nigerians, since we were buying a lot of their oil, that they needed to reciprocate by buying American goods. Competition was pretty fierce.

But before getting further into that, I'd like to talk about the reasons for my getting bounced out of India. It all hounded me in Nigeria as well, so I want to get it on the record. It probably all started when I tried to help what I thought was a Soviet defector in Colombo in 1963 or '64. That set the Soviets off on an effort to get me. They tried get me to defect too, as I mentioned. But of course I refused, which seemed to have angered them. They kept after me for decades. It was a constant drumbeat in my life. It heated up drastically in Calcutta when I was talking to the Bangladesh government in exile, before it became the government. Things got hotter when I went to Pakistan, which neither India nor the Soviets consider a friendly country. It really boiled over when I was in Kabul and, during visits to my family in New Delhi, briefed American journalists, who could not get into Afghanistan. The climax was when the Indians declared me persona non grata. They were clearly influenced by or pressured by the Soviets, although the Indian Government at every level, all the way to Mrs. Gandhi, denied it.

The Indians and the Soviets soon learned where I was headed, despite our efforts to keep it quiet. When my orders to Lagos were issued, Tom Pickering sent a classified telegram to Chargï¿½ Wes Kriebel, instructing him to brief the staff about my background. He said it was extremely sensitive, so they should not talk about it, lest it interfere with my role in Lagos. I was to do my job, and do it quietly. But that didn't last very long. Shortly after I arrived, a leftish Nigerian newspapethey have lots of tabloids there, as in India or the U.S. for that matteprinted a phony memo, ostensibly from a USIS FSN, a woman. It was to the Ambassador, supposedly signed by me, arguing that two very powerful chiefs, Chief Awolowo and Chief Abiola, needed to be killed, and that the Shehu Shagari government must be brought down. Chief Abiola was the head of his tribe and owned a big newspaper empire. When this was plastered all over the front page of one of his newspapers, it created quite a stir.

Q: You were already in...?

GRIFFIN: Yes, I was in Lagos. The Shagari government launched a frantic investigation, and Parliament had a committee look into it. It got to be front page news. But soon the government declared it was phony, saying it sounded foolish, with atrocious English which certainly wasn't written by an American. We again found a Soviet hand in itrying to make life miserable for me. Shortly thereafter, there was an attempt on Mrs. Gandhi's lifwhich I mentioned earliein which strut wires in her official airplane were found sawed half through just as she was about to take a trip to Switzerland, the UAE and Kuwait. I got blamed for that. Moscow made a huge to-do out of it. The Indians arrested some Air India mechanics and threw them in jail. They claimed that I had sneaked into Bombay in the dead of night and organized the whole thing. Of course, was in Nigeria all that time. Not too long after that, Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated. Then the Soviets really went to town, saying I was behind it as a promoter of Free Kalistan, a militant Sikh movement. (Remember, she was killed by her Sikh bodyguards.) Pravda was first to print that story. Then the Indian press picked it up and repeated it along with my picturthe whole shebang. At about that time, Secretary Schultz met with the Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, a gentleman named Tikanov. He told Schultz that the Pravda story was nonsense, and that everyone in the Soviet Government knew it. I'm told the Secretary asked him to knock it off, and it quieted down after awhile.

Q: This is something I've never heard before, of the intelligence apparatus going after somebody who's not part of it. You can raise hell, but what started the thinking behind this?

GRIFFIN: None of us knows. When we finally got at the East German intelligence service files and could request our own files through the Freedom of Information Act, I started after mine. But the officer in Berlin who was supposed to help me never got them. I haven't asked Moscow for theirs, but I might. Everybody who followed Soviet disinformation activity (it's a Russian word) said my case was unprecedented. They had never seen anything else like it. If you go on the Internet, you will find all the books in which I'm called a killer CIA spy.

Q: You're showing me a...

GRIFFIN: It is a diagram of a sinister network. As you see, it connects me with all manner of evil people, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski. It's supposed to look like a spider web.

Q: I'm surprised in a way. Two can play the same game. The CIA and the KGB don't assassinate each other, because they say, "If you do our guys, we'll do your guys." Was it the fact that you weren't CIA? I would have thought this is a thing we'd tell our CIA people: "You go talk to your counterparts," because they do talk to their counterparts, "and tell them to cut out the crap, or we'll pick on some of your..."

GRIFFIN: I'm sure they did, without telling me that they were doing it. Some of my CIA friends, and I know a lot of them, would make a joke of it, saying, "Here comes one of The Company's boys." They thought this was funny because I was taking heat off of them. I asked Milt Beardon, who was Station Chief in Lagos, to help me on that score. I showed him my file, which seemed to astonish him. But we used to see each other socially, so some probably thought we were in the same organization. Then, when he found he was headed for Pakistan to play games in Afghanistan, my experience became even more interesting to him, so we did a lot of talking. He didn't actually tell me he was going; he just went. Now he's on talk shows as an expert.

Q: It really sounds like you stepped on somebody's toes. It sounds like in our government as if a staffer in the Senate, of Jesse Helms or something, was out to get you.

GRIFFIN: Maybe. All I can do is to go back to the events in the early '60s in Colombo. The attempts to achieve defections in both directions, and what the newspaper editor told me about his clandestine Soviet support, which I immediately reported to Washington. I don't know, but they certainly kept after me. It didn't stop until the Soviet Union collapsed.

Q: What was the reaction in Nigeria about this?

GRIFFIN: As I said, they first established a parliamentary commission to investigate. The subject was eventually dropped, but I suspect that a lot of Nigerians thought I was a spook of some sort. Many of them knew I had been a political officer, which in the British Commonwealth system is quite a different creature than in the U.S. Foreign Service. They may have thought I was some sort of eminence grise. It's hard to convince others of something that isn't.

In any case, in Lagos I tried to stay out of politics which, of course, was not entirely possible. I worked very hard at my trade job. Since I was relatively new at it, I had to rely on my staff, especially the Commercial Attachï¿½, Ed Rojas. At first he was quite resentful of me, but we became friends. He's a very nice guy. After about a year, he was transferred away. I saw him again when we worked together on a small project years later.

The Commercial Section's workload was huge. We worked closely with Ambassador Pickering, and traveled all over the country. In the course of my tour, I calculated that we facilitated $20 billion worth of business. Our trade deficit with Nigeria dropped by $2 billion in that time, so I think we had a positive effect. That was, of course, the purpose of my being there. At the time it was our fourth largest trade deficit in the world, which is why Pickering got authority to beef up the commercial section and focus on commerce. Tom liked the idea of having a political officer in my position because he said you can't dissociate the two; the same with economics and politics. So I worked closely with the political and economic sections because most business is run by people who are well connected politically. They make a difference in any country.

Gene Mihaly, whom Pickering had known in Tanzania when Mihaly was a Peace Corps administrator there, was a businessman in California. We worked together to form what was then considered novea bilateral business council, made up of business leaders from both countries who agreed to try to influence their own government to facilitate bilateral business. That meant politics. Mihaly became the sparkplug, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce assigned Millard Arnold as secretary. He had been a political-appointee DAS in the Department, and then was head of African affairs at the Chamber. (In the Clinton Administration, he became Commercial Counselor in South Africa.) We canvassed the American business community in Nigeria for serious interest and recommendations for membership on both sides. Secretary Schultz and Commerce Secretary "Mac" Baldridge got involved. The most important members of the American business community in Nigeria were the oil people, so we worked with them through our Petroleum Attachï¿½. The idea was soon accepted by business and government leaders in both countries, and we went to work on substance. A year after it was formed, Vice President George Bush to come to Lagos to bless it. He made a speech, which I wrote. Shortly after the speech, he departed precipitously to attend Brezhnev's funeral as the U.S. representative.

I think Bush was rather embarrassed when he arrived, because when he landed he was told he would be helicoptered into town. I don't know if you've ever been to Lagos, but the road to the airport is where the country's most splendid "go-slows" take place. "Go-slows" you've seen them on our Beltwago for miles, and you just sit there. No one wanted to subject the Vice President to that. But he said, no, he wanted to see some of the countryside and the people. It's a 30-mile trip, or so. It usually took two hours. This time, the Nigerians stopped all other traffic. They blocked every road into the main road, halted traffic behind them, and assumed that traffic in front would get out of the way. The police are quite used to this. They drive Harley-Davidsons in a flying V formation escort and push everybody out of the way. About halfway into town, there was a jam on top of a bridge that they couldn't break. The police carry bicycle chains with them and, if you don't get out of their way fast enough, they smash your windshield. Most people know the drill and get out of the way. This time a woman was stuck. Her car stalled and she couldn't start it. She blocked the whole road by trying to get to the side, and nothing could move. The police walked in and beat on her car, but it didn't do any good. Finally they were so frantic that a dozen cops picked up her car and threw it over the railing of the bridge to the road below. She was still in it. That cleared the road, and off they went. The Vice President said he didn't want to see anything like that ever again and hoped the story wouldn't get in the press. So he didn't want to go back that way, and took a helicopter back to the airport.

During that visit, Lionel Ulmer, the Under Secretary for ITA, the foreign affairs branch of the Commerce Department, told me that his primary reason for being there was to take a look at me and my work. He said FCS was considering offering me another job if my performance was as good as the stories they had heard. He stayed in town for another couple of days, checking into our shop. Apparently he liked what he saw, since they did offer me the job and asked me if I would join FCS. In the end I took the job and went to Seoul, but we'll come to that later.

Q: Let's talk about the business community, sort of the milieu in which you were going to be working. Was this different than anywhere else?

GRIFFIN: The American presence was large and growing. The important American business men were the oil company executives. But the "oilie" at the top of the heap was Shell, which was not American. The chairman was an Englishman.

Q: British/Dutch.

GRIFFIN: Yes. His deputy was Dutch, who eventually became Chairman of Shell; a very nice guy. The next most important man in that field was the Mobil Oil representative, who was quite something himself. Mobil had two armprospecting and production, of which he was chairman, and marketing. They had retail stations all over the country, and the head of that arm became a friend. I kept pretty close to the oil company representatives, and then other types of people started coming. The word was out that Nigeria was the place to make good money. It was flowing. People came from all over the U.S., especially African-American business men and women who saw a golden opportunity. Many of them were bled dry by shady Nigerians. They learned their lesson the hard way.

The early 1980s was an especially tough time in Texas. The oil economy had gone bust, and the overall state economy was in the doldrums. Jay Anderson, President of Prairie Farms in East Texas, farmed rice. He was one of the biggest rice producers in America, until they had a drought and he was going belly up. He heard that Nigerians are big rice eaters, and that money was flowing there, so he came to try to emulate his success in Texas. He never succeeded. The politics overwhelmed him. There were many American construction companies in Nigeria, building highways, dams, and airportalmost anything you can think of. The money kept flowing, so all the big firms, from Brown & Root, to Bechtel, to almost every company you've heard of, came in. We recruited some of their CEOs to the board of the Business Council, after convincing them it was in their own self interest to do so. If I'm not mistaken, Secretary Schultz went on the board when he went to Bechtel after he left State.

But I thought the Chairman of a company in Birmingham, Alabama, was going to give us serious problems. His President had been to Nigeria several times, and was about to sign a contract, but the Chairman would not agree until he was convinced that everything was okay. So he came to see for himself. As they arrived at the Embassy, the President excused himself to go to the washroom, leaving me standing in the lobby with the Chairman. He looked around and in a very loud, very thick, Southern accent, said, "Sure are a lot of niggers in this place." I tried to sink into the floor. Several people stopped and stared at him. When the President reappeared, I whispered to him what his boss had said. He said that was normal for the man, but agreed, "Let's get him out of here fast." On the other side of the coin, we saw some of the slickest charlatans I've ever encountered from the African American community. They seemed to think it was easy to swindle their Nigerian "brothers."

Q: From what I've heard, Nigerian crooks are world class. They're the Olympic champions of charlatans.

GRIFFIN: They are indeed, and they don't stop. After a worldwide campaign by the Secret Service, they still send out letters saying, "You have been chosen, Mr. Kennedy. If you'll just sign here and tell me your bank account and credit card numbers, I'll send you $20 million. We will fix you right up."

Q: I keep getting e-mails from Nigeria. I talked to a friend of mine who's a banker in Baltimore, and he said, "If a couple people who looked like Nigerians walked into the bank, the windows would come down, because they could pick out schemes faster than the bankers could figure out how to combat it."

GRIFFIN: They're very good at it. They got in league with Koreans to whom we sold some very fine printing equipment. They could produce excellent counterfeit $20 bills, phony identity documentanything you can think of. So we had to be extremely careful, and tried to pick only the most trustworthy Nigerian businessmen. There is an easy dozen of them who are world- class, straight, upright business people, so we tried to stick with them. For example, Chief Earnest Shonekan, the Chairman of UAC, the biggest corporation in Africa, is highly respected. He becamPresident of Nigeria briefly years later, but was too honest for both the military and the politicians in the country, and didn't last. Caterpillar and several other American countries were in the UAC conglomerate, so I had a business entree to him.

The U.S. had stiff competition in Nigeria, and not just from the British. We worked to disprove the notion that Nigeria and the rest of the Commonwealth was a British lock-up. We preached that other nations had the right to equal access, but it was not easy. We were taught some lessons, but so were the Britfrom the French, who were incredibly strong. I got to know the young Nigeria Chairman of a very large French company. His English was so good that his jokes in American slang with almost no accent were better than any of the Americans in Nigeria. (He could put on a Maurice Chevalier-type French accent when he wanted to.) I told some American businessmen that they better watch out; this fellow was going to give them a run for their money. He did.

Q: This as also the time when Africa was sort of a fiefdom of Mitterrand, Socialist President, and there were all sorts of deals going on in Africa which the Socialist Party benefitted from.

GRIFFIN: It was, but don't forget: the colonial powers divided up Africa. Mitterrand took care of Francophone Africa, but couldn't get the time of day in the Anglophone or Lusophone countries. The Nigerians received regular visits from the legendary British business figure, "Tiny" Rowland. So did Kenya, which I'll come to when we talk about that. He was born in India of German parents, so whether he was a real Englishman was debatable, but that's beside the point. Prime Minister Ted Heath once called him "the unacceptable face of capitalism." He pushed the British Government to keep a lock on as much business as they possibly could. Yes, the fights were incredible. The Japanese were also trying to horn in, using every tactic imaginable. It seemed that every country was trying, which made our job all the more difficult.

Q: Okay, you've got the situation there. How did you operate? At that time we had more constraints, we speaking as Americans.

GRIFFIN: It was about that time that the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act came out. It became my job to try to convince the American business community that it was not a fatal blow. Their immediate reaction was, "We can't do business in this country like that. It's impossible, so we may as well pack up our bags and go home." I managed to make the case and convince some of them, but certainly not all. We made it very clear what would happen to them if they got caught. A few small fry did get caught. The big firms didn'at least as far I can recall. I used the Ambassador, visiting firemen from official Washington, and other tactics to influence them. One of my first visitors was Rick McIlhenny, the new Director General of FCS. It was his first trip abroad in that capacity, and he particularly wanted to check on the State Department fellow in Lagos. I had not met him before.

We got a frantic call from his secretary while he was still in the air, to say that he had forgotten his yellow inoculation card. That was something we stressed in our welcome telegrams, because Nigerian health officials were running a scam at the airport. They loved to catch people without cards, or with improper or expired inoculations. They would put them through hell, keeping them at the airport for days in quarantine, unless they paid a bribe. Of course, McIlhenny arrived without it. I went to the airport early and talked to several officials, and explained that he was a big deal. I waved a telegram from Washington with all the data that was on his card, and asked them to give him a break. My lone female FSN was with me. She was tougher than any of the health officials, and read the riot act to them. They were convinced, so I suggested that we play a little joke on the DG, making a big fuss, and telling him he was going to have to stay in quarantine. They thought the idea was hysterically funny, and did it. Rick was not amused. They took him into a small room and locked him in. He started yelling for me to get him out. I did, trying to look like the only guy who could save him.

McIlhenny spent the next few days at our house, going through my files, and talking to the staff. In the end, he seems to have decided that we were doing as well as could be expected. He did say something about teaching me how to do commercial work, but nothing much came of it. He had never done that sort of work himself. He had been a farm implement salesman after college. In the long run, we became friends, and I went to his funeral the other day.

Rick was very quick, but sometimes a rough sort of gentleman. He had an all-Africa/Middle East commercial counselors' conference in Nairobi in my second year. I went to it. He almost brought the session to a halt by insisting that we do a lot of reportinsomething FCS officers were not used to. Maybe he brought it up because I did a lot of reporting. I thought it was absolutely necessary. The others objected in one voice, and said they wouldn't do it. Rick blew his stack and shouted at them, "I just told you what you're going to do! This is the way you're going to do it! If you don't like it, you can walk out of here, and you won't have a job tomorrow morning, because I'll see to it that you're all sacked." It was the wrong approach. Jim Moorhouse, who was McIlhenny's chief civil service aide, managed to calm him down and make him backtrack a bit. The others finally agreed to do the reports, but it took an all-night session to convince them. It was quite something. Moorhouse, by the way, later succeeded me in Nigeria as Commercial Counselor.

Q: Let's talk about the foreign commercial practices there. You're not supposed to give bribes. Other companies are doing this, other countries are doing this. Particularly when you're talking about people dealing with government officials are involved, they don't give too much of a damn about the quality, they like the money.

GRIFFIN: It was a tough sell, but we made headway. We argued that the firms should calculate what they otherwise would spend on bribes and call it an immediate profit, as they didn't have to spend that money. We pointed out that in some cases there were stories of huge sums of money. We said that the best approach to that was to shine a spotlight on it. If we heard that the Japanese gave a local government official a bribe, we would publicize it in a way that was not traceable to our source. We told American businesses that we would collaborate with them to expose corruption by their competitors. We suggested many ways to go about it, but stressed that, in the long run, they would save money and build a reputation as clean. Their clients should be willing to give them contracts because it would cost them less. Of course, there would still be individuals who wanted their pockets lined. That would be the hard part, but we would go all out to embarrass them by shining a spotlight. It began to work. The oil companies in particular were grateful, because they were subjected to daily approaches for large sums of money. Over the years, I think doing business abroad has become easier for Americans because they don't often get asked for bribes any more. They seem to be telling people who come after them, "We don't talk about that. It's not part of the package. Don't bother to ask." Their foreign competitors still play the game, but Americans don't get asked so much.

In the early days we got plenty of arguments. Businessmen would ask, "What do I do at the airport if the guy's got me over a barrel? All he wants is 100 naira, which is chicken feed. Why can't I give him that?" I stressed that the law was intended to address major corruption. But added that whatever they did would be on their conscience. If they got caught, it was their necks. I also argued that, if they used their heads, there were ways to influence customers short of bribery. Today, the lawyers say that some of my ideas were not acceptable. For example, I would say that they couldn't give a client money. But if they happened to know the president of the university where a client wanted to send his kid to school, they might send a letter praising the kid, to which the president might listen. No money would change hands, and the client would have to pay full fare for the kid. I was suggesting that they be a little creative by being nice to the client. In Korea I learned some hard lessons about that approach, which I will get to when we talk about that. As in Nigeria, to do business, you had to get to know people, but it was different, as they had a particular way of doing it.

Nigerians are not catalog buyers. They're not Internet buyers. They must touch, feel, drive, or play with whatever is being sold. Otherwise, they won't buy. So we had trade shows, big ones. John Vlavianos in the Commerce Department helped us buy a large geodesic dome, which we used as an exhibit hall. Most Nigerian exhibit halls were not big enough for some of our equipment, such as cranes and cherry pickers. Our dome could be air conditioned, which was important in that very hot country, especially in the north at the edge of the Sahara. We shared the cost with several other posts in Africa, so it was moved around quite a bit. Our trade shows were mounted by visiting professionals from the Commerce Department, who taught us a lot about the right and wrong way to do things.

Our primary focus was to help small American businesses who otherwise couldn't afford to market abroad. In my view, the smart people come to the government for its virtually free assistance, because we do a lot for them. The big firms usually take care of themselves, but when they get in trouble overseas, they always run to Uncle Sam, crying "Help!" It was for that reason that we put the business council togetheto aim for political influence at high levels. That effort paid off in other ways. On New Year's Eve 1983, there was a coup d'ï¿½tat. President Shehu Shagari was in such bad odor as his government became more and more visibly corrupt, that the generals decided once again that it was time for them to take over. The announcement came from Sani Abacha, who eventually became the ruler himself. (Not that time; there were several other coups in between.) My wife and I were at the Economic Counselor's house for dinner, when suddenly we heard martial music coming from speakers all around the neighborhood. We turned on the radio and television to find nothing but music and a picture of the national seal. Once in a while somebody would say something like "stand by." All the telephones were dead, but the Embassy radio net was functioning. We managed to get home at dawn, finding that our diplomatic tags were still honored by troops at roadblocks.

That morning, the Ambassador instructed all agency and section chiefs to help get word to the American community. I recalled from trips to the oil patch that the oil companies had their own communication system. They had been in Nigeria a long time, and had a good idea of what to expect. I drove to the home of head man of one of the oil companies and asked him to help me get out the word. I told him he had just become a warden in the Embassy emergency system. He understood and helped a lot. His staff and I quickly learned the status of most Americans in the country, and there were thousands. At a Country Team meeting later, DCM Don Gelber thanked me profusely, noting that none of the security officers, consular officers, wardens, or the oil attachï¿½ had remembered about the oil industry communications system.

I had just won the James Clement Dunn Award for my performance in Afghanistan and INR. Word came after Tom Pickering left for El Salvador so Gelber had a big party for me, and invited some of the biggest names in the Nigerian and American business communities, Embassy staffers, and personal friends. It was very nice of him. He made me sound like some sort of god, which helped my relations with my contacts and others at the post. Then the Commerce Department decided to piggyback, and gave me a couple of other awards, with cash bonuses. I think it was the first time the Dunn Award had been awarded with money. It was $5,000, which was a lot of money to me at that time.

Q: Did you have any Americans arrested on commercial things that you got involved with?

GRIFFIN: Unfortunately, we had several bad guys who ended up in jail. There were also a few people arrested on trumped-up charges. I don't think we managed to spring any of them. We did insist on (and got) consular access, so consular officers saw them. We got innocent people out of trouble several times. Just as in this past week, villagers in Ogun Province, down in the oil patch, took over oil company facilities and held workers hostage. That's in the southeast corner of the country, on the border with Cameroon. Most of Mobil's operations were offshore, and its workers rarely went ashore in Ogun. But there have been several of what amounted to pirate attacks on their rigs, with people held hostage for some time. We usually managed to work a solution with local tribal elders and the central government.

Pickering is an intrepid travelemaybe one of the most widely traveled people on Earth. He loves to drive himself to the places he wants to visit, though his visits are carefully organized. In Nigeria, he sent out advance teams, and arrived himself with a very large entouragalmost a royal procession. Follow-up was done by a clean-up crew which came later to make sure the i's were dotted, the t's crossed, promises kept, and to pass out a few more gifts. In each area, he called on the tribal chief. In the oil patch, all that paid off when he talked a chief into using his influence to get the demonstrators to back off. Sometimes the hostages were held at onshore installations, as happened this week with all the women. Most of the tribes in the oil patch assert that it's really their oil, and it is being ripped off by the central government, which doesn't give them any of the profits. That's partly true, but government leaders point out that the oil income benefits all Nigerians. Of course, some are benefitted more than others. The 1967-1970 Biafran civil war was mostly about all that, and it still rankles the Ibos and other tribes in the southeast.

There was another case in which an American familactually he was the British head of an American firm, and his wife and daughter were Americawas attacked. At the time there were serious breaking and entering problems in Nigeria. In one of the most widely publicized cases, robbers armed with AK-47s and Uzis were stymied by bars on windows and doors, so they "borrowed" a tow truck from a bus company and went back to the house. They wrapped chains around the window and door grilles, and jerked a whole wall off the house. Then they snatched what they wanted and went on their merry way. Virtually all foreigners in the city had guards, backed up by supervisors who checked on them every hour or so. The American family lived in a suburb of Lagos which we had advised people to avoid because of the high crime rate. They were attacked by men with kniveno guns. The wife and daughter were gang-raped repeatedly, and the man was cut up pretty badly. I had just met with him, and when I heard about the attack I invited them to come stay with us. They did so while trying to get their lives back in order.

That incident created a sensation in the American community, and the Ambassador had a hard time quieting the staff. At his first community meeting with the staff and spouses after that, several people asked for a ticket home that day. He was challenged to specify what he planned to do to make the Embassy family safe, since "Washington didn't seem to care." He was asked why he, the DCM, and the RSO hadn't foreseen such a problem. People demanded to know where they were when it happened, and why there wasn't better protection. He pointed out that the general situation had long been mentioned in Department advisories, and tried to explain that predicting attacks was almost impossible. He said the Embassy had hired guards to protect all USG residences, and stressed that Nigerian crooks are tough and nasty. Afterward, he called the Country Team together and we cobbled together a more intense effort to provide families with better protection. As usual, we had no money for more guards, but Tom appealed to Washington, saying he had a revolt on his hands, and would lose some of his best staff unless agencies met at least some of the concerns at once. We finally got a bit more help from Washington and devised some new ways to help ourselves.

I traveled a lot, mostly by road. Getting on an airplane in Nigeria at that time was (and may still be) an adventure, shall we say. For domestic flights, airplanes were parked on the tarmac a couple of hundred yards from the terminal. Everyone had tickets, but no boarding passes. When a flight was announced, the ground staff opened the doors and everybody ran for the plane. It's amazing how large women in long skirts, carrying armloads of bags, can beat a skinny, athletically inclined American to a seat on a plane. They trip you up, knock you over, beat on you, and get there first. So there's no place for your bag, which you hold on your lap in the middle of the last row of seats. I didn't like to travel like that, so I mostly traveled by road.

We bought a van for the Commercial Section in which we could sleep, if necessary. But Nigerian roads were horrific. They were mostly two-lane, but the only lane drivers wanted to use was right in the middle, because the shoulders were eroded away. The most wonderful spots on Nigerian roads are river crossings. On both sides of the bridges, usually at the bottom of a ravine, we often saw dozens of overturned hulks of burnt-up trucks. That's because when one truck driver saw another one coming the other way, he became desperate to beat him to the bridge. So they both roared down as fast as they could, often missing the bridge or crashing together in the middle. When the trucks burned, the drivers who survived just walked away and left them. Nobody tried to clean it up, so approaches to many bridges looked like war zones. Another amazing sight was the road from Lagos to Ibadan. It was lined with discarded Coca Cola cans which looked like red lines on a map from 20,000 feet up. It was incredible. Nigerians never seemed to clean up trash.

The Nigerian Government was building a new national capital at Abuja. It was potentially a big source of money for contractors and construction people. Many American companies were interested, and some were in business there from the outset. To be of assistance to our firms, we had to go to Abuja. On my first visit there, we were accommodated at the construction camp of a French company, Bouygues. They were very nice. I had my wife along, and they were not quite used to having ladies there, but it was the nicest place to stay because we were given a private, air-conditioned trailer, and the food was first-rate. At the time, the French were the only ones there. We were accommodated because I was a friend of their office manager in Lagos. Some American firms showed up a bit later, and managed to get a little business. Abuja was bribery central when I first went there. I told the sub-Minister I met with that, while we wanted some of the business, we would not play that game. He didn't believe it, but our companies got somcleanly, as far as I know.

Q: What was the feeling towards the new capital Abuja?

GRIFFIN: None of the embassies wanted to go. It was out in the center of the country, in the middle of nowhere, which is why the Nigerians picked the spot. It was roughly where the three major tribethe Yoruba, the Hausa-Fulani, and the Ibocome together, but was not in any of their territories per se. It's a barren sort of place, with nothing much in the way of attractions. It was picked in an attempt to quiet tribal rivalries some 15 years after the Biafran War, so politically it made sense. But geographically it made almost no sense. It is a miserable place, but the government passed a law, as did others in Brazil and in Pakistan, saying that foreign embassies would only be welcome in the new capital, and soon. That was another reason for us to go up there. The Ambassador went several times, as did the Administrative Counselor to pick a site. Then we had to get FBO approval of the site, and to have a design, all long before any move could be made. Burt Moore was the Administrative Counselor. He had been one of the hostages in Tehran, you may recall.

Q: Was also moving to Abuja designed to get away from the mess of Lagos?

GRIFFIN: I suppose so. It was becoming an almost impossible place to live, especially in terms of daily crime. Not that there would be much less eventually in Abuja, but the Nigerians who first moved to Abuja were people with paying jobs. They were not part of the downtrodden, jobless criminal class that inhabits Lagos. But even they camped out in pretty primitive shanty towns, unlike foreign workers who had air-conditioned trailers. Crime wasn't so bad there at first, but tensions existed. Once in Enugu, the capital of Ibo-land, I heard dozens of horror stories about the Yoruba. I think it was Lord Frederick Lugard who, when Governor General of Nigeria in the early 20th century, called the Yoruba the most venal people on Earth. Some of them today try to prove it. The Ibos are the smallest of the big tribes. Some colleagues who served there in the 1960s say they were the most put-upon. There are many smaller tribes as well, and tribal rivalries remain a problem.

Another reason I liked to go by road was because Nigerians have a terrific sense of humor. One thing that distinguishes West Africa from East Africa is culture. East Africa has animals. West Africa has a lot of fine ancient art, and they love music. That's where, of course, jazz has its roots. So it was fascinating in that regard. West Africans also have an uproariously good time. They love to tell and make jokes. Nigerians can twist the English language in hilarious ways, better than the English themselves, and double entendres are a fine art. There are thousands of signs for small businesses, such as barber shops or food stalls, which are uproariously funny. You should see some of the garish statues. I always took plenty of photographs.

Q: Commercial-wise, did the division in the tribes cause special consideration?

GRIFFIN: When I arrived, Shehu Shagari, a Muslim Hausa from the north, was President. The Yoruba are the largest tribe, and the most capitalist. They complained loudly about the northerners who, they claimed, didn't understand Yoruba or international business. But it was easier for Americans to deal with non-Yorubas, because they tended to be more straightforward and cheat less than the others. Ibos were nicer to deal with, but they had less money, so there wasn't much business there. My staff spent a lot of time in the north, especially in Kaduna and Kano, at trade shows trying to push major American products. We tried to go where the money was.

Q: How did the money flow? The oil companies, whom were they paying?

GRIFFIN: Well, they pay taxes to the Government, and a percentage of all production to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, or NNPC, which at that time was under the Ministry of Finance. Those organizations watched the oil companies carefully, because that's where most of the Government's revenue came from. The oil companies certainly make big profits and have to pay for their exploration and production, but Nigeria gets a good cut of it, and whoever's in charge of the Government decides where the money goes.

Q: And then it's distributed, and that's where you're going after it?

GRIFFIN: Well, the various economic ministries decided where much of it went, so we met with them often. But people in the southeast where the oil comes from often told us they couldn't afford to buy much from the U.S. because they weren't getting their share of the national income. Generally, that was probably true. Almost the same in the north; there's no oil up there. The current President, Obasanjo, is from a minor tribe about halfway between the Yoruba capitals of Lagos and Ibadan and the Hausa-Fulani country around Kaduna and Kano. He is fairly acceptable to everybody because he's not from one of the big tribes. But it takes guts and wits to deal with his countrymen. Nigeria has a quarter of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa, and I expect the population is over 150 million by now. It never stops growing, and Nigerians cannot be held down. They like their freedom and, somewhat like Americans, can be difficult. Everybody speaks his or her mind.

The women are sharp-tongued. They control a lot of the basic economy, but don't get much credit for it. One chief with whom I dealt was Chairman of the national Chamber of Commerce, and became Co-Chair of our binational Business Council. He had altogether seven wives, at least three of them living with him. One of them told me that he gave her no money, but allowed her to sell soft drinks out the back door of their house. So she would buy a truckload of Coke or ginger ale or something and sell it for a slight profit, which was her only money. But she told my wife that when her husband wanted that money he would take it. She said he doted on their mutual children, but at one point kicked out all the girls and kept a boy he liked best. In local markets, one dealt with very astute women, or "mamas," who run an economy of their own. If you try to negotiate with them, a man will generally lose. They must be sharp to survive in that environment. But trying to find a business woman in corporate offices or at the head of a major firm was almost impossible. Businesses that could buy serious American equipment were all fronted by men, no matter who really owned them.

Q: What about orders on both sides? Did you get a lot of trade complaints?

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes.

Q: I would think there would be a lot of scams on both parts.

GRIFFIN: Yes. One FSN's entire job was essentially focused on cleaning up such problems and negotiating trade disputes. It was discouraging, and we sometimes gave up, after realizing that there was just so much we could do. We didn't run the country. We would give Americans our list of good local lawyers, and tell them they could go to court if they wanted, or call the police. We would have to warn them that the latter approach generally hadn't worked in the past. It kept lawyers busy, and there were plenty of them around who wanted some of that business. My deputy, the Attachï¿½ who had been there longest, would complain that that wasn't part of his job. He didn't think it was the function of FCS to handle trade complaints. He argued that it should be the consular section because they were the ones to take care of people in trouble. My response was that we were the primary contact point for American business people, and must help them.

Q: Did you get involved at all in military sales?

GRIFFIN: We did at times, because the Ambassador wanted us to. But it was essentially a function of the Defense Attachï¿½ shop. We usually were involved in cases with dual use possibilities. For instance, we supported the purveyors of tethered balloons, which were military in origin, though the first application in Nigeria was to be civilian. It was a huge potential sale. Such aerostats, as they were called, were used in World Wars One and Two by lookouts spotting German planes in the UK. And they were used in Florida by the Coast Guard watching for Cubans and smugglers. It was one of our major projects.

Q: Must have been a large amount of radar inside the thing.

GRIFFIN: Yes, the gondola could hold a lot. But the proposed application in Nigeria was for television broadcasting. They also thought of using one to lift heavy equipment to Abuja because the roads were so bad. But neither proposal took off. I never really thought it would, because of the expense. The vendor was a subsidiary of Westinghouse, whose Africa representative was David Miller, who became Ambassador there later on. After I left, the economy went downhill and it became tougher for us to do business. But during my time, business was booming, and people on both sides of the Atlantic made lots of money.

One thing that I did with my award money was to buy a boat. A good way to maintain one's sanity in that very crowded city was to go "up the creek." It was quite a popular thing to do. It meant that, on Saturday or Sunday, we would get in our boat and cruise through the port and up an inland waterway. Some of our friends had beach houses, so we would go in our boat to visit them. It was a little dangerous at times because of piracy. Local thieves would sometimes try to come after us, especially if they thought we had money, so we tried never to take any. They were also after cameras, jewelry and watches, but our boat was faster than those of most of the pirates. Over time the harbor became clearer because there was a lot less international traffic, but then the pirates multiplied.

Then there was the wonderful story involving the Nigerian Navy. The Embassy had a beach facility near the main entrance to Lagos harbor, but it had fallen into disrepair. DCM Don Gelber, after crime got worse, suggested that our community association put some money into it. All it needed was some repair carpentry and paint. Christina was on the committee, so we helped the effort. It had a nice little beach, where we could go swimming and water skiing. Not quite as nice as the private places up the creek, but most people couldn't afford those. It was on a little inlet off the harbor, not on the ocean side. One day we were told by an armed guard that we couldn't walk to the ocean beach because of a military operation. It turned out that Nigeria's brand new, and only, frigate had been steaming into Lagos harbor. Somehow it missed the harbor entrance, and ran aground. The whole ship was out of the water, so it must have been moving at full speed.

Q: It's not a small ship.

GRIFFIN: It was not the biggest warship afloat, but as the whole thing was out of the water, it really had to be moving, though it was probably high tide, too. The Navy was very embarrassed, and didn't want anyone, especially the press, to find out about it. Of course, the press found out within hours and were all over the story. Many people went out and took pictures. It prompted some of them to repeat the old "WAWA" commen"West Africa wins again." Almost everyone in West Africa says it when something goes wrong.

Q: Was this a place of African hands?

GRIFFIN: To a certain extent. But there were people who had served all over. Tom Pickering was an Africa hand, in a way. His first post was in Dar Es Salaam, but he hadn't had another tour in Africa, as far as I know. Before Lagos, he had been Ambassador to Jordan and Israel. The political officers had mixed backgrounds. Several of the economic officers had served in other oil-producing OPEC countries outside of Africa. DCM Wes Kreeble had been in Africa before, but I don't think Don Gelber, who came after him, had.

Q: What was your impression of Nigeria and its absorption of all this money? I'm talking about the time you were there.

GRIFFIN: It was clear that some people were having a party that had to end before long. The money was flying around in ways that could not be sustained, especially as corruption got out of hand, which, of course, it did. I told you about the Embassy fire. There were many other fires. We estimated that there was at least one major fire every month in Nigeria. Mostly in places containing records that some people did not want made public. Fort example, the headquarters of the National Oil Company, NNPC, caught fire mysteriously as an investigation began into corruption in the oil patcsurprise! We flew in a portable power station from the U.S. when the national radio and television center burned up. That cost the U.S. Government a lot of money, but we managed to patch it together in the name of friendship and national security. The Foreign Ministry caught on fire just after the fire at the Embassy. In the press, fingers were pointed in all directions, casting blame.

Ambassador Pickering personally oversaw the firefighting at the Embassy. He was charging about outside in the dark, and stepped into a ditch and fractured his ankle, but didn't quit. Two or three days later I accompanied him to the Foreign Ministry. The office of the Minister was on the 13th floor, but because of their fire the elevators didn't work. Tom practically ran up 13 floors without flinching or even breathing hard. I was huffing and puffing, and I was in perfect shape. That said, it was not a good idea to ride those elevators even if they did work because they were always jammed full of people, many of them on a joy ride. There were two places I tried to avoid elevators: Nigeria and Korea. Koreans eat kimchee, which is mostly garlic, so you don't want to be in close quarters very long.

As for where the money went: it went in a lot of pockets. There were two coups d'etat during my tour. The Army officers who took over always used "cleaning up corruption" as their rationale, saying they would fix everything. They would declare that many government projects were phony; started just to line politicians' pockets. Those were canceled and other projects were started; mostly things that would benefit the military.

A couple of interesting diplomatic stories. Our chancery, thanks to some clever bureaucrats, was next to the Bulgarian Embassy. One of the most dedicated recorders of our fire was a cameraman at that chancery. Our communications vault was in a corner closest to the Bulgarians. Both embassies had lots of antennas. After the fire, the FCS office was moved to that side of the building, as we were one of the least sensitive sections. Two doors past the Bulgarians was the Indian chancery and residence. The Indian Ambassador, because of my history, refused to speak to me. He would dodge away across the room at large receptions, and turn on his heel if I got too close. But his wife was the sister of India's national tennis champion, who was a friend of ours in Calcutta. A couple of weeks after we arrived in Lagos, I asked someone where to get a haircut. The most common answer was "Try the Indian Ambassador's wife." She ran a unisex hairdressing shop in her residence. Since I had heard of her and knew her brother, I took the bit between my teeth and called for an appointment. She signed me up, and as she was cutting my hair, she said, "I think I have heard of you." I replied that I was a friend of her brother. She seemed delighted that I knew Calcutta, and wondered if we had been in touch lately. I said, "No," and told her why, offering some of my history with her government. She said, "Oh, that's so silly. Why did they do that?" I said, "I don't know. Ask your husband." After my third haircut I bumped into him in the hallway, and told him I thought avoidance was unnecessary. We should at least say hello politely. I said, "What's been done has been done. I'm not going to assassinate you; nor you me." He seemed to agree, and suggested that my wife and I come for dinner. An invitation never did come. Years later, I met the man we PNGed in retaliation for my being bounced from New Delhi. He, of course, was immediately made ambassador to Malawi, or some such place. He came to a conference of Indian chiefs of mission in Nairobi, and made a point of being introduced to me. He said he was delighted that I came despite our mutual history, because he wanted to meet me. He said, "Thank you for helping my career."

When it came time to bid for my next assignment, I tried to sign up with Pickering again, but he had already picked David Passage as his DCM in San Salvador. I couldn't go back to the Subcontinent because of my India problem. The European Bureau was not very friendly. Commerce wanted me to stay with FCS, so finally I said, "Okay. If you'll send me to London, I'll think about it." Well, they first said ok, but the senior guy in London extended for a year, which blew that away. Then they offered me a choice of Sydney, Singapore, or Seoul. After consulting with several people, including Pickering, I decided that Seoul was the more important of those, and chose it.

Q: Okay. You were in Seoul from when to when, '84 to...?

GRIFFIN: The end of August 1984 until the end of May 1986; not quite two years.

Q: Your position was what?

GRIFFIN: I was Minister-Counselor for Commercial Affairs, or the senior commercial officer there for FCS, as I had been in Lagos.

Q: In the first place, what was the situation in Korea in 1984 when you arrived there, internally and...?

GRIFFIN: It was a fairly normal time in Korea. President Chun, Doo Hwan was hanging on to power in a semi-dictatorial way, but the economy was beginning to boom, which was what I focused on. At the time, Korea was our seventh largest trade partner. It was behind Nigeria in that sense, as our annual trade deficit with Korea at that time was about $3.5 billion; the one with Nigeria had been more than $4 billion.

I was happy to get the job was because at the time I was an FSO-1, and the job was an MC position. I was promoted to OC shortly after I arrived, which made me look a bit better to others. The FCS section was large, with a permanent staff of 32 FSOs and FSNs, plus many contractors we could call upon at the drop of a hat. We needed them because we had some 9,000 to 10,000 individual visitors a year to our section, plus about 60 to 70 trade promotion events a year. Our primary function was to try to redress the trade deficit. In my first year we managed to identify and facilitate sales contracts for over $25 billion in U.S. exports, which narrowed the deficit considerably.

It was, as always, a tense time on the Korean Peninsula. Most of our visitors requested a trip to the DMthe demilitarized zonto take a look at the North Koreans. It was always tense there. During my tour, there were a couple of incidents along the DMZ and one or two more at sea. The Koreans spotted a North Korean submarine close to one of their beaches and captured some people sneaking ashore. That sort of thing still goes on today. That was the security setting.

Then there were several trade issues of mounting importance. One was protection of intellectual property. We found several Korean firms and individuals pirating American intellectual property. A larger issue was market access. The Koreans talked a good line about free trade, and then made sure we couldn't sell much. This applied to insurance, music, movies, and many other things. We mounted aggressive campaigns on both fronts. Our market access approach was soon adopted by FCS headquarters in Washington and formed the basis of an instruction to all posts. The idea was to educate Koreans about our government policies and try to convince them that cooperation with us was better than constant resistance and throwing up trade barriers. We worked hand-in-hand on that with the American Chamber of Commerce. Because of my role, I was the first Senior Commercial Officer in Korea invited to join the Board of Governors of AmCham. That proved very helpful in getting many things done. For example, we worked very closely with IBM, which had one of the biggest American presences in Korea. When we learned that AmCham policy papers were being copied and sent to Korean firms, a joint IBM and Embassy technical team devised a way to protect them.

The Ambassador at the time was Dixie Walker, a political appointee from the academic world. He was new to Korea. By that, I mean he had been there a couple of years before I arrived, but Korea was new to him as a scholarly subject. He was in the Army in World War II, and afterwards was in Japan in the occupation forces for awhile, so he spoke some Japanese. He had learned some Korean. The DCM was Paul Cleveland, who will reappear into my life a couple of times later.

I started by trying to make more efficient use of the large staff, and to meet most top business leaderthe heads of the so-called choebals, conglomerates like Samsung, Daewoo, Lucky Goldstaand political leaders. Perhaps our best success came in inter-agency and inter-office collaboration in the Embassy. The credit goes mostly to Paul Cleveland. I arrived at the same time as the new Agricultural Attachï¿½, Dan Conable, and the new Economic Counselor, Don McConnell. Relations between our predecessors had been not warm, and Paul was determined that wouldn't continue on our watch. It didn't. We got along beautifully and collaborated on many things, which I think made a real difference in redressing the trade balance. I found that FCS was not well organized to focus on the priorities that headquarters and I thought were the most important, so I reorganized it. I got headquarters to increase our budget to hire five more peopltwo FSOs and three FSNs. I expanded the FCS programs around the country, opening offices in Pusan and Kwangju, but didn't station permanent staff there. We had a part-time FSN at the Consulate in Pusan, but in Kwangju we simply put a commercial library at the USIS post. We made frequent visits to both posts to meet with business people, which was appreciated by the consuls in charge.

As a member of the Board of Governors of the American Chamber of Commerce I went to several meetings of APCAthe Asia Pacific Council of American Chambers of Commerce. These were in places as far away and diverse as Pusan; Singapore; Jakarta; Auckland, New Zealand; Maui, Hawaii; Anchorage, Alaska; and even Charleston, South Carolina. Each was focused on a different issue, and I made speeches on behalf of both the Korea AmCham and Uncle Sam at some of them. In a different mode I convinced USTthe office of the U.S. Trade Representativto postpone two Section 301 cases against Korea. These involved issues of market access and intellectual property, where USTR wanted to impose immediate sanctions, but I managed to jawbone them out of it.

Q: How did Korea at that time close down access? What was the technique they used?

GRIFFIN: Well, let's take movies, for example. The Korean Government agreed to allow the import of American movies. But then movie theater owners would refuse to import any, saying that their customers didn't like American movies. Or they would refuse to dub them in Korean. Or air-conditioning in theaters would mysteriously conk out during the first showing. Some distributors would say, "Sorry, we have our own movies." They were trying to protect the tiny Korean movie industry, which was not doing very well. But we knew from experience that most American movies, no matter how bad, would pack cinemas. To Koreans, they were something new that they hadn't seen, and they liked to check them out.

Q: I would think there would be a force within the theater owners saying, "Hell, we want these American movies because the more people come, the more revenue there is."

GRIFFIN: So you would think, but one owner even let snakes loose in a theater to drive the people out; it was a great scene.

Q: Well, how did you deal with it?

GRIFFIN: We kept pushing. We held out the threat of a tough Section 301 case, in which we would ban certain Korean imports into the United States. Finally, exporters of those products managed to put an arm on the movie producers and distributors and convince them to play ball because it would cost the country too much. The same with insurance: AIG, an American insurance company which had its origins in Shanghai, China, wanted to come into Korea. At the time, there were no American insurance companies there. There were a few Korean companies, which sold very expensive life insurance. Koreans were using traditional family and clan systems to cover themselves, but that didn't include much in the way of life insurance. Women would pool their money and sell their family and friends very cheap coverage. They wouldn't pay out much; perhaps enough for a simple funeral. AIG claimed it had a system that would be not much more expensive and would, because of their broader worldwide resources, provide better benefits. That took a lot of effort, but we got AIG in the door, working with the Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry. A very distinguished economist and gentleman, Nam Duk-Woo, was the head of it. He had been Prime Minister shortly before I got there, and understood what it was about, which helped a lot. I spent hours with him and his staff, discussing how to go about it. The heads of the choebals were not easy to roll. They were members of his Chamber but, despite the country's basic Confucian set-uin which the head of government and officials are on top, and businessmen are on the very bottothey thought they were powers unto themselves. We've seen that in this country.

American business leaders like Roger Smith, the head of General Motors, come out to make a deal with the Chairman of Daewoo. GM already had a partnership with Daewoo, which was manufacturing automobiles with Chevrolet engines. Smith wanted to expand, to build Pontiac and maybe Buick plants in Korea. But it was not easy, as Daewoo and others, such as Samsung, had multiple interests. They not only made automobiles; they made computers, they made TV sets, they made toys, they made almost everything you could possibly think of. Since being unleashed by a post-Korean-War government, they competed with each other fiercely, usually in a rather destructive way. The Koreans are fighters, and are quite good at it.

Q: For the record, I was Consul General in Seoul for three years and one time I had to extract an American businessman. I'd send a vice consul with him to the airport or something to keep the bully boys... They wouldn't really hit but they would put a lot of pressure.

GRIFFIN: It was a challenge to get to know them. I quickly discovered that there was a tradition with Korean businessmeif they didn't know you, they wouldn't do business with you. It is a worldwide practice, and certainly true in Korea. Americans often act like the Lone Ranger; they come galloping into town, do their thing, and ride off into the sunset, assuming they have sealed the contract. Koreans, and most others, don't like to do business like that. So they devised a system to shortcut the process to get to know you. The idea was to go to a kaesing housmodeled on the geisha traditiosit around and guzzle scotch, and be served wonderful food by beautifully dressed women. It built to a climax of loud, drunken karaoke singing, with everybody falling about; good camaraderie. That made you friends, so the next day you could talk serious business. They would brag about their hangovers all the next day, but I soon learned that the Koreans were not as drunk as they acted. They would down a bowl of pine-nut soup to line their stomachs just before they began to drink, and the Scotch they served was watered-down to about half the potency of ours. So it wasn't as boozy as it seemed, and the food and the music were always good.

Q: My real problem was that most of the Korean men I met, if they hadn't taken professional lessons in singing, they were damned close, and all I could do was come up with 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm' or something.

GRIFFIN: My favorite was "When the Saints Come Marching In." I got pretty good at it. You had to do it.

Q: I know it.

GRIFFIN: We had a bit of a problem once. USTR sent over two people. One was Sandy Kristofan Assistant USTR. I told her about Korean attitudes; that before she got into the negotiations she should get to know her Korean counterpart. I told her about the system and how it was normally done, noting that there were no women guests; only the kaesing ladies. That was a challenge she liked. She said she wanted to go. I said it had never been done before, but agreed to see what I could do. The Koreans agreed fairly quickly. It was especially confusing to the women who served the food and drinks. Usually they help the men with the protocol and try to get them tipsy. The woman who served Sandy had never been faced with another woman before and didn't quite know what to do. Another problem, which I hadn't thought about before we arrived, was that she wore a very short skirt, and we all had to sit on the floor. She had a bit of a hard time, but we managed to give her enough tablecloths and napkins to make it okay. And it worked; she really got to know her opposite number, and she did well at the negotiating table.

Q: I interviewed somebody, who later was Ambassador to the South Sea Islandshe was a trade negotiator; and she said when she went there they said, "Okay, we'll call you 'Mr. so-and- so'.

GRIFFIN: They did that, yes. That might have been Kristoff. We also had a lot of trade missions. One day we had twelve in town at the same time; four of them led by governors, including John Ashcroft of Missouri, who is now the Attorney General, Virginia Governor Chuck Robb, and Jay Rockefeller from West Virginia. There were also several big city mayors, including Diane Feinstein of San Francisco. For those visits, we used the surge contractors so we had enough staff to handle everything. We produced huge briefing books and individual schedules, always including sessions with the Ambassador and the President of the AmCham. We put each mission on a separate full schedule, for which we seemed to have devoted all our resources.

But I had a hard time with Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, when he was brand new. He was advanced by a staffer, Robin Cleveland, who is now at OMB. She happened to be Paul Cleveland's daughter, so Paul didn't deal with her officially. They don't agree on politics, by the way. She said McConnell had heard that Korea was important to our balance of trade, and wanted to see the situation for himself. He was particularly interested in cigarette exports, which was a big issue at home. Kentucky exports tobacco, bourbon and race horses, so all that was on the agenda. McConnell wanted to see President Chun, Doo Hwan, which Robin mentioned about a day before the Senator was due to arrive. I told her that Chun's schedule was full most of the time. I explained that when Richard Nixon came to Seoul it took some doing to get him on...

Q: When he wasn't President.

GRIFFIN: ...when he was ex-President. It took some doing to get him on the schedule. I said Chun was President of a sovereign country, and did not take marching orders from American senators, especially one he's never heard of. She asked me to try anyway, so we did. Even her father tried, but got nowhere with the Blue House. She asked me to be at the airport with her to meet the Senator, hoping I could explain the situation. I agreed, and took her to the airport in an Embassy car. McConnell was almost the last one off the plane. Robin introduced us, and immediately told him that he didn't have an appointment with the President. I interjected that the Embassy was still trying to get one. He said, "What do you mean? He won't see me? If he won't, I'm getting right back on this plane and going home! Now!"

I looked at Robin in disbelief. She had put me in the hot seat. I asked what she expected me to do. The Senator couldn't get back on the plane because it was scheduled to overnight in Seoul before returning to the U.S. We had arranged several other appointments, so I asked her to tell him we would keep trying. She finally got him calmed down and off the plane, but he's a real hip-shooter. He tried to hire me a couple of years later, by the way, as his foreign affairs staffer, but I turned him down.

Q: Also, I've found that there is a real problem with newly elected Senators particularly, because it goes to the head immediately and they want to throw their weight around.

GRIFFIN: I think one reason he offered me a job was that we did get him in to see President Chun. The Ambassador practically got on his knees to get it accomplished, but he got in. I'm not sure where that got us. Or Kentucky. Or Senator McConnell.

Q: What was your impression of these trade missions that would often be, like you mentioned, Chuck Robb would come with some Virginia businessmen and go to Korea to try to establish. How did things work?

GRIFFIN: Very well, most of the time. Because of the professionalism in that FCS section. They had been doing it long before I showed up, and had it down to a fine art. I had to hire more people simply because we had more visitors. The staff could churn out a set of full schedules, get appointments with appropriate people, and prepare detailed briefing books the size of a DC phone book within days, and sometimes hours. Most visitors let us know well in advance that they were coming, what they wanted to do, and how they wanted to do it. Some trade missions were well organized; some were pitiful. We always helped the ones that weren't doing very well. The better organized ones usually didn't need much help, but we still made appointments and hotel reservations, and prepared briefing books. It was beneficial to the post and FCS, because it gave us a good name, and it was a money-making exercise. We weren't allowed to make a profit, but the income enabled us to hire more people as contractors, and do a better job.

Q: The trade mission...?

GRIFFIN: They paid for our services. That gave me more staff to do basic things like market research in our slack times. So it more than paid for itself. I think it was well worthwhile. Perhaps one of the better missions that I can recall offhand was the one led by San Francisco Mayor Diane Feinstein. She also brought along some people from Oakland. They were very focused on what they wanted, which in general was to attract more Korean shipping into the ports of Oakland and San Francisco, which had just been refurbished. Of course, they had competitors. For example, Long Beach sent a separate mission, as did Seattle. Each was carefully designed to attract business of most benefit to it. The newspapers made fun of one of my Senators, Fritz Hollings of South Carolina, saying he only bought his suits from a particular Korean tailor in Itaewan. Korean tailors are famous for putting quality suits together cheaply and quickly. But Hollings didn't just come to shop. He came with a mission that was, as usual, focused. That was one reason I visited Charleston, because Charleston had just built a new port and wanted Korean business. The U.S. was exporting everything from coal and beef to musical instruments to Korea. In FCS, we were trying to make sure that would help balance out all the Korean toys and television sets Americans were buying. There also were several Korean-U.S. joint ventures.

Q: How did you find at this point the Korean business community? In the first place, was there a considerable body of Korean businessmen, particularly younger businessmen, who'd, say, maybe gone to school in the United States or something like that and had come back? Was this a good cadre with which to deal?

GRIFFIN: We were in touch with some of them, in part thanks to the help of USIS and the Consular Section. We also learned that the Koreans were better at this than we were. The Korean Government had a list of every Korean that had migrated to the U.S., including their names, addresses, and phone numbers. When you consider that at that time there were around 800,000 Koreans in and around Los Angeles alone, that's quite an achievement. We met some American-educated Koreans in both countries. A few were in important Korean Government trade policy positions. One with whom I worked closely earned a degree in Oregon and taught school there after he graduated. His English was excellent and his ideas were moderate. People like that were helpful in many ways, both to us and to Koreans trying to deal with us.

While preference is usually given to graduates of Korea's most prestigious schools, some of the chaebals hired young people educated in the U.S. to help them deal with American business. But the chaebals were still run like highly disciplined, feudal organizations. One day I went to Samsung headquarters to see the Chairman. On the ground floor, the door to a large room full of people was ajar. A man was yelling and screaming at people marching and shouting back. At first I thought something bad was happening, but it was just their daily lesson in company policy. All employees had to attend, shout slogans and march up and down. That's the way they do things.

Q: They all wore the same uniforms.

GRIFFIN: Yes, plus hats and headbands. The chaebals are highly disciplined organizations, but that didn't stop bad things from happening. Today in America we worry about corporate corruption. There was corporate corruption in Korea then, and probably still is. As I mentioned in the case of Nigeria, the implementation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act upset some Americans affected by it, but I argued that it was better for everybody, because it cost the firms less money, and they got more bang for their bucks if they were clean. Nonetheless, we caught one American businessman trying to bribe a Korean official. I think he went to jail. Our Consul General, sadly, got into trouble of the same sort. Without mentioning names, after he left Seoul on transfer, he accepted a "gift" of first-class tickets to Seoul and back and good seats at the 1988 Olympic games. He was caught, though he still professes innocence. And his wife accepted another "gift" of mink coats.

Q: As I mentioned before, I was consul general there, and it was a constant worry for me and something I kept drilling to the officers, because at that time any visas were highly prized.

GRIFFIN: The American Consul General was probably the most popular diplomat in town.

Q: I hated to go to receptions. I'd usually try to avoid getting into a corner.

GRIFFIN: Well, you know Koreans. If you invite them to dinner, they send you massive floral displays. They're not bouquets; they're huge. Or they send expensive art objects, cases of booze, baskets of food and other things to your house. Then you have to send it all back.

Q: It's a pain in the neck.

GRIFFIN: It's very embarrassing. The Chairman of Daewoo had a very nice dinner for me before I left. He presented me with a painting, and when I said I couldn't accept it, he said he knew we had rules saying we could accept gifts of up to 50 dollars. When I agreed, he showed me an official certificate stating that the painting was valued at 25 dollars. I still have it and the certificate, after clearing it with L to make damned sure. It is a nice, fairly new water color painting that was damaged. The Chairman said he really wanted to give me another one hanging on a nearby wall, but it was worth several thousand dollars, so he didn't. We got other things we could keemostly little brass bowls and spoons.

Q: How did you find American business practices meshed with this? I remember sitting - this is back in about 1978 or so - in a Country Team meeting and hearing the Koreans at that time were trying to wean themselves away from buying Japanese stuff and they wanted to buy a couple of fire engines. They went to the United States and they came up and they were ready to buy it, but the people in the United States, the fire engine manufacturing company, said, "Well, you know, we've got such a good market here in the United States that maybe we can do..."

GRIFFIN: To get Americans interested in the Korean market we pointed out that it was a reasonably large market. It wasn't Japan or Germany, but it was pretty big, especially if you looked at the size of our bilateral deficit. We saw that they were importing more and more things, so we sought American firms which made what Koreans wanted. A couple of "for instances" may illustrate my point. The demand for electric power in Korea was outrunning supply, so they wanted to build two more nuclear power plants (they already had two). It was to be a $5 billion project. American firms were very interested, especially since the nuclear power industry in this country had just tanked after Three Mile Island. The U.S. public was afraid of it, so they weren't building more nuclear power plants. But then our companies began fighting each other for contracts in Korea. I saw what was happening, and concluded that the only way to win was for all the Americans to cooperate with each other. This was easier said than done, because there were several firms making the same type of equipment, and each wanted the contract. I made my pitch to the Ambassador and got him interested. This was sometimes hard to do with Dixie, but he caught on quickly and went to work.

He chaired a meeting with the head of the AmCham and representatives of all the interested companies we could think of. He told them the only way the Embassy could help them was to support American business in general. They knew they needed the Embassy's help to get the Koreans to deflect the Canadians, the French, the Germans, the Japanese, and the Swedes. We argued that they would get to first base only if they cooperated with us and with each other. It took them awhile to think it through, but eventually they agreed. I'm not sure it made the best business sense, but it happened. We reminded them that, as in Japan, when Korea was rebuilt after World War II, we put in an electric power system with American specifications. It had 110-volt household current, and American-style plugs and light bulbs. We wanted to ensure that the nuclear plants were built to American standards, so our firms would have an advantage over the Europeans and the Japanese. They soon saw the light, and worked with us in Washington and Seoul, and we pulled off a major coup. We got both power plants in the end. There were plenty of opportunities for corruption every inch of the way, but whenever we saw something like that about to happen, we shined a spotlight on it, made it public, and embarrassed enough people so they stopped doing it. The same thing with the Olympics. I was there only until 1986, but there was already...

Q: The Olympics would be '88.

GRIFFIN: The head of the Korean Olympic Committee was Roh, Tae Woo. He eventually became President of Korea himself, but his Olympic office was a very murky place. I went there several times, either to gather information for our businesses, or to accompany the representative of an American firm. You have heard about scandals at the International Olympic Committee in recent years. Well, that certainly seemed true of the Korean Committee. If you didn't come in carrying a present, you didn't see anybody. Naively, I went there without an appointment to see Roh. No dice, but I did see his deputy. After listening to a runaround, I told him that Americans could not compete in such an atmosphere. I said if they didn't make the process more transparent, we would cause serious political trouble. I said that without any authority to do so, but things got a little easier. Some Americans did get in the door. I don't think they got a major share of the contracts for the Olympics, but they got some.

I ought to mention a couple of other things: I told you that Roger Smith, who was then Chairman of General Motors, came out. This was just...

Q: There is, by the way, a very funny movie called "Roger and Me," I think. Roger Smith never appeared in the movie, but it was about a guy who was trying to get an appointment with Roger Smith and he never did. It's an amusing movie.

GRIFFIN: He came to Seoul just after a major political eventhe return of Kim, Dae Jung. He had been in political exile, teaching at Harvard. He decided the time was ripe to return home, though he was anathema to the Chun, Doo Hwan Government. He flew in with some fanfare, accompanied by several Americans, two of whom I knew both before and aftenamely Pat Darien, who had been Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, and Tom Foglietta, a Congressman from Philadelphia who eventually became my boss as Ambassador to Italy.

Q: By the way, to put in context, the example of Benigno Aquino, who came back of the same type of thing to the Philippines and was assassinated on the tarmac, so this was in everybody's mind when he came back.

GRIFFIN: Right. We had some advance notice that Kim, Dae Jung was coming, but probably not much. It wasn't in my bailiwick, but I was at the airport to meet a trade delegation on the same plane. Ambassador Walker knew when Kim was coming, because he had been sent a memo by the Political Counselor recommending that he be at the airport for Kim's arrival because there were Congressmen and Pat Darien on board, to make sure that there would be no problem. He rejected it absolutely, saying it wasn't any of his business, and who was this fellow Kim, Dae Jung anyway? He called Kim "some Communist," and said he didn't want to have anything to do with him. He ordered a junior political officer to go to the airport to see what happened. Well, all hell broke loose. It was all over Korean and international TV and newspapers that Kim was dragged away screaming by cops, who beat up Pat Darien and the Congressmen. I was just outside the jetway where it all took place, trying to see what was happening. When I finally learned the details, I told others I thought the Ambassador had made a mistake.

The next day, I took Roger Smith in for a courtesy call on Ambassador Walker. Smith was a bit tirejet-laggebut the Ambassador, rather than listening or engaging Smith on doing business in Korea, started making excuses about why he didn't go to the airport. That's all he would talk about. I lost it. After I got Smith out of there and to his next appointment, I went to Paul Cleveland and told him if Dixie ever did that again, and I knew he would, I would quit. I said I couldn't deal with guys like the Chairman of General Motors and have the Ambassador rattle on about his personal problems. The Ambassador was supposed to help us on the commercial side. Paul said it was the way Dixie was, and asked what I expected him to do. I said, "You're the DCM. Just tell him what I said." Paul did talk to Dixie, who was more helpful thereafter, while complaining publicly that I was trying to make a commercial officer out of him. He said that wasn't what he was sent there to do.

Q: Getting the ambassador going to something, I used to have trouble getting ambassadors to take on a consular problem; somebody unjustly in jail and it needed the clout of the ambassador. Ambassadors don't like to dirty their hands in that. Trade now is so important that there's no doubt that they're sent out to do that, but I guess it was still a period of time when he thought he was going to deal with..."

GRIFFIN: Yes, I've had similar experiences with other ambassadors. Some have their own sense of what they should focus on, which isn't always where you want their attention.

Q: What was your impression of Dixie Walker? Was he coming out of the fairly far right on the political spectrum?

GRIFFIN: Yes. He was very good at some things, but didn't want to bother with others. In the end, after Paul Cleveland left, Dixie and I got along well, maybe because there had been a problem between Paul and Dixie, but I won't go into that. Paul was succeeded by another DCM who was fine, but didn't really get close to Dixie, who finally decided I was ok. We sat together on my last day, and sort of hugged each other. He said, "You're actually a pretty good fellow, Griffin." So in a way, we kissed and made up. I guess his complaints about me trying to make a commercial officer out of him were supposed to be humorous, but I didn't think so at the time. His wife Ceci has since died, but we had a problem with her in Seoul. She was striking, with the features of a model, and was quickly discovered by a famous Korean couturier, Andre Kim. He is a gargantuan fellow who weighs about 400 pounds, loves life, and designs fabulous clothes. She liked his styles, and he knew it would help his business if the American Ambassador's wife were seen wearing them everywhere. She agreed, but then wanted to keep the dresses, so Paul had to tell her it was a no-no. When she and the Ambassador resisted, he got the Counselor of the Department to weigh in. Finally, grumbling and in tears, she gave them all back to Andre. I seem to recall that Nancy Reagan got into similar trouble for doing similar things.

I also made a misstep there, which I ought to mention. A Congressional delegation led by Senator Phil Gramm came to town...

Q: From Texas.

GRIFFIN: The representative of Bell Textron Helicopters wanted to throw a lunch for them and some influential Koreans, and asked if he could do it at my house. The rep thought my house would be more conducive to conversation than one of the local hotels. Bell was after a huge contract to make and sell helicopters to the Korean military. I checked with the DCM and FCS, and everybody approved. I invited some Korean ministers and bureaucrats, who actually came, so it went off very well. But after it was over, I made a bad mistake. The Bell rep paid for everything with a check made out to me, which was a no-nsomething I didn't realize at the moment. I took it down to our disbursing officer and asked him to do the paperwork. But he recoiled. He told me I had handled the check and that it was made out to magainst the rules. I had to send the check back to Bell, and endure a clean-up session with Jim Thessin in L, to make sure I didn't do such a stupid thing again. And I haven't.

That's pretty much the sum and substance of Korea. My tour was cut short when I was selected for the Senior Seminar. While I didn't think my job was done, it's supposed to be a great honor to be chosen for the Seminar, so I couldn't argue. I did try. I called Director General George Vest and told him I needed to finish my tour. He said, "Shut up, Griffin. Don't argue. Get on a plane and come home." So I did.

Q: Just another look at Korea on the business side at that time: Were you watching a transformation of Korea? It had gone through the usual thing: textiles and then some assembly work for other people. How did you see it developing?

GRIFFIN: They were way behind the Japanese - let's say that.

Q: Thanks to the Japanese.

GRIFFIN: Yes, thanks to the Japanese occupation. It kept them cowed from 1910 to 1945. But their manufacturing, as such, essentially consisted of ceramics and some stone carving: in other words, crafts. But they knew they had to move ahead, so after the Korean War, which slowed them up even more and divided the country, they went to work. One of the better lines that Dixie Walker used, as I did after hearing it for awhile, was, "The Koreans are the only people I know who make the Japanese look lazy." And, boy, do they woryes indeed! Their work ethic is incredible.

Q: 64-hour week at one point.

GRIFFIN: Easily. They lifted themselves up by the bootstraps. First, they cobbled together simple things, then they began to make more complex things, better and better. By the time I lefand they're even more advanced nothey were doing very sophisticated things. For example, they tried to push Intel out of the computer chip business, saying they could do it better. Andrew Grove came out while I was there to try to settle things. I handled his visit and found him fascinating.

Q: He was the head of Intel.

GRIFFIN: He was the President of Intel, and one of its founders. He is Chairman now. Anyway, the reason that the Koreans didn't take over the chip business was because they couldn't get it quite right. To quote Dixie Walker again, "Korea is the land of almost right." They fabricated military tanks out of titanium and other sophisticated alloys and, again, got it almost right. But then they would have to call in the Americans to fix something. They were making everything from those, to airplanes, to you-name-it by the time I left, and doing most of it very well.

At one point, Hyundai Motors President Chung, Sae-Young told me his company wanted to export automobiles to the U.S., but he was fearful that it would fail. He knew the Japanese had tried and succeeded to an extent, but he wasn't sure Hyundai could compete in the tough American market. I told him that, as long as Korea let Americans make and sell Buicks and Oldsmobiles there, I didn't see serious problems with trying to sell Hyundais in the U.S. They did put a plant in Canada, and later in the U.S., but they haven't done very well. His fears were well grounded, but at least they made the effort. Koreans constantly and aggressively look for new markets and technology.

My old friend Howard Schaffer came through Seoul while I was there. He was posted there during the Korean War. When was the Korean War?

Q: '50 to '53, more or less.

GRIFFIN: He was there, I think, from '53 to '56, or something like that. Anyway, he was headed to Dacca as Ambassador to Bangladesh. He hadn't been to Seoul since he left, so we're talking 30 years later. I went to the airport to pick him up and brought him into town, and by the time we got to South Gate...

Q: An old gate.

GRIFFIN: ...he said, "You know, George, I know I used to live in this town, but that big gate is the only thing I recognize. I might as well be on the moon. This is nothing like it was then." Surrounding the gate now, for example, are modern buildings like Samsung headquarters, in a big, shiny, steel and glass skyscraper. I took him to our house on Compound Two, where he used to live. He recognized that and the site of the old royal palace at the end of Sejong-No Street in front of the Embassy, but said the rest of it was just unbelievable. The palace itself was just rubble when he was there, and has been restored.

Q: What you saw would be like me. I left there in '79, but I had also been there in 1952 during the war, and South Gate was still standing and the Catholic cathedral was still standing, and that was pretty much it.

GRIFFIN: He said it was all dirt roads, full of men schlepping stuff on A-frames here and there...

Q: Oh, yes. Did you find there at that time sort of a visceral hatred, dislike, or whatever you want to say, of the Japanese and Japanese things?

GRIFFIN: Yes. The Japanese Embassy is on a narrow street between our chancery and Compound 2. I walked past it on the way to and from the office every day. Sometimes I went around a different way to avoid demonstrations. The police blocked some of them, but many were staged without warning. It was easy to organize a demonstration against the Japanese. There was always a crowd ready to join in.

Q: Commercial-wise how did that play out?

GRIFFIN: The Japanese were doing plenty of business effectively. They probably were our biggest competitors, in almost every field. They knew the country well, and used plenty of time-proven tricks to get business. Fortunately for us, the Koreans were not trading with the Chinese when I was therthough I think they are noso they weren't commercial competitors. But Koreans always found reasons for demonstrations and riots. For example, my daughter went to school up behind the big university.

Q: Yonsei or Kyung Hee or Seoul University?

GRIFFIN: Yonsei, if memory serves. She was at the large international school there. I went to pick her up one day just as a riot started, with students throwing rocks at the police, who responded with pepper gas. The students had been driven back inside the gates of the university. I decided the road was clear enough for me to get through, even though it was full of rocks and clouds of gas. I wanted get my daughter and head back before things got worse. I raced through without incident, but my air vents picked up so much pepper gas that it took months to dissipate. Every time we got in the car we started weeping and sneezing. It was terrible.

Q: So commercial activities were given a pass by anti-Japanese activists, but political issues were not?

GRIFFIN: Well, the business deals were not all that visible to most of the public. The students might find out about one once in awhile and have a demonstration. But when the Japanese entered into a deal, or a joint venture, say, with one of the Korean chaebals, they didn't put up big signs saying, "Sony is here." Neither they nor their Korean partner would make a big public deal out of it. We would find out about it in other ways. For example, Lucky Goldstar had several ventures with the Japanese, but they always used their logos, not the Japanese. Some demonstrations against the Japanese were staged by, for example, the so-called "comfort women," whom the Japanese had used as sex slaves during World War II.

Q: Did you have to deal with 'don't buy American' anti-Americanism?

GRIFFIN: Sometimes. We certainly had demonstrations against us as well. Movie distributors organized a demonstration against us one time, railing against cultural imperialism. But usually demonstrations against us were about other issues. The Koreans were pretty good about keeping them in check. The Embassy is next door to secret police headquarters, another favorite target of demonstrators. I don't know if Sejong-No Street, that huge boulevard, was there when you were.

Q: There was a big boulevard, and we had two buildings, twin buildings, built for USAID. One had been turned over to the economic ministry, and we kept the other. They were talking about getting rid of it.

GRIFFIN: We didn't get rid of the second one, and I ended up in what had been the AID Director's office; a giant, wood-paneled space. It was bigger than the Ambassador's office.

Q: This was where the power was at one time.

GRIFFIN: Shortly after I arrived, I had it partitioned in half to create offices for the new people we hired. There was no other place for them in the building, and I didn't need all that space. The boulevard was a great place for demonstrators and would-be race drivers. It was built as an emergency airstrip, designed for use by our forces in case the North Koreans came crashing down again on the South. During the monthly air raid drillthey must have had those when you were there...

Q: Oh, yes, at noon once a month.

GRIFFIN: ?everybody had to get off the streets, go inside, and into shelters. Then the Koreans would zoom in with helicopters, from which troops would come rappelling down.

Q: And tanks would go up and down the street.

GRIFFIN: You had a real sense that you were in a war zone at the time.

Q: Did this prove as an inhibitor, the fact that you had 20 or 40 divisions of North Koreans sitting 30 miles from Seoul? Did Americans who were going to invest look at this and...?

GRIFFIN: No, it didn't hold them up. They knew the risk was there, but because we had 42,000 troops stationed there, I don't think they worried about it a lot. I took Roger Smith, with the head of his Pontiac Division, to Inch'on, where they wanted to build a factory. It is quite close to the North and in a seaport that is sporadically a target of North Korean spy ships, but I don't think any of that entered into his calculations. Another time, I mentioned it to Lee Iacocca, the Chairman of Chrysler. He was intrigued, but clearly not concerned. Chrysler was making tank engines in Korea. Then there was EDS Chairman Ross Perot. He liked to talk about his exploits. You may remember that he hired a team of ex-Green Berets to get his employees out of Tehran in a daring rescue effort. Ken Follett wrote a book about it called "On Wings of Eagles."

Q: I remember.

GRIFFIN: I told Perot I was working on Iran at that time, and had been intrigued by the EDS side of the story. I asked him to inscribe a copy of the book for me. He said he would if I got a copy to him. I couldn't find one in Seoul, but back in Texas one of his aides got one, which Perot signed. They should have sent it to me through the pouch, but I guess they didn't know about that. They sent it by international mail, and when it arrived, I was really angry because someone in Korean Customs cut a big hole in the spine. "Looking for drugs," they said. I went to see the head of Customs, showed him the damage, and asked him if they really thought I was a drug smuggler. He apologized and offered to get me another copy. I told him to forget it because the damaged one had Perot's signature in it, which I wasn't sure he would redo. I still have the book.

Q: Well then, so you went to Senior Seminar in '86 to '87?

GRIFFIN: Right.

Q: How did you find it at that time?

GRIFFIN: It was a terrific year. I learned a lot, and it made me feel as if my career was on a roll. Several things began to happen, career-wise, but essentially it was a good sabbatical year. One very important thing it taught me was how to use a computesomething I hadn't done before. We didn't have them in our offices in those days. I was a pretty good on an electric typewriter, but the computer made writing even easier. Were you in the Senior Seminar?

Q: Yes.

GRIFFIN: So you know that it's divided into committees.

Q: In my time it may have been different. I was there '74 to '75.

GRIFFIN: Ok, I was a good 10 years after you. Anyway, our group of 25 was divided into five committees, and I was elected chair of one of them. It was supposed to give us focus. Each committee had a separate room, in which each member had a computer terminal. Our first trip was a pre-planned one to the Midwest, essentially to Detroit and Minnesota. In Minnesota, each of us went to a different farm for a night. I milked cows, shoveled manure, and had a good time learning about the farmer's life.

For our next trips, the group was asked to decide where we should go in the U.S., and then each committee organized a trip. My committee was tasked with the next trip, which was to New York. I did most of the leg work for that one, which the others used as a model. I found enough of my contacts to make it work well. I set up standard visits to places like the Council on Foreign Relations and the United Nations. I arranged a tour of the Wall Street Journal, and a meeting with Peter Kahn, who was then the Editor and later Publisher and Chairman. Karen House, his wife, is now the publisher. Then, a session with ABC News Anchor Peter Jennings. They are both old friends. I set up a meeting with Henry Wriston, whose dad Walter tried to reorganize the State Department.

Q: Wristonization.

GRIFFIN: It worked out well for a quick visit. We had a special guided tour of the New York Stock Exchange, took a boat around Manhattan, rode the subways, went to the top of the World Trade Center, and had some good meals.

Back at the Seminar at FSI, because of my most recent job, I was made point man in dealing with the business issues. Most of the others had very little experience with business, so I decided they were missing a lot, and became a sort of cheerleader. I made a presentation on a new strategy for U.S. business abroad, which seemed to make them think, and was praised by the course Coordinator.

Later, I set up another trip to the West Coast. On it, I made a speech to the San Francisco Council on Foreign Relations about how embassies work with the business community. The group also went to San Antonio but I returned to Washington to meet with Elinor Constable. Just before our trip began, I had bumped into her in Hechinger's parking lot on Wisconsin Avenue. She was very excited, and said she had just gotten the nod for a very important appointment, but wouldn't tell me what it was. About a week later, she called me and said, "Gee, I didn't know you had served in Africa." I said I had been in Lagos, and asked why she wondered. She told me she was going out as Ambassador to Kenya and wanted me to be her DCM. I thanked her and asked her to let me talk to my wife before responding definitely. Chrissie had said she would never go back to Africa, but I asked her to reconsider because it would be a very good assignment for me. Nairobi was not Lagos, Elinor was a good friend, and the Embassy was the largest in sub-Saharan Africa. She soon agreed after Elinor came to our house to talk to both of us about it. It took awhile to be firmed up, but it happened.

So I didn't go to San Antonio, where I had set up a meeting with Mayor (and acquaintance) Henry Cisneros, who got in trouble later, for other reasons. Another course requirement was an individual research project. Mine discussed the impact of foreign investment in the U.S. I explored the issue at a time when people were terrified that the Japanese were buying the whole country, starting with Rockefeller Center, including every golf course in the country, Sony Pictures, and keep going. It was all moving fast. I hoped to make better sense of it. The projects were scheduled for February, so I decided to do some of my research in warm places, such as Puerto Rico. I understand that ours was a somewhat unique class in that we had no foreign trips. I gather other seminars...

Q: We didn't, but that was way back.

GRIFFIN: Anyway, Puerto Rico was enough for me. We were given a fixed budget and had to make our own arrangements. I used some frequent flyer miles to get to San Juan. I also went to Arizona to a factory set up by one of my more fascinating Korean friendSung Hak Baik, the Chairman of the Young An Hat Company. He is the world's largest hat manufacturer. They make everything from baseball caps, to football helmets, to ladies' fancy hats, to Panama hatany kind of hat you ever heard of. Baik had just opened a plant in Winslow, Arizona, so I flew out to Phoenix to meet him. Then I drove to Winslow to check out the factory and its impact on the local economy.

Baik is a fascinating character in several ways. He learned long ago that he needed a plant in the U.S. because of our import limitations on hats. A baseball cap, he told me, has something like 15 parts, at least five of which must be made in the U.S. if he wants to put a "made in USA" label on it. So he searched for a place for a plant here. He makes some pieces elsewhere and imports them. Some of his cloth is finished abroad, but not stitched. Textile trade is an arcane subject. In Winslow his plant is in an abandoned underwear factory, previously owned by BVD. He had hired Hopi Indians as the labor force. The manager said they first used Navajos from the BVD work force, but found them unreliable, and shifted to Hopis. That was a bit of a problem, because the Hopi Reservation is in the middle of the Navajo Nation, and they have a 75-mile ride on a dirt road each way every day to get to work. The Navajo were not happy and some threats were made, but it seemed settled when I was there.

Mr. Baik's life story has been the subject of numerous stories in the Reader's Digest and on television. He was a kid in North Korea during the Korean War, hanging around as a sort of gofer for an American Army platoon. He was badly injured during a North Korean attack, and one of the soldiers managed to get him into a MASH unit.

Q: Mobile Army Surgical Hospital.

GRIFFIN: Right. He couldn't have been over 12 years old at that point. Anyway, they fixed him up. He made his way south and went to work for a Korean hat maker, who in those days were making horsehair stovepipe hats.

Q: That an elderly gentleman over the age of 60 would wear.

GRIFFIN: That's right. Then he started his own firm and eventually became the world's largest hat maker. When he got rich, one thing he wanted to do was to thank the soldier who had saved him. He went on a worldwide search for a man he knew only as "Billy." It turned out that the man is still alive, lives in Philadelphia, and is named David Beattie, which presumably sounded like "Billy" to Baik. Some veterans organizations found him and passed the word to Baik. Baik got very excited, and flew to Pennsylvania, where he planned to give Beattie a large check. But Beattie said he didn't need any money. He said he remembered taking a kid who got hurt to a MASH, which took care of him. He said he didn't do much, and anyone else would have done the same.

Anyway, in our Senior Seminar local project my committee decided to take a look at the problems and issues facing Washington, DC. It was the home of our headquarters, and had a mayor who wasn't very successfuMarion Barry. We had met mayors of other major cities, and thought we might do a comparative study. We began with my favorite tour of the city, along Massachusetts Avenue. If you go from one end of Massachusetts Avenue in Maryland to the other end in Maryland, you see every facet of the city, from awful slums, to the White House, to Embassy Row, to some very fancy private houses around Ward Circle. We took it piece by piece, starting on the eastern end, and working our way west. We called on city councilors, and tried to call on the Mayor, but he apparently didn't want to see us.

Q: He wasn't in jail at the time?

GRIFFIN: I don't recall; he may have been. But we did see some of his advisors and other city leaders. We talked to journalists, politicians, and business people, and put together a pretty good project. In a nutshell, we tried to describe the problems and opportunities that face the city. We didn't offer any startling solutions.

For my individual project on foreign investment in the U.S., I did some of the research in New York and Washington. I took pictures along the way and put it all in a video presentation, the first time that format had been used in the Senior Seminar. Sadly, that turned off the review committee, which refused to look at the video and demanded it all on paper, which wasn't half as stimulating, in my opinion.

Q: What was your impression of investment in the United States?

GRIFFIN: It can be good for us. For example, in Puerto Rico several Spanish banks were financing projects that most American banks wouldn't touch. They had a natural affinity with the borrowers who spoke Spanish, and things happened. I went to a sea aquarium run by an Israeli, who started his business in Aqaba. And to a French eyeglass manufacturer. Those firms alone had opened hundreds of jobs to people who otherwise wouldn't have had one. American companies that were offered tax breaks to invest in Puerto Rico were not doing it, and seemed to be lagging behind the more aggressive foreigners. The French eyeglass company was in a very poor town on the southwest coast, in a building from which an American company had pulled out, saying people wouldn't work. Well, the people were working for the French, and working well.

My committee also took a look at historic preservation in Annapolis, to see what can be done in a city that had been going downhill. We divided other issues into units, with each committee responsible for several units during the year. I organized one on the NEA Bureau arethat is, the Near Easwhich at that time still included South Asia. I did another on global energy issues, bringing in some of my business contacts from Nigeria. At the time, we were still winding down from the OPEC crisis of the '70s, and people were worried about another energy crunch.

On another trip, we went to the South, including Miami, where we looked at the drug trade, and Cuban and Haitian illegal immigrants. We spent an exciting day on a Coast Guard cutter chasing boat people and drug runners. The cutters were not as fast as some of the drug runners, so they lost some of them. In New Orleans, we had a long session with the Army Corps of Engineers, discussing how they were messing with nature around the country.

We visited several military bases on trips set up by the military members. There was one member from each of the five serviceArmy, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marines. We spent a good day at CENTCOM on MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, and got a briefing on the situation in the Persian Gulf. At Fort Benning, Georgia, the Rangers treated us to a day of Special Forces activities. At Fort Bragg and Camp LeJeune in North Carolina, the Marines, the 101st Airborne Division, and Special Forces showed off their wares to us. We went to SAC headquarters in Nebraska, to NORAD headquarters underground in Colorado, and to Navy headquarters in Norfolk. At one Army base, we spent most of a day shooting at things, firing thousands of rounds of ammo at targets from Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, machine guns, and cannons. It was a good show, but what a waste of money! What we shot off in one day would have paid for the Seminar several times over. That's pretty much it for the Seminar.

Before going to Nairobi, I took the DCM course. Our Coordinator was Pru Bushnell, who eventually became Ambassador to Nairobi herself. She was there when the Embassy was blown up, and now is Ambassador in Central America.

Q: In the DCM course, although you were going to somebody you knew as a professional, because Elinor Constable was a Foreign Service Officer, were they working with the DCMs on how to deal with political ambassadors? The marriage of political ambassador and professional DCM doesn't always take.

GRIFFIN: It surely doesn't. Yes, they did cover all that. Our course was held mostly at Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. I recall that it focused on one major theme, which was the failure rate of DCMs around the world. By that, they meant that, while one might have been a terrific consul general, or political or economic counselor, it didn't necessarily prepare one to be a good administrator, which is what a DCM must be. Nor did it prepare one for dealing with all ambassadors. Pru suggested that upon arrival, we ask our ambassadors to agree to a contract in which we would really be their alter egos. That meant we would be privy to everything. She urged us to point out that, while we wouldn't officially have the authority to, for example, know everything the station did, there would be times when we would be chargï¿½s and needed to have a clear relationship with the heads of all agencies. We should ensure that we are accorded the same respect as the Ambassador, because as chargï¿½s we would be responsible for all Embassy activities, and should not be cut out.

So, yes, it came up. Pru argued that it made no difference whether the Ambassador was political or career; in either case we needed to convince them. She reminded us that there are good and miserable ambassadors of both types. I followed her advice, and had a long heart-to-heart with Elinor Constable before she left. She preceded me to Nairobi by almost a year. She said she chose me primarily because she knew both Chrissie and me, and her husband Peter wasn't coming with her. He had been Ambassador to the Congo and was then head of the Multilateral Force Organization for the Sinai, headquartered in Rome, Italy. He had a full-time job and couldn't come to Nairobi, so she wanted a DCM with whom she could put up her feet, have a drink, and talk. We had been friends since Pakistan, so that was how our relationship began.

I briefed her on the advice in the DCM course, and later sent telegrams spelling out the way she would introduce me in Nairobi. I wanted that phrase "alter ego" in there. She put it in, and used it in every efficiency report after that. She repeated that we had no secrets from each other, and that we complemented each other. In that first meeting, I also said I knew she could be a strong-headed, sometimes bull-headed person, often very opinionated, and sometimes make mistakes. I said I wouldn't take the job unless she agreed that I could tell her when she was off base, and not be penalized for it. It worked. I only had to read her the riot act a couple of times. She gave me the best efficiency reports of my career, so it worked out very well. I think the advice in the DCM course generally was good. Some parts were not terribly fascinating, but it made you realize that you would be the conscience of your post. Especially when it came to representation and making sure everything was clean in every way. No cheating on counting the silver, or anything else. You had to make sure that everybody else did everything correctly, so you had to lead by example. It was something we all knew instinctively. It wasn't something new, but it was good, I think, to have a strong reminder that "you're It." And that we were also responsible for our Ambassador, no matter who it was, and to never forget that we were not the Ambassador.

Q: Let's go ahead.

GRIFFIN: Ok, moving to Nairobi. I was there from September 1987, to July 1990. Nairobi was our largest Embassy in Sub-Saharan Africa. We had over 800 employees in 15 agencies, and the number grew while I was there, despite our attempts to keep a lid on it. That was partly because it was regional headquarters for several agencies, which I'll come to later. It's much smaller now because after the August 7, 1998, bombing many of those offices were moved to Embassy Cairo, which is now our largest Embassy in the world. Our primary focuses were essentially bilateral political relations, economic assistance, human rights, democracy, the environment, and military issues.

The latter involved support to U.S. military activities in the CENTCOM region, especially in Somalia, Sudan, and the Horn of Africa. When I got there, the Consulate in Mombasa was quite large, with a staff of about 50 Americanmostly U.S. Navy communicators. Mombasa was also about the only port on the East African littoral where our Navy ships could visit with any regularity and provide shore leave. Not long after I arrived, the Navy upgraded its systems and wound down its Mombasa presence. So the post was eventually reduced to one American, and became our first special consular post in recent history. That meant that the Consul had no classified capability, so he would come to Nairobi to read traffic and get briefed. That whole process took a lot of time and effort.

Although the Moi Government considered it extremely sensitive, the Navy retained some landing and base rights there. It continued to maintain a hangar in Mombasa for a variety of aircraft. CENTCOthe Central Commanand the Commander, Middle East Force conducted annual military exercises in Kenya. They were not as extensive as some British military training there, which is conducted semiannually. Sometimes our people would exercise with the British forces. So there's quite a lot of military activity, much of which is invisible to most Kenyans.

I was Elinor Constable's DCM for almost two years, and then Chargï¿½ for six months before a political appointee, Smith Hempstone, showed up. We had a lot of visitors. Not surprising, because Nairobi is the regional headquarters for many agencies. For example, the UN Environmental Program, UNEP, at one of only three headquarters the UN has outside of New York. The other two are in Geneva and the Philippines. One of our first visitors was Al Newhart, the founder and Chairman of Gannett, the publisher of USA Today. He was on an around-the-world junket on his own plane, and brought with him a huge staff, including a photographer, who happened to be my niece. He was a bit reminiscent of Senator McConnell. He wanted to see President Moi and berate him about everything he was doing wrong. With the help of his top editor, we managed to cool him of a bit, so it was a reasonable visit.

Several Senators visited Nairobi, including my friend Fritz Hollings from South Carolina, Terry Sanford of North Carolina, Paul Simon of Illinois, and David Boren of Oklahoma. President Carter came three times after he left office. His mission was to mediate between Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. He also climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. While his visits were not "official," we handled them as if they were. When I told Carter that I, like he, had gone to Georgia Tech, he seemed to think I was okay. But when I tried to offer my opinion about Afghanistan or Iran, he didn't want to hear about it. I didn't bother to complain that he didn't read my INR analyses. His wife Rosalyn was with him each time, but she was very unhappy about the Kilimanjaro climb because she never made it to the top. They had a couple of grandchildren and a Secret Service team with them. Their agent who was in the best shape was the first to come down with altitude sickness. One of the kids was next, and Mrs. Carter was sent down the mountain with the failures, while her husband managed to stagger up to the rim of the crater and back down. He was quite proud of it.

Naturally, we had our share of official State Department visitors. They included Under Secretary for Management Ivan Selin, Africa Assistant Secretaries Chet Crocker and Hank Cohen, and Art Ford, who was FBO Assistant Secretary.

Some of our biggest personnel problems were with USAID. Elinor and I lost a big bureaucratic battle with them. USAID had five offices there: there was the bilateral AID mission, plus four regional missions. REDSO was the Regional Economic Development Services Office; RHUDO is the all-Africa regional housing office. There were two regional inspectors' officeone for investigations, and one for inspections. At one point, the new Inspector General of AID, a retired Marine general, decided to "save money" by stationing his investigators at 5 major posts abroad, including Nairobi. He came out on a charm offensive, seeking the Ambassador's agreement. As he spoke, we realized that, where there were 11 American officers, and 20-plus local staff in those offices, the planned shift would bring another 20 Americans immediately, and eventually another 35; not to mention additional local staff and administrative burdens. Elinor asked him where he thought we would put those people. She told him we had no extra office space and no available housing in a tight market. She said we couldn't do it. The IG thanked her politely, and left.

We tried to fight this, but soon learned that the other four posts targeted by the IG had already caved, without checking with the Department, or with us. We argued that we had a special problem. At that time, many people, especially in Washington, viewed Nairobi as the Paris of Africa. They saw it as a wonderful place where people could live happily, in the case of USAID closer to their work. Not so. What we had was a group of people, mostly men, who were on the road most of the time, leaving behind unhappy families who didn't like the schools or the place. As DCM, I saw more wife problems than at any other post I've ever been. As a group, they were very lonely, and many of them drank too much and played around. Their kids would have been a lot happier in schools here in Arlington. It kept a big school going, but most of them felt lost abroad. If they could have worked, it might have helped, but the Government of Kenya would not allow them to do so. I spent a lot of time sorting out family relationships, since I was the family advocacy officer, an official part of my role as DCM. Moreover, the employees' trips were longer than they would have been if they were based in Arlington. Travel in Africa is not simple. I don't know if you have served in Africa, but all the airline routes go north-south. So, for example, if you wanted to go from Nairobi to Lagos, my previous post in Africa, you had to go to Europe first, and vice versa. There was one flight a week at that time out of Addis Ababa, on Ethiopian Airlines, which would jump around Africa, but not directly east-west. There were almost no flights from an Anglophone country to a Francophone country, or vice versa, without going to Europe. In Nigeria, the easiest way to get from Lagos to, say, Cote d'Ivoire was to go to Paris and back, even though it's a half-hour flight distant from Lagos. So the USAID employees spent much of their time on airplanes. They covered something like 70 countries, including Pakistan, Greece and South Africa. I thought it was nuts. They shouldn't be in Nairobi at all. But we came late to the party, found that everybody else had already caved, and lost the battle.

After the Ambassador's introduction of me at that first Country Team meeting, I learned that she had a reputation for being unsympathetic to many employee concerns. Normally, the DCM is the whip-cracker and the Ambassador is the good guy, but I saw that it was going to have to be the other way around in this case. I held weekly brown-bag lunches, and tried to pack them with diverse people from every section and agency. In almost every session, for example, there would be a senior FSN, a junior American officer, and a Marine security guard. We were headquarters for the Marine company for Africa, so there were something like 50 Marines at post. There were mixed results. Some people wouldn't show up after accepting the invitation from my secretary. Some said they were just too busy. Others said they were afraid to come into my office because I was too important for them. I kept it at the sub-counselor level because I had enough interaction with the senior staff. It worked sometimes, and some people improved markedly, both socially and professionally.

A battle erupted shortly after I arrived, led by the AFSA Representative, an economic officer. He and others were convinced that we needed a commissary. The Ambassador had already dismissed the idea, noting that they could buy anything they wanted in the local market. There was a major supermarket two blocks from the Embassy where they could buy almost anything they wanted at reasonable prices. Earlier, there was a period when imports were blocked, but then everything became available. Moreover, there was a convenience store in the Embassy basement which sold American liquor, cigarettes, candy, and a few emergency supplies like aspirin. The AFSA Rep said that wasn't good enough. I told Elinor I didn't think responding with a flat "no" would work. I suggested that we build a good case and spell it out at an AFSA meeting. She agreed, and addressed the session, noting that we had APO facilities, which enabled everyone to order from the States and get it delivered in two weeks. She said she was willing to listen to their concerns, if they still had some, but needed specifics. When it was apparent that they hadn't been satisfied, she asked AFSA to make a list of everything its members didn't think they could live without. AFSA canvassed everybody, and came up with a list of a dozen "must have" things. When she saw it, the Ambassador collapsed in laughter and said, "This is the stupidest thing I ever heard." The first thing on the list was pantyhose. She said, "Huh? We're going to run a store with pantyhose? How many different kinds and sizes and shapes and colors can we stuff into our little store?" The second item was peanut butter, because the nurse was convinced that local peanut butter was full of aflatoxin. (It was not, by the way.) The third was corn flakes. There was an American company making perfectly good corn flakes in Kenya, which were for sale everywhere. I had the unhappy duty to tell everyone there would not be a commissary after all. I think it cost me in the end. I was fortunate to be promoted to minister-counselor shortly after I arrived, which made my stock a little higher, but very few of the staff forgot the commissary issue.

Democracy and human rights were always on our front burner. President Daniel Arap Moi often ran hot and cold, in calculated ways. He has been in power since 1963, and knows how to maneuver politically. He has been called a dictator, and a crook who runs a kleptocracy, but there is a benign side to him as well. I got to know him fairly well, perhaps better than most other diplomats, but he was certainly not easy to deal with. If he thought we were giving him problems, he would make trouble for us about every six months. Three months later, the world would suddenly become wonderful again. It was a predictable cycle, which rarely failed to materialize.

During my time, Kenya was a so-called one-party democracy, which was the way Moi wanted to keep it. But influential Americans came to argue that he was wrong. One memorable visit was that of Ethel and Kerry Kennedy. They came to give an award to a member of the Opposition who was pushing for multiparty elections and to unseat Moi. Moi had thrown him into jail more than once, and didn't want to hear about him again. They demanded to see Moi, and we pressed State House to set up an appointment, stressing that the Kennedys are politically important in America. I think Ethel Kennedy probably handled it reasonably well, but Kerry...

Q: Who's Kerry?

GRIFFIN: Daughter of Bobby and Ethel. In their meeting, she couldn't hold back, and lit into Moi. She was maybe 20-something. She called him names. This does not sit well with a big chief in Africa, especially coming from a girl. They were almost thrown in jail. We managed to block that. They were almost deported on the next plane. We got them another 12 hours, restricted to their hotel. The Ambassador used lots of her political capital to get them home without being hurt. I saw Kerry's cousin recently at a dinner. She reminded me of all this and thanked me effusively for helping them out. But Kerry didn't then; she was attacking me, too.

Then we had a visitor named Reece Smith, a lawyer from Tampa, Florida. He was a past President of the American Bar Association and later the International Bar Association. He came on a similar missioto check on the situation and write a report on human rights in Kenya. He was thrown in jail. He didn't check in with the Embassy, and we only found out about him after a local law firm got him out on bail. He was told not to leave the country until he was put on trial for subversion. We went to work to get him out, and finally managed to do so. The Ambassador told Moi's top aides that one of the stupidest things they could do was to take the head of the ABA and throw him in jail for no good reason, especially when he's looking into human rights violations. That seemed hard for them to grasp, but Moi finally relented and we got him on a plane home. He said he would never return to Kenya as long as he lived.

We had some nearly disastrous visits by Americans, including some CODELs, who were also pushing democracy and human rights issues. We tried to helped them understand Kenyan attitudes, not that they would always listen.

I usually went with Ambassador Constable to call on President Moi, unless one of them didn't want me there. But that was pretty rare. When she wasn't there, I saw him one-on-one, though he didn't like to meet junior people. He made it clear that it was not me, but what I represented. Except for the Brit, I was the only Chargï¿½ d'Affaires whom he would see.

Ambassadors Constable and maybe Hempstone may have mentioned a pattern in the President's behavior. He didn't want to hear about human rights or multiparty democracy, especially after the Foreign Minister was killed. If we pushed too hard, he would usually find some way to get back at us. He or one of his henchmen would create some kind of crisis for us, and he wouldn't see us or accept messages from us for awhile. But soon he would "listen to reason," and we would be invited to call. It got to be such a pattern that we could predict that, if things got too good, something bad was going to happen, and vice versa.

Elinor and I had good relations with Foreign Secretary, Bethuel Kiplagat, who professed to be a voice of reason in the Moi Government, as a career bureaucrat. With the Department's blessing, I had a series of separate meetings with him when he was working behind the scenes on an effort to resolve the Mozambique crisis. His wife was from one of the French islands in the Indian Ocean.

Q: Mauritius, the Seychelles, one of those?

GRIFFIN: Or maybe the Comoros. They both spoke excellent French. Kiplagat was dealing with Afonso Dhlakama, the head of RENAMO, who also spoke French, although Portuguese was his better foreign language. We kept our embassies in South Africa and Mozambique apprized of what was going in those talks. It got to be quite interesting, and in the end, after the mysterious death of Samora Machel, Dhlakama made peace with Chissano's government, so I guess it worked.

Q: What was his interest in doing it?

GRIFFIN: To bring peace to that part of Africa; it was a peacemaker role. President Moi liked to think of himself as a peacemaker all over Africa. Most big chief heads of state in Africa like to play such roles. They don't want Americans or Europeans doing it. The Nigerians are usually most effective at it, but the others try their hands now and then.

Another problem that arosanother one of the crisewas a law that Parliament quietly passed, banning foreigners from owning land. That created a bigger problem than they expected because there were not only Americans, but also Ugandan, Italian, British, and you-name-it owners. Some were absentee, but many foreigners lived on the land and worked it as well. We lined up some of the more powerful foreigners, including an American who had been there for 35 years and had good relations with Moi. The law was eventually rescinded.

Q: How did that work? Were we making proposals or...

GRIFFIN: We pointed out that the law had no provision for adequate compensation if the land was taken away from the foreigners. It never got as bad as the situation in Zimbabwe today, but it was similar, in that there was pressure on the land from a burgeoning population. Kenya at that time had the highest population growth rate in the world, at 4.2 percent per year. We knew there was pressure on the Government to give poor people land. But we pointed out to Moi that our lathe Hickenlooper Amendmenforces us to cut off aid if a country seizes American property and doesn't adequately compensate for it. I stressed to others, including the Vice President and some ministers, that if we took such a step, other aid donors would likely follow suit, and at least decrease their aid. We noted that American businesses were looking for new opportunities in Africa, but if they saw that Kenya was confiscating foreign property, they would turn away. We enlisted the American Business Associatioit was akin to an AmCham, but not associated with the U.S. Chamber of Commercto help make our point. While it had become rather moribund, its members understood the need to combine forces, and went to work to help us convince the Kenyans to rescind the law. The point was taken. This happened just at a time when fingers were being pointed at the USG for having something to do with the assassination of Foreign Minister Bob Oko.

Q: What happened?

GRIFFIN: It's a very strange story. Nobody seems to know exactly what happened even today. The Minister disappeared one night after someone came and knocked on his door. He went out with a man, and never reappeared. His charred remains were found in a distant game park several days later. It was not the first time such a thing had happened in Kenya. The man eventually chargebut not convicteand blamed by most people for having done it was one of Moi's henchman. He was ousted and sent to jaifor another crimbut is back again in the Government. His name is Nick Biwat. He is very close to Moi, quite powerful, and greatly feared. He is married to an Israeli woman. The last time I was in Kenya, several people predicted that he would be the next President if something happens to Moi. I suspect he had something to do with Oko, but I don't know what. Why the Minister was killed I don't know, but people immediately started pointing their fingers at us, saying that we were unhappy with Oko. That couldn't have been further from the truth. He was probably the friendliest Kenyan Foreign Minister we've dealt with in the last 25 years.

Q: When this law was passed, anybody who's been in government for a while knows how potent a weapon this is and the backlash and all that. In other words, this is an extremely controversial thing. Hadn't there been a lot of debate and talking about what would happen?

GRIFFIN: That's not the way the Kenyan Parliament works. It is, by and large, a rubber stamp legislature, though Opposition members certainly try to start debates. Moi paid close attention to things that affected him directly, and I doubt if he thought that one up. There were ministers and other henchmal use the word advisedlwho would dream up such things. They usually were after something for themselves, while claiming that they were doing it in his name. Whether he had advance knowledge about it is difficult to say. Those of us with access to him would often ask him about rumors, and would get differing answers. State House in Nairobi is a very secretive place. It was difficult to know what was going on there, so we used multiple contacts to check out what we heard. I suppose the White House is pretty secretive as well, but they're a lot more open than State House was, at least in my day.

In an effort to improve bilateral relations, when I was Chargï¿½ between Ambassadors Constable and Hempstone, I launched a campaign with the business communitsomething that had worked well in Nigeria and Korea. I invited the top American and Kenyan businessmen to form an organization to work together. It was a binational organizatiothere hadn't been an effective one therwhich we dubbed "KUSA," for the Kenya-U.S. Association. I'm not sure what happened after I left. I heard that Hempstone didn't put his weight behind it, so it probably withered away. But it worked for a while.

I also tried to reorganize and re-direct the work of the Embassy. Most Americans only go to Kenya to look at wildlife, but there were serious problems in doing so. It seemed to me that every section of the mission needed to pay attention to this. There were frequent threats to tourists. Officials were taking bribes from Persian Gulf Arabs who came to shoot rhinoceri and elephant with submachine guns, for their horn and ivory. After the Government realized the real cost to the rest of the nation, it was finally stopped. Anyway, I thought every section should have a piece of the wildlife action. For example, it was important for the Economic Section, the Political Section, USAID, and USIS to collaborate on this for obvious reasons. We put together a task force to tackle the issues, and to try to influence the country's various programs, including wildlife, conservation, and the environment. The Economic Counselor chaired it. It worked so well that other embassies all over Africa began to implement similar programs.

It paid off several times. There was an annual foreign assistance meeting chaired by the World Bank and the IMF. The USAID Director usually represented us, but once when I was Chargï¿½ he wanted a little heavier weaponry, and asked me to come. Our staffs put together some talking points in two versionone tough, and one not so tough. They asked me which one I preferred. I said it would depend on what the Kenyans said. The Kenyan side was chaired by Vice President Saitoti, whom I had gotten to know reasonably well. He opened the meeting with a speech, saying everything was wonderful and getting better, but that the country needed more money to maintain progress. We disagreed strongly with his analysis, so I used the tough set of talking points. I threatened to suspend our assistance, including the military part. When we had a break, other donor ambassadors sidled up to me and said, "Keep going. We don't have the authority, but it needs to be said, and you Americans will be listened to."

We worked well with the World Bank Resident Representative, a German named Peter Eigen, who is even better known now. He left the Bank after Kenya, having seen enough, to form Transparency International, an organization headquartered in Germany. It tries to stop corruption around the world, largely by spotlighting it. He was intrigued by my experiences with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, and has put its principles to good use.

As you would expect, I spent a fair amount of time on commercial work. We managed to get the Commercial Section upgraded slightly. It wasn't anywhere near as important as those I headed in Korea and Nigeria, but there was enough potential business to keep the small staff busy. Using some USAID seed money as a come-on, for example, FCS nailed down a huge contract for computerizing Kenya's largest bank. The British had the inside track, and the Japanese were close behind, but we managed to push them out of the way.

Back to wildlife: again when I was Chargï¿½, we had a problem with a group organized by the Audubon Society of Connecticut. It happened to be led by the husband of one of my wife's classmates. They were touring in the south near the Tanzanian border, just northeast of Mount Kilimanjaro. When they were flagged down by a couple of Masai tribesmen, the driver stopped. The men hauled out guns and demanded their money, jewelry, and cameras. When they didn't hand over the loot fast enough, one of the Masai fired off a round, which grazed a man and killed one of the women. To his credit, the driver sped off and got them back to Nairobi. When I heard about it, I went to their hotel and tried to calm them down, and thought I did reasonably well. We got them all on a flight home the next day. But later, the man whose cheek had been grazed accused uthe Embassof not warning them that it would happen, and of not giving them proper protection. He went to Senator Dodd, who called me to ask how we planned to satisfy his constituent. The man threatened to sue the Embassy, the State Department, and me personally. As far as I know, the lawsuit never was filed because I never heard anything more about it after we sent in all our reports.

Then there was the famous case of a British girl whose charred bones were found in the largest of the game parks, the Masai Mara. It's still a cause celebre in the UK and Kenya. We followed all these events, and concluded that safari-type tourism was reasonably safe if people took the right precautions and went with a reliable guide. We didn't ever try to stop people from going on safari, which was usually safer than staying in Nairobi.

We complained repeatedly to the Department, despite what's been said in the press lately, about our own security at the Embassy. I was especially concerned about our proximity to the intersection of two major streets, with no setback. At first I was more concerned about people being shot on their way in to work. There had been recent incidents in Pakistan, where a Consulate bus in Karachi was attacked, and in Cairo, where DAO employees in a traffic jam were shot by men on motorcycles. So I looked for a way for the staff to get quickly into the Embassy parking lot. This was a problem because, of course, the security officer, the RSO, insisted that the guards inspect the bottoms of every vehicle, plus inside the trunks and hoodthe whole bit. Every morning there was a long line of cars outside our back gate, making our people perfect targets. We might as well have painted bull's-eyes on them.

The AID mission was down the street several blocks, with much less protectiono Marine guardand shared the building with Kenyan firms. The AID Director, Steve Sindig, was one of the best I've ever run into. We worked up a proposal to Washington, which would move us all out of the center of town. His people identified a piece of property, which is where the new Embassy will b12 years later, after the place was blown up. We had a good price, we had everything, but FBO told us to get in line, as there were many other posts ahead of us, and not enough funds to take care of all of us. So we did try.

Another set of problems I had as DCM was with families. It kept me running, with events of that sort every week or so. There were a couple of violent ones.

Q: Was there the problem that I've heard about - I don't know whether it's a recent manifestation - attacks on people, mainly through robbery and all that?

GRIFFIN: Yes, there were a few robberies at mission homes. The staff was scattered all over the city. There was no official compound, and people lived everywhere. We had a large security network to protect them, using guards from outside contractors such as Pinkerton or one of the other well-known names. They were pretty effective, so the worst incidents didn't involve Embassy personnel, but people in the private sector who didn't have our level of security. At my house, which was on seven acres of land surrounded by a five-foot fence, I kept a large dog outside at all times, and a small dog that would bark if the big one slept. Three or four guards were posted around the clock. There were two at the front gate, one at the back gate, and another who was supposed to roam the entire property. They were on shifts, and kept two fierce-looking shepherd dogs with them. Still, we were invaded a couple of times. People came over the fence and tried to overwhelm the guards, but they were able to fend them off. We were also across the street from a police station. We were never sure whether that was good or bad, but it seemed to have some effect. In any case, it wasn't as bad as Lagos. In Kenya, most thieves tended to be armed with knives or bows and arrows, so we could sleep a little easier.

On another level, we knew of the existence in Nairobi of some Libyan terrorists. The Kenyans kept a pretty close eye on them, and so did we. They seemed to be supported by Muammar Qadhafi. We worried that they might try to pop off some of us. The Ambassador had a fully armed Mercedes, something Hempstone tried to get rid of, and my official car was armored. We had several others, but most people didn't use them, and no armored car would have stopped the 1998 bombing.

After Ambassador Constable left, signs suddenly appeared downtown in Uhuru ParFreedom Parannouncing construction of a 60-story skyscraper. A model had a huge statue of President Moi in front. The USAID Director and others on the Country Team agreed that it was a terrible idea, which we should try to nip in the bud. It turned out that Vice President Saitoti was in charge of the project and probably stood to make money out of it. In the end, he was made the sacrificial lamb. We thought we had stopped it, and then Ambassador Hempstone came. But before I get to that, let me talk about other things that happened during the interregnum.

Q: What was the issue as far as we were concerned...?

GRIFFIN: It was a huge waste of money. They didn't have much money, and were always appealing to us for more. Then they wanted to pay top dollar for this very fancy...

Q: So it wasn't a matter of security or anything like that?

GRIFFIN: No. Here was a poor government, on its knees begging for more foreign aid, proposing a ridiculously expensive vanity project in a public park. They claimed to have found a flaw in the law that made it a national park, and argued that an exception could be made. I'll go back to Hempstone's leap into this fray in awhile. Ambassador Constable left. She became Assistant Secretary for OES, but spent her first year back in Washington as Diplomat in Residence at Georgetown University. In any case, her time was up, and the new George H. W. Bush Administration decided to send a political appointee to replace her. The President chose Smith Hempstone.

During the interregnum of about six months when I was Chargï¿½, OIG inspected the post, a fairly common practice. It was to help set the scene for the new Ambassador, and give him a picture of what he was about to command. But that inspection affected me particularly. I had just reached, in retrospect, the high point of my career. OIG sent a relatively junior inspector out as the team leader. For some reasol don't know whhe took a dislike to me, and I guess I reciprocated. He gave me an awful efficiency reporit's called an IEand I was devastated. To my surprise, the entire Country Team wrote a letter of protest to the IG. My secretary had mentioned it to a friend, and word got around quickly. Their letter called the inspection report a travesty, saying the situation was nothing like what it portrayed. Inspector General Sherman Funk called me when he got the letter, and asked me several questions. Then he called again to say he had destroyed the IER. So it's not in my record, but the oral reports of the inspection team cost me my next job. I had already been approached about two chiefs of mission jobs, but all of a sudden my phone calls weren't returned. Then I talked to my career counselor, who said he had been ordered by the Deputy Director General not to recommend me for chief of any mission. I screamed and yelled, but by that time the damage was done, so the COM jobs vanished.

I met Smith Hempstone on home leave here before Elinor Constable left. We knew many people in common, and he invited Chrissie and me to lunch at the Chevy Chase Club. We had a nice time, and he seemed very friendly. After that, the inspectors returned and obviously talked to him. He changed his mind about me overnight, and decided that I had to be replaced. The Department didn't agree, and both the DG's office and AF Assistant Secretary Hank Cohen told me I had to stay in Nairobi for at least another year. They said I knew the Department's system and the territory, the Ambassador did not, and he was political. It turned out to be a pretty rough slog.

After meeting Hempstone here, I talked to friends who knew him well. He had been at the Washington Star, which was his family's newspaper. He had also been the first Editor of the Washington Times. The new Editor of the Times told me Smith was fired because he couldn't stay sober or awake. It turned out to be like that. First, he was rejected by the medical bureaMEbecause he didn't pass his physical exam. He pulled some chain in the White House, and got that overridden. PER wouldn't give him orders for awhile, but he finally beat them down and came anyway. He wrote a self-promoting piece in the Washington Times before he left for Nairobi, in which he compared himself to Ernest Hemingway, William Shirer, and John Gunther, saying he was going to go out and do good works.

He wanted to bring his own secretary, a personal assistant and another political appointee. The DG finally said he could have one, but not all three. He chose to have a personal assistant, the daughter of one of his college roommates. The only way we could get her on the rolls was to abolish one of our regular positions. After much debate, we abolished a much-needed political officer slot, and she sat in that office. As far as I could tell while I was there, she didn't do anything. She traveled with him, but that was about it. I could never figure out what she did every day, but he insisted having her in most meetings. In the end, I think she took enough notes to enable him to write his booRogue Ambassador.

When Smith landed in Nairobi, he insisted that we do things "right." That meant that we were all to go directly to the residence for what he called a vin d'honneur; in other words, a drink. It was nine o'clock in the morning. So the Country Team went out and had a glass of champagne. He dismissed us after saying he would come to the chancery a bit later. When he came in, he opened his briefcase, which was full of cigarettes. He asked me where he could buy cigarettes. I told him there were two ways. He could go to a local shop and buy them. They might not have his brand, and if they did, they might be stale. But the best way was to order them through the APO, through which two cartons would come within a couple of weeks. He said that wasn't good enough. When I asked why, he said because he would need more than that, faster than that. I pointed out that he had a whole briefcase full. He said they would only last a day. He needed more, and needed them "now." That's how much he smoked. He paid no attention to the Department's worldwide ban on smoking in offices.

Smith looked around the reception area outside the executive suite and saw the "rogues gallery," photographs of all the previous ambassadors on the wall. He said, "I want my picture up there tomorrow." I noted that Ambassador Constable's wasn't up yet, and said that standard practice was to put pictures up after the departure of the incumbent. He repeated that he wanted his up "now." He added that he didn't like the picture of President Bush, and there was no photograph of Vice President Quayle. I told him they are all supplied by USIA, so if they hadn't send them to us, we didn't have them. I guess I wasn't paying attention to the tone of his voice. He growled, "You better get them, and get them now." While the staff was working on that, he tried to get a copy of an informal photograph of President Bush he saw at Embassy Paris, where he had stayed with Ambassador Curley, also a political appointee. But that was a personal photograph taken by Curley, who wouldn't send Smith a copy. Anyway, we had Smith's picture up in less than a week. I can't recall when Elinor Constable's arrived.

Next, Hempstone insisted that he must present his credentials that day. I tried to explain that it didn't happen like that. I said we hoped to get him in there in a week or so, but warned that most ambassadors waited a month or so. I stressed that it was rather like Washington. Smith scowled at me. He said, "I'm the American Ambassador. I want to do it tomorrow." So I called Foreign Secretary Kiplagat, told him my problem, and asked what could be done. He understood, and shortly called back to say the Foreign Minister would receive Smith to accept his credentials to pass to State House. We went to the Ministry, where things instantly became tense. Without listening much to Hempstone, Minister Wilson Ndolo Ayah began to complain about the way he, a black man, had been treated as a student in the United States. The Ambassador essentially ignored him, except to ask more than once when he could present his credentials to President Moi. Ayah didn't give us much of a response.

On the way back to the Embassy, Smith asked, "Where's my air freight?" I said I didn't know, and asked when it was shipped. He said, "The day before I left Washington." I doubted that it had yet arrived, noting that it usually took a couple of weeks. He said, "That's not acceptable. Mr. DCM, if my air freight is not here by tomorrow, you get on an airplane and go home, and don't bother to come back." That's the way we started. The air freight arrived two days later, by the way, and I didn't go home to get it.

Q: Was he trying to pick a fight? In your analysis of this, was he trying to prove something?

GRIFFIN: He was trying to prove lots of things, especially that he was in charge. Since he already had revised his opinion of me and thought I wouldn't do him any good, he was, by God, going to take charge of his Embassy and run it his way. He was in the Marine Corps at some point, maybe during the Korean War, but I don't think he ever saw any action. Smith is a very intelligent man, with some good sense. He understood a fair amount about Africa, where he had worked as a journalist in the 1960s. Some of his policy ideas were unimpeachable. What I didn't like was the way he tried to bully everybody, including President Moi. I tried to advise him against it, but he didn't want to hear it; certainly not from me. When I told him his approach wasn't going to work; that there was a better way, he ignored me.

For example, he finally got his appointment to present his credentials to Moi. On such occasions, the President is surrounded by, depending on the importance of the ambassador, his Cabinet, or some State House staff. For Hempstone, the whole Cabinet was there, plus TV cameras, reserved for envoys from the most important countries (to Kenya). The Ambassador was accompanied by most of the Country Team. There were half a dozen of us, including the Defense Attachï¿½, the Political Counselor, the PAO, the AID Director, and me. Hempstone's prepared remarks had been sent ahead, so the President could respond intelligently. He was to read the remarks (which were less than a page), hand them over, hand over his credentials, and wait. The President was to say something nice in return, shake hands, do an about-face, march out, and that was it. When we walked in, Hempstone walked straight up to Moi, handed him the credentials and said, "I'm supposed to make this speech, but you know that neither you nor I are diplomats. We're going to be friends, Mr. President!" He went close to Moi, as if to embrace him or something. The security staff, the ministers, and staffers all froze. Moi recoiled. Someone motioned to the TV crews to turn off the cameras, but they didn't. Smith kept going. He said, "You and I are going to get along wonderfully, Mr. President, because we can talk together man-to-man, and solve a lot of the world's problems." He went on like that for 15 or 20 minutes. He tried again to shake hands and grip Moi, who kept backing off. Finally, Moi turned and left, and we were hustled out without the usual pose for still photographers. Then we went to see the Vice President.

Q: Did Hempstone ask you when you left how did that go or something like that?

GRIFFIN: No, he said, "I think that went just right, don't you?" I said, "Well, it's not the way I would have done it." I didn't want to disagree with him every five seconds, but the way he put it, what was I supposed to say? Later someone called from State House to ask, "Doesn't he know the President is a sovereign head of state?" All I could say was, "Yes, he knows."

So then we went to see the Vice President. In our briefings, I had told Hempstone that Saitoti was behind the 60 Story Building, which I hoped was a dead issue, though the fence and the sign were still up. We went in and were placed on one side of a large table. The Vice President came in with two aides; Hempstone had me. There was a TV camera, and one microphone, a gold microphone - I'll never forget it. The room overlooked the 60-story building site. Saitoti started talking for the camera: "Mr. Ambassador, let me welcome you formally and officially to our country." Smith didn't let him finish. He lit into him, saying, "I hear you're trying to build a 60- story building over there. That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard of." He said, "If you do, we will cut off aid." As he continued, Saitoti reached over and pulled the microphone away from Hempstone, since he couldn't get his aide to turn it off, and moved it in front of the other aide. Misunderstanding, that poor fellow pushed it right back in front of Hempstone, who was still talking. It was wonderful. I don't think the Vice President ever received Smith again.

On the way back to the Embassy, he said, "See, that's the only way. You can't let these guys get away with it. They probably thought we had forgotten all about that, so I had to tell them, by God, that we wouldn't tolerate it." I said, "You're the Ambassador."

A couple of days after Smith arrived, we had an awards ceremony. A couple of the Marines had been promoted, so as an ex-Marine he insisted on pinning on their new stripes. Part of that USMC ceremony apparently is to "pin" the stripes with a sock to the upper arm. So he smacked them all and had a good time. He also began a friendship with the Gunnery Sargent. In addition to our own contingent of Security Guard Marines, Nairobi was F Company Headquarters. The Gunny was in charge of our guards, but his own supervisors were also there. The Company was run by a lieutenant colonel, whose staff included a major, a couple of captains and a couple of lieutenants. The Gunny had been caught abusing his daughter. After consulting with the Company Commander, I decided that the best thing to do was to transfer him back to the U.S., where he could be disciplined, and the child would get the care she needed. An American psychiatrist had interviewed the girl and told me she needed full-time care, which she was not equipped to provide. But after the promotion ceremony, Hempstone began talking to the Gunny about how well they were going to get along. The Gunny told him he was about to be shipped out, adding, "They don't like me here." Smith shooed everyone else out of the room and sat down with the Gunny. Later, he came into my office and said, "That man is not going anywhere. He's staying here." I told him the background and argued that he was giving everyone a bad message. He wouldn't listen, and the Gunny stayed.

Smith's first diplomatic dinner was at British High Commissioner John Johnson's house. He nabbed Hempstone first, using the "special friends" line, noting that he had been in Nairobi longer than most ambassadors, and offering to introduce him to some of Kenya's most important people. So both Hempstones and my wife and I went to dinner, which featured former Attorney General Charles Njonjo and his wife, among others. The Brit and Hempstone took an instant dislike to each other, and barely got through dinner. I don't think they said another ten words to each other for the rest of Johnson's tour of duty. He had tried.

The next one was dinner at the residence of the Japanese Ambassador, who was Dean of the diplomatic corps. There were several other ambassadors at the huge granite or marble table, which was so large that the guest list could have been doubled, and we still could not have touched elbows. At the end of dinner, the host rose and launched into a rather lengthy toast. About halfway through it, Smith went face down on his plate, asleep. My wife tried to rouse him, to no avail. When the host finished, Kitty Hempstone stood up and returned the toast. Then she hauled her husband to his feet, and he staggered out the door and went home.

Q: This was his drinking then, I guess?

GRIFFIN: It wasn't jet lag. Hempstone is overweight and smokes like a chimney. That's why the doctors in MED refused to give him a medical clearance. They didn't think his heart couldn't stand such abuse at Nairobi's altitude of 6,000 feet, but it did. He was only about 60 years old at the time. He would start in the morning. He probably smoked eight packs of cigarettes a day. As for drink, at lunch he would down three or four martinis. He swigged beer in the afternoon after he finished playing tennis. And then he'd have cocktails. According to Kitty, he downed a fifth of bourbon every night, plus lots of wine, cognac, and cordials. The man has an iron constitution, I must say, but he did have a hard time staying awake, and constantly looked hung over.

One of the most difficult rows I had with him was soon after he arrived. He said, "To further my burgeoning friendship with President Moi, I'm going to give him a bull." I said that was nice, and asked how he was going to do it. I knew that one of the American ranchers whose land had been threatened gave Moi a prize bull every year. I suppose it was the price of staying in business. I told Hempstone that gifts from private citizens was one thing, but since he represented Uncle Sam, I didn't see how he could do it. I asked him who would pay for it. He said, "Don't worry, I'm not going to pay for it. My friend in Virginia is going to give it to me, and the Agency will fly it out one of their special planes." Before going any further, I advised him to check with the ethics people in the Department. He said, "All they'll do is tell you no." Since he didn't expressly forbid me, I called Irv Hicks, our Deputy Assistant Secretary in AF, who put me onto Assistant Secretary Hank Cohen. They agreed that it must be approved by the ethics people in the Bureau of Legal Affairs. AF queried L, which very quickly said "no," unless Hempstone were out of the picture. In other words, the USG could accept the bull from the Virginia farmer and have it presented to Moi by the U.S. Ambassador, but it could not be a personal gift from Hempstone. So Hank Cohen called Smith and told him that, if it were done just so, then maybe, but his take on the old red-face test told him it didn't look right. He said the deal was off. Well, Smith was livid, and furious at me for having brought the matter to the Department's attention. Later, after I left, I heard he asked the owner of the bull to give it to Moi, bypassing the Embassy, but it didn't happen.

Then he wanted to go hunting. Before he arrived, Smith called to tell me he was bringing several guns with him, and wanted a gun safe installed in his bedroom, so he could lock them up right away. He said he recalled from his earlier timehe was in Kenya for several years as a journalist in the 1960that Kenyan law required that. I guess someone in the Department got wise, because the guns came by diplomatic pouch, not on the plane with him. Anyway, the gun safe was ready but, as advised by the RSO, I told him that the law restricted the use of gun safes to the night before the hunter wanted to use the weapons. He said, "I'm the American Ambassador, a diplomat. To hell with the law." I said, "Yes, sir." He wanted to go big game hunting with a local hunter, but I had to tell him that Kenya had outlawed that sort of thing, partly because of a lot of poaching. About the only thing left was seasonal bird hunting. I put him in touch with some of my shooting friends. The day after his first outing, one of them called me and, very apologetically, said he was sorry, but he and his group would never take Smith with them again. He said the Ambassador got drunk on the way out and, when the shoot started, began firing wildly, almost killing one of them.

Hempstone didn't like his official car, the armored Mercedes. His driver didn't either, because of Smith's smoking. Elinor Constable had banned smoking in the car because she had a breathing problem, and the air conditioning system just wouldn't handle it. The windows couldn't be opened. So he sent a long telegram to the Department saying it was obnoxious for the American Ambassador to ride around in some German car. He asked for a Cadillac, though he confessed that it was not likely to happen in his lifetime.

Then he tried to lower our threat rating. I had been pleading with the Department to move the chancery because of all the threats. Smith said, "Nah, this is Kenya. It's not some dangerous place like Cairo." So we fought about that. I don't remember whether we put our disagreements into a telegram to the Department, but in the event, nothing changed.

He kept up his bullying approach, perhaps in part because of my efforts to make him more diplomatic. He liked to order people around, and soon began trying to give orders to President Moi. That was something no presidencertainly not Mowould tolerate, so they soon became enemies. It began with a Rotary Club speech, in which Smith called for multiparty democracy. It was calculated to annoy Moi, who quickly had the captive press and some of his ministers on a counterattack. They asked how the American Ambassador dared preach to them about how to run their country. Who does he think he is? The Minister of Livestock demanded that Hempstone be declared persona non grata for interfering in Kenya's politics, and "probably" giving money to the Opposition. Smith shot right back in a newspaper interview, saying, "If anybody knows about illegal money, the Minister does." That created a bigger storm, much of it going in circles.

Before I was transferred, Smith came back to Washington for a chiefs of mission conference. In the course of that meeting he was asked what was he doing to further democracy in Kenya, one of the Department's key goals. He stood up and defended one-party democracy, saying it is better than no democracy at all. Then, back in Nairobi, he jumped back into the fray, pushing multi-party democracy. One never knew which way he was going to blow.

I don't mean to dump on political ambassadors. There have been many good ones. But the ones who don't listen and think they already know everything are the ones who cause problems. Smith did have some sensible ideas, and he followed what was going on. But after I left he got so thick with the Opposition, he was out leading marches in the streets, which is not the way an American Ambassador should do it, no matter what you think of the leader's policies.

Hempstone accused Moi of allowing poachers to slaughter the wildlife in the country. That was certainly true of some officials and politicians in the 1980s, before Smith and I were on the scene. But we had put out a travel advisory after the American woman was killed in Masai country. He tried to get it lifted, saying everything was safe, and noting that the Kenyan economy needs tourists. He gave the Department an ultimatum. He fired off a telegram, saying he would give a speech announcing that he had unilaterally lifted the advisory, unless he was ordered not to in 24 hours. Of course, the time difference made that damn near impossible. As I recall, the Department stopped him from saying it, but he made the speech and said he had asked that the advisory to be lifted. He wanted to be hailed in Nairobi for trying to get it done.

When Moi objected to his comments about multi-party democracy, Smith gave an interview to a journalist in which he called Moi a dictator. Then, he turned around and asked Washington to send him a C-130 aircraft to give to Moi as a bribe to keep our military access agreement alive. He was shot down on that one too. You never knew which way he was going to jump. He fired off a telegram slugged for Secretary Jim Baker, saying, "Some nannies that work for you have sent off an obnoxious" - what's the Russian word?

Q: Ukase.

GRIFFIN: He entitled the telegram "Potted Palms." He said, "What do you think ambassadors are, potted palms? We're supposed to sit here and do nothing until you water us?" He said, "There's this obnoxious ukase from your office telling me that I have to pre-clear interviews with the media? I used to work in the media. Why should I pre-clear anything? Who do you think you are, Mr. Secretary?" He got a very sharp answer back on that one, but it came from PA, not from Baker, who didn't deign to respond.

Q: Tutwiler.

GRIFFIN: Probably. It said that the offending telegram was a worldwide instruction, which didn't necessarily pertain to him. It was to ensure that anyone who talked to a major American media outlet, such as CBS News, would tell the Department what they were going to say before they went on the air. It wouldn't necessarily apply to him in talking to the Kenyan press, but if he wanted to talk to the Washington Post, it would. He didn't like that.

Once or twice a week he would send a telegram to either Baker or Cohen saying, "Do this, do that." I refused to clear most of them, as did most of the section chiefs, but he sent them out anyway. Sometimes I used the secure phone to alert the Department, saying I had nothing to do with it, but that the message better be checked out before anyone reacted to it. Washington knew what Smith was like. When plans were being made to invade Somalia, they sent out an LOU telegram telling all ambassadors in the region about it. It was sent at that low classification because they knew Hempstone would respond strongly, probably negatively, and that it would be leaked to the press within hours. Sure enough, he fired back one called "The Somali Tar Baby." He was actually right.

Q: I recall the phrase that came out, 'If you like Beirut, you'll love Mogadishu.'

GRIFFIN: That's right. He said the President's idea to mount an invasion under UN auspices wouldn't work. It would become a tar baby, and if anybody didn't know the story of Brer Rabbit, they better go find it fast. They didn't heed his advice. But when it got into the press, both Larry Eagleburgewho was either Deputy Secretary or had just become Secretarand Dick Cheney, who was Secretary of Defense, tried to get Smith removed from Nairobi and shifted to the White House, but they failed. So he bounced along. As may be evident, it was a fairly rough road for the time I was there.

Q: What was happening to morale within the embassy during this period?

GRIFFIN: Some people whom he took under his wing, like the Marine Gunnery Sargent, thought life was wonderful. Others had a hard time dealing with it. My morale was at rock bottom. Maybe it was wishful thinking on my part, but my general impression was that morale was down across the board. Certainly, the various AID Directors, the PAO, and the Economic Counselor were not happy campers. The Political Counselor, the Station Chief, and the DAO may have been reasonably happy. Things were constantly changing as he reversed course, leaving the rest of us trying to figure out what to do. In the end, after a lot of tension between the two of us, Smith wrote an efficiency report which was complimentary, saying I had done a great job. He recommended me for a performance award, which I got. At the end of the report, he said, "You know, it would have been better if he had a different personality or his style was more like mine." He said I left something to be desired.

There were some strange moments: One of our junior political officers said he had had enough. He quit, and went into politics with a fat job.

Smith had a farewell dinner for him at the residence, attended by mostly embassy officers and one or two Kenyans. At some point, in front of the Political Counselor, two other Embassy officers, and me, Smith made a speech. He said, "As far as I'm concerned, you [the one who quit] are the only person in this Embassy who is anything like what a Foreign Service Officer ought to be."

The night before we left, Smith and Kitty invited my wife and me over, just the four of us. He got very maudlin, held my hand and said, "I wish you weren't leaving. We're getting to be friends. We're going to get together when we come back to Washington." Smith has a nephew who's a friend of ours. When he and Kitty came back to Washington, the nephew and his wife invited us to a party. Mrs. Hempstone greeted us warmly. But he wouldn't even look at me, much less speak. I've seen him two or three other times. No recognition. When Smith came back he was ill, and he told others he thought Moi had sent someone to put poison in his food or drink, trying to kill him.

So, I left Nairobi, as all the jobs that had been dangled in front of me disappeared. But I did get a call from my old bureau, NEA.

Q: You left there when?

GRIFFIN: I left on July 22, 1990. Shortly before that I was called bNEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Tezie Schaffer, who asked if I would be interested in being Country Director for India. She made it clear that I was not her first choice, but I saw nothing else around, so I signed up. After a quick visit to my brother in South Carolina, I reported to work on August 1st, 1990. I mention the date because it becomes important. Shall I move on to that?

Q: Yes.

GRIFFIN: I got there August 1st, a Wednesday, the NEA staff meeting day, which I went to in my new capacity. Assistant Secretary John Kelly chaired the meeting. He opened the meeting saying he had read some very disturbing reports about Iraqi troop movements along the Iran and Kuwait borders and asked what his staff made of it. He looked first at the Country Directors for the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf countries, and the INR representative. They all said it had happened many times before. It was the way Saddam Hussein operated. He liked to keep the Iranians off balance, and push Iraq's historic claims to Kuwait. They said the Iraqis march up to the Kuwaiti border every once in awhile, say it's just an exercise, and go home. To his credit, Kelly pushed them, asking them to recheck with various embassies.

li don't know what they did, but the next day was August 2nd, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. On August 3rd, Tezie Schaffer told me she'd had been waiting with great anticipation for me to come, because she hadn't had a vacation in a long time and was going on a month's leave. She was going to leave me in charge of the South Asia part of the NEA Bureau. The next day Indian Foreign Minister I. K. Gujral think he was already in the aisent a message saying he wanted to see the President and the Secretary at once. Gujral is an interesting politician. He had been Ambassador to the USSR before he became Foreign Minister, and for that reason was considered by some in our government as anti-American. In my opinion, that is a shallow assessment, though he did back the Soviet stance on Iraq at that time. He was as much as an Indian nationalist as any other politician, and later became Prime Minister. So my first job was to get him in to see Secretary Baker. The President wasn't available, but I did manage an appointment with National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft.

Gujral was exercised for two reasons: At the time there were hundreds of thousands of Indians working in both Kuwait and Iraq, as well as Saudi Arabia and all the Gulf states. There were also thousands of Pakistanis and Sri Lankans. As the biggest gorilla on that block, the Indians may have thought they would be listened to. They also presumed there would be a strong reaction from the US, and Gujral wanted to find out exactly what we were going to do and, in typical Indian style, give us some free advice. In his meetings with Baker and Scowcroft, he took the line that India understood that we would react strongly. New Delhi would like to help us resolve the situation, so long as we would be careful not to harm all the Indians there. I think he also hoped he could convince us to avoid any military reaction. With that he left, stopping first in Rwanda, and I think Paris, where he was headed originally. But then he went to talk to Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, which did not endear him to Washington. He said he went to try to talk Saddam into withdrawing from Kuwait, but got nowhere. Others have suggested that he went to give the Iraqi moral support. What the facts are, I'm not sure.

At that point there was a task force formed in the Operations Center, and I was drafted to take charge of it in the evenings, in addition to my day job. In fact, NEA coopted my entire staff and that of PAB, the Pakistan/Afghanistan/Bangladesh Country Directorate. We all went to work on Iraq for several weeks. In my efficiency report, John Kelly said I brought "adult supervision to a confused situation." None of the regular NEA hands on the task force seemed to know what to do at first, so it was a mess. Then the Indians sent Foreign Secretary Muchkan Dubay to work with Department Counselor Bob Kimmitt, trying to figure out a way to get those Indian workers out of harm's way. They didn't accomplish much, but at my urging Kimmitt seized the opportunity to get permission from the Indians for us to overfly and make refueling stops in India to support Desert Storm. I helped get the same in Sri Lanka. That took most of my first month as the war ginned up.

Q: You were saying, though, about this task force that needed adult supervision. What was the problem?

GRIFFIN: It was disorganized. At the outset, they didn't seem to know what they were supposed to be doing. Remember that Embassy Kuwait was essentially imprisoned. The Iraqis surrounded them and cut off their electricity, water and communications, though they had enough food. I can't remember exactly how long they stayed there, but on our end there was a bit of panic in the beginning. People from other offices and bureaus were thrown onto the task force, and didn't know much about either Kuwait or Iraq. Moreover, very few of them had experienced such a situation before, and didn't seem to know where to begin. So they were thrashing about aimlessly. The Operations Center managed to set up a satellite telephone connection, and DCM Barbara Bodine did most of the talking on the other end. But most of the task force, when they weren't talking to Barbara, just sat around breathlessly.

I tried to make them understand that our Principals needed constant information. They needed to know exactly what was going all the time, and needed updates as quickly as they could be produced. I told them the Task Force should think ahead, and presume that the phone line would be disrupteif not by the Iraqis, then when the Embassy's batteries died in Kuwait. Remember, they had no electricity. I ordered someone to work with Barbara to set up a way we could communicate with them when that happened. They shouldn't just sit around talking to friends in the Embassy. They hadn't thought about the need to sit down and produce updates to the Secretary at least every six hours. I had been in the Op Center and on task forces before, so I had some feel for what should be done. I should say that I'm talking about the night shift, rather than the day shift, which was supervised by the Country Director.

When Tezie returned from her month's leave, I told her I needed to get out to the field on a quick orientation trip. It had been almost ten years since I had been in the region, and things had changed. I found some end-of-the-year travel money, and flew off. I was gone for about a month, starting at CINCPAC in Honolulu for military briefings. Because of Iraq, CINCPAC more than ever needed overflight and landing rights in the Indian subcontinent. The Admiral asked me to carry some of their water by raising the issue during my consultations.

My first stop in the region was in Male, capital of the Maldive Islands. It was a place I had always wanted to visit. When I was posted in Colombo, the British wouldn't allow us to go there because there was a low-level rebellion in the southern atolls, near their strategic air base on Gan, and they didn't want foreigners around. I flew from Honolulu to Singapore to Male, where I was met by the DCM from Colombo. The Ambassador in Colombo is duly accredited to the Maldives, since we don't have a post in Male. The next day I met my old friend Abdul Sattar, now the Minister of Health and Fisheries. When I was on the Ceylon Desk in the 1960s, he was Ambassador to the U.S. and to the UN, so we had a lot to reminisce about. They agreed to provide us landing rights the moment I raised the subject. That was good, but the Air Force never used their facilities.

On to Colombo, where Marion Creekmore was Ambassador. I stayed at the residence, where he invited some of the movers and shakers to meals in my honor. I called on Mrs. Bandaranaike, who was out of power, but still active politically. She claimed to remember me, which was a surprise. My visit coincided with that of Senator Larry Pressler, who was on his way to India and Pakistan to try to convince them to back away from nuclear weapons, and wanted Sri Lankan support.

Then I went to Madras, where I wanted to understand the South Indian position on the Tamil-versus-Sinhalese problem in Sri Lanka. Our Consul General there was Ernie Heck, which was another reason for me to stop there. Her husband, Doug Heck, had been one of my bosses and was very ill. He had basically turned into a vegetable. I saw him, and she thought he recognized me, but he died shortly after that. Ernie was doing well, despite that burden, and we got some business done. She managed to set up a side trip for me to Bangalore to see the computer industry, an amazing competitor of Silicon Valley.

After that I went to Bombay, where Charlie Mast, Chuck Mast, was the CG. Most of my discussions there were with business people. I talked to the CEO of Air India about buying American aircraft, and several others about other U.S. products.

My next stop was at my old post in Calcutta, where Ron Lorton was Consul General. He eventually succeeded me as Country Director in the South Asia Bureau. I called on my old acquaintance Jyoti Basu, who had become Chief Minister of West Bengal. That was a pretty good leap for a communist who chaired a small minority in opposition when I was there in the early 1970s, and was now running the place. He still is, as far as I know.

From there, I went to Kathmandu, where Julia Chang Block was Ambassador. We talked about intractable political problems, which continue today. This was before the royal family got blown away, but communist insurrections in the west and the southeast were continuing, and governments were coming and falling much too frequently.

Then I went to New Delhi, where Ambassador Bill Clark hosted me with a serious schedule. We got lots of business done. The Embassy had a bit of a panic upon my arrival. I was met by a political officer, who took my passport and asked me to wait for a few minutes while he got me cleared by Immigration. After an hour, he returned, very embarrassed, to say there was some problem. All the other passengers had cleared quickly, but my special diplomatic status seemed to give the Indians pause. I laughed and told him I knew what the problem was. I was on their blacklist, having been declared persona non grata. I told him that, if I weren't cleared in another 30 minutes, he was to call the Ambassador and ask him to launch himself at Foreign Minister Gujral, with whom I was supposed to meet. The officer was a bit frantic because Bill Clark had scheduled an event in my honor less than two hours after I arrived. Someone in MEA must have been consulted, because I was cleared through after another 15 minutes.

From there I flew to Pakistan, stopping first in Lahore, another one of my previous posts. Consul General Dick McKee was living in my old house. Then to Islamabad, where Bob Oakley was Ambassador. He did a bang-up job of getting me to see the right people, including many of the top political leaders. That included Benazir Bhutto, but at the last minute she left the country, so I met her chief lieutenant instead, which was quite helpful. I had met with Pakistani Ambassador Abdul Sattar in New Delhi, so I balanced that with a call on his Indian counterpart, who was another old contact. We had a good conversation, during which I mentioned that some friends in Lahore had told me they were losing money because the local mills could not handle their bumper cotton crop. The Ambassador immediately said he could find Indian buyers even closer to Lahore, and called the Minister of Agriculture to try to strike a deal. Sadly, the Government of Pakistan couldn't agree to it. In KarachI'm trying to remember who was Consul General met with Qutubaddin Aziz, one of Pakistan's more respected journalists. He later gave me credit in a couple of his columns for calming another crisis between India and Pakistan. That, of course, was a gross exaggeration, but I had tried.

I went from there to Geneva for consultations with our representatives to the various UN organizations. Then on to London for good meetings at the Foreign Office, and our Embassy. The Brits usually have a pretty good idea of what's going on in the Subcontinent.

One of the things that had been created since my departure from the Subcontinent was the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation, or SAARC. It was designed to bring all the region's leaders together once or twice a year, to try to sort out problems. It was started as a sort of common market idea.

Q: Sort of an ASEAN twinge?

GRIFFIN: Exactly. The original concept was trade. Then it grew like Topsy and began to focus on other issues. I saw an opportunity there, after I had been around the circuit. It seemed to me that SAARC was a good mechanism to get something accomplished. So back in Washington I pushed the idea hard. I pointed out to the smaller members, such as Bhutan and the Maldives, that it was one of the few ways they could be heard. I noted that the Indian and Pakistani prime ministers usually came to SAARC meetings, which gave them a chance to get their licks in. It was also their chance to influence the big boys to quit trying to do each other in. It's rather like what Pierre Trudeau said about living next to the U.S. being America's neighbor is like sleeping with an elephant. If the elephant rolls over, you can be squashed. I urged them to speak up. It fell on quite receptive ears.

So, I focused on that and confidence building. Back in Washington I talked to Sam Lewis at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Bob Oakley jumped in at one point, as did some others, notably Hal Saunders, who do conflict resolution work. We tried to get several tracks going and I tried to beef up our commercial sectionobviously I was still being a commercial officebecause our exports weren't doing very well. I was convinced we could do much better, especially as we were buying up a lot of India's computer business. We needed something to redress the imbalance. I found a very receptive audience in Ambassador Bill Clark in New Delhi, who did a bang-up job, as did his successors, Frank Wisner and Tom Pickering. Bill did such a fine job that we managed to get him the first Cobb Award. Do you know what the Cobb Award is? It's given by a former political ambassador to Iceland, and goes to the ambassador who has done the most to help American business abroad. When it was announced, I knew Bill Clark had done more than most ambassadors in helping American business, and nominated him. He was its first recipient, which he is very proud of. It was near the end of his tour in New Delhi, where he was succeeded by Tom Pickering. At about the same time, John Kelly left the Bureau to go to Helsinki as Ambassador. He was succeeded by Ed Djerejian as Assistant Secretary for NEA. That was in 1991.

Q: We still had the Gulf War going on, the aftermath.

GRIFFIN: Kelly was still there when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. The next day at the NEA staff meeting, he asked what I thought would occur. Would his widow be made Prime Minister? I said I didn't think so, even though something similar happened in the case of Indira Gandhi and certainly in the case of Mrs. Bandaranaike. I said it could follow South Asian tradition, and some people might predict it. But I doubted it would happen because Sonia Gandhi is Italian, not Indian, which I didn't think would fly very far. Secondly, she didn't have a political background, and her only experience was as an airline stewardess. At that point, Kelly erupted. He told me never to say bad things about airline stewardesses. He practically bit my head off and I thought he was going to order me out of the room, but he didn't. The others calmed him down, and I never put the fact of Sonia Gandhi's former job into any of the briefing papers we prepared. It turned out that Kelly's Finnish wife had been in the same line of work.

After Kelly was replaced by Djerejian, Bill Clark came in from New Delhi to be Assistant Secretary for East Asia, and Tom Pickering came through from USUN in New York on his way to New Delhi. Since I had worked for him in Nigeria, I was delighted to get such a heavy hitter for India. He knew his way around, so briefing him was a piece of cake. We set it all up buyou know how he does thinghe walks into the briefing room and takes over. He does the talking, outlining the issues he will face, and all the questions he thinks he will get on the Hill. Briefers are told to interrupt only if he makes a mistake. His confirmation hearing was quite interesting. His nomination had been threatened by Senator Helms and some other member because of his alleged role in El Salvador. We heard that they were going to charge him with being pro-Palestinian when he was Ambassador to Jordan and later to Israel. Tom is probably one of the most even-handed, objective officers I ever ran into. Helms didn't try to block the hearing, but let Tom know that he would be tested. So he expected some fireworks. At the hearing, Tom was due to testify as the last of three nominees, and only three Senators were present. It was chaired by Moynihan, and Senator Helms arrived just as Pickering was called to the table. Tom had barely started his prepared remarks, when Helms interrupted to berate him for something that had happened in New York. Pickering didn't let Helms finish, but fired right back that the Senator had his facts backwards. Helms shut up and left. Tom was approved without further ado.

During his consultations I tried to convince Tom that there was a role the USG could play in the India-Pakistan dispute, despite strong objections by the Indians. I gave him all the arguments they would use, and some ideas about how to counter them. As a pro-active FSO with a hell of a lot of experience, I knew he wouldn't sit still. He said he would check out the situation on the ground, and get back to me in a back channel. The Congress Party was in a mess after Rajiv's assassination because they couldn't agree on who was in charge and vacillated between several candidates. I should mention that, when Rajiv was assassinated, the President sent the Vice President and Mrs. Quayle to the funeral, so we had to work on that. They barely made it on time, but did get there.

Q: You might explain, because this is a historical thing, what happened as far as the assassination, how it came about.

GRIFFIN: It happened in Tamil Nadu in the south. A Tamil girl wrapped her body in explosives, walked up, tried to touch Gandhi and blew up him and herself. Similar assassinations had happened previously in Sri Lanka, including that of President Premadasa. It's become standard fare elsewhere. BotPrime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi were shot and killed by assassins, so Indian security forces have come to expect such things, but the bombs were a relatively new phenomenon to them. In Rajiv's case, the ostensible reason was Tamil hatred of the ruling northerners in the Congress Party. India is made up of essentially 13 large ethnic groups, the Tamils being one of the largest in the south. They don't like to speak Hindi. They accuse the central government of failing to support Tamils in northern Sri Lanka, where a civil war has raged for 25 years. There are lots of grievances, in other words, and in this particular case this girl was identified with the Tamil Tigers of Elam, the group which is leading the insurrection in northern Sri Lanka. Rajiv was apparently perceived as being too friendly with the Sinhalese government in Colombo, and of ignoring the problems of the Tamils. Tamil Nadu used to be called Madras State, and is one of many fringe areas in India, where fealty to New Delhi is tenuous. West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, sometimes Punjab, Gujarat, and Kerala, plus the remote states such as Assam and the tribal regions in the northeast, usually elect leaders who are not close to the government in the center. They make the point that if they are ignored, they can cause problems.

To go back to what I was talking about with Pickerinand I worked on Ed Djerejian as well when he became Assistant Secretarwhen Tom came back later for consultations, he said he agreed with me. He wanted to get right to work on a plan of action. He and Djerejian agreed with me that it was necessary to convince the Secretary and get him engaged in the process, so we did. Secretary Baker liked Ed Djerejian. They still work together in Texas.

Q: Jim Baker.

GRIFFIN: So Ed worked up a strategy. Bob Kimmitt was Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the time, but he didn't come into the picture much. I suppose he was focused on other issues. Djerejian led the three of us in to see Baker, who listened carefully and said he agreed that our ideas were sound. He asked us to prepare a detailed plan of action, explaining how we would convince the Indians to accept our good offices. We would not be mediatorwe all knew that term wouldn't fly, and that about as far as we could go was "good offices" to help the Indians find ways to communicate with the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis, for their part, were eager for us to play any role. We agreed that we should ask other members of SAARC to weigh in when possible to help us.

But within weeks, or dayI don't remember exactlBaker was gone. He was pulled back to the White House, you may recall, to run the Bush campaign for a second term, so he was lost to us. Djerejian and I tried to shift the issue to Larry Eagleburger when he took over, but he hadn't come on board by the time my tour was up. The process did pick up some residual momentum when Congressman Steve Solarz arrived at the Bureau and heard about it. Solarz was supposed to be Tom Pickering's successor in New Delhi, but he started running into problems and never got confirmed. He and Congressman Burton, plus perhaps a couple of SenatorMoynihan may have been involvewanted to break South Asia off from NEA and make it a separate bureau. The first iteration was rather crazy, but it got refined and in the end was approved.

Q: What was the feeling with NEA?

GRIFFIN: We didn't like it. Djerejian thought it was a terrible idea, as he would lose a third of his bureau. One of the initial compromisethere were two or threwas a sort of halfway house. Deputy Assistant Secretary Tezie Schaffer was leaving to be Ambassador to Sri Lanka. Her successor had not been named, so I became the first acting head of the South Asia Bureau. I didn't even have a decent title. Not Assistant Secretary, but Interim Acting Director, or something like that. After a few months, John Melott came aboard as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. When he arrived, it was decided at first that Ed Djerejian would be the Assistant Secretary for both bureaus, which would share the NEA administrative offices. (They still do.)

Then we got word that the Political Counselor in New Delhi, Robin Rafael, would be the Assistant Secretary for South Asia. That set off all manner of bells, to put it mildly. The idea of making an FSO-1 an Assistant Secretary upset lots of people. But the Clintons were coming, and she was an FOFriend of Bill. It was a year before she was confirmed, and before that she had a terrible accident while riding a horse in New Delhi, smashing in her face. She was evacuated to Washington for a series of very tough operations. After she was released from the hospital, Chrissie and I put her up at our house until she could find a place to live. She had left her daughters in New Delhi, and it took the better part of a year for her to recover. She stayed with us most of that time. I left SOA before she assumed the Assistant Secretary position.

After he arrived, I reverted to Country Director for India, reporting to John Melott. About that time, New Delhi appointed a new Ambassador, as the previous one departed to become President of India. I happened to know the new man, Sidharta Shankar Ray, from my Calcutta days. He was a federal Minister, and retained his Cabinet position while he was Ambassador. Rather like our Ambassador to the UN being a member of the Cabinet. He was surpriseor rather, shocketo see me, because he had been partly responsible for getting me in trouble in Calcutta. At that time, he was briefly Chief Minister, and then Governor of West Bengal, and very close to Mrs. Gandhi. Once over the initial shock, he made the best of it and did all he could to get along with me. So did our two wives, and so we soon had a good working relationship. Because of his exalted rank, Ray thought he ought to have a special position in the diplomatic corps. That was not much appreciated by some of the other diplomats here.

Q: This brings up a question, in dealing with India at that time. I've heard from others that the Indians, ambassadors particularly, at least before, didn't seem to know how to work in Washington. They rather expected people to come to them, and they didn't get out and really mix and mingle. A little imperial. In Washington you can take that attitude, but it doesn't work.

GRIFFIN: No, especially since most titled people here think people ought to come groveling to them, it's not the way things work. Of course, it's the same thing in reverse if you go to New Delhi. No, I would say that Siddhartha ShankaManu is his nicknambecause was a life- long politician, understood how to do things. He worked the Congress, he worked the Administration, he worked the streets. He knew what he was supposed to do and I think he did a pretty good job of it. His main fault was an inherently Indian onnamely diarrhea of the mouth. Once on their feet, every Indian has to make a speech. Manu often did put people to sleep, especially in the second hour of a luncheon speech. But I must give him full credit. He worked very hard at his assignment. He had his share of problems. For instance with Congressman Dan Burton. But then, we all had problems with Congressman Burton.

Q: Burton was from where?

GRIFFIN: Indiana. Indiana seems to have lots of Dans. Burton accused Ray publicly of being a murderer; specifically of being the "butcher of Punjab." During the Emergency after Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, the Punjab, where most Sikhs live, was under what they call President's Rule, and occupied by the Indian Army. Ray was appointed Governor of Punjab, and imposed martial law, so he was often accused of being insensitive to Sikh concerns. Burton is pro-Pakistani, and decided to give Ray a hard time, but Manu survived it. One of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries in H and I appealed to Burton directly, and finally got him to back off a bit.

Other events of interest? Once a friend from Lahore flew to Washington to see me. He is a good businessman and an important polo player, with a nice family that we socialized with when we were posted in Pakistan. But his brother-in-law was caught up ido you remember the BCCI money laundering scandal?

Q: Yes, it was a Gulf banking scam.

GRIFFIN: Well, the brother-in-law and a colleague who had been working in Florida got nabbed for money laundering. They were sentenced to 144 years, or something like that. Many Pakistanis were outraged because their sentences were roughly 10 times those imposed on any American involved in that case. They argued that the Americans were in charge, and that they didn't have good lawyers. I tried to help the family out, not to much avail, but at least I calmed them down. They told me that some of their relatives were ready to take out guns and go after the American Ambassador.

Q: Okay, you've talked about India, but I'm not quite sure how it was related. Was there a Pakistan office director?

GRIFFIN: Yes, the INS Office covers India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives. Sikkim used to be in that list too, but then India absorbed it. The PAB Office covers Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Q: Okay. One of the things you haven't talked about is how you related, and how the embassies related. Because there is that traditional enmity and all that. Was there anything on the Gulf War and the aftermath of the Gulf War that affected you?

GRIFFIN: No, after the Task Force wound down, there were perceived commercial opportunities and other issues. There was an effort to build a pipeline from Central Asia or the eastern part of the Gulf into India, but that didn't get much of our attention.

Q: Well, how did you find relations? You were not exactly in the middle of this but at least you must have been observing relations between our Embassy in Islamabad and our Embassy in New Delhi.

GRIFFIN: Well, it's an old story. I think probably the worst period in those relationships was in 1971, during the Indo-Pak War which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. The two embassies were barely speaking to each other. By the time I became Country Director in 1990, things were much better, perhaps because we had two career officers out there as ambassadors. Bob Oakley was in Pakistan, and Bill Clark was in New Delhi. They behaved as professionals should, and did a pretty good job of ensuring that their staffs were not sniping at each other.

Q: So that wasn't a source of irritation?

GRIFFIN: No. Neither one developed clientitis. At the time, Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi were trying to reduce some of the hostility between the two countries, which helped relations between the embassies as well. By the time I moved on, both of those leaders were gonRajiv having been assassinated, and Benazir Bhutto having lost an election. After Bill Clark left New Delhi, Tom Pickering came in, and he wasn't one to allow embassy relations to sour either.

Q: I realize you were in one country but you were looking at the business side of matters. Just recently quite a well known New York Times correspondent, Tom Friedman, has written on relations there and pointed out that India has developed a very sophisticated infrastructure dealing with business support through computers and all this, whereas on the Pakistan side it's been all miserable. Some people point saying, "Well, an Islamic country just can't get its act together." Were you at all aware of the growing divergence between these two countries as far as potential?

GRIFFIN: Yes, of course. But let me back up just a second and add another point about the relations between the two embassies. At my first staff meeting in INS, I told my staff that they had to get along with our next-door neighbors in PAB who covered Pakistan and Bangladesh. I didn't want any sniping there, any more than the Ambassadors wanted it in the field, and think I succeeded. Moreover, when I was in charge of the Bureau several times and had to focus on Pakistan as well, I tried to make sure that the desk officers there got along, not only with me, but also with my staff.

Now, on the question of trade and the general economic structure of the two countries; in a way you're comparing apples and oranges, because they are quite different. If Pakistan had not lost the East Wing, which became Bangladesh, it might be stronger and better able to stand up to India. Especially since it would be on two sides of India, forcing it, in another war, to fight on two fronts as it had in 1965 and in 1971. But Pakistan has never really developed much in the way of industry, and certainly not in the high-tech industries that India has. In part, that can be credited to Mrs. Gandhi and some of her ministers who built an old set of engineering institutes into high-tech centers all around the country. The most famous one is in Bangalore, which is the center of Indian computer activity. But it all started more than 20 years before, as part of an effort to prove to the world that India could stand on its own feet. The process got a boost in 1971, when Mrs. Gandhi shut down all the USIS libraries in the country and ordered their books shipped out. She encouraged Indian chauvinism, and convinced her people that India could provide a home-grown proper education. She didn't want it colored by outside influences, which those American libraries represented. That said, there were also other foreign libraries in the country. Perhaps the biggest network was that of the Max Mï¿½ller BhavanGerman cultural institutes. The Alliance Franï¿½ais had a similar network, as did the British Council. Our USIS libraries may have been more widespread and bigger, but there were plenty of other outside influences there.

The Pakistanis have never been able to compete with the Indians on a high-tech basis. Why not? Because, Indians seem to have a natural affinity for computers, which are not used much even today in Pakistani schools, unlike in India. As a matter of national pride, Indians also want to be self sufficient. They're a bit like the Chinese. They find a product they like and try to reverse-engineer it. At Independence, India was left with an automobile factory making British Morrises, slightly bigger than a Minor. The design hasn't changed in 50 years, and they are called Ambassadors. At first, most of them had Chevrolet engines. Fiat has an automobile factory in Madras State (now called Tamil Nadu), and there were British Bedford and German MAN truck factories. Mrs. Gandhi's son Sanjay took advantage of his status to team up with Suzuki of Japan to produce the rather infamous Maruti car. But in Pakistan there is no such industry, so they import most things. Moreover, Indians are very good at repairing things. If one of their airplanes needed a part, they would try to fabricate it and then start a whole new industry to make it. In Pakistan, if a part broke, they imported another one. The mentality is different, but not because of Islam.

Q: I was just wondering whether Islamic schools and that sort of thing...

GRIFFIN: Certainly, they are there. There are Islamic leaders in both the national and provincial parliaments, though in my time in Pakistan most of those in the national Parliament were generally viewed as a joke. They had hereditary titles like pir, which means religious leader, but some of them were the biggest party boys in the country. It fit the mentality of that time. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was not a very religious fellow. His consumption of alcohol was legendary, so everybody else figured that if he could, so could they, and they did. But soon, perhaps because of the excesses, things began to change. There are madrasareligious schoolall around the country. And there are many religious leaders in politicfor example, the head of the Jamat Islamia Party was a mullah. They were teaching kids the more fundamental forms of Islam, with no attempt to modernize. Many people in Pakistan consider certain secular activities to be blasphemous. There were constant skirmishes between the majority Sunni Muslims and the Shiites. The latter are a small minority in the country, but several of them have held real political power. Some were members of the so-called "21 families" that Bhutto used to rail against for owning most of the wealth in the country. There have been attempts at building industries in Pakistan, but it would take longer than we have to try to explain how much of that had to do with the sort of education Pakistanis were getting.

Q: As a person whose jobs have been business oriented, you were watching a growing gulf, or was the gulf always there?

GRIFFIN: The gulf was pretty much always there. For example, India has the original steel mills in the Subcontinent, not Pakistan. Pakistan was more the breadbasket. The Punjab, which is divided between India and Pakistan, is where most of the grain grows, and the rest of Pakistan is pretty much a desert, aside from the Himalayas in the north. Pakistani industry tends to produce things like stainless steel tableware and sports equipment, but nothing on the scale of India. That said, there are plenty of Muslims in India who have done very well as sophisticated business leaders and entrepreneurs in industry. Then the Parsis are successful far beyond their numbereverything from the Tata empire, which has steel mills and airplanes...

Q: And shoes.

GRIFFIN: ...and so forth, to Zubin Mehta, a world-class musician. No, no shoes. That's the Bata family in Canada. Their name is Czech. Indians are capable of almost anything, but Pakistan doesn't have that sort of resource. In part, that is because the origin of most Pakistanis is the bottom of the Hindu caste system. Their ancestors were converted to Islam either by the sword or voluntarily, but most of them wanted to flee the rigid caste system. They tended to be less educated, and have less of a tradition of going into business. So they have been handicapped from Day One. Thus, in the Department we saw possibilities for trade with India that were not there in the case of Pakistan, and tried to take advantage of them.

In INS I met many Indian Americans who migrated here and now run major corporations. I think we were helpful in the transformation of the Congress of Indian Industries into the Confederation of Indian Industry. I had known Tarun Das, the Executive Director, when I was in Calcutta in the late 1960s. I gave him some advice, and introduced him to the President of the American Chamber of Commerce, who gave him some good ideas. One of the younger TataRatabecame Chairman of CII, and Zahid Baig, another old Calcutta friend of mine and a Muslim, was one of its senior officers. Its members included the CEO of every major industry in India. They were some impressive people, who wanted to do business with the USA, so it was in our interest to help.

Q: But in this time Indian policy had allowed basically business to come in?

GRIFFIN: Up to a point. There were still restrictions. The Indians' basic interest was twofold. They too were looking for markets around the world, and wanted to export their products, especially to the huge U.S. market. At first, that didn't work because Indian quality control was not very good, and they couldn't produce enough quantities to satisfy our market. In terms of population, ours is smaller than the Indian market, but in terms of buying power it is much bigger. The Indians wanted new technology and realized that, if the only way to get it was to allow people to set up factories in India or to export products to India, they had to let some of that happen. We didn't encourage certain American industries, such as the nuclear power industry, to export to India because we were aware that the Indians were trying to make bombs. The same with Pakistan. But the Indians had good ties to the Soviets, who helped them with nuclear power plants, so nuclear technology changed hands. The Pakistanis, meanwhile, were hand-in-glove with the Chinese, where they got a lot of technology, including some nuclear technology, which we tried to track.

Q: Did you get involved? I know there were issues of these very powerful computers - I think they're called Cray computers?

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, I spent a lot of time with the Cray people.

Q: Talk about that.

GRIFFIN: Their argument was that the Indians are sophisticated enough to build supercomputers in due course themselves, so it was foolish of the Department to deny Cray export licenses to sell some of their older devices to India. India's rationale for wanting Cray supercomputers was to modernize its national weather bureau. India suffers severe damage from weather-related phenomena such as monsoons and cyclones in the Bay of Bengal. With great regularity, they kill thousandsometimes hundreds of thousandof people every year. So the rationale is valid, but, of course, their need for better weather information also affected their missile, space, and military programs. In the end, we tried to help Cray. They were in deep trouble, losing money, and about to go belly-up, so this was almost their last hope. Crays are very expensive machines, so our balance of trade could use such a sale. We finally worked out a deal where the computers would be on loan, and the USG would have unannounced inspections. The Indians would have to send regular reports to us detailing what the computers were doing daily, to keep tabs on their activities. But in the end, the Indians said there were too many conditions, and told us to forget it. Then they went to work and built their own system, using multiple computers in tandem, and achieved the same results. They probably used off the shelf Texas Instruments or IBM computers. So maybe we were too smart for our own good.

Q: How were you observing the exchange, not necessarily official, through business or through our programs of students and all between India and the United States? Was this sort of a major factor in how things are developing as compared to, say, Russia?

GRIFFIN: Well, Indians, especially from the elite classes, have been going abroad for education for many, many years. Their primary destination was either Oxford or Cambridge in the UK through the World War Two period. Then, during the Nonaligned movement they started going elsewherCairo, for example. Somewhat later some of them aimed for the Soviet Union. The United States had various educational exchange programs with India ever since World War II. Other USIS programs were functioning well, and the Indians began to realize that, in their thrust for more technology-based education, the place increasingly to go was not the UK or the Soviet Union, but the United States. Families with enough money to pay for it started sending their kids especially to engineering schools here, which became more and more popular. Ratan Tatthe man I mentioned as head of the Confederation of Indian Industrwas educated partly in the United States. So there are all sorts of people who have done it, both through official US Government programs, and others who could afford it on their own. Later, in the '80s and '90s, there was a very strong push by American colleges and universities to attract foreign students, and India was a natural target for that for two reasons. One, the kids that they wanted usually spoke English, so they didn't have to come over and learn English before starting the substance of their courses. Second, there were huge numbers of them that could do it without the need for scholarships. That was attractive to the schools.

Pakistan did the same thing. Actually, the Pakistanis probably started coming to this country before the Indians did in any numbers, because as a member of SEATO and CENTO Pakistan was rather closer to us. We have trained many military officers from both countries, and often they were in classes together at the Army War College, the Air War College, and short-term professional courses. The process slowed in Mrs. Gandhi's last days, but I don't think that lasted long. I suspect the current government wouldn't push Indian kids to come to the U.S. for education, but they probably wouldn't stop them either.

Q: Anything else we should cover?

GRIFFIN: I might mention a couple of little things. Most of the time I was Country Director, the DCM at the Indian Embassy was Lalith Mansing, who is now the Ambassador. I had dinner with him the other night. The other subjecit wasn't part of my job, but something that took some of my timis the Senior Foreign Service Association. When I came back in 1990, nothing much was happening among senior officers, but there were problems on the horizon. For example, the Clinton Administration publicly announced a decision to stop performance pay. It also proposed cutting senior pay by five percent. There seemed to be a growing number of unqualified political appointees for ambassadorships and top jobs at the Department. There was a movement to convert Civil Service employees into the Foreign Service to fill jobs that allegedly were not popular with FSOs. Then Senator Helms wanted to tax ORofficial residence expenses. The Administration proposed a process, as in the Civil Service, to re-certify senior Foreign Service officers annually. There were questions as to whether seniors should be specialists or generalists. The percentage of counselor-level officerOC officerselected out shot up. And new regulations were issued to force seniors into housing abroad that was far below previous standards in most posts.

Of course, posts in different countries are quite different. But many in the Congress seemed convinced that we were all living like kings, in our striped pants, pushing cookies at cocktail parties and living in mansions. Of course, it wasn't true. Yes, sometimes senior officers had pretty fancy quarters, such as the Ambassador's residence in Rome, but there's a lot of history there. We weren't just talking about ambassadors; we were talking about senior officers around the world, of various ranks. I met with a group of senior FSOs led by Mike Cotter, who was in PM, to talk about all this. We decided to send a circular to senior officers inviting them to a large meeting to discuss these issues and see if we could work together to fight some of the moves. That didn't get much reaction. Then, Mike was transferred out of the country, and turned the position over to George High. Still, nothing much happened. Then, George was transferred, and the others looked at me and asked me to assume charge of the group. I was flattered, but pointed out that we needed someone with better name recognition than me. I argued that our leader should be one who had been an ambassador, preferably at a fairly important post. I looked around, and found Dennis Kux sitting over here, out of the line of fire.

Q: He was at that time seconded to the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

GRIFFIN: Precisely. Dennis got quite interested, and finally agreed to assume the leadership of our organization, if the others wanted him. I canvassed the group and found complete agreement, so Dennis came on as Chairman, and I was elected Vice Chairman. In 1992, we started a regular newsletter and pushed ourselves into a growing debate about how to reorganize the Foreign Service and make our lives a little better. We convinced AFSA to give us a seat on their State Standing Committee, and began drafting proposals. We spent a lot of time consulting with outside organizations, because, if you recall, during the transition to the Clinton Administration there were several attempts to influence the way it planned to reorganize the Department and the Service. We consulted Georgetown's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, and another group at the Carnegie Endowment. Congress had set up a commission to do exactly the same thing, which was headed by Nick Veliotis, an old friend and colleague. Then the Department itself created something called the Management Task Force. We looked at all the drafts and proposals, and thought we could do a better job. We certainly didn't like some of the other studies, so we went to work and put together our own document. We tried to get to the Clinton-Gore team after the 1992 election. When we saw some of their proposals for ambassadorships, we really crashed in. That's when Dennis Kux went into high gear. Warren Christopher came in as Secretary, and we proposed an immediate activity which would have made him very popular. For years, or decades, seniors had been concerned about the lack of a proper retirement ceremony. We looked at what the military did for flag officers, for examplparades, cannons, bands...

Q: Fly-passes.

GRIFFIN: All that. We thought our seniors should have something similar. We said it would be nice if the Secretary himself would say goodbye. I will never forget the departure of Ellsworth Bunker. It was one of the most miserable spectacles I have ever seen in this Department. He just said "Goodbye," walked out the door and that was about it.

Q: There's a story that a distinguished ambassador was retiring and he filled out papers and nobody said anything, and as he walked out the door he heard a woman say, "Oh, Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Ambassador." He turned around thinking, well, I guess they're going to do something. She said, "You forgot to turn in your badge."

GRIFFIN: That's about right. Anyway, we pushed and, maybe because some of our members were working on the Seventh Floor, we actually got Secretary Christopher to agree to hold a retirement ceremony. He said it would be individual, it would be mass, and it would include Civil Service people. We agreed. The Civil Service retirees were much fewer than the FSOs. Christopher canceled the first time, but eventually there was one at which he showed up. Walt Lundy ran the Retirement Office, and was put in charge of the preparations.

Then there was the scandal that broke around Elizabeth Tamposi. Do you remembelooking for records from the Bush Administration?

Q: She was the head of the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

GRIFFIN: Right.

Q: Supposedly the rumor was that Clinton had written a letter renouncing his American citizenship because he was afraid he was going to be drafted, and she went plowing through the passport files.

GRIFFIN: Well, we helped grease the skids for her. Then, Dennis got absolutely livid about the nomination of Larry Lawrence as Ambassador to Switzerland, and went to the Hill. We prepared him with good briefing papers, based on lots of research. We all agreed that Lawrence was supremely unqualified for Ambassador to Switzerland, but he got the job anyway. Then, he soon died and was buried in Arlington Cemetery, and then he was dug up because he had lied about his war record. But Dennis' testimony created such ill will with the White House, that it probably triggered his retirement.

Q: We had the feeling that we suffered a little backlash from that for a few years afterwards.

GRIFFIN: I suppose it's not what FSOs are supposed to do. Bruce Laingen still does it, but he's retired. Anyway, I stayed on as Vice Chair of the organization until 1995, which surely didn't help my career a lot. I certainly wasn't being pursued with chief of mission offers, although I was open to same. Eventually I discovered that Paul Cleveland, my old boss in Seoul, who was Special Coordinator for certain nuclear issues, a job that seemed to be going nowhere, had been asked to be Coordinator for Business Affairs. I called him and asked if he needed a deputy. He said, "Hey, that's a good idea!" Long story made short, I was made his deputy as he became Coordinator for Business Affairs.

Q: You did this for how long?

GRIFFIN: Two years. I left INS in the summer of 1993 and moved over to the EB Bureau. But since I left INS in July and didn't report to EB until September, I worked with the National Performance Review Board to help design our new office, which was supposed to have great impact. During the summer, there was a letter in the Foreign Service Journal by another FSO who criticized the Department for ignoring the American business community. He had several recommendations. I fired off a reply to the Journal saying that he wasn't paying attention, since the Administration was creating a new office to be headed by an ambassador with experience in dealing with business. I argued that, because it was the Secretary's idea, it would get a lot of attention. That caught Joan Spero's eye, and any doubts that she may have had about me seemed to vanish overnight, so I got the job.

Q: Joan Spero being...?

GRIFFIN: The Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. She came from American Express, where she had been a Senior Vice President. While the office probably was Spero's idea, the Secretary was very much aware of it. Anyway, Paul Cleveland and I went right to work, and I soon told him I thought EB was the wrong place for our office. If it was Joan's idea and was going to have the Secretary's ear, it ought to be in E, her office, or possibly in S, the Secretary's office. I said that otherwise it would not get anywhere. Paul agreed, and made a pitch to Joan, pointing out that we would not impress the business community unless we were elevated. While Paul didn't have as much experience in commercial work as I had, our residual staff had a lot, and we wanted to add several more people with such expertise. It took a while, but she finally agreed, over the very strong objections of EB Assistant Secretary Dan Tarullo. He wanted to control our office, and didn't want to be bypassed, but he was overruled.

We sent a memo to the Secretary proposing that the office be announced with a splash, as it was not to be just another little office. We asked him to invite business leaders from around the country to the Department to tell them what we proposed to do. We offered to write a speech for him to inaugurate our office. He thought it was a good idea, and immediately termed it "America's Desk." That resonated in some places and didn't in others, but it seemed to satisfy an itch in the White House and in the Congress that we were paying attention to American business. The Commerce Department wasn't thrilled, but since I had worked there and they knew me, they cut me some slack. I spent a fair amount of time at Commerce trying to convince the leadership that we were not a threat. I think that Ron Brown understood that we were being helpful.

Q: He was the...?

GRIFFIN: The Secretary of Commerce. Anyway, the process of getting the office going took more than a year. In the middle of it all, Paul Cleveland decided he had enough of bureaucratic infighting and retired, leaving me holding the bag. This was partly because Under Secretary Spero made it clear that she wanted to bring her own person into the job if it was going to be part of her office. She wanted to bring in David Ruth who, it turned out, was also from American Express, and had worked for her there. The process took 8 months, during which I was Acting Coordinator. I did as much as I could to get it up and running, but we shifted to her office only the day that David came on board. The day he left, it went right back to the EB Bureau. So much for the big impact.

At the time there was a feeling among FSOs, particularly political officers, that commercial work was beneath their dignity. Fortunately, I was a political officer, but had also been a commercial counselor twice, and I spent a lot of time in various bureaus, especially the regional bureaus, preaching the gospel of commercial work. I think it did some good. We established a Commercial Coordinating Network and got Under SecretarSpero and the Under Secretary for Political Affairs to order the regional and functional bureaus to designate liaison officers to work with us.

Before Paul Cleveland left, we organized an all-day conference for Secretary Christopher. Some 300 business leaders came from around the country, big names included. In those days, Kenneth Lay was not yet such a big name. But the heads of companies like General Motors and IBM did show up. So did the Secretary. He made a great speech (says the author). He said he was the new America Desk Officer, and introduced Paul Cleveland. Joan Spero spoke. Laura Tyson, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers spoke. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown spoke. Treasury Secretary Lloyd Benson spoke. It was quite a show, and I think our audience was impressed.

Shortly after that Paul and I hit the road, to spread the word around the country. We made speeches, talked individually to business, state and local government leaders, and were interviewed by newspapers and TV hosts. I began in New York with modest success, including a stint on the Bloomberg channel, a respected service carried all over the country. I went on Commerce Secretary Ron Brown's export promotion trip to the Middle East as the State Department representative. That trip was also designed partly to support the Middle East Peace Process by giving impetus to the Israelis and the Palestinians to do business with each other, as well as with Americans. Our first stop was in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Then, on to Amman, Jordan, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Cairo, meeting royalty, government leaders, and business people. It was quite a show. But I was a littlmore than a littlunhappy when, as we were in Jerusalem, Secretary Brown got permission from the Israelis to go into Gaza. Jim Zogby, the President of the Arab American Institute, was on the trip with us. He wanted to get to Gaza because he was accompanied by some people who wanted to start businesses there. The Embassy and the Consulate General organized a quick excursion to Gaza, but wouldn't let me go along, so I was not a happy camper. Then the Commerce staff tried to kick me off the plane for the trip back, and I really went into orbit.

Q: Why was this?

GRIFFIN: Oh, there were others Brown's staff thought were more important than I was. One of them was working with Dennis Ross on the Peace Process. But some of them really wanted to get on the plane to avoid having to come back by commercial air. Who was I? I was just the Department's liaison with American business, and they were political. I eventually talked them into letting me stay on the plane. About halfway home, Ron Brown called me into his cabiit was one of those old presidential Boeing 707s, with quite a nice cabin, but nothing like the 747 that is the current Air Force One. Anyway, he called me in and apologized, saying he had learned that I had been mistreated. He knew when to do it right. I shut up after that.

Then I went around the U.S. again, from Baltimore to Miami. I did a Southeast trip and a Northeast one. I spent a day with the top brass of United Technologies in Hartford, Connecticut.

Q: What was your pitch?

GRIFFIN: Our pitch was, "You know about the Commerce Department, but it is represented in less than 50 percent of Foreign Service posts abroad. So if you want to do business in, say, Bangalore, you probably need to talk to a State Department person, in addition to a Commerce Department person. Commerce has one in New Delhi, but there's a State Department person even closer to Bangalore." I had canned speeches for the most part, pointing out that State offers a lot more than they might realize. Having been a Department of Commerce officer abroad, I knew that State was a lot better than Commerce at explaining political risks, for example. That is what State Department political officers do all the time. I think the message got across.

I went to Pinehurst, North Carolina, where I made the keynote speech at the annual conference of the National Security Industries Association. It was headed by an ex-admiral, and its members manufacture military and security equipment. The Admiral had come to our launching in Washington, and decided to try somebody from State. He said they usually had a speaker from DOD or Commerce, but wanted a change. Similarly, I spoke at another conference in Phoenix. Along the way, I hit the middle of the country, starting in Kansas City, then on to Wyoming, Montana, Washington state, Oregon, Alaska, and back to Minneapolis. I was all over the country, in other words, and had very good audiences. Then I was invited to an UNCTAD world symposium in Columbus, Ohio. It had a big commercial aspect to it. Drawing on my experiences, especially from Nigeria, I had a display booth built practically overnight for very little money and convinced Under Secretary Spero to drop by and make a speech. So, some things began to pay off.

I kept emphasizing the corrupt practices angle. One night I was at a private dinner for a visiting British lawyer at the Indian Ambassador's. He and Ambassador Ray had met at law school at the Inns of Court in England. He was also Chairman of the International Bar Association. I lit into him, asking if his Association could put its weight behind the effort to curtail corruption. I wanted him to get involved. We had a good conversation, and he tried afterwards to interest his members, but the British Government was cool, and he ran into a stone wall of British industrialists. They apparently said that if the Americans weren't going to pay bribes, then they would. They saw it as an opportunity to get some business with no competition from us.

On another front, I worked with Commerce and USAID to bring the ex-Soviet Union, Russia in particular, into the modern world economy. We designed and helped implement offices called ABCAmerican Business Centerall over Russia. Sadly, most of them flopped, or turned bad, but the idea was a good one.

Q: What's been the problem?

GRIFFIN: Well, we foresaw some of them. We called for bids to construct the ABCs. All sorts of individuals and companies wanted to get in on that act. They all knew Russia is a huge country, which had been kept under lock and key for 70 years and was opening up to the world. They wanted to be there on the ground floor. So we had bids from everyone frono surprisGeneral Motors, to a black undertaker in Ohio who had done well in the undertaking business and was sure he could run an ABC. We checked him out and found that he had been in jail a couple of times and didn't have the record he claimed to have. But he had a big political push behind him and was quite popular in the White House, so it took a bit of effort to get him derailed. In deciding who would qualify, for example, we agreed that oil drilling, exploration, and equipment companies should not run the only office in an oil region of Russia. They argued that they were the only ones willing to go there, but we held our ground.

Then the Administration created the Trade Policy Coordinating Council. It was officially chaired by the Secretary of Commerce, and included the U.S. Trade Representative, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Agriculture, and several other luminaries. They were supposed to devise performance measurethe process I had worked on beforand, under pressure from Congress, to come up with cross-cutting budgets. There was a fresh movement on the Hill to put State Department commercial officers into the Foreign Commercial Service and abolish the EB Bureau at State. Anyone who knows what those two outfits do would say it won't work, but Congress did cut FCS's budget on the grounds that there was no need for an economic officer and a commercial officer at the same post. Clearly, some people on the Hill seriously misunderstood the function of those officers, but the budget was cut, so we met to try to make something out of what was left. It was a wonderfully tough exercise. We were screamed at with great regularity by OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, which ordered us to take our hits and to create stringent performance measures. In State, we tried to point out that Commerce could impose measures by saying it spent X number of dollars and X number of man-hours having trade shows and introducing people, creating a specified amount of business. But in State we wrote reports on foreign economies. We asked how they proposed to measure thathe length of it? The rank of who reads it?

I put together a bureau-administered training program for FSOs headed for posts with no FCS staff. I lectured to the commercial courses at FSI, especially those for political officers and economic officers, and the DCM course. With the Resources and Plans office in S, we began a program of incentives for State posts that did commercial work. If they presented us with a good rationale for the commercial work they did, and indicated that they needed some equipment or to hire somebody to do extra work, we could send them a little money. It was in dribs and drabusually somewhere between $500 and $1,00but it would buy a computer, or enable them to hire some staff, and the results were quite remarkable. We went after Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbot, and got him to help our efforts. The fact that Tom Pickering was in Moscow then helped. We got Talbot to host a luncheon with top American businessmen. We set up a couple of small breakfasts with business people for the Secretary. They were not the most thrilling events I ever went to, but the business people liked to be invited to the 8th Floor and say they met with the Secretary. We drew up guidelines for how much and what sort of advocacy our commercial officers could do, meaning how far could they go in helping a company with a foreign government. Commerce preferred to say their officers could do anything, with anybody, at any time. Some other parts of State, Defense, and other agencies argued that any advocacy was too much. It was like selling Cray computers to India: we shouldn't do it.

Q: Also, there's the one that we always come up against in countries that are buying military equipment. The French would come on and say, "We've got this plane and we want to sell that," a Northrup or a McDonnell plane or something like that, and we couldn't sort between them.

GRIFFIN: That's right. When multiple U.S. firms are competing, our officers have to promote "America." They can't talk about Northrop or Grumman, no. It may be the same company now, but then we couldn't do it. We had a hell of a time when Lockheed, Boeing, and McDonnell Douglas were up against AirBus, which had two and sometimes three governments behind them.

But we did have some successes. One was with Northern Telecom, a Canadian company, which wanted access to the U.S. market badly. They make telephones, and were competitors to the Bell system and Western Electric. They were having a hard time and, perhaps in desperation, they came to us in the State Department. We told them it wasn't our function to help foreign companies penetrate the American market, but we were willing to listen. In the process, we learned that Ottawa had blocked American telecom firms from doing business in Canada. Northern Telecom had that market locked up. So we said, "Wait a minute. You want access here. You don't want American firms in Canada. This won't fly. Go back and tell your government that Americans must have equal access there, or we won't help you." The President of Northern Telecom USA argued that his was an American company. They wanted to export from the U.S. to Russia, China, India, Brazil, and other big markets, and needed assistance. When we said we thought they were Canadian, they said that their office was in the U.S. In other works, they claimed to be American. That was an increasing problem with advocacy. Who owns what? Sometimes it can be fudged, but often it's impossible. Anyway, they got the Canadian Government to change its policy. Frankly, we were astonished. It was one of our biggest successes.

One of the least successful events on my watch happened just after the 1994 elections. Senator Helms was reelected, and was still the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee. One of the first things he did was to send a letter to Secretary Christopher, ostensibly offering an olive branch. He said he wanted to make peace and work together. He suggested that they meet often to discuss issues. For some reason, the letter landed on my desk three weeks after it arrived at the State Department. After wondering aloud what the hell it was doing on my desk, and why had it been bouncing around the bureaucracy for three weeks, I went tearing up to the Line in S. I knew Congressional letters are supposed to be answered in three days. I found the boss and told her they needed to move on it and that, to help them, I had drafted a nice one-paragraph response from the Secretary thanking the Senator, saying that he wanted to cooperate for the good of the country. I don't think the Secretary ever saw that letter, or that it was ever answered. Certainly, the relationship between Christopher and Senator Helms didn't improve. I don't know why it was done that way. I thought their instincts were all wrong.

That is pretty much it, for my time in CBA. The new political appointee Coordinator was a fast learner, but he was completely new to government and didn't have an easy time. The process of getting his clearances was slow in the first place, and he seemed to find the Department difficult to understand. He did manage to add one or two more employees, but I don't think the office was ever much of a success. The Secretary quit paying any attention to it. It was a flash in the pan.

Q: This went to when?

GRIFFIN: I left in July of 1995. It was a two-year tour after my three years in the South Asia Bureau. There were a couple of chief of mission possibilities for me, in Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa; small posts. The one in Central Asia was unaccompanieno spouses. Since I had already put my wife through that in Afghanistan, I turned it down. Then a friend in Personnel told me the Consul General in Milan was curtailing his tour, and asked if I were interested. I said I was, but wanted to be sure it was available before making a bid. I was hesitant because it was not a chief of mission job, which I wanted before retiring. But the more I thought about it, the more I saw how attractive it could be. I thought my wife deserved something pleasant after all the hardship posts she had endured, and it would be my last post, as I was approaching retirement age. It would be a nice present for Chrissie and interesting to be back in Europe. Moreover, I speak Italian, so I wouldn't need to learn another language. My friend called Dick Shinnick, the incumbent in Milan and asked him if he really was curtailing. He acknowledged that he was. She told him she had a friend who would fit the job perfectly, and asked if he would talk to me. He agreed, and called me to say, "You're the first to know, but I'm leaving early. I hear you want the job. If you leap now, you can nab it." So I did. I went to work on the D Committee. Tom Pickering had come back from Moscow to be Under Secretary for Political Affairs, so that helped. Others supported me, and I got the nod.

I left the Coordinator for Business Affairs job in July of 1995, and came to FSI to brush up on my Italian. I hadn't used it for many years, but managed in about six weeks to bring it back up to the 3-3 level. I got my wife into a regular course, where she had about three months of basic Italian. Her French was pretty good, but she had never spoken Italian, so it was very useful. We planned to head for Milan in August, but Dick Shinnick called again to say, "I understand that you're eager to get here, and I'm leaving long before then, but nobody is in Milan in August. Everybody's away for ferragosto."

Q: It's like descending into a deserted city.

GRIFFIN: But the real reason was that most of the staff wanted to take leave. If I were there, they would have to work. I learned over the years there that August is one of the best times to be in Milan. Very few people are there, so you can walk down the middle of street without getting hit or seeing anybody.

But first I had to pass muster with Reggie Bartholomew, the Ambassador in Rome. He claimed to be the first FSO ever to be Ambassador to Italy. It's almost right, but he didn't exactly start at the bottom as an FSO-8. He came from the Defense Department and was a lateral entrant into the Department, in PM, I think. His case was a bit like that of Hank Byroade who eventually became an FSO. After we met briefly in the Department, Reggie decided I was acceptable. He noted that I was a veteran political officer, who clearly understood the relationship between consuls general and ambassadors. I agreed. At least I thought I did until I got there, and then I found out that our understandings were a bit different.

Q: You were there from when to when?

GRIFFIN: I was there from September 1995 until August 1998. The post covered all of northern Italy after consulates in Torino, Genoa, Venice, and Trieste were closed. It had a big stafin my time it was the third largest consulate in the world, after Hong Kong and Jerusalem, each of which had a quite different status. It had a staff of 110 Americans, and even more Italians, in ten US Government agencies. The annual budget was well over $10 million. In terms of land area, per capita GDP, and presence of American armed forces, the district was bigger than 12 of the 15 EU countries. So it was a responsibility I could get my teeth into. The post was there primarily to assist American business, but we issued plenty of visas and passports. Before I went there I consulted with a lot of people, here in Washington and elsewhere, especially with business people. BCIthBusiness Council for International Understandinset me up with appointments in New York, Boston, and Washington.

Q: There weren't any visas because there was a visa waiver.

GRIFFIN: There certainly were visas, though at some point issuance of all immigrant visas was shifted to Naples, to keep that post alive. Milan was mostly oriented toward commercial work, though we had a large law enforcement staff, and did the usual political and economic information gathering. At the time, the Italian Government was headed by the same fellow who heads it noSilvio Berlusconi. He is from Milan, and most of the political and economic power in Italy is in the north. The President was also from the north, as are the heads of most businesses, so it is the center of action and culture in the country. Shortly after I arrived, I went to Rome for a day to introduce myself to Embassy people. I came right back, which was fortunate, because the next day the tug of war between Congress and the White House forced all posts to close. We were put on furlough, except for me. I was called essential.

Q: This was the whole American government.

GRIFFIN: That's right. Everybody shut down. It went on most of the winter. We didn't have money to buy anything, but I couldn't just sit there. I was allowed to talk to people and write reports, but couldn't have a communicator come in to send them out. It was strange.

Q: What were your people doing?

GRIFFIN: Sitting at home twiddling their thumbs.

Q: Say a counselor officer or economic officer, they didn't go away, did they?

GRIFFIN: Some did, but they couldn't go too far because we had fits and starts. Washington would send out a message saying we might open next week, so everybody would come back to town, ready to go to work, but then nothing would happen. I told them they couldn't go more than six hours away. Meanwhile, I decided to get out and meet people, using the official sedan. We had a brand-new Ford Taurus, after sending our beat-up old Chevy sedan to Embassy Tunis. They needed it because it was armored, even though it ran badly. So I hit the road, didn't claim any travel expenses, and started introducing myself around. It was odd. Once I got lost in Bolzano, the capital of the Trento/Alto Adige Region, and couldn't find the house of the President.

Q: The Prefect?

GRIFFIN: She was a Rome appointee, so you're righshe would have been the Prefect. I was stopped at an intersection looking around and checking a map trying to figure out where to go, when a nice fellow came up, licking an ice cream cone, and asked me where I wanted to go. I told him, and he said, "You'll never find it. Follow me." He was right. It was well hidden. There were one-way streets and the place was halfway up the mountain in a forest. The man guided me to the gate, and I drove in. A butler opened the door, looked at me, and asked, "Where's the Consul General?" I was driving the car, and he could see no one in the back seat. That happened a couple of times. Some of my Italian staff thought it was brutta figurvery bad image for a Consul General.

The post was in excellent shape. My predecessor Dick Shinnick was an administrative officer. He cleaned up some messes and put it back on its feet, so there wasn't much to do on that side. Most of the sections ran smoothly, but I saw some potential problems. There wasn't an awful lot of coordination, so I set up some working groups. The first one was on trade promotion, because I wanted Commerce to talk to State, to talk to AgriculturFAS was there as weland to talk to USIS. I told them it had to be a community effort. All agencies should be involved, and they began to get that way. I did the same with the law enforcement agencies. I found that the FBI was not talking to DEA, was not talking to the Secret Service, was not talking to Customs, and certainly not talking to the intelligence people.

The staff, especially in the furlough period, began complaining about having nothing to do. A lot of them wanted to exercise, but the local gyms were too expensive or too far away. So I formed a committee and we built our own. We cleaned out half of a storage room, raised some money, bought some equipment, and set it all up. It got very heavy use, and some of the machines didn't last long.

My first call was on Philip Wetton, the British Consul General, and Dean of the Consular Corps, who happened to be an old friend from my time in Seoul, Korea. He said he was delighted to see me, not just because we had been friends in Korea, but because now he could relax, put his feet up and let me take over. I didn't catch on at first. I asked him what he meant, noting that he was still Dean. Philip replied, "I'm just the British Consul General. The American Consul General is the real power around here. So it's great to see one I know, and who I know I'll get along with." He added that the Dean had a real function in Milan and was listened to. He was trying very hard to build on that advantage. He enumerated his successes, saying he pointed out to usually aloof local officials that they were hosts to the largest consular corps in the world outside of New York City. It was true. There were some 160 consulates in Milan. Some were honorary, but they at least flew a flag, went to meetings, and got things done. Like us, most of them were doing trade promotion. Of the career consuls there, who numbered 90-odd, about 25 or so of them had been ambassadors elsewhere. They didn't view Milan as a step down.

Q: A little bit like Sao Paulo.

GRIFFIN: Yes. They all had very ambitious commercial programs. Most of thecertainly the British and the other Commonwealth countries, the Swiss, the Dutch, and the Russiancovered all of Italy. They didn't answer to their ambassadors in Rome on commercial matters, but reported directly to their home ministries. Several, like the Australians and New Zealanders, were either businessmen on political appointments or from their trade ministries, not from foreign ministries. Despite the built-in competition, we all got along well.

After a few weeks, I concluded that we should do more political reporting, given the preponderance of northern Italians in high political office. My very ambitious deputy, Philo Dibble, was a political officer, and he was frustrated with marching orders from Ambassador Bartholomew. Reggie insisted that we clear every political report with the Embassy. Philo found that difficult, for two reasons. One, the Embassy Political Section took a long time to clear our reports, if they ever got around to looking at them. They often took his reports and subsumed them into theirs, removing his name. He was a highly irritated officer when I got there. I told him I had discussed reporting with the Ambassador, and thought I could change the rule. After all, Reggie had approved my assignment after he told me that he liked the fact that I had lots of experience as a political officesomething my predecessor was not. I had reminded him that there was considerable political activity in northern Italy, and argued that if we had the information, we should be allowed to report it. He said, "It's your call; your judgment."

That was, until we actually tried it. Then everything hit the fan. It didn't start with the Ambassador, but the Political and Economic Counselors in particular started raising a ruckus. They finally got to the Ambassador, who called me and read the riot act. I told him I thought we understood each othemeaning that I could report what I wanted from a Milan viewpoint. I pointed out that the Embassy could always fire in a different point of view and embarrass us. He said he too thought we had agreed, but he wasn't sure I had the right instincts. He didn't complain about our first telegram, which quoted mayors and regional presidents in the North as saying that Rome had better start paying attention to them. They were becoming vociferous, and beginning to claim the right to hang onto money. They argued that when they sent tax money raised in their constituencies to Rome, it went into a black hole, which nobody in the north ever saw again. They tended to refer to anything south of the Po River as "Africa." It was not a pleasant dialogue.

Q: You know, I had been, back in '79 to '81, Consul General in Naples. You'd have these prefects who would come down who were assigned to Naples, and their wives and they would sit around at the dinner table and really disparage everything. Also, the other things was that I noticed, and I was not an Italian hand, Rome got terribly insular. They would send out reports saying there had been another cabinet reshuffle - and this was an era where it was the same cabinets as 1948 but they kept shuffling it around - and say, "What's the reaction down in Naples?" In southern Italy the reaction, of course, was nil, and quite rightly so. But you have these people you felt up in Rome were jumping around and saying, "Oh, a new cabinet reshuffle," and playing games. It was that Roman minuet that seemed to absorb the people.

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, that's the way it was. Anyway, some powerful people, especially the mayors of Milan, Turin, Venice, and Trieste, and others, were all challenging Rome's authority to do things. The prefects, those agents of Rome, would try to keep peace. Most of the prefects were from the south somewhere. I guess that was calculated.

Q: I would assume that.

GRIFFIN: They carried a pretty big stick, but they weren't always listened to.

I soon met Umberto Bossi, the head of the Northern League, who says he detests Italians from the south, and delights in making trouble. He was trying to create an independent "Padania," or self-rule for Lombardy. His lieutenant, Marco Formentini, was Mayor of Milan when I arrived. He was succeeded in 1997 by businessman Gabriele Albertini, who was a bit like Tony Williams here in Washington. He had ties to Italy's "uncrowned king," Gianni Agnelli, the head of Fiat, and other top business leaders, who backed him. We became pretty friendly, and he helped me continue to stage our July 4th events in Milan's Castello. I got him introduced to New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, one of his role models.

During my three years, I visited every province in my district. There were some 50 of them in the district, about half of Italy's 108 provinces. (The numbers changed during my tour, as new provinces were created.) I also made it a point to visit all the U.S. military commanders in the district. They had some 29,000 U.S. military personnel and dependents under their commands, mostly at Verona, Vicenza, and Aviano, which is north of Venice, with a few scattered in other Italian or NATO commands. There was also a NASA office in Torino.

Q: NASA, this was the Space...

GRIFFIN: The National Air and Space Administration. That is because Italians make some parts of our space vehicles, and have their own space program. It was a liaison office with a small staff.

At the military bases, I saw that the Consulate was not on the radar screens of most of our commanders. I set out to fix that. At Aviano Air Force Base, the overall Commander was an Italiain a NATO positiobut the Wing Commander, the real power, was Chuck Wald, an American Brigadier General. He has been promoted rapidly, and by now should have gotten his fourth star. He was very quick to realize that we needed to coordinate. It may have helped that I had an opportunity to put him in my debt. The U.S. Air Force sent a squadron of stealth bombers to Aviano to take part in the Bosnia campaign. But they "forgot" to ask permission of the Government of Italy. The planes were apparently over France and radioed that they were coming in to land. But an Italian air controller told them not so fast. He asked who they were, where they were coming from, and for their authority to enter Italian air space. When they replied that they had no special authority, they were refused permission to land. The Air Force started ringing phones in Washington and Rome, and the issue quickly went to Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli. She took it to the Cabinet, which backed up the air controller, saying that Rome was tired of Americans treating Italy like it was part of the United States. The planes returned to the U.S. I told Chuck Wald I regretted that the aircraft didn't get to Aviano, because I knew they were needed, but stressed that it was a perfect example of why he needed to keep in touch with me and Embassy Rome. Italy is, after all, a sovereign country. Wald took the point, and we remained in close contact. On my first visit, he told me about some serious housing problems. Many of his permanent personnel were living off base in small villages around Aviano. Some of them were home to leftist political leaders who didn't much like the U.S. They collected hundreds of gripes from neighbors who didn't want our personnel living among them, and made life miserable for them. I suggested that we work together to overcome some of those problems, and we did.

Q: How did you overcome it?

GRIFFIN: We went together to see several of the mayors. They seemed a bit blasï¿½ with Wald, but my title seemed to change their attitudes. They liked the Consul General title and the fact that I spoke Italian to them. (Wald didn't know the language.) We told the mayors we needed their help. Both the Italian and U.S. Air Forces wanted to expand the base. We worked out a deal in which an unused part of the base was turned over to one of the villages for a housing project. In return, the Air Force got some land on the other side to extend a runway. So the collaboration worked rather well.

When I called on him, the U.S. Army Commander in Vicenza didn't seem to know that his people were sending us somewhere between 50 and 100 consular cases a week. These included applications for passports, visas, and birth certificates. Once we were asked to issue 900 passports in less than 24 hours. That was because a contingent of troops was suddenly ordered to Bosnia, where they would need passportsomething they didn't have. It was a tremendous burden on our consular staff, who had to work over a weekend to get it done, but they did produce them. The next day, we fired off a request to the Department and the Pentagon to give all our troops passports before they left the U.S. I told the Generawe didn't appreciate such unexpected burdens, as our people were being hassled about access to his base commissary. It turned out that we had both gone to Georgia Tech, so we resolved things. The personal approach worked.

I also worked with some of your old friends at CINCSOUTH in Naples, the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of Southern Command, and the Commander of the 6th Fleet, because their ships called at ports in my district, and I wanted to make use of them. During Sixth Fleet ship visits, we helped them invite local VIPs aboard the ships, and set up some of their calls on local authorities. One of our knottiest issues was access for nuclear-powered vessels to Triesttrue of almost all Italian ports, but Trieste was really touchy. The Mayor favored them, the Prefect favored them, the Admiral who was the Port Commander favored them; Rome did not. The Embassy staff wasn't always helpful, often claiming they had too many other things to do. Eventually we got an agreement in principle, but then the government in Rome changed and we had to start all over again. Meanwhile, I took a group of regional presidents, mayors, and business leaders on a COD flight to the aircraft carrier USS George Washington. It was cruising off Bosnia, and we spent the day. All the Italians had a ball, and my stock shot up all around the district. Then General Wald in Aviano had a huge Christmas party, featuring the U.S. Air Force Band Europe, and Jay Leno.

Q: A well know comedian on TV.

GRIFFIN: It was like a USO show. Christina and I sat next to General Michael Ryan, Commander of U.S. Air Forces Europe, and his wife. He went on to become Chief of Staff of the Air Force. After the show, I talked to the leader of the band and asked him if he could perform in Milan for a civilian audience. He said he would be delighted, because after all, he was paid to do that sort of thing. His wife was Italian, so they were always looking for official reasons to come there. We struck a deal, and had some very good times. We also managed to get the 6th Fleet Band for other performances.

Actually, I'm still working with them. Just the other day, I got an email from a mayor in my old district, asking for help. He said the Consulate in Milan didn't respond to his request for an American band for a special September 11th memorial concert. So I spoke to Consul General Douglas McElhaney, who said he is setting it up. I hope the tradition carries on. It's a wonderful program as long as we can afford it.

When I arrived at the post, morale wasn't what I thought it should be, especially during the furlough when the government shut down. For starters, I organized a party at our residence. Dick Shinnick had moved out of the former CG apartment, and found a much better one. It once belonged to the Agnelli family, and was quite elegant. It was only six blocks from the Consulate and two from La Scala, in the hub of the city. When I learned that most of the Consulate staff had never been to it, I decided to invite them all, which seemed to help their spirits. I followed the advice we heard in the DCM course and tried to manage by walking around our offices. It paid off, as I learned a lot I wouldn't have known otherwise, and I think the staff welcomed it. At the end of my three years, several staffers said that my constant presence kept them happy.

Some of our problems in the commercial area stemmed from what many Americans called an absolutely useless American Chamber of Commerce. In Washington I spoke to "Wally" Workman, the long-time Vice President for International Affairs at the American Chamber of Commerce. He was quite familiar with the Chamber. He said it was awful, but he had no power to shut them down or take their title away. He agreed to help try to institute some reforms. We agreed it was important, because it was the chamber for all of Italy, not just the north. Before my departure for Milan, I got a message from the Executive Director, asking me to deliver the keynote speech at its October annual general meeting. I agreed, and asked the Economic Section to work with FCS, FAS, USIS, and Embassy Rome to draft something. It was good, but I made it a bit tougher, which the staff seemed to like. I focused on three things: First, I said they should recruit more American members. (Its membership was about 75 percent Italian business people seeking to export to America.) I noted that I had been on the Boards of Governors of two AmChams, and knew that exporting to the U.S. was not a valid purpose of the Chamber. Next, I said that, in addition to recruiting more Americans, they needed to lobby the Italian Government to accord American companies better treatment. I said no member of the American Chamber of Commerce should work behind the scenes to block American competitors from the Italian market. Third, I had learned that most speeches at the Chamber were delivered in Italian. So, I began my speech with a few sentences in Italian, then switched to English. I told them that as long as it was an American Chamber of Commerce, I would never speak to them in Italian. The Americans there loved it, but the Italians didn't, and they paid me back. At the next elections to their governing board, they ousted all the Americans except for a couple of Italo-Americans who could walk either side of the street. They filled every other seat with Italians. I sent a full report to Ambassador Bartholemew, who was Honorary Chairman of the Chamber. On his next visit, he requested a meeting with the Chamber Board at their offices, rather than the usual luncheon or public meeting. He reamed them out. Without any further prompting from me, he said exactly what I had been saying, and said it better. He growled at them, "You are supposed to be an American Chamber of Commerce. Where's the American? Show me one American in this room." One guy in the back stuck up his hand and said, "I was born in the US." Reggie shot back, "When was the last time you were there?" The man said, "About 20 years ago." They were all scowling, and started to grumble, but what really got their attention was what the Ambassador said next: "If you don't fix this, and fix it fast, my name is coming off your masthead." After that, they started being nicer to me, though some of them accused me of setting the Ambassador up. Reggie's policy didn't continue, by the way, with his successor, Tom Foglietta, who was a different kettle of fish.

Q: Was he more the typical Italo-American who comes back and is more delighted to show the Italians how a guy from the old country made good in the United States, which means they usually end up by being more lenient towards the Italians rather than promoting American values?

GRIFFIN: As soon as he got his feet on the ground in Rome, I urged him to put conditions on letting the Chamber list him as Chairman. He not only disagreed, he came to Milan and sat for a portrait so they could put his picture on the cover of their magazine. He told me the members of the Chamber were "good boys," and indicated that would be his reaction any time I tried to tell him otherwise.

To make peace, I suggested to the Chamber that, if we collaborated, I could do them some good. They were always casting about for luncheon speakers, and I told them quite frankly that I didn't want to listen to any more Italian manufacturers of pizza machines telling us how successful they were. They needed American business, and needed to learn how Americans do business. They weren't thrilled, but I did bring in several speakers. I got Ed Artz, the CEO of Colgate Palmolive. He came to Italy fairly often, but usually hid out on vacation. He didn't want to work in Italy, but finally agreed to speak. He made a terrific speech, which even impressed the Italians. Then Alexis Herman, a Special Assistant at the White House, who was nominated for Secretary of Commerce after Ron Brown died. There was Governor Lawton Chiles of Florida.

I got Admiral "Fuzzy" Smith, CINCSOUTH himsela wonderfully bright and charming man. The Chamber treated him miserably. It was all set with the Admiral's staff when we discovered at the last minute that the Executive Director of the Chamber had neither reserved a meeting hall, nor invited the members. When I asked him why not, he said innocently, "He's just going to talk to the Board over lunch, right?" I went ballistic, calling him names, but managed to get the Commander of the Italian Air Force to lend us his meeting hall. The Consulate staff frantically sent word to every Chamber member, and we managed to scrape together a crowd less than 48 hours before the Admiral arrived. The Italian civilian and Air Force officials who attended were fascinated. The members of the Chamber Board didn't seem to know what he was talking about. I was furious.

As you might expect in Milan, the post had a steady stream of visitorinteresting ones. Many business people came, including Bill Gates, the head of Microsoft, the President of US Steel, the Chairman of General Motors. It was like Korea in that way. They all had business to pursue, and usually would touch base with us. After listening to me, several of them instructed their country CEOs to be more active in the Chamber if they agreed it would be useful, which helped.

USIS was doing an excellent job. The Italian publishing industry is headquartered in and around Milan, and USIS helped attract some name-brand authors to visit. Some of them had translations of their books coming out in Italian, and their publishers helped us draw big audiences. From my standpoint, the best one probably was Joe Heller, who wrote Catch 22.

Q: He died just recently.

GRIFFIN: Yes, his wife invited us to the funeral. The four of us had a wonderful time in Milan. Joe, his wife Valerie, and my wife and I went out to dinner quietly after his speech in Milan. We talked half the night and corresponded afterwards. I told him I wanted to write fiction, and he gave me lots of pointers. I'm really sorry he died.

Q: Did they have a book fair in Milano?

GRIFFIN: Yes, but not as big as the one in Germany.

Q: I was wondering, because these fairs, of course, are major. It's the way Europeans do business.

GRIFFIN: Yes. Nick Veliotes, a former FSO who was President of the Association of American Publishers came through on his way to one of them, and we helped him with some contacts. Other authors we hosted during their visits included Mary Higgins Clark, the prolific author of romance novels and mysteries. Another very interesting one was Peter Matthiessen, who wrote The Snow Leopard, Far Tortuga, and The Tree Where Man Was Born. He's been all over the world.

Q: Sort of an adventurer, out in the different terrain.

GRIFFIN: He's a friend of the great naturalist George Schaller, and his books are grounded in nature.

I should tell you about our use of the Castello Sforzesco, the big castle in the middle of the city, built by the Duke of Milan. Before I arrived, the Consulate held a Fourth of July reception in the CG's apartment to which they invited over 800 people, about 500 of whom tried to show up. There was no way to cram 500 people into the apartment. It was hot as blazes, and the air conditioning didn't work very well, so the staff vowed never to try that again. After hearing about it, I told them I still wanted to have an event, and asked what was the best outside place to hold one. I wanted it to be a splash. After they suggested several places, we were invited to a show at the Castello. At my next staff meeting, I said I wanted our reception held there. The group was very skeptical that we could get it, but I went to see the Mayor. Then I talked to the Prefect, the Provincial Governor, and the Regional President, who all said, "Sure." But then they began to set stiff rules. The culture bureaucrats were opposed, especially after I said I wanted to include a Neapolitan fireworks spectacular. You know how terrific those are.

I set the FCS staff to work. We got clearance from the Department, which imposed rules on how we could raise money, and how we could display corporate insignia. We raised $100,000 the first year, which allowed us to import the Air Force Europe Band, get the fireworks, and feed 3,000 people. It was a roaring success. I did it for three years, and everybody loved it. People came from as far away as Trieste in the east, Val d'Aosta in the west, and all the other provincial capitals. It was a terrific show, and well worth all the money. It never rained, though it was misty one year. Our biggest problem was mosquitoes. The Po Valley not only is the largest coherent rice-growing area in the world (a crop Marco Polo brought back from China) but is also one of the largest mosquito-growing areas in the world. One of the companies that didn't respond to our invitation to sponsor the Fourth of July event was S. C. Johnson. I went to see their CEO and asked him to reconsider. He was interested, but said he would have to get permission from headquarters in Wisconsin, which for an Italian could be hard. I told him I didn't want money, but a donation of several thousand of his little packets of Off lotion. He knew very well about the mosquito problem, and I told him how several important officials said they wouldn't come back if I held the reception at the Castello, because they didn't want to get bitten again. I suggested that he could put Off's name in lights simply by giving me a carton of the packets. He could tell his accountants it fell off the truck, and I would feature S. C. Johnson's name as a donor on our board. He decided it was not a bad idea, and did what I asked. We gave a packet of Off to everybody who came to the party, and it worked perfectly. I've still got some.

Another set of opportunities opened up while I was in Milan. American universities were not only recruiting students to come to America, but some were also trying to set extensions in Italy. Florence is full of them, and there's a couple in Rome.

Q: In Bologna they have...

GRIFFIN: ?an extension of Johns Hopkins University. But American businesses want to be in Milan because Bocconi University is universally acknowledged to be the premier economic and business school in the country. Pace University of New York wanted to set up there, and went a long way toward doing it. They opened offices in Milan and started giving classes, but then there was a problem at the home university on Long Island. The man who started the program was in trouble of some sort, and they closed. Then there was a group of American colleges, mostly from the Southeast, who set up a joint venture in the Veneto, just north of Venice. It was in a beautiful village, and still functions, as far as I know.

Shortly after I arrived in Milan, we had a long-planned inspection. The chief inspector was John Monjo, and we were given flying colors. They couldn't find anything at all wrong, which was a nice introduction for me. Their recommendations were helpful in most respects, but I didn't favor some ideas from Embassy Rome for cutting our staff, which we finally had to do. Worldwide budgets were getting tighter, so I tried to ensure that when our staff was let go, they either found jobs outside, or were used somewhere else in the Consulate.

Q: You're talking about the Italian staff.

GRIFFIN: And American. Both. It affected everybody. When the U.S. Tourism and Travel Agency office in Milan closed, it was because the entire agency was abolished. Milan was their southern European headquarters, and the American woman who had run it for 12 years stayed there and opened a travel agency. She tried to perform the same functions and charge for it. We managed to find her Italian staff jobs in USIS and elsewhere. FCS absorbed some of them because they absorbed the function.

My predecessor had fired the Italian protocol assistant, saying he was doing me a favor. We needed a replacement because my schedule was very busy. I first sought Italian applicants from some of the offices that were downsizing, but I ended up hiring the wife of George Ruffner, the FCS chief. She was Dutch, and probably the most competent protocol person I have ever run into anywhere, bar none. She set up a computerized contact system. Her predecessor took all the contact files with her, so she had to start from scratch. That wasn't all bad, because we got rid of some deadwood and came up with new names and got current addresses and numbers.

An event early in my tenure reinforced my concern about security and my antipathy to the Embassy's plan to close the RSO office. The Consulate is on a triangular piece of land and the building itself is a sort of rhomboid, with no two parallel sides. It's smack on the street on two sides, with a small sidewalk on the third, shortest side, all of which was dangerous. We controlled the entrance, but the next four floors were rented out to others, and then we occupied the rest of the building up to the 13th floor. We could have used the other four floors if USIS hadn't dug in its heels and refused to move into the building at the same time FCS did. They preferred their pretty place off of Via Monte Napoleone, the fanciest shopping street in Milan, saying it was closer to their clients. Anyway, one fine November morning I was happily beavering away on something with my windows open because the weather was pleasant. I could see the snow peaks of the Alps in the distance. All of a sudden I heard a racket, and realized that there was a traffic jam. The minute traffic stops, every Italian worth his salt starts blowing his horn.

Q: It helps.

vGRIFFIN: So I looked out the window to see how bad it was, and noticed something very odd. All the Consulate cars that were normally parked on that side of our building were gone. The only vehicle there was a truck I didn't recognize. There was a cop behind it in what looked like armor, and a long white line leading to the intersection half a block away. I picked up the phone, and called the RSO. No answer. I called the Admin Officer. Not there. I called the DPO. Not in. Nobody was there. It was 10:45 in the morning, and everyone had gone out for an espresso, except for the guard at the front door, an Italian. I finally reached him and asked what was going on. He said he didn't know I was there or he would have called. He told me that two Middle Eastern-looking men had driven into an unoccupied parking space. Since those spaces were off-limits to non-Consulate vehicles, he went out to tell the men to move. But they both jumped out and ran in opposite directions. So he called the Questura, the police headquarters just around the corner a block away. They sent their bomb squad over immediately, concluding that the truck contained one. He said they were going to blow off the back door to see inside. I said, "They're going to do what? Are they out of their minds? Suppose it is packed full of explosives?" I slammed shut my window and ran to the middle of the building. The charge went off, and fortunately the truck was empty. An hour later, the driver returned, and the police determined that the men were from the Islamic Cultural Institute, which, if you've been reading the papers lately, is a nest of al Qaeda agents. We never determined to our satisfaction whether it was a test of our security, or whether the men were as stupid as they seemed to be. They claimed that they went to register at the Questura, which aliens must do. There is usually a long line and no place to park, so they said they saw a parking place, and grabbed it. If they had been carrying a bomb, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you today.

Well, I went ballistic. I screamed and yelled to Washington, to everybody I could think of. The RSO in Rome had been my RSO in Nairobi, and I wasn't pleased with his reaction. I told him so, told the Ambassador so, and told Washington so. We got some attention for a while, and I almost got the Marine guards that I had asked for in the beginning. By law, we were supposed to have Marines to guard certain facilities. I can't be more specific here, but we were technically illegal, and kept being told by DS that we were "next on the list" for a Marine detachment. That was about the time that the Soviet Union had collapsed and the Department was opening embassies in Central Asia, which also needed Marines. We never got any. Worse, for budgetary reasons, the Embassy decided to cut the RSO position in Milan. I almost lost it then, but managed to keep my cool and gather ammunition from all the authorities in Milan, which I used to pester the Embassy. I made friends with the Questore, the General in charge of the Carabinieri, the head of Customs, and all the regional military commanders. Everybody who had anything to do with police and security became a close friend.

I also ran periodic drills. I made sure that the entire staff didn't go for espresso at the same time. We were inspected again by security teams from several agencies, and were declared vulnerable, but the Consulate is still there. We pushed the city to close a short street on one side of the building, but the authorities refused. They eventually diverted traffic away from that side during working hours, and today it is finally closed. It took that long. But the other street is a major artery, so there is no way to close it. That sidewalk is lined with bollards, parking is banned, and police are stationed there around the clock. That was probably the best we could expect. Then we installed a very fancy electronic security system. It was a lock-and-leave system for awhile, but then we kept an American officer in the building around the clock. Italian guards were always there too, in shifts, so we were about as well taken care of as we could be at that point.

I kept traveling. After I learned that the district included almost half of Italy's 20 regions, and 48 of its 102 provinces, I knew it was my job to visit every one. It took three years, but I made it to all of them, which paid off in many ways. I mentioned earlier Riccardo Illy, the Mayor of Trieste. At first, he was opposed to the idea of American nuclear-powered vessel calls at Trieste. But he is a businessmathe biggest coffee importer in Italand understood that his business would improve with more ship visits. Bosnia was heating up, so there was a real need for port visits in Trieste. After I pointed out that Venice was getting all the business, he realized what was at stake and changed his opinion. But we didn't achieve the goal, for reasons I mentioned earlier.

I got to know Enzo Ghigo, the President of the Piemonte Region and Valentino Castellani, the Mayor of Torino. My entrï¿½ was helped in part by the arrival of two massive, simultaneous CODELs, made up of 65 Senators and Representatives at an NAC meetinthat's the NATO parliamentarians counciin Torino. The ranking members included Nancy Pelosi and a Senator whose birthday was celebrated. Was it Jesse Helms? We had no money to support the CODEL, but got permission from H, the Congressional Affairs Bureau, to put the arm on the Congress for funding our support, and got it. I sent two officers and four FSNs over from Milan, and things started off well. But when I got there, a Representative, who shall remain nameless, was complaining about the service. She wanted to go to a hairdresser, and was upset when she couldn't get a car to take her. The hairdresser was half a block away. When it was suggested that she walk, she retorted, "I want a car. I get a car everywhere I go." She eventually got her way. I pointed out to the members who would listen that, if they quit slashing our budget, we could support them in the way they preferred, or better. Pelosi in particular heard me and chastised some of the others for complaining. Ambassador Bartholomew didn't come. I told the delegation that he couldn't come because he had no budget for such a trip, and that I was there because I jumped in a car and paid for the gas myself. Most of them did not seem impressed.

Since I'm on the subjeca favorite among FSOwe had some other interesting CODELs. One of the mosI was going to say "humorous," but maybe that's not the right worwas Representative Henry Hyde of Illinois. He wanted to go to Venice, though the official reason for the trip was to inspect the airbase at Aviano. Hyde didn't want to stay at Aviano because Aviano ain't Venice, to put it mildly. He didn't like the quarters reserved for him, although they were pleasant general officer quarters. When he said he wanted to stay in Venice, all the others on his CODEL agreed they wanted the same. So the Air Force flew him into Aviano, and helicoptered him to Venice. Then Chairman Hyde said he wanted a car solely designated for himself. The others could share another car. We sent back a message asking them to tell the Congressman he couldn't have a car because there are no cars in Venice. The Department sent back a message saying Hyde didn't believe that, and neither did his staff. We had a hard time convincing them that Venetians don't run around in cars. The upshot was that we had to put some of the CODEL about 30 miles away in Padua because there were no hotel rooms available in Venice. One evening, Hyde decided to go to a restaurant on the other side of St. Mark's Square from his hotel. He said he couldn't walk from the hotel to the restaurant because it was too far, so we hired a water taxi. The control officer almost lost him. I don't know if you've seen him but he's big, and weighs a lot. Fortunately the control officer was strong, or he would have lost Mr. Hyde in the drink. But he couldn't walk very fast to the water taxi, and there was another Congressman yelling at the control officer by cellular phone, asking where "his" boat was. When the control officer tried to explain that the Chairman was using it, he said, "I don't care. Get me another boat." It was that kind of trip. You've seen your share.

Q: Congressman Hyde led the attempt to impeach the President but was unsuccessful in convicting him, impeach the President on moral grounds, I guess, and he was also renowned for having fathered a child out of wedlock when he was young lad of 43. This gives a little idea of Congressman Hyde.

GRIFFIN: Our friend Chuck Robb also showed up in Milan.

Q: Senator from Virginia.

GRIFFIN: He was only there for one night, and left early the next day. I told him he should see something in the city before leaving, in particular Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper." I could have had it opened although it was closed that day. The other must-see site was the Duomo, the big gothic cathedral. The Senator said there was not enough time for the "Last Supper," but agreed to drive by the Duomo, if it was on the way. We did, and he was bowled over, and got out of the car to take a picture. Fortunately, my driver noticed one of the usual scams underway. The piazza around the Duomo is usually full of people, including some small children usually referred to as gypsies. They approach their marks with a newspaper, while little hands underneath go into your pockets. They snatched Robb's wallet, but the driver managed to nab the kid and got it back, and we shooed them off.

I had a rather different experience with Representative Paul McHale, a Democrat from Pennsylvania. He was on his way back from Bosnia, and wanted to know more about our military presence in northern Italy. He was on the Armed Services Committee, and had been to the base at Aviano, but wanted my take on it. We went out to dinner, and had a long, very interesting conversation, in which we discussed staffing, troop deployment, our overall posture in the Balkans, our Bosnia policy, and related issues. He said he was frustrated by the attitude of the White House staff. They were having problems on the Hill, but he said that, if they asked the members the right way, he, for one would probably help them out. He said he had no policy disagreements with the President, and thought they could agree on most of the issues we had discussed. I reported all that, as I was supposed to do, and did so very accurately.

Unfortunately, I made two errors. One, I sent it to several addressees I knew would be interested, such as CINCEUthe Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Forces in Europand some other military commands. Second, I quoted McHale as saying he could do what the White House wanted. That was the line that set it off. Somebody showed him my message, and he went ballistic. He called the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs in H and told her I should be fired.

At about that same time, I was hosting our Fourth of July celebration at the Castello Sforzesco. (We never held it on the 4th, by the way, because that would have conflicted with the Ambassador's party, and many of my guests were also invited to his in Rome.) As I was about to walk onto the stage to speak, one of my staff shoved a cell phone at me, saying, "The DCM has to talk to you." I said, "Tell him I'll call him back." He said, "No, he said right this minute!" I got an earful from Jim Cunningham, the DCM, who told me that Congressman McHale was going to have the Department's budget sliced unless I called him in the next five minutes and apologized. The cell phone was dying fast, but I managed to call Washington, and reached a secretary who said, "He's not here." I left my name and asked him to call back. Then I called the Assistant Secretary in H, who acknowledged that she had heard about McHale's reaction, vaguely, and had read my telegram with interest. I argued that there was nothing in the telegram that the Congressman should object to, except my quote from him saying he would do what the White House asked him to do. I said that's what he told me, so I reported it. She said she understood. She had seen nothing objectionable in my telegram, but McHale wanted an apology. I said I had tried, but was told he was out. On the other hand, she was there in his time zone. I asked her to call McHale and say I had tried to call him, and would try again. She set it up, and later I had a lonand not unpleasanconversation with him. After he reminded me three times about the powers that reside in the Congress and do not reside in the White House, and I had apologized for putting him on the spot, he said, "Actually that was quite a good report." Then he added, "But you shouldn't have sent it all over the place." I'm sorry he's no longer in Congress, because he was one Member who thought carefully about issues and how he approached them.

We had a Presidential visit too, Clinton on his way back from Bosnia. He was supposed to land at Aviano on his way to Bosnia, so I went over to the airbase to ensure that all went well. This was in the time of Foglietta.

Q: Foglietta being...?

GRIFFIN: Tom Foglietta, our new Ambassador in Rome. I went to Aviano, where the U.S. base commander put me up. The weather was rotten. The Ambassador got to Venice by commercial air, went to a hotel, and checked in with me by phone. When he heard that Air Force One might not land at Aviano because of the weather, he said he was going to stay in Venice. There is a lot of fog in the Veneto at that time of year. The President and his entourage on Air Force One had landed in Germany, where they switched to a smaller plane that could land in Bosnia. But as Foglietta went off to dinner with some friends, everything changed. Air Force One and its backup flew to Aviano to be closer to the President's party. It was touch-and-go for awhile, but they brought it in. If you have experienced a White House visit lately, you know the President travels with two 747s. The second carries the limousines, back-up crews, guns, the press pooyou name it. No one was sure the smaller plane could return to Aviano, but Air Force One was there if it did. It could always return to Germany if the other plane headed there. As all that was going on, the Wing Commander and I slipped over to his deputy's house for a party, remaining in touch with the Aviano tower. After one sip of beer, we were told everything was on again, so we went running back. I tried to call the Ambassador, who didn't answer. While we were waiting for the plane to land, my wife asked a driver why the presidential limousine was sitting there with its motor running. He said in case the President wants to ride from one plane to another. She was astonished, noting that it was maybe 200 feet from one plane to the other. She was told that was normal, as there might be terrorists around. She looked around and couldn't see anything but fog.

The plane landed, and disgorged Secretary Madeleine Albright, Bob Dole, and dozens of others. They were all shuffled off to various other planes going to different destinations. Finally the President, Mrs. Clinton, and Chelsea debarked. We had brief chat with them, during which I made an excuse for the Ambassador. The President didn't seem interested. When it was time to go, he started walking to Air Force One, talking to one of the generals. Mrs. Clinton took my arm to make conversation, as we all watched the driver steer the limousine to the other plane. Later, the Ambassador asked me why I didn't let him know the President had come. I described the whole scene to him, noting that he couldn't have gotten there anyway from Venice. I asked him why he didn't come to Aviano as I had, instead of hanging around Venice. He said, "I wanted to eat."

As you surely were in Naples as well, we were involved in a lot of cultural eventgood ones. Italy claims to have three-quarters of the world's cultural artifacts, and won't let any of them go. Since our apartment was two blocks away from La Scala, we went there a lot. Before my time, the Mayor of Milan would invite selected ambassadors in Rome to come to the opening night, which is always on December 7th. The selection for the past ten years or so had always included the American Ambassador and, more often than not, the French and the German. Normally, their Milan consuls were also invited. My first year, Ambassador Bartholomew was invited, but diplomatic invitees were cut to five ambassadors, and no consuls. The stated excuse was to open it up to more local luminaries. That set off the Dean of the Consular Corps, who mounted a campaign on behalf of the Corps. He demanded three seats for consuls, with the recipients to be decided by the Corps. The Mayor's office stalled, not liking the idea. I recalled that the Dean had told me I had more clout than the others, and went to see the Mayor. I said I must have a ticket because my Ambassador was coming. He agreed to make an exception for me. After that, I was invited every year. It was a mixed blessing, to put it mildly. My first time with Ambassador Bartholomew was fine. The last time, with Ambassador Foglietta was a disaster from start to finish, but I'll come back to that in a minute.

Meanwhile, the keepers of La Scala decided it needed a new stage, saying its equipment was at least 100 years old. That was a myth. Some parts of it were, but the theater was bombed during the Second World War and had to be rebuilt, so most of it was maybe 50 years old, not 100. But to accomplish it all, the performers had to movand have done sout of the building for several years, and the city needed to raise money. Some smart cookie realized that Americans have a lot of money, so they worked on the Washington Opera Society and the New York Opera Society, and put together something called the Friends of La Scala. That was a set of individuals who were invited to opening night when they paid $10,000 a head. It was quite a list, and because of my job, we met many of them. They included Jim Kimsey, the founder and CEO Emeritus of AOL; Lillian Vernon, the mail-order queen; John Kennedy and his wife, before they died; Lucky Roosevelt, who sort of runs the Washington Opera...

Q: Selwa Roosevelt.

GRIFFIN: ?and who used to be Chief of Protocol. Around the opening night, there would also be dinners for the high rollers in private homes all over Milan. We were invited to those as well.

We went to many operas outside of Milan. Once, we went to Parma for the 100th anniversary of the first performance of Puccini's La Boheme. The Prefect of Parma invited us to be his guests on the opening night, so we sat in the royal box. It was a black-tie event, of course, and I had on some brand-new Gucci shoes. It started snowing about an hour before the performance, and by the time we got to the entrance, the snow was about a foot deep. That was the end of those shoes. If you know the opera, it has a snow scene in it, so it fit in nicely. We also went to its 100th anniversary in Torino, where it was originally performed, in the beautifully reconstructed opera house. We often took guests to operas at the Arena in Verona; usually something like Aida or Carmen, with casts of animals and throngs of people. It often rains on those performances, so there is sometimes only one acif thabecause the musicians will not allow their instruments to get wet.

We also hosted some musical evenings in our residence. There were always American musicians visiting Italy who, if contacted, would come put on a little performance in return for a good dinner. One of the best for us was pianist John Bayless, who was a mutual friend of an American opera singer. Our packed audience thought he was one of the best they had ever heard.

There were many other interesting visitors, such as Roger Enloe and Rick Munger. Maybe you have heard about the huge Leonardo's Horse statue. According to legend, Leonardo da Vinci was commissioned by Ludovico il Moro Sforza, the Duke of Milan, to design a bronze equestrian statue, on which the Duke would be mounted. He drew sketches, including some of the horse without a rider. Then he carved a wooden model. But at about that time, the French invaded, the Duke fled, and so did Leonardo. The French used the model for target practice, which destroyed it, and the statue was never made. In the 1980s, United Airlines pilot Charles Dent saw Leonardo's sketches of the statue in the museum of the Castello. He thought they were stunning, and decided to commission the real thing and donate it to Italy. He began a campaign to have it fabricated in the U.S. and sent to Italy as a present from the people of the United States. (By the way, there is a statue of Christopher Columbus with a similar history in Genoa. It was originally on Ellis Island.) Dent began the process, but then he died, so his brother-in-law, Roger Enloe, and his former copilot, Rick Munger, kept it going. They came to see me out of frustration, saying they were getting nowhere with the culture officials in Milan and needed help. Their idea was to mount the statue in the main courtyard of the Castello Sforza, where Leonardo had meant it to be. I thought it was a good idea, so I checked them out, found nothing adverse, and agreed to help. I went with them to petition the Mayor, the culture mavens, and all the others who claim to control culture in Milan. Long story made short, approval was finally granted. But the culture officials wouldn't allow the statue to be put in the Castello because it was not an original Leonardo, and there was a debate as to which design was the one he meant to use. So the horse, which is 30 feet high, stands at a race track near Malpensa Airport. There was a big hand-over ceremony after I left, with Ambassador Foglietta and others present. The statue was fabricated at the Tallix Art Foundry in New York State, where the FDR Memorial here and several other famous works were created. There were endless debates about how to get it there. It was cast in segments, put together, finished, and then taken apart and shipped. The sponsors wanted to have a grand entrance, but couldn't figure out how to put it back together before getting to the gates of Milan, or how to transport it through the narrow streets after assembly. They investigated several options, including bringing it in by dirigible or barge up the Po River.

Another annual event was the US-Italy Council. It was created by Gianni Agnelli, the head of Fiat, and always includes the American Ambassador, the Italian Ambassador to the U.S., and the heads of major American and Italian corporations. It was one of Ambassador Bartholomew's favorite events, but Foglietta didn't like it. I was invited, thanks to Mike Calingaert, its Executive Director, and an old Foreign Service colleague. We were in Colombo together. After sending me the invitation, Mike heard that Reggie didn't want anyone else there from the U.S. Mission. I went anyway, and he left as soon as I arrived. That event was almost necessary to make good contacts, which I needesuch as Agnelli and Renato Ruggiero, who eventually became head of the WTO. The site of the Council meeting is Villa d'Este, one of the most famous hotels in the world, on the shores of Lake Como at Cernobbio. The owner and general manager hosts a July 4th party every year, since most of his guests are Americans. Every year, he asked me to come wave the flag and make a speech. That was another reason not to have our Consulate event on the Fourth of July, so I could do both. Many of our other visitors, such as the Clintons, George H. W. Bush, Henry Kissinger, Allen Greenspan, and Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer, provided us entrï¿½es to influential people in the region.

I am always asked if we went to all the fashion shows. The answer is no. I went to one or two, and very quickly decided that it was not my scene. Talk about sharp elbows and fist fights! Watching to see who gets in the front row at the shows is great, if you like to watch a brawl. I decreed that if someone had to represent American interests there, it would be a commercial officer, not me. The only one we attended more than once was staged by Raffaella Curiel, who's not well known in this country, but should be. Her clothes are things women can actually wear, not the outrï¿½ things that make the front pages of fashion magazines.

Back to the subject of law enforcement, I continued to work with Peter Eigen, and his Transparency International organization. We supported the famous prosecutors in Milan, known as the Mane Pulite, or Clean Hands. They were successfully uncovering corruption in government, nailing people, taking them to court, and even to jail. Their targets often were big names, including the current Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi. For that reason, the prosecutors were under constant attack in reaction. USIS put some money on them, sending almost all of them to the U.S. to consult with other prosecutors and judges, and for training courses. We brought American prosecutors to Italy, including, before my time, Rudy Giuliani from New York, as well as some Supreme Court Justices who gave lectures. It was an excellent program, with measurable results. That and the Fulbright program are the best things that USIS used to do.

Other agencies at post were also helpful in nailing crooks. This morning I got a call from a friend of mine who wanted to know something about the Nigerian market. I still pay some attention to it. It reminded me of a conversation with the British Consul General in Milan. He had served in Nigeria as I had, but wasn't aware of the most recent scams. He seemed amazed when I told him our Secret Service office spent much of its time working Nigerian scams. Their other big role was to seize counterfeit American bills printed in northern Italy. We quickly realized that each of us had information the other could use, so we both sought permission to formalize an exchange. Both of us got permission, so we instituted an information swap with the British, and found some of theirs very good. The result was that we both nailed some crooks.

Q: On the subject of crime, what about both indigenous and extraterritorial sort of terrorist groups, Primarenia, the Red Brigade, and then other ones?

GRIFFIN: We had a formal exchange of information with the Italians on several levels. One of the advantages of our type of Fourth of July party, for example, was that the DEA could invite, say, 50 of the people they worked with the closest. They would be of all ranknot just generals, but the sergeants and detectives they worked with every day. There was a good exchange of intelligence at every level, by every agency in the Consulate. I kept track of it all, not just for security purposes, but also for the possibility of things of higher level interest. If a topic or issuwas of sufficient import, I would call on the Questore or one of the other top officials to discuss it. After our bomb scare, I went to see everyone I could think of. They saw how serious it was and afterwards, on their own initiative, if they heard something that might affect us, they would let me know quickly.

Now, the Al Qaeda crowI don't think they called themselves that in my daat the Islamic Cultural Center was watched very closely by the Italians. The Red Bridges theoretically had been crushed, but there was still a cell that the authorities knew about. They watched other groups, some of which were just criminal gangof less interest to uand lumped them into two types. They called them AlbanesAlbanianor MarochinMoroccanbecause their skins were dark. I don't think they necessarily were all Albanians or Moroccans; they could have been Indians. Some of them were trafficking in people. Not just women, but men too, as slaves. Illegal immigration was rampant, and when the EU opened its internal borders, the problem became more serious. That concerned the French and the Swiss particularly because they figured that almost anybody could get into Italy, so if that border was wide open, they had lost control. Then there were the Russian Mafiosi, Taiwanese criminals, and you name iterrorists and bad guys of all stripes. If you drove out of the city on a back roanot an Autostradwithin three blocks of the last apartment building, there would be women in very short skirts standing by the side of the road. Most of them were black, apparently from Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

One of the things I stressed to the American military commanders was the need to be precise when dealing with Italians. If they always treated Italy as a sovereign country and asked for permission before flying an airplane into an airport, or pulling a ship into a harbor, they would have much better cooperation. It would induce the Italians to share more information and be helpful on security. That paid off every time we had a ship visit in Venice, or Genoa, or Trieste. The ship would be visited by the Carabinieri or someone from the Questura, with up-to-date intelligence about potential threats, because they too were worried about things like what happened in Yemen to the USS Cole.

Q: It was a destroyer that was hit by several suicide bombers in a small boat.

GRIFFIN: I'm sure you had the same thing in Naples.

Q: It wasn't of that intensity.

GRIFFIN: Since Italian Naval Headquarters in La Spezia was also part of our district, they coordinated with us and would send out patrol boats each time we had a big ship come into port. So I was religious about making calls on the Questore and the prefect everywhere I went. I never missed them, because they were the ones on whom we depended for our own protection and good intelligence.

Q: On the military side, were you there when that, I think, Marine Corps plane...?

GRIFFIN: I'll come to that. But first, back to visiting businessmen. One in particular irked me. He arrived shortly after Kathy Black, the head of Hearst Publications, who chaired a big worldwide convention of all her editors in Milan. And after good visits by Bill Gates and Lee Iacocca. George Ruffner, our chief Commercial Officer, rather breathlessly told me another big businessman from Washington was coming. He wanted me to host a reception at the Four Seasons Hotel, for which he would pay. I asked who it was, and George said it was Michael Saylor. I asked "Who's he?" Ruffner looked at me as if I were dense, and said Saylor was the Chairman and CEO of Micro Strategy. Today I've heard of Michael Saylor as he is featured in the papers for the near collapse of his company. But then he was on top of it, supposedly making lots of money.

Q: He's in the dot-com business, wasn't he?

GRIFFIN: That's right. My wife took one look at him and said, "That's a dot-commoner." There was something fishy about him. For whatever reason, we didn't meet before the party. Anyway, this kid wandered up and, without saying "hello," asked me when the Mayor and the Prime Minister were coming. I replied that I doubted he would see either of them there. He looked incredulous, and said he had issued specific instructions. It was why he came and was having the party. He said, "I need to meet those people. They must come see me. You were supposed to arrange it." I said, "Look, I never heard of you before. I don't think that they, who've never heard of you either, would show up, even if both of us invited them, as I'm sure we did. They're busy elsewhere." He was furious, turned on his heel, and walked away. He told his Indian Vice Chairman to talk to me. I started to explain patiently that neither Gates nor Iacocca automatically saw those politicians, but then I got fed up, and left. Saylor had bad vibe\l'll put it that way.

On to other things. I tried to help further the negotiations for the nuclear test ban treaty. There was a crucial meeting in Geneva, to which the Indian Representative was Arundati Ghosh, an old friend from Calcutta days. My wife and I had gone with some other friends for a weekend in Switzerland, an easy drive from Milan. The weather was nice, so I called ChukkArundati's nicknamin Geneva and asked her to join us. I had been reading about the conference in the newspapers and suspected that she might not be in full agreement with her Government, though she would try to reach agreement with the other delegations. She said she needed a respite, and agreed to come for the day. I called the head of our delegation in Geneva and explained the situation, asking for some talking points if he thought I could help. He said he thought she was reasonable but was having a tough time with her own government. If I could give her a bit of a push, he would be grateful. He sent me the talking points, which I used, and she seemed interested. But in the end, any agreement was shot downot by the Indians, but by Washington, which insisted on saying, "Do as I say." The Indians replied in kind.

Now, about Tom Foglietta. He was a Congressman from the First District of Pennsylvania, in South Philadelphia. I first saw him in Korea. Earlier I mentioned the return to Seoul of Kim Dae Jung, who had been in exile at Harvard. He was accompanied by former Assistant Secretary Pat Derian and several others, including Foglietta, who was beaten up by police at the airport. Before the 1994 elections, the Democratic Party concluded that Foglietta could not be re-elected because the Republicans were putting up a very charismatic and popular black candidate against him, and the pollsters foresaw a Foglietta loss. He was asked to step aside in favor of a young black candidate, but at first refused. Asked what it would take to change his mind, he said he wanted to be Ambassador to Italy. A deal was struck, and he got the job. As you said, it was an Italo-American coming home to show off. The sad part was that he didn't speak Italian. He spoke a few words of Calabrese.

Q: It's sort of like sending somebody to the United States who speaks maybe at best not-very-fluent hillbilly.

GRIFFIN: Soon after he arrived, I informed Foglietta that he could have a ticket to the opening night of La Scala. They weren't going to issue one to the American Ambassador that year until they saw what manner of fish he was. But I had talked the Mayor into giving me one extra ticket. The Ambassador leapt at it, but insisted on bringing along a lady friend from Philadelphia. (He has never been married. He brought two sisters with him to Rome. They never went out, and just stayed in Villa Taverna the whole time, as far as I know.) His political- appointee staff aide and his gay partner also moved into Villa Taverna. Foglietta wanted tickets for all of them, but I told him it was impossible. I thought I could get two and maybe twist the Mayor's arm again for the staff aide, but that was it. In the end, I managed to get only two tickets. I put all four of them in a good hotel, though not the one Foglietta wanted, as it was jammed with other VIPs. At least he got a nice suite for a good price.

I warned the Ambassador on the way in from the airport that they must be at La Scala ahead of time because they lock the doors at eight o'clock on the dot. I stressed that no one would be allowed to enter once the performance was underway. At seven thirty, my wife and I were at the hotel to escort them. We had two cars and a police escort. First, the staff aide appeared, badly dressed. He had managed to get a standing-room ticket in the rafters. I reminded him that it was black tie, and said some men would wear white tie and tails. He said, "I don't have any." I let it go. Then the Ambassador appeared, not in black tie either, but in a strange sort of jacket. We started to head for the car, but he told us to wait because his friend wasn't ready. I reminded him of the deadline, noting that, to be sure, we only had five minutes. He told my wife that his friend had a run in her stockings, and would not go that way. So we had a frantic pantyhose search. Fortunately my security officer was a young Italian woman who knew how to run and where to find things, and managed, in the space of literally 10 minutes, to get what was needed. By that time it was about two minutes to eight, and we were 20 blocks from La Scala in very heavy traffic, as the cops performed miracles. At his insistence when they checked in to the hotel, I gave the Ambassador his ticket, his friend's ticket, and a program. When we were three blocks away from the opera house, I suggested that they get their tickets out because it would be a rush at the door. He said, "Ticket? I don't have any ticket."

I radioed the Admin officer, who was in a follow-car behind us, to return to the hotel for the tickets, though the Ambassador had no idea where he left them. We got to La Scala just as the outside doors were closing. I raced up to the fellow shutting the door, said I was the American Consul General, with the American Ambassador, who had seats as guests of the Mayor, but he didn't have tickets. What were we to do? He let us all in.

Q: To arrange things.

GRIFFIN: No, they showed us to our assigned box. Then Foglietta kept getting up to go to the bathroom. It's not supposed to be done in the middle of a performance at La Scala, but I think he had an incontinence problem. He didn't like formal dinners, but enjoyed restaurants. It was difficult. The staff in Rome said he wouldn't come to his own dinners. He would invite people to dinner, and sometimes show up, sometimes not. If he did appear, he often stayed five minutes and left. They were tearing their hair out, and didn't know what to do about it. We all soon learned that he didn't ever want to do what you wanted him to do. He had his own agenda in his head, and didn't want it interfered with. He didn't like to meet many people at once.

During intermission, we suggested going to the lobby to see the exhibits and to meet some people. It's usually quite a scene as all the celebrities and famous faces mug while TV cameras roll. The Ambassador declined. We went out anyway and chatted first with John Kennedy and his wife, and then several others, enjoying ourselves. As we started back to the bol think my wife went in and told the lady friend that John Kennedy was therFoglietta came running out, pushing people out of the way. He went straight to Kennedy and said, "I'm Tom Foglietta. I was close to your father." Kennedy was very polite about it, but quickly returned to his box as the lights dimmed.

The next day we took them to Pavia, to see its stunning Charter House and monastery. Foglietta liked it, sort of. On the way back to Milan, he said he wanted to see the Duomo. I suggested that it would be better to wait til the next day when we had a guide ready, and do it properly. No, he wanted to do it right then. I radioed the police escort in front of us to alert them that we were going to stop at the Duomo. We screeched to a stop, blue lights flashing, and Foglietta jumped out. He went up to a crowd of people calling, "Io sono ambassador Americano." I reminded the staff aide that we had a police escort because of intelligence saying the American Ambassador was under threat. I didn't think his actions were clever, and asked the aide to speak to him. He said, "I can't talk to him. He's always like that."

Q: Well, there's a certain thing. You can sort of sit back and nature takes its course and you...

GRIFFIN: If something bad had happened, it would have been my fault, with all that entails. Anyway, we got through the visit and he went back to Rome. A few months later, in February, just as we returned from a trip, I found an urgent message from my deputy, Desiree Milliken. A U.S. Marine Corps fighter-bomber had crashed into a cable car at a place called Cavalese in the Alps, killing 20 people. The Italians were in a rage.

Q: It had cut the cable and the cable car fell down. It was awful.

GRIFFIN: Desiree, who is fast off the mark, learned that the Ambassador was at a ski resort not far from the crash site. He was headed back to Rome, but she managed to reach him by cell phone while he was still in the Alps. To his credit, he turned around and went right to the site at Cavalese. A camera crew from RAI-TV, the Italian state television network, was there, and pictured him kneeling in the snow and praying. He turned to the camera and apologized for the United States. It was all shown on national TV. If he hadn't done that, things would have been much worse.

He didn't drive to Cavalese, which would have taken too long. Instead, on my advice he went to a nearby Italian Air Force base. I first called Aviano Air Force base, but the American Commander said they had no helicopters. Then I called our Army General in Vicenza, but he said all his helicopters were grounded, as they were unsafe, and he would not put the American Ambassador on one. So all three of us worked on the chief of the Italian Air Force, who agreed to send one of his helicopters, which got Foglietta up there and back down the mountain in good time. We used the same arrangement to take up a Congressional delegation led by Bill Young of Florida, who was Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

The Marine Corps was in utter denial from Day One. Their mantra was, "It was not our fault." The pilot claimed he did nothing wrong, which was a lie. The copilot had incinerated a videotape he made of that flight as soon as they returned to Aviano. I'm convinced they were hot-dogginroaring around at treetop level through valleys, frightening cattle and people. I doubt that they saw the cable across the gorge at Cavalese. They clipped it with their tail, and somehow kept the plane flying. It cut the thick cable like a razor blade. Twenty people died, mostly Poles and Germans. There were only two Italianthe driver and someone else.

So we had a serious problem on our hands. It came at a time when the Status of Forces Agreement was being renegotiated, and that incident did not help our case. The Marines kept saying things I didn't want to hear. The U.S. Commander at Aviano, where the plane was based, was an Air Force brigadier. He told me he could get nowhere with the Marine Corps or its pilots, whom he had grounded while an investigation took place. The investigation was led by Marine General Peter Pace, who went on to become Commandant of the Marine Corps. In the end, the investigators couldn't decide exactly what happened, but they did say they thought the pilots were guilty. So there was a court martial, staffed by Marines, who let them off the hook. The Italians were flabbergasted. I told some of them that military justice is an oxymoron.

One of the issues was compensation, on which I tried to help, because my inquiries in Cavalese convinced me that the community needed it. To get a process moving, I put together a team of American business people. We found that the first concern of the Italianafter the deaths, which wasn't their main concern because they weren't Italiawas the loss of their money machine. The ski lift was what brought people to Cavalese to spend money. They seemed uncertain as to what to do. (I discovered much later that a previous ski lift collapsed years earlier and killed even more people, but since that was their fault, they didn't talk about it.) I asked our business people to help Cavalese find other ways to earn money until the ski lift was repaired, or to raise enough money to help them rebuild it quickly. They agreed, and a coalition got moving, led by the CEO of Schering Plough, who was an ex-Marine, and very unhappy about the way the Marines were behaving. He flew to the States and went to express his feelings to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, whom he knew. He told me he argued for at least a court martial for the air crew and their commander, which is what eventually happened.

Ambassador Foglietta also tried to get the Marines to bring the pilots to justice. But we all ran into strong disagreement at the Pentagon, where we were told we just didn't understand. They argued that handing out compensation would set a bad precedent. Something like the attitude today, where the USG won't let the International Court of Justice try any American soldier who might go out and do a My Lai somewhere. They got very sticky, insisting that under NATO rules, the Italians had to pay any compensation. That was true, so we knew it was going to be a long time in coming. Our colleagues at the Embassy went to work on political leaders in Parliament, as I did on leaders at the regional and provincial levels. We did raise some money, and were about to hand out some of it, when we learned that the Mayor of Cavalese and a friend of his had other plans for it. Then we became extremely careful. The last I heard, the ski lift was rebuilt in a slightly different location, which allows it to go much lower than before, in case another Marine aircraft comes along. That was about the best we could do in the circumstances. I don't know if people ever got full compensation.

Q: Probably not. I was in Naples when we had a major earthquake down there. This was 1980, and it's my understanding there are people still living in temporary housing.

GRIFFIN: I wouldn't be surprised.

Q: Before we leave Milano, I would like to ask you how was Berlusconi seen from your perspective and also the Northern Alliance and the politics of that area. And two other things: one is on Italian business. Did you find that it was similar to the oriental, sort of self-sealing to keep other people out? And the last one is: Did you have any insight on the Bosnian activities, or was it Kosovo at that time?

GRIFFIN: The simple answer to the latter is that I put the Consulate on the telegraphic addressee list of some military and State reporting for Bosnia, but I didn't get into the thick of it. I went to military intelligence headquarters in both Aviano and Verona, and got briefed on what they were doing. It was fascinating, with real-time views of bombing missions and so forth. But I didn't have time to pay attention to it daily, though I tried for awhile. I thought I should know the basics because I was being asked why we were there. My usual response to the Italians was, "Well, why are you there?"

Q: Okay, having served in the Orient and other places, about Italian business and how open were they to American initiatives.

GRIFFIN: Good question.

Q: Let's talk first about the politics of the north. We're looking at megaterms. Italian politics is sort of broken; things have broken up. There's no longer the CDU trouncing the communists but changing the same people over and over again for about 30 or 40 years. How is this change working as far as Berlusconi and the Northern League and all this? How was this playing out during your time up in Milan?

GRIFFIN: Well, Italian politics is still something of a revolving door, and today Mr. Berlusconi is back in the job, after being ousted a couple of times. When I first got to Milan, his government had collapsed. Most of the time I was there, Romano Prodi was Prime Minister. He led a leftist coalition government, which didn't last either. Most northern Italianespecially the Milanese, but also the Torinese, the Venetians and the Veronesconsider themselves more important than people further south, and say so publicly. They think they're far more clever, and know they make more money. It's one of their political rallying cries. They say, "We pay all the taxes, then all our money goes south and disappears into the black hole of the Mezzogiorno." Having created a giant television network, having broken the monopoly of RARadio Italiana, radio and TBerlusconi fills the airways with glorious views of himself, which helps him get elected. He appears on regular programs on his channels, all of which are based in Milan.

There is a sort of coalition of very big businessmen in the north. Most manufacturing is in the north. Not all of it, but certainly most of it. Berlusconi can get along with the uncrowned king of Italy, Gianni Agnelli, of Fiat. They don't share the same politics, but they certainly know each other and can get along. I got to know Umberto Bossi better than Berlusconi or Agnelli, partly because he needed allies and was willing to stoop to the level of Consul General much more quickly than Berlusconi. One of Bossi's lieutenants, a man named Fiorentini, was Mayor of Milan when I arrived. He's very personable; very much a back-slapping politician, and he wanted our cook. I wasn't about to give her up, but every time Fiorentini was invited to our apartment, he came. He loved her cooking. We made a running joke of it, saying he was trying to steal her, and that I was fighting back. Ketti knew that the American Consulate General was going to last longer than Fiorentini, no matter how many incumbents we had. She likes to work there.

Fiorentini was instrumental in getting Bossi and me together. But the first time he came to our place was to meet Ambassador Bartholomew. He seemed taken aback by Reggie's aggressive style. The Ambassador tried to get Bossi to say whether he had enough votes to play a major role again in Parliament. One of Bossi's platform planks is that the north can ignore Rome because it is unimportant. He talks loudly about separating the north off and forming a new country called Padania. It's an old name that supposedly came from the Po Valley, the alleged homeland of the Celts of northern Italy. One of Bossi's heroes, whom he talks about at length, was the main character in Braveheart, the movie that Mel Gibson made about Scottish nationalism.

Q: With William, was it, Douglas?

GRIFFIN: I guess so. Bossi had it on video and would watch the film at least once a week, to build up his spirits, I suppose. The Padania crowd talked about independence, and were quite strong in the sub-Alpine region north of Milan around some of the famous lakes. He's back in Parliament again. He brought down Berlusconi in 1995 by walking out of the coalition. In their first meeting, Ambassador Bartholomew tried to press Bossi as to whether he would ever join another coalition with Berlusconi. He said sure, if things were right. The Ambassador thought Berlusconi would be foolish to join with Bossi again, and told him so. It didn't make much difference because they're once again in coalition in Rome. That's politics. I don't think the Padania movement is as strong today as it was when I was there, but Bossi certainly has enough votes to make a difference in Parliament. He will play national politics despite what he claims to think of the rest of Italy, and still be reelected. He makes a fetish of being very difficult to understand. He speaks a dialect of Milanese that is almost impossible for a non-native to comprehend. He certainly speaks Italian, but usually sticks to Milanese, saying Italian is a foreign language, and gets even more votes. That makes it difficult for me and other foreigners who don't speak the dialect to understand. He doesn't speak English.

Q: Obviously this is something you kept a watching brief on. Were there any elements to this that caused us disquiet other than the break-up of Italy?

GRIFFIN: That was, of course, the most important element. As a close NATO partner, and given what was going on to the east in Bosnia and Kosovo, our continued access to Italian military facilities was extremely important. So any talk of breaking up the country was not something we liked to hear. Every time we met I tried to reason with Bossi, asking how he could think of splitting Italy. He said he had nothing against NATO, but that independent Padania would provide bases too. He didn't listen to suggestions that such a course might lead to civil war or suppression of his movement. He asserted that he would win. He claimed to have a low opinion of the U.S., but he didn't hesitate to come to my functions, or to talk to me. At my last big Fourth of July reception at the Castello, I put him and Albertini, the new Mayor of Milan, next to each other at our VIP table. The Mayor was certainly not a particular friend of Bossi, and was a close ally of Berlusconi, but they got along just fine, and with all the other politicians who were there.

Q: This government sort of to the right that was going on, did this cause us any problems? Did we feel that there was an awful lot going on, corruption, influences...?

GRIFFIN: Well, I mentioned earlier that USIS had a program to assist the Clean Hands prosecutors in Milan. They were going after corruption after being instrumental in stopping some of the terrorism. They brought to trial and convicted several major figures in the Italian establishment, including some in the giant fashion industry. Armani and other big names were involved, as was Berlusconi and some Fiat executives, but Gianni Agnelli managed to dance away. USIS looked on this as a way to improve the health of the Italian political and economic system. It was a great program, and included not only the Clean Hands prosecutors in Milan, but others from Torino, Vicenza, Verona, Venice, Trieste, Pavia, and Genoa. I spent a lot of time with them, and introduced them to people from Transparency International in an effort to foster cleaner government and processes.

You asked about Italian business attitudes toward America. That's what I'm talking about right now. Many American businessmen complained about being asked for bribes as a prelude to business. When the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act came into force, they were prohibited from doing it, and they were tearing their hair. So I included some of them in meetings with the prosecutors and Transparency, as well as in some high-profile American businessmen who delivered that same message.

It was always a fight. We asked the American Chamber of Commerce to help us on the Italian side, both official and nonofficial, so Americans could market their goods more easily. That was of no interest to most of the members. When I tried to get the head of Westinghouse, who was an American, elected President, or at least Vice President of the Chamber, there was fierce resistance from the Italians, and he didn't make it.

Q: Let's say there's a contract put out by the government, say, to put up a new phone system or record system. How receptive were they?

GRIFFIN: It was a tough slog every time. The national telephone company is a miserable organization.

Q: If you want to make a long-distance call, people would say, "Well, I know somebody in the telephone company," you know, in order to help you make those long-distance calls.

GRIFFIN: But a new way was opened with the advent of cellular phones, which Italians call telefonini. That broke the back of the phone company, though we still had to use it for our office lines. Now, virtually every Italian has a cellular phone permanently attached to his or her ear, and they talk all the time. Of course, they need one hand free to gesticulate, or it makes no sense. Getting Italians to shut up is almost impossible. Some people in this country are annoyed when people use cell phones on a train or airplane. With the Italians, it's non-stop everywhere, including in church. But they aren't allowed in La Scala. The first time one rang during a performance at La Scala, Conductor Ricardo Muti stopped the orchestra, turned around and told its owner to leave, or he would end the performance. American cellular phone companies tried hard to break into the market, but the Italians crawled into bed with Phillips, Ericson and Nokia, and locked the door. We tried to help several U.S. companies, but the rules were set and carefully restricted by Rome.

Out chief Commercial Officer thought trade fairs were the best approach because we could get past the Government to the consumers. By paying a small fee, anyone could come in to see American wares. Milan is one of the top two or three trade center venues in the world. It is an enormous facility, which hosts trade fairs almost constantly, and the Americans come and go. Our primarily role was to help small business people; not General Motors and Kodak, though sometimes they came looking for help too. I always cut ribbons on opening day, to meet all the Americans and show them that we were there to help them. Our shop spent a lot of time setting up appointments for people seeking new markets in Italy, and it generally worked well. But when the big boys came, resistance became much stronger. It continues, but we're still trying. I wouldn't call it a closed shop, but the door is not wide open.

Q: Was the Communist Party of any consequence during the time you were there?

GRIFFIN: Some, but in the north it was flagging, and didn't amount to an awful lot, even in trade unions. It was big in Bologna and pretty firm in Tuscany, but elsewhere, no. I didn't pay attention to what it was doing in the south. Maybe you know.

Q: No, no, I hadn't spotted it.

GRIFFIN: They weren't that strong. The anarchists were just about as strong in Milan. They could make trouble for us, and did so. There were strong Northern League unions in the north, but not Communists.

Q: When you left there in '98, what?

GRIFFIN: Well, I wanted to stay for a fourth year, but the Department in its wisdom said no. I thought it would save them money. So, looking for what to do, I saw an opening for a senior inspector in Olthe Office of the Inspector Generaand applied for it. My inspection experience in Nairobi had soured me, so I wanted to understand the process better and perhaps have some influence over it. I was accepted, and signed on as a Senior Inspector. I hoped to be put in charge of a team right away, but that isn't the way it works. I arrived midway through the preparation process, and was made Deputy Leader of my first team, led by Dick Howland, who had been an Ambassador. He spent a good bit of his career in Indonesia, but he wasn't Ambassador there.

Q: I think Suriname.

GRIFFIN: Probably. As deputy leader, I was essentially the executive officer, and my primary function was to make sure everything worked properly. Howland had led other inspections, and was a very energetic and easy man to work with. In sequence, the posts I inspected were Cairo, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Lyon. Cairo at that time was our largest Foreign Service post. Dick helped me draft the work plan, which begins the process. In Cairo I managed the team and edited the final report. We divided responsibilities among the members, and I was given interagency relationships, political-military affairs, narcotics control, the mission performance plan, science and technology, the regional health unit, and equal opportunity matters. Ours was the first OIG inspection after the bombings of the Embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam, so I asked why we had no security inspectors on the team. Dick agreed, and made a pitch to the Inspector General, who concurred. The IG was Jacqueline Williams-Bridgers, a political appointee, who had worked in another IG office. We had four security inspectors added to our team of 15 people. Ms. Williams-Bridgers came to Cairo in the midst of the inspection to see how we were doing.

We were in Cairo for two months, working at a very fast pace. On our second day there, which happened to be a Friday and thus a weekend for the post, USIA inspector Bob LaGamma and I went out looking for a restaurant. We hadn't walked 200 yards when he tripped and fell, breaking his arm, and smashing his glasses and his nose. He was quite hefty, but I managed to get him up and back to the hotel. I called the Marine Guard and got a duty car to take us to a hospital, where we were told there were no surgeons because it was the weekend. I called the Marine again, who put me in touch with an Embassy doctor. He tracked down a renowned Egyptian orthopedic surgeon on holiday in Alexandria. He caught a plane and came back, fixed the arm and got Bob back in action. Two weeks later he was back on the job again, as his wife came out to help him recover.

The first thing I encountered in my probe of the post's equal opportunity program was an Embassy officer accused of discrimination by another employee, who had filed formal charges. I talked to all involved, checked with the DCM, and concluded that the officer had been accused wrongly. I conferred with the Department's Equal Opportunity Office, which had gathered more evidence. They agreed with me and threw out the case, so at least I helped one person. I inspected the Health Unit, which had a poor reputation. That was primarily because a couple of years earlier several people fell ill after pesticide was sprayed in Embassy apartments. One person died, and others were medevaced.

Q: Nancy Lewis, whom I knew - she was a babysitter for our kidwas the one who died from that.

GRIFFIN: So I took an especially careful look at the unit. I saw that they had fixed most problems pretty well, but there were others that needed attention. There were three RMOregional medical officerin Cairo, and they really were regional. They spent a good bit of their time at other posts, but tried to ensure that one of the three was in Cairo at all times. One was a general practitioner, another was a psychiatrist, and the third was an Air Force flight surgeon, who helped on the civilian side as well. The cooperation was good, especially when one of them had to drop everything and fly someplace else. They were even responsible for Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

In the Political-Military Section I discovered a pile of Blue Lantern cases that hadn't been touched. Those are requests for clearances to ship military equipment, to make sure it went to the right place, and that it was something Washington would approve for sale to Egypt. The Pol-Mil officer was on home leave, and when she returned I made sure she went to work and cleared the backlog. The Ambassador was Dan Kurtzer, who is now Ambassador to Israel, and was in NEA earlier with me. The DCM, Vince Battle, was amazing. He impressed us all the first day, as he took the entire inspection team through the post. That's how teams learn the rough geography of the post and meet the people they will inspect. We probably met 600 people that day. Battle knew the names and personal details about each one of them, with no prompting. It was a fantastic display of what a DCM can do, and he was clearly beloved by virtually everybody, Egyptians and Americans alike. He made our work easier because he understood it and facilitated it.

We had some fun with him, too. At lunch one day in the cafeteria I got a knife marked "Stainless Steel, Made in Pyongyang." I showed it to Vince, saying, "Obviously this post has been infiltrated by North Koreans. Where is the RSO? What are you going to do about it? This serious breach will have to go into our final report." He got on his knees, and begged for mercy. We did include it in our report, but made light of it.

Embassy Cairo is built to Inman standards, which means it's supposedly bombproof, has a large setback, and has windows so thick that you can't see through some of them. They're laminated, some three inches thick, and the Egyptian sun crinkles some of them. We judged the post to be basically secure. USAID had occupied a whole building across the street from the main compound which was unsafe at any speed, as Ralph Nader would say. It was mostly glass in narrow steel frames, with no setback. After the embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, AID demanded to be moved into the Embassy. That created a mess that you had to see to believe. The compound had offices to accommodate about 600 people, but there were close to 1,000 there when arrived. They were doubled up in tiny crawl spaces, and sitting in each other's laps in auditoriums. It was a confusing, but they were getting things done. On two sides of the Embassy, there is a row of offices in the outer wall. The offices there were considered to be less sensitive, and included a small shop, an auditorium, and some FAAgriculture Departmenoffices. But then the RSO ordered them vacated, fearing a bomb attack from the street. That triggered an argument, also involving our inspectors, who wondered where else that staff would go. There were Egyptian guards outside the walls 24 hours a day who kept traffic moving, prohibited parking, and could block off the streets, but that wasn't enough for some. In any case, one of our final recommendations was to reduce the staff. We understood what they were all doing, but security became more important, so some of them were sent elsewhere.

Ambassador Kurtzer complained to us during a round of Middle East negotiations at the Wye Plantation on the Eastern Shore of Maryland that the Department was not keeping area posts well informed. It was part of the Middle East Peace Process, and the Palestinians and the Israelis were both there, so he got queries from Egyptians every day. He asked the Department for continuing information, but got no answer. We heard a similar complaint from Dick Jones, the Ambassador in Amman, Jordan, so we stuck our noses into the equation. Dick Howland fired off a telegram saying it was crucial for ambassadors in the field to know more about what was going on. The communications got a little better, but not remarkably so.

Another thing we looked into was Y2K compliance, for which we had a special inspector on the team.

Q: You might explain what Y2K was.

GRIFFIN: The year 2000. At the time, many computers, especially in the government, had not been programmed to deal with the arrival of the year 2000. They had been manufactured with all dates set to begin with the year 19-something. The problem was recognized in 1998, when some genius suddenly realized that not all computers were going to die before 2000. That meant that lots of computers would not work properly unless they were fixed. Our Y2K inspector discovered that USAID had built a new water and sewer system in Cairo, a city of at least 15 million people. The entire system was controlled by a series of some 3 million electronic underground valves, each controlled by a computer chip, none of which was Y2K compliant. To their credit, they went to work, dug up every one of them, and replaced them, ignoring the discombobulation in the USAID offices. We didn't think that they could do it in time, because 3 million is a lot when they had to dig up streets. That was another reason for our informal recommendation to the Ambassador to send as many people as possible away on home leave, on official business or any other excuse he could find, in the last quarter of 1999. Thus when the calendar did roll over, if the water and sewer system shut down, there would be less people there with problems.

We also inspected the post in Alexandria even though it had been closed as a Consulate before we got there. There was a branch USIS post there, and the Branch PAO was given the job on the understanding that she would handle some State Department business. Some 6 FSNs, or local employees, in Alexandria were State Department people, mostly handling Embassy shipping, because that's where it all arrived. But the branch PAO apparently didn't consider it part of her job to monitor them, and things were slipping through cracks, so we issued a minor reprimand there and the situation improved.

In their final reports, inspectors not only point out things that are wrong, but also praise things that are unique or done well, and identify so-called best practices. In Cairo we found several of the latter. Interestingly, in our pre-inspection consultations, we were particularly dubious about one arrangement. I had seen it tried in India, Dick Howland had been a part of one elsewhere, and it didn't work in either case. The arrangement was a combined economic and political section under one counselor. The idea was to better organize their workload. In Cairo it was working very well, so we had to praise them.

They also had been quite innovative in emergencies. You may recall that a group of tourists, including some Americans, was shot up in Luxor. The post's response had been terrific. Because emergencies seemed to keep happening, they created a computer system that would generate faxes and e-mails to wardens around the country to alert people to impending dangers. It worked very well, in a country that isn't well known for computer abilities. They also had field backpacks stored in the Consular Section, with two-way radios, consular forms for deaths, passports and other consular necessities. They were ready to go, and worked beautifully. Thus, they could go to Luxor, where a lot of tourists were still going, at the drop of a hat. One weekend, some of us inspectors went there to check out the scene.

The CLO, or community liaison office, was big. It had to be for such a large post. It conducted an orientation course at least twice, and often three times a year. They called it a trade show. The DCM ran it, and showcased all the post organizations. There were about 30 agencies at the post. Each was asked to display its wares, to show newcomers what they did. The format wasn't everybody sitting in a big auditorium being lectured at. Instead, they had booths on the lawn and everyone walked around to visit them. It was well done, so we gave them good marks. Interagency cooperation was good, the Embassy was reasonably secure, and the team that ran it was doing an excellent job. They had some VIP visitors while we were there, whom they handled well. We couldn't really find many problems.

My next inspections in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were quite different. Again, naively, I hoped to be team leader, but it didn't happen. The IG made Tom Weston the leader. Neither of us had been an ambassador, which is one criterion for picking team leaders. When I asked about that, the OIG front office put out the word that Weston was about to be one. We went to Tel Aviv first. We stayed there a month, and another month in Jerusalem. In Tel Aviv we found some serious problems. I had met both Ambassador Ned Walker and DCM Richard Roth in NEA. They seemed to be focused entirely on political issues, and weren't paying much attention to post management. Worse, the Administrative Counselor was almost universally detested by people his rank and below. The Ambassador and DCM thought he was doing a marvelous job because he was doing a marvelous job of taking care of them, but he certainly wasn't doing a marvelous job of taking care of anybody else, and resentments were high. At first, I tried to convince him to change his tune. I told him about my own experience with inspectors when I had insisted that all was well and not everyone else agreed, but he wouldn't listen. So he drew pretty harsh comments from our admin inspectors, and was curtailed shortly after we left.

Relations between the Embassy at Tel Aviv and the Consulate General in Jerusalem are rarely easy. They reflect tensions in the society between Palestinians and Israelis. The Consulate General is independent and does not necessarily report to the Embassy, as it reports directly to the Department. But all administrative matters are the purview of the Embassy, which creates problems. The previous Consul General, Ed Abington, had been my colleague in the South Asia Bureau, and I talked to him before we went out. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary in INR at the time. He was almost apoplectic about the way the Embassy treated the Consulate. In Jerusalem, we found Consul General John Herbst doing his best to maintain better relations with the Ambassador and others in Tel Aviv. But there were still tensions and difficulties, and he wasn't much helped by his relatively new deputy, another officer I had known in NEA. He had allegedly become guilty of personal indiscretions, and didn't get high marks from the staff. Those problems were enough for us, and we didn't attempt to step into the politics of the Palestinian-Israel issue. It was not what we were there to do, though it was our function to ensure that the posts were addressing it. They were.

After a visit to Gaza, we recommended strongly that the a Consulate General office be opened in Gaza City. Technically, the Consul General is our representative to the Palestinian Authority. Yasser Arafat and company were headquartered in Gaza City at the time, so he needed to go there. The Ambassador has a flat in Jerusalem where he conducts business with Israelis. Congress has often proposed legislation forcing the movement of the Embassy to Jerusalem, which is the seat of the Israeli Government. As a matter of policy, the Department has always resisted it. The status of Jerusalem is divided, unclear, and unresolved, so it would create the wrong image and could create a bigger crisis. The Ambassador's very nice flat was renovated while we were there. On the other hand, the Consul General is stuck with day trips to Gaza. Mostly for security reasons, he generally doesn't stay there, though there is a decent hotel in Gaza City where he could stay. So, we thought he ought to have an office, but the Department rejected the idea.

Q: Do you think the Israelis have a hand in that...

GRIFFIN: Oh, yes, very much so.

Q: ...as far as the rejection?

GRIFFIN: Israelis told us that, if it were forced down their throats, they might live with it, but they opposed the idea, even though it's not supposed to be their territory. So, if they were objecting officially and strongly, the Department wasn't about to do it. It was too much of a burden.

The set-up at the Consulate is strange. There are two buildingone in West Jerusalem, and the other in East Jerusalem. The Consular Section that issues visas and passports is in the East, while the political and economic officers and others are in West Jerusalem in a rather historic building in front of the Consul General's residence, neither of which is safe. Both office buildings are smack on the street, as is the chancery in Tel Aviv, which has a street on one side and a public beach on another.

We again brought along security inspectors. My impression, not being a security expert, was that the situation was really bad. Our inspectors said it's not "really bad;" it's dangerous. They concluded that no U.S. Government facility in Tel Aviv met basic security requirements, and especially not the chancery. We stayed in a hotel that overlooked the chancery, and sitting on my balcony I could have lobbed a hand grenade in the window of the office in the Embassy where I worked. The post put the whole inspection team on the street side, I might add.

The USG facilities in Jerusalem were also severely dangerous, and we helped them find a new building which had a setback. It was under construction at the time, and I think the Department approved renting it. It would be much more secure for the Consular Section, and would have room for some of the people in the West Jerusalem building, which was very cramped for space. Neither post had thought of Y2K eventualities, so we gave them a complete education, and forced them to replace lots of computers, which got to be rather expensive.

It was also a time when the Department and the Congress were engaged in abolishing USIA and merging the agency with State. We saw that, not only had nothing been done to start the integration process, but that the PAO, the Ambassador and DCM were at loggerheads, getting absolutely nowhere. Morale was the pits in both posts, but USIS was trying to do important things. They had a good program to train Palestinian journalists, and Palestinian journalists are a rare breed indeed. They really had to start from scratch. They staged drama workshops on conflict resolution all over Israel, in the Occupied Territories, the West Bank, and Gaza, bringing in all kinds of people, including Jews, Orthodox and non, Christian and Muslim Arabs, Druses, and Russian and Ethiopian immigrants.

The Consular Section in Tel Aviv was very well run. It had good passport issuance facilities and a good e-mail warden notification system.

To try to get a better sense of Israeli realities, Tom Weston and I wangled an invitation, along with some of our military attachï¿½ staff, to an Israeli forward observation post. The Israelis had recently pulled their troops out of southern Lebanon, and the outpost was smack on that border next to one of the earliest kibbutzes. First we visited the kibbutz, had lunch there, and then went to the outpost, which was well armed and full of troops. It was regularly shelled by the Lebanese, or Syrian artillery. We had a little scare while we were there. We were herded into a bomb shelter as something whizzed overhead, but nothing hit the post.

We also had a very interesting time in Gaza. We visited a fruit and vegetable processing facility that was directly on the border with Israel. The Palestinians aren't allowed to export directly. They have to go through Israel to export their produce, so there were Israeli trucks on one side loading Palestinian produce from the other. We also took a side trip to Jordan. An officer at Embassy Amman monitored Palestinian and other Middle Eastern activities, so we talked to her and got her view of that side of things.

Q: Did you get any feel for the problem of the Israeli lobby influence weighing on our Embassy in Tel Aviv?

GRIFFIN: Oh, sure. It's something everybody talks about. We were introduced to lots of Israelis Tel Aviv, and Palestinians in Jerusalem. The posts tried to introduce us to a cross-section of their contacts, and it was instantly apparent that not all Israelis agree with each other. Certainly not in Tel Aviv, especially those we met in restaurants, shops, and on the beach. Our hotel rooms were equipped with stoves and fridges, so we went shopping in the local markets, which was very interesting. The produce was good. But that part of town was home to many immigrants from Russian, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere. It was also clear that that part of town was very secular. The Orthodox Jews were mostly in and around Jerusalem, with very few in Tel Aviv, which seems like a very pragmatic place. We didn't hear much about religion from anybody there, but we certainly did in Jerusalem, where differences between religions are intense. It is a city where anyone who wants to understand the situation should go, because the tensions are on the surface and they are real. It's amazing that they get along as well as they dnot just Jews and Muslims, but others, such as Christians. Scores of American Christians, especially fundamentalists and charismatics, lead parades around Jerusalem, retracing the 12 Stations of the Cross and visiting the various churches. At the biggest church there's a huge struggle underway among five Christian sects, each of which claims to own the church, and none of which will give an inch.

Q: The Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

GRIFFIN: Yes. It's astounding the way they snarl at each other. They take turns going to the main altar. One group of Ethiopians has been camped on the roof for decades, and won't leave. This is how Christians behave in the so-called Holy Land. We didn't get much of that in Tel Aviv, but we certainly did in Jerusalem, where people were posturing daily. At the Wailing Wall, at the Temple on the Mount, at the Al Aqsa Mosqutensions are always there. Heavily armed Israeli troops are everywhere, which increases the sense of tension. My wife joined me in Jerusalem and we stayed in East Jerusalem at the American Colony Hotel. It's an old private house, with a wonderful atmosphere. All the others stayed in West Jerusalem in modern hotels that we didn't particularly care for. We went to refugee camps, where the situation of the Palestinians is, in a word, awful. They are treated like dirt by many Israelis, especially the Orthodox ones and the settlers. We didn't stick our noses into all that because it wasn't our job. We just tried to make sure that our people worked together and we tried to encourage a process between the Embassy and the Consulate that would stay on track. At least were talking to each other when we left, which hadn't always been the case. There were too many things done by the Embassy and too many Embassy reports that were never shared with the Consul General. That, of course, irritated the staff of the Consulate General intensely.

My next inspection was Taipei, which was strange, to say the least, and quite different from the other places. To go to Taipei, U.S. Government officials have to become non-officials, because there is no diplomatic recognition. The team leader was Dan O'Donahue, who had been inspecting for years. I was again the Deputy Team Leader, and Mike Cotter joined us as the Political-Economic Senior Inspector. He had just come out of Bishkek as Ambassador, and it was his first inspection. The three of us visited CINCPAC in Hawaii on the way out, because that command works closely with the American Institute in Taiwan, or AIT Taipei. We have a large military sales program, and our Pacific forces are charged with implementing the Defense of Taiwan Act, among other things. We had a good session with Admiral Larson, the CINC, or Commander-in-chief of the Pacific forces. AIT is a Congressionally legislated entity, supposedly in the private sector, which handles relations between Washington and Taipei. There was a political appointee at its head in Washington, and career Foreign Service Officer Darryl Johnson was Director in Taipei. He had served in China and spoke good Chinese.

Our unofficial inspection was strange, to say the least. We worked for the State Department Inspector General, inspecting a supposedly unofficial entity, which did need inspecting. That time, we did look into policy issues. For example, we concluded that there were too many restrictions on mid-level exchanges and travel. Under the legislation and its implementing rules, nobody of deputy assistant secretary rank and above in the Executive Branch, including ambassadors and Cabinet officers, is allowed visit in either direction. But we thought there should be some exchanges at a lower level, because there's an awful lot involved in that relationship. The Military Affairs shoit wasn't called defense attachwas run by a retired Air Force colonel. He and others there were no longer in government, but most of the staff was technically taking time out from official life. We argued that the law needed changing in some respects, because the transfer of a Foreign Service Officer to AIT Taipei is difficult bureaucratically and hard on the officers. They must give up a lot of things. For example, it was very difficult to pay per diem, or to get household goods shipped. There were many such niggling problems, so we tried to help them change those things.

Earlier you asked about Congressional intervention in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Try Taiwan; it's almost the same thing. Congressional influence is strong, and Congress generally has taken the attitude that Taiwan is an officially recognized friend. Congressmen and Senators go there all the time without bothering with the niceties, and many of them think that that's the way things ought to be. Part of that, of course, is to show firm resolve in dealing with mainland China. But we discovered a lot of back-and-forth between Taiwan and the mainlanmuch more than we had thought.

One reason we got into the questions of law was because the contract with the Department that governs the operations of AIT in Washington and Taiwan was about to expire. It needed to be fixed by Congress, and the Department was having a hard time being heard, as was AIT, so we tried to help get it fixed.

Generally speaking, we found that the post was well run. It was doing well on the policy side, and an excellent job in promoting trade, which is heavy in both directions. The political-military unit was run well, with sensible approaches to issues. There is constant pressure from the Congress and from the Taiwan Government for us to sell more military equipment, some of which is extremely sensitive to China. Beijing gets very irate when some things are sold, such as warships, airplanes, tanks, rockets, missiles, and other military materiel which might make the island stronger. The post was doing a good job of monitoring and keeping a handle it without getting blown away by either the Congress or the Chinese. There were no major incidents in the Taiwan Straits while we were there, but the subject was always close to the surface, and people spent time preparing for them. As in Korea, there were regular air raid drills and other military exercises.

Q: Were you picking any reflections of the problems back in AIT in Washington where for the first time they had put an extremely political type, or something like that, in as the Director, who seemed to be pursuing his own policy which was tainted with political money?

GRIFFIN: The inspection of AIT Washington was done after the team came back from Taiwan, and I was given another assignment. I didn't do that part of the inspection, and don't know how it came out, but certainly that issue came up with us repeatedly. We talked to AIT Washington and many others before the inspection. An office in the East Asian Bureau, or EAP, in the Department handles most administrative affairs for AIT. There is supposed to be a cut-out, so they deal with another office. Some of this is fiction, but under the law it's the way it's supposed to work. There is an officer in EAP who does nothing but Taiwan full-time, so we talked with him a long time. We also went to the Pentagon and to several other offices all over town where people deal with AIT.

I led the inspection of the subpost in Kaohsiung, a big city on the southwest corner of the island, where we would have a consulate in normal circumstances. There, sadly, we found problems brewing. The Principal Officer was doing things he shouldn't have been doing, and wasn't paying attention to things that should have been on his front burner. He was a very good officer in some respects. His Chinese was excellent; he spoke both Mandarin and Cantonese at almost the five-five level. He also spoke some six other languages unrelated to Chinese, so he was an excellent linguist. He was very good at making speeches, and his contacts were impeccable. They were everywhere, and he was probably well known as any Taiwanese politician, but internally things were falling apart, so we had to chastise him for that. We did pull our punches because he was already reassigned to go to another post, where we thought he would be fine, and we didn't want to ruin his career. But his Taiwanese staff was miserable, as were some of the Americans, a few of whom were contract employees. It was a nice set-up, on a couple of floors of a nice office building downtown, in a fairly pleasant city.

The principal officer had been invited to dinner by a Taiwanese businessman, and got our team included. The businessman owned the building, and we had dinner in his penthouse. It turned out that most of his business was on the mainland. He manufactured computers, chips, and a variety of electronic gear, most of which was made there, so he was in China at least once a month. The products were shipped to Taiwan, packagethe stamp on them said "Made in Taiwan" and exported elsewhere. He was doing a lot of business, and was involved in politics, which was of interest to the Department. The Principal Officer did a good job of reporting how he was trying to encourage capitalism in China and undercut the Communist Party, and seemed to have a significant impact. So we finished that inspection, gave them decent marks, and returned to Washington.

Shortly before we departed Taipei, a sudden request came to the IG from the Seventh Floospecifically from Under Secretary for Political Affairs Tom Pickering, my old boss, and from Ambassador Felix Rohatyn in Paris. Several consular posts in France had been closed for budgetary and other reasons, and the Ambassador had opened something called an American Presence Post in Lyon. He wanted to open more, specifically in Toulouse, Rennes, Bordeaux, and Lille. Ambassador Rohatyn had considerable of influence in Washington, so he was someone to reckon with. But before the Department would approve opening such new posts, Pickering and the Under Secretary for Management wanted Lyon inspected, and an IG recommendation made. So I was pulled off the Taiwan team and told to lead a mini-inspection of Lyon, which, of course, I was happy to do. Congress got involved in the form of Representative Harold Rogers of Kentucky, Chairman of the State/Commerce/Justice Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. He was quite suspicious of the idea, and wanted an inspection, so there were three pressure points. Ambassador Pickering favored it because he had his eye on opening another couple of posts elsewherone in Africa, and the other in Southeast Asia.

The staff of an American presence post consists of one American officer and a handful, generally no more than five, FSNs. The FSNs had been in Lyon all along as FCForeign Commercial Servicstaff, because Lyon does a lot of business with the U.S. and hosts large trade fairs. I had met the Mayor of Lyon in Milan, because he and the Regional Presidents of Lombardy, Italy, Catalonia, Spain, and Bavaria, Germany, had formed a coalition of movers and shakers in what they called the "Four Engines of Europe." Most European business and economic activity takes place in those regions, and they wanted a process of almost constant communication. I met all of them during their visits to Milan, so I knew something about it, and was interested.

Ambassador Rohatyn wanted the inspection done by yesterday, so I went right to work with inspector Keith McCormick, who was assigned to assist me. We were asked to determine whether such posts would be effective and whether they were worth the money. The Ambassador argued forcefully that there were cost-free, because all he did was to move an officer out of the political section in Paris to Lyoa simple trade-off. The officer would have to be paid anyway, he noted. While we found that it was not free, we said it was probably worth it. The Ambassador said he didn't understand the ground rules for American Presence Posts, and certainly didn't agree with them. But later he told me that he finally realized that there were only a few Embassy officers eligible for such posts, and that moving them out would detract from the effectiveness of their offices at the Embassy, so it wasn't cost-free in that sense. He was frustrated that he couldn't just take action himself. He found that his powers were more restricted than he had expected. He argued that there were too many people in the Embassy that he didn't need. He wondered why he couldn't send them where he wanted. But that isn't the way things work, because the officer had to fit the job. He also claimed that it was the first time it had been tried, so in my final report I pointed out that it certainly wasn't something new. The first American Consul in Lyon happened to be James Fenimore Cooper, who was appointed in 1826, and was the lone American on the staff.

Q: I wrote a book on the American consul. Cooper spent an awful lot of time traveling around. This is sort of an honorary appointment.

GRIFFIN: That reminds me of another story about Calcutta. One of ConGen Calcutta's claims to fame is that it was our second Foreign Service post. Paris was the first, with Benjamin Franklin. The first Consul, Benjamin Joy, was dispatched in 1792 by George Washington to build up trade. Joy was never recognized as Consul by the British East India Company, but was permitted to be a Commercial Agent in April 1794. The trade between Calcutta and New England was fascinating, in that it was an attempt to circumvent British blockades. The Colonists, about to become revolutionary republicans, wanted things like tea and spices from India, but the British East India Company cut them off, so the only way to get it was to go themselves, which they did. In my commercial training courses in the Department, I used to tell the students that, knowing that they went in 1781 or so to buy tea, spices, rice and silks, what did they take to trade? Almost nobody got it. It's a great true story, and you probably know the answer.

Q: Ice.

GRIFFIN: That's right. It was fascinatinsix months out.

Q: Sawdust.

GRIFFIN: That's right. They never lost more than about 15 percent of it.

So, there were good reasons for having a post in Lyon, but we pointed out that the Department would have to engage in out-of-the-box thinking because it involved changes in Foreign Service systems, especially in personnel, reporting and consular services. For example, who would write the efficiency reports? To whom would the officer report? For whom did he really work? The system isn't made to encourage officers to volunteer for such posts, because if they don't have an efficiency report by someone who directly observed their performance, they could be badly served. Many officers would be unwilling to go under those circumstances.

The officer in charge of Lyon was Stuart Dwyer, a very dynamic, relatively junior officer, who was bilingual in French and English. He had great contact skills, had already served in another post in France, and possessed excellent professional skills. But, how many of those can one find around the Embassy every day? We concluded that the idea would be useful elsewhere in France, as well as in other countries. Lyon was probably the best place to start. It is the second-largest city in France, with a population of more than a million people, and the capital of the Rhone Alp Region. It has an economy the size of Switzerland. There are well over 150 American companies headquartered there, and they are the largest international investors in the region, with trade exceeding $5 billion a year.

The Ambassador's next target was Toulouse, largely because that's the center of the French aircraft and missile industry, where many American businesses want to compete. As Airbus grew, it had to agree to make some parts in the U.S. I asked the Embassy why they were interested in Rennes, in Brittany, and was told because it had the largest newspaper circulation of a local language in the country and was hugely influential. USIS wanted an officer there. The Ambassador envisioned that any officer who went to Toulouse would be from FCS. He hadn't figured out staffing yet for Bordeaux and Lille. Since any such staffing would depopulate offices in Paris, the heads of those sections didn't think much of his plan. We concluded that the plan was not cost-free, but that it was probably cost effective, because somebody would have to go to Lyon at least once a week anyhow. So, why not put a face on the American presence, especially one as good as Mr. Dwyer, who proved his value by introducing us to many of Lyon's movers and shakers. We also recommended that candidates for such jobs serve at Embassy Paris for a year before moving to such a post, to get acclimated and become known in the embassy. That was pretty much it. I did a couple of odd jobs in OIG before I retired, which I did on October 31st.

Q: October 31st of...?

GRIFFIN: 1999, which was almost 40 years to the day after I first walked in the front door of the Department, and just after my 65th birthday, when I had to retire anyway. It was a good ride.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much, George. This is a fascinating story, and I hope you've cleared your name with the Indians by this point.

GRIFFIN: Oh, they love me now.

End of interview