

AMBASSADOR JAMES F. MACK

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 20th of March 2004, this is an interview with James F. Mack. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stewart Kennedy. You go by Jim?

MACK: Yes.

Q: Oh Right! Well to begin with when and where were you born?

MACK: Well I was born in 1941 in Norwalk, Connecticut.

Q: Can you tell me a little about your father's side of the family?

MACK: Well, my father actually was born in Washington, DC and he graduated from a High School in Washington and went off to Cornell to study Mechanical Engineering. He graduated in 1929, not a good year.

Q: Not a good year!

MACK: Not a good year. He graduated 3 months before the stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression. He worked a year as an engineer in a silk mill in Connecticut. Then, like all the other newly hired, he was first fired. So, he went back to Washington, lived with his parents and went to law school at night at George Washington University and worked in a law office by day. He became a patent lawyer and moved back up to Norwalk, Connecticut, where he went into practice, met my mother who was a "Yankee", and got married in 1937. My sister was born in 1940 and I in 1941. Shortly after I was born, my family moved to Rye, New York, where I grew up.

Q: What was life like for you in Rye? What was Rye like for you in those days?

MACK: It was a good place to grow up. Rye is a small town in Westchester County on Long Island Sound about 25 miles from Times Square. You can see the New York skyline. While Rye is close to New York, it has a small town atmosphere, good public schools, a public golf course, a public marina, and a public beach, nature preserves etc. So it remains a very nice place to grow up, a really, safe environment.

Q: The schools, you went through the public school system?

MACK: I went through the 10th grade in the public school system. Then I went away to boarding school for Williston Academy in East Hampton, Massachusetts for 11th and 12th grades.

Q: Lets stick to the Rye thing. What sort of thing in elementary school interested you, reading, extra-curriculum things, particular studies?

MACK: Elementary goes way back. Of course, I was a kid, so I liked sports, especially football.. I played the tuba in the school band. I was always interested in geography and those kinds of things. By 5th and 6th grade I was interested in international affairs.

I can't remember how young I was, but I still remember watching a bright young political science professor from Columbia or NYU who appeared frequently on television talking about the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. His name was Zbigniew Brzezinski. So, I always had this kind of fascination with international affairs issues as a kid.

Q: By the time you got to High School were you able to do anything with International Affairs.

MACK: Not really. I was a pretty normal kid. I played in the band then football.

Q: While you were in Rye did you ever get in to New York to the UN or anything like that?

MACK: Oh sure! I mean as a kid living in the suburbs we went into New York for one thing or another; and, of course, we did the standard, "let's go see the UN" kind of tour. And I do remember following major developments at the UN. I remember listening to the Israeli Ambassador to the UN Abba Eban make his elegant speeches in British English.

Q: Why did you go to Williston?

MACK: My 10th grade was a little bit dramatic. In the Fall I had my jaw broken in two places during football practice. During my recuperation, with my jaw wired shut, I lost 20 pounds in a month because I could only take liquids. And I was not overweight to begin with. And I wasn't really doing that well in school. Half way through the school year my father said "Well Jim, maybe you would want to go away to school for your last two years of high school. Since I was off the football team and kind of out of it for a long time, I was willing to do that. Ironically, I played football during my two years at boarding school. To get into Williston, I had to go to its summer school to improve my writing skills. I had an absolutely marvelous English teacher who really excited me in writing. Certain teachers have tremendous effects on you.

Q: What was his name?

MACK: His last name was Robinson. We called him Mr. Robinson. He was very enthusiastic about his subject, would stand on his desk and quote poetry. Actually I really learned how to write in the Foreign Service, but of course that is a different form of writing. But Williston gave me the basics and had a big impact. Not that I particularly liked being there. In fact, for many years thereafter, my best friends remained those I grew up with in Rye. But Williston gave me a good academic base, taught me how to study, and I was able to get into Cornell University. I majored in Political Science there, which at Cornell is known as "Government". We had absolutely superb professors in that particular field, Cornell, and that experience also whetted my appetite for international affairs.

Q: You went to Cornell from when to when?

MACK: 1959 to 1963.

Q: Why Cornell?

MACK: Well! My father had gone to Cornell. We did look at a few other schools but I visited the Cornell campus, liked it and actually applied nowhere else. I can't imagine doing that today. But Cornell advised Williston that if I applied I would be accepted. It was a very simple process. That is why I went to Cornell. It could have gone someplace else but Cornell just made sense to me.

Q: Would you say that Cornell at that time had a pretty diverse student body that time?

MACK: It was diverse in terms of international students, but in terms of U.S. citizens it was overwhelmingly white.

Q: You took courses mainly in Political Science?

MACK: Yes, mostly Political Science, History that kind of thing.

Q: Cornell at one point had quite a reputation for its courses in Southeast Asia and Indonesia?

MACK: Yes, they had an excellent Southeast Asia Study Program. I did actually take a couple of courses of Southeast Asia in History or Politics, also on Mao Zedong's China and the Cultural Revolution. I almost became a Southeast Asian person as opposed to a Latin American person.

But let me tell you, when I was at Cornell there was a campus organization called Cornell United Religious Work, funded by the University, that had International Summer Programs for students. One of them was a summer program in Honduras. Few people knew about Honduras. The program sounded interesting to me. I had been studying Spanish, so in the summer between my junior and senior year, I joined a group of about six or seven other students and lived in a little house in a little mountain town called Valle de Angeles, outside the capital. Honduras was quite an eye opener for me, both the Caribbean coast side, where we spend a few days when we first arrived, and the little mountain town where we spent about 6 weeks.

As I said, Honduras came as quite a shock to me, a kid from the suburbs of New York City. There was so much poverty. We arrived on Honduras north coast city of San Pedro Sula at a time when thousands of kids were sickened by gastro enteritis caused by contaminated water. But I found the whole scene fascinating. By the time I returned to the US I spoke half decent Spanish. Actually when I finished the Honduras program, I traveled through Nicaragua to Costa Rica on the basic transportation at the time, which was a "bus" consisting of a wooden superstructure built on to a truck chassis. In Costa Rica, I stayed with the family of Carlos Manuel Rojas, a Sigma Chi fraternity brother, which was a wonderful experience. His family owned a big cattle ranch on the northern coast of the country. This was something that I had never experienced before, including riding horses.

Shortly after returning to the US, I took the Foreign Service Test. I was only twenty.

Q: It was about 1962 or so?

MACK: Yes, in September, 1962 when I came back to the US. I forgot one thing. While I was living in this little Honduran mountain village, we were visited by the labor attache of the US embassy in Tegucigalpa. He had been a labor organizer for the AFL-CIO. He was one of many labor union activists brought into the Foreign Service at the start of the Cold War to support the democratic labor movement overseas in their battles with the Communist labor movement supported by the Soviet Union. In any event, he came up and talked to us about what he did. And that really turned me on, particularly to the Foreign Service although I had previously planned to take the test. But that really excited me. I took the written test before the start of my senior year.

I took the orals in Washington in late May of 1963, the week before I graduated. Frankly, I never expected to pass the written exam, much less the orals. So here I was. I hadn't yet received my college diploma, I was 21, and I had a big decision to make.

I had been accepted in the Peace Corps and but had this chance to go into the Foreign Service.

I should back track a bit here to tell you something else. I am quite hard of hearing, always have been. In fact I wear two hearing aids today. I did not when I was a student although if the technology had existed at the time, I should have.

Like many university students facing the military draft in those days, I elected to go into ROTC, the Reserve Officers Training Program, offered at Cornell. This is a four year program, that includes summer boot camp before the junior and senior year. Upon graduation, students are commissioned as second lieutenants and do 2 years active duty. I completed the first two years of the program. At that point, before entering the "advanced" program, that is after the first two years, cadets are subjected to a major physical exam. I flunked the hearing test royally. So my post college plans of doing two years as junior officer in Army intelligence went up in smoke. So I had to hustle for something else to do.

And the result was that I took the Foreign Service Test and, in my senior year, also applied to Peace Corps. The Peace Corps had already accepted me before I took my Foreign Service orals in late May. So after I was told I had passed the orals, I asked one of the examiners what I should do. He told me I was a young guy; hadn't even graduated from college yet; that while I could come into the Foreign Service, I really should go into the Peace Corps first. The Foreign Service, he said, would hold the commission for me until I completed my Peace Corps Service. He said that when I got out, I would be older, more mature, speak really good Spanish, and be much more useful to the Foreign Service. That made sense to me so I said, "fine"! It turned out to be great advice and that is what I did.

Q: I must say that one of the things that often hurts kids starting out is a lack of maturity. There is no point in having to go through maturation process after you enter the Foreign Service. Do you recall any of the questions that were asked of you in the oral-exam?

MACK: I remember one, but I don't remember the answer I gave. The question was if you were stranded on a desert island in the South Pacific somewhere and you could have only three books, which three would you choose - things like that. I can't recall the other questions. There were questions basically that would make you think a little bit or catch you off guard or make you sweat to see how you responded. The oral exam was a nerve-wracking experience. Here I am a twenty-one old kid and I am answering questions from fairly senior people in the Nation's Capital. I was pretty nervous, tingling the whole time.

Q: Well tell me, when you were at Cornell did the idea of public service come up. Did you get caught up in the Kennedy Phenomena?

MACK: Oh well, let me tell you what actual happened. Yes, there was a lot of that. I applied to the Peace Corps because that was one of Kennedy's big initiatives. And, like most people in the Foreign Service, I do believe in national service; and I do believe in giving back. Obviously, I had a very privileged background. I had an excellent education and I had two wonderful parents who loved me and took care of me and encouraged and supported me all the time. And I felt I owed something to my society. When I was not able to go into the military and Kennedy came along and talked about the Peace Corps, I was very moved. The Peace Corps had only been around a year or so when I applied. The Peace Corps started in 1961. Some of the first returned volunteers were involved in our training when I joined in August 1963 when I joined. So it was a pretty exciting time. So the answer was absolutely, yes. Kennedy had a major impact. So like all other Americans including yourself probably, you know exactly where you were when he was assassinated.

Q: Oh yeah!

MACK: I was in a little town in northern New Mexico in a Peace Corps training program when I found out. So we were all doubly motivated to carry on. So guess where they sent me? Honduras!!!. I had been hoping they would send me somewhere else. I wanted to go to a Spanish speaking country obviously because I spoke some Spanish, but a different one. But the great powers in the Peace Corps must have looked at my resume thought I should go back to Honduras. However, I did not go back to the little town where I had lived the previous summer. I was assigned a town located a hundred miles away. I had an absolutely fabulous two years in the Peace Corps.

Q: Just to get a feel for the Peace Corps of that time, it was really very new. Did you have the feeling that you were on the cutting edge?

MACK: Oh Yeah! The first volunteers (nurses and public health people) to serve in Honduras had only arrived one year before and still had one year to go in their tour. My group was sent to work in what they called "Community Development". Understand that we are talking about a Cornell political science major from suburban New York working in Community Development. I also worked in agriculture.

Q: One of the major Agricultural Schools of the United States.

MACK: Cornell yes, but I did not study at the ag school. I had no experience in agriculture at all. But with the help of a North Carolina-trained UN/FAO ag engineer from Bolivia assigned to Honduras named Hector Lizarraga, and, of course, the campesinos I worked with, I was able to learn the things I needed to know. One of my projects was to introduce improved varieties of corn and beans, plus chemical fertilizer, in the little villages around the town I lived in. My town, a municipal center, had only 6,000 people at the time, no paved roads, no banks, and electricity only two hours a night. I also worked in a literacy program and set up a Savings and Loan Co-operative for School Teachers. I was really busy. And I loved it. It was the happiest, most satisfying two years of my young life up to that point. As a matter of fact, I stayed on a little longer than I was supposed to because I felt I had to complete some projects. I was well received by the Hondurans and I have nothing but good memories.

Q: This would have been the first time they had been up against a Community Development type person.

MACK: Right!

Q: So how does one arrive in almost a piping voice and say, "Here I am"?

MACK: Yes, "Here I am." Exactly! Basically that was it. The Deputy Director of the Peace Corps dropped me off at a boarding house in Siguatepeque after a 5 hour jeep ride over a winding dusty "highway" that looked like photos of the Burma Road during World War II. Siguatepeque had a delightful climate, cool. It was 3,600 above sea level, set in a valley surrounded by pine forested mountains.

The boarding house, which was my first home in Siguatepeque, was run by a formidable woman. Doña Margarita Raucher was her name. She was Honduran, married to a German whom I think had been raised in Guatemala. In addition to running the boarding house, she was a community organizer, and the real power in the family. For example, she had organized a youth group which had a basketball team. And not only that, with Doña Margarita's encouragement, the team was in the process of improving a vacant dirt lot that served as our basketball court, putting up the backboards and stringing light bulbs around the court for illumination, and I mean regular light bulbs, not floodlights. But hey! Everybody was very excited about this. That was when I showed up. At that time, Hondurans assumed that all "Gringos" were a great basketball players. Well, I was a normal American kid, in good physical shape who knew how to play basketball; but that did not make me a great basketball player. But given what I was competing against, I was considered a solid member of the team. So basically my introduction to my Peace Corps community was as a member of the los Pinares basketball team playing against their arch rivals from a town called Comayagua 30 miles away. We lost but played a good game and everyone was very excited. All of a sudden everyone in town knew who Jim Mack was. That introduced me to the community and expanded my contacts in town very quickly.

The rural villages around Siguatepeque were a totally different issue. However, it turned out that the priest in Siguatepeque, Father Antonio Juarez, one of the relatively few Honduran-born priests in the entire country, had studied in Vermont and Montreal. He was a very bright guy, fluent in French and English. He was also a recovering alcoholic. He told me that his return to Honduras after years of seminary in North America had been a shock. He had been assigned to Siguatepeque where he had almost no intellectual peers, and started drinking. He told me that he had just about killed himself drinking, but several years before I arrived had become sober and started a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous. Father Juarez became my best friend. We even went on trips around Honduras together in his jeep. He was a wonderful guy. A great friend. He took upon himself to instruct me in local Spanish slang and local history and so I really learned a lot from him. Interestingly, I also was befriended by a US evangelical missionary couple living in Siguatepeque, Ralph and Mary Keep, who happened to be very good friends of Padre Juarez.

Q: What religious background you come out of?

MACK: I came out of a Presbyterian background.

But the point you asked me is how I gained access to the rural communities in the mountains around Siguatepeque. Well, Padre Juarez also served 45 little villages in the mountains that surrounded the town. Get thiof the total of 25,000 people living in his parish, only 6,000 lived in town. The rest were scattered around the mountains, and I am talking about serious mountains. His job was basically to hit the patron saint (feast ) day of each of the 45 villages. That is about all he could do. He could not say mass out there regularly. There were too many villages. He had another priest working with him, but serving 25,000 people was quite a daunting task, really impossible.

But, he knew everybody because every little village had a parish representative, a lay person who would come in and visit with Padre Juarez regularly, participate in his catechism class and that sort of thing. So Padre was the one who opened the door for me to all these people, to tell them that "this guy Mack was okay, and this is what he wants to do in your village. When he comes to visit, show him around and work with him." So all of a sudden, thanks to Padre Juarez, the doors opened all over the mountains.

Here is a funny story. Once I ventured beyond the mountainous boundaries of Padre Juarez's extended Parish to a very remote village, almost completely indigenous, a very difficult 6 hours walk away by trail. I had gone to find out if the people would be interested in my setting up a radio (literacy) school as part of a program run the Catholic Church over its radio station, called "Radio Catolica". The idea was that we would select a literate person in a village who would serve as the tutor to the illiterate students, following instructions from the radio announcer. For example, the announcer would instruct the tutor to draw the letter "o" on the blackboard and the tutor would do so, helping the others to copy it. I had set up this program in a number of villages within Padre Juarez' Parish with his support.

Well, I thought my exploratory visit had been successful since I was well received, and in fact spent the night in a house in the village. So on my next visit, I took along my Peace Corps partner, Mary Wazeter, a Wellesley graduate from Dobbs Ferry, NY and a herself Catholic, to actually bring in the required materials, train up the tutor and start the program. Anyway, to get there I had to lug on my back a blackboard plus a big old fashioned battery-powered radio 15 miles over the mountains.

Unfortunately, I had not "cleared" the program with the priests of the distant parish to which the village belonged. Big mistake!! Unbeknownst to me, the villagers had traveled to priests of their parish, American Dominicans as it turned out, to ask if they should cooperate with the "gringos". Something must have gotten lost in the translation, but the Dominican suspected that I was a protestant missionary, and instructed the villagers not to cooperate.

After spending the night with the same friendly family which has hosted me on my previous visit, Mary Wazeter and I awoke to a house surrounded by 200 very unfriendly-looking Indians who escorted us en masse out of the village. Only months later did we realize what had happened after a chance encounter with the American priests in the town they lived in. We all had a good laugh, and they sent word back to the village that we were oso we finally set up the literacy school.

But in Father Juarez's extended parish, I had basically a free pass and as a result I was able to carry out both my literacy and corn and bean projects. Regarding the latter, what I would do, with the help of the local campesino, was plant my improved corn and bean seed using different combinations and amounts of chemical fertilizer, which the UN supplied. We also planted the local corn and bean seed with and without fertilizer as a comparison. At the end of the growing season we would weigh the results and see who had produced more. .

As I said, I was taught to do this by a Bolivian Agricultural Engineer named Hector Lizarraga, a North Carolina State grad, who was working for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO ) of the UN. My ag project was not very complicated. But Lizarraga needed people to help him who had strong legs and liked to hike in the mountains which I did and still do, and was willing to go out on the countryside and make contact with the farmers. I put experimental plots in, dozens of them, all over the countryside. And the door was opened for me by my good friend, Padre Antonio Juarez, the local priest.. I followed up with the literacy program that I described to you. We did this for two years.

Q: Did your improved corn and beans prove better than the local corn and beans, which are indigenous to Central America? Were the results a lot better?

MACK: Well actually they were. The first year my corn was astoundingly better. We planted my corn and theirs in identical sized plots next to each other. My corn grew tall and strong and the ears were heavy with corn kernels. We weighed both types. It was marvelously successful. Our corn produced triple the local variety. At the end of the year, I remember I was on top of a mountain with one family, indigenous, very nice people, very warm people, humble, dirt floor poor people. Poorer you couldn't get. But these were really good people. If you took their kids and raised them in the U.S. they would be very successful people. That is one thing I found out. In any event, The guys name was "Don" Domingo. In Central America every adult male has the honorific "Don" before his given name. As I said my corn produced at least triple what his did, growing right next to his. I was all excited and said to Don Domingo. "Do you know what that means? Even deducting the cost of fertilizer and improved seed, by planting my corn you would end up with double the income from the same amount of land." . He looked at me and said, "yes that is true but you know, if I planted your corn and fertilizer on just half the area, I could produce as much corn as I did before and work only half as much." That day I learned a very good cultural lesson; that while we "gringos" think that producing more with the same effort is best, Honduran farmers at the time were not at that time terribly interested in producing more, but the same with less effort. Remember, they planted corn, one seed at a time, with a wooden stick with a metal tip. They did not plow. And they weeded by hand with a hoe. No Round Up. People had been farming this way for a thousand years. That is how primitive it was. One reason they did not think in terms of increasing production was they thought they had enough to live on. They ate chicken from time to time, and occasionally eggs, but what they ate all the time was corn tortillas and beans, which they grew for themselves. There was not much to buy. Remember cheap transistor radios were only beginning to appear at that time. There were no roads near their homes, only steep trails, so a bicycle or a motorcycle was useless. There was no electricity so electrical devices would have been useless. There was only a main road from the Capital to the coast, which was unpaved. It was not going to do a whole lot of good for someone who lived an hour and an half hike up the mountain. So these people really felt they did not have much to buy. That has all changed now. When the small transistor radio came in, as opposed to the larger battery-powered radio, that brought about a revolutionary change in Central America.

I had wanted to go to grad school after the Peace Corps and write a thesis on the "Impact of the Introduction of Transistor Radios on Cultural Patterns of Rural Farmers in Central Honduras." I applied to the University of Texas Latin American Studies Program, but was rejected. I guess in 1965 I had a lot of competition from people trying to avoid the draft. In fact, I noted that some of volunteers who came to replace us in 1965 had joined up to avoid going to Vietnam. That was not the motivation of our group at all back in 1963.

Q: Was there also a question of who was going to supply the fertilizer, who was going to supply the seed? Because in a way this made the farmers more dependent on somebody else?

MACK: Absolutely. Fertilizer was only used primarily by larger farmers of which there were not many. But most people in that part of the country were small farmers, "campesinos" My expectation was that over-time that the private sector would respond to this need and simply begin to sell fertilizer to small farmers. That is exactly what has happened. Keep in mind that where I was living there were no vast expansive flatlands you can run a tractor over. The terrain was very mountainous, and often the soil very acidic that had to be adjusted with lime to be productive, although citrus grew well. And if you are going to spend all that money to adjust your soil you probably should very higher value product than corn and beans, such as vegetables. That is what farmers are doing in Siguatepeque today.

Q: What about land ownership? What were you observing sort of the sociapolitical social guide?

MACK: This was a very interesting situation. Some of the farmers in certain parts of the area "owned" their little piece of land. I don't mean they had a formal title, but everybody knew who "owned" what land. However, without a formal title, it was impossible to get a loan.

However, there was one huge tract of land that was owned by a large absentee landowner, who did not reside in my municipality. He resided in a municipality (like a county) at a much lower altitude over the mountain and so his overseers accessed it from another direction. Actually it was near where the American priests lived who thought I was an evangelical missionary. It was a huge tract of land by Honduran mountain standards, probably a square mile of land. It actually was the inside of an ancient crater. Some of the campesino farmers I worked with rented this land, which was flat and quite good. I felt very strongly that these guys ought to be able to buy the land. They wanted to buy the land. I remember going down to this other municipality, which was quite a haul, several hours by bus. I walked there once. Took me two days.

Anyway, I went to see this the lawyer for the owner and I asked him if he would be willing to sell. There were about 600 farmers working the land there, or some large number like that up there and, like I said, the land was actually quite good. He was totally unwilling to sell. I was most disappointed. I was very upset. But there was really nothing I could do about it. I guess my social activist side began to show its head there because I just felt that these people really ought to be able to buy the land they were working.

It is very clear to me when people own their own land they invest in improving the land. They plant high value, permanent crops. Citrus would have grown very well there. Coffee would have grown very well there. Those are crops in those days fetched quite good prices. Coffee in particular could be transported out easily by mule. So, I thought the people could significantly improve their lives by owning the land they worked rather than planting corns and beans, which is what they were doing. That was my take on it. But my efforts did not succeed. That was one of my failures.

Q: Were your priests involved in liberation theology, would they have gotten involved in social activism?

MACK: Padre Juarez was not a revolutionary, but he certainly believed in social justice. He had come from very humble origins. His father was a carpenter and he was very dark-skinned, of mixed race and clearly had a sense of wanting people on the bottom to have a chance to move up. But he was not a practitioner of liberation theology. I happened to get quite involved in that issue in El Salvador after I had joined the Foreign Service.

Q: We will pick that up later.

MACK: At the time liberation theology did not loom very large in my thinking. Ironically, I did once meet a priest friend of Padre Juarez who was an American. His name was Father Carney. His parish was in United Fruit's banana producing area near the Caribbean coast of Honduras. Years later I learned that Father Carney had joined a Honduran Marxist Leninist Guerrilla group. Apparently, he had become radicalized, had gone to Nicaragua, I think in the early 80s, then under control of the Sandinistas and trained there with a group of Honduran revolutionaries. He reentered Honduras with this group across the mountains. The area is difficult and he was no kid at that point. He must have been in his fifties by then. And apparently, as I understand it, he just couldn't keep up with his comrades as they were being tracked by the Honduran army. He had a bad leg, and at one point he just told them he could not continue and so they left him. He probably died there. Later it was alleged they the Honduran Army had captured and tortured him to death but I do not believe that was the case. He probably died of exposure and dehydration. That was very rough country.

But at the time that I met him Father Carry. He just seemed to be a normal priest. Happened to be an American, a friendly guy. I had no impression at all that he was radicalized. When I went back to Central America in the early 80s as a Foreign Service officer, I did have substantial contacts with Spanish Jesuit liberation theology priests in El Salvador, several of whom were later murdered by the members of the Salvadoran army. .

Q: Did you get any feel for the Central Government, its effectiveness and what it was like and all?

MACK: Sure! Honduras was and remains one of the three poorest countries in the Americas. Back in the 60's, the vast majority of the population lived in rural areas. With the exception of San Pedro Sula in the north coast and the capital, Tegucigalpa, Honduras was a mostly collection of small towns and villages. The road network was very, very, very limited. Only on the coast and particularly where the foreign-owned banana plantations were located was the infrastructure any good with paved roads, electricity and that sort of thing. But the mountain interior was very, very, backwards. Except for a few roads, things moved on people's backs and on the backs of horses and burros. So we are talking about a very primitive social-economic life style which probably hadn't changed a whole lot, for hundreds of years.

All the problems with corruption and inefficiency and lack of education permeated Honduras at that time. You had underpaid, under trained officials, who along with teachers were often paid months late. In fact, the reason one of my projects was to set up a savings and loan cooperative for the teachers was precisely because they were forced to obtain loans from local merchants while they waited for their late pay checks to arrive. The merchants charged 10% interest for each month their check had not arrived. Our cooperative charged 1% a month.

But, there were islands of development in places such San Pedro Sula, which is the largest city in the country and it is near the north coast. But, where I was, we are talking about very basic places. And at that time, Honduras was not terribly over-populated. It only had 2 million people in an area the size of New York State. Today it has over 7 million, over triple the population in forty years. Think about that? And that is in spite of out migration. But now they have terrific environmental problems. They have chopped down most of their beautiful pine forests. There has been mass rural to urban migration of people not prepared to live successfully in an urban environment, and tremendous social dislocation. The family structure was never very strong in Honduras. Illegitimacy must have been 80 percent. When most lived in rural areas this was not such a big problem. But in urban areas social controls have broken down.

When I was there in the Peace Corps, the President was a army colonel named Lopez Arellano who had staged a coup against the left of center president elect just before our Peace Corps group arrived. In fact, for a while during our training, we thought the Peace Corps might even cancel our assignments in protest. But we were eventually sent. There were elections while I was there, and they were not terribly free. In those days, there were two major political parties, and interestingly enough, the rural people were split almost down almost right down the middle in their party loyalties. So I worked with campesinos who supported both sides. The party in power, and on whose ticket Col Lopez ran, was the so called, the "Nationalist" Party, which was the conservative Party. On election day the parties would rent trucks to bring their rural voters to the polls in Siguatepeque. The Army stopped truckloads of farmers who were coming to vote for the other party opposition party and took way their "cedulas", their national ID cards, so they could not vote. How do I know this? Because I worked with these guys. After they were taken down from the trucks and had their cards seized or destroyed, they came to see me to complain. I had been working projects with people from both sides. Both groups were poor. The farmers simply voted for the party their fathers had voted for. They asked me if I could do something about it the coercion and fraud. Of course, I couldn't do anything about it other than commiserate with them. But, it certainly bothered me greatly. I was really outraged that this kind of thing happened. But! That was the nature of the society in which I was operating.

Q: Honduras, did it have rule by the "14 families" and that sort of thing?

MACK: Not to the degree that El Salvador had the famous fourteen families. No. Because it was a more diffuse society. It was a more traditional society with a lot of poor people living all over the mountainside in little communities farming small plots of land. There may have been richer or smaller farmers but no much of the huge "terrateniente" (huge landowners of a type) you would see in El Salvador at that time.

Q: These were all basically people of Indian origin?

MACK: In Honduras virtually all people are Spanish speaking. Most are mestizos, people of mixed European/Indian ancestry, but a great number are of largely Indian ancestry. The Indian cultural influence remained very strong in many ways, in the food, for example, as well as in many of the beliefs, customs and physical gestures. Many of the words for many basic things like cooking implements, certain foods, tools, building materials, the corn planting cycles were of Indian origin.

Q: What were some of the Indian origins? Were they part of the Maya?

MACK: Some of them were peripheral Maya people. But most of Honduras lay outside Maya Empire. However, there is a major Mayan center site near the Guatemalan border in a place called Copan. Even in my town of Siguatepeque, people occasionally found Mayan-style pottery, although not as sophisticated as that found in the Maya heartland. In fact, I have some in my house. Those particular pieces were discovered when a bulldozer that was leveling dirt street in town unearthed it. It was chipped by the bulldozer. And somebody said "oh look at that". I heard about it, went to see the person and offered to buy it.. I bought a couple of pieces and chards and have been carrying them with me ever since. Obviously locked up because they are pretty fragile.

Q: How about the Peace Corps itself? Did the Peace Corps seem to have problems with its volunteers in that area? Not just your area but in all Honduras? Again it was early days. I am just wondering.

MACK: No. As I said, the first two groups served in Honduras before the Vietnam war was an issue. Those volunteers were idealistic, largely motivated by desire to serve and by patriotism. That changed somewhat as the Vietnam war heated up and the Peace Corps began to attract some guys who, as I said, were seeking to avoid military service. That is why so many people went to grad School to get a deferment. But when I was there, that was not the case at all.

Q: Did they warn you not to write uncomplimentary postcards? You arrived shortly after they had the problem, where was it in Ghana?

MACK: Chile or Ghana, uncomplimentary about the local government? It has been so long that it is hard for me separate what I heard about other countries from my case. I certainly don't remember any incidents like that involving the thirty-some odd people in my Peace Corps group. I should note that when I was in Honduras, there were maybe forty or fifty volunteers in the whole country. Later the Honduras program became huge, with four or five hundred volunteers. It seemed every town had one. I was the first ever volunteer in my town. Then after about a year I was joined by a young woman (I mentioned above), who had trained in my group, but had been sent somewhere else until she had medical problem.

Q: You left in about 1965.

MACK: I left in December of '65.

Q: And then what happened?

MACK: Well, what happened a month later was that I joined the Foreign Service. Six months before at the end of my tour with the Peace Corps I received a telegram, an old fashion Morse code telegram. That is how people communicated in Honduras, via telegrams send to the telegraph office. The phones were the crank type, almost impossible to hear, especially for me.

Of course the telegraph operator in Siguatepeque knew everything that was going on. I received a telegram that said I had been accepted into the Foreign Service to start in the class in January of 1966, and my starting salary would be \$7,200. And by the way, I had been brought in at a higher level because they had given me credit for the Peace Corps. Well, within a half a day the whole town knew this, and that I was going to be making \$7,200 a year. That was a huge amount of money for Siguatepeque. I was very embarrassed because my Peace Corps salary I think was \$75 a month, which is what a high school teacher made and quite adequate for my simple life style. I actually saved \$25 a month of that. One reason was I that I almost never drank beer. If you drank beer you went through you pay pretty fast. But I didn't and I was able to rent my little two-room house and eat, buy clothes and shoes and do everything else I needed to do on \$50 a month. My rent was \$16 a month.

So, I was embarrassed that people in Siguatepeque knew I was would be making so much money in the Foreign Service.

Then all of a sudden, "gee", Mack was going to have a salary of \$7200. Well anyway I left Honduras in December 2005, spent Christmas with my family in Rye and then sometime in January I went down to Washington and joined the Foreign Service A-100 course for new FSOs. I should tell you a funny story. One day I was driving to FSI which then located was located in Arlington Towers in Rosslyn. Basically it was a garage at that complex turned into classrooms. I don't know if you remember.

Q: Yes. Yes. I remember even being evacuated from there at one-point because the carbon dioxide level got too high.

MACK: I was living, get this, in Georgetown in a small apartment, actually what I was told were renovated former slave quarters, just off "M" Street that cost me \$125 a month furnished, including utilities. One day I was commuting to work along M street to Key Bridge and happened to find my self behind a DC Transit Bus, Washington's privately owned bus company that preceded Metro. On the back of the bus there was a sign that said, "Wanted, DC Transit Bus Drivers, Starting salary \$9,900 a year". Then it really hit me. \$7,200 really wasn't that much money in the US. I thought that was very, very funny. I wasn't making a lot of money and even back then \$7,200 didn't go very far.

So I joined the Foreign Service and assumed I would be sent back to Latin America. But early on in the A-100 course (the basic course for incoming FSOs) I had a meeting with my Personnel Officer to tell her that prior to leaving the Peace Corps I had been offered a Peace Corps management job by Frank Mankiewicz, then Deputy Director of the Peace Corps to the famous Sergeant Shriver. The job offer come from Mankiewicz when he stopped by my little Peace Corps town for a few hours on a visit to volunteers in Honduras. Apparently I made a good impression on him and he asked if I would like to be the Deputy Peace Corp Director in Costa Rica. I was thinking this would be great. I would postpone my Foreign Service career and be a Deputy Peace Corps Director in Costa Rica, which for guys in the Peace Corps was considered a really neat place to be. The girls are beautiful, just a paradise. Anyway I told the Foreign Service Personnel officer I wanted to take leave right away from the Foreign Service and go to Costa Rica as a Deputy Peace Corps Director. She responded to me firmly, in a deep southern accent, "Mr. Mack have you joined the Foreign Service or are you still in the Peace Corps?" I said, "Well, Mime I guess I am in the Foreign Service." She then said, "well I guess that is that." Then she asked me if I would be willing to serve in South Vietnam? I said, "yes". At that point I did not think much more of the Vietnam part of the conversation.. In those early days of the war, not many Foreign Service Officers were being assigned to Vietnam to positions other than in the US Embassy itself. They were not being assigned to the provinces in the "CORDS" program.

Q: We are talking about 1966, early '66?

MACK: We are talking about early 1966. Then came the fateful day in April in the famous A-100 Course, when the first assignments are announced.. You remember the big day?

Q: Oh Yeah!

MACK: They were reading off the assignments. Mary to Rome, Harry to Madrid, Joe to London, Mike to Stockholm, Jane to Paris, George to Buenos Aires, all these great places. Each time a big cheer. And then they called my name. "Jim Mack, Saigon, South Vietnam." Silence. I was the only one in my A-100 class to be assigned to Vietnam.

Q: I would like to quickly add, that I talked a little about the A-100 course. What was its composition and what was your impression of it?

MACK: Interestingly enough of the 30 or so people in my class, about 4 or 5 of us were former Peace Corps volunteers. That remained true for a number of years.

Q: I was with the Board of Examiners at one point and we looked long and hard at Peace Corps volunteers because of what they had been through.

MACK: You knew they could certainly live successfully outside the United States. There were certainly some very, very talented people. There also were also 4 or 5 women out of 30. It wasn't half, obviously. It was smaller numbers in those days. I don't recall any minorities in our class.

Q: This was still a group that was still not really focused on in Vietnam. I mean insofar as it might impact them.?

MACK: Correct. By the way, everybody wasn't an Ivy League grad. The myth that all FSOs had gone to Ivy League colleges had persisted for years. But it was simply not true. Obviously, you are dealing with very smart people. And a fair number did go to prestigious schools, but I'd say that far less than a third went to Ivy League Schools. So that myth wasn't even true forty years ago. It may have been true sixty or eighty years ago.

Q: I think it might have been before the war but after the war?

MACK: Are you talking about after the Second World War?

Q: Well, I am still talking about World War II. The GI Bill changed the whole thing. And even those who went to the Ivy League Schools, these were farm boys or something who got the GI Bill and who said, hey, this Harvard sounds good, I will go there.

MACK: Exactly! Exactly! The number of people who came from blue blood families wasn't that high. I am sure there were some, but nobody was talking about his gene pool.. It really wasn't like that at all. They were just a bunch of smart, "with it", very nice people. And we had a great time in the A-100 course. By the way one of my classmates, a Mary Ryan rose to be the Assistant Secretary of the Consular Bureau. She was the most successful person in my class.

Q: Anyway you got assigned to Saigon. How did you feel about that?

MACK: Well, I guess I would say somewhere between stunned and thrilled. I certainly trembled a little bit when I heard I was going to Vietnam. But! I had said I was willing to go. I never thought they would send me. I figured, they would say "hey! MACK is an excellent Spanish speaker. Why not send him to some place in Latin America". But, they sent me to Vietnam. I was a excited and facing the assignment with some trepidation but I certainly was willing to do it. I went to Vietnamese language training at the same Arlington Towers for 5 months. In those days when you were a Junior Officer, the system would not send you to the full eleven-month hard language language course. So I only got five or six months, which for Vietnamese is not enough. So I arrived in Saigon not speaking very good Vietnamese. I became a very good speaker because I was there for a total of three and a half years and I worked on it all the time. But since I did not take the full course, I think I tested only at a 2/2 when I had finished the course, which is not saying much if you are a political officer. Which is what I was. So it was pretty tough at first.

Q: Did your deafness hurt. I think you tone the language?

MACK: My deafness obviously hurt but I do happen to have a fairly good musical ear even though I don't play any instrument. Mother and my sister are both musical, so I inherited that. I inherited a good ear to learn languages, even though I just can't hear very well. Hearing tones Vietnamese "tones" was not a big problem, as long as I listened hard. Some people have excellent hearing but can't "hear" the tones of a tonal language like Vietnamese. So I tested out fairly decent in my MLAT aptitude test which is why they were willing to teach me Vietnamese I guess. Whatever my score was, it was sufficient to teach me a hard language. I don't mean to say I was a genius but I like to learn languages and I like to work hard on them. I was certainly enthusiastic about learning Vietnamese. And one of the best teachers I ever had for any subject was Mr. Quang, one of our Vietnamese teachers. He lived and breathed what he did and we were all very excited about learning.

John Negroponete by the way, preceded me to Vietnam, I guess a year or two. He was still there when I arrived. John spoke French rather than Vietnamese. But there were some superb Vietnamese speakers in th political section who had gone through full the course.

One of them ended up being a translator during the Paris Peace talks. So we newcomers really looked up to these guys, the same way I looked up to the first generation of Peace Corps volunteers.

Q: When did you get there, was it '67?

MACK: I think it was December of 1966.

Q: What was the situation like there.?

MACK: The war was all over the place. I was assigned as a Provincial Reporting Officer, working out of the Embassy in Saigon but traveling frequently to the Mekong Delta where the war was very, very close at hand. And I remember deep in the Delta near the U Minh forest flying on a mission with a newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel who was a FAC, a forward air controller, a pilot who guides in air strikes. He had offered to take me up in his plane, a little single prop one, like a little Cessna, when I was on a visit. He sat in the front seat, and I sat in the back. And watching him mark the Viet Cong positions with smoke rockets was pretty exciting. Each time he fired one, the little plane jumped. I also have to admit I was very scared. In fact, the VC fired up at us too. We even took a round in the wing. But I felt it was something I ought to do since it was part of what was going on in the provinces I was covering. I did it only once, but this guy did it every day.

After two months working the Delta, a position opened up in II Corps in Central Vietnam and I was sent to live in Nha Trang, a coastal city, and cover the surrounding provinces from there. Nha Trang had been a French resort town. Nicely laid out; very beautiful scenery. The beaches, islands and mountains looked like Rio de Janeiro without the skyline. And there I worked as a political advisor to the senior US official in the region, the head of what was called "CORDS", I recall one's last name was Madison. My job was to travel regularly among the five coastal provinces of II Corps writing reports about what was really going on in the war, and meeting with local religious (Catholic and Buddhist), political, and military leaders (both US and Vietnamese) and learning and writing about their attitudes towards the war. I would write what we called "air-grams", really dispatches prepared on a manual typewriter and physically sent to the embassy. Air-Grams and things like no longer exist in the Foreign Service.

Henry Cabot Lodge was the US ambassador when I first got there, but Ambassador Bunker replaced him shortly thereafter and was there for the rest of my time. That is what I did and then.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the Delta. Where were you located in the Delta?

MACK: When I worked the Delta, I was based of the US Embassy in Saigon. I did not live in the Delta. I traveled there, would spend a few days in a province, and then write a report on what I found. However, when I was transferred to II Corps, I actually lived in Nha Trang. In fact, all told, I lived in four cities during my 3 ½ years in Vietnam (Saigon, Nha Trang, Danang and Qui Nhon), and I think visited all 43 or so provinces. So I got to know Vietnam quite well.

Q: Did you go up in the Central Highlands too?

MACK: Yes I did go up into the Central Highlands. But, I was not the primary reporting officer there. Another officer handled that region.

Q: Who was that?

MACK: His name was David G. Brown, not to be confused with David E. Brown. who also served in Vietnam at the same time and also worked as a provincial reporting officer for the political section and covering the provinces in III Corps, the area around Saigon. In fact, for a time the two David Browns shared a house in Saigon. Both are now long retired.

Q: The South Koreans were in Vietnam too weren't they?

MACK: Yes, the Koreans were assigned to both parts of central Vietnam that I operated in, in fact to the two provinces I lived in. One division was assigned to Binh Dinh Province north of Qui Nhon city, and the other to a province just south Danang.

Q: How were they doing there?

MACK: Well, they were very, very tough guys. Very effective in Binh Dinh. They were feared by the Vietcong, and managed to clear out the area where they operated. They were quite ruthless. Very effective tactics. They would send out people who could basically dig themselves into foxholes at night all over the place. When the Vietcong would come though, these guys would pop out and blow away the Vietcong. They did this over a large area. They were fully quite successful, cutting down infiltration by the Vietcong.

Another South Korean Division was deployed was in the province that surrounded the city of Danang. By the time I was assigned to Danang to head up the branch consular office and also serve as political advisor to the US Commander of I Corps, a Marine 3 star named Lt Gen. Cushman who later become number # 2 at the CIA, the Koreans had become much less aggressive. Apparently, the Korean government was under pressure to cut casualties so the Koreans had barricaded themselves behind huge Maginot line of sandbags.

While the Vietcong did not go through their area, the Koreans did awful things to the people of the area.

Q: What was that?

MACK: It was basically a Korean My Lai where they executed a whole lot of people in a village. At the time it was not politically correct to cast aspersions on our allies. But I decided to do a little work on it. I happened to come in possession of a whole lot of photographs and interviewed people who were witnesses and wrote a report.

Q: What happened as a result of your report?

MACK: I can't tell you what happened. I know the US Embassy got my report, including the photographs. It was really up to the South Koreans. I don't recall anything happening.

Q: How was the war going? You were basically in II Corps and then I Corps?

MACK: It was both in that order. I spent 18 months in II Corps working out of Nha Trang, and a year in I Corps working out of Danang. Then I spent my last six months in Saigon.

Q: How was the war going when you were there?

MACK: Well, I was there during the huge build up of the American Forces from a relatively modest number to 500,000. Then in 1969 Nixon came into office and he started the "Vietnamization" program. In February 1968, during the Tet offensive, I was living in Nha Trang when the city was overrun by two battalions of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops.

By then, the war had become less a guerilla war and more of an old fashion large unit type of war. A war of mobile battalions. A lot of people today believe the Tet offensive was the greatest defeat ever suffered by the U.S. It is true that Tet was a great political success for the Communists which led to the decision to start to withdraw US troops. However, it was, in fact, a huge military defeat for the Viet Cong. To carry out the attack, the Viet Cong ordered their undercover VC agents to surface and join their troops as they converged on provincial capitals all over the country. But they in fact lost over 50,000 men in a matter of weeks, including much of their "infrastructure", their secret cadre.

The security situation actually improved rather dramatically after Tet 1968 because there were not as many Vietcong running around. What North Vietnam did to compensate for the huge losses sustained by the Viet Cong was to increase the pace in which they were moving regular North Vietnamese troops to the south. They had been coming South as early as '1965, but the pace quickened. However, they did not have as many local folks to guide them around as they had before. So in one sense, things were more secure. That is not to say they were secure. I mean I still had to travel between provinces mostly by air, although within the provinces I could move by road. I also traveled by military helicopter dozens of times as well. I left Vietnam at the end of 1969.

At that point I was assigned back to the Department of State to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research as an analyst on South Vietnam. A junior officer would never be assigned to that job today after having spent 3 years in the same country. Believe me. I didn't want it, tried to fight it, but then had no choice but to take it.

But you asked about security in Vietnam. In early 1973 when I was back in Qui Nhon on 6 months TDY to report on the implementation of the Paris Peace Accords, my wife and I drove literally all over the country alone in our sometimes not so trusty International Scout. From Binh Dinh all the way up to Quang Tri on the border with North Vietnam, all through the Central Highlands, and all the way south to Saigon and Can Tho in the heart of the My Cong delta. I never would have done this during the war. That is how things had changed. But it was the lull before the storm. By that time the US Congress had pulled the plug on support. US air and logistical support had dried up. When the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive 2 years later in 1975, the South just collapsed.

Q: The first time when you were there what was your impression of the situation in villages and the central government?

MACK: Well first of all there was a speckled pattern of government control. By that I mean some villages firmly in the government camp, some were contested, and some were under Viet Cong control. Often where the Vietcong were active, a lot people left and moved into the cities. Huge numbers of refugees built their little houses along the road. The government was not particularly popular on one hand. On the other hand, I don't think the communists were popular at all. I say that as a person who traveled around unarmed, alone and very frequently.

In Nha Trang I had a Vespa motor scooter for a while and later a white jeep. I didn't drive my jeep outside of town, but I did drive my motor scooter into the countryside. And I often met people who would invite me into their homes. They would talk to me. I was a young guy, unarmed and in civilian clothes and I guess not considered hostile or threatening. I got to meet people in virtually every walk of life. It was amazing how the Vietnamese would pick you up on the street. I would be going to the Buddhist Temple or something and walking around and they would say, "Oh you speak Vietnamese." All of a sudden, I would have an invitation to dinner, it was absolutely amazing. I never, I won't say never, I almost never felt a security threat. I can remember going to some, somewhat dicey areas in the countryside and have people come up to my little motor scooter and motion with their hands with a finger like this; basically what they were saying was don't go that way and I turned around. That did happen. I felt nearly zero hostility. I had a wonderful experience with the Vietnamese people at every level of society.

There were some things that outraged me, for example, the corruption in some parts of the government. Some province chiefs were very, very corrupt. Occasionally the government would send in someone who was really clean and I would write a dispatch about him or about someone who was dirty. People were skeptical about the government but those who supported the Vietcong or Communists were definitely in a small minority.

I really traveled everywhere, to every province in the country. I have been in numerous numbers of the districts but I did not go into areas that were red on the map. I did not go there.

Q: What happen to you during the Tet Offensive in '68?

MACK: Well, I was living in Nha Trang and sharing a regular Vietnamese house with another young American civilian. It was not in an American Compound. I did not live in a compound. I didn't want to live in a compound. The night before Tet (The Chinese New Year) I went to sleep late at night because it very noisy, like the 4th of July in the US, or New Year's eve in Latin America. Both sides had agreed on a cease fire for Tet, as they had done for years. So people stayed up late having a good time and drinking, eating, shooting off fire works, shooting their weapons in the air, and generally making merry. And along about one o'clock I went to bed with my air-conditioner on. In the early morning hours I was awakened to the sound of low flying helicopters. My first reaction was to think that insensitive Americans were buzzing the town when people were trying to sober up from the previous night. "Gee, what the hell are they flying the helicopters low over town for?" That was my first reaction. So I rolled out of bed, went out my door and looked down the end of the street which is two houses away, sixty feet away, and saw a jeep, a Vietnamese police jeep with water leaking out of holes in the radiator. Standing with his foot on the fender was an American Public Safety Advisor, German born, a real character, a cop from New Jersey. I went out and asked him what the heck was going on, I said to him. He answered "what the "deleted" is going on here?". "There are two battalions of North Vietnamese troops in town and they shot out my jeep."

What happened was that when the North Vietnamese troops came into town under cover of the truce, fireworks and general merrymaking, some units became disoriented by the layout of the city and never found their targets. It so happens that Nha Trang is laid out in a checkerboard pattern except that at one point the streets of one part of the checkerboard intersect each other on an angle. So while one section of town was logically, north, south, east, west, the other section was at a slightly different orientation. And so where the roads of each section intersected the North Vietnamese got totally and hopelessly lost. So while one North Vietnamese unit was able to take over the lightly defended provincial headquarters, dig in, others were left wandering around looking for their objectives.

And they were facing limited opposition because most troops were on leave for Tet. One North Vietnamese unit, probably without realizing what they were facing, attacked a series of houses which formed a Korean army compound that sat right next to the CORDS compound. In taking on the Koreans they made a big mistake and paid for it with their lives. Other North Vietnamese soldiers entered private houses and hunkered down. Then the local people started pointing out their locations to the Vietnamese, Korean and US special forces troops in the area. The North Vietnamese, reduced to operating in small groups, were picked off one by one, their bodies scarfed up and dumped in a central part of town. Over a period of several days, they had lost six or seven hundred people. I don't know how many got out of town alive. But, most did not. It was a disaster for them.

Later on that first day, I drove around and saw all the damage and all the blown up buildings, bodies of the North Vietnamese, and things. That evening, the CORDS leadership instructed all the Americans associated with the CORDS program, civilian and military, to come to the CORDS compound to spend the night for their own protection. Since many of these folks, including military, had not been in combat much, I really had no desire to spend the night with this them. I thought I would be better off somewhere else. So I went to spend the night at a top floor apartment in another part of town. And late that evening when I was there, I remember looking at the CORDS compound in the distance seeing what appeared to be a huge firefight going on.

The next morning when I went back to the compound I learned that many of the bullets (all outgoing) had impacted half way up a tree across from the compound where someone had thought he had seen somebody. We thereafter referred the purported intruder as "the ten foot tall Vietcong." Unfortunately, the tree sat immediately next to the Office of the Bishop of the Nha Trang Diocese. The Bishop's personal bedroom was pierced by numerous bullets. He was not hurt, fortunately. But guess who was deputized to go over to apologize to him. Me. There was no Vietcong. Our people were nervous because after all there had been plenty of action the previous night, including right next door. But the night after Tet there were no North Vietnamese around so it fell to me to go over and apologize to the Bishop of the Diocese of Nha Trang.

But I just did not want to be a part of all these armed and nervous people. I asked myself what I could contribute to protecting the compound if I spent the night there. The answer was not much. If there had been a real threat, believe me I would have been in that compound. I thought there wasn't. That was my sense as a political officer. I thought I had a pretty good sense of what was going on. So, I wanted to be somewhere else. There were just too many guns.

I must tell you I did not carry a weapon in my travels. Someone did give me a very nice souvenir folding stock Kalashnikov automatic rifle and several ammo clips. But I never took it out of my house, except once to test fire it. My view was this. Before I went somewhere, I ought to get an intel brief and generally try to figure out what was going on there. I did not worry about being assassinated by some guy running up to me and shooting me in the head because basically the Vietcong did not operate that way with the small fish that I was. I basically operated alone. My concern was that I might run into a Vietcong patrol crossing a road or something. On the other hand, how was I going to defend myself against and get away from twenty guys or a company of one hundred guys with just a pistol or rifle. I was going to be dead for sure. So I just made a decision not to carry a weapon. I was given one once when we were in a convoy in the Delta where we learned a Viet Cong unit had just passed. But that was about it. If I had been really accomplished with weapons, maybe I would have carried one regularly. Also I worried about losing it. A weapon is heavy. I was going to be meeting and talking with people, and I felt I couldn't do that if I packed heat. I have nothing against weapons. I believe Americans who are properly trained and tested should be able to own weapons, but in my case, I just didn't think that was a smart way to go.

Q: Well tell me, I thought we would finish up this Vietnam thing, tell me how did you find your dealings with the political section, your bosses in Saigon?

MACK: I had excellent bosses. Really great team of people, mentors. Officers who were far more talented in drafting than I was when I got there, and who worked with me and encouraged me. Dick Teare was one of them, Henry Dunlap was another. It was a very positive and demanding experience. I must say I had never had to write so much and so fast as I did in Vietnam. There was an insatiable appetite for information. This was particularly true my last six months in Vietnam (in 1969) when I was brought back to Saigon from Danang to work in the political section. Galen Stone was with the DCM, and the political section had 20 some odd people. It was huge. Like an Embassy. There was an external unit affairs, internal affairs unit, and a provincial reporting unit.

When I was brought back to the political section, one of my jobs was to draft what was called the "war and peace-a-gram". It went out every week, every Monday and covered Vietnamese attitudes toward the war and the internal political situation. And it had to be huge. Remember this was before the era of the word-processor which was maybe the greatest invention since sliced bread. Particularly for someone who was a sloppy typist like me.

Q: And also a bad speller, thank god for spell-check.

MACK: In those days you would type little pieces on your typewriter and then you would literally cut and paste and that sort of thing. I had to put this thing together every week. It was due in the early afternoon each Monday. Now I knew there was no way I could produce a twenty-five page cable in six hours. So what I had to do was to come in every Sunday right after lunch start the cable. This way I had 24 hours instead of 6 to produce this report. So for six months the only time I had off was Sunday mornings. That was the only time I had off. I would work on this thing Sundays and then other people would give me more material. It'd put it all together and then pass it on to Harry Dunlap. Remember Harry! A really good guy who was head of our Internal Reporting Unit.

Q: Harry and I took Surfing lessons together.

MACK: Really! Okay. So Dick Teare was the head of the Provincial Reporting Unit for the first year and half or so that I was there. I can't recall if he was there in my last year. But Harry Dunlap would edit it and we would get the sucker out. And then I would report on the status of the constitution the Vietnamese were drafting. This was '69. My beat was the National Assembly so I would have a lot of contact with people who had been elected to the National Assembly. And, of course, the caring and feeding of US congressional visitors like Houston Congressman George Herbert Walker Bush. We would brief them. But, I was really fully occupied. We just worked all through dinners and lunches. Richard Nixon came to that was a story in itself. May I tell you.

Q: Yes!

MACK: Richard Nixon paid a surprise visit to Saigon. I can't tell you exactly when it was. It would have been in the Fall of '69. Early in the morning, I received a call at home before I left for the Embassy. It was Martin Hertz, the Political Counselor. He said the President of the United States is arriving in three hours and you can't tell anybody. And we have selected you to do the consecutive interpreting for his address to the Vietnamese Press.

Think about this. I was a quite a good Vietnamese speaker at the time. But what happened was Nixon was a superb extemporaneous speaker. At the end of Nixon's meeting with President Thieu, I was sitting in the side room of the national palace waiting for Nixon to address the huge assembled press corps, both foreign and Vietnamese. I was nervous as hell! You can imagine. There were bleachers set up for the press, the Vietnamese and Foreign Press. I was suppose to do a consecutive translation from English to Vietnamese. In theory that mean President Nixon would speak a sentence or two, and I would translate.

Well, finally the bilateral meeting with President Thieu ended and he and Nixon emerged and began to speak. Unlike President Thieu who spoke first from a written text which I had been able to read in advance, Nixon spoke extemporaneously without stopping for at least ten or fifteen minutes. Now think about this. I am not a professional interpreter. I am not a consecutive interpreter. I twenty-seven years old and I am nervous as hell. The President of the United States is there and hundreds of people are waiting. And the President doesn't stop. So I am feverishly taking notes and after about ten minutes of this was desperate. I happened to be standing next to the very professional, very experienced, very smooth Chief Press Officer for the Vietnamese Government, who spoke fluent English. At one point I turned to him and said "I can not do this." "There is no way I can make sense out my garbled notes on Nixon's fifteen minute uninterrupted extemporaneous speech and translate it into Vietnamese. I just can't do it." I was wringing my hands. To my immense relief, he said "I will take care of it". He went out there and spoke about two minutes, supposedly summarizing what the President had said. So I never did interpret for Nixon. Thank God! It was a task that I was not equipped to do.

I gained enormous respect for people who work in the interpreting business. And I learned that interpreting is a skill, not to be confused with being able to speak a foreign language well. Not to be confused in any way. And, of course, I was being set up in a sense. It was not like interpreting in a small meeting for visiting US Congressmen, which I did frequently. I could always stop a congressman who went on too long and say, "excuse me, let me translate what you just said since I can't remember a whole paragraph.". I could control the conversation. But I had absolutely no control over Nixon's monologue. I was way out of my depth. I was never more relieved in my life when this elderly Vietnamese gentleman (who was what my age is now said) said he would do it for me. He was in charge of Press Relations for the Vietnamese Presidency. He was very accomplished at it. He basically made it up. Ha! Ha! But he was speaking his own language, so he was able to wing it.

Q: When did you leave Saigon?

MACK: I left in early December of 1969. I had been there years. I arrived in December of '66 and I left in December '69.

Q: By the time you left, did you, what were you getting from your contacts. Was there a feeling of confidence or a feeling of unease? What I am talking about is the Vietnamese.

MACK: Well! There were some war worries obviously. I think there was a feeling among the Vietnamese that as long as the Americans were they were going to be able to keep going. There was always a question of whether the "Vietnamization" policy would work. But things were getting better. The things in the My Cong Delta were definitely improving. The Vietnamese Government had begun its land reform program, with US money paying for the land that was redistributed. And the land there was extremely rich. Electrification was going on there. Particularly when I went back in '73. Things were really going well. There weren't any Vietcong running around in the Delta in '73. They really weren't. Most had been exposed during the 1968 Tet offensive and over time they had "attrited" was the word they use to use (or weeded out) and there were not many left. The Delta was quite secure in 1973. But when I left Vietnam for the first time in 1969, there were still huge numbers of American troops there. So, as long as the Americans were there, the situation would be manageable. When I returned in early 1973, the ceasefire had been in place for little over a month, and by then the US military had already drawn down most of its troops. In fact, shortly after I arrived, I personally saw off the last GIs off from II Corps out of Qui Nhon harbor. They were the last 3 US divisions in Vietnam.

So by February of '73 the Vietnamese were feeling very much alone, although the countryside was quite secure. I told you I traveled by vehicle, unarmed with my wife (my bride) through a large portion of the country. This is something I never would have thought of doing when I was there between '66 and '69. But you could see the North Vietnamese in some places building roads in the mountains. And the South Vietnamese military were short on everything. They were short on ammunition. They were short on gasoline and replacement parts. And it was a big problem. They could not fire their artillery as much as they wanted. They could not move their vehicles around as much as they could before. So they were getting worried.

We really were pulling out and they were very much alone 1973, in my last six months there. They had no US military advisors to lean on. There were only a few American civilians involved developmental type activities. I did get out into the countryside a fair amount. I remember spending the night in a fortified hamlet with my wife, being entertained by the local people. An unbelievable experience. I had been well treated the first time I was in Vietnam, but even better the second time. People obviously looked at an American with his wife differently than a single male.

But the South Vietnamese were worried at the time. They were very frank about it. The military officers that I knew were very happy to see me around. They welcomed me with opened arms. I would show up in a district mostly unannounced, driving my International Scout. But I did always check the Intelligence Reports before I would go anywhere to be sure the roads were open and there were no problems. Folks were very happy to see us. The North Vietnamese Army had not yet brought its full power to bear in most parts of the country. There was kind of a Kabuki' Theatre show. In Binh Dinh Province where I lived, the South Vietnamese military sometimes would take back some populated areas controlled by the Vietcong and the VC would react. But it was basically a waiting period. Both sides kept the fighting within bounds and limited. Clearly, the North Vietnamese were waiting, building and rebuilding roads, resupplying, waiting for the big moment. In hindsight that was what was happening. But at the time in early 1973 the environment was amazingly secure in comparison to the Vietnam that I experienced between 1966-1969.

Q: Well, when you were in Saigon up to December of '69 did you feel there was pressure from the White House to put out favorable reports?

MACK: I did not feel it at all. I understand things may have changed by the end of 1974 and early 1975, under Ambassador Martin?

Q: That was Graham Martin.

MACK: Yes, He was there and I understand some people felt that. I never did. I never, ever felt that. I felt I could say anything that I wanted. And I did. If I detected abuse, I reported it. I told you about the case of abuse by the Koreans that I reported in 1969. If I learned about corruption involving the Americans, like I did in 1968 at the US military huge supply base at Cam Ranh Bay, where a small group of American NCOs in a supply unit were selling lighter flints, batteries and other equipment to Vietcong agents, I reported it. This stuff was used by the VC to manufacture explosive devices. People concerned about these things, both Vietnamese and Americans, came to see me as someone who would get the word up to the right places but outside the chain of command when, for what ever reason, they could not. I remember an Army CID (Criminal Investigative Division) guy from Cam Ranh telling showing me photographs of what was going on. Apparently there was a Commanding General there who didn't want to accept that this was going on in his command. So the CID guy felt stonewalled. When I met with him he said, "look at this". So I asked to give me the photographs. He said, "yes, yes, I will give you the photographs." He gave them to me and I wrote a pretty graphic report like the other one with photographs to prove it. Photographs showing the sergeants handing the stuff over the barbwire, rather remarkable. Something was done about it and action was taken. I think the General may have been removed. Now we are talking almost 40 years after the event, but my recollection is that I did not feel as if I were writing under a great big censor. My biggest challenge was to write to the very high standard set by some very, very able Foreign Service Officers.

Q: Well Martin Hertz was a scary guy. He could take dictation and without changing a word.

MACK: Yes, he could take dictation and without changing a word. But that requires a extraordinary high level of intelligence and focus. So it was really inhibiting to work with somebody that good. And when you got a little complementary note from him, with his signature that looked like a tiny flower, you would put it up on the wall. Ha! Ha!

Q: Okay Jim, this is a good place to stop and we will pick this up in 1970 I guess when you are off to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

MACK: We will talk about the worst job I ever had and did in the Foreign Service. And how important good management is? Ha! Ha!

Q: Okay we will talk about that.

Today is the 24th of January 2005, Jim 1970 you are off to INR (Intelligence and Research) and you were there for how long?

MACK: Well I was there for almost two years.

Q: Talk about it, is this the worst job you ever had?

MACK: Yes. This was the worst job I ever had and did. After three years in Vietnam, I returned to Washington to take a job that probably would have been an illegal assignment today for a junior officer. That is to assign a Junior Officer, an untenured Junior Officer, to work on the same country on which he had been working in the field for the three previous years. I was assigned to INR to be an intelligence analyst for South Vietnam. This involved among other things preparing a daily morning brief for the Assistant Secretary of East Asia Affairs, it was Ambassador Sullivan. And also to write intelligence reports on how I saw the internal political situation in South Vietnam at the time.

Q: I am interviewing Terry Tull now.

MACK: Terry Tull is an esteemed colleague and served at the same time that I did as a matter of fact, in Vietnam. She worked in the Embassy political section. Keep in mind what I was coming from. I had been in the field. I was a Provincial Reporting Officer in Vietnam, one of the best jobs I ever had or did. So any way I come back to the Department of State after three years in Vietnam to a suffocating bureaucracy and without the freedom I had to move around and write reports and interact with people there. In the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) there were six or seven layers between me and getting a paper out.

Q: Was this particularly because Vietnam was obviously hot. Was the subject a tendency to put more people on to it. As I mentioned, Iraq probably today has the same thing. I mean you throw people at the job which usually doesn't make for a better product.

MACK: Well, there is probably something to that. There were certainly quite a few people. There must have been, I don't know, four or five people working on South Vietnam at the time. Well, they were all good folks. My boss was a good guy.

Q: What was his name?

MACK: His name was Lou Sarris. But just getting something through Lou was very difficult and it was quite a culture shock coming back to Washington, frankly. I mean this in a personal sense and in a professional sense. In INR there was much more time to get reports "out", but we'd have to go through ten drafts, as opposed to Vietnam where we had to get reports out very, very, quickly. I also hungered for the contact with the local people that I had in Vietnam every day. That was the excitement of it. In INR worked in my little windowless cubical with no contact with the people whose country I was supposed to analyze.

Q: I know the feelings.

MACK: It was socially difficult and professionally not very inspiring.

Q: Well, do you recall how things were going in 70 and 71? What was happening in South Vietnam?

MACK: Well yes. In 1971 there was a major North Vietnamese Offensive into South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese Army came straight down the highway number one, right on down the coastal highway in a traditional WW II type tank attack. There was nothing "guerrilla" about it at all. And they managed to push the South Vietnamese Army totally out of Quang Tri Province, which the northern most province in South Vietnam. So the Vietnamese were quite battered. It was a difficult time for them since we had already pulled all the US troops out of that part of the country. So the Vietnamese had to do it themselves. And they did finally did halt the North Vietnamese offensive with the help of with the help of U.S. B-52's. But it was a very, very, difficult time for the Vietnamese.

Q: Was this kind of discouraging to you that the South Vietnamese were unable to push back the North Vietnamese?

MACK: Well yes, It was discouraging and I will talk to you about that a little later about what happened because I did go back to Vietnam. But it was not an encouraging time. Obviously, Nixon clearly had realized that he had to get us out. So US military peaked out in personnel strength there somewhere in '69.

Q: I think it was.

MACK: By 1972, US force levels had wound down considerably and the North Vietnamese felt bold enough to undertake a major attack, a frontal attack on the South. The North Vietnamese were never really guerrillas anyway. The South Vietnamese Communists, the Viet Cong) were the guerillas. The North Vietnamese were a conventional army. They fought very much like most soldiers do in the world with artillery, rockets, tanks, etc.

Q: How you were working. Were you finding the material that you came up and evaluating it or was it more a cosmetic of changing of the verbiage?

MACK: Obviously some of both. There also was a lot of war gaming and devils advocating going on. Keep in mind, my reporting, my analysis, was not on the war. It was on the internal South Vietnam Political Situation. I was not a military expert. There were other people who did that.

Q: It has been said that South Vietnamese corruption and political maneuvering played a major role in the collapse of South Vietnam. At the time do you feel that this was part of the problem?

MACK: Corruption definitely was an issue. I never believed that the South Vietnamese people supported communism. My personal experience showed me otherwise. And I believed very much that the communists could not have won a free election in South Vietnam. They absolutely could not have an election. People were frustrated with the corruption and getting tired of the war. Once our military presence, along with our logistical support, wound down, we began to see a sapping of the morale of the Vietnamese. But I really have to come back to that in a later chapter. Because, there is an interlude here.

Q: Okay.

MACK: The interlude is that in late '71, I was offered an assignment as Political/Labor Officer in San Jose, Costa Rica. Since I wanted to get back to Latin-America, I welcomed that assignment. I got married just before I left. My wife Sheila and I drove from Washington to San Jose, a wonderful trip which, including stops and a visit to my old Peace Corps town in Honduras, took about 3 weeks. Costa Rica was an open, democratic country, a delightful place, and it was easy to work there as a political/labor officer. I had been a post about a year when, at the end of 1972, I think around Christmas, when the Paris Peace Accords were signed.

Just a few days later, I was called to the ambassador's office. Viron Vaky was Ambassador at the time. He said, "Jim, I just received a cable. You have been selected as part of a group of Foreign Services Officers with Vietnam experience to return to South Vietnam within a month to start a 6 month unaccompanied tour to report on the progress of implementation of the Paris Peace Accords, including the cease fire." The spouses of returning officers were supposed to remain in place at whatever post they were current at during this period, which in Sheila's case, meant San Jose, Costa Rica. According to the Peace Accords, the agreement was to be monitored by a four party International Control Commission consisting of two communist states (Poland and Hungary) and two non-communist states (Canada and I think Indonesia).

I was ready to do my duty, and frankly rather excited about the chance to go back to South Vietnam. However, as I mentioned before, my wife Sheila and I were newly married. When I broke the news to her that evening, she was not happy at all about my going without her. She told me flatly that she would be going too and was not about to be deterred by a decision by the State Department that my TDY tour was to be unaccompanied. She found my arguments that it might be dangerous unconvincing. She also very quickly persuaded me to try to obtain a waiver from Director General of the Foreign Service. So with the support of Ambassador Vaky, I sent in an appeal. As the days ticked by with no response, I decided I would try to take her no matter what. My idea was to just show up in Saigon with her.

With only a couple of days until departure, we finally got a cable from the Director General who said I could take Sheila, but would have to pay her travel costs, which were \$2,500, about ½ of my yearly pay. Furthermore, I was told that since my wife would be accompanying me, I would be required to live in a secure area. We accepted that. We also left without visas since there was no South Vietnamese Embassy in Costa Rica. We left San Jose at the end of January for Los Angeles, and hop scotched across the Pacific - Hawaii, where we spent a couple of days, Guam, Wake Island.

In Honolulu, the Pan Am Ground Chief did not want to let Sheila board the plane because he thought the Vietnamese would fine his company if she arrived in Saigon without a proper visa. Always persuasive, Sheila prevailed upon him to let her board. She had to convince the Pan Am representatives in Guam and Wake Island as well. When we finally arrived in Vietnam, Lo and Behold I was able to bring her into the country. Ha! Ha! We were initially going to be assigned to Can Tho to work at the Consulate General.

Q: Yes, down in the Delta region.

MACK: Right, and, this is really off the record. I met the guy who was going to be heading up the Consulate General and realized very quickly that we were not going to get along. Plus the Delta was the area with which I was least familiar. I did know the Delta somewhat, but I had really operated in Central Vietnam and not in the Delta. So I asked to be transferred to a Consulate General in Nha Trang. My wish was granted because there happened to be another fellow officer who had gone back with me who had been assigned to Nha Trang, but in fact wanted to go back to Can Tho where he had once served. So it was a perfect switch. Everybody was happy. However, when I got to Nha Trang, I quickly came to the conclusion that I did not want to be part of the huge bureaucracy there. I also knew they wanted to fill positions in the surrounding provinces and not just the Consulate General. It turned out that the Political Officer in charge of the Consulate General in Nha Trang, who also had been sent back for a 6 month TDY was an old friend of mine.

Q: Who was that?

MACK: Dick Teare, who during my first tour, had been in charge of the provincial reporting unit, and my first boss. Dick helped me get assigned to Qui Nhon city in Binh Dinh province farther up the coast. I knew the town well and was quite happy to be assigned there. I was assigned to a CORDs Office there. The provincial senior advisor, a retired US Army Major, whose name I will not mention, was clearly not happy to have new guy bringing his wife, and instead of been given space in the little prefab homes where most personnel were housed, we were given an old French Army Trailer equipped with a very narrow single bed, and a closet full of hand grenades left over from who knows when. This senior advisor was a very arbitrary person, with an explosive temper and often threatened his local Vietnamese staff, who feared him. It was clear we were not going to get along very well. However, my wife was a really good trooper. She had been a VISTA volunteer in northern Arizona on the Navajo Reservation, and determined not to complain. She also did not complain that her orders from the moment we arrived in Vietnam had been that for security reasons, she was never to travel by land out of town. It turned out we both did many times.

But returning to the provincial senior advisor, his abuse of his staff was really terrible. He was an alcoholic. It was a pretty serious situation. I called back to Dick Teare at the Consulate General in Nha Trang and said the CG really needed to take a look at the situation. Very shortly thereafter the Binh Dinh provincial senior advisor was removed. I really think I had done a good deed, but my real job was to report on the war which continued at a more restricted level during the cease-fire, and on the political situation and the morale of the people.

Q: You were at Qui Nhon?

MACK: Yes, I was at Qui Nhon which was the capital of Binh Dinh Province, a large province in Central Vietnam. And within a month or two of my arrival, I literally put the last GI on the last boat to leave.

Q: Is Qui Nhon a port?

MACK: Yes Qui Nhon is a big port. It serves as the port for the highland city of Pleiku, for example. So within a month or two all U.S. Forces, all, were gone. And the Vietnamese were very lonely with no Americans around. So since I was there with my wife, all the doors were open to us. There were only a handful of American civilians left, carrying out civilian functions.

Since, in those days, I was a Vietnamese speaker and knew the area, I was considered an old hand at the ripe old age of 30. I couldn't have had more access than I did. And Sheila and I took advantage of that access and traveled around a lot. The cease-fire had funny rules. The war took place in certain areas but not in other areas. It was fairly predictable. The result was we could get out and around. When we had a day or two off, my wife and I would drive to different place around the country. For example, we drove in our International Scout all the way from Qui Nhon the North Vietnamese border in Quang Tri Province; also from Qui Nhon up to Pleiku and Kon Tum. From Qui Nhon through the mountain vacation town of Da Lat down to Saigon and on to My Tho on the Me Cong River. I would never have attempted this during the war.

I would get intelligence reports before we would go. I never carried a weapon. My view was for what? What good would that do. And just tried to play it smart when we were on the road. We never had an incident.

Anyway for my reports on the ceasefire, politics, and attitudes, I would type out my dispatches in my messy style. We did not have word-processor in those days. My wife, who was my unpaid assistant, would then retype them nicely. A plane would come by every afternoon to pick up my "dispatch" and take it to the Consulate General in Nha Trang and the Embassy in Saigon. Just like in the old Foreign Service days, except instead of a ship it was a plane.

I reported on what I had heard and seen. Whatever skirmish had taken place. How the International Control Commission, which was set up under the Paris Peace Accords to monitor its implementation, was getting along since they had an office in the town. If the North Vietnamese were building roads in the mountains in eyesight of where I was, I could report on that. If there was a prisoner of war exchange, I could report on that. In fact, Sheila and I went to a South Vietnamese/Viet Cong prisoner of war exchange. We probably shouldn't have but did. This is how it happened. At a party, a South Vietnamese Air Force Base commander, at Sheila's prompting, offered to fly us in his Huey helo up to the headquarters of the northernmost district in Binh Dinh. We took him up on his offer and he came through. He flew us up to that town, where he commandeered a jeep, ripped off his name tags so he couldn't be identified by the VC, and drove us to the exchange site in the middle of nowhere. To get there we had to drive way west of the last outpost of the South Vietnamese Army. It was a very exciting time, probably my best ever six months in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was happening because the area where you assigned. Were the highlands part of your area?

MACK: No! I just covered Qui Nhon, I mean Binh Dinh which was a lowland province. It did contain some mountains, but I just covered the lowland areas. I did drive to other areas, including the highlands, to visit colleagues who had been assigned back to provincial teams on TDY just as I had been.

Q: Were you getting any feeling of buildup of the North Vietnamese side?

MACK: Absolutely!

Q: Was II Corps where the final North Vietnamese attack began in 1975?

MACK: Yes. Yes, the final offensive began against the highland provinces. Even in 1973 when I was in Binh Dinh the impression was that the North Vietnamese were logistically building up to do something. You could see the roads they were carving out on the mountainside, literally. And in addition, we were cutting back on our logistical support to the South Vietnamese Army. That meant, for example, that a Vietnamese Unit would have a limited amount of gasoline to use in their vehicles. So they were restricted how often they could drive. They were running short on ammunition. They couldn't fire H&I (Harassment and ) Interdiction fire as they always had before. They were much more careful about how much ammo they expended. They knew their source of supply was severely reduced. While I was there in 1973, we knew the North Vietnamese were building up, but the South Vietnamese were not expending resources to counter it. It was a very strange situation. Yet in this limbo period, we could move around to many areas freely. These were areas that in my first tour I never would have gone into on the ground or without being accompanied by armed military force. It was kind of a shadow war or a phony war, a kind of a surreal situation.

Q: What were your Vietnamese contacts in your area saying? Were they all saying that when something happens will you get me out or that sort of thing?

MACK: No! No! They were not really saying that. But the Vietnamese military was plainly worried about the drop in US logistical support. When the Americans pulled out, they left their air bases and all the equipment and all the buildings, but clearly the Vietnamese did not have the resources to maintain them. They were restricted in the weapons and the munitions they had available as they were in fuel and parts for vehicles and that sort of thing. They could feel the pinch and I just have to believe that they were feeling lonely and probably wondering if the Americans would come back if the North attacked.

At the same time, they were extremely warm toward me and to my wife who was teaching English in a normal school in Qui Nhon. They were very, very happy to see Americans. I think they took some comfort in that and the fact that I would be there with my spouse.

Q: There was an major North Vietnamese offensive against the South at one point, wasn't there?

MACK: Maybe you are thinking about the 1972 North Vietnamese frontal assault, the so called "Easter Offensive" down Highway I into the South. I can tell you that Quang Tri City, the first provincial capital they came to, was reduced to rubble. My wife and I visited it in 1973. There were no buildings standing above my height. Literally the whole town was wiped out.

Q: Were American reconnaissance planes going over looking at things?

MACK: During my time, they were not flying out of South Vietnam. They may have been flying out of Thailand. Frankly, I just don't recall.

Q: What were you getting from your colleagues? I mean was this a feeling well this is fine, but?

MACK: My colleagues in the highlands were a little more nervous, I remember, and rightly so. I remember driving up to Kon Tum via Pleiku with my wife unescorted in our not so trusty International Harvester Scout. The first leg of the trip, from Qui Nhon to Pleiku, was uneventful. That stretch was at one time known as the "the highway of death". It had been made famous in Bernard Fall's book " Street without Joy" about destruction of the French Army's "Force Mobile" by the Communists during the French Indochina war in the early 50s.

Q: Street Without Joy, yeah!

MACK: But in any event, while we were on the highway from Pleiku to Kon Tum we witnessed a series of air strikes about three miles away. We just stopped the car and stood on our own hood and watched. And then that night in Kon Tum the local forces were constantly shelling with artillery North Vietnamese Army targets about ten or fifteen miles from town.. According to my colleague Richard Mueller who was there, that was not an unusual occurrence.

Q: What were these? Where these to keep people from?

MACK: They were North Vietnamese units in the jungles around Kon Tum. The area was not heavily populated.

Q. Was South Vietnamese Government corruption a big issue where you were here?

MACK: Of course. Not in every province, not all the time. Because from time to time you did have honest people who really wanted to clean house and attempted to. But you did have a tradition of corruption and you also had by virtue of the huge U.S. presence a big potential target for local corruption. Qui Nhon City in Binh Dinh Province in II Corps was a major logistical hub. Three divisions - two U.S. and one South Korean - were supported out of the port of Qui Nhon. The opportunity for diversion, whether of fuel, other logistical material or other things like commissary items, was huge. And, therefore, the temptation was enormous. I suppose there was a lot of the same in Europe during World War II..

Q: When I was in Vietnam I ran across someone who had files that went back to World War II that showed there was diversion of gasoline that came through France for our armies.

MACK: Right. And it was huge in Vietnam too. But while I was there in 1973, the allied forces withdrew and opportunities for graft declined. For example, the gasoline pipeline was not full anymore.

Q: But also I was wondering whether you got involved in consular activities? Because when I was Consul General in Saigon we had some problems up in Danang with American civilians.

MACK: Oh Gee! I was the head of the Branch Consulate in Da Nang in 1969 but another junior officer handled those issues, and I don't recall any specific incidents.

Q: What was the background of your wife?

MACK: Well, she comes from a small town called Pleasantville, which is near my hometown of Rye, New York in Westchester County. I didn't know her growing up. I met her in Washington actually when I was going through Foreign Service A-100 course for junior officers in 1966. She was then a Geography teacher at Langley High School in McLean, Virginia. We didn't get married until five years later in 1971. From Langley High School, Sheila had gone off to be a VISTA Volunteer on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. I shipped out to South Vietnam. We got back together 5 years later when I heard she still wasn't married. She was the kind of gal that's good in any kind of situation, obviously.

Q: What a wonderful introduction to the Foreign Service.

MACK: Well she probably enjoyed Vietnam as much as any place we have ever been since. Never complained at all.

Q: Well you were there six months, how did you feel about the Peace Accords when you left?

MACK: You are asking me thirty-four years after the event and after all sorts of things have happened which will cloud my memory of what happened and when. I was never convinced that the Paris Peace Accords agreement would lead to elections under conditions acceptable to the North. Real free elections in the North would have been impossible in any event. In the south, the Communists would have lost. But clearly the communists never planned on getting to that point. They were simply waiting for the Americans to leave so that could take South Vietnam by military force. Which, of course they did.

Q: You left there when?

MACK: People get confused. I left there in August of 1973. South Vietnam fell in April or May of '75. There were almost two years between my departure and the fall. So, I'm not one of the guys who were plucked from the roof of the Embassy in that dramatic photograph.

Q: The end came rather quickly.

MACK: It came rather quickly but it came in context of the continued reduction of U.S. logistical support and, contrary to the North Vietnamese offensive in 1971, no US air support either. To my knowledge, we provided no air support in final battles in 1975. And by then the South Vietnamese military had been bled down and knew that the Americans were not going to help them this time around. So I think it sapped their will to fight. Some units actually fought very, very well but were simply overwhelmed. But others, particularly in Central Vietnam, crumbled. The fall of the provincial capitals in the highlands turned into rout in the coastal cities as well. People just panicked. Once it started, things collapsed like a house of cards.

Q: Where did you go when you finished your 6 month TDY in Vietnam?

MACK: I went back and finished my tour in Costa Rica. And after I finished there I had the opportunity to serve in Brazil. I had always wanted to serve in a Portuguese speaking country so I requested an assignment in Brazil. After Portuguese language training, I was assigned as a Labor Officer at the Consulate General in Sao Paulo.

Q: Costa Rica is always held up as being the golden country of Central America. How did you find it there?

MACK: Well Costa Rica really was an island of democracy, in a sea of dictatorship. It was really an open society. As a political/labor officer I had total access to almost everybody. And it was a great assignment and a delightful place to live. The climate was ideal in San Jose up on the Meseta Central. Warm in the day and cool at night. There were a lot of things to do on weekends. We liked to hike and did a lot of backpacking. At that point, we had no children so we were basically free to do whatever we wanted.

That said, the Costa Ricans for years very successfully milked their democratic status with the US. As a result they received economic assistance for much longer and in far greater quantities than their relatively advanced economic level of development justified.

Q: You were a labor officer. We also had strong AFL-CIO representation there. How did you work with this reality?

MACK: Fine! I had just gone through the labor officer training short course, which included orientation sessions at AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington. The AFL-CIO (AIFLD) officer in Costa Rica named Russo was a good guy and we got along very well. He worked with Costa Rica's democratic labor organizations and we really did not have any problems. Remember I was a Junior Officer. I was not making and shaping U.S. policy. Not that we had to make and shape anything in Costa Rica.

Q: How about United Fruit? Was it there?

MACK: Yes. United Fruit had a plantation on the Pacific coast and Standard Fruit Company had two on the Caribbean side.

Q: Were the banana workers organized?

MACK: Yes, they were well organized, and if I remember correctly were democratic unions, strong, strong unions. I can't remember any horrible labor strife in the banana zone while I was there. My memory may fail me but the workers there on the average were much more handsomely paid and much better taken care of than average rural worker in Costa Rica. I found that was the case in Honduras too by the way. But the United Fruit Company was always a political punching bag because it had gotten involved in local politics in the old days and represented an important part of region's exports. But in Costa Rica in the 70s, they really did not occupy the lions share of the economy. They were not insignificant, but at that time, in addition to bananas, Costa Rica produced coffee, cattle and sugar. Also, bananas were grown on the coasts, not in the central highlands where most the population lived. So, it was not a hostile environment.

Q: Well, then you took Portuguese here in Washington?

MACK: Yes, I did.

Q: When did you leave Costa Rica?

MACK: I left in mid '75, took four or five months of Portuguese language training and at the end of the year went to Sao Paulo.

Q: Now Sao Paulo, of course is a huge city.

MACK: Indeed and the industrial center of Brazil. This was during the military government period. At that point, Gen. Geisel was President. He proved to be a more open-minded leader than some had expected. The Labor movement was ostensibly under government control. But believe me, underneath their control a lot of things were going on. And in any event, basically my job was to maintain relations with the Sao Paulo labor movement, which I did. I spent a lot of time with the labor union leaders and sent a few off to study at the AIL-CIO's "George Meany Institute" outside Washington, etc. I also reported on how the government kept union leaders under control. They had systems for doing this. I won't bore you, but it was very interesting. One of my union contacts was a guy named Ignacio "Lula" da Silva, now president of Brazil.

Q: Oh Yeah!

MACK: While I was in Sao Paulo, Lula had become head of the Metallurgical Workers Union that covered the three satellite cities around Sao Paulo where Brazil's automobile and truck manufacturers were located. Lula's union was probably the strongest and richest in Brazil. We became really pretty good friends. I liked him a lot. I recognized that his union had some strong leftist influence particularly among the lawyers who at that time were often the powers behind the throne of Brazilian unions. And some were members of the Communist Party of Brazil. But Lula was a bright young guy, honest and forward looking. He also was fairly open minded, though obviously being schooled by some of the advisors that I just spoke to you about. Lula and his wife were guests in our home. I also invited Lula to attend the George Meany Institute for a month's training. He had never been out of Brazil and was very excited to have this opportunity. He really could not wait to do this. But a couple of weeks before he was to leave for the US, he phoned me and said, "Jim, I am sorry I just can't make the trip; I have other commitments". At that point it was clear to me his advisors had told him not to go the United States. Perfectly clear.

Q: It sounds like these advisors were sort of they represent the left wing intellectuals hanging around. Not really workers but -

MACK: Right, they were labor lawyers. But in Brazil, union leaders typically had lawyers to advise them, to write speeches for them etc.

Q: The lawyers were advisors.

MACK: Yes. So anyway Lula did not go and the rest is history. He became a very successful Labor Leader and then ran for President, I guess twice before winning his third time. And he is turning out to be a very, very attractive pragmatic leader of the left. The US has developed a good relationship with him despite the ideological differences; he has shown his pragmatic side, which was pretty obvious even way back then.

Q: There is a certain amount of concern when he became President?

MACK: Yes there was.

Q: Which way is this guy going to go? Is he going to be another, not necessarily a Castro but somebody who is going to dismantle the whole apparatus?

MACK: But he turned out not to be that way at all. Though he is socially very progressive. And he is intent on righting some of the social wrongs in Brazil. And definitely wants to improve the lives of the workers. He also recognized that he couldn't do that by destroying the economy. He needed the support from the industrialists and foreign investors to keep the economy moving. He is acting in a very, very responsible way.

Q: You were in Sao Paulo from when to when?

MACK: I was there from '75 to '77.

Q: Now wasn't this a time when things were going in Chile with Allende?

MACK: The Allende was already out.

Q: Huh!

MACK: Allende must have been killed in '72 or '73. So Pinochet was the President, actually.

Q: I was wondering whether in conversations our role in our role Chile came up?

MACK: I am sure that it did. Chile was always a topic in Latin America then, but I cannot remember a particular conversation while I was in Brazil.

Q: Was there the feeling that we were, I am talking about in the Labor ranks, that we were overly supportive of the military government or not?

MACK: Sure, but I also was there for a year and a half under Jimmy Carter. I am trying to remember what year Carter launched his Human Rights initiative.

Q: There also were nuclear issues.

MACK: Yes, Brazil had a nuclear program at the time and Carter was very strong against nuclear proliferation.

Q: Brazil and Argentina were quite a problem for some years.

MACK: Yes there was a little bit of tension there. On the one hand we wanted a return to democracy and an end to Brazil's nuclear program. But on the other hand the labor movement believed that the US had been supportive of the coup d'etat in Brazil in the '60's. So yeah, the union leaders on the left, and some democratic labor leaders would bring that up. On the other hand, some of the unions were sympathetic to the military government would not have been concerned about it. Obviously, students would have been concerned about it and intellectuals. While things were calm on the surface, there were a lot of problems under the surface.

Q: Well, was military taking-

MACK: It also was a time of great economic growth for Brazil.

Q: On the economic side was the General Geisel siding with the manufacturers as opposed to the workers?

MACK: What the General Geisel wanted was labor peace. And the military had designed a system to keep labor peace. Basically if a labor leader got out of line, he was arrested. The government also controlled the unions by controlling their money. The government imposed a "check off" system by which all workers had union dues automatically deducted from their pay checks. But the money first went to the Government which then turned it back to the unions. So the Unions were quite prosperous. They had nice offices and they had a lot of services for their members but they were totally dependent on the Government for their funds. In most cases the Government was successful in using this approach.

But some unions, like Lula's metallurgical workers unions, represented workers with a higher level of education and who drew pretty good salaries and good benefits because they worked for multi-national automobile manufacturers like Volkswagen, Chrysler, Ford and General Motors.

These unions were more assertive but I don't recall any strikes. So, yes, I think the Government basically wanted economic development and social peace and labor peace. And some labor leaders were bought off by the government one way or another. Some were given positions of theoretical influence. Some got out of line and were arrested. Others lost their political rights, they called it *casacao*. I knew one labor leader who was a democrat, in fact, and a true fighter for labor rights. He was banished to a farm in Paraná ½ State.

Q: How was the Communist Party of Brazil particularly within the Labor Movement. Was this Soviet off shoot or Castro or what?

MACK: It was an old fashion Communist Party. But this was a clandestine party. The communist party was illegal. Nobody ever said he or she was a communist. These people operated behind the scenes. They whispered and organized but they did not fly the communist flag. They were trying to survive and many I am sure were jailed during that period. They were basically went underground. And some of them were involved with the unions labor lawyers. A couple actually were in Congress. But they were careful.

Q: I have never served in Latin America but I seem to recall that Consulate Generals in Rio and Sao Paulo as being fairly autonomous from our Embassy in Brasilia.. Did you all talk to each other or were you pretty much working your own territory?

MACK: Well, there was clearly a division of labor but there was no question as to who the boss was. It was John Hugh Crimmins, the Ambassador. Clearly anything dealing with the Federal Government was in the province of our Embassy in Brasilia. The Consulate General in Sao Paulo, under Fred Chapin, a very, very capable and senior officer, was able to report on commercial economic or labor activity in Sao Paulo State, which is saying a lot since Sao Paulo generated a huge proportion of Brazil's economic activity in Brazil. But Embassy clearance was required in some cases. I remember we did prepare a series of cables on the coffee freeze when much of Brazil's coffee trees died causing a tripling of world prices, and producing a windfall for Brazil because it had such huge stocks of coffee, but also produced a lot of unemployment. I also think those coffee freeze cables had to be cleared through the Embassy since in those days coffee was so dominant in the Brazilian economy.

Q: I imagine labor waSao Paulo must have been pretty much the labor capital wasn't it?

MACK: Absolutely!

Q: How did you find living in Sao Paulo at that particular time? Because now I understand that crime and pollution have made Sao Paulo a very uncomfortable place.

MACK: Criminality existed but not on the scale that I understand exists today. I never really felt threatened there when my wife and I went out at night. I do recall that there started to be some armed holdups in homes of people we knew. But it wasn't something that made people not dare walk down the street. I jogged every day, and I walked a lot. Sometimes I walked to work. I never was threatened and I don't think I was ever robbed. Obviously things got a lot worse.

Q: How about the AFL-CIO, were they present there or not?

MACK: There was no AFL-CIO representative in Sao Paulo. And I don't think there was an AFL-CIO representative anywhere in Brazil. It would have been unlikely during the military regime. However, the Embassy Labor Attache, Jim Shea was formerly with the Amalgamated Meat Packers Union and had the complete confidence of the AFL-CIO. Jim was very close to the unions with which the AFL-CIO had historic ties. Of course Jim was not there to organize. However, he would have sent labor leaders to the US for training, as I tried to do with Lula.

Q: I am interviewing former American Foreign Service people who were involved in Labor work in Latin America, Charlotte Roe and Rick Becker. Before entering he Foreign Service, Charlotte was a labor organizer in Ohio.

MACK: Right. Charlotte is a dear friend of ours. In fact, she is from my wife's home town of Pleasantville, NY. Charlotte and my wife went to school together from Kindergarten through High School.

Q: Charlotte wanted to be a jazz singer.

MACK: Now she plays the harp.

Q: Was the Brazilian Labor Movement a tough bunch. Did they use muscle for this or that. I thinking about the teamsters or something like that?

MACK: It could well have been the case with regards to the dockworkers in Santos, Sao Paulo's port city. But up in San Paulo I don't recall that was a problem. Keep in mind the military put a lid on a lot of overt labor organization activities. I mean the unions had quite good physical infrastructure - buildings etc. However, their trying to be militant defenders of Labor Rights was another issue. Everything was very, very controlled and orchestrated by the Government.

Q: Now Labor Officers during the Carter Administration were often also Human Rights Officers. This is was because Political Officers did not want to mess around with their Human Rights. As a labor officer in Sao Paulo did you get involved with Human Rights at all?

MACK: Well, I don't recall being directly involved in Human Rights issues. There were instances of people being arrested. Not frequently, but Tony Freeman, the head of the political section, would have followed that issue, as I have since, but not at that time.

Q: What was your impression of the Sao Paulo Labor Unions you were dealing with? Were they doing well by their people? Sometimes Union Leaders do well by themselves and not as much for the rank and files.

MACK: I told you the military government had put a lid on the labor movement. The structure was all there. The physical structure was definitely there. The Government saw to it that the unions had money and could provide certain kinds of services for their members. Union leaders who played the game could live comfortably. But I don't remember their living in absolute luxury.

Q: You left there, when in '70?

MACK: '77.

Q: Where did you go then?

MACK: I went to the Azores Islands, a semi-autonomous region of Portugal as consul. I had wanted to be assigned to another Portuguese speaking country, and after all these years in the Foreign Service, I wanted to run something myself. The US Foreign Service is not the US Army. There are not many opportunities to be the equivalent of a platoon leader in your earlier years. I actually applied for various autonomous consular posts. Not many exist any more. But I was accepted and assigned as consul to the US Consulate in Ponta Delgada on the island of Sao Miguel, with responsibilities for the entire archipelago. It was a two officer post. Myself and a Junior Officer, plus 14 Foreign Service National Employees. We were basically an immigrant visa issuing post. And most of our clients ended up in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. It was a delightful respite from the real world, poor but breathtakingly beautiful. A fairyland . On the other hand, you don't go to the Azores to go to the beach. While it never freezes at sea level, there are a lot of Atlantic storms. A few amateur sailors come through, and the occasional naval vessel and cruise ship.

Q: You were there from when to when?

MACK: I was there from '77 to '79.

Q: How did the base negotiations with the Portuguese go. I mean our whole Portuguese policy revolves around the Azores?

MACK: Well, it did in the cold war days, definitely. We ran our anti-Soviet submarine detection operations out of the Lajes base on Terceira island. Also, during the 1973 mid-east war, we sent our military resupply flights to Israel through Lajes, where we had base rights, since the Europeans would not allow us to refuel on the continent.

There also was a fairly strong Azorean independence movement at that time. The reason was at the time of the Portuguese revolution, in I think 1972, the communists in mainland Portugal quickly came to dominate most of the posts in the government and fully expected to win elections which took place in 1976. Most of the people of the Azores were very, very conservative and wanted nothing to do with communism. We are talking about islands of basically poor peasants with a few rich landowners, plus poor fishermen. Most of the poor majority were linked emotionally and by blood ties of their emigrant relatives to the United States.

Every Azorean, and I mean every Azorean, had a close relative in the United States. And most of them wanted to go to the United States. And very few of them had any ties at all with men in Portugal. Only the rich did. And the rich sent their children to university in Portugal where many became leftists. The poor sent their children to America where they became red, white and blue Americans. Ha! Ha!

As Portugal was drifting far to the left, a movement grew up in the Azores advocating Azorean independence and membership in NATO. You probably recall there was a period when Kissinger made a decision, a U.S. Government decision, to support the Portuguese Socialist party, which was democratic, against the communists, rather than to give up on Portugal and let it become communist to serve as a lesson for the rest of Europe.

Q: I've interviewed Frank Carlucci.

MACK: He was the Ambassador part of the time I was there. There had been a US policy debate on whether to let Portugal go communist and go down the tubes just to teach the rest of left leaning Europe a lesson. Or whether we should urge the Europeans, particularly those with socialist governments like Germany, to support democracy in Portugal and the Portuguese Socialist Party against the communists. The Communists in Portugal made a huge strategic error, just as they later did in Nicaragua, by agreeing to free elections. They were totally convinced that since they controlled the streets, the labor movement, the universities and the press, they would win a free election.

What they did not realize was that even though they did dominate the labor movement, the student movement and the media and intellectuals class, when it came to counting votes, the politically conservative small property owners, the small farmers in northern Portugal, would overwhelmingly vote against the Communists. The Communists ended up winning outright only 12 % of the vote and about 18% with their allied parties. It was amazing. They owned the streets of Lisbon. But when the votes were counted they were blown away. So by the time I got to the Azores, which was in '77, Mario Soares, a Socialist, was Prime Minister, and General Eanes, a conservative was President. US policy was to support the Soares socialist government. My instructions were to have nothing to do with the Azorean Independence movement. But, I did have a little problem; the senior FSN in my consular section was one of the leaders of the Azorean independence movement. So it was an awkward situation.

Q: In a way I would think that the Azoreans as a group didn't not really think their islands had a chance of becoming an independent country.

MACK: Well, I can't answer that question. I do not know. But there are a lot of smaller island states. Look at the Caribbean. They were a quarter of a million of people in the Azores. There are probably eight countries in the Caribbean that don't have the size or population of the Azores. There are a lot of microstates that have strategic importance .

Q: What happened?

MACK: To counteract the Azorean independence movement, the Portuguese government agreed to grant the Azores a rather considerable amount of autonomy. The Azorean autonomous region has an elected assembly and president. They received a large proportion of the payments that the US makes for its Lajes base rights. That, and the defeat of the communists on the mainland, took the wind out of the sails of the independence movement. I have not been back since I left in 1979 so cannot tell you how things are now, but I do think that the fires of independence are long out.

Q: This Lajes base rights thing seems like a running bargaining situation which has gone on forever. Either you just completed a treaty and you start the new process.

MACK: I frankly have not followed this situation through years and I don't know what the status of the U.S. facility is currently. We are talking really about the use of a Portuguese base since Lajes is not a U.S. base per se. It is Portuguese base at which we have use rights. There actually was a Portuguese side of the base and an American side of the base. I have no idea how extensive the US installations are now; how many Americans are still there? In my time, there were probably well over a thousand uniformed US military and maybe a total of three thousand Americans there if you include including families, and there were a lot of families. It was not an inconsequential number. The US facility was commanded an USAF Brigadier General.

Q: Was it at the same Island you were?

MACK: No it was a different island.

Q: So in a way, I would think it would be a little hard to go from Island to Island?

MACK: Well you flew. That is how we got there. You take a commercial airplane flight, which was sometimes very exciting in winter or the middle of a storm. The turbo prop plane was solidly built. I had some frightening moments but I never had to take a drink in the ocean. And we would fly over to the base about once a month. I had an excellent relationship with the people at the base. They were happy to see us and were very supportive. My wife, in fact, got a Master's Degree in Public Administration through a university extension program at the base. She would go over there for two weeks every three months. Anyway, we had close relationship with the people at the base, including the commander of the US facility. Also, I was a member of the San Miguel Island tennis team, and so I organized tournaments against the American Base. They would come over to San Miguel with their families and we would go over there. It was a lot of fun. Everybody had a good time. It was very enjoyable.

Q: It didn't leave much chance for the troops to get in trouble nor did they?

MACK: Well, I don't think there was a whole lot of trouble. First of all, a lot of US military people were accompanied by their families. There were USAF, Navy (P-3s flew out of Lajes) and a small US Army contingent. I think the military favored families. They wanted a stable environment at this isolated facility.

Q: It was not a fighter base or something of that nature?

MACK: No. It was a logistics support base that supported USAF aircraft coming through, and a home base for Navy P-3s tracking Soviet nuclear submarines. Ponta Delgada was a good post for a family with very young children. Our kids were very young at the time.

Q: How many children did you have?

MACK: Well we got there with two and we adopted a third while were there. So we had three, all very young, all under four.

Q: What were you doing?

MACK: Well, I, or I should say my vice consul and I were doing Consular work non-immigrant and immigrant visa work, provided support to US military ships that would come in. Lots of commercial and private vessels would stop there also. We would have seaman issues. Strange Americans would wash up there and we would have to deal with them. I also did some political reporting and representation.

Q: Did you have a lot of Portuguese Americans coming back from Massachusetts or Rhode Island?

MACK: Absolutely! Absolutely! We even had the Archbishop of Boston at the time, Cardinal Medeiros, who was born in the Azores and emigrated to the US at the age of fifteen.

The Feast Day of Santo Cristo and the whole population turns out, many participate in the procession to demonstrate their faith and make and keep promises in exchange for God'. The streets become basically flowerbeds. People made pave the streets as if a giant carpet in different designs made of flower petals. Mostly they use azaleas of different colors (the Festa is in April) and lilies, both of which grow in great profusion in the Azores. It was absolutely breathtakingly beautiful. Archbishop Medeiros had been ordained as Boston's first Cardinal not of Irish ancestry shortly before. So his participation in the Festa do Santo Cristo made that year's event even bigger. The Azores had many native sons return to visit, but never as a Cardinal.

Q: Prince of the Church!

MACK: He was a delightful person. Anyway, after the procession, my wife and I had a big reception for him in his honor. We also had a Congresswoman from Massachusetts, a Republican actually, who was there at the same time. So it was quite an affair. Everybody who was anybody was there. It was just wonderful a wonderful time.

Q: Will did you end up with Senator Kennedy.

MACK: He never made it out there during my time.

But the Azores were kind of a fairyland, a whole different world. We really were isolated there. But, people were very good to us and we got around to see all the islands and that was part of my job. People were happy to see me. There were lots of consular issues to deal with because of the large number of immigrants to the US, returnees to the Azores, ship visits, adoptions etc. .

Q: I would imagine immigration would not be a great problem in the sense that there wasn't a lot of room for fraud or anything like that? It was fairly straightforward.

MACK: Immigration was pretty straightforward. The immigrants were family members being called by relatives already in the US. The frauds were the marriages, like a 23 year old Azorean guy marrying a fifty-five year old non-Portuguese speaking American woman; that kind of thing. We also did thirty or so adoptions a year including my own.

Q: Were the Azores in the transatlantic yachting circuit?

MACK: You are very good at this Stu. Yes, in fact, they did but they would come into mostly another island, Faial at a town called Horta which had a gorgeous natural harbor. Faial was part of archipelago with three big islands Sao Jorge, Faial and Pico. These islands were quite close, probably no more than 10 miles apart and easily visible from one another. The sea between them was protected and quite calm. It was a great place for Trans-Atlantic yachts to stop so if I happened to be in Faial I would certainly go down to the harbor in Horta to see what was going on. I remember I did get a ride on a yacht one time in San Miguel a US yachtsman took me out for a few hours.

Q: I think Horta in Faial was where the Alabama came in during the civil war put the guns on board or something before it started its cruise under the confederate flag.

MACK: Is that right?

Q: It came out of Liverpool without guns and all. This is part of the Laird ram it was called and it was met at Faial where it took on its armament. This was to try to get around the union blockade.

MACK: Faial was quite a bustling place a hundred years ago. And we actually had a consulate there for many years because of its importance as a whaling center. The population then was much greater than now. Then they had a horrible volcanic eruption in the late 1950s, I think 1957, that destroyed a large part of the island. Shortly thereafter, the US Congress passed some special legislation allowing any resident of Faial to immigrate to the US. About two-thirds of them did. That is that main reason the population went from 30,000 to about 12,000 in period of twenty years. During the late 50s and 60s, the US Consulate in Ponta Delgada on Sao Miguel, which processed immigrants from all of the islands, was issuing immigration visas to 12,000 Azorean immigrants a year. That meant the consulate for a time was the seventh largest immigrant visa issuing post in the world. Can you imagine!

Well the result of all this out migration from the Azores was that the total population in islands had dropped from about 440,000 in 1920 to about 250,000 when I was there from 1977-79. The number is probably less today. And the island of Faial itself was a beautiful but sad place because it was half abandoned, with homes boarded up and collapsing. Even in the main city of Horta which is nicely laid out along a curved bay there were a lot of abandoned houses.

Q: How heavy was the hand of the Embassy in Lisbon?

MACK: Not very heavy. My only explicit orders were that I was to have no truck with the Azorean Independence Movement and to maintain good relations with the leadership of the US military installations at Lajes airbase on Terceira Island. I complied with both instructions. The first order was a bit more tricky proposition because my senior local employee was active in the independence movement, and an American citizen who had purchased farm there and lived here with his family was connected to the movement and his wife was good friends of my vice consul's wife. Sao Miguel was a small place. The second instruction was easy since there were great folks at the base who treated us extremely well. I think I had two or US Ambassadorial visits the whole time I was there. Every four months, I would travel to Lisbon and report in to the Embassy there, but really, the folks in the American Embassy in Lisbon had a lot of other more important things to worry about other than the US Consulate in Sao Miguel.

Q: Didn't they worry about the negotiations for renewal of our Azorean base rights?.

MACK: Yes, but I was not involved in those negotiations.

Q: This was done by the lawyers of the Pentagon and the State Department.

MACK: Right. So the bottom line was that I didn't cause problems for Ambassador Frank Carlucci or Ambassador Bloomfield. I drafted and sent my dispatches to them. When I was in Lisbon, Ambassador Carlucci would invite me to play tennis with him.

Q: Well it kept you reporting.

MACK: Well, it sure did. And I found drafting my reports a lot easier than encrypting them, which I had to do when my vice consul was on leave. Sao Miguel turned out to be a good post for a young family with kids below school age. It was a good assignment.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop! You put it at the end here. You left there in '79 and where did you go?

MACK: '79 I was assigned back to the Department of the State. Where I became the Guatemala/Belize Desk Officer.

Q: Well Okay we will pick this up in '79 in Guatemala.

Today is the 12th of September 2005. Jim you are the Guatemala Desk Officer?

MACK: Yes, I was the Guatemalan /Belize Desk Officer so I covered both countries. The reason for this was that at the time there was, and I believe still is, is a serious border dispute between the two countries. In fact, at one time Guatemala claimed all of Belize, which in 1979 was still a British colony. I think the Guatemalans have since reduced their claim but it is still rather substantial. Anyway that was the big issue at the time I was on the desk. The British were anxious to unburden themselves of Belize, which was one of the few remaining British colonies in the Caribbean at that point. Also, important in their thinking was the cost of maintaining defense of the colony. Because of the ever present threat of a Guatemalan incursion they had to keep a couple of thousand troops in Belize, including a unit of Harrier jump jets, which was an expensive proposition to them. At the same time, they worried, as did the elected internally self-governing Belizean government of George Price, that a grant of independence without a border settlement could provoke a Guatemalan invasion. So they were stuck.

In any event the border issue consumed a significant amount of my time as a desk officer. During this period, I worked very closely with guy named Millard Burr from the State Department Office of The Geographer. Burr came up with the proposal to guarantee Guatemala sovereign access to the Caribbean sea from their main port of Puerto Barrios. The problem was that without an agreement, while ships did enjoy physical access to Puerto Barrios in accordance with the international law of the sea, it was not the sovereign access that Guatemala felt it had to have for political reasons. So when we received word that the Guatemalan dictator might be willing to cut a deal, Burr came up with the idea of granting the Guatemalans a mile wide sovereign channel through Belizean waters to Puerto Barrios. The problem we had to solve was that smack in the middle of the proposed sovereign channel were several very small islets called the Sapodilla keys, which belonged to Belize. We knew that George Price was adamant against giving up an inch of territory, so Burr came up with the idea of granting Guatemala usufruct of the islands in perpetuity which would allow Guatemalan to claim it had won sovereign access to the sea.

Now usufruct is a word I had never heard before, but exists in international law, It means use as if it were sovereign. For Belize that meant they would retain theoretical sovereignty, but Guatemala would get to use them as if it were the sovereign owner. We thought this was a brilliant solution that would be acceptable to everybody, end the dispute, allow Belize to peacefully achieve independence and win us the Nobel Peace Prize. Just kidding but we were very excited.

Unfortunately, the problem ended up not being the Guatemalan dictator president and notorious human right abuser Gen Lucas Garcia , but the democratically elected Belizean Prime Minister George Price. Price was adamant that he wasn't going to agree to any deal that as much as implied loss of any sovereign territory even some water and a few islets. And so, Price lost the opportunity to settle the deal then and there. The British were pushing Price very hard to accept.

Q: I was wondering why we were making a deal or acting as though we were outside authority. Why weren't the British doing this?

MACK: Oh the British were very actively involved. Lord Carrington was very, very involved in this.

Q: He was a Foreign Minister?

MACK: He was the head of the FCO, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the time. He was very, very active in the process and the British dearly wanted to get out. I am sure I am missing some details twenty-six years later. But that occupied a lot of time. My other important issue as desk officer was Guatemala's horrendous human rights record under the military dictatorship, which was waging a war without quarter with Marxist guerrilla group.

Thousands of people were killed in the rural areas where the insurgency raged. In the urban areas, hundreds were gunned down by Lucas Garcia's people working from death lists which in my understanding he personally approved, kind of like the evil Ming the Merciless in the Buck Rogers movies. It was pretty awful. Not that we could do too much about it since the US already had cut Guatemala off from military assistance a long time before. Remember this was under the Carter Administration. But what this also meant was with no US assistance, we could not use the threat to cut it off as a lever to force greater respect for human rights, although I'm not sure that Guatemalan government would have been susceptible to pressure in any event. They had decided to fight the insurgency, and anyone suspected of supporting it, their way, which was brutally. In some ways they were successful. Not that they are better off today because of it. In fact a lot of the lawlessness, high level corruption and impunity in Guatemala today can be traced to that period.

In any event, all this was happening in the context of Central America going down the tubes. Remember, the Sandinistas come into power in '79 or '80 in Nicaragua. The insurgents were rapidly gaining strength in El Salvador. The Chichoneros were growing in Honduras. These were not the most happy times to work in the Office of Central American Affairs. And the nights were very long. We were seriously understaffed.

Q: Well now who were the Guatemalans dictator and his crew killing. Were they basically Indians or were they people who had gotten in his way, or were they unidentifiable group that was fighting him?

MACK: In the rural areas anybody who was perceived to give aid and comfort to the guerrilla was a target. I didn't have much access to what was going on. The Embassy could not travel to the worst areas because of security reasons. I really didn't know much unless an American or a missionary living there got caught up in it. In urban areas however they were going after anyone perceived to opposed his regime. Those killed were not necessarily communists at all. They may have been labor union leaders or democrats. I am sure there were some communists among them. I had some contact with the people that the dictator was going after when they would come to Washington. This included a Vinicio Cerezo who later became President. But he was certainly no communist at all. He survived a number of assassination attempts and so anybody who was opposed to the dictator seemed to be fair game for Lucas Garcia.

Q: Well now, this during the Carter Administration?

MACK: Yes, and Carter was going full bore on the whole issue of Human Rights. So here we are in 1979 in a situation in which on the one hand the leftist insurgencies in Central America were rapidly gaining ground, and on the other President Carter's Human Rights policies were coming on strong. The State Department was kind of caught in a bind. On one hand, obviously we didn't want to see all those governments in Central America be taken over by leftist guerrillas. On the other hand, we wanted to carry out the Human Rights policy. In the case of Guatemala, we did not have a friendly government to support. In fact, they did not want anything to do with us. They were not receiving any military assistance from us.

Q: Were they picking up any support from the Righthe Jesse Helms types and all that?

MACK: I don't recall that in case of Guatemala. I just don't recall. I can recall very vividly El Salvador but I cannot recall the case of Guatemala.

Q: But, did you get caught up in the rest of that. The El Salvador and Nicaragua business.

MACK: Well we all worked in the same office. And we were all overworked in the same office. Central America was staffed at a level for the sleepy old Central America days. A total of seven officers covered Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize. To give you an idea of the work load, after I left, that office grew to nineteen. Our Deputy was Rich Brown, who passed away a couple of years ago. To say Rich was a very hard working guy was an under statement, and he expected the rest of us to emulate him. Just to give you an idea, when someone left before seven p.m., Rich would comment wryly that that person was "taking the afternoon off". The fact is that most of us habitually left work a lot later than that which put a lot of strain on those of us who were married with kids, which was practically all of us. We really began to worry about people there. They were wearing. A few years later, the deputy office of Central America Affairs died of a heart attack.

Q: Was anything happening in Belize from your perspective?

MACK: Our focus was to bring the Belizeans and Guatemalans together to resolve the boundary dispute to allow Belize to become independent. That really dominated everything. At that point, George Price had been Prime Minister of that self governing colony for many years and he wanted to be the leader who took Belize to independence. He eventually did, but independence was delayed for a number of years because of the border issue . I cannot recall what year, but it was several years after I left the desk.

Q: Did we have a Consulate General in Belize at that time?

MACK: Yes, we had a small Consulate General and interesting people assigned there. The consulate had been there for one hundred and fifty years. It was located in an old wooden building that had been shipped down piece by piece from New England and erected in Georgetown. It was made of pine, a pretty old building. I think it had been painted so many times over the years that by 1980 I think the paint was thicker than what the termites had left of the wood. The standard joke was that the building was being held up by one hundred coats of paint. It definitely was not a secure building and it was a firetrap. I don't know if they are still in it today.

Q: They had a bad hurricane but I guess that they survived the hurricane?

MACK: They had a real bad hurricane was 1961 as I recall. It was really bad.

Q. Who was the US Ambassador in Guatemala during your time on the desk?

MACK: Frank Ortiz, he just passed away. He was in Guatemala at the time that I was there. He had a very difficult job given our terrible relations with the government, the human rights violations, the insurgency etc.

Q: That must have been a difficult place for the officers there and the staff.

MACK: The security was awful. And there was a lot of killing going on. The leftists were active too and they were carrying out assassinations. It was a very, very nasty situation.

Q: You were doing this from what '79 to '81?

MACK: Yes!

Q: Did you feel the cold hand of the Reagan takeover because it really hit Central America, I mean ARA . Or were you too far down?

MACK: No. I mean there was certainly major change when Reagan came in but remember the Republicans did not control the Congress. So the Carter Human Rights legislation stayed in place. We still had to abide by the law. But the Carter Political Appointees who had wielded tremendous influence, who staffed the powerful Bureau of Human Rights, which had grown to wield an enormous amount of power and practically had veto power of any policy initiative proposed by the careerists working on Central America, were gone.

Q: Had we pretty well written Guatemala off?

MACK: We just couldn't do very much with Guatemala because of the human rights problems. It was a very difficult place to work. The country was in the midst of a very serious insurgency and a large part of the country was closed for casual travel; lets put it that way. The government was organizing the rural indigenous population in the highlands into local militias to defend their villages against the insurgents. This turned out to be a rather effective program. But these groups also carried out their own vendettas.

Q: Did you do that for two years?

MACK: Did that for two years. Then I changed jobs and became the Head of Labor/Management Division of the Department, which meant that my job was to negotiate collective bargaining agreements with the two unions representing Department of State employees. One was the American Foreign Service Association for FSOs at State. The other was a Local 1812 of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), which represented FSOs and civil servants at the then USIA. AFSA was a professional organization trying to act like a union. AFGE was a real union, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO. Both AFSA and AFGE had won elections establishing them as representing their bargaining units. .

Q: And your position was what?

MACK: I represented management in collective bargaining with AFSA and AFGE on how the reforms of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 were to be implemented. That act contained some new benefits so for the first time there was something really to discuss. That is what I spent most of my time doing.

Keep in mind that in the Federal Government unions cannot negotiate over wages, which are the prerogative of Congress. You may recall that the Air Traffic Controllers learned this the hard way in the early Reagan years. But unions could negotiate over working conditions and implementation of benefits provided by law. For example, the Foreign Service Act of 1980 provided that an employee traveling to or leaving a post could request an advance of a certain number of months pay, for example, to buy a car. We negotiated agreements covering how long an employee would have to pay it back - interest free by the way. It is amazing how much time people can negotiate over the side issues when they are not allowed to negotiate over the main one, salaries.

Q: Well, I guess, welcome to the world of academia, I guess.

MACK: So that is what I did. I actually found it interesting. I had been a Labor Officer before but always worked overseas and from the perspective of the union, not the employer. I had never worked the issue within the Department of State. I found it very interesting to do that. When you represent management, you represent the bad guy in the minds of the employees. Sometimes the discussions in my Department contract negotiations became rather heated. But, at any rate, I did that for a couple of years.

Q: Did you find the difference in culture or outlook between the AFGE, which is The American Federation of Government Employees and The American Foreign Service Association?

MACK: Yes, AFGE, at least on the surface, operated like a real union, which it was though they were very frustrated on the limits of what they could bargain over. The young woman who was the lawyer for Local 1812 saw things in terms of class warfare and comported herself accordingly. But the Foreign Service Association had always seen itself as a professional organization, rather than a union. They too got fairly frisky in negotiations, but my relations with them were more cordial. I had been a member of AFSA until I took that job, but had to resign my membership while in my position representing management. There were those in ASFA who just couldn't see themselves as a labor union. They saw themselves as professionals. On the other hand, AFGE had no illusions as to who they were. They thought they were a serious labor union. And in those days the AFL-CIO unions were losing members very quickly, except in the public sector where they were organizing like crazy. Eventually AFGE came to dominate public sector employees.

Q: I remember the argument at the time. We were suppose to choose if we wanted to join AFGE , a real union affiliated to the AFL-CIO or AFSA. But our problems were so different from regular labor union things, you know. Housing allowances, how to ship goods and all of that.

MACK: Right but a housing allowance per se was not negotiable. However, the procedures on how it was implemented and administered were negotiable. Some of the benefits were useful. Although I am not sure they justified amount of staff time and money devoted to their negotiation. It was quite a learning experience for me as I had had no previous labor negotiations experience. And eventually when I left, they actually went out and hired a professional labor negotiator with the civil service to replace me. That made more sense.

Q: Who was your boss?

MACK: My supervisor was Jack Collins, a wonderful guy. We are still in contact with him. A very human person.

Q: Did you find in your labor negotiations there was an attitude of "let's see if we can find a solution" or was it let's hold tight?

MACK: On whose part?

Q: On your part?

MACK: Sure, my attitude was let's work this out, let's find a solution. Obviously I had some limits to what I could agree to. I didn't just free wheel.

Q: There had been some internal turmoil in USIA over AFGE's drive to organize its employees, including its Foreign Service Officers.

MACK: Right, AFGE managed to get the bargaining unit at USIA to include both civil service and Foreign Service employees and defeated AFSA in a representation election. When I was negotiating with both AFGE and AFSA at the table, negotiations often got much more confrontational.

Q: After being the hard nose labor negotiator where did you go?

MACK: Well, in 1983 I was asked for the second time whether I would be willing to serve in El Salvador as political counselor. The first time I was asked, San Salvador was a non-accompanied post and I had then three little kids at ages four, three and one. As interested as I was in the job from the professional point of view, I was not going to volunteer for a job that would separate me from my family.

The person who had asked me to go was Ted Briggs, then Deputy Assistant Secretary in ARA. Nineteen months later came back to me to tell me that San Salvador was being reopened for families, and asked if I would take the job. Under those circumstances I could not say no. So in April 1983 my wife and I became the first family with kids allowed to live in El Salvador. Our arrival at the Embassy turned out to be quite an emotional experience for all of us. When we walked through the door the local FSN staff was so excited to see an American family with kids that they broke out in applause. They had interpreted our presence as being positive sign for the outlook of the country. In fact, as I soon realized, the situation in the country was still deteriorating.

Q: My God!

MACK: The Embassy had been without families for eighteen months. Of course, in that atmosphere, a kind of macho kind of culture had developed in the Embassy. Everybody was single, divorced or separated. Work hard, party hard. I had seen it in Vietnam. Over time more and more families came back which changed things.

Q: You were in El Salvador from when to when?

MACK: '83 to '86.

Q: What was your job?

MACK: I was Political Counselor.

Q: Who was the Ambassador at the time?

MACK: Well Dean Hinton was the Ambassador when I arrived in April 1983. He left post three months. Tom Pickering arrived in the summer of 1986.

Q: What was the situation in El Salvador when you got there in '83?

MACK: When I got there in April the situation on the ground was terrible and getting worse. I remember having a kind of heart to heart talk one weekend with an Agency Officer who had been there a while and whose opinion that I respected. His view was that if things continued the way that they were, with the government losing a battalion every month to the guerrillas, the insurgency would win a military victory some time in 1984. This is a true story.

Q: Was it that the guerillas were that effective, or was it that the army was so ineffective?

MACK: Probably a combination of both. The Army as it was then constituted just could not deal with the guerillas. The guerrillas were much more nimble. They used hit and run tactics very, very well. They carefully chose their ground, where to fight, where to attack. The Army was kind of a parade Army and they just couldn't deal with guerrillas.

Q: As political counselor, what did you find was happening with the populace?

MACK: Well for one thing, right wing death squads were killing more than 800 people a month. The Left was killing people too but not at that rate. You may recall that under Carter, the Congress of the United States had passed an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act which prohibited the provision of military assistance to governments which were judged to be engaged in patterns of gross violations of the human rights of their population. With respect to El Salvador, that had the practical effect of severely limiting the amount of military assistance we could provide. And it was very, very clear to us that unless the U.S. Government could provide substantial military assistance to El Salvador, like training, equipment and munitions, that the Government could not sustain itself over a period of time. I told you before that, that was the impression of one guy I talked to early in my tour. That became my impression in those first few months. It was just bad news following bad news. Military setbacks and horrendous human rights violations.

Elements of the Army and their friends felt they could deal with the insurgency by grabbing people in urban areas suspected of supporting the guerrillas and executing them. They couldn't deal with the guerillas in the countryside.

Q: Well, how did Dean Hilton operate in this?

MACK: Dean was a good friend, but left post within about two or three months or so of my arrival. He was a very, very strong leader, impatient with incompetence and those who he perceived were not pulling their weight. He was a very, very astute political observer. Had very few resources to work with because the terrible state of human rights in the country made it impossible for the U.S. to provide much assistance to the Salvadoran government. He was trying to help Alvaro Magana the interim President, who was a basically decent man. But against the background of all these death squad killings and military defeats, he was very limited in what he could do in 1983.

So, what happened was after several months or so at post, it was late summer, about four or five us in our section got together to talk over what we could do about this situation. Our judgment was that the Salvadoran Government was losing the war. Yet given the terrible human rights situation with people in the Salvadoran military linked to death squad activity, the U.S. Congress was not going to provide any assistance. But without it, the war was lost.

We asked ourselves what we could do to change the equation? One of my officers named Felix Vargas had actually written a paper to get the folks in the political section talking. The idea we came up with was for the Administration to send down a very high ranking person, someone with credibility with the Salvadoran military, to read the military the riot act. To tell them "look!. We can help out but only if you do certain things and which included, obviously, getting the death squads under control and reducing the death squad killings dramatically. But we did not think that alone would be enough to justify US assistance and turn things around. The Salvadorans also would have to make major reforms in Army command structure as well and get rid of certain people. We kicked that idea around, polished it up and a month or so after Ambassador Pickering came to post, presented the proposal to him. He thanked us and we didn't hear anything for awhile. I don't know if I should say this on tape?

Q: Put it on tape and then you can always look at it later.

MACK: First of all I have to tell you that I have tremendous respect for Ambassador Pickering. He has been a mentor and a great friend and an awesome person who served his country very well in many, many ways. I worked for him twice. In any event about one month after we had made our proposal, he called me up to his office and he said, "Jim!" You have betrayed me." Those were essentially his words. I was crestfallen because I idolized him. He told me that someone in my section had violated a confidence. Someone had leaked the document that we had given him, or at least the ideas in the document, to the press. It was clear that he had taken our proposal to heart and had planned to turn it into a proposal to send to Washington. I went back and to tell my troops, all whom had been working like crazy, all of whom were totally loyal to Pickering, what had happened. I felt quite strongly that nobody in our section would leak the contents of this document since that would guarantee that nothing would come of our proposal. To leak it would have undermined its impact and made the Salvadorans much less likely to react in the way we wanted.

Right after that episode we asked for a meeting with Pickering and told him that we had not leaked the document. That was that! He just said, the proposal was over. He essentially led us to believe that the proposal was dead and would not go forward. We were all about ready to submit our resignations because we were so upset at what happened. We felt that if we did not have the confidence of the Ambassador, the section could not operate with the personnel it had on board. Keep in mind ours was a very active political section. We were not just reading newspapers. We were out on the street, all over the country talking to people, taking the human rights message to every actor we had access to. All of us had scarified a lot to take this job. American Embassy San Salvador was not your casual assignment. Ambassador Pickering did not want us to resign but said no more about the incident.

About a month later as he was about to leave on a trip to Washington, he called me in and asked me to ride with him to the airport. En route he handed me a paper and asked me to read it. Basically it was a cable proposing what essentially what we had proposed to him. His gesture was his way of saying "you have regained my confidence."

About a month later, I think it was December, 1983, Vice President George Bush, Sr. came to San Salvador on as head of the high level mission we had proposed earlier to meet with the entire Salvadoran high command, all of the senior colonels and President Magana at the President's residence. I was the notetaker. Bush told them that the US wanted to help El Salvador but could not under current circumstances. Congress would not allow it. He delivered the message on human rights, and without accusing them directly, not scolding them, but as a friend of el Salvador who wanted to help but also wanted them to understand some political realities in the US and some organizational realities in their own armed forces. He said that death squad killings had to end and that the military command structure had to be reformed. Following his visit there was an immediate and precipitous drop in death squad murders from almost 800 a month to almost nothing. In fact, the drop probably started before he got there because the Ambassador had told the Salvadoran high command in advance what message the Vice President was bringing. So the Salvadorans were leaning forward by the time he got there. And the number of death squad killing remained very low for the rest of the time I was in El Salvador. That changes, plus the reforms in the military, together with, I have to add, Ambassador Pickering's very persuasive lobbying of Members of the US Congress during their frequent visits, convinced the Congress to dramatically increase military assistance.

Let me say something about CODELs. In my first 18 months at post we had 80 CODELs, 80. Not 80 Members, but 80 CODELs. The political section was in charge of scheduling CODEL agendas and reporting on their visits. We had a guy who did nothing but organize CODELs. We all shared the task of taking them to meetings with Salvadorans and translating. I would say that a quarter of the Congress came to El Salvador at least during my three years there. I am talking about CODELs as large as 14, which is a huge number to handle. Many came on weekends since it was so easy to get there from Washington, tough on us but we did have an excellent opportunity to explain our case on what was happening. As an aside I should tell you that we would frequently brief the CODELs an my house, which means we had to feed them and their accompanying staffs. But since only Americans were present for those briefings, that also meant we were not allowed to claim those meals as representational expenses. Once my wife pointed this out to a CODEL and the rule or law was changed.

And the fact was that things began to improve in early 1984. In addition to the improvement in the human rights situation, Napoleon Duarte was elected president in a free election. He was a Notre Dame grad so was quite effective with the members of Congress. The war also began to turn around. There were some preliminary peace talks with the FMLN groups in 1986 in a little town near the Honduran border called La Palma.

Q: Did the Salvadoran military get rid of some poor commanders or people linked to death squads?

MACK: Yes. Some were some people sidelined or sent abroad.

Q: Wasn't an American Navy Seal assassinated when you were there.

MACK: Yes. Lt Schlafenberger. He worked with the MILGROUPE in the Embassy. He had a girl friend who studied at the Catholic University. He would pick her up every night after class. A guerrilla sympathizer obviously spotted him told his friends who set up the assassination attempt. He was sitting in an armored car but the a/c was not working so he had opened the window.

Q: Did you have case any case of US Nuns being killed? The Churchwomen's murder was still hanging fire wasn't it?

MACK: Oh yes! In fact, the Churchwomen's case was successfully prosecuted while I was there. The US justice department sent down a Spanish speaking lawyer named Carlos Correa to work a Salvadoran lawyer to build the case. Preparations took almost two years.

Q: Who were convicted?

MACK: About four or five National Guardsman. Apparently, the wife of one of the Guardsman was an Evangelical Protestant and I guess this guy got religion too. Eventually he decided to cooperate with the prosecution. And through him they were able to get information about the others who were involved in the murder. The trial was in a dusty little town down near the National Airport and the verdict was guilty. That was a big deal, and a big political issue, especially in the US. The family of the murdered churchwoman had tremendous support in the US Congress and they were not going to let this case go. The Congress wasn't either. It was successfully prosecuted. Many believed the higher ups had known who was responsible and were involved in a cover-up. The people who actually committed the murders, apparently on their own, were nailed. There was a lot of excitement, a lot of excitement in the Embassy when the guilty verdict came in. By the way I had a death threat, from the far right apparently. For my last year I had two armed guards with automatic weapons at my house at all times. I don't know if the threat was serious, but the Embassy security officer took precautions. I always traveled in an armored car.

Q: In a way you were feeling pressure both from the right and from the left, weren't you?

MACK: Right! One thing we were trying to do was how do I say this to civilize or democratize the far Right to bring them completely within the democratic process, to abandon recourse to political violence. Now the Right had a lot of public support. Despite what many people think the far right was quite popular and they could get the vote out. Most of the Salvadoran people were basically quite conservative, at least they were in my time. The proof of that is that following Duarte's presidency, the rightwing party ARENA has proceeded to win every presidential election to this day. Internationally observed Free elections. So, our view was, look! The Right exists, has popular support, so what we need to do is bring them into the legal political process to operate like a loyal opposition. Remember, while I was there, the Christian Democrats under Duarte were in power. Anyway that was our objective to bring the right in to political process and abandon violence. That was our message to these guys. I'm not saying that all the people on the Right were involved in or supported the death squads. But there was some overlap between the democratic right and the violent right, no question about it. I would have been kidding myself if I said it didn't exist. But we wanted to strengthen those on the democratic side of the party, and to democratize the Army, if possible.

Q: Did you have contacts with people on the intellectual left and those who represented a center position.

MACK: Yes! Yes! We had some very, very close contacts. Actually we became close friends who were progressive people but no question that they were democrats no question about it.

Q: You mentioned all of these Congressional delegations coming down. There is a certain alignment within our own Congress, with some siding with the Right and some siding with the Left. Were you seeing this in the delegations?

MACK: Absolutely! People of all persuasions. Some people came with their minds made up and left with their minds made up. But, there were others who came with fairly open minds and the Embassy staff worked quite hard to educate them on what really was going on on the ground. And over time the majority came to support the policy because they could see the reforms and the progress.

Q: What was your reading of Napoleon Duarte?

MACK: Duarte was a democrat. As I said, he was a Notre Dame graduate and a very persuasive advocate with the US Congress. About 10 years earlier he had run for president but had the election stolen. He really won, but was not allowed to take office. He was subsequently arrested by the military, physically abused they broke his cheekbone- and exiled to Costa Rica or Mexico. I can't remember. He came back and was elected President.

He was basically a good and honorable man. Obviously everyone has their weak side and Achilles heel. His showed when one of his daughters was kidnapped by the guerrilla arm of the Orthodox Communist Party. She was taken to the guerrilla base on the slopes of the Guazapa Volcano, which was a notorious area. Negotiations ensued for her release. The guerrillas were demanding the release of hundreds of their people from government jails..

Duarte was distraught during this period. He had a difficult time functioning as President. This was in 1985. Ed Corr had become Ambassador. Ambassador Corr took me to meet with Duarte 30 times during the 44 days Duarte's daughter was held hostage. Duarte was so upset. He was willing to agree to virtually anything to get his daughter freed. He was willing to make some concessions that probably were not in the best interest of the country. In fact, he probably would have been willing to go farther than the final deal in which a large number of guerrillas were released in exchange for his daughter and a number of government mayors who had been kidnapped. For a while, we were worried he would not insist on the release of the mayors. That would have been devastating. In any event, that episode substantially weakened Duarte as president. But he was a decent man.

Q: Going back to something, what was your impression of George Bush Sr. when he came down as Vice President?

MACK: This actually was the second time I had met him. The first time was in Saigon, I think it was 1969, when he was a Congressman from Houston and I was a political officer at the Embassy. He had come to dinner at my house to meet with some Vietnamese congressmen. He is a very engaging person who makes people feel very much at ease in his presence and he is not arrogant. With the Salvadorans his approach was to come at the problem in a positive way, saying, "look we really want to help you but we can't. Please make a change in this so we can help you to win." He was firm but respectful. He did not insult anybody. So I thought the message was very effectively delivered.

Q: From our understanding he was very good in foreign policy.

MACK: Yes, and he also knew how to deal with people. He had a knack for dealing with human beings -relaxing them to make them feel comfortable so that they could engage in dialogue.

Q: Did you find that Senator Helms and particularly his staff were quite strong supporters of the fairly far right?

MACK: Yes. And they often came into the country and did not want to speak to the President. Our normal practice at the Embassy was not to set up any meeting to which we were not invited. So they made their own arrangements in advance and came. They pretty much cut us out. .

Q: Did you have any feel for what they were doing?

MACK: No! I am sure they were whispering support in the ears of those people. Now keep in mind we in the Embassy also had very close contacts with the rightwing party. We spoke with these people all the time. However, when Senator Helms' people came down, they went straight to their local contacts without any Embassy involvement.

Q: Was this a sort of in a way a feel good operation for the Helms crew in that we were already talking to the people they were seeing?

MACK: That's a very good question. I can't answer that.

Q: While you were there did events in Nicaragua impact on El Salvador as far as you could see?

MACK: Well yes! I mean supplies were coming in from the Sandinistas for the guerrillas in El Salvador. Some came right up the Pan American Highway hidden in trucks. Other stuff came directly across the Gulf of Fonseca in speed boats from Nicaragua to El Salvador.

While I was in El Salvador, I actually traveled to Nicaragua with my wife on vacation. I wanted to see how the other side operated. Ambassador Bergold was then US ambassador to Nicaragua and his wife and mine were friends, I think from language training years before and they invited us down. So we got to see a whole other world. Traveled around the country. Went to a big Sandinista rally. I never felt threatened. I guess they assumed I was just another internationalista who supported the Sandinistas.

But it was clear that the revolution was not going well. The people had nothing to buy. Supermarkets were bare; maybe a few Romanian Sardines or something in the market but that was about it. Everything was rationed, all food was rationed. I remember going to a market which actually the U.S. had built several years before the Sandinistas had come to power. It was a beautiful marketplace but there was virtually nothing sale. Then somebody in the market told me what the deal was so I went up to a guy and I asked him if he had any beans for sale. There was nothing visible on his stand. Then the guy looks around to see if the secret police were there and said how much you want? I said a kilo, a kilo of beans. He reaches under his counter and pulls the beans he did not have displayed and I paid the black market price to see how it was. You know. But clearly the people were hurting. The small time entrepreneurial class, the market people, were suffering greatly. These were not rich people. There were just market people. I could not even buy a guayabera (a kind of shirt for which the Nicaraguans are famous). I asked why and was told they did not have thread.

Q: They were famous for making beautiful guayaberas.

MACK: Right! Right! They did not have any supplies for making anything. For example, the price of gasoline in pesos at the at the hugely inflated official dollar exchange rate was very expensive, but the black market rate we were able to fill up the whole tank of the embassy van driving me around for a couple of bucks. Anyway dollars were in short supply.

Q: You mentioned term" internacionalists". These were a lot of the same kids who sang protest songs from the United States..

MACK: There were a lot of people streaming into Nicaragua to support the revolution, yes.

Q: I guess they just were not welcome in El Salvador?

MACK: There were not a lot of them, and they were not particularly welcomed by the government, but some were there. One woman who was there is now in jail now in Peru, convicted for helping a Peruvian terrorist group, the MRTA. Her name is Lori Berenson. I understand that before she moved on to Peru, she actually worked as personal secretary for one of the guerrilla leaders during the peace talks with the Salvadoran government at the end of the war. Apparently, she never said anything, so nobody had a clue she was an American, but she was a note taker and evidently spoke Spanish well.

I also remember that occasionally college kids would come down to El Salvador. Some were real idealists. They would have some local contact slip them into guerrilla territory. I remember one young woman, I think from Oberlin College, who spent a month or so with them. And all the while we were being hounded by certain members of congress to find this poor "disappeared" young woman, with the implication that she had been a victim of right wing or military violence. Then she resurfaced. I think she may have been picked up by the government soldiers during a skirmish with the guerrillas, and this angelic looking little twenty-one year old girl comes out of the countryside having been with the guerrillas for four weeks.

Then there was the case of an American priest whose name I cannot recall, but who was quite far to the left. He had disappeared. Since he was on the left, it was feared he had been murdered by the far right. We were bombarded by Congress in this case to find him, once again with the implication he had been a victim of right wing violence. A month or two later he magically reappeared. When told of all the concern about his wellbeing and where he had been, his answer was that he had been "on a walk with the people." That was his answer. So, yes, they were there.

Q: Had the Contra Movement been developed when you were there?

MACK: Yes.

Q: Did that seem to have any effect or not?

MACK: Well apparently some things were moved to Nicaragua through El Salvador, although I did not have privy to that.

Q: Did you run across Ollie North in any of his shenanigans?

MACK: Yes. He came to El Salvador several times.

Q: Did he work with the Embassy or basically bypass the Embassy?

MACK: He came down in his official capacity as a staffer for the National Security Council to see how the war in El Salvador was going. We briefed him several times. .

Q: Was the political section making any efforts to meet with the Left, the guerrillas?

MACK: The guerrillas no; the left yes. Late in 1986 just before I left a few members of the FDR, an progressive group with links to the insurgency but was not violent, were allowed by President Duarte to come back. And so we felt it important to have a conversation with them. I had breakfast with a medical doctor named Hector Silva, who had been in exile for years and who after the war was elected mayor of San Salvador on the FMLN ticket. I was able to contact him through because a friend knew his sister. We spoke for one hour and a half to two hours. At the end of it, I concluded that this guy was a democrat, not a communist. He ended up being the Mayor of San Salvador. Years after the war, when the FMLN was competing in the political area, Silva challenged Shafik Handal, who was a notorious hard line orthodox Communist, for the FMLN presidential nomination. Handal wanted the nomination for himself so he had Silva expelled from the FMLN. Otherwise, Silva might have ended up as president. Handal lost badly to the ARENA candidate, by the way.

Anyway, it was clear from my breakfast conversation with Silva that we could work with him. And that is how things turned out.

Q: Was Fidel Castro was his group there or not? Were we seeing Castro agents within the guerrilla movement or not?

MACK: I am sure they were there. We know Cuba provided specialized training for guerrillas. We also knew that guerrilla leaders would slip off to Cuba from time to time. My guess is that they traveled to Nicaragua somehow and from there to Cuba for R&R Cuba and to meet with Castro. In addition, there were leftists from all over the Americas fighting with the guerrillas. There was a lot of revolutionary solidarity.

Q: What about working with the CIA there? Was this a place where the CIA was dominant, would you say, how did it work?

MACK: Actually I had very good relationship with the Agency. We shared a lot of thoughts and information with each other.

Q: Sometimes, some post ends up, - I was in South Korea at one point where the CIA was basically running things.

MACK: I wouldn't say that about EL Salvador. We both had our spheres of influence and obvious different ways of operating. They were in intel gathering and helping the Salvadorans with intelligence planning and training and special ops and that sort of thing. So, obviously we were not involved in that.

Q: We were not tripping over each other.

MACK: No, not at all, but we did compare notes on the political and military situation.

Q: This is a good place to stop and we will pick this up when you left in '86, Where did you go?

MACK: I went to Paraguay and became the DCM. That was my big promotion.

Q: Stroessner was there!

MACK: Alfredo Stroessner was there and in fact was overthrown toward the end of my tour.

Q: Next time we will pick it up '86 and off to Heir Stroessner. STOP!

Today is the 28th of November 2005, and we are off to Paraguay and it was '86. You were there from when to when?

MACK: I was there from 1986 to 1989.

Q: What was the state of play in Paraguay at the time first in Paraguay itself and then in American/Paraguay relations?

MACK: When I arrived Stroessner was in his 33rd year in power. And his relationship with the United States was very poor. Because of obviously the U.S. did not take kindly to his form of one party rule, which was really a dictatorship, albeit a popular one. There were continuing civil and human rights violations of opponents who were still being arrested. In the electoral sense, Stroessner did allow some prominent politicians from the opposition party to come back to Paraguay and there was an election. And of course Stroessner overwhelmingly won the election.

There was a joke told in Paraguay about the how the Americans are always boasting about their extraordinarily modern system for tabulating presidential votes, how they did all these projections within an hour of the closing of the polls based voting patterns in certain precincts, how the prognosticators could predict with a high deal of accuracy who would be the next President of the United States. According to the joke, when Stroessner heard about the American boasts, he responded that all this was very impressive but that he was able to predict the results of a presidential election in Paraguay years before it was held.

Q: Did we have any particular issue with him other than he was a dictator?

MACK: Human rights and lack of political freedom in the country. Those were the major issues.

Q: There are dictators and dictators. What kind of rule did he have at this time?

MACK: Well, when he came to power, the country had been in the midst of a long civil war. He put an end to it and put his party, the Colorado party, in power. He really brought order to the country. There was no question that he enjoyed a lot of popular support.

The country had been in shambles due to years of chaos. Stroessner began to bring order to Paraguay. He made some major infrastructure improvements over time. For example, the water out of the faucet was good to drink in most Paraguayan towns. This is quite an achievement for a third world country. You could drink the water.

Having served in Central America and been sickened with dysentery and every other intestinal bug known to man, I thought that was a rather impressive achievement.

Over time he established a decent phone system and a fairly decent road system. He negotiated an end to a border dispute with Brazil regarding where in the Paraná<sup>1/2</sup> River to draw the line, paving the way for the construction of the Itaipu dam between the two countries, which at that time was the largest hydraulic dam in the world. I am not sure whether the Three Gorges dam in China now is the largest. But Itaipu was absolutely huge. Paraguay's half the electricity produced was about 20 times the demand in Paraguay at the time so Paraguay then was able to sell 95% of it so to Brazil which largely financed the project with the World Bank.. So by putting an end to this dispute, essentially inundating the disputed area in a huge lake behind the dam which became a bi-national entity, Paraguay was able to take a gigantic step forward in terms of energy independence. The project employed a lot of people, gave opportunities for a large number of Paraguayan firms to get lucrative contracts. I am sure not all of them were awarded based on merit. But, nonetheless a lot Paraguayans learned a lot of skills in the process. And he did the same thing with Argentina down stream in the construction of the Yacyreta dam which was well underway at the time that I was there. So he really did bring progress to the country.

On the other hand, like most dictators or authoritarian figures, he did not know when to leave. If he had left five or ten years earlier he would have probably gone down in Paraguayan history as a greater leader despite his strong-arm rule. He basically overstayed like Marcos and Fujimori did, as did a lot of others.

The fact is that Stroessner may even have had the support of the majority of the population at the time he was ousted. The Colorado Party through which he ruled was very well organized right down to the grassroots. He spoke Guarani. Many loved him. Many did and obviously many did not. Many left the country because of him. But even people who did not support him recognized that he did a lot of positive things. But he stayed on too long. He had many of the same acolytes with him including ministers who had been with him since almost the beginning. Those running the country were almost a gerontocracy, if that's the word. The average age must have been seventy or seventy-five for the ministers. And by and large they were corrupt but very, very loyal to Stroessner.

And that was the situation when I got there. Our ambassador was very direct in dealing with Paraguayan Government on human rights issues and as a result our relations with the government were very, very poor.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

MACK: Clyde Taylor was the Ambassador when I arrived. I remember for example that Ambassador Taylor was going to be awarded some sort of certificate of recognition by a group of women who were trying to support democratic change in Paraguay. These were not leftists by the way. These were, I think, people who really did want to see real democracy come to Paraguay. They were middle and upper class women and who had invited Ambassador Taylor to an evening social event at which they were going to give him an award recognizing his support to human rights and democratic change.

I went with Ambassador Taylor. When we got to this development of very nice new houses, we found it had been completely cordoned off by the police - the entire development, I don't know, maybe twenty or twenty-five houses. No one was allowed to cross the police lines. The only people who got in were the women who had arrived very, very early to help set up, plus Ambassador Taylor and yours truly. We were able to talk our way by the police lines, I guess they didn't want to cause an incident by refusing to allow the US Ambassador to enter a house.

So we went inside and found maybe twenty people drinking wine and eating canapies around the pool. All of a sudden a smoking missile of some sort lands, on the deck of the pool. At the time I thought it was a firecracker, but it turned out to be a tear gas grenade shot at the order of the Chief of Police, an old Stroessner loyalist, who had decided the festivity had gone on long enough. Had been watching us very closely. Just over the wall.

And at that point we retreated inside the house to the bedroom of the woman who hosted the event. All twenty of us were crammed in there. Unfortunately, she had the air-conditioning going because it was very, very hot in Asuncion. And, of course the air-conditioner sucked in the pepper gas and after a few minutes it became rather intolerable inside. At that point, the Ambassador called his trusty driver and bodyguard and we were whisked off to safety. Of course, the Ambassador filed a protest for what happened with the foreign minister.

To give you an idea of the type of relationship that we had with Stroessner, the Chief of Police clearly was orchestrating all this. We saw him physically present outside the perimeter and clearly he gave the order to launch the tear gas grenade. I am sure he would not have done that without approval from a higher authority. So, this gives you an example of the kind of relationship we had with the Stroessner government.

Q: What was Stroessner doing to his own people. Were the jails full of dissidents?

MACK: Well I don't think that at that point after thirty-five years in power Stroessner had the jails filled with dissidents. There were a few but at that point most who had actively opposed the regime had simply left the country or shut up. I don't think there was a huge group that were actively protesting. He had the place pretty well tied down. This brings us to an event celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday, which was a national holiday by the way, to which the diplomatic corps and spouses were invited. At that point, I was in my third year as DCM and Tim Towell had replaced Ambassador Taylor. The annual event was hosted by the Presidential Escort Regiment, which was basically his Praetorian Guard. At that event all the senior members of the military were there. It was a big event.

Then somewhat after that, not too much actually, a curious event happened. Unbeknownst to the U.S. Embassy, his "consuego" General Rodrigueconsuego in this case meant that Stroessner's son was married to General Rodriguez' daughter - was plotting against Stroessner. Understand that the two were very close, General Rodriguez was his senior general and Commander of the First Cavalry Division and when I say Cavalry I literally mean literally that. I paid a major in that division to teach my young son how to ride!

In any event, President Stroessner kept his Presidential Escort Regiment stationed very near where he lived. Gen Rodriguez' division was on the edge of town. Theoretically this arrangement provided protection to Stroessner. But it turned out that unbeknownst to the U.S. Embassy, the plot was beginning to thicken.

General Rodriguez apparently had become convinced that Stroessner had lost confidence in him. At least this was the story that I heard later. When Stroessner called Rodriguez in, Rodriguez assumed he was going to be axed so he claimed he couldn't go because of a leg injury. At that point, Rodriguez' group decided to strike first. A few months before, Stroessner had undergone a prostate operation that did not go well. Apparently there was a lot bleeding and his long recovery led to speculation that he was dying or even had died. This led to some jockeying among various factions for advantage just in case Stroessner did not survive. Some of Stroessner's people must of picked this up and for some reason believed, maybe correctly, that Rodriguez was suspect. In any event, thinking that Stroessner was moving against him, Rodriguez decided to move against Stroessner.

This was almost unthinkable in the context of a rule that had gone on for 35 years. We in the American Embassy saw some clues but never put the pieces together because we could not conceive Rodriguez would overthrow Stroessner, given their historical and family ties. Of course, no Paraguayan believed the US did not know. In fact, since I was in South Africa at the time of the coup, they thought I had been sent over to secure his exile.

That was absolutely not true. I had just left for South Africa before the coup but was there with my wife, three of my kids and mother in law to visit the game parks. The night that the coup took place we had just arrived in Pretoria. The next morning a note was passed under my door informing me that Stroessner had been overthrown, and asking me to call the Embassy in Asuncion. So I called Ambassador Tim Towell, who said "Jim you don't have come back but I really prefer that you would". I got the message so I left my family to complete the trip to the game parks alone and took the next scheduled plane to plane to Rio, which was not for two days. .

When I got back, I learned that bullets had flown over the Embassy compound between forces loyal to Stroessner, some of which were stationed across the street at the president's home, and the forces under Rodriguez who had Stroessner's Presidential Escort Regiment headquarters surrounded a few blocks away. Fortunately no one at the embassy was hurt. .

Q: Were there casualties among the Paraguayans?

MACK: Yes, among the military, but eventually it became clear to Stroessner's forces that they could not prevail against Rodriguez' division. It was a kind of Mexican standoff at this point. At the end, the commander of the Escort Regiment counted his own guns and realized that further resistance was futile. Stroessner was sent out of the country. He is alive today. 1989 was sixteen years ago, so that would make him ninety-one years old. He is living on ranch in Brazil and still alive. And there are still people in Paraguay who would like to see him return. He remained fairly popular. There were a considerable number of people who supported him. In fact some of his younger supporters from those days are powerful in the government today. The joke going around Asuncion when I was last there in 2006 was a group of Stroessner supporters went to visit the old man in Brazil to tell them how well the "Stronistas" were doing. He reportedly responded that "he was the only one missing".

I must say under Stroessner biggest crimes were of corruption and repression of political opponents. There was virtually no violent street crime at that time. The streets of Asuncion were safe. This is unique among any Latin American country that I have seen. In Asuncion, young women, children of the middle class, high school girls would ride public buses at night to go down town to promenade around in the center of town. Can you imagine that today in any other country in Latin America? It is inconceivable. That is how safe things were. Yes, there were burglaries and that sort of thing. But there was, virtually, no violent crime. It was said that not a leaf fluttered in Paraguay without Stroessner knowing about it. That was the condition in Paraguay.

Q: What kind of Embassy did we have there?

MACK: If you add up all the agencies there were probably two hundred and sixty U.S. and local employees. There were eight U.S. Government Agencies. Defense, the Agency, Peace Corps AID, State, USIA, who am I leaving out?

Q: In a way, this man had been going since 1954 and we were tutt tutting at least or shaking our heads about his human rights thing, yet we had Peace Corps, we had military connections, I mean it seems like we were working both sides of the street?

MACK: I guess you might say that. Paraguay was a great Peace Corps country. Peace Corps volunteers were welcomed and relative safely as well. Unlike some other countries.

But I must say relations grew quite testy during Clyde Taylor's Ambassadorship. He was very, very strong on pushing the Government to open up and on human rights side so there was constant tension with the Government.

Q: Were we concerned that Paraguay was a smuggling haven?

MACK: There were some who said that Paraguay in those days existed to provide to its neighbors, the Argentines and the Brazilians, smuggled products that were heavily taxed in their own countries, the most important of which I think at the time was whiskey. Apparently, Paraguay was one of the largest importers of Scotch Whiskey in the world with 3 million people. Ha! Ha!

The smuggling business was huge. Whiskey, computers, condoms - you name it. Whatever was in short supply in those neighboring countries or overpriced, Paraguayan smugglers were happy to provide. And the smuggling was very coordinated. Stroessner's military commanders controlled much of the trade. That is how they made their money. Their salaries were paltry, which is why a cavalry officer taught my son how to ride on the side. Stroessner's acceptance of smuggling by his commanders was just part of the deal; that was the arrangement. They were allowed to do that in exchange for loyalty to the government. That system worked quite well. There were a lot of wealthy senior military officers.

Q: Well, were we able to make any inroads on the human rights thing in conjunction with other countries?

MACK: I would say, yes things did open up a little bit. One of the leading opponents to the government was allowed to come back and begin some political activity under certain restrictions. But he was allowed to come back. The largest newspaper, I think it was called ABC Color if I remember correctly, was allowed to resume publishing when I was there. And they were somewhat critical of his government. They couldn't be too critical but the fellow who ran it definitely was not Stroessner supporter. So I think because of the gerontocracy, because the leadership was aging, they were not as vigorous as they might have been in stamping these kinds of things out. So the government was opening up somewhat. However, Stroessner gave no sign of stepping down. He was "reelected" while I was there.

Q: How did you read Stroessner? Did you have much contact with him?

MACK: I had almost no contact with him. Nor did the Ambassador.

Q: Was Paraguay playing any role in Latin America that we were interested in other than smuggling whiskey?

MACK: Well, I would say not a huge role, their role was smuggling. A Paraguayan city across the Paraná<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> River from Brazil, and also close to Argentina, personified this. It was then officially called "Ciudad Presidente Stroessner". That city is now called "Ciudad del Este" or City of the East, and exists to supply the contraband needs of those countries. Over time it attracted a very interesting element from the Middle-East that settled there and later became a hot point for terrorist fundraising and perhaps was even the place from which the terrorist acts against the Jewish community in Buenos Aires were orchestrated. At the time I was there, these terrorist acts had yet not taken place. But people who engaged in every kind of smuggling activities were there. And anybody who wanted to do that kind of thing seemed to be allowed into the country by one means or another. My guess is that these people had to pay heavy bribes.

To give you an example of the extent of corruption in Paraguay, I remember our consular officer once telling me he had in front of him an applicant for a US visa with a Paraguayan diplomatic passport who could not speak Spanish. It turned out the guy was from Morocco. So the point is that the Paraguayans were even selling their diplomatic passports to foreigners. That was the level of corruption. That was an issue between us and Paraguay. Because even then we had some security concerns about people traveling, for whatever purpose, to the United States.

Q: Was there any residue of Nazi's there at that time or not?

MACK: '86 that would have been 41 years after the war. I think if it were, it was very, very limited at that point.

Q: You didn't have Nazi hunters working in the area?

MACK: I don't recall if there were Nazi hunters there. I don't recall, no. I do remember that there was a very old Colonel in the Paraguayan army who was Russian in origin and I think came over in the 1930s as a captain in the cavalry to fight with the Paraguayans. In 1986 he was still serving Stroessner loyally. Remember Stroessner was probably only a young lieutenant or captain during the Chaco war.

In the 1930s Bolivia and Paraguay had fought a really nasty protracted war for several years over control over a desolate region that covers half of Paraguay called the Chaco. The war was largely won by Paraguay. To help them, the Paraguayans hired a number of White Russian Officers who were unemployed as a result of losing the war to the Bolsheviks in the early 1920s. Paraguay hired them to train and lead their Army against Bolivia. These were cavalry men because in the 1930s the cavalry was much more efficient in operating the trackless waste of the Chaco. Interestingly enough, Bolivia hired former German officers from World War I to train their Army. These officers from Russian and Germany played an important role in training, and probably leading, the Paraguayan and Bolivian armies in the war of the Chaco.

In fact, I think some Tartar officers, White Russians, who were particular adept at cavalry tactics trained the Paraguayans. They helped them defeat the Bolivians in what was really a war of "water holes". Since much of the Chaco was basically a desert most of the year, whoever controlled the very few sources of fresh water controlled the battlefield. It was a very bloody war and most who died likely died because of dehydration rather than being shot.

Q: How did we deal with the Government itself. Did we go to the various Ministries and other active services?

MACK: We would seek Foreign Ministry support on various international issues, which I cannot remember at this point. We were always politely received, but as I recall we were not particularly successful in pushing our brief. One big issue we did have was narcotics smuggling. Paraguay was a transit point for Bolivian cocaine because of the porousness of the borders, the availability of landing strips all over the place. This was complicated by having a corrupt government and military that was complicit in smuggling. If you could smuggle whiskey you certainly as heck could smuggle cocaine or whatever you wanted to smuggle.

In fact, while I was there I took it upon myself to convince the DEA to reopen its office due to Paraguay's role as a narcotics transit point. So drugs were an increasingly sensitive issue for us. To say that we solved any major problem at the time, I would say no. Paraguay was not the location of major foreign successes of the U.S. at the time.

Q: Were a lot of Paraguayan's, young men and women going to the United States to study?

MACK: Not in great numbers, no. Not at that time. But there was a very active Paraguay-Kansas partnership through which every year several Paraguayans went to study at the University of Kansas. So over a period of years we are talking about a fair number.

Q: Did any of the Brazilians or the Argentines play much of a role in the government?

MACK: Both had very active embassies. Brazil obviously was more influential. Stroessner was very astute about playing his hand of a weak country located between two very, very large countries. I think he was very successful at negotiating favorable relationships with both of them.

For example, Paraguay is a landlocked country, lie Bolivia. They called themselves a Mediterranean country which means in the middle of land not of sea. Historically Paraguay used barges to export its products down the Paraguay River to Argentina for onward shipment by sea. But this put them at the mercy of the Argentines. So Stroessner negotiated an agreement with Brazil that gave Paraguay essentially free port privileges in a port in Brazil, Paranagua. So Paraguay began exporting cotton and I guess some soybeans by truck across southern Brazil to this port.

So Stroessner was really quite adept at following this approach. Of course the Brazilians were drawing Paraguayans into their orbit by essentially offering Paraguay use of a seaport. Also there were thousands of Brazilian farmers living in Paraguay; maybe five or ten percent of the population was Brazilian, mostly from Southern Brazil. They bought land and planted soybeans. And they leveled huge amounts of their native forest in order to do so. These were very often the second or third sons of farmers in Southern Brazil who were not going to inherit land. The Southern Brazilians did not want to divide their property, so the sons who were not going to get it would be given money to buy land in Paraguay where it was cheap .

Q: Was there much pressure coming from Washington to do something or was this a big backwater?

MACK: Let's be realistic here. Paraguay was not the central focus of U.S. Foreign Policy, even to Latin America. We had our marching letter on human rights issues but other than that I don't think the Secretary of State was focused day-to-day on the happenings in Paraguay.

Q: How was Tim Towell? The reason why I asked was that he was a Foreign Service Officer who quit and became a Protocol Political Appointee. He not come from a background of being an enforcer type, someone who could go and straighten out Stroessner.?

MACK: Well, actually Tim was good to work for because he really, he recognized that he needed help on the substance side on Paraguay issues. And he used his people. He sought counsel when the golpe against Stroessner occurred. . And the Mission came together and recommended the course to take to try to steer General Rodriguez toward elections, etc. to open things up. And Rodriguez to some extent did that. He ran for president and was elected, naturally. I left about six months after that.

But things began to open up at that point. Rodriguez's concern was that he be able to walk the streets of Paraguay after he stepped down from the Presidency. He didn't want to have to go into exile like Stroessner or to have to barricade himself in his residence. In fact, he served a term and then he left. And there was another election. But Paraguay has had a troubled history since that time. One of Rodriguez's former senior commanders named Oviedo from his Cavalry division wanted to become president and enjoyed support from many in the Colorado party who like strongman rule. Unfortunately, he was cut from the mold of a dictator. In the end he was not allowed to run. But Paraguay was had a very difficult time. Still, things are more open than they were before.

Q: Did Paraguay play any role or show any interest in what was happening up in Central America at that time?

MACK: in 1979 before I arrived, Somoza had been overthrown in Nicaragua by the Sandinistas and was given exile in Paraguay by Stroessner. And Somoza was assassinated in Paraguay after that, also before I got there. I don't remember if it was one year, two years, three years, or four years, but he was assassinated. His Mercedes was attacked by an armor-piercing grenade and he was killed. If I recall correctly, the people who carried it out came out of Nicaragua. So they sent down a group probably aided by local leftists to dispatch Somoza once and for all. So was there a Central America connection? I guess you could say there was. Stroessner was a staunch anti-Communist..

Q: Well then '89 you left?

MACK: '89 I left.

Q: Where to?

MACK: Well I went back to Washington. And I became the Director of the Office of Andean Affairs.

Q: Andean Affairs consisted of what?

MACK: Of five Andean countries. Which were Venezuela, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. There were five. Chile was handled by South Cone Affairs.

Q: You did that from '89 until?

MACK: Until '91. The Office of Andean Affairs was a very busy place. Remember Colombia was not in the best of shape. The drug cartels were very strong. Shortly after I arrived, the Liberal candidate for president, Gaitan, was assassinated at the behest of Pablo Escobar, one of the notorious Medellin drug cartel king-pins. Colombia was in very, very bad. The Government of President Virgilio Barco was really shaken by the drug cartels which were enormously powerful to the point where they were electing people to Congress. In fact at one point, a quarter or a third of the Colombian Congress were ineligible for US visas because their links in some way to narcotics trafficking or money laundering. Their power went up to the Supreme Court. It was a pretty serious situation.

As a result of the Gaitan assassination, President Bush (the father) and his National Security Council decided we needed to take a hard look at Colombia and come up with a proposal to provide a massive amount of assistance for Columbia. This was almost 10 years before "Plan Colombia". This was a reaction to the assassination of Gaitan and the power of the drug cartels.

Over one weekend we in the Office in Andean Affairs were asked to come up with a proposal to spend several hundred million dollars in support of Colombia. And in addition, we were asked to come up with something that would the attention to show that the U.S. really supported the government of Colombia and the other Andean countries in their war against drugs.

At this point I can't recall who actually came up with the idea for all of this, but the Bush Administration agreed that they would propose an Andean drug summit involving President Bush, Jaime Paz Zamora of Bolivia, Alan Garcia of Peru and Virgilio Barco from Colombia. It was to take place in February, 1990. I had come on board in the fall of '89 and my office had been given the lead in preparing for a summit. That's what we did for my first four months on the job. Anybody who has been involved with this kind of thing knows that Heads of States don't just show up. A huge amount of prior planning and inter-agency coordination is involved.

It also involved advanced negotiations with the other countries involved in the summit. It involved the negotiation in advance of six different Agreements of Cooperation with each of the four countries. And that occupied my first four months as Director of Andean Affairs.

And actually we had finished negotiating these agreements in Cartagena itself the evening before the summit. So we had very little time to put them in final form for signature by the respective Foreign Ministers and Secretary of State. Unfortunately, when we tried to enter the changes and print them out, we realized that the computer disc on which we had brought the draft agreements was not compatible with the computers we had available at the hotel. As a result, a heroic US Embassy secretary, I think the wife of a MILGRP officer, stayed up all night retyping them into the computer. This was a huge job. She didn't finish until after the official caravan taking the staffers had left the hotel for the summit site, which was the Colombian president's equivalent of a summer white house. This was a highly secure location at the tip of a peninsula. You first had to go through a naval base just to get to the outside walls of the presidential villa. I am telling you with the presence of 4 presidents including George Bush, and with worries about missile threats from Pablo Escobar, security was tight!!

Anyway, I missed the caravan by a half hour. By the time I got from the hotel through the Naval Base, the gate through the wall to the presidential retreat was closed tight, with the guards under strict orders not to allow nobody to pass.

I had the six agreements that were supposed to be signed by the three foreign ministers and secretary of state James Baker. What to do. I was able to make telephonic contact with a colleague on the other side who came to his side of the wall. So I threw my brief case containing the agreements over the wall to him. Eventually I did get in. The agreements were signed. It was kind of funny how it took place. Because security was very, very tight.

Q: So how did the Summit turn out?.

MACK: Well it actually came off quite well. The Summit launched substantially increased U.S. support for the Andean countries. It was quite a show. US Chinook helicopters from the US Naval ships off the horizon, a huge protective detail for Bush.

Q: Well, when you were charged with this, doing something about this, what were you looking at?

MACK: Well we were looking at the protection of Colombian judges. That was one thing. Judges were being assassinated by the dozens by the cartel. They were afraid to hear cases involving drug trafficking and to render verdicts. So one of the first things we focused on was physical protection for the judges. Armored cars, secured court buildings, secure communications. The Colombians also borrowed a concept of "faceless judges" from Italy by the way from Sicily to protect their judges. The judges heard cases behind a screen so their faces could not be seen by the defendants. That was a major area that we looked into. There were other kinds of systems as well.

Q: Well, were the other countries involved like Ecuador and Venezuela in particular?

MACK: Venezuela and Ecuador were not part of the summit. Only the three major Andean drug producers: Columbia, Bolivia and Peru, plus the US. Ecuador was not a serious drug producer. So, only the three that were there. They agreed on a set of principles for fighting drugs, including the concept that in certain circumstances their military could be involved. That was a tough one. They also agreed on the concept that both the drug producing and consuming countries had a shared responsibility to cooperate to deal with the drug problem . Previously the three producing countries were constantly blaming U.S. drug consumption for the problem. We, of course, blamed them for producing drugs. The declaration of principles established that everybody was part of the problem so everybody had to be a part of the solution. The time had passed for name calling, etc. We felt that the militaries of these countries ought to be involved when appropriate although the Latin countries had been reluctant because they saw drugs as a police function and also did not want the military to become corrupted by drugs. And in fact, in some cases corruption did happen, such as in Peru. But we argued that the Cartel was so strong that the military had to get involved with the problem. The police could not possibly handle it alone. So in Colombia, in fact, the military did get involved.

Q: Were you there long enough to see the beginning of the shift to change?

MACK: Well, I mean you have to put it into context because the U.S. consumption was rising through the mid-eighties. We had a very, very high level of consumption of drugs. Consumption in the US began to drop in the late eighties and early nineties in large part because the U.S. took internal measures, not only law enforcement measures, but also to reduce demand . Many parental groups got involved because they saw that drugs were destroying the fabric of our country. We were losing a generation of young people. A series of activities and programs took place that I think had the cumulative effect of dampening the demand for drugs in the United States.

Unfortunately, as the U.S. market leveled off, the cartels began marketing cocaine in Europe. Consumption there began from almost nothing in 1990 to today they where consume a quarter of all the cocaine produced. The U.S. consumes about half of the cocaine produced maybe a little less whereas 20 years ago we consumed about 80 percent of all of it. So the Europeans have, unfortunately acquired a problem, because the narcotic traffickers were good businessmen. They developed another market for their product when they saw the U.S. market was not expanding. Coca planting was still going up in the early nineties in all those countries. It began to drop somewhat in the late nineties.

Q: Obviously you had to deal with the Drug Enforcement Agency. How did you find that and the other enforcement agencies? Was this difficult?

MACK: I didn't personally have a big problem. Obviously we had different corporate cultures. But I had worked with the DEA people before and I was certainly able to work with them while I was working with the Office of Andean Affairs. I got along quite well with other agencies. Maybe I just didn't have the cultural hang-ups that some people seem to have.

Q: This was under the first Bush Administration?

MACK: That is correct.

Q: The whole drug business was quite a priority of that Administration?

MACK: A very, very big priority. We also did a lot of high level trip preparation. The Cartagena Summit. President Bush went to Caracas. Vice President Quayle traveled to Bogota and then we had the Presidents of Peru, Colombia and Venezuela traveling the United States during this period. And of course our office in charge of papering these visits. From your experience, you know what that means. All the preparation, all the scene setters, all the talking points, and all the liaison with the secret service.

Bush was very, very good by the way. I have to put a plug-in for the Bush the father. He really appreciated the Foreign Service. Obviously, with his experience with the Agency and as Ambassador to China.

Q: And the U.N.

MACK: And the United Nations. He was very good about recognizing and rewarding people who knock themselves out organizing his visits. And he always made a point out of inviting the Desk Officers and the Office Directors to the big social event he held at the White House for presidential level visits. I think that a very strong motivating factor for people was that he recognized the hard work of the people in the Foreign Service.

Q: Well then you were there doing this until 91?

MACK: That is correct.

Q: And then went where?

MACK: Well after '91 I went to Ecuador as the Deputy Chief of Mission.

Q: It probably would be a good place to stop here and pick it up then.

Okay, today is the 16th of February 2006. Jim you are in Ecuador from when to when?

MACK: I was in Ecuador from 1991 to 1994.

Q: And who was the Ambassador?

MACK: His name was Paul Lambert. He was a good friend and Yale classmate of George Bush the first. I think they both played on the Yale baseball team. And Lambert was a prominent estate lawyer in New York City and I think an excellent fundraiser for the Republican Party in New York City. Very decent guy, a very, very decent guy. He was nominated for his ambassadorship I guess about a year before I got there, roughly. I had met him when he came through Andean Affairs for his briefing before he was confirmed. I was then the Director of Andean Affairs at the Department of State. When the position of DCM became available as it did shortly after he got there, he asked me if I would like to go down there and I said that I would. I arrived in the early fall of '91, in about September.

Two weeks before I got on the plane in September, 1991, he called me on the phone from Ecuador. He had already been at post for six months. He said, "Jim I wanted you to know that I have just submitted my resignation to the President effective January, 1992. In other words, he said. I have given the President five months to find a replacement." I said, "Well, thanks for telling me; I haven't really signed up to be Charge," but he explained why he was leaving and I understood.

Prior to taking his ambassadorship, he had been at a major firm in New York for years. At that point he was 62. He had a large stable of clients who used his services, and when he was tapped to be ambassador he left his clients under the charge of a young lawyer who they had brought into the firm. When the clients who had been working with Paul Lambert for years realized that he was going to be gone for a long time, and recognized that they would need his services in the interim, said, "Paul, your protigü has just informed us that he is leaving the firm. Unless you tell us that you are coming back shortly, we are going to go with him to his new firm."

So he really had to make a choice. As I said, he was 62 and to try to rebuild a client base at that age is not a simple thing. So he elected to terminate his ambassadorship and go back to his profession and his clients. He is probably still working as far as I know. In any event, I got to post recognizing that he would be leaving in four months later. And he did. He left in January, 2002.

President Bush, the father, immediately named a friend of his from Texas, an oil man, to replace Lambert. I understand he actually could speak Spanish. I never met him. Can't even remember his name. Now as you may recall, the Democrats thought 1992 would be their year, as it was, and they already did have control of the Senate if I recall correctly. And the Senate never even gave this gentleman a hearing. Which meant that I remained as Charge through the end of the Bush Administration. Then Clinton came in in January 1992 Ecuador was not at the top of his agenda. So by the time he did and a new ambassador was confirmed it was already November 2003. I had been Charge for twenty-two months. It was a very interesting time. Pete Romero was the new ambassador.

Q: Okay well lets talk about when you went out there you had been dealing with the bureau and all of the situations there. What was the situation in Ecuador and well, politically; economically and all at that time?

MACK: Well, Ecuador as you know has a substantial amount of natural wealth. It is an oil exporter, is a major banana producer; shrimp producer, gets a lot of tourism and has a fairly balanced economy, but it is largely an extraction and farming economy. Parts of the economy did very well. When the price of oil was high in the boon times in the 70's, the country really developed very, very quickly under a benign military dictatorship. When the price of oil dropped, the government did not have the income it had before and the development of the infrastructure slowed down. And the government in power when I got there was of the democratic left, not totally committed to private enterprise and certainly not supportive of foreign investment in a big way.

There also were some impediments to export. Ecuador was then getting into the cut flower business. Colombia had the market but Ecuador was getting in big time. But there were many bureaucratic steps to export each flower shipment, which was perishable and had to be processed quickly. I remember that one of the first speeches I made dealt with the kind of things the government should do to cut bureaucratic impediments to exports. There also were also oil issues. Texaco had been there for sometime. It had discovered the oil in Ecuador in the late '60's. But under their contract they were fazing out and turning their wells over to the state owned oil company. Petroecuador I think it is called now. There was a major lawsuit against Texaco brought by some environmental groups in the United States using some indigenous groups in Ecuador as their pretext, suing Texaco for billions of dollars for destruction of the environment.

And there was another small U.S. company that discovered oil in an area inhabited by some indigenous people on the Amazon side. Almost all the oil was on the Amazon side of the country. This particular group, the Wai Wai, had been contacted back in the '50's by some North American evangelical missionaries. There was a very famous story about that. Five young male missionaries were murdered by the Wai Wai in the initial contact attempt, they had landed in a sandbar in a river that flowed through Wai Wai territory. After that the sister of one of missionaries who was killed made it her life's work to live among them. In any event, the US company did a pretty good job of protecting the environment where it was working. They built no bridges over the major rivers in the area to keep out squatters. The roads they built were made with a special textile base minimize disturbing the environment and were built as narrow as possible. Still the environmentalist movement in the US remained still pretty much opposed to any further oil development in the Amazon. Later the company was bought out by an Argentine firm. I have not followed it since then, but the initial development was done pretty well in my view.

I traveled twice to the area to see for myself. The second time was for a ceremonial signing agreement between the oil company and the various semi-nomadic clans that made up the tribe of then about 1500. We flew in in single engine missionary planes and landed at a tiny grass strip built by the missionaries years before. The president of Ecuador, Sixto Durán Ballón followed in a huge Sikorsky helicopter. As the chopper taxied toward the meeting site, where hundreds of Wai Wai were gathered, the strip on both sides of the strip were lined by an honor guard of dozens of stone age tribesman dressed in their typical Amazonian splendor, which means virtually nothing, with their 8 foot long spears raised in the air. I'll show you one in my kitchen. It was quite a scene!!!

Cocaine trafficking was also a big issue in Ecuador. It was coming out from southern Colombia through Ecuador. Early in my tenure, a major Ecuadorian Drug Cartel was taken down by an elite Ecuadorian police unit trained by us. It was a rather large operation. In addition, we were able to persuade the Ecuadorian Government to agree allow us mount a radar for them on a volcano on the Amazonian side to detect drug flights coming up from Peru to Colombia through Ecuadorian airspace. That proved quite successful. So the drug issue was very important.

Another big challenge for us internally was funding. At that time all at the embassies were suffering through budget cuts. I am talking about cuts in embassy operating expenses so we had to find ways to save money to meet our lower budget target. And we did meet our new targets. And since the Ambassador's residence was unoccupied, one of the ways we saved money was to put up TDYers and newly arrived staff there, as opposed to a hotel, as long as they didn't have any children. This also kept the residence staff, whose salaries we had to pay anyway, on their toes. We did this for a year and a half and probably saved 60 or 80 thousand dollars in TDY expenses in that period. There were those who probably were not too delighted with the idea, but we did not have any major problems and we were able to save ourselves a lot of money from funds that came out of the embassy budget.

Q: While you were did that border problem that has been going on since the 1940's between Peru and Ecuador raise its head?

MACK: That issue did not raise its head in the fullest extent until after I transferred from Ecuador to Peru. I was in Peru at the time the war broke out. But having been in Ecuador before certainly gave me insights into both sides of the issue.

Q: I have finished long interviews with Wes Alexander who talks about his time in Ecuador towards the ends of that war. Well let's talk about economics. Were these obstacles to business just socialist mindlessness or was this a case of people looking to extort. What was happening?

MACK: I think you are describing in an interesting way two facets of the Ecuadorian mind. One was I think that was embedded in the DNA of the political culture in Ecuador, an particularly that of the highlands, was a huge distrust of foreign investment. The party in power at the time I got there was a left-leaning and they were certainly very, very suspicious of business. You will recall this was 1991. I had arrived just after the Soviet Union collapsed. And so Ecuadorian government realized that, I think, that things were going to change.

On the other hand we are talking about leaders of one of the major parties who had grown up basically on Marxian rhetoric. The universities, the national universities, were basically run politically leftists. So the idea of an open free-market approach to development was not one that was embraced by many, many people in the middle class in the highlands. Interestingly enough, these leftist views were more strongly held in the highlands where the government, but not the natural resources, was located, than on the coast where their half of the population lives and a strong tradition of an export economy existed bananas, fish, shrimp and other tropical products. A very small portion of the population lived in the Amazon where the oil was. There was also a very strong entrepreneurial class on the coast. But regarding the other point you made, there was a lot of extortion of business, both local business and foreign business.

The courts were corrupt by and large and the result was that a local business partner with a foreign partner could avail himself of the courts to win a dispute or to blackmail a foreign investor. I will give you an example. Not infrequently, American investor, who had a partner in Ecuador, would come down to settle the problem and find himself under arrest on a Friday, evening. This is how that would happen. The local partner would have bribed a judge to issue an order of arrest of the foreigner just before COB on Friday so the individual would have to spend the weekend in jail. Since many Americans would not want to endure a weekend in an Ecuadorian jail, they would settle up right away on terms favorable to the Ecuadorian partner.

A very, very unfortunate case involved a naturalized American from Colombia, a civil engineer on a Quito water project, who had suspended his project because his company was not getting paid. He was arrested and thrown into jail for the weekend. It turned out he was a diabetic and had no insulin with him. He started going into insulin shock and would have died if he hadn't prevailed on a sympathetic guard to slip a note to the American Embassy, which is how we found out. And he was going into a coma when we got to him and secured his release. If we had not, he would have died. So Ecuador really was a difficult place for investors to do business.

Now obviously big firms like Bell South and the oil companies could fend for themselves, mostly. But they had problems too. Ecuador, potentially, could be a very, very prosperous country. But it definitely did not achieve a tenth of what it is capable of doing. For the last ten years or so there has been a huge exodus of its young people going to the U.S. and Europe because of the lack of opportunity at home.

Q: How did you deal with the two Ecuadorian governments you worked with during your time when American businesses were having problems?

MACK: Well, both governments would hear us out, but clearly the second government I had to deal with, that of Sixto Durán-Ballón, was much more market oriented. We had good access to him personally and to his ministers. But even in the Durán-Ballón administration, the government would find funny ways to make investment difficult, for their own people as well as foreigners.

Q: Did the economy work fairly well with this type of attitude?

MACK: Well, it worked fairly well because of the abundance of natural resources, which could be mined. Oil provided one-half of the government's budget. So that was a tremendous cushion for the Ecuadorian Government. When you have billion dollars a year coming in, which at today's prices would be three billion something, it pardons a lot of administrative sins. So yes, there was economic activity there. Certainly life in Quito was for people who had middle-class income or above was very, very good. Quito was a delightful place to live. It was a clean city 9,300 feet above sea level. The climate was cool and the setting spectacular, It awesomely beautiful. From where I lived you could see five glacier covered volcanoes and a forest across the city. Quito was located in a valley, a long narrow valley. We lived on one side and could look at the other which was a volcano that was occasionally snow-covered. It was just a delightful place to live.

Q: Sticking to the business-side, were there Americans involved in the flower business, the cut-flower business?

MACK: Yes. But I think at the time most of them were either Colombian or Ecuadorian.

Q: The reason I asked is because there is a real problem in the cut-flower business, in that usually these young women have to do work in an environment that is heavily chemicalized. This is not good for people.

MACK: Well! That is certainly one side of it. The other side is that tens of thousands of women found work and regular cash income outside their home for the first time in their lives. I don't know whether your concerns regarding chemicals are completely justified. But yes! Of course you have to spray the flowers to keep the wee beasties away. Everything is done scientifically. They apply exactly what the rose needs by drip irrigation. I don't know what the long term impact is.

Were you referring to the insecticides and fungicides?

Q: Yes I remember seeing some reports about this maybe about twenty or thirty years ago in Columbia

MACK: If there was some truth to this concern at that time, I would imagine that more benign types of Herbicides and Fungicides are being used today. And keep in mind as I just said, the flower industry brought about significant social change in some of the rural areas in the highlands where the cut flower industry is located.

It empowered women, because about 80 percent of the workers in the flower industry were, and I suppose still are, women. The men did the heavy lifting kind of stuff and the women did the fine motor work like pruning, cutting and packing. The flower industry provided work outside the home to large numbers of rural women in the highlands for the first time. And they tended to spend it on things the family really needed. So instead of the husband pissing it away on liquor or something, women tended to save it and spend it on family necessities. Of course, when women started working outside the home, that produced some social tension for obvious reasons. I don't know how it all turned out. I have been away for twelve or fifteen years now. I would be interested in reading a report about how that all came out.

Oh! I forgot one of the major industries in Ecuador is tourism. Ecuador, I would say, square mile for square mile is the most fascinating country that I have ever seen. Absolutely phenomenal! Whether you are interested in the Galapagos Islands, the Coastal Forest, the Indian highlands, the Volcanoes, the Glacier-covered volcanoes, the Amazonian jungle, its all there. My family did all this by the way. We did a lot of backpacking. It is just phenomenal. There are lots and lots of things of interest for tourists. It was just a great place. I wrote a tour guide based on our adventures.

Q: Did you have any problems of lost Americans or Americans getting in trouble as tourists?

MACK: Yes! The problem was mostly along the Colombian border on the Amazonian side where the FARC Colombian guerilla group then, and even now, was very strong. While I was posted to Ecuador, several Americans were kidnapped for ransom either by the FARC or by bandits, perhaps some of them ex-FARC. Some victims worked for the oil companies and had a reason to be there. Others were just adventurers that insisted on going to the area against Embassy warnings about how dangerous the area could be. So yes, there was a problem.

Q: Did you get involved in any of the cases, trying to deal with them?

MACK: Yes but not directly. Obviously, I did not do any negotiations directly. If the victims worked for the oil companies, the companies would bring in their own security people in, or hire expert negotiators to try to establish contact with the kidnappers and negotiate the ransom. The companies did not want the Ecuadorian government, or the US government for that matter, involved because they did not trust its competence to deal with this type of situation, and of course because the companies were prepared to pay the ransom, which is something, by the way, the U. S. does not support.

Q: What role did the military play in Ecuador at this time?

MACK: Well! The Ecuadorian military was quite well regarded by the populace because it had controlled the government during the period of the greatest economic growth probably in the history of Ecuador, which were the seventies and eighties. The growth was stimulated by Texaco's discovery and exploitation of large deposits of oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon. While it was in control, the military tended not to apply harsh measures against the population. In fact, in contrast to, for example, the Chilean and Argentine situations, the military dictatorship was referred to as a "dictablanda" or soft dictatorship. In addition, the Ecuadorian Army was very active in civic action type activities. They were seen as agents of national development, and they saw themselves as ultimate bastion of protection of the state and the welfare of the people. And they were quite popular.

In fact, the military was often more popular than the politicians. I mentioned the oil boom that coincided with the military rule. The military considered, and still does, oil as a strategic asset, and it certainly is for Ecuador. As a consequence, the military deployed large numbers of troops to the oil producing region to make sure there would be no interruption of the movement of oil through the pipeline across the Andes over a 16,000 foot pass to the Pacific ports.

Q. Were interruptions of the pipeline.

MACK: Not very often when I was there although the oil workers unions would stage occasional strikes that shut things down temporarily. However, the companies kept a supply of oil in holding tanks at the port so they could load the oil tankers even if there were a short shut down. Historically, the most serious interruptions were caused by earthquakes. The Ecuadorian Andes are a very earthquake prone zone. Prior to my coming and subsequent to my leaving there were some major earthquakes that severely damaged the pipeline and interrupted oil exports for a long time. These were devastating for the economy and national treasury since oil was the source of half of the government's revenue at the time.

Q: Did arms sales or potential arm sales occupy you at all?

MACK: Not arms per se, but military supplies yes. A major U.S. electronics manufacturer, Harris Corporation out of Rochester, NY, if I recall correctly, was bidding on a multi-million contract to sell a field radio communication system to the Ecuadorian Army.

There were field trials. The main competition was a between Harris and an Israeli company, whose name I cannot recall. Harris alleged that the Israelis paid someone off to sabotage their equipment just before the field trial and that as a result, Harris did badly and lost the contract to the Israelis. The Harris people were furious. And it fell to me as Charge to meet with the Commander of the Ecuadorian Army to express my concern about what had happened. I cannot recall how that finally came out. I don't think the Americans won the contract, but they did get a hearing.

Q: What about the drug business, while you were there?

MACK: Well I told you that cocaine was coming out of Columbia through Ecuadorian ports for transport by boat to the U.S. Also precursor chemicals used to produce cocaine came through Ecuador en route to Southern Columbia, as contraband. So drugs were a big issue. Then there was the case of a retired Admiral in the Ecuadorian Navy who had founded a bank in Ecuador and an off shore bank in the Caribbean that we were fairly certain was laundering drug money. The Admiral expressed outrage to me, alleging he had been falsely accused and was always trying to clear his name. And a major Ecuadorian drug smuggling cartel was taken down while I was there with significant help from DEA and another US agency. The Reyes Torres cartel. That was a little touchy because a daughter of one of the Reyes Torres clan was in my son's seventh grade class at Colegio Cotopaxi. In fact, she had attended a class party at my house.

So, yes, drugs were a big issue. Not as big an issue as Columbia but nonetheless a serious issue.

Q: Did you see then that drug money was beginning to corrupt the legal system and all of that?

MACK: Well, I can't say that drugs were the only source of corruption in the legal system. However, following Reyes Torres' arrest, it appeared to us that his associates were trying to move the courts to spring him on a technicality. President Borja's Minister of Government at the time showed a lot of courage in trying to keep Reyes Torres behind bars, and also putting him there. Beyond drugs, there was certainly a lot of corruption in the legal system, and that preceded the drug problem. I am not suggesting that every judge was corrupt; I don't believe that is the case. But, there was corruption. And it impacted on US businessmen trying to work in Ecuador. So corruption in the legal system was a great area of concern for us.

Q: Were there elections while you were there?

MACK: Yes!

Q: Did they change anything?

MACK: Well through the elections, the government changed from Center Left under Rodrigo Borja to Center Right under Sixto Durán-Ballón. Ecuador was definitely developing even before Sixto. There was no question about it. Investment was going in because there was so much potential there. The early 90s were a period of the high tech boom. Cell phones were coming into their time. Ecuador was and still is a significant oil exporter, not in the league of Venezuela, but it certainly had the potential to export a lot more oil than it is exporting right now. It probably could export about as much as a million barrels a day if it developed its oil fields to the maximum, but is probably exporting half of that.

Q: What about the church, was the church an important influence at that time, or not?

MACK: I don't recall that it had any greater influence in Ecuador than other Latin American Countries and I don't recall a major situation occurring that showed the role of the Catholic Church to be essentially different than that of other Latin American Countries.

Q: Were there a lot of American Pentecostal type missionaries wandering around the place?

MACK: Yes, there were lots of Evangelical missionaries there. The powerful evangelical radio station, called "la Voz de los Andes or "Voice of the Andes" was located in Quito. Unfortunately, one group that had been working with the Amazonian tribes for decades had been forced out three weeks before my arrival. They were accused of being CIA front, which was an absurd charge. And I think that the Amazonian Indian tribes lost a very strong source of support when this missionary group was forced out. Missionary schools were training the Indian kids who became teachers and went back to their communities. Missionary hospitals and clinics provide health care, that sort of thing.

Q: Did they cause any particular problems?

MACK: Not at all, not that I was really aware of.

Q. Did you know any Catholic priests?

MACK: I knew many of them. One of our best friends, Padre Pacho Eguez, happened to be a Jesuit Priest. He was a serious hiker, in his 60s at that point. He really knew the mountains of Ecuador. Every month he would take my family and me somewhere to go hiking. Sometimes just for the day, sometimes for one or two nights. I came to know much of Ecuador thanks to him. He taught at the Catholic University right across the street from the Embassy. Through Padre Pacho, my family and I were able to spend with several days with some Italian Salesian priests working in the Southern Amazonian jungle with the Azuar Indians, formerly known as head shrinkers. We also were close to a US missionary priest who runs a school in Quito to train boys from dysfunctional families in vocational skills. So in a way, both the evangelical missionaries and the Catholic priests and missionaries really helped shape my understanding of Ecuador.

Q: What about the Peace Corps, did we have a Peace Corps there?

MACK: We had a very, very active Peace Corps. Ecuador was a great Peace Corps country. Volunteers were all over the place. I am a former Peace Corps volunteer. So we enjoyed visiting the volunteers.

Q: What kind of work were they doing?

MACK: Oh! They were doing community development work. They were working with the small businesses. They were teaching forestry. There over two hundred of them.

Q: How about relations between the Embassy and the Consulate General in Guayaquil? I know the world view of the Guayaquilenos, with their business focus, and the Quitenos, with their government focus are worlds apart.

MACK: During my stay, our relations with the American Consulate General in Guayaquil were excellent. I made it my business to go down at least once a month. And when there I would have an active schedule of meeting people and giving speeches to business groups etc. I would also bring the consul general up to Quito. Her name was Gwen Clare. Later she became US Ambassador to Ecuador. Our relationship was fine. You are right about the different world view of the people on the coast from the people in Quito. They were almost two different countries.

Q: Thomas Nast died in Guayaquil.

MACK: The cartoonist?

Q: In Guayaquil!

MACK: I had no idea.

Q: From Yellow Fever.

MACK: Well! That is the way he would die in Guayaquil. Yellow Fever! Right! It was not a very healthy place.

Q: Did you get a new Ambassador while you were there?

MACK: Yes, Peter Romero came in at the end of November of 2003. I finished out my tour and left in roughly May or June of 2004.

Q: How was he?

MACK: Pete was a take charge type of guy. So even though I had been Charge for almost two years, when Pete came in there was no question about who was the Ambassador, and that was Pete. He was a very energetic type of guy and he got around a lot. He put his stamp on Embassy. Obviously I had to step back, which I did. In a situation like this, some former Charges simply leave post, but I had kids in school and I did not want to leave. Pete and I had known each other. We both worked to make it work. .

Q: Did you have any high level visits while you were there like a President or Vice , President?

MACK: Not at that level. We did have Sen. Boren from Oklahoma.

Q: Was there a major Ecuadorian community in the United States?

MACK: Yes!

Q: Did it have any weight in Congress?

MACK: Not at that point. Also the social-economic level of the people coming was quite low. Many were illegal so they did not have a huge congressional access that some immigrant groups now have in Congress.

Q: After '94?

MACK: After '94 then Al Adams our Ambassador to Peru selected me to be the DCM?

Q: Who was Ambassador?

MACK: Alvin Adams. Previously, he had been Ambassador to Haiti. My wife and I decided to take the assignment to Lima really because of my oldest daughter Sally. Sally was going to be a senior in high school and had been in the International Baccalaureate Program at the American School in Quito. We knew that the American School in Lima, Colegio Roosevelt, was an excellent school, and it had the IB program as well. I had actually wanted to go to Guadalajara as consul general and was offered the job, but when I researched the American school there, I learned that it was not very good. They also did not have a International Baccalaureate Program. So we went to Peru for my daughter's sake. Lima was a very different type of town.

Fujimori was President and at that point Peru was the Saudi Arabia of coca, the raw material for cocaine. They produced more coca than Colombia and Bolivia combined at that point. Peru had two insurgencies, which were declining strength but, nonetheless, still quite dangerous. One was the MRTA and the other the Shining Path or Sendero Luminoso. Even in Lima there were fairly frequent bombings and shootouts. The MRTA was the more traditional revolutionary movement, with links to the Central Americans guerrilla groups. In 1995, this group had planned very thoroughly to take over the Congress of Peru which was housed in a 1930's fortress type building. For this purpose they had purchased or made Peruvian military police uniforms and had a vehicle painted up to look just like a Peruvian Army truck. To execute the plan they had brought 45 of their fighters out of the jungle to Lima and staged them for two weeks in a house in one of Lima's tonier suburbs to put the fine fitting touches on their preparations.

Fortunately, somebody in the neighborhood noticed an awful lot of bread being delivered to the door every day and tipped off the police, who surrounded the house. There was a big shoot-out and a number of people were killed. The police captured all those who survived as well as 45 weapons, ammunition and explosives.. And, therefore, the takeover attempt on the Peruvian Congress never happened. It was going to take place in two days.

An American involved in the group was arrested separately. Her name was Lori Berenson. She had been living at that house and apparently was the lover of the leader of the MRTA unit that was posed take over the Peruvian Congress. She had been scouting the Congress with the wife of the overall MRTA leader posing as a journalist from the "Third World Press", of Brooklyn New York. Her ruse apparently was an interview with one of the female members of Peruvian Congress about what it was like to be a female member of Congress. Anyway she was arrested getting on to a bus the same day the police raided the house where the guerrillas staying. Her arrest became a cause celebre in the U.S. and the subject of an enormous "free Lori" campaign in the US, I think orchestrated by her parents, both of whom were university professors in NY City. Twelve years later I believe she is still in jail probably because the Peruvian population was outraged that a foreigner had actively aided and abetted a violent guerrilla group that had cost so much pain and suffering to Peru.

Almost exactly one year after the first failed attack and Berenson's arrest, the same group, this time led by the group's maximo jefe successfully took over the residence of the Japanese ambassador and took hostage 700 people who were attending a reception in honor of the emperor's birthday. 72 of them remained hostage for over 4 months. So yes, the guerilla groups were active when I was there, but little by little Fujimori was applying the pressure successfully with the support of the notorious Vladimiro Lenin Montesinos.

Q: That was his Chief of Intelligence?

MACK: His Chief of Intelligence who did all sorts of other things. Fujimori had recognized that Peru's role as the major supplier of raw coca and cocaine paste to the Colombian cartels was jeopardizing his efforts to bring about central government control of the country. The guerrillas were living off the proceeds of their taxation of the coca growers and processors and of taxation of the aircraft that landed in the jungle to take the cocaine "base" back to Colombia for refining into cocaine HCL. And Fujimori recognized that to get a handle on the guerillas he had to cut off the source of their financial support. Therefore, he moved very vigorously to support a plan to intercept aircraft that Colombian pilots and pilots of other nationalities were flying in to pick up the loads of cocaine base for processing back in Colombia. The US contribution was to help the Peruvians acquire the information on when these planes were coming i the date, time of day, and landing location so that the Peruvian Air Force would be ready to receive them. Intercepting narco-aircraft isn't quite as tricky as you would imagine if you know when and where the planes are coming. We started this cooperation with Peru early 1995 if I am remembering correctly shortly after a US law had been changed to allow us to provide intel, in this case Peru, to intercept civilian aircraft bearing cocaine, provided certain safeguards were followed to insure the aircraft that the Peruvians had intercepted was the right one. I think for this sharing to be possible, the US president also had to certify that drug trafficking from Peru was a threat to US national security.

Between January of '95 until May of 1996 I think there were twenty or so successful "events" in which Peruvian intercept aircraft successfully intercepted narco aircraft, either in the air, on the ground as they loaded the cocaine base to transport to Colombia. A number of them were shot down, when they refused to land. Some of them were forced down. Some of them landed after the pilot realized he could not escape. Some were destroyed on the ground. It took about a year and a half for the first narco pilot to agree to land peacefully. I was surprised it took so long because the intercept success rate was quite high. But the upshot of these successful intercepts was that fewer and fewer pilots were willing to make trips to Peru to pick up a load of cocaine base.

But the coca bushes kept producing coca leaves . And the peasants kept making the coca paste and coca base so the stuff started piling up in Peru. When you have too much of something, what happens? The price drops. And the price of coca and coca base in Peru dropped over 80% to what was well below the cost of production . And when that happened the most coca farmers simply abandoned their coca fields. The weeds grew up and killed the coca. The result was in a four or five year period the coca production in Peru dropped by 70% percent. This was a real success story. .

Q: I don't know if you got involved with this but last week I was interviewing a man in the NSC I don't know if you know Randy Beers or not?

MACK: Of course I know Randy. I used to be his principal deputy when he was Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. Great guy!

Q: Randy was saying when this thing started somebody at the Pentagon said, let's look at this because we getting all these radar tracks of narcotics aircraft flying between Peru and Colombia, but that after the Russians had shot down a civilian Korean Airliner violating Siberian airspace, the US passed a law making it a felony for anyone to give assistance to another country that led to the shooting down of a civilian plane.

MACK: Correct. That person was criminally liable, which meant we could not share intel on the movement of narco aircraft to the Peruvians or anybody else. So while we had the information, we could not do anything about it. Remember this law was in reaction to a Russian, not US, shootdown of a civilian aircraft. We had to change the law and it was changed. It said that there would be no violation of law if the countries that received the information took certain steps to determine to safeguard if they had the right aircraft in their sights and to give the pilot a chance to identify himself and to land if instructed to do so. Once that law was changed, which would have been at the end of 1994, we were able to provide the Peruvians the information they needed. The program was tremendously successful. It really changed the situation in Peru. As I said coca production dropped seventy percent in about five years.

Q: How did we evaluate Fujimori at the time you were there?

MACK: Well a couple of things. He was no great friend of the United States. Neither Al Adams nor his successor Dennis Jett had a relationship with him at all. This was in large part because both were following instructions to push strongly human rights issues. Fujimori basically cut off the American Ambassador. However his ministers were willing to cooperate with us.

Having said that, Fujimori was very successful in his early years in three absolutely key areas: (1) He got a handle on the guerrilla insurgency, (2) His political decision to use the Peruvian Air Force to intercept narco aircraft produced a dramatic reduction in coca production; and (3) The economy boomed while he was President. He strongly supported foreign investment in Peru. While I was there the economy was growing eight, ten, twelve percent a year.

There was a huge amount of economic growth and investment, mostly in mineral extraction or energy. But you could see it. He also had a very strong work ethic. He worked like crazy. I don't know what he took but he had a huge amount of energy; he was going all the time, up to the altiplano and back to the coast. Huge altitude changes can be very fatiguing, but he did it all the time.

He was very supportive of the poor. For example, he pushed electrification in highland villages and in the pueblos juvenes, the shanty towns around Lima. You could see things happening. He also was very supportive of legalizing the status of the squatters who were putting up these shanty towns in the sand dunes around Lima.. Those areas would be squatted upon by the people coming in from the highlands, largely. He was very supportive of their getting services, and getting legalized. Of course he had a dark side as well. His election to a third term was questionable. But there is no question he won the first election and he won the second election. No question about it. He won them going away.

Q: I guess this is a good place to stop, Jim.

MACK: Okay!

Q: I will put at the end here that we are talking about the time in Peru '94 to '97 and we talked about putting down the insurgency and the drug trafficking and how we evaluated Fujimori.

MACK: One last comment. As authoritative a figure as he undoubtedly was, if he had left after his second term he would be a hero today. He probably could have come back and gotten elected ten years later. But he just stayed on too long. That is just sort of typical of many authoritarian people who believe they are irreplaceable.

Q: So we will talk about what was happening during the time you were there? The Peru-Ecuadorian War. What was the problem as we saw it with Human Rights? What was our relationship on that issue? Because it sounds like he was doing many of the right things? We will talk about that? And any other things that were going on there. Maybe the business, the role of the military and any developments that was there?

MACK: 1994 to 1997 in Peru.

Q: So during that time how were we dealing with him? The good points, the bad points and where were we standing?

MACK: Well! The mission had virtually no relationship with Fujimori as a person. He was not predisposed to the United States. Both our Ambassadors, Al Adams and Dennis Jett, early in their tenure, had forcefully expressed our human rights concerns to Fujimori, regarding alleged government involvement with death squads who had killed alleged leftists. That soured Fujimori on us so we did not deal with the Fujimori government at a Presidential level. The Ambassador met Fujimori only when he was accompanying a high level visitor to call on the president. But I cannot recall that either ambassador had direct talks with Fujimori during my time, except to present credentials or escort a high level visitor, like the head of ONDCP under Clinton, Gen Barry McCaffrey. We dealt with the Peruvian government at the ministerial level. We did have access to the ministers and to the military high command so we were able to get our work done.

The big issue was, of course, narcotics. Fujimori had come to the conclusion, I think I spoke about this the last time we talked, that the narcotics trafficking was fueling the two Peruvian insurgencies, the Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA, so he made a commitment and decision early on to really go after the traffickers. And I explained, I think, during our last conversation that he authorized the use of deadly force to force down or shoot down narco aircraft who refused to obey instructions to land. We had worked out the arrangements with Peru under which we could share intelligence just prior to my arrival. I believe we negotiated the deal with either the head of the Peruvian Air Force or Minister of Defense. I can't recall.

Under the agreement, the Peruvians had agreed to respect certain international rules related to how you intercept civilian aircraft, in this case civilian narcotics aircraft. You need to be aware that there were stringent requirements in that regard. Unless the Peruvians met them, any US official who passed information led to the loss of life could be criminally liable for murder.

Prior to that time, a US person who shared information that led to loss of life could be liable even if stringent safeguards were in place to avoid mistakes. So obviously none shared information under those conditions. In any event the law was changed; Fujimori agreed to follow strict intercept guidelines; and we began to share intelligence on narco aircraft. As it turned out, most of the information that the Peruvians used for intercepts they had gathered themselves based on training and equipment we had given them. In a nutshell, they were able to learn when the narcotics aircraft were coming and to what landing strip in the Peruvian Amazon. As a result when the narco aircraft was landing or when it was trying to take off with a load of drugs, it very frequently was intercepted by a Peruvian Air Force plane, often a plane we had provided to them.

The Peruvian Air Force was very successful in starting in '95 intercepting these aircraft, very successful. And during for eighteen months or so I think there twenty odd aircraft were shot down or shot up on the ground. I think of these 20, six or seven were actually shot down when they refused to land. Finally, after about eighteen months, the first narco pilot agreed to land when instructed to do so. It surprised me it took that long for those narco pilots to come to the conclusion that if they did not land, the odds were very good they would be shot down.

Q: What were the Peruvian Air Force flying for the intercepts?

MACK: They were flying actually A-37's which we had given them. A-37s are very old jet aircraft that only fly about 400 miles per hour. But that was fast enough since they were dealing with narco aircraft flying at half that speed. We had mounted F-16 radars on the front of the A-47s. In addition, we always sent up a separate aircraft to monitor the situation and help the A-47s identify the narco aircraft.

It was only many years later that we had this horrific incident where the Peruvian Air Force apparently didn't follow completely its own intercept safeguards and ended up shooting down a missionary aircraft. This produced the immediate suspension of all U.S. aerial intercept assistance to Peru.

The Peruvians were not following their own guidelines; they were rushing through the procedures. And in that particular case, the indications that the missionary aircraft was a narco aircraft were not there. It was actually going into Peru, not out of Peru . It was not varying its altitude. It was not trying to evade. It was in broad-daylight. They didn't bother to check the tail number. Or at least they had not gotten a response back before they opened fire. The interceptor never established contact with the missionary plane. It is true that narco pilots rarely acknowledge a request by the intercept aircraft to land. But the narcos usually flew at night. There were a whole lot of signs that should have told the Peruvian Air Force interceptors that the missionary aircraft was not a narco aircraft. But anyway, that tragic incident ended the intercept program in Peru. This occurred in 2001, four years after I left.

Q: During that time basically the pilots were taking coca out, was that it?

MACK: Well they were not taking out the coca leaves; they were taking semi-processed cocaine it was called "paste", in its crudest form or "base", which is more processed, but still not cocaine HCL, the product sold in the US.

Q: The big money is not there?

MACK: Well the biggest money is not there. But certainly there is money there. The farmers were not able to take it beyond paste or maybe base anyway. So they took it that far. And you are absolutely right if you compare the price they received for cocaine base in Peru to the wholesale price for cocaine HCL in the United States; There was a huge difference. It was probably two or three percent of the US wholesale value of cocaine. However, the buyer actually flew almost to your door and you didn't have to hump it over the mountains to Lima. It was a quite good deal for coca farmer as seen from his perspective. He wasn't really comparing himself with the wholesaler in New York. He was comparing himself to how well off he would have been if he were not growing coca.

Q: Was narco money penetrating the judiciary or military system?

MACK: This is a very broad question. I would not allege that narcotics penetrated to the degree that it penetrated in Colombia. I think there was much greater penetration in the Colombian Congress and Judiciary. But some military who served in the jungle areas where narcotics were produced did become tainted to some degree. There were cases where the Peruvian Army Officers were directly involved with narcotic trafficking or protecting trafficking and being paid off by them. I don't recall instances of members of the Peruvian Congress or Legislators being involved. I don't recall that was the case. Fujimori worried about that. He didn't want Peru to become another Colombia. That was often discussed.

Q: Incidentally the death squads seem to be a more general Latin American manifestation and not restricted to Argentina and Central America. Did you ever sit around and figure out why was so?

MACK: I mean I can certainly imagine why it was. In some cases it was a judiciary fearful to act because of the threat of retribution so that the bad guys walked. In other cases the incompetence of the police, their inability to collect good evidence, or maybe it did not exist. So it boiled down a feeling that from their perspective there was no other way to go after these people successfully.

Q: Well now can we talk about what started the Peru-Ecuador War?

MACK: Well the territorial dispute that started it has been around for many, many years, decades.

Q: We first got into it in 1942.

MACK: Correct. I have now forgotten the precise history, but yes, there was a dispute in 1942. There was another dust-up in the '50's or '60's. I can't recall exactly when. But what happened in 1995 was that the Ecuadorians had much better and easier physical access to the disputed area in the Sierra del Condor than did the Peruvians. This area gets 200 inches of precipitation a year. The terrain is very rough, mountainous. The forest is dense. The area is very difficult to move through, extremely difficult, with no access roads except on the Ecuadorian side. The access by the Ecuadorian side is not as precipitous so they built roads up to the disputed area and constructed fortifications just inside. This was just a way for the Ecuadorians to demonstrate their sovereignty over the Amazon, because it was on the Amazon slope of the Andes. And at some point the Peruvians noticed what they perceived was an Ecuadorian encroachment. I can't exactly remember what it was. But the Ecuadorians expanded a little bit farther than they had before, and the Peruvians caught on and told them to, "Stop" The Ecuadorians would not leave so the Peruvian military was given the order to oust them. And the Peruvians tried. They had to walk through fifty to one hundred miles of mountainous terrain even to get to these little forts the Ecuadorians had constructed, which were very close to Ecuadorian supply lines. It was very, very difficult for the Peruvians. They had some minimum success at first but the Ecuadorians held pretty fast. They had all the advantages of terrain and supply. And to add to the Peruvians misery, the Ecuadorian Air Force was flying cover over these areas and when the Peruvian Air Force attempted to attack the Ecuadorian positions. The Ecuadorian's shot down, I think, a total of about four or six Peruvian aircraft. Once again the Ecuadorian air base was much closer to the front than the Peruvian base. The Peruvian pilots faced horrendous weather in getting to the front whereas the Ecuadorians didn't because they didn't have to fly over the rain forested mountains. So there was just a horrible fight that was very, very damaging and very difficult for the Peruvians. This was an extremely popular undertaking on the part of the Ecuadorian military. For years every Ecuadorian school child was taught that this was Ecuadorian territory and that the Ecuadorian army was simply attempting to obtain what was rightfully Ecuador's.

On the other hand Fujimori was not going to let Ecuador get away with it. And therefore the war ensued. The war was really a series of skirmishes. I do not know what the total death toll was but I imagine the its was in the hundreds with many more wounded. There was a cease-fire. Luigi Einaudi, then I think US Ambassador to the OAS, and who later became Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, headed up a group to try to find a solution. It took over a year but they did. Ecuador and Peru signed a Peace Agreement. I can't remember the date.

I have an interesting story about the war. Our military attaches from the embassy were prohibited from going up to anywhere near the war zone by their own commander because of "force protection" concerns. Instead we sent up our Political Counselor, not to the front line, but to Peru's forward staging area. We had him there for two weeks. He would report back to us by satellite phone on what was going on. It was ironic that the military was not allowed to go so we had to send our political counselor, a civilian. Sometimes the US military imposes tighter restrictions on its people that we civilians. They were very frustrated. It was a difficult time.

Q: Were we trying to prevent Peru, which got its nose bloodied at the Sierra del Condor, from attacking somewhere else? After all, Peru is a bigger country with greater military potential than Ecuador?

MACK: Correct, yes. We particularly feared that since the Peruvians were at a tactical disadvantage where the war was actually being fought, they might attack somewhere else where they would have an advantage. We worried that they would go up the Pacific coast and try to take Guayaquil. Fortunately, the war ended before that happened. But it was a pretty tense two weeks.

And, of course Fujimori went up to the war zone and walked around the jungle with his troops. Those were the days when Fuji was riding very, very high. He was seen as personally leading the defense of Peruvian sovereignty.

Q: How was it playing in Peru at the time?

MACK: Well it, I think the overwhelming majority of the Peruvian populace supported what it saw as Peru's effort to defend its natural territory. We could hardly really take sides. We just wanted the two sides to stop and work out an agreement. Remember we had military missions on both sides. And we were in contact with the military on both sides. Our desire was to foster some sort of cease-fire.

Q: I was having an interview with Les Alexander who was in Ecuador during the war. He was having a hard time with Ecuadorian military. He kept telling them that they were poking at a much bigger tiger than they were and urging not to do it..

MACK: The Ecuadorians were pretty full of themselves, I am sure. They were able to successfully hold off the Peruvians in that particular part of the country. But that didn't mean they could hold them off in the coastal area where it would be much easier to run tanks across.

Q: Was there a democracy? Was Fujimori a product of democracy?

MACK: Fujimori was popularly elected in his first and second terms, of that I have no doubt. I was there for his election the second time around. When he was elected for the first time, the traditional political parties were held in very low repute. And people basically elected the pig, if you know what I mean. Anybody but! He ran as the anti-establishment candidate. And the populace was so upset with the traditional parties that they wanted to turn to something new. In a sense that is what they did in the case of Chavez in Venezuela.

So, yes he did quite well in his first term. He began to get a handle on the insurgency and the economy was going up. In his second term he began to get a handle on the drug situation. So he was riding very high. He was very active in carrying out projects of electrification in the highlands and legalizing shantytowns being built outside of Lima. He spent a lot of time with poor people. So he was quite popular with them. He still is quite popular with those people.

Q: He is sitting in Chile now waiting to make a major comeback?

MACK: He has lost that opportunity because he lost his appeal to run for president. He is not going to be allowed to go to Peru. His time to inscribe himself as a candidate has now expired. This time around he will not be allowed to run as President. So he is out of it. So basically his gambit failed.

Q: During the time you were there how did the government relate to the economy and with different things American?

MACK: Would you believe that they were very, very supportive of foreign investment. The vast majority of the huge projects were aimed at minerals or hydrocarbons. Peru is very, very rich in all sorts of minerals and agreements were signed with quite a few foreign firms of various nationalities. Then also the Camisea gas project went out for bid. That was a huge project. So yes, there was a rush of foreign investment which produced very rapid economic growth. Unfortunately, mining does not create a lot of employment. It is highly capital intensive. So there was still a major unemployment problem. Peru is still Peru. But the investment situation improved tremendously. And the Economic situation improved.

The one question you did not ask me about was the famous takeover of the Japanese Ambassadors residence by the MRTA guerrilla group in December of 1996 on the Emperor's Birthday in somewhere around December 11th or 12th. For the Japanese, the Emperor's Birthday is equivalent to the 4th of July. And as far as the Japanese are concerned, with Fujimori being of Japanese origin, that event took on a greater import in Peru. The Japanese Ambassador, who was a good friend, had invited the who's who of Peru. In addition to the diplomatic corps and 20 ambassadors, you had the captains industry, plus all the senior people in the military, the cabinet, the congress, the supreme court, something like 700 guests in all. At about 8:30 an explosion ripped open the wall behind the garden where the reception was being held. The charge had been placed by the MRTA, the more orthodox of Peru's two guerrilla groups, with links to most of the other movements in Latin America. 14 armed MRTA guerrillas charged through the hole in into the reception. They essentially held Peru in their thrall for four months and ten days.

Q: Were there Americans in there?

MACK: Yes, there were I think twelve American Embassy people were taken hostage. I was not one of them, I had just left along with the Ambassador Jett very early in the evening because his mother and my son were flying in for the Christmas holidays and we both had to go to the airport. And six minutes after I left I heard an explosion followed by machine gun fire. I lived about six blocks away. At the time I was not particularly concerned about it because we did hear this kind of thing from time to time. My wife insisted that I check with the Marine Security Guards, who had just received word that these guys had busted into the Japanese Ambassador's residence. Once they were inside, the walls around the residence became the defensive barriers for the terrorists. All the armed security guards who were supposed to be protecting the VIPs were stuck outside the walls and there was nothing they could do.

Think about the situation for a moment. There were 700 people inside the spacious grounds of the Japanese Ambassador's residence all dressed up in their finery frantically making their cell phone calls. After about 4 hours, the guerrillas let all the women go, including one of my political officers, who came back and described all of this to me. The MRTA guerrillas did this for practical reasons. They realized they simply could not handle 700 hostages. Food would have been an issue. Sanitation. So they got rid of that group and through periodic releases over several weeks whittled down the numbers to about seventy some odd, which they held on to until the end. For reasons that I still do not fully understand, the guerillas made a decision not to keep any Americans long term. All were freed within a week. Maybe they did not want to engage America head on on this. Maybe, the decision was not pick a fight against the United States or cause a big problem. But they let the Americans go fairly quickly, although the week they were held captive was hell for their families and stressful for all of us.

Among the 700 they initially took hostage, were about twenty ambassadors. They gradually release all of them as well, except the Bolivian ambassador Jorge Gumucio. And the reason they held Gumucio was because the Bolivian government had jailed one of their comrades in Bolivia and had refused to release him. From the Japanese Ambassador's residence, the head of the MRTA group issued his demands, which was for the release of four hundred MRTA prisoners the Peruvian government was holding. He actually presented a list with the names of the 400. By the way the American woman Lori Berenson was near the top of the list.

So Fuji was faced with complying with that demand or risking a really nasty outcome. But it was clear Fujimori felt that for a Peruvian President to release the imprisoned guerrillas after all these years of fighting would have been a gesture of surrender of sovereignty. He would have lost any credibility that he had as a President. And we all know that Fujimori, if anything, was into defending power. There was no way he was going to release them .

And the guerillas made a whole lot of mistakes. The biggest one was that throughout the 4 month standoff with the Peruvian government, the MRTA never relaxed its initial demand that the government release all four hundred MRTA prisoners on the list . Not that Fujimori would have honored an agreement to let a few guerrillas go. But, they never even put Fuji in that situation where he had to decide whether to free a smaller number of the guerillas in exchange for freedom of the hostages. They never put Fuji to the test in that regard. Can you imagine a similar hostage situation in the United States in which a sitting president would agree to free four hundred terrorists in exchange for some high level people held hostage? No President can do that and retain creditability; and it would be an impeachable offense even in Peru. It was not in Fujimori's nature anyway. So while negotiations were going, Fujimori was busily assembling his Commandos and retaining some Israeli experts to advise or train the Peruvians how to carry out assault on the Japanese Ambassador's residence to free the hostages.

Q: Would he have turned to us to help him?

MACK: To my knowledge he never asked us for help directly. We did have an intel relationship with the Peruvians and did cooperate in important ways during the hostage crisis. But Fujimori never once acknowledged our assistance when I was there even to senior visiting US officials when given an opening to do so. He did not want to admit we had helped. And the fact was the US did not plan, train the Peruvians for, or participate in the raid that freed the hostages. That was Fujimori's doing. He brought indigenous miners in from the highlands to tunnel under the residence from outside the walls, and of course he brought in the Israelis to help train his commandos. The tunneling was a slow, painstaking process. To mask the noise, the Peruvians played the loud-speakers they had placed outside the walls at a very high volume. The tunneling and the preparation of the commando attack took a fair amount of time, but at some point I guess his people came to him and said, "okay, Mr. President we are ready". And they had placed explosives right under the floor of the living room of the residence. They detonated these explosives there and in several other places and the commandos rushed in. They were actually able to free all the hostages but one got caught in the crossfire in the escape and was killed. He was a well respected Supreme Court Justice. The Foreign Minister, also a hostage, was wounded in the leg.

In the end some of the guerrillas may have suffered from I guess what you would call a reverse Stockholm syndrome in that at least one of them had sufficiently bonded with the hostages so that he was unwilling to follow his standing orders to execute them if there was a rescue attempt.. He just couldn't do it. Some guerrillas were killed outright when the explosion went off under the living room where they were playing soccer in the living room. But most were not killed in the initial blast.. One or two of them simply refused to kill the hostages. And it was over very, very quickly, maybe a couple of minutes. No guerrillas survived and I will leave it to you to imagine how that could possibly happen. But in the end Fujimori won a tremendous victory. During the hostage crisis the whole country was hanging on every moment. The government was paralyzed. Nothing was happening. Imagine. A senior intelligence officer was a hostage, a senior naval and army officer, Supreme Court Justices and Ministers. There was just an amazing number of high level Peruvians held hostage.

So that was another huge victory for Fujimori. But I want to tell you that when the hostages were taken, which included I think 12 US Embassy people, the US very quickly sent down a special crisis task force. And I think it is a great credit to the Embassy to be able to organize itself successfully to deal with the crisis with the help of the people who came in. The folks who came in were very competent but some were also very strong willed. However, we were able to successfully integrate them into the country team, and there was very little friction.

And during that whole period, which was four months and ten days, this task force, worked successfully to coordinate all information that we were able to acquire and do whatever needed to be done to help ensure a positive outcome.

Q: Did the group that was holding the hostages have much communication with the outside or were all their eggs in one basket?

MACK: To my knowledge, if the guerrillas were able to communicate with the outside, it was minimal. This was because one of the first things that the Peruvian government did was to totally cut them off, isolate them. They were forced to live in a bubble. And because of this, the MRTA leader may have developed an unrealistic understanding of how strong the cards he was holding were or were not. Or maybe he was just stubborn or had an inflated view of his power. He showed no flexibility at all. I am not saying that ultimately he would not have been undone in any event, but his inflexibility assured an outcome that was disastrous for him.

Q: Well now, was the young American woman associated with this group?

MACK: Yes, directly.

Q: I can imagine that you found it hard to feel sympathetic towards her. During the time you were there, how were you dealing with that?

MACK: Well, here is a little bit of a background. As I told you last time, one year exactly before the takeover of the Japanese Ambassador's residence, the same group had been plotting, and was within a day or two of an attempt, to take over the entire Peruvian Congress. They had brought in something like forty-five guerillas from their operations in the Amazon, mostly Amazonian types who were totally alien to Lima, and housed them in a toney Lima suburb where, by the way, some of our people lived and who witnessed what I am going tell you.

The house where they were staying had been rented for this group by Lori Berenson. She rented it, she and a Panamanian. I saw a copy of the rental document. The two were foreign internationalista revolutionaries who had come to Peru to support the MRTA. Berenson and the Panamanian rented the property for the MRTA. And I understood that she actually lived there with her boyfriend who was one of the leaders the assault group that was going to attempt to take over the Peruvian Congress. Berenson had come to Peru posing as a journalist for the "Third World Press" of from Brooklyn, New York. I think the Third World Press was just a front. She had just left an interview in the Congress with a female Peruvian Congresswomen named Townsend on what was it like to be a female in a predominantly male Congress. Berenson was picked up by the police shortly after interview getting on a bus, along with the wife of the MRTA leader. The leader himself happened not be in Lima at that moment so was not arrested with the others. The reason that the government found out about this plot was that apparently someone in the neighborhood reported an enormous amount of bread being delivered regularly to this upper middle-class house. Clearly the food deliveries were a lot more than one would expect for a family of four. The fact is they were a family of forty-five. The police surrounded the place. When they realized what they were dealing with, they called the army for backup . A shoot-out ensued. A few guerrillas were killed but most of them were arrested. Berenson had been arrested near the Congress shortly before the shootout so was not at the house at the time. In the house the police found automatic weapons and Peruvian Military Police uniforms. The also found somewhere a truck painted to look like an army vehicle. The group was clearly ready to go. Their audacious plan probably would have worked if their staging house had not been discovered.

Three or four months later - at that point Berenson was in jail - a videotape was sent to a Lima TV station which it played on the air. The video showed the head of the organization standing in front of a black curtain with the insignia of his group. In front of him was a mockup of the Peruvian Congress. He proceeded to explain exactly how the take over was going to take place. He said, in effect, you caught us this time but we will be back. And exactly one year to the day, they were back and successfully took over the Japanese Ambassador's residence during the reception in honor of the Japanese Emperors' birthday. The residence was a large walled property. One three of its four sides, the walls bordered directly on the street. On the fourth side, a row of houses sat between the wall on the street. One of those houses was rented from someone from the German Aid Mission who happened to be on vacation. It was through that house, the guerrillas gained access to the one residence wall sheltered from the street. Several days before the attack, the guerrillas showed up in a ambulance. They took the house guard prisoner and went inside, set up and waited for the big reception. As the reception got under way, they placed an explosive against the wall, set it off, ran through the hole, and took 700 stunned guests people hostage. It was very well executed. Anyway your question was how did we deal with Lori Berenson.

By way of background, Berenson had dropped out of MIT as a sophomore. Apparently she had been radicalized while in El Salvador on vacation when she stayed with a family of guerrilla sympathizers. That is what I understood. She later married, and I think then divorced, a Sandinista from Nicaragua. During the El Salvador peace negotiations, in 1989 I think, Berenson, apparently unbeknownst to the USG, actually served as a secretary to the head of one of the FMLN guerrilla groups which were then negotiating a peace deal with the government of El Salvador to end the war. She actually sat in on the negotiations as notetaker for the guerrillas. But at the time the US did not know she was an American. Her role with the Salvadoran guerrillas only came to light after she was arrested in Peru in 1995. I am just speculating here, but putting two and two together, it was probably because of her impeccable revolutionary credentials in Central America that she gained entry to the MRTA in Peru. You need to understand that most Latin American revolutionary groups like the MRTA had very close ties with each other. They fought in each others' insurgencies. I don't know if you were aware of this but they did. I recall that there were Peruvians fighting with the FMLN in El Salvador when I was assigned here. Berenson must have gotten an introduction to the MRTA and agreed to do some logistical work for them.

Berenson's parents were very concerned that she had been arrested. They were very well educated people from New York. I think her father was a professor of statistics, and her mother a Physics Professor. I met with them I think twice. They just could not believe and refused to accept that their daughter would be involved in any terrorist acts. They probably still don't believe it to this day. To them, she just wanted to help the poor and oppressed. Berenson's parents came to Peru very frequently to visit her, and while there met with Ambassador Jett and me, I think twice. Our head consul regularly trekked up to the altiplano to visit Berenson at a prison over 14,000 feet above sea level and deliver food, clothes and vitamins, which she shared with her fellow revolutionaries. However, she was at that particular prison by her own choice because her boyfriend was in the same jail. Finally she agreed to be transferred down to a prison at a lower altitude. I still think she is in jail to this day.

Q: I think so too.

MACK: And this despite a lot of pressure from the United States on the Peruvian Government to release her. You would be amazed and dismayed to learn some of the sources. But neither the Peruvian government nor the Peruvian people felt very sympathetic to foreigners who came in to support insurgencies that went on for 20 years and produced 20,000 dead. And the Fujimori government was not about to give in to pressure to release somebody simply because she was an American. Now, her parents insisted all along that she was innocent. Moreover, her first trial was judged by international observers not to meet internationally recognized standards of justice. So she was tried again and convicted again. She has been in jail for over ten years, long after Fujimori left office.

But what I want to tell you is, the U. S. position always was to insist Berenson receive fair treatment and a fair trial regardless of what she may or may not have done. And, of course, she was entitled to and received consular representation and regular consular visits. And we went out of our way to provide her first class consular protection in every aspect. When I was there, a consul would visit her every month.

Q: What were the Consular Officers' impressions of how she was doing there?

MACK: They found her very strong willed and utterly committed to the revolutionary cause. They respected her commitment, not her position. But the fact is that this was not a person who ever repented for what she had done or ever disavowed her group for that matter. She was an extremely, extremely committed person. By the time I left there had been no change in that at all.

Q: When you were there were there any problems with Bolivia or with Chile at the time?

MACK: Between Peru and Chile? I don't recall any major problems.

Q: Were there any old issues?

MACK: The big issue was the border dispute with Ecuador when I was there. You are referring to the War of the Pacific 130 years ago when Bolivia lost its seacoast to Chile and Peru lost about 200 miles of coast, also to Chile. But I did not see the effort by Peru to reopen that issue while I was here. Bolivia is another matter.

Q: Any fishing problems?

MACK: I don't recall any fishing problems. You are referring to the 200 Mile Sovereignty Zone off the coast. The world came to accept the concept of a 200 mile economic zone but not 200 mile sovereign zone. Before I arrived the Peruvian Air Force shot at a US C-130 on an counter narcotics mission over what we considered international waters, killing a member of the crew. The plane had been flying over Peruvian air space but at the time of the attack was well off the coast about 60 miles off the coast. The C-130 had refused the interceptors' order to land in Peru. Worse still, the Peruvian pilot was actually decorated for his heroic act against an unarmed aircraft. That certainly produced some bitterness on our part. But that incident was no longer a hot issue when I was there. That happened earlier.

Q: Well was there anything else that came during your time in Peru?

MACK: Three months before I arrived, a car bomb placed in front of the old embassy downtown had killed two local guards and blown out most of the front façade of the embassy. One year after I arrived we moved into our new embassy. This was a long awaited and welcomed move, but also very complicated. And, of course when you are a DCM, there are things you have to do. One thing is negotiate space arrangements for the various sections and agencies in the Embassy. And of course people are very territorial. But actually the move worked quite well. It really did. I would not call the new embassy beautiful, but it was imposing, interesting and very secure.

One problem we had to deal with was that the design for the new embassy compound did not envision any exercise facilities for the 650 people who were working there. Now in any Federal facility, and especially one that was a danger post, you would expect people to be given a place on the premises to exercise. We are supposed to encourage our employees to be healthy. And because of certain security restrictions, there were not a whole lot of places you could jog around Lima at the time. It was dangerous. The compound consisted of I think 18 acres, which is pretty good sized. There was open space. So we thought why not find a way to put in some exercise facilities. We had all of these military personnel, a lot of them on TDY, who wanted a place to exercise. The Admin Counselor was a very astute fellow and when we put our heads together, we realized there was a line item in the construction budget for the embassy called "site work". Basically it was to pay to clean up after a major construction project. With those funds, I think something like \$70,000, we built a really nice soccer field that is there to this day, along with two tennis courts, and a basketball court. Plus we were able to fix a little space in an out building for a gym that we bequeath to the incoming generation of embassy, all of which are still there and used to this day.

Q: This is a good place to stop! And we will pick this up in 1997 and where did you go?

MACK: I went to Guyana as Ambassador

Q: Okay we will pick it up then. Today is 20th of February 2006. Jim, you are off to Guyana, 1997?

MACK: That is correct.

Q: How did that appointment come about?

MACK: Well, that was the year in which President Clinton had named a fairly high number of political appointees to fill ambassadorial openings in Latin America. If I remember correctly, there were only two or three posts filled by career people. Georgetown, Guyana was one of them and I was lucky enough to get an appointment..

Q: Well you served in Guyana from '97 to when?

MACK: To 2000.

Q: What was the situation in Guyana as you got ready to go there?

MACK: Well an election was coming up and the situation was getting fairly tense, with racial overtones. Janet Jagan was the presidential candidate of the ruling People's Progressive Party, or PPC, which was Marxist Leninist, and Desmond Hoyte was the candidate of the opposition party, the People's National Congress known as the PNC, which had largely shed its Marxist ideology and had evolved into a more moderate party.

Since most people know much about Guyana, let me give you a bit of background. Guyana achieved independence in 1966. About 10 years prior to that, the main pro-independence party, which was a Marxist party, had largely split in two along racial lines between the two largest Guyanese ethnic groups. The group headed by Forbes Burnham, a British educated barrister was predominantly Afro-Guyanese. The other group, headed by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, a US trained dentist, was predominantly Indo-Guyanese, that is to say comprised of descendants of indentured servants who had been brought to Guyana from the Indian subcontinent in the mid-1800s replace the African slaves on the plantations after slavery was abolished in the British empire.

Q: Jagan's wife was American.

MACK: His wife, Janet Rosenberg Jagan, was born an American in the mid-west, I think in Chicago, and had met him when he was studying dentistry at Northwestern University just north of the city. In any event, Cheddi had largely built the independence struggle in Guyana. A peaceful struggle I might note. It was basically based on his support from labor unions, especially the sugar cane workers, most of whom were Indo-Guyanese. In fact Jagan's father was a foreman on a sugar plantation and Jagan was raised on one. But the problem for the British, who wanted to extricate itself from Guyana, was that Jagan was an avowed Marxist-Leninist. At the time of independence, the British and Americans were very concerned that Guyana would be the first country, at least in the British Empire, to achieve independence under a Marxist Government. So they changed the electoral system to require that the party or coalition of parties winning the presidency be backed by an absolute majority of the seats in the parliament. The idea was that the parties representing the non-Indo-Guyanese groups, who together formed a slight majority of the population, would join together to defeat Jagan. Even though the two main parties were Marxist, Jagan at the time was considered more extreme, and therefore the greater evil.

The electoral change produced the intended result, at least in the beginning. Forbes Burnham and his largely Afro-Guyanese party called the Peoples National Congress or PNC forged an alliance with a party with strong support from Guyana's Portuguese, Chinese and Amerindian population, plus some non-Marxist Indo-Guyanese businessmen. As a consequence it was Burnham, not Jagan, who won the election and therefore it was Burnham, not Jagan, who became independent Guyana's post colonial leader. However, in the end things did not work out as the British had hoped. Burnham himself proceeded to move farther to the left and ended up nationalizing something like 85 percent of the economy - the bauxite mines, the sugar industry, the rice industry. Even relatively small businesses were nationalized. Of Guyana's large enterprises only the Coca-Cola franchise escaped nationalization. Burnham's actions destroyed the economy and impoverished the country, spurring massive migration abroad of Guyana's population - to the US, Canada, the UK, the Caribbean, Venezuela - to the point where today at least as many Guyanese and their descendants live outside of Guyana as inside. Despite a relatively high birth rate, the country's population has not significantly changed in 40 years. This is almost unheard of in a third world country and gives an idea of how bad the situation there became.

In any event, Burnham was reelected several times, almost certainly the result of fraud. Early on in his reign, he basically told the other ethnic groups that had supported his election in 1966 that he didn't need them any more, didn't want them in Guyana, and that if they were unhappy they should leave the country. Most of the Chinese and Portuguese Guyanese did just that, largely to Canada. Finally in the mid 80s, I think around 1985, Burnham, a heavy smoker, and sick with lung cancer, died on an operating table. His attending surgeon was Cuban. At that point, the Soviet Union, his main benefactor, was not doing very well either so Guyana too was at a dead end.

His successor Desmond Hoyte also was a British trained barrister and had been in Burnham's cabinet for years. Given the ethnic composition of the country, Hoyte's subsequent electoral victory in 1985 also almost certainly came about as a result of fraud, but he turned out to be much more moderate and proceeded to start to open up the economy.

When the Soviet Union finally collapsed, the world changed radically for Guyana. After a couple of failed attempts, Jimmy Carter convinced Desmond Holt to allow an internationally supervised election when he ran for reelection in 1990 or '91. Cheddi Jagan ran again and this time he won. His election was basically due to demographics. The Indo-Guyanese population remained greater than the Afro-Guyanese population. And people tend to vote along racial lines. In fact, the editor of the country's largest newspaper once described elections in Guyana as "a racial census" So Cheddi, a declared Marxist-Leninist, a faithful friend of the former Soviet Union, who for 30 years vacationed on the Black Sea a guest of the Soviet state, finally became President.

But he was elected after the fall of the Soviet Union, and was simply unable to do a lot of things that he otherwise might have wanted to do. Also, Burnham had already tried those things they had failed utterly. They bankrupted the country and reduced it from the ranks of a middle income nation at the time of independence to a country only a notch above Haiti in terms of their per capita income. As a consequence, Jagan did not attempt to reverse Hoyte's economic openings, but did little to deepen them either.

Four years into his presidency, Jagan suffered a heart attack. Unlike his predecessor, he was offered US medical treatment by the US Government a gesture which he and Janet Jagan appreciated. In fact, the US Air Force flew him to Walter Reed medical center for treatment, giving him the royal, or I should say presidential treatment. No Cuban doctors for him. Unfortunately, he succumbed a few weeks later to another massive heart attack, without finishing his term. The ruling party named an Afro-Guyanese member of a small coalition partner of Jagan's party to finish it out. When Jagan's party could not agree on a successor, it turned to Jagan's widow Janet Rosenberg Jagan as the party's presidential candidate in 1997. Desmond Hoyte was her opponent, just as he had been her husband's opponent in 1991.

Janet Jagan was a well known figure in Guyana, a major political power in her own right, one of the principal founders of the ruling party, and for years the real organizational force in the PPC party. There were some interesting comparisons to a prominent US power couple in the US at that time and now. Janet also was demonized by Hoyte and his party. Hoyte's campaign was very strident with racial overtones. When Janet Jagan was declared the winner, which was inevitable given the racial makeup of Guyana, things got out of hand.

Q: This was when?

MACK: This was December of 1997. At that point, the Afro-Guyanese population was largely urbanized or lived near the capital, and formed the absolute majority in the capital of Georgetown. When Janet was elected, Hoyte repeatedly claimed massive fraud. It did not matter that OAS and other outside observers did not detect any significant fraud. Afro-Guyanese anger boiled over into rioting and arson. They just could not accept that the PPC had won reelection. Cheddi they had some affection for, but not Janet.

I won't say was situation was totally out of control but it was very, very serious leading CARICOM, the economic association of the English speaking countries in the Caribbean, to intervene and broker discussions between the two parties which led to an uneasy truce that allowed Janet Jagan to take office. Things had been so bad that Janet was hastily sworn in at the presidential residence. And I do not believe Hoyte or his party attended the opening ceremony at of the newly elected National Congress. Things were that tense. By the way the Canadian ambassador, the British high commissioner and I worked with a highly respected, and politically independent Afro-Guyanese figure behind the scenes with CARICOM to urge Hoyte to accept the election results and tell his followers to cease their violence.

However, even after the deal, tensions remained high, with the danger of things getting out of hand at any moment. After about a year of this, President Janet Jagan decided to step down on the grounds that she had some heart condition. She was well into her 70s at that point, but always struck me as healthy and vigorous. By the way, I found her very approachable and plain speaking with a typical mid-western manner, even though she always retained her communist beliefs.

In any event, she decided, ostensibly for health reasons, to step down. I think the real reason was the constant tension with the opposition with the Afro-Guyanese Party., constantly. She knew she was a red flag to the opposition. In fact, every little issue tended to blow-up into some sort of strife. Labor strife or strife from the street. And so, she decided to step down. In her place the People's Progressive Party Central Committee named Bharrat Jagdeo to finish her term. Jagdeo was a very bright Soviet trained economist of Indo-Guyanese origin. I think he was in his mid or late 30s at the time. He had received his Master's Degree in Economics from Patricio Lumumba University in Moscow along about the time that the Soviet Union was collapsing. Jagdeo was from a small village up the coast from the capital. Years before, the Jagans had identified him as a young man with great leadership promise and had overseen his education and development. The Jagans brought along other young people in party in the same way, like Jagdeo, and eventually sent them off to the Soviet Union for an education. My guess is that they were grooming Jagdeo for the presidency after Cheddi Jagan had hopefully finished two terms so in a sense his assumption of power was premature but inevitable.

When Jagdeo returned to Guyana after his Soviet education, he was given a senior position in the Ministry of Finance and eventually becoming the Minister. I met with him in that capacity and later as president. I found him much less ideological than Janet Jagan. Must have been something about the water in Moscow since he was there when the Soviet Union collapsed.

I think the party's choice in naming him to finish Janet's term was excellent. I found him pragmatic person, and very, very approachable. When he was president, I was able to get right to the point with him, walk through all the issues and reach conclusions. That was his style. By the way, when Janet Jagan was president, she was always available to see me, unlike the Foreign Minister, Clement Rohee, a party loyalist, who avoided me for months at a time even when I issues important to both our countries to discuss. My guess is that he was under the thrall of regime on a bid island off the coast of Florida. A couple of times I went to President Jagan directly to complain about the Foreign Minister and got what I thought was a very fair hearing.

In any event, that was the situation I walked into. A country that had suffered grievously, through because of Marxist economic policies over the preceding thirty years, a country that had fallen from the ranks of a promising mid-level developing country to one that was just about at the bottom of the scale for the Western Hemisphere next to Haiti. A country that had been hemorrhaging its people, including the best and brightest for over a generation!

Q: Where were the Guyanese people going?

MACK: They were mainly going to New York and Toronto. But a lot of educated Guyanese were going to the English speaking Caribbean countries, most of which were substantially better off economically. Many Caribbean Island States needed skilled people - doctors, nurses, school teaches judges etc. Even Botswana was recruiting Guyanese teachers and nurses . Botswana was short on qualified English-speaking teachers and had the money to pay. So they sought them in a much poorer country. The impact of these losses on Guyana, year after year was very high. Even with several years of growth in the late 80s after Hoyte become president and, Guyana was still losing its best and brightest all over the world. Needless to say, when I got to Georgetown, the lines outside the Embassy consular section were pretty long. One of the first things I did was to set up an appointment system for non-immigrant visa interviews, which ended the problem of lines.

But it was pretty disconcerting when I first arrived, to see lines of people sweltering in the sun and dripping in sweat waiting to get an interview on the chance that they might be allowed to enter the United States on a tourist visa so they could overstay remain in the United States illegally.

But that was the situation in Guyana. We were trying to encourage the private sector. We had training programs to help to private sector organizations develop some economical analysis capability so they could make constructive sound economic policies proposals to the government.

One of the consequences of Guyana's massive out migration was that they had bled so much of its human talent that the government found it very difficult to staff itself adequately. There were simply not enough skilled people around in the country to do all the things that needed to be done. There was a very small, very thin veneer of extraordinarily, able well educated people. But many of them were over 50 years old at that point. They had been educated under the British system, and for one reason or another they had stayed in Guyana and actually succeeded despite the economic situation. Others had gone to work for international organizations; some became international consultants; some where in the private sector, so there was a small group of really stimulating people. Many became wonderful friends. Others would come back to Guyana to visit family - like university professors in the United States, judges in Antigua or the Bahamas or teachers and etc. Others would be working for the UN. The number still living in Guyana was very small. So it made it very difficult for a private company or the government to move ahead.

Q: Did you get any feel in talking to your predecessors who had been there that these socialist or Marxists governments were essentially driving people away. It seemed to be a deliberate policy. Did they understand what they were doing?

MACK: I think Forbes Burnham knew exactly what he was doing back in the late 60s and 70s. I think he felt he could consolidate and maintain power by driving away those people. His successor and fellow PNC party member Desmond Hoyte tried to move the government back to the center. Hoyte had reprivatized a couple of significant businesses and was trying to attract foreign enterprise to come back to Guyana. And he had some success, but when the country started to grow again, it was from a very low base. And while Cheddi Jagan did not welcome these policy changes, which occurred before he took office, he did not really attempt to reverse them. On the other hand, he did not have much of a choice because at that point, he had nobody else to turn to. No socialist country was around to bail him out. Remember Forbes Burnham had received significant assistance from the Soviets and from Cuba during a number of years. But those sources had dried up. So Guyana had nowhere else to go.

Q: Well did you ever talk a heart to hard conversation with Cheddi or Janet Jagan to say look what has happen to you?

MACK: Cheddi Jagan had died 6 months before I arrived. And I never had an ideological conversation with Janet Jagan. We are talking about a fully formed person her mid-70s who had worked on behalf of her Marxist beliefs her entire adult life. I just don't think that kind of conversation would have been productive. My guess is that she would have blamed Guyana's problem on the excesses and corruption of the Burnham government, not on any basic flaws in Marxist thought. I did make a number of speeches on the importance of free enterprise, foreign and domestic private investment, open markets, and less restrictive regulatory regimes to Guyana's economic development, but my focus was on the business community.

I do remember once that I had an informal conversation with one of the top leaders of Jagan's PPC party right after the Fifteenth Party Congress. I had run into him at a cocktail party. The newspapers had reported his speech stating the ruling party's "unswerving commitment to Marxist Leninist principles." We had always been friendly so I went up to him and in the course of our conversation, referred to his remarks, and said bluntly "you don't really still believe that stuff do you." His response was in a serious but friendly tone. "Oh! Absolutely I believe it" he said. We are committed to this. Basically, our time will come." I was a bit surprised, but he was being very serious, not hostile at all but serious. That was world view of those of his generation in the party leadership. These folks were in their fifties or up at that time.

The party did all the things you would expect of a Marxist party. May-Day was a big deal. The party leadership would establish slogans for each May-Day celebration. And the faithful would chant them like "Forward ever, Backward never". They would sing the "Internationale" But they were always very friendly toward me. Nobody was hostile to me. There was no tension. One of Jagan's key deputies, a 1970s Howard University trained medical doctor with whom I had a very good relationship, would always address me, have jokingly as "comrade ambassador". With the exception of the Foreign Minister, I had access to anyone I wanted in the government. They were perfectly willing to see me. They invited me to everything. And the U.S. had significant assistance programs there and of course an active Peace Corps program.

Q: We are talking about a time when the Soviet Union ceased to be the Soviet Union, I think by '92. And reverberations all over Eastern Europe. The whole system, essentially Marxist Leninist just died on the American and European campuses, I think.

MACK: Well I don't think the average Indo-Guyanese guy in Guyana who voted loyally for the PPC cared about Marxism at all. But the party leadership did. The old line people. Especially those over 50 and were raised in this dogma. And remember they worked harder than anyone else in the party. They were moving all around the country all the time tending to their grass-root party organizations. They were constantly organizing and fertilizing the faith of the Party cadre. This was a party organized like the communist party. It was a communist party! But it was operating when communism's time had clearly passed.

Q: You mentioned the Foreign Minister several times in not the most friendly terms. Who was he?

MACK: His name was Clement Rohee. He had been Foreign Minister for quite a while when I arrived. He always seemed to have plenty of time to sign trade and cultural agreements with Cuba, but did not have much time for the Ambassador of the United States which was providing fifteen million dollars a year in assistance. Remember this was a country with 800,000 people. We had also a large Peace Corp contingent. And of course the US was the largest market for Guyana's exports. In our meetings he was civil, but he would put me off for 6 weeks at a time before he would agree to see me. It was very, very frustrating. On two occasions I actually wrote letters to the President Jagan essentially saying look, I have some serious business to conduct with your government and I can't seem to get any time with the Foreign Minister. She immediately called me in and we talked.

Q: At that point what were the American interests?

MACK: They were not huge. There were a number of American businesses there. Gold mining companies, although the largest was Canadian, a US owned bauxite mining operation, fish processing companies, a large box company. The tropical timber industry was large but not in American hands. We were concerned about the high level of illegal immigration to the US from and through Guyana. Drug trafficking was an issue. Tough we never had a permanent DEA Agent we did have a multiple ton cocaine bust of a ship passing through Georgetown. And we were concerned with Guyana simply because it was a very poor in the Western Hemisphere that we wanted to see develop. But I cannot say that United States had absolutely critical foreign policy interests either because Guyana's geographic or proximity issue or because they produced a strategic mineral unavailable elsewhere. That would be a vast overstatement.

Q: Now at one point way back we were concerned about Guyana was part of a n expanding crescent in Caribbean that include Cuba and Granada..

MACK: Actually there is some truth to that. During the "Cold War" Guyana was quite an interesting place. The Soviets had a huge Embassy, the Chinese had a large presence as well as Yugoslavs and the Romanians. Even by the time I got there the North Koreans still maintained an Embassy, the Chinese were building a brand new embassy, and, of course, the Cubans were there, in fairly large numbers - medical people and sports trainers. As you know Cuba was renting out their medical people and athletic coaches all over Latin America and the Caribbean.

There is an interesting story I would like to tell you. The Soviet Embassy, I guess in the mid-80s, was built on a choice piece of land on the coast donated by the government. U.S. had wanted to build a new embassy as well but did not want to accept the property where the government wanted to put us because it had been confiscated from its owners by the Burnham government without compensation. Therefore, we decided to build our modern bomb proof on the same plot of land on which the Ambassador's old wooden residence had been located, but with an exemption from the new State Department setback standards since there was simply not enough room. .

The Soviets Embassy was a large compound that contained not only the chancery, but also, in the typical soviet manner, the apartments and recreation facilities for the twenty five or so Soviet families. By the time I arrived the Soviet Union no longer existed and the Soviet Embassy was now the Russian Embassy. However, Russia at that point had fallen on very hard economic times and could not keep the entire compound going. To compensate they built a lousy chain link fence right down the middle of the compound and turned the apartments into a hotel and athletic facilities pool, tennis court, weight room into a private club open to all who wanted to pay the monthly fee the "Ambassador" club. They also rented out their recreation hall, which was converted into a night club, called "Night Flight". Since there were few sports facilities around, I joined the "Ambassador Club" for a time.

I should note that the Russian Ambassador was very friendly as was the Chinese Ambassador. There were only 12 ambassadors in Guyana. Of course I was restricted on my contacts with the Cuban ambassador, but I remember there were only 12 foreign embassies in Guyana. It was a small place, and the Cuban was the Dean of the diplomatic corps based on his length of service Georgetown . And also since I was one of the few Spanish speakers around, I got invited to social events for the Spanish speaking community at which the Cuban ambassador was almost always present.. When I was with the Cuban in such situations, we spoke mostly of baseball and he told dirty jokes. In fact, there was a custom that each month one of the 12 foreign Ambassadors would host a lunch for the other 11 ambassadors. And in that situation I had to invite the Cuban as the Dean of the diplomatic corps. I was unable to communicate at all with the North Korean since he spoke no language I knew, and certainly not English. At that time, the 3-4 North Korean diplomats in Georgetown survived by selling contraband, liquor, you name it, they had brought in under their diplomatic privileges. I communicated with the Russian, Venezuelan, Colombian, and Cuban ambassadors in Spanish. None of them spoke decent English.

Q: Did Guyana have any border problems at the time?

MACK: Guyana had has a long standing border problem with Venezuela. Actually was more than a border problem, an existential problem since Venezuela claimed at least two thirds of Guyana's national territory. The problem dated back to the nineteenth century when Guyana was a still British colony. The dispute had been settled by international arbitration in the early 1900s, which, while Guyana was still British Guyana, largely in Guyana's favor. A prominent American whose name I cannot recall was one of the arbiters. Venezuela accepted the ruling for forty, fifty or sixty years. However, I think in the early 1960s, one of the assistants of the arbitration panel now on his death bed alleged that arbitration decision had been cooked. The Venezuelan Government immediately seized on this alleged confession to declare the arbitration decision null and void and reinstated its claim.

I personally think that British historical British claim is probably correct given that the Dutch and then the British had established plantations along the coast of the disputed area over 300 years before Guyana's independence. But while I was in Guyana, the Chavez government did not push the issue.

Q: Was there any residue of Jonestown?

MACK: No! There was no residue of Jonestown, site of the mass suicide of over 800 American followers of the California sect led by the Rev. Jim Jones. By the way, I visited the place 20 year after the end and found virtually nothing. You would not know that almost a 1000 people lived there. The jungle had reclaimed it., except for couple of rusty old tractors and other farm implements. By he way Jonestown is located in an extremely isolated area in Western Guyana not far from Venezuela. No roads link the area to the outside world. Everything had to move by air or boat . It was very inaccessible. That is why Rev Jones was able to do get away with the things he did in Jonestown away from the scrutiny of the world. Unless you were invited at the time, you could have not gotten into the settlement even if you were physically able to get to the front gate which itself would have been difficult.

Q: What was the Peace Corps doing?

MACK: Oh! The Peace Corps was very active. They were working in health, they taught school, they worked in community development. Having been a former Peace Corps volunteer myself, I was very close to the director and the volunteers. I visited the volunteers frequently. However, Guyana was a challenging place for volunteers because of threats to their personal security. Shortly before I had arrived there had been a spate of assaults on volunteers including rapes to the point that the Peace Corps came close to leaving the country. The attacks were criminal in nature, not politically motivated. There was a high level of violent crime in Guyana in general. Most volunteers physically stood out and were seen as easy targets by the criminal element. In the end the Peace Corps decided to stay but did remove the volunteers from urban areas. They had originally thought the volunteers would be safe there since they had placed them with families thinking that their living with local families would give them protection. That turned out not be the case given the high level of criminality in the community.

Security in the rural areas turned out to be much better. However, even there life was not easy for volunteers. The climate is very hot and humid. Even though trade winds blow through the Guyana coast, for those without electricity life was hard.

Q: What was USAID doing?

MACK: AID was helping to strengthen private sector organizations. They worked in health and they financed the reconstruction of sea walls or dikes. Remember much of Guyana's coast is three or four feet below sea level at high tide. First the Dutch and then the British built sea walls all along the coast for 150 miles to reclaim tidal swamps for agriculture. Sea walls need to be maintained. And they were not well maintained under the Burnham government after independence. A lot of sections had crumbled and collapsed. A lot of rock had to be brought in from the interior to rebuild the walls. By the way there is no surface rock on the coast. It is all mud. Rock had to be brought from inland. It was quite expensive.

We did some training of judges and prosecutors and helped them rewrite some legal codes and things like that.

Q: Did you find as Ambassador that the State Department had no particular interest in Guyana?

MACK: Yes. Interest was very, very limited. We were way off Washington's radar scope.

Q: At one time it was pretty high up on the scope. This was when the Cubans were active and all. We all knew the name of Cheddi and Janet Jagan..

MACK: That is correct. That was during the cold war.

Q: Did we have any bilateral interest at all?

MACK: Nothing huge. Nothing to compare with Venezuela or Mexico.

Q: You left there in 2000?

MACK: I did.

Q: And then what?

MACK: Before we go there, I should tell you about one scandal that hit us in Guyana. While I was there an untenured Junior Officer named Tom Carroll arrived at post as a rotational office. He had come from the US Interest Section in Taiwan. What I did not know, since the Department did not tell me, was that Carroll had left Taiwan early under a cloud. And he went to work first in the consulate session as our one non immigrant Visa Officer. Remember, we were a very small post. Sometime after his arrival, I would imagine three to six months after his arrival, he fell in with a crowd of visa fixers. And he went into business with them. And over a period of about a year, he sold about a thousand visas, for I would say between five or ten thousand dollars a piece. It turned out that he had made arrangements to be paid at home by the fixer.

Carroll arrived I think in 1998 I believe and was assigned to the Consulate Session as the Visa Officer working with non-immigrants. His refusal rate was, in fact, twice as high as his predecessor. And he created an image of somebody who was very committed to his job and who took his responsibility of adjudicating non-immigrant visa applicants very seriously. By the way, among the first time applicants, our refusal rate was historically about 90%. Even counting all applicants our refusal rate normally was about seventy percent, to give you an idea. I will not talk about his supervisor, the head of the consular section, but obviously Carroll was not well supervised. Overtime, unbeknownst to me and unbeknownst to his supervisor, Carroll began to sell visas in cahoots with a known Guyanese visa fixer. He covered his tracks well since his refusal rate remained well above that of his predecessor.

About a year before I left, and about ten months after Carroll arrived, I began to get reports from various sources alleging he was selling visas. By the way these such allegations are constant at high refusal posts.

Q: Oh Yes! I was a consular all of my career, but you have to take such allegations seriously.

MACK: You have to take them seriously. When I first heard about his alleged involvement, I was somewhat skeptical I have to confess because Carroll had been very, very assiduous in tracking down visa scams and that sort of thing, particularly involving Chinese migrants. He spoke fluent Mandarin by the way. The Chinese came through Hong Kong, some of them with visas they had purchased from the Surinamese Embassy in Beijing. They transited the Netherlands where the authorities simply let them continue on to Suriname. Eventually they made their way to Guyana by boat and on to Venezuela and up through the Caribbean to the US. .

In any event, an investigation into Carroll was launched first by our post security officer, later assisted by others sent from Washington. By September of 1999, a serious investigation was underway and it was pretty clear to me that Carroll had in fact sold visas. Only a few of us in the embassy that knew an investigation was under way. Keep in mind ours was a small embassy. The American staff of only fifteen, almost all of whom frequently socialized together, from the lowest to the highest ranking. I regularly played basketball with this Carroll. He his wife were frequently at my house. It was that kind of post, like a family. Yet, at the same time I knew an investigation was going on. Of course, I couldn't let on even to my wife. To make a long story short short Carroll was led to believe that another consular officer was willing to sell visas. Since Carroll wanted to keep his business going after he left post, he propositioned the other officer to go into business with him for part of the proceeds.

Keep in mind I knew all this was going on. You can imagine living like this at a small post. When Carroll was about to leave post for home leave and his next assignment, I threw a big farewell party for him. The short of it is that when Carroll returned to Chicago for home leave, he was arrested by federal agents. He was given an opportunity to cooperate with the prosecutors for a reduced sentence but despite the incontrovertible evidence against him, including tapes of his propositions to the other officer, he refused and was sentenced to twenty-one years in jail. Two of his Guyanese confederates were caught in the US and are serving time. I think this was the first successful prosecution of US consular officer for visa fixing for many years. I think Carroll is getting out this year after serving six years. The FBI recovered over a million dollars in cash and gold bullion from several safe deposit boxes. My guess is that he has several million more stashed somewhere that was not recovered. Possibly in Taiwan since his wife was Taiwanese and I believe we have no extradition treaty in Taiwan.

Q: Well, what was his background?

MACK: He was an American from Chicago. At least one of his parents was Irish since it turned out he had an Irish passport as well as a diplomatic passport. By the way we don't have an extradition treaty with either Ireland or Taiwan so he was never granted bail. I have to admit I liked Carroll. While he did have a very short fuse, he was smart and energetic and would have made an excellent commercial officer if he could have controlled his temper. In the beginning it never occurred to me that he was selling visas. It was a tragic situation and absolutely devastated my American staff when I brought them in Sunday to announce his arrest. People were absolutely devastated. They could not believe it. These were people who had socialized with him, eaten lunch with him, worked on the visa line with him. They just couldn't believe it. They felt utterly, utterly betrayed. I stayed on an extra month in order just to see this thing through. To make sure he departed post as planned and after his arrest to help the staff heal because they were so devastated by this.

It was not only a said situation, it did not have to happen. If the US Foreign Service personnel system had been willing to tell me that this guy had a checkered past I would have looked at him in a different way; but I presume they wanted to give him an opportunity to start with a clean slate to be able to get tenure. And the Foreign Service paid the price.

Q: Did you find out what his problem in Taiwan was?

MACK: I never was officially told. I think it may have been some sort of sexual harassment, problem possibly related to visas. I am not sure. But let me tell you another story about this guy that he himself had told me before I knew he was involved in selling visas. His first Foreign Service assignment had been to Beijing. As a junior rotational office there, he had spent some time working with the visa section chief, a former marine, who was later indicted for visa fraud that means selling visas, but who beat the rap. Carroll actually told me this. It never occurred to me then that Carroll had learned from this officer and came to Georgetown with criminal intent.

Q: That very seldom ever happens.

MACK: I am not so sure. Apparently the Foreign Service has passed these people along quite a bit. Carroll is not the first Junior Officer or non-Junior officer I have served with who has been investigated for visa fraud. He is only the first one I have worked with who was convicted and served time. But I know for a fact that others with whom I have served were associated with visa fraud, and in one case proven to be involved in a visa selling scheme. That particular guy was not prosecuted and allowed to retire since the investigators could not prove he personally took any money. The Foreign Service has a problem here. After Carroll was arrested, I sent my A-100 classmate Mary Ryan, then serving Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Consular Affairs a cable on this with some recommendations for changes in training at FSI. Once I returned from Georgetown, I personally told her then deputy, Maura Harty, of my concerns. Both are very capable officers, but did not feel I got a very sympathetic response. Both were very protective to their consular officers. So what can I say.

Q: In 2000 you left. Where did you go?

MACK: I returned to Washington. The US Congress was about ready to pass the Plan Colombia Support Act. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Ambassador Tom Pickering, for whom I worked many years prior in El Salvador, asked me to come back and head up a new Inter-Agency Task Force called the Plan Colombia Task Force. The idea was that the Task Force would facilitate the coordination the implementation of US support to Plan Colombia. We are talking about a billion dollar package here. I started up the inter-agency task force before Congress even passed the appropriation, but we knew it was coming and wanted to be ready. We basically teed up for the Principles, that is those senior officials in the various US departments with programs to be implemented with Plan Colombia Funds, issues that could not be resolved a lower level.

That is what I did for about eight months . Once our support for Plan Colombia was launched I moved to Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) where I served first as Deputy Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Latin America and the INL Air Wing, which provided support for our counternarcotics programs, at that time largely in the Andes.

Q: How was most of the vast amount of Plan Colombia money going to be spent?

MACK: Well a significant part of what came to INL was actually then funneled to other implementing agencies, much of it USAID for alternative development or to the Department of Justice for legal and judicial reform. Alternative Development programs were aimed at providing alternative livelihoods for people who had been growing coca. INL itself executed very large programs to support aerial coca eradication in Colombia and to train specialized police units to go in and bust big drug labs often defended by and later also run by guerrillas. In fact the guerrillas, especially the FARC, actually pushed aside many of the traditional narcotic traffickers and took over much of the businesses themselves. And of course many anti-guerrilla paramilitaries groups got heavily involved in the drug trade as well. So there were the three major areas: narcotics control, alternative development and legal and judicial reform.

Q: So then you moved. You were then working with the new administration?

MACK: Correct. Bush came in January of 2001. It was at that time that I moved from the Plan Colombia Task Force to INL. In 2000, we had negotiated with the Government of Colombia, the conditions under which we would provide the Plan Colombia assistance. The biggest issue was getting the Colombian Government, the Pastrana government, to agree to specific targets for eradication. And after an enormous amount of back and forth during two weeks at the Colombian foreign ministry in Bogota, the Colombians agreed to reduce their coca cultivation by 50% by 2006. That is what has happened if you use the UN coca figures. According to the CIAD figures, there is as much coca as there ever was, but the CIA keeps discovering new coca areas that have been there all along, which distorts the figures. In any event, these results made were possible because of aerial eradication. I should note that while then President Pastrana would occasionally place temporary restrictions on spraying for political reasons, or as a sign of good faith in his on and off again and eventually fruitless negotiations with the FARC, the current Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe has been unwavering for his support for coca eradication.

Q: There was quite an apparatus by this time in the Department of State for drug trafficking wasn't there?

MACK: Indeed. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs maintained large apparatus. That apparatus included an Air Wing which we sometimes joked was the seventh largest air force in the Western Hemisphere. I don't know if that was true, but we had over 100 aircraft including helicopters fixed wing. The helicopters, armed by the way, rode shot gun for the Air Wing and Colombian spray planes. In addition we had supply aircraft. And of course we had to have the contract people who flew them and maintained them. With Plan Colombia money we also bought 300 million dollars worth of helicopters for the Colombian police and military. So all this required an impressive effort to make it work.

Q: Was this all concentrated in Colombia? What were we doing in Bolivia and Peru?

MACK: When I was in INL, we only sprayed in Colombia, both of coca and opium poppy. In the 1990s we had sprayed poppy in Guatemala. Peru and Bolivia did not allow aerial spraying of coca. They depended on manual eradication. But we did support the Peruvian Police Air Wing and the Air Force in Bolivia which were involved in counter-drug operations. We also supported Peru's aerial intercept program with aircraft. And of course INL financed local government manual eradication operations in both Peru and Bolivia.

Q: How long did you have that job?

MACK: I had that job until the summer of 2002 when I retired.

Q: During that time did you find any change in focus on the drug issue between the Clinton and Bush Administrations?

MACK: Actually not. Our Assistant Randy Beers, who started drug the Clinton administration remained in his job until the summer of 2002 when went to the National Security Council. By the way, Randy resigned his NSCA job not much later and went to work for the Kerry campaign as a senior foreign policy advisor. I am sure you have had an interesting conversation with Randy about the things we are discussing now.

Q: We haven't come up to that point yet!

MACK: The bottom line is that there was very strong program continuity between the Clinton Administration and the Bush Administration with respect to narcotics control in Latin America. I would like to believe that Kerry would have followed the same path.

Q: Sometimes Colombia has been portrayed as turning into a narco state

MACK: Well that is an unfair characterization and obviously I have seen a lot more sides of Colombia than the average person. Yes, the narcotic traffickers and the cartels gained enormous influence in Colombia, and even apparently made a substantial campaign contribution to a former president, Samper. They probably controlled a quarter of the Colombian Congress at one point. They had infiltrated people into much of the government.

However, many brave Colombians didn't fall prey to this and sacrificed their lives. They were in Executive branch, the army, police, the judiciary, and they were also in Congress. We were able to make common cause with these people.

Those people are in power in Colombia today. They were in power when I was working there as well. Colombia's mistake was letting things go too far before they decided to address the problem frontally. For many years they thought it was America's problem but it turned out to be much more a threat to their country if everything is considered. Now a large number of Colombians are fighting quite hard and sacrificing an awful lot to get their country back and I think they are having some success. But it is not easy.

Q: Well, you retired in 2002 and since then what have you been doing?

MACK: Well, a month after I retired from the Foreign Service I started working with The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, best known by its initials in Spanish, CICAD. CICAD is the drug control agency of the Organization of American States. And since September 2004 I have been the Executive Secretary. In other words, I head up the permanent staff of this organization, which is based at the OAS headquarters in Washington. We carry out programs to train people and strengthen institutions involved in drug control, drug prevention and drug treatment in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Q: So the fight continues?

MACK: The fight continues.

Q: Is there a diminution of support from the United States and does it have any real effect?

MACK: There was a reduction financial support from the US for my organization in the last year. But that is probably a product of Katrina and Iraq. So everybody is feeling the pain and I am feeling the pain as well.

Q: Well Jim I want to thank you very much.

MACK: My pleasure.

End of interview