

AMBASSADOR JOHN R. COUNTRYMAN

Interviewed by: David Reuther

Initial interview date: November 19, 2001

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

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with John R. Countryman. Today is November 19, 2001 and we are in Washington DC. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am David Reuther John can you give us some personal background, where you were born, what's hometown.

COUNTRYMAN: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, January 25, 1933. My father was a photo and art editor. At the time, he was working for the Associated Press. My mother was an immigrant from Czechoslovakia, the Czech portion. She came over when she was about 11. They met in Omaha, Nebraska. My father was offered a job in New York, they came, and I was born in Brooklyn. I spent my youth in Brooklyn, and in Mt. Vernon, New York. For about five years from the age of about three to nine or ten, I was a model in New York. I was also in the movies in California. I was in Hollywood. I made about 18 movies, including one with Shirley Temple called The Bluebird [Editor's Note: Twentieth Century Fox released this movie in 1940]. I came back and acted on the New York stage.

About that time I think both my parents and I decided a normal childhood was to be preferred, so we settled in Garden City, a suburb of New York out on Long Island. I went to grammar school and then graduated from Jesuit military prep school St. Francis Xavier High School in 1950. I attended Fordham University and graduated in 1954 with a bachelor in English. I received a Fulbright Fellowship to the University of Berlin. I was one of the first Fulbright students to the University of Berlin after the war. After a year there I spent three years in the Air Force flying airplanes. I was with the Strategic Air Command, flew mainly tanker airplanes, KC-97s and KB-29s, but also did B-47s and B-52s. I had always wanted to be in the Foreign Service. I will come back and touch on my early interest in that, but decided that with an English major and although my German was fairly fluent, I didn't have a background in political science or economics to pass the tests, so I accepted an assistantship in English at the University of Miami in Florida after I got out of the Air Force. There I not only got a masters in English, but on the side studied for the foreign service exam. I passed it in 1961 and came on active duty in the Foreign Service in 1962. Between graduation from the University of Miami and entering the Foreign Service, I was a city side reporter for the Danbury, Connecticut News Times.

My interest in the Foreign Service came from...it is interesting...my godparents who were dear and close friends to my parents. My godparent was a fellow by the name of Thomas Paprocki who was an Associated Press sports cartoonist [Editor's Note: from 1943 to 1955]. He was a man that I thought of as not only as my friend but also like an uncle that I didn't have. Out of the clear blue sky one time, they were at our house for dinner, and he said, "John whatever you do in life, you ought to think about being a diplomat. I think you should be in the diplomatic service." At that time I knew very little about what that meant, but because Tom Paprocki had said so, it was something that got my special attention. Of course, being in Germany after the war and being a Fulbright, I had a chance to travel around and see foreign places, so his comment kind of struck a bell with me.

Q: Let's look into that with a little more detail. When did the Fulbright program get started; shortly after the war right?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. It was named after Senator Fulbright. The idea of the Fulbright program was that so many of these countries in Europe owed the United States money. If they were going to pay it back, they would pay it back in hard currency. The Fulbright grants gave these countries to pay their debts by giving the United States an opportunity to send say 1,000 students per year to study in their country under the Fulbright program. The students would be vetted by a joint commission of the United States and German, French, Italian, British representatives. The terms of it would be that the individual would be given a full scholarship to the university that they selected and were accepted at, and also a stipend in local currency. That was used then to cancel that portion of what was owed to the United States. It meant that all those countries, which were operating after the war with soft currencies in comparison to the dollar, were using their own currency rather than American dollars.

Q: Now this is a very competitive program. You went there out of Fordham?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. Actually I had applied to study English Literature at the University of Leeds. I got a special letter, not a form letter, from the Fulbright commission shortly after I applied that said, "We have your application. You are competitive. We will put it through the normal process, but because there is no language barrier for England, we have a surplus of applications. We see however, that you have a fairly good background in German, and we are looking to fill some extra slots in Germany. Your project, which is to study the little magazine, the little literary magazine in England, could very easily be done in Germany, and might be very interesting to see the growth of the little magazine after the war. Would you like us to put you down for Germany?" So, I said, "Yes."

Q: Now your German comes from high school and university?

COUNTRYMAN: High school and university. I had really very good teachers, but I learned it the old way. In other words I could write an essay on Goethe but probably could not say, "Please close the door after you turn out the light."

Q: The research vocabulary rather than the useful vocabulary. Now you were in Berlin at the Frei University?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, the Frei University. I was there from '54-'55.

Q: What was Germany like in those days? The occupation was over.

COUNTRYMAN: No, the occupation...we were still there in Berlin. The occupation was still very much in force. We had, Berlin itself was divided in four sections, British, French, American, and Russian. Evidence of destruction was all over, I mean very huge areas particularly in the East. In the West they cleaned it up, but you still found the skeletons of buildings and tremendous amount of destruction still to be seen. I could go into the east section of Berlin, but we were not allowed to travel into East Germany. I did eventually get a special permit from the Russians to visit Sans Souci, the palace of the Kaisers in Potsdam, but that was only one day down and back.

Q: What were your living arrangements?

COUNTRYMAN: I lived in a home with a widow by the name of Frau Karla Kluge. Her husband was Kurt Kluge who was a very well known kind of second rank novelist in the 20s and 30s. He wrote a book called Der Herr Kortum [Editor's note: Lord Kortum, published Stuttgart, 1938] which was the story of a kind of bumbling academic who is guilty of malapropisms but somehow comes out with the truth, and is very ingratiating. Kluge was a very cultivated man. He was a sculptor and an historian, and had an extensive library in the house where I rented a room. On the wall outside it said "Kurt Kluge Achie," the Kurt Kluger Archive. He had a lot of personal papers. He was a civilian assigned to the German general staff. You will recall when the Germans invaded Belgium over the Albert canal, there was a supposedly impregnable fort called Eben-Emael. The Germans landed paratroopers on top of it, dropped in charges and stormed in. The Albert canal fell and they moved on. Well Kurt Kluge was assigned to the German historical section of the general staff. They used to have all throughout the war...the Germans would have an historian right there at the battle site to write it up for history. He died of a heart attack on the battlefield. He was not shot, he just had a heart attack. He was an elderly man and passed away. It was a very nice place to live because I had my own literally private library in the house.

Q: Fascinating. So you then graduated from Fordham. Did you go into the Air Force after that?

COUNTRYMAN: I was in ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) in college, so I had a three year obligation which was deferred for that Fulbright year. I should have gone in right in '54 but I was given a year off by the Air Force. It would have been to their advantage perhaps if I made a career out of the Air Force.

Q: And you were a pilot.

COUNTRYMAN: I was a pilot. I always wanted to be a pilot. I found it very exciting. I loved flying, but I was strictly a civilian and it was not something I wanted to do as a career.

Q: Where did you do your basic training then?

COUNTRYMAN: I did primary flying school in Malden, Missouri, down in Boot Heel, Missouri. My advanced...I got my wings from an advanced air force base in Enid, Oklahoma, then went through transition school. When you get out of flying school, you can only fly training planes which in my case was the old B-25. I was sent to West Palm Beach and learned to fly the KC-97, and then spent 18 months until I was discharged at Great Falls, Montana, Malmstrom Air Force Base. I was in the 407th air refueling squadron. But also flew B-52s and B-47s because we had to know what it was like to be at the other end of the boom as you were refueling.

Q: So your entire career was stateside.

COUNTRYMAN: I did get to Japan. You know SAC (Strategic Air Command) had, might still have, but in those days it was very big, the idea of a deployment where they would deploy squadrons overseas. Our sister squadron was deployed half to Guam and half to Alaska, and we flew support for them. So I would fly...support meant you would deliver generators they needed or replacement people or fly mail or food in, this sort of thing. So I flew from Great Falls, Montana to Guam to Fairbanks, Alaska, and to Japan where we would take guys for R&R (rest and relaxation) and back. So I got to see a little bit of Japan. May be for a couple of days. We would get crew rest, so my knowledge of Japan is very minimal.

Q: When your obligation was up, you moved on. You went to the University of Miami. What was your major there?

COUNTRYMAN: English again. My thesis was the German elements in the writings of Thomas Wolfe. People don't read Thomas Wolfe anymore. He was a very valuable southern writer who wrote *The Web and the Rock*, *Look Homeward Angel*. Pretty popular in his day. But most definitely a German element in his writings. He was influenced by Germany. I thought that that would not be a bad thing to be able to show that I knew something about foreign influences on American literature for my Foreign Service oral exam. I put myself under the care, I have forgotten his name now quite frankly, the head of the history department, who gave me a reading list and sort of helped me prepare for the Foreign Service test. I was very strong in languages and English, but I did not have the knowledge of political science and my economics was weak. So I wanted to...although when I did take the test I did rather well. It was because I had spent two years preparing for it, in addition to getting my masters degree.

Q: Actually you might have gotten the better deal. I spent all my time in history and poli-sci, and the first boss I had was an English major, and I was dead. A little late to learn to write. How did the Foreign Service exam seem to you at that time?

COUNTRYMAN: It has been so long. I think at the time. I think I felt I passed, but I have forgotten what the criteria were. I think there were just so many people they would take. I think I had done fairly well, but I didn't know what other people had done. It was somewhat dependent on what other people did and there was a kind of a curve to it. I have forgotten. I felt fairly good about it. I felt I had done fairly well.

Q: Now after the written exam there was an oral examination; what was that like?

COUNTRYMAN: Comical. To make some money in between semesters at Miami, I worked for an organization called Casser Tours in New York, which at the time was the largest bus tour outfit on the east coast. They had two, three, seven, fourteen day tours to places like the Gaspi<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> Peninsula, to Cape Cod, to the Carolinas. I did a tour to Kentucky and West Virginia. One of the places that we went to was to the Henry Clay home in Kentucky. Part of my job was to give people a guided tour of Henry Clay's home. In the Foreign Service oral exam, one of the questions they asked me, they said, "Mr. Countryman, who is an American statesman in the past that you admire?" The name Henry Clay popped into my head. I could see almost a smug look on the face of the panel as another person leaned back and said, "Uh-huh, you like Henry Clay. Well you are a vice consul in La Paz, Bolivia, and the Bolivian-American friendship society has invited you as their speaker for dinner and the subject of your talk is the life and times of Henry Clay. You have five minutes, Mr. Countryman." I began by saying, "The best way to describe the life of Henry Clay is to take you through his home in Knoxville," I had forgotten where his home was. "As you enter on the right," and I had this thing all memorized. It was beautiful. It was very articulate. A lot of it was cribbed from other sources. These people just reeled back. I said, "the painting that is over the fireplace was given to him by so and so in recognition," and on and on. I was looking at my watch and I said, "I can go on for another fifteen or twenty minutes." So I blew the whistle on myself. Everyone laughed and after that, all the pressure was off. I was sort of one of them.

Q: Where did you take the orals?

COUNTRYMAN: In Washington.

Q: So you traveled there at their expense or at your expense?

COUNTRYMAN: I lived at the time, that summer I was in Garden City with my parents. I had the option. I think they had a traveling team. I could have taken it in New York, but I had the thought, something in the back of my mind said well I should go to Washington and show them that I am really anxious and eager. Maybe I will get a better team. I just made a judgment that I should go to Washington rather than be interviewed by the traveling team.

Q: While your family friend who encouraged you in this adventure, this is the start of the Kennedy administration, Peace Corps. Did any of those atmospherics further encourage you to pursue this or were you already on this track?

COUNTRYMAN: I don't think so. I mean I think I was enough committed that it didn't matter what administration had just come in. It really wasn't a factor for me quite frankly.

Q: The oral interview in Washington was at a long line of people being interviewed, at what, half hour, an hour at a time or did you assume you were the only person being interviewed?

COUNTRYMAN: As I came in there was a fellow sitting next to me who was fidgeting. He had just come out of the oral. I have forgotten, but he and I talked. He said something like, "Oh, it was very tough, very hard." He was very skeptical. As we talked, I got some idea of his background. I have forgotten now some of the details, but it sounded like he had a very distinguished background, rather more distinguished than mine. He was called in, and I was still waiting. He came out in a couple of minutes. His face was very long and he said, "I didn't pass. I didn't pass" I felt, well so he didn't pass, but it was not an unpleasant experience to be sitting next to someone who did not pass.

Q: After you passed how long was it before you came on board?

COUNTRYMAN: I think the oral was like in August, July or August, and with considerable apologies they said, you know because of you having traveled with the Fulbright and being a bit older, security procedures would take some time. Of course, you have to have a physical. I wasn't worried about that; I had passed the Air Force flying physical so I thought I could certainly pass the State Department physical. They said it would probably be at least six months before we can get you in. They offered me, I think, a position as a GS-something (General Service, the civil service pay scale) in like passports in New York if I wanted to do that. I turned it down; I said "no." They said "Well what would you do?" I said, "Well, I have always wanted to be a, my father is a newspaper man. I think I can without any trouble get a job on a newspaper. I would like to be a reporter." They said, "That would be an excellent background for you. We encourage you to do that, fine." When I was in Great Falls, Montana, I had at that time...t was almost mandatory that flying officers have an additional assignment because you didn't fly all the time. So I was the assistant base public relations officer. One of my jobs was to put out our little newspaper, which was maybe a half step above maybe a high school newspaper, as base newspapers go. But I was the editor. My father, when I told him about this, said, "You should go see my friend John Denson who was the editor of the Herald Tribune." So I got an interview with John Denson, sat down with him. He said, "John, I would be very happy to give you a job as a researcher. No one goes in as a reporter but as a researcher, and it would be an interesting job, and I will pay you this." But he said, "Quite frankly if I were in your shoes, I would go out and work for a small town daily. It would be much more interesting. You will be a real cityside reporter." He said, "Here is the card of what is one of the foremost newspaper employment agencies. I will give them a call. I want you to go over and see them." I went over there and gave them my curriculum vitae and they talked to me so on and so forth. I got three job offers. One from the Danbury Connecticut News Times, one from the El Paso Globe or whatever it was, and another from a weekly newspaper in New Jersey. I decided to go with the Danbury Connecticut News Times. They had won a number of awards for journalism. It was a very good small town daily. I went out and worked for them for six months.

Q: What kind of a beat did you have?

COUNTRYMAN: I did the local hospitals. So I did accidents. I did the county agent. I wrote stories on the little bit of farming that was left up there. I also did feature writing. I wrote features and got bylines. A young woman, who had graduated from Danbury High School had gone on to become a fairly significant nightclub singer in Las Vegas, came back and gave a benefit performance in a local bar. I went down and interviewed her about her singing career. We had an infestation of some kind of a bug called a linden looper [*Erranis tiliaria*] that was tearing all the leaves off the trees, so I did an interview with the local county agent of the U.S. Department of Agriculture who described efforts to control the linden looper.

Q: It sounds like good basic Foreign Service reporting to me. Then you did come on board in February '62. What was the A-100 course like at that time? How many were in your class?

COUNTRYMAN: I think it was about six weeks. There weren't too many in my class. I think there was something in the neighborhood of 40-45 in my class. I still have sort of yellowed green sheet someplace in my files of the people in my class. Of course, a lot of them dropped out along the way. It was about 40-45 people.

Q: Anything remarkable about the class? You are probably older than the average person in there since you had the three years in the military.

COUNTRYMAN: I was one of the oldest people in my class. I was pushing 30 when I entered. In those days that was old. The other people came right out of college, 21 or 20. I thought that they were fairly diverse. I had always heard that the Foreign Service was a kind of preserve for the Ivy League. I found that very few of my fellow foreign service officers were from the Ivy League there.

Q: Any women in the group?

COUNTRYMAN: I think we had four women. No black officers. I don't think any Hispanic officers.

Q: But a fair diversity of birthplaces and educational backgrounds?

COUNTRYMAN: I think so, yes. I think probably, still probably not a predominance, more people from the northeast, but some from the south and midwest. I don't recall that many people from the far west. I think there still was a predominance of people from the northeast.

We didn't have Peace Corps people. A number of the guys, however, though had been in the military, because they were still like I was, where we had universal military training. They had elected to go to ROTC. A good number of people had been in the military and had been overseas unlike myself who had been stateside in the military, overseas as a Fulbright. Quite a few of them had been overseas in the military.

Q: Anything particularly remarkable about the A-100 class?

COUNTRYMAN: No, nothing that really sticks in my mind. I always remember a trip we took to Beltsville to the United States Department of Agriculture experimental farm there. We got a long lecture about...it was a lecture by the agriculture officer who was preceded by our A-100 course coordinator. He said sometimes you might be asked to negotiate for some other United States government entities, and you must do it as if it were the State Department. You serve the entire United States government. Apparently back in the 19th century the United States was the foremost exporter of lard, and therefore you wanted to have hogs with deep back fat so that you could export the lard. Well, when tastes changed and people wanted to have a leaner type of hog, the United States did not have one. Evidently Denmark, I still remember this because it made such an impression on me, had a landrace hog with almost no back fat. The exportation of these landrace hogs was absolutely forbidden by the Danes. They would not let the landrace hog out. Some Foreign Service officer was given the job of negotiating with the Danish government on behalf of the Department of Agriculture to allow the importation of landrace hogs in the United States so we could start developing the strain of hogs that had no back fat and better pork and bacon. He was given some kind of decoration by the United States government, some service medal from the Department of Agriculture.

Q: Fascinating. How did the assignment process work then after the A-100 course?

COUNTRYMAN: I was surprised, happily so, at how sensitive people were, how good from my standpoint it was. I thought it was superb. I was assigned, and I have forgotten now her name, I was given a woman in personnel who was my sort of personal counselor. We had a number of sessions together where she explained where, what one, how one's career could develop, the idea of getting some kind of expertise in an area, and what were my interests and so on and so forth. It was very sensitive and very much drawing me out, but giving me feedback saying, "X" probably won't work. The long and short of it was I was very interested in both the Middle East and perhaps becoming a Soviet specialist, and at some point taking Arabic or possibly Turkish or Farsi, or if I went the other route to be a Soviet specialist, taking Russian. We sort of arrived together at the point where she said, "Well, look, you are not really sure which way you want to go. I think we can get you an assignment in Turkey via a short course in Turkish." At that time Turkish was a hard language, I think it would have been a nine month course. "We can get you through with four months of Turkish, and with your German background you obviously have some facility with languages. You would arrive there in good shape and be a very useful officer to the embassy." At that time the State Department had the central compliment officers at various embassies. I was over compliment. I was not taking a position, so that is what happened. I was assigned very briefly to NEA/P, the Office of Public Affairs (in the Near East Bureau which covered Turkey at the time) until the actual Turkish course began. That was in recognition of the fact that I had been in the newspaper business.

Q: Let me back up a little bit here. Did they have, or was FSI using the MLAT (Modern language Aptitude Test) test? That was this test that demonstrated that you had some capability?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. I think I did well in that. I think when I came into the Foreign Service we all took exams. I got a 4+/4+ in German. I got something like a 2/2 in French. [Editor's Note: these scores first represent speaking, then reading levels. The 4 level is graded as a college graduate.] So they knew I could handle languages. She referred to that when she said, "... with your language background. Of course, I had Latin and Greek from college. I didn't take the Greek exam, although they said I should have because my ancient Greek was probably good enough that I could have read the modern Greek, particularly as the newspaper relies heavily on the ancient Greek. They were keen for me to take a hard language. They were very happy that I was interested in something like Turkish.

Q: Wasn't it was a bit unusual to receive hard language training as a first tour officer?

COUNTRYMAN: There were a couple of us. One, a good friend of mine, Dick Barkley, who had been in Germany and stayed on, on his own on the GI Bill and had gone to the university at Tübingen or someplace. His German was very good. He wanted to go to Scandinavia. They sent him to Finnish, he went to Finnish which is a hard language. There were a couple of other people. There were a couple of people in my class that went to Greek, modern Greek.

Anyway during the A-100 course, people got their assignments. Some people who did not have language training; of course, a lot of people I think did have language training. Nevertheless, some people went directly to their assignments. They left right after the course. I didn't report to Istanbul, I came into the Foreign Service in February, and by the time I finished the A-100 course, my little stint, TDY (Temporary Duty) in NEA, and about four months of Turkish language training, I didn't report to Istanbul until January '63.

Q: And the TDY in NEA/P, what was that like?

COUNTRYMAN: I helped the director who was a fellow named John Billings. I helped to prepare the daily guidance for the Department's noon press briefing. He would do most of the drafting, and I was kind of a gopher, run around to the Israeli desk and say you know, will you clear off on this guidance over troubles in the Gaza Strip or whatever it was.

Q: So then you arrive in Istanbul in January, '63. But you are over compliment, so what duties are your assigned?

COUNTRYMAN: The arrangement was, within the context of the embassy's own needs, that was the key phrase, the post was supposed to give us about six months in each of the four sections, consular, admin, economic, and political.

Q: To give you a sense of what the different cones and duties were at that time. The Foreign Service still had the cone system.

COUNTRYMAN: I don't think so. I think when I came in there was a sense that you were in it, but it was not formalized as a cone. As a matter of fact, when I came in the Foreign Service, in my oral, I had been also in the Air Force in addition to being a public affairs officer, I also had a stint as an admin officer. They were quite interested in that. That was to my betterment. That was an advantage in my oral. I never really knew if they said well this guy is going to be an admin officer. I think maybe that was something extra that they thought of. But I don't think I went out to Istanbul with any thought that I was in a particular cone.

Q: How did you arrive in Istanbul? Fly from Washington then?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. When I returned, I came by boat, and when I went to Beirut I went by boat. Because, I had met with the Consul General, Ben Hill Brown over Christmas. He was keen for me to get out there. I think that he even thought of my being sort of a staff aide to him or something like that, which never worked out. I am glad it didn't, not because he wasn't a nice guy, but I got a chance to do more important things. I worked very closely with him anyway. He put some urgency on it and said, "We'd like you to get out there." So I thought rather than have a good time, I should impress my future bosses, be responsive.

Q: What did Istanbul, the consulate look like in those days? How big, how was it organized?

COUNTRYMAN: The consulate general...I was very pleased when I arrived there. There is an article that I have, I should have brought it along with me, that was in the Foreign Service Journal [Editor's Note: a publication of the American Foreign Service Association, the labor union for Foreign Service personnel], about the old consulate. It is a very interesting building. It is the Palazzo Corpi. It was built in the late 18th century by a Venetian businessman who had business in Istanbul, essentially for his mistress. It was very ornate and had some beautiful frescoes on the ceiling, some rather revealing. But a lovely old building, a little worse for wear by the time I got there. The story is told, and I think it is accurate, that at some point, of course it was the embassy, because the Ottoman capital was Istanbul, not Ankara. So it was the American embassy. At one point in the 20s the American ambassador there, I think was a political appointee, no it must have been before the First World War because it was only after the war when the Turks moved. Maybe it was just after the First World War, before the embassies had been set up in Ankara. Anyway, the story was that a visiting head of the foreign relations committee came and played poker with the then political appointee ambassador who said, "If you win the next hand, you introduce a bill for this to be bought by the United States government, and if I win you do that, If you win, I will buy it for the United States government and make it as a gift." The ambassador won, and the bill was put in and it was purchased. It was a very charming building.

Q: A new definition of lobbying Congress. So how was the consulate staffed in those days?

COUNTRYMAN: Modest. It was a Consul General. The deputy principal officer had traditionally been head of the economic section for some reason. A political officer, a consular officer, with a staff consular officer who handled visas and passports, a USIS (United States Information Service) operation, and a base for CIA.

Q: What was your first assignment when you...

COUNTRYMAN: Consular section. And business was brisk. We did a lot of notarials. We did shipping and seamen in those days; shipping and seamen were an important thing. We did a good number of rather complicated visa cases for people who claimed birth in the Soviet Union, because these were Turks from Turkic backgrounds who lived in Turkestan or areas like that and could claim Soviet citizenship. It was still back in the quota days. It was very important to prove that you had been born across the border from Turkey and in the Soviet Union because the quota for Turkey was oversubscribed. So it was very useful to prove you were there.

I got involved in a very interesting case. Of course, there was still a Greek minority in Istanbul, and, of course, a lot of the Greeks had lived along the western areas of Turkey. When the Greeks and the Turks fought, there was an exchange of population. The Social Security Administration noted and was concerned that they were getting a lot of people who claimed birth in Turkey who were Greek-Americans, and that their birth date was such and such. SSA's concern was the dates the applicants provided might not be accurate. Because obviously it was less complicated in those days. It was at 65, you got your social security. Well, these people would prove they had been born two years earlier and you know had been changing their birth date. The Social Security Administration was doubting the validity of some of these records because the records had been destroyed, and there were no Turkish records. These were church records. People had photographic copies of pages from books in churches. I had to go out to go to a number of these old churches and to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch where they had some of these central records and actually view the records. I am sorry to say that in many cases they looked forged and doctored to me. Well, it was a very difficult thing for this young whippersnapper vice consul talking to this very aged and distinguished Greek Orthodox cleric and tell him that someone had diddled his records, or maybe he himself. I had the full support of the Consul General, and I went through this. It was a very difficult assignment, but I did it to the satisfaction of the Social Security Administration. I think we cleaned up the act. It didn't happen again. We OK'd certain people; other people were disallowed. There were certain procedures that were established...

Q: Was the consular section large enough that some people were doing IV's (immigrant visas) and some were doing NIV's or (non-immigrant visas), or did you do everything?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, we had the consular officer who was Tom Buchanan who was I guess an FSO-5 [Editor's note: the Foreign Service, like the U.S. military has a rank-in-person personnel system. At this time FSO-8 was entry level, second lieutenant equivalent; FSO-1 was the highest rank, a general officer equivalent] in those days. We had a staff of two or three, that was when we still had staff officers, Foreign Service staff officers. She was the citizen and passport, a Mrs. Biddle. She was the citizenship and passport officer. But the consul and I did the non-immigrant visa interviews. Then we had a local hire, a woman, Ms. Bendich, who had been Miss Yugoslavia in 1938 or something. She handled the immigrant visas. She prepared a file, and of course one of the officers would interview the people. Then we had one local hire who did shipping and seamen and another local who did notariats.

Q: Once you got out of the mission did you have the opportunity to talk to local government people or that kind of political reporting?

COUNTRYMAN: That came later. I didn't get out that much except to go to the Greek churches. I think there were a couple of instances where I had a protection of welfare situation where I went to a prison or I went to...I had to go to an insurance company one time on behalf of an American who had local insurance. It was usually the question of delivering papers, but I dealt with the head of this Turkish insurance company.

Q: What was Istanbul like to live in in those days?

COUNTRYMAN: It was very pleasant. It is a lovely city. you had the Golden Horn. I was very lucky in my accommodations. I lived in a very nice section called Maïç<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>ka in an apartment house. You don't see many in the United States except in a place like New York or a place like Paris where literally you have one apartment that covers an entire floor, you know with four or five bedrooms, kitchen, pantry, servant's quarters. Well, I didn't have that, but that's the building I lived in. I had the penthouse, which was a tiny little apartment that had balconies on all sides with a beautiful view of the city in all directions. I had like 1-1/2 bedrooms. I had a tiny bedroom and kind of like a sitting room off the, kind of a walk-in closet kind of affair, and that was it. But it was a very charming apartment with a lot of woodwork on the inside, a very nice apartment. The owner of the apartment from whom I rented was a fellow by the name of Tefik Bey Kharadout who came from a very wealthy Ismir family that were in fruits and vegetables. He lived in Istanbul; but the major part of the family lived in Ismir on the southern coast, but he lived in Istanbul to handle the distribution of the fruit and shipping it abroad.

Q: Interesting. So how long were you in the consular section?

COUNTRYMAN: About six months. The Consul General was quite keen that I do that, that that be the system. You will see later on from my story that that broke down to my advantage. But I spent six months in the consular section, about six months in admin, and then only about a month and a half in the econ section, because the more senior consular officer was pulled out quickly, and there was no replacement, so I ran the consular section for about four months. Then the political officer was pulled out, and there was no replacement, and I was made the political officer. So instead of having a tour in the political section, I was the political officer which at that time was like an FSO-3 slot [i.e., senior officer with fifteen plus years of experience], and here I was an FSO-7 or six. But the Consul General had confidence in me and so did the ambassador. I had the Turkish, that was the big thing. They wanted someone who had the Turkish language. We were coming in to, going into elections. Raymond Hare who was our ambassador in Ankara wanted very much to have a sense of reporting, what was going to happen in the elections. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Raymond Arthur Hare presented his credential in Istanbul on April 5, 1961 and departed post on August 27, 1965.] Obviously what was going to happen in Istanbul was terribly important. It was a big city. Ankara was just the capital of...they wanted much wanted reporting that could be done, and someone who reads the press. So, I was very fortunate.

Q: Obviously your opportunity in the consular section and getting out from time to time would use your Turkish. Then you said you moved to admin. There too you would be using some Turkish. Were there any particularly interesting admin issues that you had to deal with?

COUNTRYMAN: I used my Turkish...by the time my Turkish was really quite good. I was quite comfortable with it. On the admin side, one of the things we were doing, we were doing some remodeling in the Embassy, and in the Consulate General. I had to go out and get some bids from Turkish contractors. Frankly, it was something I had no experience in. Here again, architectural drawings, and getting a sense of materials, how much labor costs would be and so on and so forth was quite an experience for me.

Q: You probably had a couple of fairly senior local employees who were assistants in this project. Were they Turks?

COUNTRYMAN: Most of our local employees in admin tended to be mainly Turks, but the others, we had a mixture of Greeks, Armenians. We had a Yugoslav. We had, one of the ladies that later came into the consular section was Maltese. Literally Maltese, not even partly British. I mean she came from the island of Malta.

Q: But the admin section does give you an interesting view of a Foreign Service operation that one normally doesn't get. You moved to econ but that didn't last long.

COUNTRYMAN: No because I was pulled back to the consular section. Then when that was filled almost coincidentally with that, there was no political officer, and I was in the political section.

Q: So there you were in the political section with Turkish and an election that is coming. What was the mission's election coverage like?

COUNTRYMAN: Without going into a great deal, I have to make sure my facts are right, but one of the...Turkey at that time was an emerging democracy. There had been a military coup. The military had overthrown a dictatorial regime, and the ruling party was the RPP, the Republican People's Party, which was I guess we would think of it as an Ataturk party somewhat left of center. Similar to a labor or socialist party, opposed by the Justice Party that represented more conservative interests and was more of a right wing party. The military had always supported the RPP, the Republican People's Party. The feeling was that Suleyman Demirel, I remember the name, who was the candidate of the Justice party was somebody who was more popular, had a better sense of the people and could continue to make progress in areas where the military thought it was important to make progress. He was from Istanbul, so I got to know Suleyman Demirel, and also got to know General Midonalu who was retired but who had engineered the first overthrow of the preceding government. He indicated to me, and this was a thing that the embassy didn't know was very important, that he would support the election of Demirel. Whereas I think the Embassy and most other people in the country were predicting continued rule by the Republican People's Party. I went out on a limb based on my talks with Demirel and this General Midonalu and suggested that Demirel would win, and he won.

Q: Now you were interviewing them and you were interviewing other business and political types.

COUNTRYMAN: Right next to the consulate general was an old hotel called the Pera Palas. It was a wonderful old hotel. It had a very nice bar there, a bar in the broad sense, not just liquor, but tea and Turkish coffee. I, with a very small budget, would meet people from the Turkish parliament and businessmen in the bar at the Pera Palas. You know, two o'clock in the afternoon, five, six, or whatever time it took to go over and sit around and talk to them. It was very convenient for them to come there. It was a nice place to conduct business.

Q: Now you were recording these conversations as a written memcon (memorandum of conversation) or cable?

COUNTRYMAN: Most of these were, since we were in the country, most of these were memcons. We still had airgrams in those days, and I did airgrams. But the memcons quite often, I forgot how we handled those, I sent those up to the political counselor in Ankara.

Q: Was there any unique aspect to the relationship between the Consulate and the Embassy? Could the Consulate separately cable Washington if it wanted to?

COUNTRYMAN: I think we tended to, yes. We would, but I think we kept it pretty closely. The Consulate had literally a bedroom for the ambassador. Ambassador Hare would come to Istanbul quite often, because quite often, although the government was in Ankara, people would schedule appointments with him in Istanbul, because they had a house there or they would be there, or it was an excuse for them to go to Istanbul. Actually Ankara and Istanbul are very close, it was only a few hours either by air or by train. So the ambassador was in residence at the Consulate General more often than most ambassadors are in most consulates.

Q: How many American consulates were there in Turkey at that time?

COUNTRYMAN: At that time there were three. We had Istanbul, Ismir, and Adana in the southeast.

Q: Looking at Turkey in a little larger view, were there any particular social strains or political tensions?

COUNTRYMAN: One of the things, of course, is a legacy even today that remains in Turkish society is...of course, everyone today is familiar with Kemal Ataturk, the face-west philosophy and doing away with Turkish being written in Arabic script, making it a secular state, modernization, doing away with the fez. When I was there, particularly the people in Istanbul, the sort of more modern people were very committed to pushing forward that Ataturk revolution and being western. There was a significant group of people who were Islamic, who felt that this was not godly. There had been too much secularization. Turkey after all was almost 100% Muslim. So there was a tension reflected between the RPP and the Justice Party, and the Justice Party having a heavy element of what we would call, I suppose, the religious right, the more conservative people. There were some very great social tensions.

Turkey had a universal education law, and there were, of course, secular schools, but traditionally there had not been. I mean they didn't have a school system set up all over the country. In many areas they had what they called the "Imam vi hatip okulary," the Imam or priest and preacher schools. These are strictly Islamic. Some of them were pretty good, but some were not very good academically. I mean they didn't even teach you to read well, because you memorized passages from the Koran which a Turk couldn't understand because it is in Arabic, and recite from rote the Koran in Arabic. Things like modern Turkish, mathematics, social studies were not taught very well, or so the reformers said. Some of these Imam vi hatip okulary particularly in the larger cities were pretty good. I mean they were just religious schools, but they would match up to the Turkish secular schools. But there was a great deal of argument, for instance, about whether you could get into the technical schools or universities from these religious schools. There was a good bit of sniping back and forth in the press over the question of secularization versus Islam.

Q: How does it strike you now about the larger political relationship between the United States and Turkey at that time? Were they in NATO?

COUNTRYMAN: Not then. But we were very close because we had air bases there. They had fought, of course, with us in Korea. That was a big sort of PR element that the Turks would always talk about, you know our great friends the Americans. We fought with you and were there for you in Korea and the Turkish brigade saved the Americans at the Changjin Reservoir, whatever it was. They felt very much that our relations were good, very friendly. There was a strain in the...there was an element in the RPP that was pretty far to the left and was quite socialist. I don't think it was crypto-communist, but it was very strongly socialist, and saw the United States as not being that much of a model for Turkey. We were too capitalist. There was a strong socialist side element in the RPP.

Q: Now, you were there at the time Kennedy was assassinated and the whole change in the U.S. Did any of that affect the Turkish situation?

COUNTRYMAN: I remember it very well. I was at home when we got the word. Our budget and fiscal officer for some reason called and said, "John, come down to the Consulate right away. Our President has been assassinated. I feel sick to my stomach." So I left immediately to the Consulate. The Consul General was there. I remember setting up the book that we had, the condolence book. The first person in the door was the Russian Consul General, who signed the book. I remember for days after that people in my office...I had an appointment with some RPP representative. He called me up on the phone and said that he had to cancel our appointment. He was so upset about Kennedy getting assassinated that he was crying on the phone. I mean this was not feigned. He was literally crying. He said in Turkish, "Young, dynamic, and he's been killed. It is terrible." He was crying on the phone. "I just can't meet with you." The Turks can be very emotional. It hit them very hard.

Q: You left Istanbul in '65? Normal rotation?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, two years almost to the day. I arrived in January and I left in January.

Q: January is a little off the normal summer rotation cycle isn't it? How did that work out?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, because my next assignment was to go and work for Harriman as a staff aide. The fellow that I was replacing was leaving.

Q: Did you seek this out or did personnel, the great finger of fate...?

COUNTRYMAN: No, as a matter of fact the NEA personnel people wanted to send me for some reason before I did anything else, they wanted to send me to Kuala Lumpur as a junior political officer. Which I wasn't...I mean I knew Kuala Lumpur, I knew the geography, I thought it was kind of... So, it was more or less set that I was going to Kuala Lumpur. But about three or four months before I was due to be transferred, Governor Harriman's niece and a young lady came to Istanbul. The Consul General made me the control officer for them.

Q: You were a bachelor at the time?

COUNTRYMAN: I was married. He made me the control officer. We had a boat, a very lovely yacht.

Q: We, the Consulate?

COUNTRYMAN: The Consulate, that had gone way back. It looked like it had been built in the 20s. It looked like one of those things you saw in an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel, beautiful boat. The theory was that because you didn't have, you had the Bosphorus to cross to get from European Istanbul where the consulate was, the consulate and the embassy had to have its own boat if there were troubles and you couldn't rely on a ferry to get across. So we had this lovely, and on the list of personnel we had a captain, a barge captain and seamen. It was a lovely boat. So I took these two young girls up the Bosphorus and did a marvelous tour. I knew from my days as a tour guide I was pretty good at this. So I described the places and everything. They said it was fine and had a lovely time and wrote a nice letter to me and to the Consul General about what a nice guy I was. In retrospect I think I may have been being checked out. But word came through and I was assigned to Averill Harriman as a staff aide. I was told later on that there were two reasons that I got the job, as he had asked for a short list of people who were junior officers, I mean it was obviously a junior officer slot, but who had completed one tour and had done well. I had just gotten good efficiency reports on my first tour. Secondly, he wanted a New Yorker and someone with newspaper experience, because of course he was from New York. I guess he felt more comfortable with New Yorkers, but he said he wanted a New Yorker.

Q: Interesting set of criteria. So how did this transpire? Did you just get a cable one day?

COUNTRYMAN: I got the assignment order. It said assigned as staff aide. I was so taken aback. I think I was savvy enough to know that that was a good job, you know that it was something that would give me a chance to do an awful lot of things in the department that other people wouldn't see, seventh floor experience. I think I knew that this was a good assignment.

Q: You obviously had some leave time between departing Istanbul and reporting to Washington. How did you use that? Was that just family leave or did you get some travel in?

COUNTRYMAN: Well I was on a pretty tight schedule. They wanted me, I flew to Rome and then took the train, spent a couple of days in Rome, took the train to Bremen and took the old USS United States back, took the boat.

Q: How was working for Ambassador Harriman? He had been involved in everything and still was?

COUNTRYMAN: He was kind of a field goal kicker for the Kennedy and later Johnson Administration. He had been Undersecretary for Economic Affairs. Then I think just about coincident with Johnson coming in he was Ambassador-at-large. Even as Undersecretary for Economic Affairs, it was to have somebody like him to make him a super control officer and give him sort of certain accounts; things that he would follow and use his prestige or his knowledge and be sent off on missions. When I joined him he had just sort of finished up the Congo. He had the whole thing with Congo. He worked very closely with AF (Bureau of African Affairs) in the whole Congo operation. At the time that I joined him, of course Vietnam was the big thing for him. But he also got involved in the coup in Indonesia and the follow up to that and getting aid. He was always available. We had a problem with Liberia with rubber or something like that, no, Romania with Firestone Rubber or something. He took that on. The Liberian minister of finance came to the United States and there was some kind of debt rescheduling with Liberia. Harriman took care of that. He would do special...

Q: How many people were on his staff then if you were the junior officer?

COUNTRYMAN: I was the junior officer, and he had a secretary who was like an admin aide, Hilde Shishkin who had been with him for years and years, who was actually civil service. She later went on to UN affairs after she left him. She was State Department, but she had been I guess maybe she had come with Harriman or something like that and then became State Department, but she was clearly a Harriman creation rather than a State Department person. She handled a lot of his non-State Department stuff. Then there was a secretary, Millie Letterman who is a crackerjack secretary. Monteagle Stearns was his special assistant. Then there were two other FSO-4 types who did other things for him. One was liaison with CIA and another was a Soviet expert, Rollie White, who was just mainly that.

Q: Wasn't Daniel Berry on Harriman's staff at one time?

COUNTRYMAN: He may have been but he wasn't at the time. It was Monteagle Sterns, Monty Sterns.

Q: So what kinds of things were you following for him?

COUNTRYMAN: My job was simple. I screened...sometimes he would get stuff direct, but I screened most of the material that came in to him that was routine. I was in charge of all the cables that came in. Now if there were stuff that was eyes only Harriman, that was going in a special jacket and put on his desk by a briefer. But I got all the cables. It was my job to screen. That was quite a job because I got practically every cable that came into the department.

Q: It was worldwide.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. Not just NEA, and this was, well, I worked with the people, the editors in S/S (Office of the Secretary's Staff) to make sure that our cubby hole, I got what I wanted which was what he wanted. But what the criteria was, I mean there were certain steps. If it had to do with an economic report from Bolivia, we didn't get it. There were certain things that Harriman was watching. It would change as his accounts would change. I would deal with S/S and tell them anything that has to do with Romania, because he is doing the Romanian rubber thing, we want to see Romania. So I would go down and get all the cables very early in the morning. I would with a heavy blue pencil underline stuff and then write, literally write, because that is the fastest way to do it, like a headline on the top of the cable that would flag it for him. I got pretty good at that, summarizing what the cable said. Catching his attention, and then he would see what stuff was in it.: I had to do a lot of, he would go to Monty Sterns usually, although we would have a meeting, and he would want a file. He kept the file. He would say what he wanted, "I need to know this, that, and the other thing." He was very good about knowing what the system had and could produce. Very seldom did people have to produce papers for him. Occasionally they did, but normally, just informally, I would pull together a package for him. I would work with the desk or say do you have this. I would go through people's files, or I would get an airgram or something. He would rather be briefed up on something, and I would you know, produce a little package for him.

Q: Now this was your second tour. You had seen all the duties at post, and now you are here in Washington getting the view from the mountain top. You must be starting to get some better ideas about what the Foreign Service and the State Department are all about.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, I think at that point it redoubled...it increased my desire to have an area expertise. I saw that as being, I knew people who had certainly jumped around and had done all kinds of things and had been successful, but I felt that I would be comfortable if I had an area that was sort of mine. Early on the Arabic school and being an Arabist appealed to me.

Q: Even though Vietnam was beginning to dominate everything, I mean this is '65-'66. But you are seeing the Arab world as something that could be equally as interesting. In August '66 you are off to Arabic language training. How did you get that assignment?

COUNTRYMAN: I simply applied for it. I think that the personnel people, I was under the purview of S/S, the seventh floor. There weren't many of us in my ilk. The S/S took care of the seventh floor principals, but I have forgotten who the person was who my assignment guru, and said you can have anything you want, but what do you want? We will probably get it for you. I said, "Arabic training." They said, "That's no problem at all." As a matter of fact I had put in some kind of piece of paper way back in Istanbul, what would I like to do in the future and I had put in Arabic training. When I had been in Istanbul, I had been there about a year, and they had trouble filling some of the slots in the Arabic school, they offered me the Arabic training right then and there. The Consul General said, "Well if you really want it, but you know, I have got plans for you kid. I would prefer you stay here and finish your tour." I did too. He said, "Believe me, this won't hurt you if you turn it down." So I turned it down. I sort have been on the short list for Arabic training.

Q: Well it is interesting. You are talking about having mentors and having some relationship with the assignments type people which is not just cold and distant. The consul had obviously begun to make some assumptions about your talents and capabilities and was interested in encouraging you.

COUNTRYMAN: I found I think it was very informal. I found that the State Department counseling system, personnel system, was very good. It certainly treated me very well. I mean not just that I rose to be an ambassador but all along the way. It was sensitive and gave an ear to what I wanted and certainly gave me the tools of the profession. Skipping ahead here but, here I was going to Dhahran and after all the time out to take Arabic they sent me to Exxon Corporation which was a marvelous experience for three months training as preparation for being a petroleum attaché<sup>1/2</sup>.

Q: So, at this time the Arabic language school is in Beirut.

COUNTRYMAN: That's right, in the Embassy. We also went to lectures and courses at AUB, the American University of Beirut. The British had a school up in the mountains called Shemlan that was for their British Foreign Service and businessmen. I mean you a person off the street could go to Shemlan. It was an Arabic training school, Arabic language, but also people in the British Foreign Office went there. The Foreign Office had a special course that was more intensive than the business man's course. So we exchanged both tests and lectures with them. So for 18 months I studied Arabic, Islamic law, and Arabic history. We had this little exchange. I would go up to Shemlan once in awhile and attend one of their lectures.

Q: Now I have taken Chinese. That was a year in Washington and a year in the field, but you are saying 18 months in the field.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes.

Q: Well now, what would be a daily routine?

COUNTRYMAN: Instruction was nine to about two or three. That is about all you could take in classes. It was an eight hour day because in the afternoon you were supposed to go home and listen to tapes, or go to the lab, and do your homework. Many times that time in the afternoon would be when you would go to AUB for a lecture. But it was nine to three I guess in the Embassy, and the Embassy had a special section with little rooms and places we could listen to tapes.

Q: So it wasn't off campus.

COUNTRYMAN: It was in the Embassy.

Q: Did people get pulled out from time to time to fill a hole in the consul section, were you guys pretty protected?

COUNTRYMAN: The agreement was, the ambassadors were very good at adhering to this, that we were attaches to the embassy, but that we were not to be pulled out. We were not to be used. Our full time job was the Arabic. We only pulled duty officer shifts. No one really minded that, and it came up so infrequently, I think I had it once maybe. You would sit in the front office on Saturday or something. At night you were available on the phone.

Q: Who was in language training with you?

COUNTRYMAN: Bob Pelletreau, who later went on to be ambassador to Bahrain [March 1979-April 1980], Tunis [July 1987-May 1991], Cairo [September 1991-December 1993], and assistant secretary [February 1994-January 1997]. Joseph Twinam, who would be my boss in ARP (Office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs) and Ambassador to Bahrain [June 1974-August 1976]. Eli Bizic who is now retired. I forget what his last post was. Peter Sutherland who was ambassador to Bahrain [July 1980-September 1983]. A couple of people from other agencies.

Q: So it was a very small group, 10 or so. Now this is not quite your third tour, you are five years in. Were the others equally young officers?

COUNTRYMAN: I think they had a little time on me. They were about my age, but I think they had been in longer, because I came in so late, and they had come in earlier.

Q: Now while you were there, the Arab-Israeli war breaks out in June '67. Does that impact on the school?

COUNTRYMAN: I arrived one day and the head of the school Harley Smith said, "What are you doing here? The school is closed. We are at war. Go upstairs and report to the DCM." So I reported to the DCM, and the decision had already been made to evacuate all Americans. So the Embassy was cut down very much. I was put in, not in charge, but I was given the responsibility of doing the phone calls and getting people out. Because the Ambassador hired literally 25-30 Pan Am planes (Pan American Airways) to come in and start taking people out. I was doing some of the admin things, getting buses there, making sure that people assembled at the right point. We were executing the pre-scripted Embassy evacuation plan.

Then temporarily I was taken off that and given another assignment. In a place like Beirut, the American Embassy was quite often the source of information for all other diplomats in the area. So there are an awful lot of other embassies there that, when the war broke out, received instructions from their capitals to go to the Americans and find out what is going on. So we had this deluge literally. It wasn't usually an ambassador but it could be a DCM or a first secretary who was seeking information on what is going on, can I have a briefing from you. So I was given a little office and a chair and a desk, and one after the other literally for a couple of days there, one after another, I was briefing these foreign diplomats about what was going on.

Q: Of course, you are the lieutenant and they are the general.

COUNTRYMAN: I didn't know. I had all these important looking documents and was saying we are doing this and we are doing that.

Then I remember being told, go to the econ section and burn their files. I toted up all the files and put them all in these huge 55 gallon drums, and the Marines dropped in thermite grenades and these things burned away. It led to an erroneous report in the American press that the American embassy was in flames. Flames could be seen shooting from the roof of the American embassy. Then I was evacuated to Greece, because Americans from all over the Middle East, not just Beirut, were being evacuated.

The reception points for evacuees were two, Rome and Athens. So I was sent to Athens, and the embassy in Athens did a marvelous job in preparing the way and getting us places to live and so on and so forth. But I worked for them, helping them service Americans, particularly dependents around the Middle East.

Q: Now, an Arab-Israeli war is not an unfamiliar circumstance. So I would assume Athens had been through this before, although the last war was '56, about seven years earlier, right?

COUNTRYMAN: Again I think the embassy in Athens did a marvelous job. I mean they met us, they had buses hired, they met us at the airport. I was given a very nice little hotel to stay in, delivered there. Of course, there was the question of TDY. Money was handled well. They did a marvelous job. After awhile when things quieted down, the '67 war was over quite quickly. The embassy sent a special message to wherever, most of us I think were the Arabic language students were in Athens, but some went elsewhere. Word came back that we were to come back before other people. The reason was to literally be guinea pigs. We were back when the Embassy was still a skeleton staff. We were the first people that were brought back. Our job was to roam around Beirut and even into the countryside and see what the attitude was whether they were going to bring the rest of the Americans back. So being somewhat of a wise guy, the DCM was handling this, I turned to him and said, "Well if I don't come back, is that as good as a report that there is a problem out there?" He said, "No, John, use your discretion." But it was interesting, we did that. I went around and observed. All of us had been there long enough; at least I had been there long enough, so I had some Lebanese friends. There were certain areas. There were certain things without being clever about it, or using spy craft, or anything; I did my job, roamed around. I came back and did my report about what the attitudes were or the degree of control of the Lebanese government was, how the police were directing traffic, signs of demonstrations.

Q: So that meant you got in a car and drove out of Beirut?

COUNTRYMAN: Since my car had CD [consular, diplomatic plates] plates, I would use the car somewhat. I had a very unobtrusive car, a little Fiat 600. Do you remember that little car? Very unobtrusive car. But I used buses, or I would park the car someplace and then walk, or I would use a cab.

Q: What was your feeling? What did you determine about the hold of the Lebanese government?

COUNTRYMAN: That it was calm and that Americans could come back. There had been very few incidents before the evacuation, but of course that wasn't really a good measure because people had been evacuated so they weren't there for there to be incidents. As a matter of fact, there was one American who was very bitter about the evacuation, "As you see nothing happened." Well yes, nothing happened because you weren't here. Suppose you had been here, maybe there would have been some problems. But, yes, just from talking to people. I went into the place where I used to have my hair cut, a barbershop and I talked to people in there.

Q: In the evacuation itself did you also experience the phenomenon where missionaries or long-term businessmen aren't really willing to be evacuated?

COUNTRYMAN: We had people like that. We did have people who stayed. Our answer there is you have been given the opportunity. It is your choice. But it is being offered now, and probably won't be offered again not because we are being difficult, but it may not be possible. So you will evacuate now and take the flight at 5:15 tomorrow afternoon and if you say no, I will take you off the list. Very straight forward.

Q: How soon did you break off from the language training to go into petroleum attaché training?

COUNTRYMAN: I was assigned to Dhahran, to our Consulate General in Dhahran as head of the economic section. My tour in Beirut in the language school had been up some time like in August in the normal course of events. I was pulled out about a month early. I wasn't curtailed at all. Because the department...I didn't ask for this, but the department, again someone watching out for me, said we are going to send Countryman to be head of the economic section over there. In that role, his major responsibility is not just talking about the souk, the local market in eastern Saudi Arabia, it is going to be petroleum because he is going to be seeing...he will be our liaison with Aramco. Countryman doesn't know anything about petroleum. Most Foreign Service officers don't know anything about petroleum. We don't want to give him the full year-long petroleum officer program. Under that program a few people went to university. There were places which had good...I think Cal Tech or something like that, and there were a couple of people who went through this and then they also went to the companies.

But what they did for me is they literally hand created a program for me, a few months with Exxon. I think Exxon had also done a program, the full scale program, in cooperation with the university, but they hand created, hand tooled this program for me over at Exxon which was absolutely superb. So I came back like in June or July from Beirut, went directly...just passed through Washington, said Hello-Good-bye, took the Arabic exam, and they said we will see you in three or four months before you go out to Dhahran. Everything from there on in was handled by Exxon. I went very briefly to New York, to meet the president of Exxon and the senior people in Exxon headquarters, which was in Rockefeller Center. I was then sent to Houston to learn domestic operations and the basis of the oil industry. They taught me some geology. I sat down with an aging German professor who talked about organic material and these magnificent huge electron microscopes they had for looking at shale. I have had people who showed me how these reverberation thumpers, where they would drop a heavy weight on the ground and read seismic results from that to tell you where the strata were. I went out on one of these in the interior of Texas where they were doing it; went out to where they were pumping the oil. They assigned me to a Humble, which was Exxon's...Humble Oil Company was their Texas affiliate. I worked at a Humble gas station for two weeks. I pumped gas; had overalls on and put gas in the car and wiped people's windshields.

I learned the economics of it, prices at the pump, just learned everything about Humble's operation. They were very forthcoming and just treated me beautifully. I was there for about close to a month. Then the next phase was to learn about terminal and refinery operations. Their big operation was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. So I went to Baton Rouge, spent about three or four weeks in Baton Rouge, went all through the refinery. I have forgotten 9/10ths of it, but I used to tell the difference between refining diesel, and gasoline and how you crack it and polymers, everything about that. Then the terminal, how the tankers unload and load and various sizes of tankers. I went on board a tanker. Went out to sea with a tanker and then came back on a launch. I went all over the tanker and saw how the stuff was stored. Of course, you always had to wear sneakers because you didn't want to touch anything and make a spark. There were certain places they could smoke. If you even carried cigarettes with you, you would be thrown overboard. The final, and what was probably the most interesting part, was six weeks in New York to learn the economics of petroleum. Those were the days when you heard a great deal about the posted price of petroleum. You don't hear about that anymore. Now it is just posted price negotiations between the producers and the...between the oil companies and the producing countries. Now, of course, OPEC just sets the price according to some complicated formula.

What happened was the petroleum industry had changed. You had what is called participation. In other words, in the old days we said we had a concession. I mean Aramco was a concession which was an agreement between Aramco and the Saudi government to extract oil from Saudi territory, and the Saudis really didn't own their own oil in a way by the terms of the concession. Then they had participation where the Saudis really owned the oil, and the oil company was simply a contractor to remove the oil. So that was a shift that occurred while I was in Dhahran,...that was to come.

Q: You come to Dhahran in '69. As often happens as a result of an the Arab-Israeli war is that all American embassies close down; everybody is evacuated. Later the embassy is reconstituted as an to interest section. Did that happen in Saudi Arabia?

COUNTRYMAN: No. We were fully organized. I arrived there actually in May '68. There had been some minor riots there at that time. Things were quiet when I got there.

Q: What did that mission look like? Who was in charge?

COUNTRYMAN: The Consul General was a fellow named Lee Dinsmore who at the time was one of our better Arabists; a very good Arabist. The post had originally been established literally for Aramco. It was really a post for passport services and protection of American citizens. In order for Aramco to attract Americans there...the idea of going out to the wilds of Saudi Arabia, it would be comforting to have an American flag and an American presence. The Consulate was actually established after the Second World War. There were a number of...the Saudis simply gave us the land. I forget how many acres, just a large area between the town of al-Khobar and the big Aramco complex. After the Second World War...we had captured a lot of Italian prisoners. A lot of them were very good stone masons and builders. Italy of course was in shambles economically. We offered a whole group of these Italians to go to Dhahran and to build us a consulate. These Italian prisoners of war built the Consulate. Our accommodations were absolutely luxurious, because they had gone out and quarried stone, there was stone in Saudi Arabia, and they had quarried this stone and built these lovely little bungalows. So I had a very charming house built by these Italian laborers. But the post, by the time I got there, had changed very much. It had gotten a lot larger because it became a listening post for the Embassy in the eastern province. The Embassy in those days of course, was in Jeddah. Riyadh was still sort of the holy city. There were no embassies allowed in Riyadh, so the Embassy was in Jeddah. That was a long way across. So we were a listening post for the eastern province and a liaison with Aramco. Of course, that is why it was important to have someone who could talk their language and knew petroleum rather well.

Then of course, it came into its own after 1970, because the British government announced in 1968 or I guess maybe '67 that it would withdraw east of Suez, which meant that all those sheikdoms, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman were going to become independent. So our job was to travel to those places at a time when no one was allowed to go there. Other diplomats were not allowed to go there, but because of our special relations with the Brits, they allowed us to travel there. It was my job right from the start to go to those places and start doing economic reporting. Later on, when I was literally promoted halfway through my tour to be deputy principal officer, I also helped the Consul General understand and the U.S. government to understand the politics of those places. Then toward the very end of my tour to actually help establish the posts. I helped set up all the posts in Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman from an administrative standpoint.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

COUNTRYMAN: Ambassador Hermann Eilts [Editor's Note: Ambassador Eilts served in Saudi Arabia from January 1966 to July 1970]. He visited about once a month. He would come, and we had an American school on the compound, and he would use its auditorium, and he would have the American business community in and give them a kind of a briefing, an unclassified behind the headlines of the New York Times kind of briefing. They liked that very much. The Ambassador came and reassured them about things, and, of course, he was very articulate and you know would be able to say at my last meeting with the king why we said so and so. Throughout my tour in Dhahran, in any given month, I was outside the Kingdom for a good two weeks and sometimes three weeks, particularly toward the end when we were coming toward independence and the necessity for the Brits to make some judgments about what countries would be allied, or what kind of configuration could those emirates take. The original plan had been for the entire...Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman...to be one entity.

To backtrack a little bit, you recall the British had Aden. When they pulled out of Aden it was kind of a mess, and Aden went very far left and became really a Soviet client state, because the British had not handled it all that well. So they were determined when they pulled out of these other places they would do it thoughtfully and carefully with a sense of local realities. So the original idea that they would all be together, although it looked good on paper, it ignored the very the great differences between these places, tribal differences. So the eventual configuration which was Bahrain went independent, Qatar went independent, the United Arab Emirates, the seven of them came together, and then Oman. So you had four entities instead of one. But back then as part of my job, Embassy London was constantly sharing what was going on, and there was a British political resident, because this was still the old colonial system. It was not the diplomatic system. The British still had a Foreign and Colonial Office because they had colonies. But there was a British political resident who had been there since the 19th century in Bahrain. Then you had political agents in Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Muscat who reported to the British political resident in Bahrain.

Q: Now the analysis and the development that these would be ultimately several countries. That was something that was going on internal with the British, were we were making any inputs?

COUNTRYMAN: We kept our hands off of that one. We were briefed by the British. We had our ideas and would share our ideas, but the way in which these countries would come to independence and who would become part of whom, that was a British and local decision that we were not involved in.

Q: Again, you are our man on the ground.

COUNTRYMAN: The Consul General was in the first instance, but as the economic officer and his deputy, I worked with him. He would say, "John, I have got to go down. I promised the Sheik of Qatar to meet with him on a Thursday. The British political resident has told me that he has got some...he needs to talk to me. I want you and go talk to the British political resident in Bahrain tomorrow while I go to Qatar."

Q: So Dhahran had some very unique responsibilities. How big a mission was it?

COUNTRYMAN: There was a Consul General and a political or deputy principal officer. The reason I had the title of deputy principal officer was that the CG was gone so much, so they need to have somebody run the Consulate. There were other things we did. We ran the admin and consular side of the Consulate General. Then there was a political officer, a junior economic officer who worked for another agency, and that was it. It was really only three State Department officers, the Consul General, the deputy principal officer, and the econ officer. Of course, the admin and the GSO (General Services Officer).

Q: How did you travel to these places?

COUNTRYMAN: Air. Flew. Gulf Aviation, they flew these little two-engine Fokker Friendship turbo props. Then Saudi Airlines had DC-9's. We used to fly those occasionally to Qatar and also down to the Emirates. Basically it was British pilots flying. They flew mainly in the daytime. The only times there were problems was occasionally you would have dust storms.

But that was a lot of fun to travel to those places. I would arrive with a list...and the British are very helpful. They wouldn't make appointments for us necessarily, and we didn't ask them to be to run American Express for us, but we quickly got our feet on the ground. As you know, a mission needs to have an administrative sense of the place that it is living in. I mean apart from what the administrative officer would do. How do you get a cab? What hotels do you stay in? What time are shops open? How do you get things done, so on and so forth. But there was an awful lot of stuff that Washington said we didn't know about these places, so anything that you were reporting was thought of as very helpful.

Q: Now who is handling Saudi and Gulf issues back in Washington? Later it is ARP, the Office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs. Had that office been established at that time?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, and Dick Murphy, Richard Murphy was Country Director. Joe Twinam was the Gulf desk officer. That job opened with Joe Twinam. Before we never needed that; we just asked the Brits what was going on. He was the first Gulf desk officer.

Q: Well, with these special responsibilities, Dhahran probably has its own communication with Washington, not having to go through the Embassy all the time?

COUNTRYMAN: Nominally we were under the Embassy. We were not accredited to any of these places yet because they were still British, if not colonies, then treaty friends. But the Consul General from the stand point of the State Department was supervised by Embassy Jeddah. Hermann Eilts, very appropriately did not interfere with meetings or our activities in the Gulf. We were pretty autonomous and took our instructions from Washington. It is what Washington wanted us to do and wanted to know, so we operated for all intents and purposes like an embassy.

Q: As we go into these new places, how do you compare them, did you see the differences that will ultimately come out?

COUNTRYMAN: A tremendous amount. Tremendous difference, because oil was just coming on, and these were little specks on the...you know they were very primitive. They had old mud palaces or mud buildings where people, where the sheiks lived. A good portion of the population, particularly in the lower gulf, were Bedouins. The oil money was as I say, just coming in. But now you go to a place, any one of these places, Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, these are modern cities, modern airport, air conditioned hotels.

Q: So you really were present at the creation. Was anything happening in Yemen at the time of interest?

COUNTRYMAN: What was happening at the time North Yemen was quiet, but of course you had South Yemen, PDRY, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and the British withdrawal, so to speak, even when they did withdraw and the places went independent, the British stayed on in Oman. Oman was made an exception to the policy of withdrawal east of Suez because they had a war going on down there. The province of Dhofar was in revolt from the sultan who was in Muscat. The PDRY, the communist backed people down there, piggybacked on that and were aiding the Dhofar rebellion. Of course, they wanted to eventually take over Dhofar as a province of PDRY and take it away from Muscat and also ferment a possible further revolt in Muscat itself that the sultan had taken over. So the British as part of their dedication to tidying up their colonial empire were determined that they were going to defeat that insurgency in Dhofar, seal it off, and that Muscat would come to independence with a lot more care and feeding than the other places where you didn't have insurgencies. They had intelligence and special branches try and prevent any subversion, but those were easy tasks in the upper emirates, but in Oman they had a real problem. When I visited Oman to visit the old sultan, of course the other problem they had is that the old sultan Said Bin Taimur who was a very reactionary leader. There was a good reason for Dhofar to be in rebellion because he ruled that place with an iron fist. You couldn't go out at night. There were no schools, no hospitals. Qaboos bin Said, his son, eventually overthrew him, with British assistance. Sultan Qaboos had been trained at (Royal Military Academy) Sandhurst, spoke English, and was a modernizer. He overthrew his father and that greatly aided the process of calming Oman because he opened up a lot of things, got education going. Some oil money was coming in. But the British stayed on in a military role to help the Omanis, and also the Iranians helped them a little bit, put down that insurgency.

But when I was there, I only made a couple of trips to Oman. When I went out in the countryside, we would drive in British Land Rovers with sandbags on the floor because the intelligence was that there were no land mines that could destroy a truck, but there were personnel land mines and those could go off and it would be a nasty shock if they came up through the bottom at you. I actually went off and saw some of the military operations in Oman.

Q: Now when you are going to some of the other places, the British are leaving and the Americans are coming. How did the British look at our presence?

COUNTRYMAN: It was I think very well handled. Of course, a lot of liaison was done in London and Washington. We assured the British that we were not going to be there to take their place. But the British, I think, understood that it would be helpful for these countries to have an American connection. It was a thing we were obviously interested in, having posts in these places. As it worked out, the British had a whole series of bases in these various countries as part of their colonial presence, and the only one that we benefited from was the one in Bahrain. That for years was where we stationed our Middle East Force. The British Navy left Bahrain; we moved in and used their very good facilities. Of course, the British Navy having been there, it was set up to handle destroyers which was mainly what comprised the Middle East Force. Originally they had two destroyers and then they had a command ship, the name of which I have now forgotten, which was the headquarters of the commander of Middle East Force, the admiral. We actually had buildings ashore, but the fiction was that no he is not ashore, his headquarters is on the ship. It is a seagoing command. He just puts in so many days in Bahrain. We even had some kind of arrangement where the ships would leave, you know, facility days, so we could say they were not actually home ported, they were not ported there.

Q: How did the local authorities in Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain begin to view the Americans?

COUNTRYMAN: I think that they were sophisticated enough...just to backtrack. As I said, the arrangements with the British were very good. They didn't think of us as pushing them out. This was their decision that these places should become independent, that they could maintain their economic interests there without an actual, that is, the British ambassador would do the role of the British resident. If colonialism's day had passed it was time to move out and have other arrangements. It was natural in other countries, and we, the French, the Germans would have embassies. Because of the special relationship with them, the Brits were more forthcoming with us. I think also a shared sense that in many of the places we and the British were in partnership in oil, you know because of the oil connection. So it was all very cordial, and as I say the British will allow us access. We would have a non-objection certificate, and they would allow us to, help us get visas. But once we arrived in the country, I made it a practice and so did the Consul General, at some point either when we arrived or when we left, we would brief the British on what we were doing very candidly and give them our reactions. I met with these businessmen; I met with the Sheik of Umm al-Quwain, and he said so and so. Very open and forthright.

Q: As you are preparing for these countries to appear, did the other Europeans begin to show up and stop by Dhahran and say we too are thinking of setting up an embassy in Muscat?

COUNTRYMAN: As I recall, I recall briefing both the French and the Germans. Those are the only ones I remember. This was somebody from the French embassy in Jeddah and the German embassy in Jeddah.

Q: What were some of the other priority issues for Dhahran?

COUNTRYMAN: I was extremely busy. I retained the petroleum officer mantle even after I was promoted to Deputy Principal Officer, so I had a major responsibility. I was our liaison working level with Aramco. So I met with one of their vice presidents who was in charge of their sort of government relations office. I met with him once a week. We would sit down and we would exchange information. I would give him a kind of LOU (Limited Official Use, i.e., sensitive but unclassified) briefing on the emirates and what was going on in the gulf, because we were traveling down there and they weren't. So we would brief them on the gulf. We would talk about the local Saudi economy. They would tell me about, you know, it had to be left confidential - about oil strikes and what they were doing. But it would be a gossip session, and we would both take notes. He would go back to Aramco management and say, "Look, Countryman was here yesterday and said that it looks like Qatar and Bahrain are not going to be one country. Looks like the Brits are in favor of them being two separate entities." I would report, you know, "The Aramco people are having some trouble with their Shia laborers over something," you know. I mean exchange gossip which we would then make note of. Some of it we would report to Washington, some of it would be local gossip just for our consumption and was not worth reporting. So I had to maintain that liaison and while I was still economic officer, I had to report on economic conditions in the eastern province, be in touch with the chamber of commerce. But then as the clock started ticking away and we were doing more and more work in the gulf, there were times, two and three weeks at a time, I was on the road. That is what Washington wanted.

Q: You are saying Oman, Bahrain had their own oil revenues coming in. What oil companies were down there?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, in Bahrain it was BAPCO, the Bahrain Petroleum Company which was American, which was CalTex, Texaco and Standard of California. Bahrain had a very small amount of oil, very little. That was American. In Qatar, Americans were exploring. Both Phillips and Occidental were exploring, but Shell was the biggest, British Shell was in Qatar. In Abu Dhabi and Dubai I have forgotten now, but there were a small American, like Continental, or Union Oil was there, but the main ones were the British BP and CFP, the French, Compagne Francais de Petrol. In Abu Dhabi and Dubai they were a consortium. In Oman it was Shell.

Q: Given the large petroleum facilities that Aramco put on the east coast which used large amounts of expat labor, not only Europeans but others, Palestinians, what did the labor force on the east coast look like?

COUNTRYMAN: In Aramco they had a lot of Indians and particularly Goans. I remember in the Consulate General we had a Mrs. Mariados who was a Goan Indian, Christian-Portuguese speaking. She also spoke whatever they speak in the area of Bombay. She was a Goan. There were Palestinians and Jordanians who worked in clerical jobs in the Aramco headquarters, but the people who were actually the roustabouts, the people that did the oil exploration were either Americans or Saudis.

Q: How big a population was this on the east coast, because basically the east was a Bedouin area wasn't it?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. There was nothing out there before the Americans, the oil strikes back in the 20's and 30's. The total population of Aramco, now Aramco was actually three separate entities. There was Dhahran Aramco which was just buildings and administrators. Then there was Ras Tanura which was the refinery and the port. It was up the coast. Then there was a place called Abqaiq which was inside the interior which was the sort of gathering place for all of the oil that came in and really the petroleum exploration and production center. So there were three Aramcos I mainly dealt with. I visited one in the terminal and refinery in Ras Tanura. I was out at Abqaiq and I went out in the field to see what their operations were like. The Aramco population I used to say was 10,000.

Q: Now how did the Saudis deal with this population? I mean the area was Bedouin before, and now we have this urban area with different nationalities. Did this present any problems for them?

COUNTRYMAN: The Saudis were, I think...before Aramco could bring somebody in, I never explored how they did that, but I think that there was pretty close ties. What I mean is Aramco didn't bring anybody in to work at Aramco without there being a security check. The Saudis were comfortable that this person was OK. How they did that I don't know. Some of the things with their security service, I didn't know.

Q: Of course you are in Dhahran before the big oil boom of the 70's and this enormous wealth that comes in. Later it turns out that there is vast numbers of Thai and Palestinians who are working in all kinds of economic projects. So at this time what you are saying is Aramco project and the economics around it were fairly manageable and confined.

COUNTRYMAN: Although by that time the Saudis had already got a lot of money. There was a lot of money in Saudi Arabia because the oil in Saudi Arabia went back to the 30's and 40's. There was a lot of development going on in Saudi Arabia already.

Q: What did the city of Dhahran look like?

COUNTRYMAN: Well there wasn't a city of Dhahran. Dhahran is a misnomer. Dhahran is the airport, the Consulate General, and Aramco. The neighboring town is al-Khobar, which at the time I was there had dirt streets. It did not have paved streets. They never paved roads that went to al-Khobar. But al-Khobar was just a little...it was like an Arab souk, like an Arab market. There was a little shop where you could buy food and cloth. There were a couple of places that sold Seiko watches. There was one place that my servant went to and they would compound a curry for you from all the individual ingredients out of bins. But now, of course, it is a modern city. The streets are paved, there is a luxury hotel.

Q: Your personal staff at your residence, were those Saudis?

COUNTRYMAN: I had a Yemeni servant who had worked in the British officers' club in Aden. When the British left, he walked to Saudi Arabia and suddenly appeared at the embassy. I think he worked briefly for Aramco. I vetted him through Aramco and the local security service. He was what the French call "i½ bon a tout faire" he did everything for me. Took care of the house, and did the shopping. His name was Said. When I left, the Consul General took him. He was a very good servant.

I had some other interesting experiences. One of the things when I arrived, as we were not being so pressed by Washington to do the gulf sort of thing, is that the Consul General, being an Arabist, and, I think, sensing that he would be spending a lot of time in the gulf, wanted to get a sense of the eastern province. He had served in Iraq and Jordan and a few other places. So he and I made some very interesting trips in Saudi Arabia. One of them...Aramco is at the edge of the empty quarter. As you look at a map of Saudi Arabia, that is the rather largest unexplored area of sand, of desert, that area of Saudi Arabia is called the empty quarter, Rub' al Khali. It has beautiful dunes in it and a lot of Bedouins. The Saudis had built a railroad from Dhahran to Jeddah. It made a hook at a little town, the name of it escapes me; I don't remember what it was, but beyond that little town south of Dhahran was nothing. Just thousands of miles of open sand and a few Bedouins. Lee Dinsmore was determined to make a trip down there. So we got two Land Rovers. You always travel with two because one might break down. We drove from Dhahran, followed the railroad track down to this little town whose name I will think of in a minute, and took off into the sand. Aramco had given us one of their trackers, a Bedouin that they had used, because they had been over this area oil exploring. You know getting samples, sending exploring parties out there. But the area we went into there was no oil being pumped. So they sent this old tracker with us. Of course having been in the Air Force, the Consul General said, "You will navigate." So I had very good maps and I had one of these compasses you know I could take a bearing with. Of course, blind navigation is not a big deal, so every morning when we would get up we would take a bearing and look at the map and so on and so forth. This Bedouin went to Lee Dinsmore and said, "That guy who had that round thing like a watch. That is useless out here. You have to know what I knew which is the way the dunes are formed by the sand going on them. That thing is a piece of nonsense." Well the trip was planned to take us to a point that Aramco had on one of their maps where they had evidently were going to do some exploration. What they had done is take about 25 or 30 55-gallon oil drums and stacked them up to make like a pyramid and then poured cement over them to make a rude sort of pyramid as a marker. That was where we were going to stop and turn around and come back. So on the day when we should have sighted that pyramid, we didn't see it. So this Bedouin walks over to Lee Dinsmore and says, "That guy who is with you with that little watch thing; what does the watch thing say about where the pyramid is?" I said, "We are right on. It must be over the next dune." The tracker said, "It is over the next dune." It was over the next dune.

Q: Did anybody from Washington come out from time to time getting involved in your work in the gulf?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, I have forgotten now who the NEA (Bureau of Near East Affairs), Joe Sisco came out. Joe Sisco was the NEA assistant secretary [Editor's note: Joseph John Sisco served as Assistant Secretary from February 1969 to February 1974.]. He did a trip around the Middle East and he came to Dhahran. I am trying to think of any other distinguished people we had that came to Dhahran. There must have been, but I just can't remember who they were because if they came to Jeddah, they would also want to see the oil fields at Dhahran. I am sure we had some.

Q: You had a fair number of visitors.

COUNTRYMAN: We had some professional groups. We had a large CODEL (Congressional Delegation) that came out and I remember, met with Aramco. It was a group of people from the house and senate wanting to get a sense of oil and where the Saudis sat.

Q: The local administration on the Saudi side, was the Dhahran area organized as a province?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. There was an emir of the eastern province who is like a governor. We dealt with ministry of aviation officials and ministry of petroleum officials on the local level. Of course, all of their headquarters were in Jeddah where the ministries were. We dealt with local ministry people.

Q: So you would be going to their offices from time to time to obtain their view on some issue.

COUNTRYMAN: The advantage in dealing with a consulate from the Saudi standpoint is that the primary reporting responsibility was based in Jeddah because they were dealing with the government and we were dealing with provincial officials. So the petroleum ministry, I used to go, I have probably met with the Minister of Petroleum who happened to be Riyadh more than Hermann Eilts did. Ambassador Eilts was far more important than I was, but I was the one who got to see him. I was to ask him the embarrassing questions, the technical questions that Hermann Eilts wasn't going to ask, and also the head of the Saudi Petroleum company.

Q: This meant that you went to Jeddah from time to time to do that business. Why would it be you that would go to see the Minister of Petroleum?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, I had the petroleum expertise, and the Embassy welcomed it. They would say we would like our petroleum attaché to come and talk to you, and the thought was that sort of on a technical non-political level, I could elicit things they couldn't. It wasn't really the embassy asking, it was just his petroleum guy out there who had this hobby. The Saudi's knew what was going on.

Q: Could you give us a sense of what the social conditions in the eastern shore were?

COUNTRYMAN: Pretty much the same throughout Saudi Arabia. Of course Mecca and Medina, the holy places. When I made my trips to Jeddah, you would go on the road, and there would be huge signs. I mean as big as the largest sign boards you have ever seen in the United States, in at least 10 or 12 languages, saying from this point on, non Muslims are forbidden to enter. Once you saw that, you were brought home the major consciousness of it. I had served, of course, in Turkey where foreigners are very welcome in mosques. You are not in Saudi Arabia, even male. You are not welcome to go to a mosque in Saudi Arabia. The problem of women...of course, women could not drive, which made it difficult on wives. Women are not allowed to drive. There had been occasions prior to my arrival where the mutaween, the religious police, had...who carried around sort of a riding crop, the kind of the thing you would use on camels. It was a kind of a stake with a bulb on the end of it that they would walk around with. They were very easy to see because they would not wear the igal, the little round piece on top of their head. They would just have a little draped cloth over their head. They usually had beards. They would go around town in al-Khobar, also in every city, and when it came time for the prayers, they would make sure that the shops were shuttered and closed, and people went to prayer. Prior to my arrival, western women on a couple of occasions had been struck for not wearing proper clothes. Hermann Eilts went to the king and said, "We are here with our wives," and Aramco urged him to do this, too. "I would like to establish with you a dress code so we are honoring, we are being proper. It puts an undue burden on our women and there must not be a misunderstanding." So he wrote down the dress code. It was that dresses would fall below the knee, and sleeves would go below the elbow. There would be no décolletage. We didn't have any problems while I was there. There were no incidents that I can recall. But it was very strongly promulgated within the American community. The foreign community welcomed this, too - I mean British and French and other people who had missions there because they knew that we had more influence than anybody else.

Q: Did the Aramco people have wives with them too?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes.

Q: Of course they mostly lived in a compound on their own.

COUNTRYMAN: This is not a criticism of Aramco particularly, but I knew people at Aramco who had never been off the compound. Literally, someone said, "What does downtown al-Khobar look like," to me. They had been from there to the airport, and they had a very generous travel allowance. You get R&R (military term, Rest and Relaxation), so to speak, at various places around. They would go to Beirut. Ceylon was a favorite place to go. There was a luxury hotel so they would go to Ceylon for R&R.

Many years later I gave a talk on Islam to my daughter's prep school class. People asked me very much about conditions in Saudi Arabia. I used an anecdote to describe what it was like. The beaches, Aramco had its own little beach in Saudi Arabia near, about three or four little beaches that were for Aramco only, and women would wear bathing suits there. Otherwise you could go up and down the coast and you would go swimming, and a man could just take his long pants off and jump in the surf and go swimming. There were some excellent places there for scuba diving. I went scuba diving with a gun, a fish gun, you know take some fish in the water, a spear gun. I went one time to one of these beaches, and there was a tent set up on the beach. As I parked the land rover, and came down, a Saudi came out and said very politely, very nicely, "Would you mind going further down the beach? I am here with my wife and daughters. Would you mind going down the beach a little bit." I went down the beach, and of course I was there for an hour or an hour and a half, and I swear his wife and daughter never emerged from the tent. I am sure inside they were totally covered, but the sensitivity that maybe they would look outside and see me in a bathing suit just made him so uncomfortable.

When I left Dhahran, I was packing up. I had a little tent, a little LL Bean two person tent, because we used to take trips out in the desert. I had this tent, and I had it all folded up. I had it in my backyard and had it all set up just to make sure it was all right. I decided I was going to take it with me or leave it with somebody. Our number one local in the consular section came to me and said, "Ah, Mr. Countryman, that tent you have out there, it is beautiful. Would you sell it to me?" There were plenty of big tents you could get from the Bedouin, or you could make one with tarpaulin, but mine was kind of a fancy. A nice tent that you would see in King Arthur's time with a peak on the top and a little cloth around the front and stakes, and it was colored. "Oh when I go to the beach with my wife, this would be just wonderful." He was so happy. I sold it to him. It had to be a pittance, five dollars or something. But he was the envy of everyone. More and more people said to me, you know, how can we get one of these? This was so important to them to have this tent so they could take their wives to the beach.

As you may know, in Arabic there are about...we have the word "desert." In Arabic there are about five or six words for desert to describe what the desert is, whether it is a dry cakey sort of area next to the ocean where from time to time there would be flooding or rains so you could have a wadi, that kind of a desert. There is the shaley desert in the interior, and there are the dunes that we think of. It is one of the things I will never forget going into the interior in a Land Rover. It gets quite cold at night. You need a sleeping bag, even in the summertime.

Q: How far could you, there is no road so I guess you could just take off.

COUNTRYMAN: We had extremely good maps from Aramco who had mapped an awful lot of the area around there. You would just land navigate. You would use some kind of a mark. There was a road from Dhahran that followed the tapline. There was a pipe line that ran from Aramco all the way to Sidon in Lebanon. Along that there was a good hard paved road all the way, and there were little pumping stations. Well, a favorite trip was to take off from Dhahran, go into the interior, and then head straight north. You couldn't go wrong because you would hit the tap line eventually and you would come back on paved roads all the way to Dhahran. But the first part of that box, the "L," would be out in the desert. There is nothing out there.

Q: On any of these trips did you ever come across and have a chance to chat with Bedouins?

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, yes. If you...the rules of the desert were very simple. Occasionally people would come along. There would be like a family, or two or three people. We never saw a big tribal migration, but there would be a few people going along. If they saw you, they would come to you and we would be stopped. If we were going along and they were traveling nearby, we would stop and they would come to you. Of course, I always was lucky because I always got included on a trip because I could speak Arabic. You say hello to them, exchange some pleasantries. We would always carry a lot of extra water and tea. That's what they drank, so we had big jugs of tea. I remember one time this group came along, family, and the Bedouin are much less skittish about the women. They would be unveiled and they would have something over their head, but that was mainly against the sun rather than being protected. Of course, on these adventures, we often would have women with us. We would have one of the secretaries or a wife in our group. The women would go off, and the men would sit down. We would drink most often tea and cookies. They had cookies. I remember one time the sort of head man in this little group turned to me and said, "Your tea isn't very good. It is much too heavy and thick. It tastes too strong. It is not good tea." I took his comment as a friendly piece of advice. "It is just too heavy, too strong."

Q: Interesting. How are the Bedouin a different cultural group than the Saudi?

COUNTRYMAN: The Bedouin, it is a way of describing...I mean as they have always been city dwellers. Saudi Arabs will make a distinction between Bedouin and city dwellers. There was a program in Saudi Arabia of doing things to help the Bedouin. It was rather sensitive. Because of all the jobs that were going, the opportunities that were coming about, Saudi Arabian people would hear about these things. So the Bedouin would leave the Bedouin life and they would become taxicab drivers and porters or get a job with Aramco, there were other opportunities for them. At the time I was there, Saudi Arabia had enough money, they had enough jobs, they could probably abolish the Bedouin practically. In other words offer every Bedouin in the kingdom a job or just support him because they had enough money. Of course the Bedouin liked their life. They liked the independence. So the Saudis did not force people to cease their nomadic life. But what they did do is that they tried to do things like, where ever there was an oasis, they would install a pump and maybe like a trough so the Bedouin could know the various places, if there was drought or a problem with the well, the traditional wells, they could always get water, because that was important for their animals and themselves. So there was a system in eastern province of wells that were for the Bedouin. I mean anyone else could use them, but they were there distinctively for the Bedouin. They had a health program too. They had because if the Bedouin got cholera, cholera was of course, still prevalent in the world.

And it is water borne, they would also do this. Once cholera got into a Bedouin community, it would kill people off very quickly because there was no way of hydrating them, and they wouldn't see a doctor, so the children particularly and the adults would die very quickly. So they had a public health system where Saudis in Land Rovers, you know, would go around among the Bedouin, of if they heard there was a cholera outbreak someplace, they would run in there with Land Rovers and give some kind of medicine or shots and try to take care of them. They also had a big program that Aramco had for trachoma because trachoma was a big cause of blindness in Saudi Arabia, and they had as a matter of fact someone from Massachusetts General that Aramco brought in. He was an ophthalmologist brought in and given space in their very lovely hospital there with a couple of researchers who did nothing but work on trachoma. How it is caused, how you prevent it, what to do about it and so forth. They did great work in eradicating trachoma because particularly among the older Bedouin you would see a great number of people who were blind. You could see the eye had literally been eaten away by trachoma. It is very contagious. A lot of the children had it, but there was a very active program to clean that up. There was a very tragic case. The German government sent a German doctor to al-Khobar, a little town, and set him up, sort of a German aid program, just he and a German assistant. It was for people who didn't have access to Aramco, just supplemental. He worked on trachoma. He told me a story one time about having a young girl come into his office brought in by her father, brought in by Saudi health workers in a Land Rover. A little girl about five or six years old screaming and crying rubbing her eyes and so on and so forth. He looked at her eyes and said, "My god what happened to this child? What was put in her eyes?" Because here eyes were literally destroyed. Lye or some very caustic material had been put in her eyes. It was beyond anything he could do, I mean she was blind, her eyes destroyed. So he wanted to find out what had happened so it wouldn't happen again. The Bedouin father was very upset about this. He said, "She started rubbing her eyes and said there was something wrong with her eyes. I had medicine, so I put medicine in her eyes. She screamed and cried, but I thought the medicine hurts but it is helping her." "What kind of medicine did you put in her eyes?" He said, "This, it is medicine." It was some kind of medicine for removing corns for the feet, to burn the corn off. He was squeezing this into her eyes.

This was dallah, this was medicine. But the Saudis that I dealt with, I dealt almost exclusively with men rather than women. There were a couple of people who had foreign Arab wives who would invite you over and who were western thinking and the wife would be dressed in normal clothes and associate with women. But otherwise it was a very closed male society.

Q: Much of your official work I would presume would be via office visits.

COUNTRYMAN: And dinners. I was invited to, at important Saudi feasts I was invited as the Consul General, other people in the consulate would be invited to the emirate, to the emir's palace. There would be a big...you would be seated in his dewan [Editor's Note: dewan or dewaniya originally referred to the section of a Bedouin tent where the men and their visitors sat, a reception area.] He would sit up in the front and talk and welcome people. You would talk and wish him well and sit down and you would be served coffee in little cups. Then everybody would troop out. There would be these huge braziers with either a camel or a goat and big beds of rice. You would sit down, break bread, and you would eat. Then you would get up and wash your hands be perfumed with incense and leave.

Q: I am always intrigued that rice is the basic carbohydrate, even though it may not be native to the area. It comes from Italy, right; introduced during Roman times?

COUNTRYMAN: It is prevalent in the Gulf. It is the basmati rice. In Arabic the word Eesh, which comes from the word for life... It depends on where you are as to what Eesh means. In the western part of the Arab world it means bread. In the area where I was it means rice. They were very great connoisseurs. My servant when I was in Dhahran. I was able to buy from the Aramco commissary, which was very good. It was like an American supermarket. I would just send them a list and the stuff would be delivered to my house. Of course, I paid for it, but it was very good service. That's where I got to know basmati rice, which is very good. In this country most people like basmati. It is very light and very good. I always got the basmati rice. One time we ran out of rice, and it was not time for an Aramco delivery; now, normally my servant went into Khobar for shopping. Since I was going to Khobar I said, "I'll get some rice for us." I went into this little store and I bought some Egyptian rice. Said, who was normally very differential to me and never stepped out of line, he said, "What is this? Nobody eats this. This is terrible stuff. I am not going to serve this you, we have to have basmati." The American Uncle Ben's. I mean, the people were really connoisseurs about this. Egyptian rice, it was terrible to eat Egyptian rice.

(Continuing Tape Two, Side B) Good morning. Today is January 24. We are talking with John Countryman. John had been talking about his assignment in Dhahran. I would like to ask a few more questions about that. You were saying that Dhahran was an important listening post for the Gulf. We had no missions in the Gulf at this time. So, the traveling portfolio was a great assist to your career.

COUNTRYMAN: Perhaps, but it was the Consul General of course, and the Deputy Principal Officer who did most of the traveling, because it was important that a senior officer called on these Gulf officials, not a junior officer.. I was assigned there in 1969 out of Arabic language training as the economic officer. Halfway through my tour, the Deputy Principal Officer, Dick Adams, left. He retired from the Foreign Service. This doesn't generally happen in foreign service posts, I was promoted in place, not in rank, but I was moved up to Deputy Principal Officer. My focus shifted away from the economic to the political. I still retained my portfolio as petroleum attaché<sup>1/2</sup>. I think we discussed that. I had been sent there as petroleum attaché<sup>1/2</sup>. So I retained that for the eastern province. It happened 18 months into my tour which meant it was in 1970, late 1969 at a time when the tempo of the British withdrawal from those posts in the Gulf was quickening. The pressure from Washington to get more information about these places because we would be setting up house there, increased. So it made it more interesting politically, more urgent. Therefore I did an awful lot of traveling. I shared the idea of having somebody with the title of Deputy Principal Officer but with the Consul General as the primary contact. He was speaking to the British, the sheiks and this sort of thing more than I was. I would sort of run the post when he was gone. Ultimately he would want to rest and he would stay home. We would have a list of important meetings to make, and I would make them, so we were sort of alter egos. Obviously he being the senior man decided these things.

Q: Now you were saying Washington has increased interest in this. How did that express itself? Were you getting cables saying...

COUNTRYMAN: Instructions, yes. Well there were two things. One is the question is what the shape of the federation is going to be. Here Kuwait had already been independent so we are talking about Bahrain, Qatar, seven Trucial states as they were then called, and Oman. The original British plan had been that literally it would be one nation, all of them. That was kind of pie in the sky. They were just too diverse and fractiousness and jealousies and that was impossible. So then there was the possibility that Bahrain and Qatar would be an entity, and the UAE, as it came to be called, would be another. Of course Oman was always a distinct country. All of these things had to be worked out. This was the British experience when they pulled out of Aden; it had gone bad and a communist government had been set up. They were determined to, and when we are talking about withdrawal we are not talking about the British breaking diplomatic relations.

We are talking about the military presence going and going from having political agents and a colonial situation to independence. So the British embassies of course, the British political agent became the British ambassador. Under the British system, the British political resident for the Gulf was resident in Bahrain. Then there was a British political agent in Bahrain for Bahrain, one in Qatar, one in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai. There were two in the soon to become UAE and one in Muscat. They reported to him almost the same way we would have Consul Generals reporting to the ambassador. The British political resident was in Bahrain. So they were very keen to be leaving in good order. There was an awful lot that the British were doing to do that, that they would not so much consult us on, but tell us. There were things like the police forces which had been heavily encadred by the British were now the local police forces. Well they made arrangements so some Scotland Yard or special branch Brit would stay on to be sort of an advisor. That was very important particularly from a public order and worries about subversion possibly. There was a lot of economic stuff that had to be done. The British had been the accountants and bookkeepers and suppliers and now you are going to be turning it over and you would have ministries. There was a great deal of nation building that the British were engaging in, that we simply watched. But Washington of course wanted to know what kind of political situation are we going to have, because the ideal was that the British would stay on.

But the British were happy that the American security blanket would be extended over the Gulf. How that would happen, of course, was another very sensitive thing. That was an era in our history where we just simply didn't have bases over there. But the British had a system of bases when they were the colonial power there. They had a naval base in Bahrain. They had a fairly major air base in Bahrain, and they had another base in Sharjah, one of the Trucial states, and of course a considerable presence in Oman. We had had, because of the special relationship with the Brits, we had an organization called commander middle east force, COMIDEASTFOR, which had been in existence I am not sure, but I think it has been at least since the late '50s, which called on, which was not based, but home ported in Bahrain and used the British base there. We had a converted seaplane tender called the USS LaSalle which carried the admiral's flag. It was a floating office in effect. I think it mounted one six inch gun in the front, but basically it was a big yacht, and it had offices on board. It preserved the idea that we did not have a base in Bahrain even after the British left and COMIDEASTFOR and the British naval presence was withdrawn, and we had a more regular visitation by Middle East force, which at that time consisted of the LaSalle. It would rotate two destroyers either from the Pacific fleet or the Atlantic fleet. So that was something that had to be worked out. We were working very closely with the Navy to make sure that that was done quietly, efficiently. We didn't step on the British toes; it was done in a way that the Bahrainis could accept. As it wound up, by the time independence came it was quite clear that the whole relationship Middle East Force, not a treaty but a document was signed with the Bahrainis providing a home port and it was classified in describing the circumstances.

Q: You were talking about the Brits doing nation building. At the same time, were we using things like international visitor's grants or bringing people back to the States?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, I am glad you remembered that. We were doing a lot of that. One of my more successful ones In Bahrain there was a newspaper called El Hadroit, the lights. It was a local newspaper. I got the editor of El Hadroit to come to the United States. We didn't have a USIA (U.S. Information Agency) presence in Bahrain. As a matter of fact that is one of the hats I wore. I was sort of the USIA's guy there. We got a leader grant from the United States, and if you recall from my bio, one of the things I did before I came into the Foreign Service, I was a reporter for the Danbury, Connecticut, News Times. So although we allowed the USIA people to handle the whole thing on the general program for this editor, I said, "Look I can call my old friends, the publishers of the Danbury News Times and they would welcome him with open arms, and there is a significant Arab community in Danbury, Lebanese and Syrians." So we did that. They also got him an appointment with the New York Herald Tribune and New York Times. But when he came back, the one he was enthusiastic about was the Danbury News Times because it was 25,000 circulation, a small town daily. It had won a number of prizes for journalism and it was much more comprehensible to him with his little newspaper. It had a funky old building with turrets on it. Steve King who was the editor was still there who had been a very great friend of mine. The publisher who is from the Hardaway chain. They had just treated him like a king, took him all over, had dinner for him, sent him out with cityside reporter, investigating accidents. He had a wonderful time. Yes, we did that sort of thing.

Q: You, or somebody from Dhahran, were taking these trips once a week, once a month. You probably have to string four or five days together if you are making a big swing. It isn't one day down to Bahrain and back.

COUNTRYMAN: Well it was occasionally. If there was something we had to do with the British political resident there, we would do one thing, but we tried to make it a swing of four or five days. We'd hear something. One of the problems, and there were just all kinds of problems coming up. Again it was our responsibility as being the primary U.S. government diplomacy vehicle to check on it. It became clear about the time I took over as deputy principal officer that the shape of the Gulf would be what it is today. Bahrain would be independent. Qatar would be independent. The seven Trucial states would amalgamate into the United Arab Emirates, and Oman a distinct entity. So there would be four. Well, one of the problems in getting together with seven little Trucial states was a series of rivalries among the sheiks. The logical leader of it was Abu Dhabi because it had the most wealth, and because the Sheik of Abu Dhabi had already exerted a kind of primus inter pares (Latin: the first among equals) relationship with the other people in the seven Trucial states. Sheik Zayed. However there was Sheik Rashid who was the ruler of Dubai which was the second most wealthy of the sheikdoms. It had less oil, but it had a very well developed port and was really the port for the emirates. There was a rivalry between the two, and a lot of things were being done to assure that indeed if indeed the capital were to be as it was to be, Abu Dhabi, that there would be kind of a power sharing. Leading Dubai families would get contracts, and that the cabinet would be reflective of the other lesser emirates. The Sheik of Ras al-Khaimah, which is the last, but largest one emirate down the line; it borders on Oman...Sheik Saqr...they discovered oil there. It was just about this time. They had been looking for oil but they made a strike. I think it was Union Oil. It was unclear of course, as it often is in these things, how much oil. I mean was this another Saudi Arabia or 85 barrels a day. What was this. Well Sheik Sutter immediately thought he could parley this into a stronger position in the confederation than he had before because he was very much a junior partner. Well that raised a few hackles. We went down and met with them. Again pretty much in a listening mode and saying good solid State Department platitudes like, we want to work with you as a group. We hope that these things will be resolved before independence because it obviously would not be in the best interests of everybody if they were not worked out. So it was an active but a very low key kind of approach that we took. We were very much under instructions from Washington.

Q: Before independence these sheikdoms would have a British resident...

COUNTRYMAN: No, there were only two in the Gulf; there were only two in Oman. There was a British political agent in Bahrain, a political agent in Doha the capital of Qatar, a political agent in Abu Dhabi and Dubai for the Trucial states and one in Muscat for Oman. All of those political agents reported to the British political resident in Bahrain.

Q: Okay, so when you talked to him, he would be able to give you if he wanted the reporting of the other British officers.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, he was very much in touch.

Q: Did Embassy London have someone assigned to watching any of this?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, very much. Anything that we reported we would copy to London. I have forgotten now who the fellow was. We always had an Arabist in London. Hermann Eilts had that job at one time way back. It became less important as the British divested themselves of their colonial empire. But we always had an Arabist who looked to...who was usually a first secretary...who did nothing but sort of plug in with his British counterparts in the foreign and colonial office on middle eastern matters. So we would always copy them.

Q: So you were getting instructions from Washington; you were getting feedback from the embassy in London and you are talking...

COUNTRYMAN: Well, it was a three card arrangement. The embassy in London would report and say spoke to X today who feels it would be very helpful if our next trip down to Doha, an American representative could play this line with the Qataris over the dispute over Bubiyan Island. This was another one of these. There was a dispute over an island that was off the coast of Qatar that both Qatar and Bahrain claimed. It was eventually solved. You know it would be helpful if you could say blah-blah and we would, nine times out of ten we would just pick up the British line and support them. It looked like we were playing the same approach. The other player in the area who of course was important, the other two players were Saudi Arabia because these were people that they sort of always looked down their nose on as being sort of not big political players in the area, and the British. The Saudis were used to dealing with the British. So now all these little places were going to be independent. So the Saudis had to get, it was important for these people to make sure that their house was in order for the Saudis. The other big player was the Shah in Iran. The Shah of course was...

Q: That why its called the Persian Gulf...

COUNTRYMAN: That's right. There was one particularly nettlesome aspect that again we watched, but supported, while the Brits and the UN took the lead on this. There was way back an Iranian claim to Bahrain that was part of the province of Farse. There was an Iranian speaking minority. There were Iranians in Bahrain who were merchants, a quite wealthy group. The Shah, we suspected correctly, as did the Brits, just to assert himself in the Gulf asserted that right. So when the British leave, of course Bahrain is going to revert to Iran, which would have been disastrous, because of all kinds of Arab nationalist sentiment. Of course the rest of the Arab world was looking at this, and the Brits were conscious of that as well, that these places would become independent so somehow the idea that Bahrain would be turned over to Iran was unacceptable. So Ambassador MacArthur who at that time was our ambassador in Tehran got into the loop, anything that had to do with Bahrain. There were also a couple of islands off the coast of the UAE that were right in the middle of the gulf that there was a claim on. They were not so important as an entity except that in the center of the Gulf there was the possibility of oil. So if you are talking about who gets the oil, that becomes rather important. So to get off of this, what the British did was work with the UN as they approached giving independence to Bahrain. There was a UN special representative named, whose name was Mr. Winspeare Guicciardi who was the son of an old Italian diplomat and a mother who had been part of the British gentry. Winspeare Guicciardi came up with a brilliant idea, and that is the way we will get around this is that in Bahrain we will have an ascertainment. There happens to be a word in Arabic, I have forgotten now, that translates very well into ascertainment, about the will of the Bahraini people. Of course you didn't have a democracy. There were no parliaments. It was the Brits and the sheik. You couldn't have an election because even if it went in the favor of the royal family in Bahrain, you couldn't put them in a position that they were elected. They had a right to be there. Obviously the election probably would go against the Shah, but you couldn't do it by fiat. You had to have some kind of way to show that Bahrain should remain under the royal family and essentially Arab rather than the province of Farse. So the ascertainment was they found a list of all of the possible groupings in Bahrain.

Q: Ethnic groupings?

COUNTRYMAN: They got the chamber of commerce. There was not a union, but there was a workers league for BAPCO, the Bahrain Petroleum company. They spoke with them. They spoke to leading bankers. There were a lot of the mosques had what they call muhattams which were sport clubs and Islamic charities. They spoke to them. They spoke to, they had a list of social, business and civil society groups, and they spoke to leaders of some of the ethnic groups and they came up with this ascertainment that indicated should be independent, and the Shah backed off of it. But there was quite a bit of backing and filling as the process was unfolding.

Q: As this process was unfolding, you were commenting that it put England to be in a more difficult situation for the Saudis who originally only had to deal with the Brits, and now they were going to have to deal with these newly independent countries. Did you get any feel for how the Saudis had organized or looked at this area, and skipping ahead, did they move diplomatic missions in there about the same time or later. They were being moved at the same time obviously.

COUNTRYMAN: At the time that the British, of course, nobody had any embassies.

Q: Because they weren't independent yet.

COUNTRYMAN: But the Saudis had had a long history of relations with these places, visitors coming in. The Brits, if the Saudi prince wanted to visit, he would not be told he couldn't. He might be told well Thursday is more convenient than Monday. There were commercial relations, but the relations between the Saudis and each one of these places were different. With Bahrain, the crown prince and Prince Bandar who was the Saudi ambassador here, they were very close. Those two were royal families. The families weren't close but there were members who were close. The Saudis and the Bahrainis had worked out a development and cost sharing agreement on an oil field that lay between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. That had been done under the aegis of the Brits, but that was the relationship. The money actually was paid from that field directly to the Saudis and then a little commission existed that decided exactly how much went to the Bahrainis. That had been in existence for a long time, with a British advisor probably sitting by.

In Qatar, the little thumb that sticks up out there, they were Wahhabis. They were co-religions with the Saudis. The other people were just normal Sunni Muslims. So religious connections between the royal family in Qatar and the Saudis. In the UAE and Oman there had been some border problems between the Saudis and those places. The Saudis had at one time laid claim to an oasis called El Heim which was actually Abu Dhabi territory and had been under the Sheik of Abu Dhabi. The Saudis had actually sent troops down there. There had been a confrontation, no one got shot, but nevertheless there had been a confrontation and finally the Saudis had backed off. The Saudis had backed the Imam in...

Q: We were talking about Gulf issues...

COUNTRYMAN: So, there were tensions between Saudi Arabia and Oman. Oman had always been more or less a nation, but there had always been distinction between the coastal Muscat and the interior of Oman. Like many countries where we back the idea of a total national identity rather than loyalty to a local tribal leader which was the order of the day. One of the things that the British were anxious to do in Oman was to make sure that they left that a functioning and united country. The Imam of Oman in the interior had revolted against the Sultan. The British had put that down, but the Saudis had been somewhat supportive of the Imam. One of the members of the Imamate revolt had been thrown out and actually was a guest of the Emir of the eastern province in Saudi Arabia. You would go to dinner at the emir's and there would be this Imam Ghalib who would be sitting there. He was an imam who had been kicked out as a result of this revolution. We really seldom spoke to him, but it was interesting to know was he there; what seemed to be the relationship between him and the eastern province.

Q: Now you had Arabic language training and you were getting this opportunity to travel separately, using your language a lot?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes a great deal. I would use it obviously for arrangements, taxicabs, hotel, souks to sell things, and for lower level people. I was not one of those people who was going to by-golly use my Arabic even if it caused bad feeling with the person I was talking to. There were some of the Bahrainis particularly whose English was so good, and they felt more comfortable with English. Many of the sheiks and many of the people in some of the smaller Emirates did not speak any English whatsoever. I always had an interpreter but I prefer to do those things on my own. Since the kind of things I was doing was not hard-edged negotiation where I had to be careful with every word, it was more important I thought, and so did the Consul General, that the tone that I could establish by speaking Arabic was more important than the absolute last nicety of the language. I was the first American official I think, who called on the Sheik of Umm al-Quwain. The talk with him was less substantive. The talk was to talk about, and he was very well read about America. He had already been briefed by his advisors and he would ask, I have forgotten what the questions were, but obviously questions about current events in the United States. He was a charming man, totally without normal education but obviously a clever, I mean there was no university or even high school, but a smart, intelligent kind of guy. So the conversation with him was completely in Arabic for the best of PR reasons; it was a feel good session for him to say "Gee I talked with this guy from this country who speaks good Arabic, knows all the niceties, is charming. You know, Americans are good people."

Q: When the Consul General or you traveled, did you take a senior local with you as an interpreter.

COUNTRYMAN: No. It fell out that we none of us knew who we were going to talk to. It fell out that way. Occasionally I think I may have used an interpreter or had gotten somebody in to make a particular point. That was more the exception than the rule.

Q: Getting back to American issues in Dhahran, were there any particular consular issues that were a problem.

COUNTRYMAN: Well the original reason why we had a Consul General there was literally for consul narrowly defined. We had at one time 10,000 Americans working for Aramco in the eastern province. As a favor to the oil industry, to make these people feel better to see the American flag flying over the consulate, and to be able to get their passports taken care of was something very good. It was something that they wanted and we provided. Aramco had its own very good liaison with the Saudi police and the eastern province governorate. If an Aramco individual got in trouble outside of the gate that was usually handled without consular intervention. What became more important as time went on and more and more things were happening, we had Americans who were not under the Aramco umbrella in the eastern province. That became of course a potential consular problem. These would be petty things. Alcohol of course was prohibited, but if someone smuggled liquor and had some liquor in their house, usually there was no penalty. The liquor was just seized. In a particularly egregious case a person's visa might be pulled and they were booted. We didn't have any incarceration issues.

Q: As you are looking into at the Gulf, were American business people, outside of oil, making their presence known?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, there were a number of people were coming in. We were looking for areas where there would be openings for American business. Now American business, although that was a period where they weren't that sophisticated as some of the other countries were in making a foreign presence, there were so many reasons why we would develop in the United States rather than go overseas. They were worried about the political aspects. But there were opportunities for American business. Some of them we took the lead in. One of the things that was obvious was that these countries had a lot of money, and had a lack of water and no food production. So we were very helpful to a couple of American companies in building desalinization plants in Qatar and the UAE. We got the University of Arizona to send a team to the Emirates even before independence. They set up an experimental station on a strip of land in Abu Dhabi for desert crops. I am not sure that even today this is actually that the tomatoes they make are cheaper than the tomatoes you might have flown in from southern Italy, but it gives them the pride of raising it on their own. The University of Arizona was very sophisticated in their approach. It is a way you can grow crops by putting a tube over the top of the ground and instead of irrigating all at once, you have a slow drip method to irrigate. An agricultural engineering problem that is beyond my ken, but I found this. They would have sort of like these geodesic domes instead of hot houses that were covered over with a particular kind of plastic that would sweat and create possibly a hot house environment inside for plants. So we did that.

Q: Let's turn to the staffing of the American mission. Hermann Eilts was the ambassador to Saudi Arabia while you were there; but who was the DCM?

COUNTRYMAN: Bill Stoltzfus. He later went on to be ambassador to Kuwait [Editor's Note: William A. Stoltzfus, Jr. presented his credentials in Kuwait in February 1972 and finished his tour in January 1976. Simultaneously he was accredited to Bahrain (February 1972-June 1974); Qatar (March 1972-August 1974); Oman (April 1972-July 1974); and UAE (March 1972-June 1974).]

Q: Any other people that were assigned there at the time that you particularly remember? Dick Murphy was in the political section wasn't he?

COUNTRYMAN: Dick Murphy had just left. I think Dick Murphy was there when I arrived and then he became country director for the peninsula. I think he was there the whole time. Then Joe Twinam, who had been in Arabic with me was in the political section in Dhahran rather briefly. When Dick Murphy went back...at that time Arabian peninsula affairs did not have a gulf desk officer. It had a Saudi officer and maybe somebody for Kuwait and somebody for economics. But Dick Murphy came back to Washington. The tempo was really picking up on the Gulf, he insisted that he had a desk officer for the Gulf. He knew Joe Twinam, so Joe was pulled back, cut his tour short and he became the Gulf desk officer. So, Joe was there rather briefly. I forget the job timing but it was really less than a year.

Q: So Murphy is seeing this coming and he is beginning to make some administrative arrangements back in Washington.

COUNTRYMAN: With all due respect to Dick, I think the department saw it. I mean there was so much going on, and it would only get worse. I mean a lot of it was administrative and obviously that would be something that NEA/EX (the Bureau of Near East Affairs Office of the Executive Director) would be working on, but the whole question of setting up the posts there had a substantive aspect. I mean how are we going to do it. Were we going to have an ambassador in everywhere? How it worked out, what we did is Bill Stoltzfus went to Kuwait and was accredited to Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman. Then we put chargés in those places. This is in 1971 when they went independent.

Actually I left in the summer, July or August of '71, and independence was in September. Phil Griffin, who I had replaced, was sent out to replace me in Bahrain very briefly. He went to be the chargé in Abu Dhabi.

Q: So, looking ahead here is NEA faced with establishing four new embassies and authorizing new positions to staff those embassies. I suspect that put great pressure on Dhahran to report admin-related information. Did you have any sense of what buildings might be under consideration as embassies?

COUNTRYMAN: Well the latter part of my tour in Dhahran, I won't say it was exclusively, but it was heavily admin oriented. There were some people in the department who came out. But I went to Bahrain, to Doha, to Abu Dhabi where it seemed quite clear we would set up something, and Oman. I had I remember a list of about 1001 things the admin people wanted to know. Prices, you know what is it going to cost us for locals. Can you get this? Can you get that? You know, airline thing. What are the hotels? What do you suggest about a building? Obviously we are going to rent. Where should the embassy be? Where is the ambassador going to live? Where is staff going to live? All these things had to be answered. In all these places I had made recommendations. Most of them were what we eventually did. Some were not. In Oman interestingly enough, Oman being so underdeveloped, there was just literally no place you could possibly go for either an embassy or a chancery except one place called the Big Zawawi which was owned by the Zawawi family. I had put in a report that this very historic old building, we might be able to go to the Zawawi family and work something out, because they had moved out of it. Oman was thinking of making it a museum. That is then the building that I moved in to in 1981. It was the Big Zawawi that they had taken as the ambassador's residence. The ambassador lived on the top floor, and the rest of the building was embassy offices.

Q: That is a great story. So you were heavily involved in admin work. In those final days were people coming out from Washington and going around with you?

COUNTRYMAN: I did one kind of master tour with somebody, I forget who, somebody from NEA/EX, or somebody from Washington. But most of the time it was stuff they relied on us. Our admin officer, Bob Deason, went with me on a couple of occasions. It was a question of fill out the form for us. Here are the questions. These were not, I mean these were queries but they were not esoteric. I mean they were what is the cost for a driver? What are the possibilities for a house? Obviously that could be better if you could actually see it, but you take so many square feet, is there funning water. I mean there was a lot you could do by mail.

Q: Did you get any sense of when FSI and the bureau finally glommed on to the idea that they would be opening these new posts and they would need additional language officers?

COUNTRYMAN: I don't think it was. I think it was the thing began so modestly, and I think there was a sense of maybe that you didn't need Arabic that much, that many people spoke English, which was wrong. Of course the British had been there, but the British had Arabists in every one of those posts. Some of their best Arabists were in the Gulf. But I think the idea was you just take them from someplace else, because I know that I wasn't that much concerned with the personnel aspect of it. I remember people in Washington saying the NEA was told well all these new posts opening up, you are not going to get the people. You are going to have to take it out of your own hide. You know, take it out of Cairo or Rabat.

Q: Shift positions; get new positions.

COUNTRYMAN: I think actually they were allowing a couple of new positions, but basically it was take it out of your own hide.

Q: Then as these new posts were set up, they probably were very sparsely manned, a chargi½, a political officer, and a couple of admin officers down there.

COUNTRYMAN: That's right.

Q: Is there anything else we need to look at for Dhahran in terms of U.S. interests, instructions to the post, living conditions?

COUNTRYMAN: Well one of the other things we did back then, of course we had a military presence there. This was a military training mission. Because Riyadh, there was no presence in Riyadh except for a small liaison offices. The embassy was in Jeddah. It was only later the embassy moved to Riyadh, the national capital. The U.S. military training mission was in Dhahran. We had a brigadier general there. From my back patio of my house in Dhahran I could literally see the field. I mean it was a good distance away. It was open desert, and I could see the airfield. Dhahran had an international airport, and a portion of that was a Saudi air base. This brigadier general who was in the Army was in charge of all of our training, because of course, we were doing the tanks, automatic weapons, it was Air Force deployment. He was in charge of that. Well, he of course reported up the line to the Department of Defense, but he would sit in on our staff meetings. I was usually the one, I would sit in on his staff meetings. All of it was just sort of local housekeeping, you know, what's going on. They would be aware, we would brief them politically on what was going on in the Gulf, and they would tell us what they were doing with the Saudis and military training. So that was another sort of portfolio we had. We didn't control them but it was liaison. We were Americans with common interests.

It was a fairly modest operation. There was a time when the Saudis wanted an advanced fighter. They wanted an F, in those days it was the old 101...102...101...F-100. As an Air Force guy I should remember that. Anyway, the Saudis wanted to buy this airplane, and we decided it was a little too thick for their blood. We got a lot of opposition from Israel to put it frankly. So the British sold them a comparable airplane called the Lightning. [Editor's Note: The British Aircraft Corporation Lightning was a supersonic jet fighter ordered by Saudi Arabia in December 1965 with the first units delivered the following year. The aircraft was noted for its great speed and unpainted natural metal exterior finish.] The British had the training program. Of course, the British military training mission was at Dhahran air base. They were of course, very close with our people, and they helped each other. We knew the Brits there. That was another thing we looked in on. You know, how was the lightning program going.

Q: Were we the only diplomatic mission on the east coast?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. We were very hospitable and occasionally a British vice consul would come down to the eastern province because there were some Brits who worked at Aramco or British businessmen in the eastern province. We would give them an office and let them set up and you know, do favors. The Germans had a big project in the Kufra...was it the Kufra oasis? Anyway there was an oasis south of Dhahran where they were rationalizing the various elements of it and coming up with a water project that was done by HOCHTIEF, the big German construction company. So the German vice consul from their embassy would come out from time to time. I would invite him over for lunch. We'd give them an office and let the Germans come in and get their passports renewed.

Q: Do you think the other embassies in Jeddah sent somebody down just to check on American activities in eastern Saudi Arabia?

COUNTRYMAN: They did not. I think we felt, it was a strikingly anomalous position we had because the Consul General was not an ambassador. We were not accredited to these places yet. I think Hermann Eilts...remember the Consul General in Dhahran reported to Hermann Eilts...but Hermann Eilts was really good about letting us run the Gulf contract rather than he constantly intervening on us. But I think that in deference to him it was not appropriate for us to have diplomatic dealings as the consulate general. I think to answer your question, if a French diplomat wanted to know what was going on in the gulf, and rather than going to our embassy in Paris, they wanted to go to our embassy in Jeddah, to have on the spot comment, he would go to the political officer, or to Hermann Eilts. Hermann would say our Consul General in Dhahran reports that and give them a briefing.

Q: After Dhahran we turn an interesting page. In 1971 you go to Libya as the chief of the economic section. Here you are using your FSI economic training. Libya at this time has got to be rather interesting because Qadhafi has just come in. You have got the Wheelus airbase in country. There is talk about nationalizing the oil industry. What was the environment when you arrived? Before we start off, how did you get that assignment?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, the thought was that I would take a little hiatus because I knew so much about the Gulf, and was being considered for one of the chargĳ½s in one of these Gulf posts. Which would have been, I think, in terms of foreign service rank and face time, a great assignment. But I was a little concerned about being so associated with the Gulf. I didn't object, as this was being bandied about. This was way before I was up before transfer. People said, "Yes, that is a point. Maybe you ought to do something else." There was always this thing that I had not used all that much, but I was one of our experts in oil. I mean I had gone through this FSI program. About this same time, Ambassador Palmer who was assigned as the ambassador to...Joe Palmer who had been Assistant Secretary for Africa, had been our Ambassador to Nigeria where, of course, there was oil. He had a lot of clout and he said, "Look, I want as an economic officer, I want someone who really is first rate on the technical side of economics, who knows oil field economics, who can talk to the oil field people. Obviously I will be talking to the big guns, but I want an oil man." They said, "Well this guy Countryman is your man." He said, "Yes, I want Countryman." Those two things, my self...the sense that maybe another Gulf coast was a little too much and would be getting too specialized, and a great interest in me by Joe Palmer in Libya led to my going to Libya. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Joseph Palmer presented his credentials to Libya in October 1969 and departed post in November 1972.]

Q: Now who did you replace?

COUNTRYMAN: Jim Placke.

Q: What was the environment like when you walked in the door on the petroleum side?

COUNTRYMAN: Let's talk about across the board. I think the embassy was struggling to come to a modus vivendi with Qadhafi. To backtrack just a little bit, this was one of these cases where it wasn't supposed to have happened, and it hit us, everybody, Embassy, CIA, military...the coup against King Idris came out of the blue and you know, wasn't supposed to happen. We weren't prepared for it. Qadhafi...it was difficult, because he was deciding who he was going to be and what Libya was, so it was this very awkward dance in deciding well just how much can we do? How can we handle these things? What is the relationship going to be? Can we make him a friend? What had been decided early on was the policy of transfer of technology. Libya was so backward, but had so much money because of the oil that we would be their friend and help them develop the country, not through the normal AID process but this was like we had in Saudi Arabia, a joint commission or a way of funneling in, making available to them all kinds of American technological expertise outside the oil industry. It became very clear right from the start that the reason that was never going to work is, at the top of...Qadhafi was delighted with that, but at the top of his list was military hardware. That is what he wanted. He wanted tanks, planes. Well, if that was not going to be the case, then he wasn't interested in what we had to peddle, because he saw it as a political liability to have a kind of a close relationship with the Americans.

Q: This is the time of Nasser in Egypt, so he is more on the Nasser...

COUNTRYMAN: And he is very much Arab unity. He wanted to, he as a matter of fact, signed some meaningless papers for unity with Egypt. Then he got Syria, sort of unity declarations rather than actual amalgamations of countries. He also began to do a little green book and began playing the Islamic card.

Q: Little green book?

COUNTRYMAN: The little red book was the sayings of Mao. Well he published, I think I have a copy at home, the sayings of Qadhafi, quotations from the Koran, used politically. He was not what we would call a Muslim fundamentalist. He was using Islam for political purposes, whereas I think people like Khomeini and similar people are using politics to forward what they would call an Islamic purpose. Qadhafi's was a little more cynical. But it was a difficult time for the embassy. We didn't have much access to the Libyans. American business was not there in any great...there wasn't much American business. There never had been, apart from the oil industry. But because the political side of things was going to be so dormant or trouble ridden, the policy at that time was to try to do as much as we could in the economic field. Intellectual, USIA things were out. People didn't want to go to the United States. Some did, but that was not an area where we could do an awful lot, but the economics seemed to be a big thing.

Shortly after I arrived, my big job as head of the economic section was to organize our participation in the Tripoli international fair. This was a commercial fair. Because of the political climate, Washington and the Department of Commerce were not particularly anxious to put a lot of money in it. That is the way these things are done. The United States government would really be given a building by the Tripoli international fair committee, but you would have to pay a certain fee, an entrance fee. Then all of the flats and decorations for some of the interiors that were not supplied by the companies would be something the United States government would pay for.

We were so successful the whole economic section was awarded a group distinguished honor award for organizing U.S. participation in the Tripoli international fair. What we did is we got the Department of Commerce to give us - for about two months- an exhibits expert, who was everything from a logistician to a carpenter. We used people from the Embassy and its GSO office. I mean literally set up the participation. We got local business and local oil companies to give us some money, and we recruited American companies to participate in the Tripoli international fair.

I spent a lot of time on that. Of course the other thing the ambassador was very interested in, I met constantly with the oil companies. At that time there were posting price negotiations going on with Libya about what the price of Libyan crude would be. This was very important. What happened at that time, there was less discipline among OPEC. Now it is more or less established that a particular kind of Abu Dhabi sweet crude would go for this amount. All of this is standardized through OPEC channels. When there is an increase, everybody moves together. If the Abu Dhabi crude goes up one cent a barrel then the Saudi Saffani goes up two cents a barrel. All of this is pre-arranged. In those days it was much more chaotic, and an increase in Libyan crude might mean that the Shah was saying "Hey, wait a minute!" Or the Saudi...it was much more...Or the Nigerians or the Venezuelans.

So it was a thing I did a lot of reporting on that, and the oil companies were very good about briefing me on their negotiations. They would give me highly proprietary information and business confidential information, and I had to arrange with Washington...in a very special way - a special reporting channels - about how this would be handled. If it was outside the normal security questions, it was who you could share this with, foreign governments, other oil companies. I have forgotten all of the rules now, but there were very clear rules that I had to insist on to Washington only because if they wanted me to get the information from the oil companies, this is what they were telling me I had to do, and if Washington let me down, they would cut me off. So I had to in a diplomatic way explain to the Office of Fuels and Energy and NEA, or whoever was listening in Washington, listen this is how you have to handle these cables. We even had a special designation on cables. It was called... It had a code word. It was like "secret oil barrel" or something. Any of those messages got special handling.

Q: This raises an interesting question. Libya was in the Bureau of African affairs at the time, not NEA (the Bureau of Near East Affairs). How was the control from the Washington desk? Did they understand some of these Arab and oil issues?

COUNTRYMAN: For the Maghreb (Arabic term referring to northwest Africa), there were three country directorates. Egypt was always NEA, but Libya was a country directorate all by itself. Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco was another country directorate as it is today. But Libya was its own country directorate.

Q: Do you recall who the country director, who was in charge?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, he later went on to be ambassador to Iceland, a very nice thin sort of fellow, came out there. I have forgotten what his name was. [Editor's Note: probably Jim Blake, ambassador to Iceland from September 1976 to September 1978.]

Q: With the lack of political dialogue, you are focused on doing things like the fair. You are spending a lot of time with the oil companies. What other sorts of economic issues are you focused on?

COUNTRYMAN: Well that was it. I had a very fine junior officer who was very good. Fred Makelround, he is now retired, who was one of the early people. This was a time when economic modeling was coming up and he could do this. We did an economic model of the Libyan economy, with him doing the work. Then it was sent off to Washington for it to be tweaked and you know a little data added and so on. So we worked on that. Then we also did a comprehensive list cooperating with the Brits of all of the projects open for bid in Libya which would be to American companies. These were roads; these were airports, yes a list of government contracts. I did a lot of trade promotion. My door was always open, and the American businessmen would come in. Water, we had a water desalinization group who came out there. There was one group that was coming in, they were called the rainmakers. It was the time where you would use dry ice in the clouds and create rain. The Libyans had an oasis in the Qattara depression, remember in the Second World War the Brits and the Germans fought over the Qattara Depression. They had a multi million dollar agricultural project, and we got some of those contracts. That was something we followed, I went down there.

Q: Actually Libya is a former Italian colony. Did the Italian business people and the Italian Embassy have a...

COUNTRYMAN: They had a commanding position. The Italians still despite the, I think it is because some of the old commercial families stayed on even though King Idris was thrown out and had an earlier relationship with these commercial families. One of the big Libyan companies, a cousin lived across the street from our house in Libya. A lot of Italians would come over there for dinner. So the Italians were the leading force.

Q: If we were having a strained political dialogue with Libya was it similar for some of the other Europeans?

COUNTRYMAN: Well of course, nobody had an easy time. I think we were particularly the target of their wrath because we were the Americans.

Q: And we had Wheelus airbase. That is closed down by now?

COUNTRYMAN: That is another story. That is an important story which I want to come to. But, before I forget, the British at one point during the time I was there...the whole question of sorting things out in the Gulf was coming along. The perception was evolved that the British in effect let the Shah take over one of those disputed islands in the Gulf. As a retaliation, because he was an Arab unity man, Qadhafi nationalized British Petroleum. So that...and British Petroleum had a very small element of that was Bunker Hunt, which was an American company. So, the Bunker Hunt section of British Petroleum was nationalized. Of course the British were very upset about this. I got very involved. The British wanted our support. What could we do? I mean we are kind of keeping our heads down because of course we had Occidental, Exxon, we had a lot of big oil companies of our own in Libya. I mean the Libyan oil strike was basically American. So the fear, of course, was that Qadhafi was going to nationalize us. Because British Petroleum was so small, and it was the British, I reported that my judgment was that the Libyans thought they could get away with it. They felt they had to do something that Arab Unionists was political rather than an economic one. They would not nationalize American companies. They would run into problems marketing. There were all kinds of reasons why they wouldn't do it. We got a lot of reports that they were going to nationalize tomorrow, nationalize Occidental. The word I got from the oil companies and my own sleuthing was that they were not going to nationalize and they never did. But at the time it was touch and go. It was of course a thing that Washington wanted to know, it was on me all the time, what is this latest rumor we hear.

Q: And your contacts with Libyan authorities, who were you touching base with most often?

COUNTRYMAN: I had very poor access, as we all did. The ministry of petroleum people, I had a couple of contacts there, but they were working level, lower level people. I only contacted them because I wanted to set their mind at ease. I didn't want them to think I was some kind of a spy or I was doing something that I shouldn't be doing. So I would call on them to talk to them. These were working level people.

Q: So the general standoff applied to even the petroleum bureaucracy on the Libyan side. They weren't very eager to see us either. They would deal with oil and gas companies, but talking to embassies was not attractive to them.

COUNTRYMAN: For instance, the Venezuelans had an Embassy there. They had a Venezuelan ambassador because of the oil. This Venezuelan was a very charming, a good looking Latin kind of guy who loathed his assignment. He loved to go dancing, had a very charming and pretty wife. For him the diplomatic corps was something like maybe it was in the '20s. He had a wretched house. He was probably told if you do this, the next go around we will send you to Belgium or Norway or something where your true talents could be developed. He was there for one reason only.

The Germans had someone from their energy ministry who was assigned there. Because I went to school in Germany, spoke German, plus we later became friends, the German ambassador asked Joe Palmer if their energy expert could come and call on me. This guy came and called on me. I was supposed to be an expert, and I knew a lot of things that I could talk with the oil men, but he was a real expert. A Germanic kind who knew oil economics backward and forward. An awfully nice fellow, so we struck it up. He would come over. He was useful to me because of his great analytical mind. I would maybe, have the ideas and the facts, but he could put them in a row better than I could. So it was a good relationship. We had this thing worked out - his English and my German were about the same - and we would trade off, English and German. He called me one day and we started speaking German over the phone. All of a sudden I hear this voice in English say, "You speak English or we cut you off. Speak English!" Of course they were tapping my phone. I said, "OK." I talked to him over the phone, "Talk to you later, it was nice talking to you," and hung up.

Q: In a lot of diplomatic situations I have seen, action officers from different embassies get together for a regular lunch or something and pool their information. You are talking about kind of one-on-one sharing with other embassies.

COUNTRYMAN: And with the DCM in the British embassy, a guy named Michael Hammond, who later went on to be an ambassador, who was a very good economist, Cambridge. Their oil portfolio was vested in him as DCM rather than somebody in the economic section. So he and I met very regularly. Can we take a break? Then the most important thing I want to talk about in Libya is probably the Wheelus Air Force Base thing, because that led to my being kicked out. There was a lot of unpleasantness. That was a big deal.

Q: You were just about to talk about Wheelus Air Force Base and how that impacted on your career.

COUNTRYMAN: Some very brief background. After the Second World War, I think at a time when NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was being set up, the British, of course, were instrumental in this because they had the presence in Libya following the war more than we did. There was an air force base that they had developed that became a NATO air force base. But we were the ones that were more clearly identified with it. The reason for it being there is it is a NATO training base because so much of the time the weather in Europe is bad. Even if you are a good pilot and you know how to fly instruments you do want some time when you can get people in the early days of training on an aircraft to have clear weather, and you can't depend upon it in Europe. I think there was also some strategic idea of lengthening the presence. That is beside the point. The point was that by the time Qadhafi overthrew King Idris, we had had a long standing arrangement to use Wheelus air force base, and it was extraterritorial really. It didn't fly an American flag but it was our base. There were American MP's at the gate. There might be a Libyan policeman with them, but in fact it was an American air force base, under NATO auspices.

Q: Was there a SOFA in place, a status of forces agreement?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, and there was a treaty, an agreement with the Libyans for the use of this base. It had no end date to it. David Newsome was our ambassador when Qadhafi overthrew King Idris. One of the things he did very wisely is...as we worked to get the relationship going with Qadhafi. He got an agreement from Washington within 24 hours, an agreement in principle that we would vacate Wheelus, thinking that this would prevent any bitterness. We gave that to them, and we moved out of Wheelus very quickly. That was behind us. About a year before I left Libya, this would have been 1972, the Libyans came to us and said, "Hey, we still have an agreement on Wheelus. We want to formally abrogate that agreement." We said, "Fine." They had accompanied that though with a note verbale, a diplomatic note, with a huge bill for environmental degradation and damage to the reputation of the government of Libya, millions and millions of dollars. We immediately countered with a bill that was exactly the same amount of money for what it cost us to precipitously move out of Wheelus, and then we began negotiations. They were conducted by Joe Palmer, who was our ambassador at the time. On the Libyan side, the Libyans didn't take somebody from the ministry to head their delegation, they took a member of their revolutionary command council. These were seven of the original officers who overthrew King Idris. One of them was a Major Jeroud who was a particularly, and I choose my words carefully, thuggish individual. He was in charge of negotiations, and he was the number two after Qadhafi. So we began these negotiations. Ambassador Palmer was one of these old style diplomats who had been through negotiations and was determined that since this was probably going to be his last post, that he is going to do this in a manner that was proper, dignified and right. It was the only thing that he really, he was somewhat frustrated because he for a very senior diplomat here he is in a country where he didn't do anything with. This was something that was a challenge. He very carefully briefed all of us on how we were going to conduct these negotiations. He obviously would be the chair, so would Jeroud. We obviously had a sense of who else the Libyans would have there and they would be totally unimportant, just people to occupy seats. It would be Jeroud talking to Qadhafi and other members of the revolutionary command council. Joe Palmer wanted the political officer, Charles Marthinsen, to be his number two, his deputy. They worked out all kinds of political strategy, what Charles might say at some time, be called upon to give a briefing, and so on and so forth. I was the third member of the delegation. He wanted me as the technical man. I presided over what we came to call "the book." It was one of these three ring binder things about like this, or maybe I had two of them. We corresponded obviously by cable with Defense Department and its historians. We had the whole history of the base. We had the cost of putting in the hangars, the depth of the concrete on the runways, anything you wanted to know about Wheelus air force and its history, we had. I was the custodian of that book. The point was to...in the course as the negotiations unfolded, if there was a technical point, we would out staff them and Palmer could turn to me and I could get tab C that said what the depth of the runway was or how much we had spent on this. The efforts we had made to clean up bombs or what we had done for water purification, anything that the human mind could have conceived of. The Defense Department who, of course, wanted to negotiate this well too, provided me with this data. So I had this book, and that was my job at the negotiations. One day we were at a particularly nasty point in the negotiations with Ambassador Palmer being very quiet and very diplomatic and Major Jeroud pounding the table and ranting and using foul language. He made some kind of a statement; I scribbled something on a piece of paper and handed it over to Ambassador Palmer. It was a technical point, again my bailiwick. It was a good point to defuse the political anger. So, Ambassador Palmer said when we came back that, "You made the statement that, and I think the secretary has some information on that in his tab B." blah blah, so I took the floor. Just before I was going to speak, English was the language of negotiation, and the Arabic was being translated into English by a Libyan interpreter. Both Charles was an Arabist and so was I, so we were listening to this very carefully. Jeroud turned to someone on his side and said something to the effect that, "That little twit just called me a liar." I said, "Ambassador Palmer, before I address this point, may I make a point. I believe the Major feels his been called a liar. I want to assure him that I did not call him a liar but that he was not in possession of the facts." I said that in Arabic to him. Well, he looked at me as if thinking "If I could kill this guy, I would kill him." The negotiations went forward and we got what we wanted, which was a mutual write off. I think the final wording was the Libyan government has presented documentation that the cost to the Libyan government comes out to \$8,000, 925.33. And the United States has tabled an accompanying document that shows the cost to the United States government is \$8,000,925.33, and that by mutual agreement there will be a mutual write off, whatever that legal language was. This treaty is no longer in effect. So that passed us by.

Jumping forward to the end of my tour, I had met in Libya, the secretary of our office in Benghazi, a young lady by the name of Elena Fashan who was David Mack's secretary. She and I, it was love at first sight. She and I used to see each other quite a bit. The Embassy did not have a courier flight, so they would give...she became the courier between the Benghazi office and Tripoli, mainly so that she could come and see me. We decided to get married. About a year before I was going to be transferred, the Libyans reduced the number of people you could have on embassy staffs across the board in all embassies. The net effect of it was we closed our Benghazi office, so my wife-to-be, we pulled every string in the book, got her assigned to Tunis, so I could fly over and see her. So we were in the process of getting married. I went to see her, and we were all ready to get married, the date set and everything. We were going to get married in Malta. It was just charming, both of us were Catholics, and it would be very nice. I was there talking to her making some final arrangements. I arrived back...She was given the job of a regional secretary. She worked in the consular section in Tunis, but if there was a need for a secretary some place in Africa, she would go and fill the slot. She had already finished a TDY (temporary duty) in Ouagadougou, and was told to go to Khartoum, and was going to be the scribe, and was the scribe for all of the proceedings of the trial of people who murdered Noel, remember the Ambassador and DCM who were murdered in Sudan. She got on an airplane with me in Tunis and flew to Tripoli. I got off. She was going to fly to Cairo and then on down to Khartoum. I got off the airplane in Libya, Tripoli. The Libyans had come to a decision while I was away that henceforth all passports had to be in Arabic. Passports in Arabic! I mean the Libyan visa that I had was in Arabic, but your passport had to be in Arabic. You have seen passports, they are in English. They wanted the United States government to print a passport that would be in English and Arabic. And every other government. I arrived, and they refused me entry. I couldn't get in. I was told get back on the airplane, your visa and passport are not appropriate. Well, Tunis Air like all air carriers was responsible for me, so I got back on the airplane, and my future wife said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Oh I just couldn't be away from you." So we went to Cairo and went to the Embassy and everyone got all upset. I flew back to Tripoli, again couldn't get in. The embassy...Charles Marthinsen, the political officer, met me and tried to get me in and could not. So I went on to Tunis, and stayed in my wife's apartment while she was gone. The Embassy in Tunis sort of took care of me, I was like an extra complement until we sorted this out. Meanwhile, we made a number of representations and so on and so forth, and it was very clear that this rule was, one, arbitrary, two, was not clear. A lot of other countries were not doing this. We got some inside information from guess who, that they were delighted. They hadn't instituted this for me, but there were a number of foreign diplomats that they wanted to get rid of. They were delighted to get me and there was no way they were going to let me back in. The Department, and I think the Department made a mistake here, so did the Embassy, it was determined to get me back in. I was never clear why they were so determined to do this. So I stayed for about a month in Tunis, and got a message telling me to book a flight from Tunis to Paris and get on a particular flight, they had already made a reservation for me from Paris to Tripoli, because the French Ambassador was going to be returning from leave on that flight, and I was to enter with him and claim...we knew that the French did not have a French passport in Arabic, and I was to piggyback on his presence. I said, "It's the Libyans. They are going to let in the French ambassador and bar me again. This is silly." But you take orders. So I went off to Paris, left a couple of days early, visited some of my old haunts in Paris, nice time, good meals, hopped on this plane, said hello to the French ambassador whom I knew very slightly, sat down, arrived in Tripoli. Charles Marthinsen is again there to get me in. He was under orders to get me in period. I was under orders to get in. So the Libyans took Charles and myself to a little office in the airport and ordered me to get back on the airplane. I said, "I am sorry, I'm not a free agent here. I can not get back on the airplane. This is my post and I am here." Charles Marthinsen said, "He is here, and you have no right to do this." The Libyan in civilian clothes who worked for, I guess, Libyan intelligence rather than their immigration service was obviously upset and really didn't know what to do. I said, "I'm not moving." There were these two Libyan two rather big guys, guards. He said, "You have got to get on the airplane." I said, "I am not moving." Now, I had been told that when they put their hands on me, I was to go. Whether that meant hitting with a billy club or just threatening me...going like this. When force was applied to me, then I would get up and go on the airplane. But not before. So literally for 20 minutes this game of chicken happened there. These guys sort of leaning toward me. I said, "I am sorry. I am not moving. this is my post and I am going to my house. I am a properly accredited diplomat. If you don't believe me, Charles can... Finally this one guy came over and put his hand on me. Charles made one more comment and this guy behind the table blew up and said in Arabic, "Finished. That is enough." The other one grabbed Charles and lifted him up out of the seat and frog marched him out to the airplane with me. By this time I had had force applied, I was walking. The guy was next to me very nice sort of smiling saying I did my thing. We were walking out to the airplane and Charles was being frog marched. Charles is rather a slight fellow. Literally this Libyan had lifted him under the arms and Charles' feet were not touching the ground, so he was carrying him out to the airplane. Charles was put on the same airplane with me and sat next to me and we were off to Tunis.

Q: Going back to Paris!

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, going back to Paris. Because it was a return flight and it was going to leave in another hour. We were the only ones in there because they hadn't boarded the other passengers yet. They put us on the airplane. Charles was sitting there, saying, "Well, we did our thing." We were calm and so on. He said, "What hotel are you staying on?" He had been in Paris a couple of times and all the rest and so on. All of a sudden a couple of more Libyans come on board and approach Charles Marthinsen and said, "You, get off the airplane." I thought, are they going to shoot him? "Get him off the airplane."

Well evidently the Libyans wanted not to just put him out, but they wanted to take him back to the Embassy and then formally declare him persona non grata because of ungentlemanly and beastly activity [Editor's Note: literally persona non grata means "an unwelcome person", a term used in diplomacy with a specialized and legally defined meaning]. They had a whole, I never saw a copy, but they did a note verbale that formally declared Charles Marthinsen persona non grata. They wanted to have the opportunity to do that and needed him off the airplane. He was declared persona non grata and given 72 hours to leave. As a final little story, I finally got back to Tunis to wait there for further developments. Charles said, "If I go out to the airport, they are going to harass me, if I am persona non grata. Would the Department go for this, have the embassy drive me from Tripoli to the Tunisian border and I will cross." That Tunisian-Libyan border post was hardly ever used. There were a couple of Tunisian workers there. It was a very quiet post. "And I'll just simply exit. Then the embassy car from Tunis can meet me and I will fly out of Tunis to come back. I want the dignity of being able...because they will be laying for me at the Tripoli airport." The Department said, "That is a good idea." So Jock McDonald who was the political officer in Tunis, he and I got into a car and drove to the Libyan border. The embassy car comes from the other side. There was a no man's land between the border points, you have got the one checkpoint here and one here and there was an area, a city block between in the desert. We saw Charles Marthinsen coming through with two suitcases. He walks across and comes into Tunisia, and then went back to the States.

Q: To get away with that strategy, he would need plane reservations to keep people focused on the Tripoli airport...

COUNTRYMAN: I think they did dummy reservations and so on and so forth. So that was that, and now the Department was deciding what to do with me. The old saying in the State Department is...the Department said you have been constructively PNG'd [acronym for persona non grata] to me. Of course, we had a lot of correspondence about why this had happened. We brought up the thing with Jeroud. There had been a lot of cable traffic on this. Anyway, I was pretty close to the expiration of my tour of duty anyway, so I was up for a new tour. I thought well, if I am in trouble for having gotten PNG'd...and there was a sense in the Department if you get PNG'd your career is over, or it is made, if you got PNG'd for the right reasons. Well, it became very clear that the Department didn't hold it against me because from Tunis I was in communication with Chris Nelson my personnel officer about planning my next assignment. You know, "Whatever you want, you can have within reason; whatever is appropriate for your rank." I held the rank of FSO-4 at the time. I had always wanted to be a DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). I received a little management experience in Dhahran as DPO (Deputy Principal Officer) and I always thought it would be a good thing to be a DCM. So I said, "Look, I want to be a DCM." At that time there were very few posts in the world where you could be a DCM as an FSO-4. I was a pretty small voice. So the Department got back to me and said, "Well, we have consulted with the ambassador in Libreville, Gabon, and that is an FSO-4 slot, would you like to go as DCM to Libreville." I would be delighted. I knew something about Libreville. I thought it would be kind of fun.

On the other hand, I also thought for awhile I would take over Frank Wisner's job, who was leaving as the economic officer. Work in that job for awhile, and when they replaced him, I would take Jack McDonald's job as the political officer for a new two year tour. But that was sort of plan B or C. I liked the idea of DCM and being in Africa. As I say by that time I had some idea of who the ambassador was and the ambassador wanted me, which I thought was important. When we come to that we can talk about Gabon. John McKesson who was probably one of the finest Foreign Service officers I have ever worked with. Anyway, it was decided. My wife-to-be came back from Khartoum and we went to Malta and got married, and then went on home leave on our honeymoon to the west coast and continued the honeymoon in Libreville.

Q: Not exactly your standard honeymoon, but this is the Foreign Service. Let's go on to Libreville, and you are right, Africa does seem to offer the special experience of being a DCM as a younger officer. I take it you didn't take the DCM course.

COUNTRYMAN: I did, and it was very good. I had the full two week course at the training site in the Virginia mountains...Berkeley Spring? A very lovely place. They really worked us. I mean gosh, we came back at night afterwards and it was very intensive. But it was very good in two respects. I remember I would like to think I didn't need this, but they really made two points. They had this sort of scenarios of things that had gone wrong because a DCM had not fulfilled his job or did too good a job. The two things they stressed, number one, was your compact with the ambassador. You know, know what he expects out of you, because you are his man. Don't let there be any mistakes about what he expects you to do, what degree of authority he is going to give you, which of course varies tremendously. If you are DCM in London and you are DCM in Libreville, you know it is a very different kind of administrative management job you will have, quite apart from what the ambassador's preferences are. The second thing is to not shy away from making the important decisions. You are in a positions where you are going to have to make decisions and you are going to have to make them. The worst thing to do is sort of waffle and think that things will solve themselves.

Q: The DCM course as I understand it is one of the major rights of passage in the Foreign Service. I mean even yourself, you have taken language; you took training in the petroleum, but the DCM course is now to step you to a very special portal and open up some very special opportunities.

COUNTRYMAN: I was the junior person in the DCM course. Gleysteen was going out to Taipei. Roz Ridgeway was going to the Bahamas. There were a number of other quite senior people, some guy was going, I forget his name, to Poland as the DCM. I mean they all held the old FSO-1 or 2 rank. I was a 4, I was very, very junior. I benefited by...and a couple of them had been DCM's before, or had been political counselors in big posts and just had more experience.

Q: The course, then, is a series of case studies. For example, you are the new DCM; the ambassador has been there three years, how do you integrate yourself?

COUNTRYMAN: Exactly, or the admin officer you know, has had a fist fight with one of the communicators because he refused to give the communicator a particular apartment that he wanted, and the communicator's wife is in the hall crying, and the ambassador is down country, what do you do?

Q: I understand these case studies were actually commissioned by FSI from management consultant people at Harvard University. The consultants looked around the Foreign Service and they came up with these scenarios. They were very detailed.

COUNTRYMAN: That's right. They were excellent, and they ran the range of human things and arguments about reporting responsibilities. I mean they were very cogent and very real. I mean you can identify with this. A couple of people said, "Oh, that reminds me of..." not that it was word for word or actor for actor, but I mean I think the names were changed to protect the innocent or protect the guilty as the case may be. But it was an excellent course.

Q: In addition to reading these case studies, was there any role playing?

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, yes, a great deal of that. Or, people would propose a solution. I would do this; I would do that, and these moderators would say, "Well, if you do that, John why don't you play the role of the admin officer," and you know the moderator would complicate the thing. He would add another dimension and say now what has happened is X. What you have done so far is okay, but now.

Q: This was during the Nixon administration. Vietnam is on going, did the course include material with a policy angle?

COUNTRYMAN: Nothing substantive. I mean not policy in places, but it was more of your role as a DCM. I mean it wasn't to educate you about foreign policy. It was strictly what do you do; what can we do to make you a more effective DCM. That's what it was, two weeks. At that time, this was a fairly recent course, fairly recent. It hadn't been in being very long, so maybe they changed it and made it you know, incorporate other things by now, but as it existed, I remember I gave it...we all gave it very high marks.

Q: I understand that one of the reasons they started that course was they had such a high disaster rate for DCMs who just made total fools of themselves or got entangled in their ambassadors and their ambassadors tossed them out. So, you got your wish to go to Libreville, Gabon. French speaking, so you are pretty good at the language?

COUNTRYMAN: My French was,...I had never really studied French formally. I don't think we mentioned this earlier on, but my first wife, I was married in Istanbul and divorced by the time I arrived in Tripoli, was French. We spoke a little bit of French, and when I was at the University in Berlin, I also took a couple of courses in French. When I had been in the tour business in Canada, in French Canada, I used it. I always wanted to have it as something that I could call on. So my French was fairly fluent. I pronounced it fairly well, but it was very spotty, and I made mistakes. But the French put up with it because I knew a lot of slang and I talked a good game, if we could say that. But my French was not particularly good. I remember corresponding with John McKesson who was the ambassador who sent me a very nice letter [Editor's Note: John Alexander McKesson was Ambassador to Gabon from February 1971 to June 1975]. He said, "I know about your career, and I am particularly anxious to have somebody who knows something about petroleum because Gabon has oil. There are a lot of other things I like in your background. You are a New Yorker." He had gone to Columbia. I mean it was a personal thing, it was not in the personnel files. "I look forward to working with you. The only thing I am a little concerned about is your French." He had every right to say this because he had gone to school in French, and was 5-5 in French. When I arrived there, people in the French community loved him, and the word was if he and the French ambassador were called upon to speak at a function, the French ambassador's speech was the second best speech. His French was absolutely impeccable, and he knew all of the things, he knew all of the signals. So he was in a perfect place because, as I'll discuss, at the time I was in Gabon it was more of a French colony than it was when it was under colonial rule. It was a very special kind of place where the French were very strong. So anyway he said, "I am a little concerned about your French." At that time I was on the record with something like a 2+-2+. I wrote him back and I said, "I will do my very best. I will take tapes and take tutoring. I think I might be able to squeak by with a 3-3. I went and took the test at FSI. I forget who the gal was who gave me the test. Of course by this time I had been divorced from my ex-wife who had taught at FSI, French. I felt that they would maybe take it out on me because of the past. But this woman who gave me my test was very charming and very nice. She said, "You need a 3-3 because you are going to be a DCM, but we will see what happens." She gave it to me and said, "You deserve, vous meritez  $\frac{3}{2}$ . Non, non, pas de question, trois, trois." So I got my 3-3. Then of course in Gabon where everybody spoke French, I used French an awful lot, and had a tutor three times a week, a Madame Capule whose husband was a forester. The French had the forestry institute there. She was excellent. By the time I left, my French was really quite good. I've forgotten whether I took a follow-on test in French; maybe I did and got a 4-4? Anyway, it was quite good.

Q: To set the scene now, how was the Embassy organized? How large was it?

COUNTRYMAN: The Embassy at the time was about the smallest Embassy we had. We had an ambassador, a DCM, a combination economic-consular officer. We are talking about American staff. One communicator, two secretaries, one for the ambassador and one the DCM shared with everybody else, a USIS officer, and that was it.

Q: When you went out, how did you see U.S. interests in Gabon? What was the Embassy to do?

COUNTRYMAN: We were...it was never put in these words, but it was do what you can for American business, and get along with the French. The French ambassador was ex-officio the dean of the diplomatic corps. It didn't rotate by seniority.

Q: That is unusual.

COUNTRYMAN: In downtown Libreville which was a charming little city, all of the stores and shops were run by French colon, colonial people. When you went in to buy groceries, there was a French woman behind the counter and you addressed her in French. There were a few Gabonese who were minor clerks or stacking things, but the whole commercial thing downtown - French. It was a French colony. There was a kind of a market outside, an African market with manioc and vegetables where Gabonese and the Senegalese, who were Gypsies in that part of the area, would run this little souk, this market place. The economy, however, was run by the French. It had a normal government. It had a chamber of deputies which was a rubber stamp because this country was presidential, modeled after the French. The president's name was Bongo, Omar Bongo. He took an Arab name so that he could get Arab assistance.

It was one of the wealthiest of all the former French colonies. They had oil; they had manganese. That created an interesting American connection. I have forgotten the name, the French word for it is Union Minière, or something. Anyway it is the big French mining conglomerate, had a place in the interior for the mining of manganese. Thirty or forty percent of the concessions they had was with U.S. Steel. They were in partnership with United States Steel. But the French company, Union Minière, people ran the place. There was no U.S. Steel person there. But they were extremely nice. Jumping ahead, (Hank) Cohen, who was the country director for the Office of West Africa Affairs came out, and I took him on a trip to this comilague, which is an acronym. I have forgotten what that stands for, Compagnie de Gule or something else for manganese. The French couldn't have been nicer, just charming. They lived in this lovely sort of barrack type places with porticos on them and a lovely with vintage wines being served. Ah les Americains, they wanted very much to make sure that we went back with good feelings because of the relationship with U.S. Steel.

But it had oil, manganese, gold and okoumé. Okoumé is a tropical hardwood that is peculiar to Gabon that is very prized in Europe. In the Second World War, that was the big export. What they would do was Gabon, Libreville is at the head of an estuary, and the whole country is cut up by little rivers and streams. What they would do is cut this okoumé in the interior and float it down on the rivers to Libreville. Then they would hook it and put it on ships and send it off to Europe. When the Second World War hit they had a large amount of this okoumé that was held in chained pens in the harbor waiting to be loaded on ships. With the collapse of France and interruption of shipping and everything, that okoumé was not picked up literally for the whole period of the Second World War. The chains rotted and a lot of these logs broke loose. To the day I was there they were still floating around sometimes in the water outside. You were well advised to stay very far away from these logs as they were huge. If you got near one and it hit you...they had a case of a Frenchman who was out there swimming, and one of these big logs came and crushed him. He was just too close and didn't realize how fast the tide was coming in and it crushed him.

So the French had a lot to do there. The French also had a military presence there. The French paratroopers and Foreign Legion had a base there that was a tropical training base. There was always somebody there. They would rotate people every two months on a two month cycle. You would see these people in camouflage outfits, French going by in trucks and so on and so forth. So they were there. The president, President Bongo had been in the colonial administration and was clearly the choice of the French. There was one party, Parti Democratique de Gabon. No opposition. In every ministry you would have a Gabonese minister and then a consiliere, a French counselor. Quite often I would go off someplace to see a minister or see somebody in the office, and he would say, "Ah, monsieur Countryman, un instant, je \_\_\_\_\_ la consiliere. And the Frenchman would come. \_\_\_\_\_ And sometimes the Frenchman would literally take over the conversation, or contradict him, or take over. Not unpleasant to me, but clearly...and the Gabonese would smile. In other cases he would be very quiet and interpose or answer a question.

I arrived there...and the other big thing was that this was the time there were two border issues that were very important. One, Angola was in the final throes of gaining independence from the Portuguese, and Rhodesia had unilaterally declared independence. The Gabonese had a relationship with the white Rhodesian government. Of course the black governments in that part of Africa were all anti Rhodesian, but in Gabon...you could see it. There was an Air Rhodesia airplane that would come in to Gabon, and they were sanction breaking. You would go to the meat to buy beef and you would get this Rhodesian beef. There was a guy, a Rhodesian who lived in Libreville, who was really the Rhodesian representative. I mean he didn't have any...he wasn't a Rhodesian consul or anything, but he handled all the flights of this Air Rhodesia. It was from the Libreville airport they were running things back and forth to Rhodesia. These were things Rhodesia wanted to export to the outside. We knew about this.

When I arrived in Libreville, John McKesson wasn't there. He was on vacation, so I arrived as Chargé on my first day; I'd never been there before. The day after I arrived, I was told to go in and give a demarche to the Gabonese about the sanction busting, and do some probing around on it. I thought, "Oh my god, I have just got off the airplane" I had just called on the French ambassador who had been absolutely lovely. He said, "Ah, I know you are not here to undermine us. We have a good relationship with John McKesson, a wonderful person. I personally love Americans, and we look forward to working with you." I made some artful way of saying in French, "Yes, and we are not here to get in your way. It is delightful to be number two for a change." Now I have to go in and put this hot potato on the Gabonese. Ambassador McKesson had a very good relationship with the president. That really was the relationship. You didn't even deal with ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a cipher, was nothing. There was a Monsieur Adande who I finally cultivated, but the president was the minister of foreign affairs, you know, carried that portfolio. So there was no way to sort of get at them administratively, so anyway I went through the motions and marched off down to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and delivered this note verbale. I never got an answer from them, and reported it to Washington and got a you-did-well response and so on and so forth. I understood that nothing could be done, but we had done the proper thing. I think we had signed off on those UN sanctions against Rhodesia, so it was necessary when you saw a flagrant case of...I have forgotten all the details of why we knew this, but how it had been raised. The French had handled it in a similar fashion. The French said, "Oh, sure, we protest against the terrible, you know..."

Q: You were describing the two border issues.

COUNTRYMAN: The other issue, of course, we followed from Libreville was, since I was the political reporting officer in addition to being the DCM, we followed the Rhodesian-Gabonese relationship. Another issue was, of course, just to our south was Angola. It was still a Portuguese colony. Jonas Savimbi who was one of the two the UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, in Portuguese: União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) group who lost to the more communist popular front. He made a state visit to Gabon when John McKesson was there. Of course there was a reception for Savimbi. That was a very ticklish problem for us because the diplomatic corps was invited, and the Portuguese of course, didn't recognize these people. The Portuguese were NATO and our friends and so on and so forth, so it posed a great problem for us as to whether to go or not. Again very elegantly John McKesson said, "Why don't I be sick. I will send John Countryman. You will be here." So I went as the DCM. We said, "Ambassador est malade, but we do want to make sure someone attends." So I went.

Q: Now, at some time, Gabon starts nationalizing some of the industries. Was that when you...

COUNTRYMAN: No that was...when I was there was a friendly atmosphere. There was an American oil company, the Compagnie Française de Pétrole was there with a little bit of oil. The French had a big concession for their okoumé. The manganese was still under Comilog. The French had never built up the interior, so there were these laterite roads and then there would be a stream. The only way you could get across was on a ferry. It was a terrible time to try and travel in the interior. So because they had some money, they wanted to build a railroad from Libreville to Port Gentil, a spur there where there was a port and then into the manganese mines. That took a lot of my time because the ambassador sort of turned that over to me. I mean he supervised it obviously.

We, of course, didn't have an AID program to Gabon. But we had a thing, I think it still exists. It is that thing in countries where you don't have an AID program where the ambassador in those days had a personal fund of something like \$25,000 that you could just give off. Well, I ran that program for John. We did some nice things with it. They had a forestry school where they taught Gabonese the rudiments of forestry, cutting down these okoumé logs. We built them out of cinder block a little medical facility, not a hospital but a clinic, an infirmary something like that. A couple of beds and a sterilizer and this sort of thing. We had Peace Corps there. The Peace Corps was doing a school construction program in the interior, as well as English language training. We worked out a deal where we parlayed some Gabonese money, Peace Corps using the construction and some of the extra cinder block that they had for the school for the little infirmary, and did the whole thing and gave them this functioning infirmary for about eight or nine thousand dollars. You know with some inexpensive autoclaves and sterilizers this thing from American medical supply companies. But literally we did this, nice little infirmary for about \$8,000.

Q: How big was the Peace Corps program?

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, small. We had a Peace Corps director, when I ticked off the Embassy staff, of course, we had a Peace Corps director. As I remember he had a deputy. We had 10 and 10. Ten in the English language program and maybe ten in school construction.

Q: Were there any particular circumstances come out of their presence in country?

COUNTRYMAN: No, the Peace Corps director was a very good, spoke superb French, and went on Gabonese TV to explain to the Gabonese the Peace Corps presence and vetted what he was going to say with Peace Corps and the ambassador. I sat in. Not with me but I sat in. He did a marvelous job. I remember there was a phrase he said in there about, "ne renein pour se plus grande par les Gabonese." There was nothing in this program that isn't Gabonese. He talked about the people who were consulting with him. We sounded better than a French consiliere. We sounded like he was taking all his orders from the Gabonese. We were just there to, Monsieur so and so and Le Presidente. Beautifully handled for the Gabonese audience. The guys that did it, who worked in the interior, loved it. I mean they absolutely loved the job. They were out there working in the jungle building these buildings. Without putting too fine a point about it, the Gabonese girls were fairly attractive, and here were these guys out there who could squire them around the jungle a little bit. So that was taken care of. They were a nice bunch of guys and liked living out in huts in villages and building something. There was a program with the University of Libreville of English language training.

Q: Did you have an IV (International Visitor) grant program that kicked in from time to time?

COUNTRYMAN: Very small one. We again wanted to make sure to look like we weren't undermining the French, so we ran that by the French. I remember one thing they raised their eyebrows at about, and I remember having to explain it, I was actually chargi½ there for six months because John McKesson went back on leave and...

Q: Was this just after you arrived?

COUNTRYMAN: I was chargi½ for about two months when I arrived, and then just before I left, I was chargi½ for six months. He went back on leave, and then was very highly regarded in the Department. I think he was offered another ambassadorship which he turned down and retired. He was made head of the Cyprus working group or something.

Q: Oh, yes, that blew up in '74.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, so he was gone for six months. The French...we used an IV grant to send a guy from their Ministry of Forests for exposure to American forestry techniques. The French were saying forestry is ours. But this was not so much somebody who was going to study dendrology or that sort of thing. This was more forest management and forest economics, this sort of thing. So we sent some guy back who was in that slot in the Gabonese Ministry of Forestry and had been to school in France, but knew English.

Q: Actually the embassy had a very interesting road it had to follow there to not only get along with the local government but not antagonize the French who I would suspect are quite sensitive about every book every...

COUNTRYMAN: Well, the French ambassador, I remember his words. He said, "Vous êtes trop visible." You are too visible. They were occasions when they came to us on this Gabonese railroad. They pushed us. I remember he coming to talk to John McKesson saying, "This place is not available for AID." They knew about this tiny program we had. "But can't the United States government do something to assist the building of this railroad?" He didn't say this, but what it meant was they wanted a broad international participation in this Trans Gabon railroad and wanted to be able to go to the Gabonese and say look, we the French, we got this for you. You don't have any clout out there in the world, but we went to our American and German and British friends and we have gotten all this for you. That is why we should continue to have this commanding position. That was the name of the game. But we were quite prepared to play that game. Due to John McKesson's knowledge of the system and brilliance, we got the Agency for International Development somehow, I don't know how they did this. My wife works for AID and she still doesn't know how we ever did this, to pay for feeder roads for the Gabonese railroad. We didn't pay for the railroad, but there had to be feeder roads for it. That gave us a look in to bid on everything connected with it. So General Electric had bid on and got the bid for the locomotives for the Gabon transcontinental railroad, over the French and Germans. We got it for General Electric.

Q: I wonder if General Electric used its Washington headquarters or its European headquarters. It probably came out of Europe.

COUNTRYMAN: GE people came and called on us and stayed at the hotel. I don't remember where they were from. I really don't know.

Q: But again it is another story of large and small how the Embassy is of great help to American business and finding opportunities overseas. The French are predominant. Were there, this is the Cold War, were the Russians roaming around?

COUNTRYMAN: The Russians, Gabon recognized Russia when we were there. There were a number of other diplomatic things before I come to the Russians. They broke relations with the Israelis. That was the time when the Israelis were all over Africa for the UN votes, and they booted the Israelis out. Very regretful. They also kicked out the Taiwanese, because of pressure from Peking.

Q: The Yom Kippur War was October, '73, so that is shortly after you arrived.

COUNTRYMAN: That was the reason. But the Israelis continued, the Israelis had an aid program there which continued even though they broke diplomatic relations. The Israeli head of the aid program was I think, Mossad, and had regional responsibilities there.

Q. You were going to talk about the Russians.

COUNTRYMAN: The Russians came when I was there.

Q: For the first time. Just newly recognized.

COUNTRYMAN: And the Russian ambassador was a fellow by the name of Filatov who spoke beautiful English, no French. His DCM whom I got to know fairly well was their French language officer, spoke very good French. The Russian ambassador had been in their Embassy in London two years before, 1971. Do you remember the British kicked out about 150 Soviet diplomats from London for spying? Filatov was one of those people. He was very friendly. I was surprised. I mean he got along with our ambassador. He is a very outgoing sophisticated guy. His wife is very attractive and laden with jewels as a good communist always would be. He was absolutely irate. He loathed the British. "My whole career was so I could serve in the United States, that's what do we want to do. Of course if you are friends with the British, now I can't get agreement [Editor's Note: agreement is the diplomatic process where approval from the receiving state is sought for an ambassadorial appointment, prior to an official and public announcement of the appointment]. I can't go. The foreign ministry...I will never go to the United States because of what happened." So he said, " This is my consolation prize. I get this terrible little place down here. Disease ridden, I obviously don't even speak French. Who are these people? This is terrible."

Nevertheless, he was a charming fellow. His DCM was a very good language officer. The third guy in the embassy who I don't think was their intelligence guy, I am quite sure he wasn't, came from Azerbaijan. Very few of the people in those days in the Soviet service came from their constituent republics. They were all Russian Russians. This guy looked like an Azerbaijani, had this slight Mongol oriental cast to his face, or he just looked like a middle easterner. I met him at a cocktail party, and we started speaking, you know, speaking French. His French was pretty rough although we were able to carry on a conversation. It came out he was an Azerbaijani. I said, "turki con..." "I speak Turkish." Of course, Azerbaijani Turkish is a little bit different than Turkish Turkish, but it is close enough. Turkish Turkish is the standard, and he was well educated. So we spoke Turkish. I was delighted that I had a chance to talk Turkish. Of course, what we talked about would be small, incidental stuff. His Turkish of course was native. He would come up with some strange things that I couldn't understand being Azerbaijani. But he and I would talk, and I would deliberately whenever he was around and the Russian ambassador was around, I would deliberately get him into a conversation and talk Turkish to him. It pissed off this otherwise very nice and charming Russian Ambassador. He didn't like this. Russian was the language of Azerbaijan, not Azerbaijani. At one time I said to this guy, I said, "Maybe we shouldn't speak Turkish." He said, "Oh you do that deliberately. Don't worry. We have our own agenda in Azerbaijan. We would never do anything to harm our Russian brothers, but we have our own agenda." This was way before everything thawed about the Russian empire dissolving. But it was a little snapshot of this guy. He was...those were the Russians; I am Azerbaijani.

I remember I duly reported that and got some kind of a snippet from INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) saying you know, "More of this, It wasn't as though you have saved the republic. It wasn't an intelligence coup, but well done and you know, anything more you can do in this vein, do it." It was a very pleasant place. I enjoyed it very much. There was not very much to do.

The other thing that Gabon's claim to fame was, it is less now, was the Schweitzer Hospital was there at, Lambarië½nïë½, the leper hospital, Albert Schweitzer's hospital. It was a pilgrimage spot. We went there, to Lambarië½nïë½, and spent a week there in this leper hospital. I have back what is called pierenbigou. It is a soapstone that was carved by one of the lepers there, of a Gabonese woman with a basket on her back. It is worth something in terms of African art, but I saw this place there.

The other thing we did is we took a month's leave and went to South Africa. That was very, because it was still in the old apartheid days. Gabon was one of the few places on continent...Air France stopped in Libreville and then Johannesburg. So we flew to Johannesburg. The Embassy got us a visa for South Africa, and we had a marvelous trip through South Africa. We went to the Umfolozi wilderness which as the name would imply is a wilderness of...I don't know what it is now, but in those days literally tens of square, hundreds of square miles of just wilderness. You are not allowed to go into it at all, nobody. Except once every two weeks, the Department of Parks would lead a safari through there which was limited to four people. My wife and I got on to this thing. We went and hiked for a week through this Umfolozi wilderness with a white South African guide and a Zulu. We had a very small backpack, and then they would have mules that would go with tents and food and some bearers. They would set up camp for you, have fires, cook for you, go to sleep, trek the next day. It was interesting, the other people on the treks, we read this all at the embassy. The other persons, there were five of us actually, my wife and myself and a fellow who was the editor of the Rand Daily Mail which was the English speaking liberal newspaper, and his wife and his daughter, and a guy who was the manager of Iling's Mazda in Johannesburg, a Mazda car company. That was our group. I always wondered about, this guy from the Rand Daily Mail was just delighted to be with an American diplomat. After the trip was over, he invited me to the Rand Daily Mail and I addressed the staff there and talked about Africa and he talked about apartheid and so forth, another story. But anyway one day we would trek out, it would be you know Indian file. The South African guide would be the one in front. He had a heavy duty .30 caliber because there were wild animals of every kind including rhino which was particularly dangerous. Then the Zulu had a shotgun. That was more because it was so loud, you know frighten game, and he would shoot it to frighten rather than to kill. These people were not out to shoot animals; they were out there to protect us. So we were on the third or fourth day out. We were told about rhinos and that the black rhino was not particularly dangerous, but the grey rhino could be irascible. The one thing you didn't want to do was to get between a mother and her cub, her baby because she would charge to protect you. If they charged, the thing to do was to climb or get behind a tree and don't go into the open. To make a long story short, the second third, or fourth day out, we came on a water hole. For some reason...the mother was at the water hole, and this guide put up his rifle, just stopped dead. He was just about to decide whether to disperse us or not when she charged us because her calf had strayed away. Our scent had gotten between her and her calf's scent. So the mother charged us. So we broke, and I went a different way from my wife. I was behind a tree that was really about twice this size, and this enraged rhino charged the tree literally and then tried to turn around in the back. There were three of us behind the tree sort of a conga line holding each other. I had my hands around the wife of the Rand Daily Mail guy. The little girl was in front. This whole thing happened, and we were charged. No one was hurt, but it was very exciting.

Q: You are talking about a very thin tree.

COUNTRYMAN: I have it at home, the guy from Illings Mazda had sense enough that he took pictures. There were pictures on the front page of the Rand Daily Mail of party charged by rhino. Of course the editor of the Rand Daily Mail, what is he going to do.

But that was a very interesting thing to see you know, what apartheid was like. I had heard about it, but to see what it was like and to see how little sense it made in every respect to say nothing of the morality. It was a very interesting experience.

We went all over the country. We also went to the other part. We went to Durban. We took the Blue Train, which is one of the most fabulous trains in the world, very deluxe train between Johannesburg and Cape Town. We went to Pretoria; we went to Cape Town. We traveled all over the place. Cape Town is, of course, a delightful place.

I think most people who went there, I wasn't prepared, and I thought I was fairly sophisticated, for what apartheid really meant. I mean when they said apartheid they mean apartheid! I remember the American South, I am old enough before integration. I remember black only facilities in the American South and segregation in the South as a child and as a young man. But in the Blue Train for instance that would go from Johannesburg to Cape Town, would pull up in the main station, and the station was totally segregated. I mean we went in through a whites only entrance, and the Blue Train came in, and there was a wire, it was a heavy wrought iron partition. The train stopped just here, and these are the white only cars. The porter who carried my luggage and my wife's was white. We were in that section. In the other section of that train were for Indians and coloreds and blacks totally. The taxicabs were white. We a couple of times took taxicabs that were driven by blacks. I would immediately establish that we were Americans and get a rapport going with him, you know. Because I think there was some problem about picking up a white South African, if you were a black taxicab driver. All the benches in the park would say whites only or blacks only. Indians were in a slightly different capacity. We stayed in a hotel in Durban, a lovely hotel. The people in the dining room were Indian and the staff behind them, behind the counter was Indian.

Q: Talking about Foreign Service life, back in Libreville you don't have an APO. All your mail comes to you by pouch. This is pre-DVD and everything else. What was entertainment?

COUNTRYMAN: We had what was called WACSC, the West African Commissary and Supply Commission in Nigeria in our embassy in Lagos. All of the posts like ours were serviced by this. It was like our PX (military term- post exchange). I mean you could order, you couldn't order everything, but you could order, we didn't order the meat because the meat was so good from Rhodesia, but canned goods or special things that you wanted. We would get liquor from them. We had a WACSC flight about every two months or every six weeks. An old C-54, four engine prop plane would come in and supply us.

Q: So you wouldn't have a commissary in your embassy there, you were ordering everything out of Lagos.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. We had a system with USIS, we had movies. We would have these in the auditorium of the USIS building. Twice a week we would have the movies.

Q: I know the military circuit does that.

COUNTRYMAN: Maybe it was the military, we got on it somehow. I forget. I think they arrived by pouch. I think you are right, I think it was the military, and it came out of Germany; it came out of Frankfurt.

Q: Then that would be the big thing for the American community or other English speakers.

COUNTRYMAN: You had to sort of go on a list so that you could invite people. We had a beach house. Libreville is a port, and there is a spit of land that extends out. On that spit of land we were given a little tract and a house. I forget who built it. It had been there for a long time. We had a boat, a little motor boat. So that was a very nice diversion. On the weekend you could make arrangements for the boat. It held about 10 maybe, so it was practically the whole embassy. You would go out, go out across the bay. There was a beach there and a house we could change with a little porch with seats on it. There was a village just behind. We would go in and talk to the villagers, so that was a diversion.

Q: Here you are a very young officer. Did you get a promotion out of this?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, I was promoted to the old FSO-3 in place.

Q: That is now our current rank of FS0-1. So you have had a fair amount of administrative experience in your career so far, being the Deputy Principal Officer in Dhahran and now the DCM.

COUNTRYMAN: I had a lot of things to do there; you know that called on some administrative stuff. I told you we had a Peace Corps group there. I had an unpleasant brush with the Peace Corps that I survived. These Peace Corps people were playing football on the beach, you know touch football and throwing it back and forth. Anyway one guy went up for a pass or something and came down on another guy on his back. I was Chargé<sup>1/2</sup> at the time, and I got a call from the head of the Peace Corps saying...I'll explain in more detail later, but health there was very bad. I mean the French had a military hospital that was a very poor hospital, and there were a couple of private clinics. I mean you really for anything more than a band aid on your hand you ought to get evacuated. That was John McKesson's and the Department's view and certainly mine. Don't play fast and loose with someone's health.

So anyway the head of the Peace Corps called saying, "He is at the French military hospital, I think you had better go down. I understand he doesn't have any feeling in his arm and part of his leg. I am concerned about this." So I went down there and the head of the French hospital, who was a Colonel in the French army, was there. They had this guy on a board properly strapped down and so on. "Mr. Countryman, I am scared. I can't feel anything in my leg and my arm." I said, "Well take it easy and we will take care of this." Anyway to make the long and sort of it, the French said "I would get this guy out of here immediately." I said, "That is exactly what I am going to do." I talked to the one better private doctor in town. There was consultation...blah blah, blah. Anyway very carefully they immobilized this guy. They put him literally in a cast that had like a hood on it, and put him in a complete cast so he wouldn't move and kept him strapped on this thing. The only flight out was Air France, the first one. I went to my friend Philippe Berosai who was the premier consulaire, the DCM of the French embassy. I said, "Philippe I have got to get this guy out. My admin officer said the flight is booked." He said, "We will work out something."

Q: It is good to have friends in time of need.

COUNTRYMAN: Because of the way this guy was, he needed two seats. I wasn't going to send him off by himself, so I had the number two in the Peace Corps go with him to Paris to the American hospital. I sent him off, got him to the American hospital. There was a happy ending. He got there; we had done the right thing. It was a question of a broken vertebra that was touching some nerves. They were able to immobilize it. He had some slight gaminess for awhile. In six months he was perfectly fine. I got a lovely letter from his parents saying you know, thanking me and the government for taking good care of him. I also got a letter that had been sent to the desk, I mean the country directorate, not even the State Department by some deputy in the Peace Corps complaining about how I had handled this case, and that Peace Corps funds had been spent not only on the evacuation, which didn't seem to be necessary, but I had arbitrarily elected without any consultation with the Peace Corps to send another person at Peace Corps expense to Paris and back for a few days. Very nasty note, which concluded, this kind of thing doesn't bode well for cooperation between our agencies. The implication that you have overstepped your authority and we are an independent agency.

Larry Eagleburger was at that time Undersecretary, I think. Was he undersecretary? No he wasn't undersecretary. He was later on. What was Larry doing? [Editor's Note: Lawrence Sidney Eagleburger was Deputy Undersecretary of State for Management from May 1975 to February 1977. He later served as Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, February 1982 to May 1984.] Anyway, Larry got word of this. I had known him from way, way back. We had been on the seventh floor together when I was working for Averill Harriman. He got word of this somehow and tipped me off to this, and said "If there is anything I can do for you let me know. This is an outrage." I said, "Well other than run down the halls and say the facts speak for themselves, Countryman will stand by this. Fly me back at State Department expense and I will explain exactly what I did. I wasn't going to send somebody who had a broken back off by himself,...or languish in Gabon and I wasn't going to send him by himself. So finally somebody in management wrote a very nasty letter back to the Peace Corps and carbon copied me on it. It in effect said he did absolutely right and you ought to be thankful that someone's life was saved.

Q: Those little bureaucratic things come out snapping off friend or foe.

COUNTRYMAN: We had a secretary, my secretary had a very bad infection, feminine problem. I didn't hesitate for a minute. I had her evacuated.

Q: I would take a larger question from this though that friends are important and can help you out like the French DCM who bumped a couple of people. That is pretty serious stuff. But obviously he had to be cultivated and be there and already be a friend of yours before your event happened. You don't order up friends.

COUNTRYMAN: His wife and he and my wife and I we were a team. We knew each other very well. He lived just down the street from us. We were comparable rank and comparable age. We kept up with them afterwards. When we left we stopped off in Paris and stayed with them and became pretty good friends.

(End of Tape Four, Side A)(Start of Tape 5, Side A)

Q: Today is February 12th. We completed your DCM tour in Gabon. In 1975 after Gabon, you went to the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. How does one get that assignment?

COUNTRYMAN: I had gotten some indications, I have forgotten what they were, that I was a candidate for senior training. I had been outside of the United States for so long that I had thought it was about time for me to come back anyway. The prospect of doing it via the War College was very attractive to me. As I recall, senior training in those days meant not just Army War College but also the Air War College, or the Naval War College, although I think the year I was there the Naval War College for some reason was not an option. Or also university training. There was management program at Stanford and you could go to the Kennedy School at Harvard. There were a few other options. But I felt that because of being in the Middle East and the fact that I had a pleasant career, not a career but a stint in the Air Force, that I wanted the War College. I applied for, you were given a list of preferences, I just said one of the war colleges.

Q: This opportunity was by virtue of your rank at that time, or coming from a DCM tour?

COUNTRYMAN: I think that was a combination. I think the senior trainer training was open to those in the old FSO-3 rank, and they wanted someone who was a fairly newly minted FSO-3. In my case they thought it was good that I had been overseas for so long that this was also a good way to integrate me back into...

Q: Well, as you were saying earlier, you were one of the youngest DCMs in the DCM course. This makes you a flier, a star, I mean people looking out for you?

COUNTRYMAN: No, as I recall my promotion history, I was not...I got promoted frequently and often, but I was not particularly a water-walker. I think, as I recall, it took me ten years to get from FSO-4 to the FSO-2 rank. It was five years in grade as FSO-4 and five years in grade as an FSO-3. So that really wasn't water-walking. But I thought of myself as being reasonably successful, and more importantly than that, having done things that I wanted to do.

Q: This is certainly key to the morale side of it. When did you hear that you had gotten this assignment? You were in Gabon?

COUNTRYMAN: I was due for transfer sometime in the summer, and I heard in the spring, so I had plenty of opportunity. Archer Blood was the Diplomat-in-Residence at the War College. He was the Deputy Commandant. I had known him when he was in personnel. He, as a matter of fact, when I was in Istanbul, had come out and had discussed my future. So he was very happy when he saw me on the list. I think maybe he put in the word because I think maybe there was only one slot at the Army War College. There were multiple slots at the National War College and ICAF (Industrial College of the Armed Forces) and the Air War College, but there was only one slot. I think he sort of asked for me and wrote me a very nice personal letter explaining that the War College was very well set up to get me housing and take care of me and my shipments, very efficient, and that they would go out of their way to be nice to somebody from the State Department. If he could be personally helpful to me, please call on him.

Q: Well, that makes for a very attractive introduction. I have been to Carlisle and the campus is very attractive. What kind of housing did you get? Was it the standard...

COUNTRYMAN: It was very nice. At the time I didn't have any children, and you could opt for off-base housing. I got on-base housing which was very convenient. I was in one of these places that looked like it dated from the 1890s, sort of double, two story brick building with big porches in front of them. If you had a family, you could get a little bungalow house. But my wife and I not having any children got a lovely two bedroom apartment, nice and roomy. It was right on the parade ground, and right across the parade ground was the main War College classroom building. I literally could wave good-bye to my wife and in the morning and walk across this parade ground and be in my classroom.

Q: .Let's talk about the curriculum for a minute. What kind of classes were you exposed to?

COUNTRYMAN: They started out with a kind of a review, almost a sophisticated civics course, of American values. You know, who are we, and why are we? One of the things...how does the military fit in to, that was sort of a sub set,...how does the military fit into American democracy. One of the very interesting exercises we had was lectures by academicians from universities talking about the American heritage and the role of the military. We did an exercise where we went around the world and we all did individual research on the constitution of various countries and the basic documents of the countries to compare it with our own, our own constitution and declaration of independence. It was very interesting to take places as diverse as Israel and South Africa at the time, Switzerland, Great Britain. We discussed these things, and that was part of the sort of introductory segment of the War College. We had, since the Army War College also had people from the Navy, the Marines and the Air Force, there was a segment for the benefit of the Army people, who predominated, on the other services. What is their role and some of their vocabulary. What is the composition of a standard Air Force wing, rather basic sorts of things. Then there was a segment of going through the various commands of the Army, so you really got a very thorough knowledge of the army, its organization, Department of Defense. We had a lot of international briefings and very top secret stuff on Soviet military capabilities, Chinese military capabilities. We had people from the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) come and lecture to us. We had at the end a budget exercise where through a computer run data we were going to do budgets for the next few years for the United States, not just for the military but where the military would be part of it. Some of the desired procurement was included in the military portion of the budget, but we had to work within a certain parameters so that we were actually budgeting for the Department of Education, the Department of Interior, Department of State.

Q: So you could see what trade-offs.

COUNTRYMAN: And where that fit in. We were in seminars. There were ten people in my group, and the format would be there would be a lecture on a given topic. Then we would come back to our little seminar and discuss it. We had a staff full colonel who was our discussion leader. He would lead the discussion. Sometimes we would have assignments. In other words we would know that tomorrow someone was going to be talking about Soviet military capability, someone in the class would be designated to take notes on certain aspects and review it for the seminar or take a contrarian view and begin a discussion, argue against something that was being discussed. Then there was an elective portion to the curriculum where you could take various electives. I took one on nuclear weapons that was very interesting.

Then there was an individual field trip that was paid for by the War College. It was part of your student days. It lasted about a month. Archer Blood was my mentor for it obviously. The Army, Navy, Air Force people had other people on the War College faculty who were there then. I wanted to do a study of the interaction between Iran and the Emirates in the Gulf, because, of course, the Shah was still in power and there had been some frictions between the Saudis and the Iranians who were, of course, our allies. How was the Shah, how was Iranian foreign policy going to play itself out as these new states became more and more functional and independent? So this involved me with a schedule of going down to Washington and talking to people on the desk, talking to people in Washington, doing some research to establish what was the traditional Iranian view of the Gulf from way, way back. What were the land claims or the border questions? Then I took a trip, a field trip. I went to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman. I spent about three weeks, talked to the ambassadors, renewed some of the contacts I had there, and came back and wrote this thing which was entitled "Iran and Their View of the Persian Gulf Emirates."

It was, jumping ahead for a moment...it was when I was doing this research - I didn't really do it with this in mind - but everybody, all the ambassadors down in the Gulf knew me. Of course, NEA knew me. Of course, I interviewed Fran Dickman who at the time was the country director of Arabian Peninsula affairs, who was looking for a new deputy. So that is how I got my job as Deputy Director of the Office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs, when I came up for assignment after the War College. He was saying, "That guy Countryman seems to know something about,..." I had the credentials; I had served in Saudi Arabia. I had been known as the guy who had run up and down the Gulf and knew the Emirates. I had this research done which was published by the in the Army War college series of papers. It was a very interesting experience for me to go back and kind of as a scholar just step back and almost not be a Foreign Service officer;. I spent about a week in London. I went through old Foreign Office documents on the British presence in the Gulf and what the British, how they had dealt with the Iranians in the past. I spoke to some people in the Foreign Office. It was for me a very personally rewarding experience.

Q: Now this was your individual project...?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, that was my individual project. I came back; I had numerous notes. I came back and we had a period when it had to be done like a thesis. I had to present it by a certain date. As I say, it was published in the Army War College series. A couple of other scholars who wrote on the Gulf at the time quoted my little study.

Q: I would assume that, in fact, underlines what this year was supposed to accomplish - improve your analytical abilities, get you off the desk, gave you a little scholarly detachment. Another part of the War College experience is your interaction with the other students at Carlisle and coming to grips with inter-service stereotypes, if you will. How did some of that pan out?

COUNTRYMAN: I had a very good time, and I kept up with people later on. A couple of people, one who is in my actual seminar worked for CENTCOM and came out to Oman and was a Brigadier General and was head of intelligence. I was the ambassador. General Kingston said, "You know, go out there and be nice to Ambassador Countryman because he is this good friend of ours." This fellow who is going, "Oh, I know John Countryman very well; we were in the same seminar together." So that is a kind of payoff that you get to know the people and they are not so frightening. I, of course, having been in the military didn't have the stereotypical view of them as a bunch of gunfighters who were dumb. I have great respect for people in the military, and you know thought they were a nice bunch of people, dedicated to America's welfare, and intelligent, and thoughtful people.

I think that they probably had a few more misconceptions about the State Department and the Foreign Service officers that in a quiet sort of way I sort of changed a few minds. I remember a little impromptu lecture that I gave that was prompted by a couple of things as we were getting to know each other in the seminar. I think there was a sense that the State Department took the side of foreign countries against the United States to put it in its most crude sort of way. There was an advocate for Saudi Arabia or Indonesia or some country where you were accredited. I remember not being prepared particularly to answer this, but giving I think in retrospect what was a fairly good little refutation of that. First of all, constitutionally there is no other organization in the United States government that presents a foreign view for consideration for the executive. If I am accredited to Indonesia, whether I am the economic officer or whether I am the ambassador, it is part of my constitutional responsibility to be able to advise the president, if you take such a policy toward Indonesia, this is likely to be their response. If you have other interests that you want to protect in Indonesia, those interests may suffer if you do X or they may prosper if you do Y. That is it is not a question of advocacy but making sure that State Department and the executive really understands where the foreign country is coming from and helps to sharpen American interests and pursue them. I think that the people, I said that one of the abiding sins in the Foreign Service was to get a reputation for having gone native. Quite often people were given quite unpalatable or unpleasant instructions to go in and read the riot act to a host government. That was part of our obligation.

Q: Monty Sterns makes a similar point in his book, *Talking to Strangers* (1996, Princeton University Press), saying that the diplomat sits in a very difficult situation. He has to interpret the foreigner for the American decision making elite so that they don't make grievous errors, and yet he has to turn around to the foreign audience and say this is us, these are our interests, and insure that American interests are fed into the foreign power's decision making loop. Sometimes these two things get tangled and often, as you say, the process is not really very well understood, certainly domestically.

COUNTRYMAN: The other thing that was very interesting is at the close of the War College experience we had a crisis simulation. The crisis was that Tito, who at that time was still alive, dies and Yugoslavia begins to break up. The Soviets are edgy and moving in. It wasn't exactly what did happen in Yugoslavia, but was kind of a variant of it. There were various groups that were vying for power within Yugoslavia, and how do we handle that. Of course, because of the possibility of Soviet invasion there had to be a military response, or at least calling up of reserves or sending the Sixth Fleet into the Mediterranean closer by where you do over-flights. It is very clear that as much as some of, most of my colleagues had some international security experience, I mean they were Lieutenant. Colonels or Colonels. When it came to what we had to do in a crisis situation diplomatically, or vis a vis our allies, they didn't know what to do. So I took a very leading role in working on how we handled our representation in the UN. What NATO's role was going to be, what we said to the Japanese, what instruction we wrote for our ambassadors for various posts. What do we say to India; what do we say to China. So that was a very useful exercise. I think brought home to all of us the fact that when you do have a crisis situation like this, you do need to concert your diplomacy and your military response. A perfect example of course is what happened in Afghanistan. That wasn't just bombing with laser guided munitions in caves. There was extensive and very important diplomacy going on at the same time.

Q: That is a very important role for diplomacy. Was there anybody at the War College that was, "Oh, that is what you guys do?"

COUNTRYMAN: I think there was a basic feeling that I had that then knew about what State Department did. There weren't too many gross misconceptions. But I think that a lot of them had been in the kinds of assignments where maybe they hadn't had that much experience. But I felt they generally had a fairly open mind. There was a CIA officer at the same time. There was a USIA officer assigned to the class. I think that the military people were pretty good about...I don't know what hierarchy of values they had in their own mind. I think they must have thought well you know to go out there and fight militarily is more important than sending in a first secretary or ambassador to write up some document. I think that may have been kind of an underlying feeling, but it was not very pronounced.

Q: Now Carlisle is just over the border in Pennsylvania. How is the weather, and I am thinking in terms of sort of recreational facilities while you were going there.

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, my wife and I had a very nice time. The military, of course, is very social. We had a formal ball practically every month; we were honorary members of the officers club. That area in Pennsylvania, of course we were just setting up our house. We had just been married before we went to Gabon, and you can do some very good antiques in that area, inexpensive, and very nice antiques can be purchased, so that was one of the things we did on weekends.

Q: Gettysburg is just down the road. Was battlefield visits...

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, and the War College sponsored a trip there that was led by one of the people in their Army Historical Institute which is a little unit attached to the Army War College that had people who were some civilians and some uniformed military who were historians who maintained the archives and wrote articles on everything from Lee's tactics at Second Manassas to why the Germans took Fort Eben Emael in 1941 from the Belgians when it was supposed to be impregnable. One of these colonels took groups there to the Gettysburg battlefield and gave us a very special kind of a tour which was very fascinating. So we had the Gettysburg videos and what they normally had and we had this very professional historian who took us all over the battlefields.

Q: I would suspect that in addition to the military people having the opportunity to understand where diplomacy comes in, that on the other hand you gained a better understanding of the military in terms of how fast could they get someplace and with what capability.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, that was very useful to me. I think the fact later on when I dealt very closely when I was in Gabon the ambassador, the fact that I had been in the Air Force and the fact that I had been in the War College I think was very useful because I might not have agreed with my general colleagues, but at least we had a vocabulary in common. There were things they could use military shorthand.

Of course, the other thing was there were a great number of things that might not seem to bear directly on foreign policy that had to do with the nuts and bolts of the military life. I mean we spent a good bit of time on personnel and some of the problems of handling non-commissioned officers. We did an exercise in promotion where we got the files, you know hypothetical files of officers with the names taken off, and we had to go through and vote as to who was to be promoted and who was not, who was below the zone, who was to be recommended for being dropped or passed over. It was very interesting that I was almost dead center in the middle of...I mean I was very typical. The way I rated the military officers was almost exactly the way my colleagues rated them. I was very interested to see what thoughtful and good efficiency reports were written on officers. Most of the people we were reviewing were majors, major to lieutenant colonel. That was the group that we had. I remember making a big point of this to my colleagues about how good I thought the process was of promotion. There were certain criteria, certain instructions that were made known to us that guided how you filled out the form. But the requirements for typical performance, duty and the thoughtfulness with which people described the individual officers I thought was outstanding. I was very impressed with that.

Q: Because of the War College field trip and research that you did, you re-introduced yourself to the people on the desk, Arab Peninsula affairs. Now organizationally, had Arab Peninsula affairs always been there and basically had been the Saudi desk? Is there any particular administrative history there that sets the background?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. ARP had always been a country directorate. Since when I'm not sure, but way back. Initially it covered Saudi Arabia and Yemen, as I recall. Then Kuwait slipped in when Kuwait went independent. When Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman were under the British, they were not covered by ARP. It was sort of handled out of London. So it was really a Saudi directorate with Yemen tacked on. When Joe Twinam, when he was transferred from Jeddah back to the Department and Dick Murphy was the Country Director, Joe Twinam was the first gulf desk officer. He was the desk officer for the whole gulf at the point when they were coming in to independence. Then he was the first U.S. ambassador to Bahrain, a resident ambassador. But by the time I got there as Deputy Director, it was one of the biggest country directorates in NEA in terms of number of countries that the Director was responsible for, and one of the biggest in terms of personnel because of that fact.

ARP had a Country Director, and now a Deputy Director. The only other NEA country directorate which had a deputy director was NEA/AIA, Office of Israel Arab affairs. Again because of the span of control and the size the office. Then there was a senior Saudi desk officer and a junior Saudi desk officer. There was Barbara Bodine, who later went on to be Ambassador to Yemen. She was the desk officer for the two Yemens and handled political-military affairs, which were very big. Then we had two other desk officers who split the Gulf. This changed over the years. I mean somebody took like Kuwait and Bahrain, and the other desk officer took Qatar, UAE, and Oman. So you had country director, deputy director, two Saudi people, a Yemen pol-mil officer, and two more desk officers, so you had seven officers. When I became country director (in 1979), I had two deputy directors. I had Roger Merrick and Quincy Lumsden. Roger was...Quincy was the senior of the two, but Roger Merrick was the deputy director for Saudi Arabia and the Yemens. Quincy Lumsden was the deputy director for the Gulf.

Q: Illustrating that it is all becoming much more important to U.S. interests, and we are having to staff it out. Who was the senior Saudi person when you arrived in the fall of 1976?

COUNTRYMAN: Charles Cecil, who later was my DCM in Oman and went on to be Ambassador to Niger.

Q: Now looking up if you will, the Country Director at the time you arrived in the summer of '76 was...

COUNTRYMAN: Fran Dickman, but was only there a matter of weeks before he went off to be Ambassador to Kuwait, and Joe Twinam came back from Bahrain and was country director.

Q: Joe was country director. Now up in the NEA front office, which deputy assistant secretary was responsible?

COUNTRYMAN: Sid Sober. Roy Atherton was the assistant secretary.

Q: From the desk's point of view, what are some of the policy priorities that you are looking at and you are asking these embassies to watch for you?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, this was a time when Congress had just passed legislation that foreign military sales had to be submitted to them for review if they were over a certain amount of money. As I arrived, this legislation had just passed, and we had our first test case with sending some military equipment to Saudi Arabia, which actually was turned down. There was heavy opposition from APEC, The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, the Israeli lobby in Washington. The offices in NEA and PM (Bureau of Political-Military Affairs) were simply not very well prepared to do the kind of congressional work that needed to be done to handle the arms sales. This was a very tricky kind of a thing. It was a thing that became, because I think Joe Twinam thought he had enough other things to do with oil and the dollar and Saudi involvement in the peace process, sort of my thing that I watched over for the office was military sales. I was sort of in contact with...not that Joe didn't do it, but he looked to me for and also for some drafting and working with the desk officers. I was sort of our pol-mil officer writ large. As Deputy Director I did whatever he told me to do, and it shifted day in and day out. But that was a large part of what I did for the next two years as his deputy.

Q: Can we fine tune the timing of this legislation a little bit, because you come in the summer of '76, and the American presidential elections are that winter with the Carter administration starting January '77. Did that legislation pre-date the transition to the new administration?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. it did. It was in place. It had passed in the spring or very late winter of '76 and the first cases under it came up in the summer. This was case, the actual one was the TOW missiles, you know the wire guided anti tank missiles [Editor's Note: "TOW" stands for Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire data link, guided missile]. There had been, in conjunction with this, a lower Gulf arms policy that had been approved in an inter agency Presidential Directive as to what would be the guidelines for our arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the lower Gulf. The language in there was rather general, I mean, it sort of indicated that we would not sell offensive weapons whatever that means. It is a very tricky concept. What is this? It is practically, I mean a military purist would say there is no weapon that is purely defensive. And that they would not be sort of first generation so that there was a certain sense that an older version of a weapons system would be sold. Not a second rate particularly, but not the cutting edge technology would be sold, and that we would encourage the countries to look to Saudi Arabia and Iran for their security in a local sense. I think what was particularly on people's minds was that there not be, because these countries were increasingly getting more oil wells, is that they were not going to have their own little arms race and buy an awful lot of expensive equipment just for prestige purposes.

Q: I am struck that the Yom Kippur War in 74 was followed by an oil embargo and increase in oil prices. Congress then passed legislation to restrict arms sales to an area that has new found wealth; an illustration of Congressional impact on foreign policy, as it set the parameters of what the American government can sell, and what it can't. So now Congress is even more directly involved in setting American foreign policy agendas.

COUNTRYMAN: I feel we weren't all in that much trouble, once we kind of got our act together and had a better sense of being able to brief the Congress. There was a general understanding, and I was interested to see this was in an article yesterday or the day before in the (Washington) Post on the relationship with Saudi Arabia. The basic parameter, or guidelines of our dealings with the Saudis since the Second World War and President Roosevelt made King Saud a beneficiary of lend lease for his help in the Second World War. It has always been oil for security. That has been the trade-off. U.S. being the sort of metropole, being the protector over the horizon very quietly, so that it doesn't embarrass the royal family, but American security guarantees even though there is no treaty, but a sense that there is a special relationship and the United States would protect Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia would be helpful in terms of oil.

Then as oil became even more and more important and Saudi finance became a very important instrument in the world of finance, all those millions of dollars, that they would invest their money in U.S. treasury bills, recycling the petrodollar. That message to the strong supporters of Israel in the Hill caught resonance. There was a relationship with the Saudis that predated the founding of the modern state of Israel. It was in Israel's best interest that the United States had access to oil and there be stable oil and financial markets in the world. So then the issues came down to just how sophisticated the weaponry is that you sell to Saudi Arabia, and what controls do you put in place so you make sure it is not used against Israel. And of course, this was later on in my tour. The following year we sold the F-15 fighter plane to Saudi Arabia. That was a major Congressional battle because heretofore we had never sold a first run, front line American fighter plane to anyone in the Middle East except the Israelis. The Israelis were very concerned about losing air superiority. The Saudis had a good air force. They had good pilots. But we were extremely careful and had very, and I was very much involved for two or three months. I did little else other than worry about that F-15 fighter plane sale to Saudi Arabia.

Brian Atwood who later on would become the head of AID, he was the Deputy Assistant Secretary in H, Congressional Relations. He did almost nothing for months except that. He was extremely effective in going up and talking to people in Congress. He made himself familiar with all of the issues. I was practically at his beck and call. I mean call Joe Twinam out of courtesy would say, "I would like John Countryman to come up Thursday at three o'clock and meet Senators," blah, blah, and blah and representative Blah, and the staff aide of blah and just chat this up. Sure. So I would spend the afternoon sitting around and sort of calming to people. So we really I think learned a lot from that early experience. I think Roy Atherton was particularly good and had very good relations with the Hill and was a very persuasive testifier.

Q: Let's look at the Congressional side of this a little bit. The common stereotype of the Foreign Service officer stationed in Washington deals with a local embassy and writes internal memos. Extensive liaison with Congress is not part of that stereotype. How were you interacting with Congress?

COUNTRYMAN: Stepping back, I remember when I worked for Averill Harriman, how he used to rant and rave about how he thought that the State Department's Congressional Relations office was terrible. His attitude was it was not effective, and it was more effective in telling the State Department what it could not do and how difficult things were up on the Hill rather than having, knowing how to present American foreign policy on the Hill and selling it. Of course, being a politician, he was very sensitive to the necessity of bringing the Congress along. He was not, you know, let's stuff it down their throats. He was a very strong advocate for a strong Congressional relations office and not one that simply told the State Department what it couldn't do, but enable the State Department and the President to achieve.

Q: We were talking about State's interaction with Congress. In your position as Deputy Director, were you only dealing with staffers?

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, no, I was dealing with the principals. We got Ambassador John West, our ambassador to Saudi Arabia, who of course was a political appointee. He had been governor of South Carolina and was a very close friend of Jimmy Carter. He came back and we used him. I went up and took him around. He knew a lot of people particularly on the Democratic side, but also on the Republican side. He knew a lot of people on the Hill. I went up with him, and he gave briefings and talked to people. He was extremely persuasive and helpful. But a lot of what I learned in that period was that the mere fact of my walking in the room with a particular attitude which is: I am not here to apologize for what the President wants to do and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense in these arms sales, but I am here to answer any of your questions and to try to make you understand where we are coming from. I think that kind of achieved far better results than the attitude: look I am the foreign policy expert; you are just a dumb Senator from North Dakota who doesn't know anything about these people. Let me explain these foreigners to you.

We tried very hard to get that element out of it, and to say absolutely that is a very legitimate question to ask, and here is the answer to it. I can understand why you would be concerned about it. No, that is not the way the Saudis have traditionally thought about this thing. Here is the history of the royal family. Here is what it means to be a protector of the holy places. So, I think that the amount of time that we spent there was extremely well spent. I had the feeling that in many cases the warmth of the reception was not so much tied to the substance of my message as it was how nice of you to finally have been courteous enough to come over and taken me into your confidence. You as a representative of the State Department.

Q: Did part of your work include suggesting to staffers to contact local embassies or suggesting to the local embassies to include a staffer or congressman on the next Embassy dinner list? I guess my question is how effective were the ARP embassies in also presenting their case?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, I guess the Gulf embassies didn't have to do it; we really didn't have such controversial sales. It was the Saudis. At that time the Saudis tended to be rather quiet. They didn't have someone as flamboyant and highly placed as Prince Bandar right now. So they were not very active. I think they felt that they could probably do themselves more harm than good. The ambassador usually did. He would deal with a few people, but the embassy itself was not particularly active.

Q: While you were at ARP there was an election and transition between the departing Ford administration and the incoming Carter administration. Transitions can be interesting as the desks prepare background papers for the new people. Did you recall anything of note about this transition?

COUNTRYMAN: As I recall, it happened fairly soon after my arrival. Of course, I hadn't been in Washington for years, so I was a little forgetful of what had been the usual thing. In retrospect after I spent five years in Washington before I went to Oman, between the time I arrived in ARP and actually left. It really wasn't that much different in the tasking on the desk than if the Secretary of the Treasury were going to Saudi Arabia, you would get the tasker from S/S and NEA. You know, ARP will write a paper on oil in the Gulf or the current state of our relations with the Saudi royal family. The political military affairs officer will write this paper, and there would be this book compiled that would be presented up to S/S to be given over to the Secretary of the Treasury that was his briefing book on the background and talking points. The Saudis may raise this, and this is what you should raise. You shouldn't raise this, and if you raise this, here are your talking points. Here is background on this. Well, when the transition came in, it was like that writ large. We had an incredible number of papers to write, to brief the new administration on relations with Saudis and the Gulf.

Q: Did that tasking list of papers come from the front office, Ambassador Atherton or did the newcomers...

COUNTRYMAN: I think it came from the transition team to its people in S/S, and S/S filtered it down. Obviously there wasn't just NEA. There was policy toward Japan and Australia and South American things and drugs. Everybody got into the act. I think what it was the transition people sitting down with the career people in S/S and the 7th. Floor and coming up and discussing what kind of papers they wanted and information they need.

Q: With the arrival of the Carter administration and its emphasis on human rights, and I think the State Department established a human rights office t the time. Do you see any difference in your work or priorities upon the arrival of this new administration?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, and I think I can remember that, I have forgotten her name now, but she was a young woman who was on the White House staff who was sort of spearheading the whole question of human rights. What was her name? Her mother wrote, was an historian and wrote a famous book on the First World War. I will think of her name in a minute. Wait, wasn't it Patt Derian? What happened with human rights was that the people who were most interested in human rights were really unaware of some of the realities in the Middle East. There was very little concern then about what I think now would be something we might see as repressive and that is the way that women are handled in a place like Saudi Arabia. That was no so much an issue.

It was more a question of the more traditional freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, voting, that sort of thing rather than women's rights. I remember one of the first sessions we had with these people from the White House we're talking about the bureau being set up. I, or Joe Twinam, was asked at one point, "When is the last time one of your ambassadors in the Gulf had a discussion of human rights with a host government?" I think it was Joe who was all prepared for this. He said, "Well in the case of our Embassy in Kuwait, yesterday they had a thorough discussion of human rights in conjunction with Kuwait's complaints to the United States about the human rights of Palestinians being violated." Well that is not what they wanted to hear. So the wind was sort of taken out of the sails of the whole human rights thing in terms of ARP or the Middle East because there was at that time quite frankly a lack of desire to ruffle the Saudi's feathers or even anybody else in the Gulf with sort of an implicit criticism of Islamic law. There was also a feeling that if you brought up human rights in any context, you were opening the door to have an undesirable discussion about the United States condoning Israeli degradations against the rights of Palestinians. So the whole question of human rights puffed up as the Carter administration came in, but as far as I was concerned, when I was Deputy Director and I was in regional affairs and I came back, it was never a very large issue with us, human rights because of those two factors. One a disinclination to take on Islam, and disinclination to open the door to a thorough discussion of human rights which would have embroiled us in bitter exchanges about the Palestinians. That United States support of Israeli policies could be construed as against basic human rights.

Q: Given the paper that you wrote in the War College and your duties in ARP, what were the view and the priorities given to Iran and its activities in the Gulf?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, the Iranians were in general quite thoroughly...fairly circumspect under the Shah in what they did in the Gulf. They tried to be good neighbors. They did help the Omanis a little bit and actually supplied very quietly and discreetly some Iranian troops to help the Omanis put down the communist revolt in Dhofar. But that was done very quietly even though that was a little bit, you know Iranian troops on the Arab side of the peninsula. The Saudis weren't too happy about that, but the Saudis didn't particularly like the Omanis to begin with. They kept quiet about it. But the Iranians were pretty good about not attempting to use their military power on the Arabian side of the peninsula.

Q: So the Iran that you are looking at and you are factoring in to your policy suggestions is the Shah's Iran. It is a less overt actor in the Gulf at this time.

COUNTRYMAN: And someone who, we always wanted there to be a Tehran-Jeddah, Tehran-Riyadh axis of these being the two most powerful countries in the region to sort of keep things quiet and do the right thing. You know money in the case of the Saudis and oil. There were money and oil in Tehran but also a larger population and a larger military force. That never quite worked out because of mutual suspicion between the Shah and the house of Saud never were very close to each other.

Q: What would be some of the factors keeping them apart?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, the Shah was, of course, Shia. The Iranians rather than Arabs, the Wahabi fundamentalism versus a rather tolerant view of Islam and a progressive secular state that the Shah was advocating, and just basic geopolitical and geostrategic divergence. Who was going to be the primary power in the Gulf?

Q: What was the Saudi view of Iraq at that time? We are talking late '70s.

COUNTRYMAN: Well, suspicious and not good relations but not quite so...I don't think they felt the way we feel with the analysis that Iraq presented that much of an immediate threat, that whoever was in power in Iraq was going to step over the border. There had always been this question of Kuwait, but that had been met by the British with a show of force. That was something that had never been settled. The Iraqis had never stepped back from their claim that this was their territory and they had been forcibly separated. It was not an active problem.

Q: Again as you are coming to '78, you have been on the desk a couple of years, how would you describe now your policy priorities and whether they shifted from when you first came on board?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, there was still the question of appropriate arms sales to Saudi Arabia because this was something that Prince Sultan who was the Minister of Defense, this was a thing that every body was concerned that the Saudis are very much concerned about. I think it was for a number of reasons. They literally wanted to keep their military happy, and that it was a way of convincing themselves that the United States was a good ally, that we would supply them with this equipment. I think that from a geostrategic standpoint, we wanted to sell it to them because it would mean if you were going to sell them the F-15, well then you had to have hardstands for repair of the F15 which meant that although you could never have an airbase in Saudi Arabia, if the Saudis and U.S. had common equipment and you had tooled the Saudis up to handle American equipment, and you were rather lavish in the way you constructed the base, in effect, you had base facilities that you could use.

This was still, of course, a time when we were concerned about a Soviet thrust into the Gulf to seize the oil. And there was some concern that perhaps Iraq could be a threat to Saudi Arabia. There was always a concern about holding the Saudi's hands, I guess is the best way to put it, over the Arab-Israeli problem, that it was always a discomfort between us and the Saudis because while the Saudis, like so many of their Arab brethren, didn't like the Palestinians, they felt obliged to make the Palestinian cause a bedrock of their foreign policy and to complain about mistreatment of fellow Arabs and injustice to the Palestinians and the necessity for a Palestinian state. That was always a problem; we were always concerned that we were writing instructions and I worked very closely with the Israeli desk and the front office to make sure that if the slightest thing happened in the Levant or whatever it was that happened between Israel and its closer Arab neighbors, that we read the Saudis in. It was a particular sensitivity to the kind of questions that the Saudis would raise. The talking points could not be the same ones we gave to our ambassador in Amman or Cairo. They would have to be a little bit tailor made to the Saudis. The same idea but we would phrase it in a little different way.

Q: By suggesting we were bringing them in on our most intimate thinking about a subject and suggesting we were taking account of the way they looked at the problem, I suppose we were given them special status.

COUNTRYMAN: And with the added thing of and the next time when Prince Abdullah goes up to see his friends in Damascus, if he could stress so and so, gee that would be helpful. So we would try to use the Saudis because the Saudis, although they did not have political muscle in the Arab world because of large population or big armies, they had the power of the purse, and they had the prestige of being the protector of the holy places. So what the Saudis said was not of overwhelming importance in the Arab-Israeli context, but it had some importance. Under somebody like a Roy Atherton or Nick Veliotis who were trying to do everything they could to forward the peace process, it would have been foolish and very bad to leave the Saudis out. So that was an element of American foreign policy that required a lot of work on the desk, because the Saudis always were being pulled into it, and we wanted to be able to lead them in.

One of the other big developments is because of the tremendous amount of emphasis on oil and the Saudis desire for development, we launched in that period the U.S.-Saudi Joint Commission which was really, since Saudi Arabia was obviously not eligible for foreign aid, it was sponsored by the U.S. Treasury. It was really a way of funneling petro dollars into appropriate development projects for Saudi Arabia. It took some of its impetus from our AID and from the British Crown agent, back in the 19th. Century. The British still had a Crown Agent in the Gulf when I used to go before the Brits pulled out. The Crown Agent was established way way back in the 18th. not even the 19th. century for British colonies. The Crown Agent was a private individual sponsored by a British business but with some quasi Foreign Office blessing. The Crown Agent would be resident in India or in Dubai or Kuwait and would have offices in London. The local maharaja or the sheik could come to the Crown Agent with any request from: "I want new drapes in the palace," to "I want to buy a Rolls Royce," or "I want to buy commercial refrigerators for my kitchens." So that some Brit or some other person wouldn't rip him off, the Crown Agent would work with British suppliers to make sure, first of all, that it was a British supplier, and secondly to make sure that things were done fairly. So the Treasury Department became the agent, and there were Treasury reps in Jeddah and Riyadh. The Saudi ministries would go to them as they would go to AID and say, "We want to build a road from Jeddah to al Baha." "Fine we will get Bechtel to come out and give you an estimate on it." Or whatever, we need a turnkey operation for a medical system for the King. So we got, this was a big thing the Treasury did. We got a huge American medical conglomerate to come out there and gave them hospitals or built hospitals and staffed them with nurses, staffed it with autoclaves and centrifuges and medical staff, so on and so forth. Just set up these turnkey operations for them. That was a big operation. There was a lot of Embassy involvement, a lot of writing of papers so that the Treasury officials who went out there, Secretary of the Treasury Simon was the one who was very involved in that. Briefing him so he could get a better sense of what the Saudis were like, the kinds of projects they would be looking for. That was a big involvement at the desk in that period, launching that Joint Commission.

Q: Let's go into that a little bit because what I hear you saying here is one of the functions of the desk is to liaise with other agencies in the federal government, and in this case of recycling petrodollars Treasury gets involved a great deal. Is the Saudi desk officer handling most of the liaison with Treasury or are you and Joe Twinam attending a lot of inter-agency meetings?

COUNTRYMAN: It would depend. As obviously, we were talking about the Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of State is talking to him. In second instance probably a front office person, Dick Murphy or Nick Veliotis is talking to an assistant secretary level counterpart. So the big meeting would have perhaps Secretary Simon coming over and meeting with Dick Murphy. I might have been there, either in my deputy capacity or later on when I was Country Director, to sort of figure out, to be there and aware of what were the lacks in his knowledge. What was he looking for, so that we could give him what he wanted, but at the same time a lot of these other agencies, to them Saudi Arabia was really kind of a mystery. I mean these were people with funny head dresses and where the camels fit in with oil production. I mean there really was a lack of knowledge as to who these people were, and a difficulty in understanding that the Saudi interlocutor might on one level be extremely sophisticated in terms of what he knew about the United States and all the expertise in petroleum and so on, but in other respects have some rather... You could not derive from that immediate sophistication, sophistication about other areas of American life. except that there would be certain sensitivities or certain ways of looking at the world that they might be somewhat surprised about. So there was a constant need to make sure that people were properly briefed. That is what it comes down to.

Of course, we had a lot of people who came over to the States for military training. A lot of the Saudis came over. We had pretty good people in the Pentagon that we talked to and we did not give the briefings to these people when they went out to, someplace in San Antonio or Kansas City. But I had a certain input into it and would supply them with talking points and things that they might want to stress in their briefings with Saudis.

Q: In addition to working with Treasury Department do any other agencies particularly come to mind? Wasn't the Army Corps of Engineers deeply involved in a lot of construction in Saudi Arabia?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, they were there. They were there through the whole period. They were more or less folded into our military missions.

Q: Let's see now, you are Deputy Director ARP to the summer of '78. As you said this is your first time back in Washington for some time. Were you able to do things like serve on a promotion panel or...

COUNTRYMAN: No I didn't. I served on a promotion panel some years later, something I always wanted to do. Those two years I was really busy. It was a very busy time, and Joe Twinam, I think, felt very strongly that to do his job properly, he had a very full plate, he had a clear idea what he wanted off his plate that he wanted me to take care of. So he delegated a good bit of work to me and worked me hard. This is what I need to do, and this is what you need to do. So I worked long hours; I was working very hard for those two years. There was a lot going on, and there was a lot that he looked to me to take care of.

Q: Did that also include such things as making sure everybody's annual performance evaluation was written in the spring.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, I was sort of his DCM but back in the States kind of thing. I would handle a lot of administrative things that the country director. I would worry about are we getting an extra secretary. I would worry about we had some, Joe didn't wash his hands of it, but he didn't want to deal with for instance with any consular matters. We had some difficult consular problems, so I would more or less work with the desk officer in resolving some consular problems.

For example, when Ambassador West came there, we had a number of incidents involving Americans who were...before we had had classically in Saudi Arabia, we had sort of two groups of people who were sort of shielded. One were the diplomats and the other were the ARAMCO people. ARAMCO, I think we discussed this before, ARAMCO had its own kind of enclave and its own system for taking care of its people, working with people in the eastern province and keeping Americans out of trouble. Well, you got this Treasury presence and a burgeoning of other Americans and civilians coming in, there were people who were not American military or diplomats or ARAMCO, you got other people. So you got such things as drunk driving or someone bringing in alcohol or someone punching out a Saudi. The consular section in Jeddah and Riyadh had always been very small and staffed by good competent consular officers, but not the kind of people who had a great deal of...who were senior protection and welfare people, people who had served on the Mexican border, say Nuevo Laredo, who were really experts in that field of consular work. I remember there was a time when Ambassador West kind of came to Joe Twinam and me on one of his consultations and said, "I feel like an old country lawyer. I shouldn't have to do this. I have to go down and deal with some of these things." Joe and I hit the ceiling. "My God you shouldn't be with all the other things we look to you to do, you shouldn't be worrying about this." So we got a fairly senior consular officer in there. I worked with consular affairs to try to pull that act together and come up with some guidelines for Americans and publish some stuff about Saudi sensitivities and what to do if you got into trouble.

Q: Our other Gulf Embassies are expanding. Are you also the one going to personnel and saying we need another slot or we want to make sure this assignment is made, getting yourself involved in the assignment process.

COUNTRYMAN: Joe did that, and I would be sort of the follow up. Yes, because this was at a time when those posts were getting bigger and bigger and the idea of having permanent ambassadors in every place was there. As the relationships became clearer and got bigger, we then had to say yes or no. I remember there were a lot of little things. In the UAE, since it was so small, plus it was a small population, we had an embassy in Abu Dhabi, but there was a reason to open an embassy office or a consulate or a branch office in Dubai. There was a good deal of discussion about that. I took a very strong position that we need the post in Dubai, and we finally got one. It was a mini post. I mean it was serviced out of Abu Dhabi. I think it was they didn't even have communication capabilities. It was just a principal officer and one other American. That was it.

Q: Were you also making importations to the personnel assistant to make sure they are turning out enough Arab speaking officers so that you can fill those posts, or is that feedback coming from someplace else.

COUNTRYMAN: That was more or less an FSI thing. We got into...Joe Twinam had been in personnel and was particularly strong on doing this. We would help the embassy spot good candidates. In other words, I remember the number two position in the political section in Jeddah came up. It needed to be filled. We sort of scoured the system to look for a good person for that. You know and there would be a sense of who was going to take so and so's place and who are we going to get into the office here. There was very much a forward looking...I credit Joe Twinam with an awful lot of that. He was always thinking about well if the embassy in Qatar comes to us and wants to know who was going to be the admin officer, do we have someone who is going to be good, is going to be good for Qatar.

Q: Did you have and use frequently a back channel means of communication where you are talking to the ambassador and you are chatting things up in an informal way? I am asking you this, now we have E-mail. We have that capability, but in the olden days...

COUNTRYMAN: I know that Ambassador West would call, Joe Twinam would be on the phone to Ambassador West quite often. It depended more or less on the ambassador. People would use the phone. There was some criticism of that because of security questions, but a lot of this would be administrative stuff. Or, it was easy to double talk. I mean Joe Twinam would receive a phone call from John West and say, "I have State 4596 here in front of me, and I really have great problems with paragraph three." "Well John I thought you would. Let me explain where we are coming from on that. I think you can handle that and blah, blah, blah." You could talk around it from time to time. But there was a good deal of use of the phone.

Q: Why don't we move to the summer of '78, summer transfer season. You become the acting director of NEA's Office of Regional Affairs.

COUNTRYMAN: Well actually I was Deputy Director and then acting Director. What happened was Henry Precht had been deputy director of regional affairs, and he was moved to be country director for Iranian affairs. I was put into Henry Precht's position as deputy director of regional affairs. The director was a fellow by the name of William Dozier, Bill Dozier, who had been economic counselor in Tel Aviv, and was a very, very top notch economic officer. The theory was that Bill Dozier would be very strong in the economic side and I would have the political and pol-mil side, we would be a good team and take care of all these little performers we had in regional affairs that we would farm out and use for regional purposes for NEA.

Bill arrived on the scene at about three months afterwards. He was near retirement and was quite senior. His rank was the old FSO-1. He received a job offer from, and I have forgotten the exact name of it, but it is like American Textile Association, someplace in the Carolinas that wanted an economist. He came from someplace down there. He had some family connections. They wanted a Washington lobbyist. They wanted someone who knew Washington, knew the State Department, could understand textile legislation, and would go to the Hill and protect them from the depredations of foreign imports and so on. So I knew something was going on. Bill early on in the process told me what was going on and swore me to secrecy and that he was seriously considering this. They wanted him right away because there was a new round of textile negotiations coming up and they wanted to get him on board and crank it up and so forth. To make a long story short he retired from the Foreign Service. So they had nobody for that slot, and by this time it was into the fall, and assignments had been made. So the people sort of pulled things together and they said, "Would you take it as an interim assignment until we decide what we are going to do. You may be the acting director for a year or so. It was supposed to be a two year assignment. I will try to get you a very strong sort of number two, whether we call him a deputy or not, a sort of regional political officer to help you with things because there are a lot of things we are going to want you to do to spread your talents." So I said, "Of course." So I was actually the deputy director for about two or three months until Bill Dozier left and then I was acting director for the next year.

Q: Most people when they look at State Department structure see country specific offices. But your next assignment is the regional affairs office in the Middle East Bureau. What does this office cover? How is it different?

COUNTRYMAN: The idea was that there were certain things that had regional validity, that you needed someone, you needed an office to sort of look at the regional impact of these things and be a sort of briefer for the front office, and you needed a kind of stock of expertise when things came up that the front office needed to accomplish and did not want to mandate it and take the personnel from the desk or tell the country director to do it, but wanted to have almost an extension of its own self sort of a staff pool of experts it could use for particular jobs, and for liaison with other agencies. For instance, I was, I wore a number of hats as acting deputy director. I was our human rights person. I was the one who went to all the human rights meetings. I was our liaison on narcotics. I would arrange for instance...we would have somebody who would be going out from say DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency). I would be the one that the DEA would call and say, "Agent Rubano is going out to be assigned to our embassy in Islamabad and we need a series of briefings. Do the same thing you did for agent blah blah. So I would take this guy and provided the kind of briefing that fit this case.

(End Tap Five, Side B)(Start Tape Six, Side A)

COUNTRYMAN: When I was RA's acting director, I had an Army Colonel Woolf P. Gross in the office and he was sort of the military advisor for the bureau. Well, I sort of didn't really supervise him, but he had office space in my office suite. If we needed his expertise for arms sales or anything else, he was available throughout the bureau. He was available to you know, the Pakistani desk country director or available to the Egyptian desk country director. He had a GS assistant. We had a woman who handled Congressional affairs in a very special sort of way. She would, under Roy Atherton's direct direction, more and more over the years since he served as country director, she would provide briefing materials to the Hill. This was a thing Roy Atherton started, very useful particularly in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But she was a kind of point of contact of being a quick way that Hill staffers could directly tap into NEA and get briefing materials that they needed to understand the Middle East. We had an economic office. These again were people who dealt with the Department of Commerce to help American business, or who again were available to worry about little special papers on oil, the dollar, that would transcend one country director. We had a regional political officer who increasingly took on such things as narcotics and human rights, which were regional issues.

Then there were a host of ad hoc things. I remember being in my office one day and Bill Crawford was then a senior Deputy Assistant Secretary. He said, "John, please come up to my office. Brent Scowcroft is here and would like to talk to you." Well I grabbed a notebook and went up. Brent Scowcroft by that time was out of government, but I guess he had been the National Security Advisor under Gerald Ford, and former President Ford wanted to make a Middle Eastern trip, and obviously had sent Brent Scowcroft over to the State Department to pave the way. Cables needed to be drafted and the right tone had to be brought. He was a former president, because he was former President Ford, and was going out and what he wanted to achieve and all this. Well Bill Crawford simply turned to Brent Scowcroft and said, "This is John Countryman, Director of Regional Affairs. He will take care of it for you." I was very clear, Bill wanted someone fairly senior that Brent Scowcroft could deal with for this whole trip. I just took that whole thing off of the front office's hands. They were confident that I would handle it diplomatically and instruct the posts as to what to have on hand and work with Scowcroft and arrange briefings stateside for the former president and on and on. So that was the kind of ad hoc sort of thing that was useful to have a regional affairs office for.

Q: I am intrigued that there was also a Congressional liaison officer for the bureau. Since earlier we were talking about working with the Congressional relations bureau or H.

COUNTRYMAN: We had someone...my DCM in Oman went from there back to Washington, and before he was country director for North Africa, he was the NEA man in H (Bureau of Congressional Relations) H had desk officers covering the various bureaus. But what we had in regional affairs was something a little bit different. This was the staffer Stephanie, she was a GS and had been there for years. Hers was not so much to give substantive briefings but just to be more or less a technician, and people would want...she had a rather clear mandate on what she could send over. It wasn't always classified. Sometimes it would be classified, but just that there would be a person at the end of the line if there was some question about the current state of Middle East policy or a pamphlet or information. If there was something that the Hill needed, they could get it immediately without a lot of bureaucratic encumbrance. We got a great deal of mileage out of her; she was deeply appreciated. She was a very good woman, and she knew an awful lot of the committee chairmen, staff people. She knew everybody over there and was an extremely effective officer.

Q: I am asking this because a lot of people on the Hill are very critical of State, you can't get the mail answered, etc. But I have found at least in the two bureaus I have worked in that the bureau itself had a staffer to assist on at least low level liaison. Somebody is going out to a country, here are the background notes.

COUNTRYMAN: Well and the other thing was she was an early warning device for us, because she would go to me or to Roy Atherton and say, "Look I have gotten about four or five phone calls just this afternoon on X. People are evidently quite concerned about X." Well that would then engender perhaps another response. Maybe Roy Atherton would call H or Roy Atherton would call somebody up on the Hill and say, "Are you concerned about the latest squabble between the Jordanians and Israelis over water in the Bekaa Valley?"

Q: You're in regional affairs and not the Iran desk, of course, but how did the November 1979 seizure of our Embassy in Tehran play out for you with this regional portfolio?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, first of all, I remember very distinctly Charlie Naas who was the predecessor to Henry Precht as the desk officer - Henry was the desk officer when the hostage situation arose - talking about the problems that the Shah was experiencing with this mullah by the name of Khomeini, and gave a briefing at the NEA staff meeting on the threats the Shah's regime is receiving from the right. I remember very vividly the reaction of almost everybody in the room, no one who was supposedly the expert on Iran that Charlie Naas was, but everybody was NEA, and we lived and breathed Iran... I had more expertise because I had written my paper on it. But the reaction of everybody, myself included I am sorry to admit, maybe not as much as other people and maybe with some nuance. Everyone's reaction was Gee poor old Charlie, he has kind of gone around the bend. A threat from the right? Everybody knows what the threat to the Shah is. It is from the left and the Tudeh Party, the communists. Just total dismissal of this.

His briefing was a very sophisticated briefing, a good one. He indicated areas where the Shah was vulnerable, where there had been misrule, and where SAVAK, which was their internal and external security service, had been heavy handed, and an incident where some dissident doctor had been evidently been mistreated. He had apparently been blinded in prison. Just a lot of anecdotal sort of stuff. And some indication of how there had been very little trickle down effect. Just a whole series of danger signs that one who was looking to the stability of the regime would have questioned the long term stability of the Shah. So when the hostage crisis came up, it was the big thing in NEA. It dominated everybody's activities. Henry Precht as country director and dealing with the hostage families I recall was a big burden, handled by Sheldon Kryszewski who was in charge of NEA/EX, the Executive Director. Of course, there was the point where some of the hostages were released. I think some of the black officers and some of the women were released. There were people who had taken refuge in the Canadian embassy. They snuck out. It was a thing that dominated the NEA staff meeting. It was huge.

Q: Let me go back to Charlie Naas. Is he coming to these conclusions just Cassandra like or is the embassy reporting things that he has put together in a special way?

COUNTRYMAN: I don't recall taking the time to go and looking...you know when you are a country director, you get a tremendous amount of stuff from INR. Of course, there is always a lot of CIA stuff, too. I have forgotten exactly the degree to which he was drawing on other agencies or INR. I have the sense that this was more or less on his own, and that this he was not quoting to us from an INR brief. That it was embassy reporting, and it was out there perhaps in classified form. It was available to the intelligence community, and to anyone who would look who had a high enough security clearance, but no one had put it together or attached the importance to it. I don't think anyone disagreed with any of his facts. I think it is the old question of well your facts don't fit into my pigeonhole so they are not particularly useful for me. It is that famous passage in E.H. Carr's *What is History*, and he described a whole series of documentation that talked about terrible violence in the Victorian period. You know riots at fairs, this sort of thing, people being beaten in the streets. These are not historical facts we recall, because we accept as truth the narrative that the Victorian period was calm and everything was under control. So the fact that these riots took place, they don't become historical facts because they don't fit into your pigeonholes because you have already determined that the Victorian period in England was a time of calm and sedate rule by Victoria. So the fact that in Newgate there was a terrible riot that took 55 lives doesn't become history because people rioting doesn't get recorded.

Q: It appears then that the Embassy was picking up bits and pieces. There were indicators out there which, when Charlie put them together, brought him to conclude...

COUNTRYMAN: And if you recall, Khomeini was in exile in Paris of all places, and he was making statements from Paris, and his little clique was issuing not so much fatwas, Islamic decrees, I guess they did issue some Islamic decrees condemning the Shah, but I think he drew on that also. Again attaching some importance to it. Whereas I think the people who heard the briefing sort of dismissed as some nut in a turban off in the left bank in Paris talking to the wind.

I don't know whether you recall, but before that we had the incident in the Mecca mosque where some Saudi dissidents, it was almost a Jonestown kind of thing [Editor's Note: "Jonestown" is a reference to the November 1978 mass suicide of more than 900 people in Guyana who belonged to a religious cult], where these people came in there with their families, with weapons underneath their cloaks, shot people, and took over the mosque. The Saudis finally contracted with a French hit squad, and these people finally came in and killed these people and cleaned them out. I think there is this idea that yes there is this nut fringe out there, and no one ever thought this was a threat to the Saudi regime particularly. It was an embarrassment that one of their holiest places had been taken over, but it was only that. It was not a threat to the stability of the country.

I think that it was a question also of the kind of people you have in the Foreign Service, who whatever their own strong, but personal, religious beliefs might be, tended to be a kind of secularist individual and not understand the tremendous motivating factor that religion can be for certain people, or just dismiss it as being a fringe phenomena, and not being able to accept it as something that for good or ill a large number of people could subscribe to. Evidently it is very clear that the message that Khomeini had brought to Iran received very strong backing. Women being in purdah and the turn to the right was broadly accepted in Iran. There is some indication now that people are getting tired of this, and that maybe some more democratic impulses are crowding out those more traditional Islamic values. But that is another question. But at the time that this happened, I think that the kind of person you had who was a Middle Eastern hand tended to discount the pulling power of Islam and Islamic fundamentalists.

Q: When the Tehran hostage crisis starts, how did the bureau administratively responding? Was a crisis center set up. How was it staffed? Were people sucked out of your office?

COUNTRYMAN: We had a crisis management team on the 7th floor set up in an office up there. This was staffed 24 hours a day, and people from all of NEA served on it. It was heavily staffed by people from NEA/EX, from the S/S, but as I recall it was like a duty roster thing. My desk officers...as a country director I never served up there, but my desk officers,, like all NEA desk officers, took turns up there, because it was manned 24 hours a day. I thought that, some of the country directors fought it, you know, I still have all of my responsibilities and can't we get this manpower from outside? I thought it was a good idea for my people to get the experience up there. I would ask them what was going on when they came back. It was a way of briefing me.

Q: Despite the demands of the Tehran crisis, what other priorities does your office have? The human rights report has become an important priority with the establishment of the Human Rights Bureau. Does that report fall to the desks or to your region affairs office?

COUNTRYMAN: It fell to the desks. As I recall, that was one of the responsibilities that I had in regional affairs is to be the person that worked with...I don't think we had a human rights bureau at the time, we had like a coordinator up on the 7th. floor. But it was my responsibility to work with the NEA front office to establish the timelines and the guidelines and to present the package that came out of NEA for the human rights report for all the various countries, and to go to country directors and push them to get the thing done and make sure that the format was correct. I had a certain amount of staff responsibility to read them and make sure that they were responsive to guidelines. So that was a fairly large responsibility that I had. I can remember literally going myself or sending somebody to the place on the 7th. floor with human rights reports from NEA.

Q: At the time of the Tehran crisis, who is in the chain of command? Is Roy still the...

COUNTRYMAN: No, it was Hal Saunders, who had been in INR. He wasn't a Foreign Service officer. When the Shah was overthrown, and the hostage crisis began, I guess it was just about coincident with the hostage crisis or just thereafter. I have forgotten the timing. But Hal Saunders was a very thoughtful guy. He literally shut the bureau down about a day and got in absolute top flight people from around the country, academics, maybe a couple of people from the CIA, but basically top flight academics to have a seminar on Islamic fundamentalism and what was going on. What the motivation was with these people and how broad it could be. I remember it was a very good session. A lot of these people that lectured to us were somewhat critical of our head in the sand inability to see what was going on in the region, and pointed people at academic literature that if not predicted politically the Shah's downfall, at least by its sheer bulk and direction would have said you have got a real problem there. So that was a volte-face and the system the ability to say "Gee now we have been wrong. We were blindsided."

Q: We need to change our focus. Who was your supervising DAS?

COUNTRYMAN: It was Bill Crawford who was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary. He had been our Ambassador in Yemen. Toward the end of my time in RA, or just before I became Country Director, Joe Twinam was made Deputy Assistant Secretary, and Peter Constable, he just recently passed away, was our Ambassador to Zaire, became senior Deputy Assistant Secretary for NEA.

Q: In the midst of all that pressure, how did that team work?

COUNTRYMAN: I think they worked effectively. I think what happened was, and this happened just about the time Joe Twinam was brought up from being Country Director, there was some dissatisfaction with Bill Crawford quite frankly, the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary, when he had been acting Assistant Secretary before Hal Saunders. So he was replaced and Peter Constable was brought in.

Q: One of your office's responsibilities up to now is liaison with the Congress. This crisis comes upon you. Are you still dealing with the Congress? Is that dialogue caged in different terms now?

COUNTRYMAN: Well in terms of, I think, there was a separate sort of lines, obviously the Congress had about three or four concerns. One was just the normal foreign policy. The other one was, of course, handling congressional inquiries simulated by constituents associated with a hostage. We had a big public relations chore that was largely handled by our NEA/EX which was constantly being in touch with the hostage families. You had a lot of people, who instead of coming to the State Department,, were going to their congressmen or senators saying how about my husband or my brother or my son. What is the United States government doing to take care of these people? And the wife of, I have forgotten her name now, he later resigned from the Foreign Service. He was in the political section there, and he later joined a not-for-profit that was run by the Episcopal Church in New York for peace. It may have began with "M." His wife was a particularly strong woman and sort of organized the hostage families and was insistent on getting the latest word, but was not unreasonable. I mean she understood what was going on, and she was not recklessly critical of the State Department's handling of this. But this was a big part of the information flow problem was that, I know, that NEA/EX was constantly in touch with the hostage families. People on the Hill were constantly wanting more information about what are we doing, what is today's latest initiative through the Italians to get at this problem? How is that working itself through?

Q: Is there much impact on your priorities or your assignments, or are some things suddenly not having the priority they had before?

COUNTRYMAN: No, I guess this is true of any bureau, but NEA tends to be, I think, more than other places crisis oriented. I mean it is always some kind of a crisis. The Indians and Pakistanis are at each other's throats. There would be an Arab-Israeli war. We had an oil embargo. The Iraqis and Iranians would be going to war against each other. The fall of the Shah. Sadat being assassinated. I mean it just seems that there was always some kind of a crisis that was facing NEA. This was the one that dominated the period when I was in regional affairs.

Q: Actually we shouldn't forget that what was dominating the bureau up to this time was the Carter administration's deep involvement in the Middle East peace process. This is when Sadat and Begin come to Washington. While that tide was rising, did you see any particular impact on your responsibilities and priorities?

COUNTRYMAN: No. I mean there was certain satisfaction. There was a question always of keeping our posts informed and making sure that whatever...the way NEA worked it was that with almost no exception, if you were an NEA post, you were an info addressee on the more important cables out of the confrontation states and Tel Aviv, and you would be a recipient of guidance from Washington. In other words, because the Arab-Israeli problem was so important, obviously our ambassador in Amman and Cairo would be getting very specific instructions. Or perhaps in Lebanon or Damascus. But the other posts, at minimum, would be getting more general guidance. At the next opportunity you should call on the foreign minister and give him the following briefing on our current efforts to achieve a Middle East peace. This would be circulated for instance, to somebody, not so much while I was in regional affairs, but more when I was in the country directorate, to make sure not that we wouldn't argue with the peace process because I wasn't in a position to argue that, but to make sure that Prince Abdullah of the Saudis always worry about the status of Jerusalem because of the holy places. This instruction doesn't say anything about the holy places, and the ambassador sure as hell is going to be asked about that, so I would kick this back and say can we at least have some routine language on Jerusalem. But that is the way NEA handled that. There was a constant flow of information to NEA posts on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Of course, the same thing was true when we had the hostage crisis. This was something that posts were briefing host governments on.

Q: Now you were in regional affairs for a one year stint. You had come as the deputy and then you were acting. How did the next assignment come? Shouldn't you have been there two years?

COUNTRYMAN: Well there always had been a sense, I had been asked so casually when I was coming up on my reassignment as deputy director to look at my next assignment. There was more or less, I was asked did I want to go as DCM to Damascus. I had for personal reasons been out of the country for so long. I wanted to get my feet on the ground, and I thought I needed the Washington time. I forgot who got the job, David Newton? But I more or less said take me off the list. I would rather stay in Washington. Since that was a very good assignment, DCM in Damascus was a very good job. I think people knew I was quite serious about wanting to stay in Washington. At the time when I was coming up for assignment, the other opportunity I had was to go to Personnel and be the personnel officer for FSO-4s. I kind of wanted to do that. I wanted a tour in Personnel. As I was talking about this, both Joe Twinam and Sid Sober, Joe being my supervisor and Sid Sober being the senior DAS, sort of looked uncomfortable and wanted to say something to me. Finally the thing broke about the time I was having to make my decision and other decisions were being made. It wasn't exactly promised to me, but there was some thought that I would replace Joe Twinam as Director. They really didn't have anybody in the pipeline, but they wanted me to stay on another year, and there was this opportunity in regional affairs. NEA liked the idea of my going to regional affairs to fill that slot immediately and also kept them in control of me so that if they did something else they would have first dibs on me so that if Joe Twinam moved out of being the director for Peninsula affairs, I could be pulled out of regional affairs. So that is in effect what happened. It became more and more apparent that Joe was going to move on. There was some thought that he would go to Kuwait as ambassador. There was also some thought that he would move up to deputy assistant secretary. So that is what happened.

Q: This raises an interesting personnel issue in the Foreign Services, whether the bureau should have control over assignment or central assignment. I think what you are saying here is here is the bureau looking out for its own people. It has a plan, and that is what operated in your case, that NEA was very mentoring of its own people.

COUNTRYMAN: Well, now I think if I had said at the time when I was in ARP as deputy director I said, "No by golly I want a little breath of fresh, I want to take that personnel assignment," I think I would have gotten it. I think it might have irritated people in NEA and done some damage to their ability to watch out for me in the future. I must say I had a little bit of, I mean I was sorry I couldn't do both, and wasn't particularly keen on taking this job in regional affairs. It wasn't a bad job. I understood you know it sort of wasn't beneath my rank. I thought I could have enough freedom to make good things out of it, and if it meant that I would become country director for the peninsula that was all fine. But I knew if you didn't want the job and seen its substance. I kind of wanted the personnel job. But I remember kind of sitting down and thinking I have always gotten what I wanted, and I think it is time for me to play along with the system and be good to them and hope things pan out for me.

Q: So in the summer rotation cycle of '79 you come back to ARP as the Director. Do you have some ideas of changes you wanted over the way the office ran only a year earlier?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, I would still be working for Joe Twinam and he is very good about being, I mean he had other responsibilities as a DAS, and it was very much my country directorate. I had been around long enough I had some prejudices about the way the directorate would be run. I had a certain sense of what I would be doing which was very imperfect because I was not prepared for what did eventually happen. But I had a lot of backing about staffing the country directorate the way I wanted to, and using people, using my deputies and my desk officers the way I wanted to.

Q: Well, let's get into that. Who was your John Countryman, your deputy?

COUNTRYMAN: I had two. I had Quincy Lumsden had been in our...had sort of had the Arabist slot in Paris. I pulled him back to be the deputy director and the senior deputy for the Gulf. He supervised...he was my deputy, my senior deputy, and he also supervised the two Gulf desk officers. Then Roger Merrick was the senior Saudi desk officer and had the title deputy director but he was junior to Quincy, and supervised one desk officer.

Q: With two deputies the office is bigger than it was just a year before. You are coming still as the Tehran hostage crisis continues to drag on or unfold however you want to describe it. As the hostage crisis proceeds in time, does the desk have a different type of responsibility in terms of holding hands with the Saudis or the Gulfies. I suppose I am saying are people getting more nervous?

COUNTRYMAN: Well there came a point where we tried the rescue operation.

Q: Desert One.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, and that of course was a little bit later, but as it started out, from the standpoint of the peninsula there was little we could do. I mean we would keep the Gulfies and the Saudis briefed you know, on our continued concern. There were a number of initiatives that I have now forgotten through others, you know the Swiss or the UN or third party the British or the French. Other little...and we were trying also to put some pressure on through the Saudis or through Islam through various avenues to resolve the hostage crisis. But none of those of course, came to any fruition.

Q: How did Desert One change the atmosphere?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, in the wake of Desert One, one of the problems that the military surfaced was that, we had so far to go and it was so difficult. Now of course, Oman was used. We had already started a relationship with Oman in a clandestine...the British run base in Sera was used as part of a launching pad for Desert One. And the Seve airport was used. Supposedly the National Security Council, Brzezinski, I spoke to him years later about this at some detail. He claims it was his idea. What happens was President Carter said, "Well why was it so difficult for the military to launch this operation when we have all those bases out there?" The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Brzezinski said, "We don't have any bases out there." So the decision was, well why the hell don't we, so if this happens again we are in a position to stage. That is when the push came in that led to our early relationship with Oman. At the same time we got base rights in Somalia and Kenya. That of course comes later on in my tour. When I went out with the team, it was Rich Bartholomew in PM (Bureau of Political Military Affairs) was the head of it. An Air Force two star general was on the team, and I was the State Department member. I remember going out, and the general and Rich went to Somalia and Kenya, but I of course, only went to Oman. Oman was the one they wanted most of all because it was more conveniently located than Somalia was.

Q: And the time frame?

COUNTRYMAN: That was in '79.

Q: Let's take a break here and then ask about the conversation with Brzezinski years later, since you have stated the impacts in this period. Is there anything you want to bring up from that.

COUNTRYMAN: Brzezinski is the one who said that he was the architect of the idea of getting these bases in Oman and Somalia and Kenya, and evidently had gotten the CIA to make some back channel inquiries as to whether this would be feasible for us to do these negotiations.

Q: Allowing the Shah into the United States in the first place was the trigger for hostage crisis. My understanding was prior to these events the Embassy cabled and said if you let the Shah into the United States, we are toast. Do you have any sense why somebody decided at a higher level that the embassy's recommendation wouldn't be the operating recommendation?

COUNTRYMAN: I don't know that a cable in that form existed. I can see why it would be quite reasonable, but I never saw any traffic on that. I don't know that is the case, but it seems logical.

Q: It would be something to put in a freedom of information case at some point. So I mean your later conversation with Brzezinski didn't cover an earlier period as to whether he had encouraged letting the Shah in?

COUNTRYMAN: This was years later when we were both together at the Center for Strategic International Studies at Georgetown University. He and I didn't become close friends, but we were there at the same time and we talked. He was Polish and my wife was too and he was very interested in meeting my wife, so he invited us over one time. We had a drink with a few other people. At that time he, not in an unpleasant sort of way but wanted, and he knew who I was, that I was ambassador to Oman, and had been the one to go out and negotiate this. But he wanted to make it very clear that it was his whole strategy, his conceptualization of foreign policy problems that led to this what we both agreed was a very wise move at least in relation to Oman. He was very happy that not only I had helped to negotiate the treaty, but had also been there to also administer it so that in effect it protected his legacy. See, that was a good idea, see how it worked out. He felt warmly toward me, in a sort of a pat on the back of the head kind of way, "Glad you followed up on the brilliant idea I had."

Q: In the midst of the hostage crisis and Desert One, what are the atmospherics for relations with the Saudis and the Gulf States now? Were those who saw us as a protector concerned?

COUNTRYMAN: There was some apprehension, because Iran appeared to prove we will let a traditional regime be replaced. So there was a good deal of handholding here. And some public statements I think that were well positioned, coming out of the White House and Hal Saunders contributed to this and the Secretary, how the Peninsula was different. The Saudi royal family were respected, numerous, powerful, tough. There really is a contrast between Saudi Arabia and Tehran and the imams of smaller gulf emirates. They are so small and the royal families are in close personal touch with everybody, not to worry about this. It is a legacy of the British being there and there is good feeling. So there was a lot of diplomatic PR that was going on for the world to make the world feel that this wasn't a domino theory at all. The traditional regimes who were our friends weren't going to fall tomorrow nor are we simply going to do things that would permit traditional regimes to fall.

Q: Now when you were in Dhahran, you traveled in the Gulf and now you are the director covering those embassies. Did that familiarity on your part help you guide the embassies and describe the foreign policy environment that they faced?

COUNTRYMAN: Actually, it would. I think that the embassies, particularly would say things to me like, if anybody can make Washington understand "X", it is you John. So I was put...I think they were pleased to have someone that knew their bailiwick well, because it was true of all ambassadors outside of Yemen, which I did not know very well, but I knew it by association. I have been in and knew people in every other of my constituent posts, so that the ambassadors and the people in the posts, if they were having a difficult time convincing Washington of something, felt they should have an advocate on my part or that I was in a particularly good position to explain it to Washington or to have a dialogue with them.

I made a couple of trips out there. I mentioned this before. I made trips out as deputy director and when I was director I went out to the posts. I am not one for a lot of junketing, but I think those are some of the most useful trips that can be made in the State Department is to have a country director go out to the post and really sit down with the ambassador and the staff and get to know them and go beyond the telegraphic or the phone traffic. This is really what Washington is worried about. We need to have more reporting on "X", and then conversely to go back to Washington and say you know, 'We really are not doing the right thing by our post in Kuwait because 'X'.' They really don't feel that we understand their problem with "Y". I think that is a very useful sort of thing, and I hope it is something that is continued.

Q: I think in part people can't really understand an environment until you see it. Despite Foreign Service complaints, that is why Congressional travel is important and educational. Were there many CODELs going out to the Gulf area?

COUNTRYMAN: No, there were not. They did not have that many. We had some to Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf, but not a great thing.

Individuals. I remember when I was in Oman we had more people coming out there because of the relationship. That is jumping ahead, but for Saudi Arabia we didn't have quite that many. I think we are sort of at the point where we are getting into my period as country director, and I would like to stop if we can. I think that is an important period and I would like to think a little bit about what are the important things that go on there, particularly that foreshadow the relationship with Oman.

Good morning. It is February 21. We are back with John Countryman talking about his time as director in the office of Arab Peninsula affairs. John, at the time that you were there, one of the things that happened was that Ambassador Dubs was killed in Afghanistan. How did that affect the atmospherics of the bureau?

COUNTRYMAN: Well Spike had been of course, the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA and was a very beloved kind of person, and was someone we had a good deal of respect for. I think it was just a sense of horror and great sadness that it happened. I think that the judgment was that it was not something that was suddenly going to extend to other countries in NEA. It wasn't a generalized terrorist problem. It was sui generis to Afghanistan. I think the conclusion as I recall was it wasn't a question of Russian attempts to assassinate Spike Dubs. It was Russian or Soviet incompetence.

He had been kidnapped and held in hotel. The Russians were attempting a rescue. It is one of these things. They broke down the doors and started shooting and shot Spike Dubs as well as, I don't know if they killed all of the people who had taken him as hostage or just some of them. But he was felled by a hail of bullets. I think the judgment was it was not an attempt to do him in but incompetence on the part of the Spetsnaz or whatever the group was that had broken in.

Q: One of the things that became a major part of your duties toward the end of your tour is that you were negotiating a military access agreement with Oman. Can you describe some of the bureaucratic processes in these negotiations. When did we think we wanted to do this?

COUNTRYMAN: I remember very distinctly Hal Saunders called me in late November of 1979 and said, "Can you come up and see me?" I came up right away, and he said, "Have you got all your Christmas shopping done?" I said, "I am pretty good I have done some of it." I kind of knew what was going on. He said, "Well,..." and he described what was going to happen. This was the first I had really heard about this. He explained the whole thing about this attempt to negotiate access agreements, agreements was the operative word, with a number of countries, and one of them was Oman. I was to go out with this team early in December and begin the process of talking with the Omanis about this access agreement. Reginald Bartholomew, who was I think at the time was the assistant secretary in PM was going to do the chief negotiator and head the team. I was going to be a member, and a General Lawson, two star Air Force general from the Joint Chiefs was going to go along, not so much as an Air Force officer, but as the sort of uniformed military representative and somebody from the Joint Chiefs. So it was the three of us. I think we had one other person from PM who was sort of Reggie's secretary. But it was the three of us who were the real negotiators.

We had a brief of things we were looking for. There had been a preliminary contact with the Omanis, which I think had been handled both by the ambassador and by the Agency, the CIA, to sort of drop the word. Of course, we were very careful that this did not leak. It was held very close. Our main objectives were access to facilities. The Omanis had the port of Muscat which the Navy could use, and also they had Salalah in the south. So there was port access for the Navy. They had two excellent airfields, Seeb, which was the commercial and military airport for Muscat, and then the British had built up a base on Masirah Island, which is a little island off the south of Oman, which is just nothing, desert and an airfield. When the British closed the base, it had been a British base, they had offered it to us and asked us if we wanted it, and we turned it down. This would have been around 1978 or '79. But at this point we wanted the Masirah Air Base, too. So it was access to the ports and airfields, and it was also prepositioning. The idea was that if we had to fight a war or do anything in that part of the world, it presented a terrible logistics problem. We wanted to be able to preposition things like tents and a certain amount of food, water, medical supplies, all kinds of things that the military had that they would want to say deploy the 101st Airborne as the first striking force, lightly armed, but they could pick up more heavy arms on the way, a few tanks and so on. So that was the second element of it.

And of course there would be some quid pro quos. We would also make the Omanis kind of preferred candidates for purchasing U.S. military hardware. Although they had a small budget, the Brits tended to selling them mainly British equipment. There had been the history of the sale of some very modest amounts of American equipment. We sold them the C-130 aircraft, and we had sold them some sidewinder missiles for their British aircraft. So there was an area there where we would not give them a carte blanche on military hardware, and we would not want to be appearing to replace the British, but there would be kind of a three cornered arrangement between us and Whitehall on what we were offering them. The Omani military was still at that time heavily encadred by the British. The head of the Omani Air Force, Navy, and Army were all British officers. Within the Omani military, they had not advisors, but they had people who were either on contract or who were seconded who were active duty British Army, Navy, or Air Force officers, who actually held command positions, who commanded Omanis rather than being advisors to them. They were part of the TOE, the table of operations (and equipment) of the Omani army. We never had that kind of system, but this went way back in British history where you had people seconded. So the British had a very close military relationship with Oman. When I had been in Dhahran of course, the Omanis had fought an insurgency in Dhofar province where there was some legitimate grievance on the part of the Dhofari, but they had been co-opted and supported by the communists in South Yemen, the PDRY, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which of course had been British Aden. When the British pulled out of Aden, their sort of chosen successor government was overthrown by this almost Maoist, very heavy left-wing communists so that when the British decided to withdraw, the government decided in the early 70s to withdraw militarily east of Suez, Oman was made an exception to that because the British wanted to make sure they didn't leave until the government was solid and the insurgency was stopped and it was not going to be turned into a communist state. So it was apparent, and we knew all of this. I knew the history of it. We were particularly anxious that our relations with the British worked properly.

Of course because we were doing something with Oman, we would want to brief the other people in the gulf, particularly the Saudis. So all these things had to be done. I am skipping ahead to set the groundwork. So we had a number of meetings in the State Department with DOD (Department of Defense) to gain consensus on our terms of reference and what we wanted to do, before we went out in December of 1979 for our first meeting. Of course were keeping Washington terribly au courant.

Q: Who would be typically represented at these inter agency meetings before you went out?

COUNTRYMAN: Well anybody from the joint chiefs. Of course NEA and I have forgotten now who was the undersecretary for political affairs in the State Department.

Q: We can look that up [Editor's Note: Under Secretary for Political Affairs from 1978 to 1981 was David Newsom], but was there an NSC (National Security Council) rep?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, I think it was probably Gary Sick or he was later at CSIS when I was there and he was ambassador to Germany. Bob Hunter, who was very bright but was basically I don't know why he was the NSC person for the Middle East. I think Gary Sick worked for him. He was really a European expert rather than a Middle Eastern expert, but very bright. Of course he was one of the ones who wanted very much to make sure that we kept the right in on it.

Q: Getting back to a little more background on the origin of this idea, what was your sense that stimulated the idea that we wanted access in the gulf? I mean there wasn't anything particularly ominous going on was there?

COUNTRYMAN: Well it was the fallout of the failed hostage rescue attempt in Tehran. It was supposedly that at the time, President Carter or somebody said, "Well as a jumping off point can't we use those bases we have got out there?" Someone said, "There ain't none. We don't have any." We had actually used both Seeb and Masirah on a very clandestine basis in the hostage rescue attempt. So it made, because Oman was the most friendly and because we could trust the Omanis. The Omanis were very good at keeping things quiet, so that Oman then became, and because of the British presence, and because of Masirah, no one would see it was a little island off the coast and even see that Oman was a place where there was not that much toing and froing. The Sultan was known to be friendly to us.

Q: So this is a lessons learned out of Desert One.

COUNTRYMAN: And also Kenya and Somalia. But of course as I say the jewel in the crown was Oman. Because if you had a Persian Gulf emergency, it was a lot closer than Somalia or Kenya. Somalia and Kenya were of great interest for the Navy was, and this was an integral part of our arrangement; we had this even before we signed the agreement. We had P-3 Orions who used on a very limited basis Seeb and Masirah for landing. These were the P-3 anti submarine patrol aircraft. I have forgotten what the pattern was, but it was all worked out by the military. But they flew from Oman to Diego Garcia where the British had a base to Kenya to Somalia and back. That was the ideal. That was after we signed the agreements with all of them. Now what they had done before that, I think the P-3s sort of shuffled between Oman and Diego Garcia. Because they have, they are turbo prop propeller aircraft, and they have very long range. You recall the aircraft that was hit in mid air off China recently was a P-3 Orion. It is an old airplane, but very good because of its, you can cram it full, it is a marvelous airplane. It is a 50s vintage airplane, but it is crammed full of electronic gear, and it has because of the turbo prop, very excellent, crank the propellers back, and just go for hours and hours. So that was another element. The impetus for Oman was, if we ever get into trouble in the Persian Gulf, we need to have access to facilities, to make that arrangement.

Q: The delegation goes out to Oman. Who do you talk to in Oman? They are already primed?

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, yes. First things first. There was a Canadian who had the strange title of the Sultan's Equerry by the name of Timothy Landon. Tim had gone to Sandhurst. The Sultan, of course, had been to Sandhurst under a program the British had at its military academy. The Sultan had gone there as a young man. In his class was this fellow, Timothy Landon who was a Canadian. After the graduation from Sandhurst the Sultan went with the Welsh Fusiliers, or whatever it was, in Germany as part of the occupation troops. Timothy Landon went to the Trucial Oman Scouts in what was then the emirates. That was a small British officered little army for the emirates. But he had maintained...he had been a good friend of the Sultan. When the Sultan overthrew his father, Timothy Landon resigned his commission from the British Army and became his equerry, or in other words, his advisor. One of the things he did, he was an advisor across the board, but one of the things he did was he in effect set up their intelligence service. It was called the Palace Office. He set up their counterpart of the CIA. Of course, early on we had a liaison with the Palace Office, the Agency had a relationship with Oman, and of course their contact was Timothy Landon.

So a lot of the things were done through Tim Landon, but there was also at the time the Foreign Minister who was Qais Zawawi. He had sort of a strange background. He probably came from Morocco or Saudi Arabia. His father had been an advisor to the old Sultan. His brother Omar Zawawi was the John D. Rockefeller of Oman. He was the wealthiest man in Oman, had a private jet, had every single business that you could imagine under his thumb. The Under Secretary for External Affairs was a fellow by the name of Yusuf bin Alawi, who will become very important later because he succeeded Qais as the foreign minister. Actually minister of state for foreign affairs because the Sultan carried the portfolio for foreign minister, as he did the portfolio for minister of defense. At the time, the Omani military was organized with three service chiefs, all British, Navy, Army, Air Force. And a sort of a coordinator, an elderly British brigadier general who really was not the commander of the three services, but was kind of a coordinator and just someone around who was a paper shuffler, because the three service chiefs reported directly to the Sultan. That was to change later on, which is important to mention. So this British, his name was Brigadier, I have to check on what his name was, but he did not play a very large role in the negotiations. It was Qais Zawawi who was the administrative state for foreign affairs and the three British service chiefs.

Of course, when we went out, we had of course, briefed London on what we were doing very thoroughly. So we arrived in Oman in December, and were put up in this very nice guest house that they had. That is where all the negotiations took place. The first thing we did was call on the Sultan to get his blessing. Tim Landon went along, and Qais Zawawi. None of the three service chiefs went. We called on the Sultan in his gardens. I remember sitting there and Reg was describing what we were there for. The sultan nodded in great confidence. His English by the way was excellent. His first comment was, "What took you so long? This makes every sense. Yes, Don't worry, I will not be there for the negotiations, but I will be very carefully briefed and you have my blessing. My best to the President. Go do it. "

Q: Now your negotiations are being conducted at where you are staying. You are not obviously running around town.

COUNTRYMAN: No, very pleasant. They had a swimming pool there. The food was absolutely superb. I must have put on 15 pounds when we were there. You could have...there was always somebody available. You could always have coffee, tea, and fruit or a piece of cake. We ate extremely well. Very good. But we got right to it and spent a good week on negotiations.

Q: They weren't public yet.

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, no. That is something that is very important to point out is we, all of us agreed on this before we left to go out and talk. I don't know how the things were handled for Kenya and Somalia, but I was particularly keen having had problems with the Congress on arms sales. We wanted to keep this very quiet, so we briefed just very key members of the congress that we were going to go out there and negotiate this agreement with Oman. I more or less took the lead on that with Lee Hamilton (House of Representatives) and with Chuck Percy on the senate side.

Q: These were committee chairmen?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. Very grateful, very supportive. Of course, when you talk about a treaty, you know, people get obviously, but with good reason, somewhat nervous. What are we committed to? And of course, the big question was does this mean that if Oman has problem "X" are we committed to coming in and saving the Sultan. Do we have to commit forces if the Dhofar rebellion comes up again, or if they are invaded? A lot of questions like that. We assured them that was not going to be the kind of...it was not a mutual defense treaty. It was an access to facilities agreement, and we would simply be quiet on those areas. That is how it finally worked out. But the initial contact was to sketch out what we were looking for. This is what I described, access to, prepositioning of facilities, prepositioning of equipment and access to facilities, with a certain quid pro quos for the Omanis. It would develop later on that we actually came up with an aid package for the Omanis, but that had not been in our...sort of at the back of people's minds. These are people who want to get as much as they can out of this agreement, and there could be a financial quid pro quo.

We, on the original call to call on the Sultan, we had assured them of our seriousness. We wanted a treaty with them and this came from the White House, the President. We were fully committed to this as long as the terms were all right. The Omanis like a lot of our foreign friends respect our freedom of the press and transparency in one way, but they didn't want this to be publicized. They were very nervous about seeing headlines in the Washington Post or the New York Times: "Oman and U.S. Sign Pact." That scared them because they pursued a fairly independent foreign policy, but they didn't want to take a lot of flak from their Arab neighbors. Obviously this would be something that a great number of people might not be happy about.

Q: It is one of those diplomatic situations where you can get more if you keep your mouth closed.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, absolutely. So we told them, and they asked us if Congress is going to have to pass on this. Will Congress go for this? We said that we will structure it in such a way and do it in such a way that one, it would get through Congress and two, with minimum publicity. We impressed Lee Hamilton and Chuck Percy with this fact that you know, we are not trying to hide anything from you, the Congress, but you must understand why we have to be very discreet about world publicity for this.

So we went out in December, and we went out, I am skipping ahead just to give the framework. We went out in December, and we went out two more times in like April and maybe July. We signed the access agreement in September in Washington.

Q: Up to that point all the discussions had been in Oman.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes.

Q: And what was the occasion when it was signed?

COUNTRYMAN: It was very quiet. We didn't use one of the treaty rooms. It was done in the NEA front office, and the Omani ambassador came in and signed. I think we had the Secretary sign for the U.S.

But the negotiations proceeded in a very orderly sort of way and a very nice sort of way. What we decided on right from the first. The U.S. if you looked at the treaties we have, we had a previous treaty with Oman, the treaty of amity and commerce that had been signed 150 years before that, back when the United States was very young, and Oman was a big power in the Gulf. It was a very charming old document. It had a lot of references to what you do to shipwrecked seamen. Of course, when I went out there as ambassador subsequently it was the 150th anniversary of the signing of this treaty of amity and commerce. We built a whole USIS PR (public relations) effort around the fact that Oman and the U.S. are old friends and good friends. We had Hermann Eilts come out and give a series of lectures and had banquets and so on. So it was sort of part of my strategy to build up the idea of U.S.-Omani friendship and the access agreement which at that time had become generally known was not just a mindless dialogue about guns, but was the fruit of a long and good relationship between the U.S. and the Sultan. It piggybacked and it was a modernization if you will, of that original 19th. century document.

So the negotiations...early on we decided that the form they would take, and of course we had a lot of help from legal, our legal people. The U.S.-Omani access to facilities agreement would be called the U.S.-Omani security agreement. And the agreement would be about one sentence long. The United States of America and the Sultanate of Oman agree to military cooperation in a manner to be determined by subsequent documents and negotiation. That is the agreement, unclassified. So it was a box inside of a box inside of a box. So we had all kinds of letters of understanding and documents that were confidential, secret, top secret. But that is what the world saw. That served both of our purposes. The Omanis liked that box within a box thing. So that was the original idea we had. So then, since we knew we were going to do these things and to have these things, we got down to working out the language in the various detailed documents, so that we would have access to the facilities. We were very clear, no American flag. This is not an American base. This is an Omani base to which American forces would have access under these circumstances. So there were a lot of details on that. The DOD and the State Department lawyers tended to want to have generalized conceptual legal language. We at State Department, people like myself and Reginald Bartholomew and the uniformed service DOD people, from long experience with status of forces agreements understood, were concerned that particularly in a country they didn't know what they were getting into in Oman, was less so in Oman than other places, but still it was true there, that you want to have a conceptual agreement up here, but the little guy down at customs is the one who is going to open the box. That is what you wanted to prevent or wouldn't let you come on the base after four o'clock. The devil would be in the details. So against the advice of the lawyers, we tended to make these internal agreements rather detailed and spell them out and try to anticipate problems that would arise for us in Oman. So one element of course, was access to Seeb and Masirah. Technical stuff, notification, how you would do it, call signs, how many flights a week we thought there would be, refueling, how you would pay for fuel, very detailed kind of stuff. That was one thing. The second thing of course, was preposition. Well this would mean building some kind of buildings for us where you could preposition stuff and where would it be. So the Corps of Engineers came in on it. About this time there was some thought about lengthening the runway at Seeb and getting some extra aircraft parking spaces and also improving the airfield at Masirah, which by this time was an Omani air force base. So that became the question of monetary aid to the Omanis. There were those who said we could do ESF. ESF at that time was economic support funds. ESF was you know, a check, ten million dollars a year or whatever it was. It was never clear to me the people in AID didn't like that, and the Pentagon didn't like that approach. I think early on we came to the decision that again for the public image it would be better to have some kind of an aid program to show that there was not the mindless dialogue about guns, this was expanding relationship with Oman and we were doing other things for them. Of course, because although Oman had rather large oil wells it was not eligible for US aid. So we came up with the idea of a joint commission, and we spent a lot of time on that. The joint commission would be chaired by the American Ambassador and the Omani Foreign Minister. It would have an office in Muscat separate from the Embassy, that would be staffed by USAID employees, and people seconded from the Omani development ministry would work together. We would have a certain amount of funds, and the Omanis and the Americans worked together coming up with projects for Oman, development projects. So that became a sort of a separate issue that we started working on. AID was not too keen on this, but got a phone call I guess from Vance or the White House and said you will like it! Once that happened, they were extremely helpful. Of course, it was an area where, particularly in my case, we had some minor AID projects in Yemen. I didn't know the whole AID process or I was not one of these Foreign Service officers who knew a lot about AID.

Q: Let me ask you by way of background, the resistance to ESF, is that because the ESF was closely associated with our approach to Cairo and Israel about that time. Just write a check.

COUNTRYMAN: That's right.

Q: So, to avoid that perception, with the public or with the Congress, you turn to this other mechanism.

COUNTRYMAN: Well I think it was "both," "and". ESF was a bad idea, but the joint commission idea was better, because it has this other PR advantage of being concerned about a holistic approach to our relationship. It is not just security we are interested in the civility of Oman, we are interested in...and the projects, I will come to say, the projects that we picked were picked very, there was so much to do in Oman, but these projects were picked for maximum impact and true helpfulness to Oman, and in ways that everybody could understand were important, were good.

As I say the process started in December of '79. We signed in, I think it was, September of the following year. So in those six month period these things came up and side agreements were, all right now we are finished on the access to facilities. OK, no we are finished with the prepositioning agreement. OK, we had a provision in there for joint maneuvers, and that was a rather ticklish one. It happened shortly after I arrived in Oman and that is we had Marines coming ashore, in effect not invading but coming ashore and maneuvering with the Omanis. Well, this was unheard of, but it was a thing that was very carefully orchestrated in the press when we did it, to get the idea that the United States could project power onto the Arabian Peninsula, at least in this one place. So that became a very difficult element, is this idea of joint maneuvers and exercises.

Q: And then that proceeds into creating the joint commission.

COUNTRYMAN: Well as I say, the covering letter was the agreement. It just says the U.S. and Oman will cooperate. Then we had all the classified side agreements. As I recall they were a creation of the joint commission, access to facilities, prepositioning, maneuvers, and then there was something about arms sales. Kind of a letter of intent that we would look favorably upon Oman's purchasing appropriate defensive weapons.

Q: Who is the ambassador in Oman at the time?

COUNTRYMAN: Marshall Wiley [Editor's Note: Ambassador Marshall Wayne Wiley served in Oman from November 1978 to May 1981].

Q: It sounds like these agreements are going to impact on embassy staffing, aren't you are going to need a pol-mil officer that you didn't need before? Someone will have to cover joint commission issues. How does this get worked out?

COUNTRYMAN: Exactly. We had a military attaché<sup>1/2</sup>. We was the same one...he stayed on for a year after I came out there as Ambassador. We added one more officer. We added one more pol mil officer to...as it worked out when I was there, we didn't, we really converted him into a strict political officer because things had changed. But at the time it seemed like a smart thing to do, mainly as a favor to the ambassador who just had an awful lot of stuff to keep track of. It was sort of a staff aide for pol-mil, and someone to run between the ambassador's office and the attaché<sup>1/2</sup>'s office.

Q: This is actually fairly typical State Department approach where you have somebody on the ambassador's staff, not just his attaché<sup>1/2</sup>s who overlook any kind of military relationship you might have in country.

COUNTRYMAN: Exactly. But as it worked out for me because we had...that was I think you know, we are not saying a NATO country where we had so many other things in our relationship. In my case the military relationship was a very large part of what my job was, so I was the pol-mil officer as the ambassador. But the period between December of '79 and the signing, the actual final signing of the agreement was to hammer out the language in all of these various agreements, and to come up with a figure of what the joint commission would be. We wanted to make sure...again briefing the Congress all the time, because the idea was Oman aren't they an oil country? What do you mean giving them aid. What we pointed out was of course was that we had, this history of Oman was they had been at one time just a few years ago one of the most backward countries in the world because of the ancient ideas of the old Sultan. And that they needed a lot and they were good allies and they would match the funds. I have forgotten now what the original amount of money was. It was somewhere around \$15,000,000, which is not very much, \$30,000,000. The Omanis matched it. We also by this time, by the time we got up to signing the agreement, we had a pretty good idea on what we were going to spend the money on, what the projects would be, and they were very, very good projects. One was...and here I must say USAID did a marvelous job, because they sent a team out there, and just roamed around the country and asked the right kind of question. We had given them some guidelines, we wanted maximum impact on the Omani population...

Q: You were saying an AID team came to Oman and looked around the country to see what projects the joint commission might support.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, and of course they had to be sized according to how much money was available. The first project they came up with, I will go through the projects they eventually came up with over time, but the first thing they came up with was a wadi water catchment scheme. I am not a hydrologist, but it is easy to understand, and it was a brilliant idea. Oman, of course, is a desert, but at the very lower portion of Oman is actually hit by the monsoons in Dhofar. It is almost junglely down there. The rest of the country is very rocky and dry, a typical Arabian Peninsula desert, so water was a problem. They do have some downpours in the winter, and they have a wadi which is a sort of a depression in the ground. Particularly around Muscat they had one particularly large wadi. The skies would open and you got very heavy rains, all the water would go into this wadi and go right out to the sea. So AID came up with a scheme of a series of dams so when this wadi filled up, the water would not all go out to sea, but it would be caught in a series of catchments. Then it could be drained off and used for agriculture. They were concerned because in Muscat the population was increasing, as it does in any capital city. With more people; there was more demand for water. So that was the one scheme we took on. This was expensive. There was a lot of laying of concrete. You have to do some catchments on the side, and they have to be properly placed and measuring the water. But that was an excellent thing. Everyone could see the American and Omani flags out there on this big hill outside of Muscat. It had a very practical use: to provide water.

We also decided there should be a training component. My wife now works for AID and this has changed a little bit. But in my day there was an office of training in AID. Any country where you had this little training package could tap into all kinds of...this is not university or college training, but this was technical, special training. It was like a catalogue, and you could tap into U.S. government training facilities. For instance if you wanted to...Oman was going to do a census. How do you do a census? So the Census Bureau will train foreigners on how to take a census. There were some agricultural things...in other words the Omanis had a drawing account of about 3-4-5,000,000 dollars, and we would consult with AID people on the ground who would consult with their people, and we would come up with a wish list of people that they would want to be trained in these various fields and say, "Oh, yes, for census we can do this. The course is a three month course and it begins in August and blah," and, "Oh, yes, you want to do this type of hydrology. The Department of Agriculture can help." That was the second project.

The third project developed after we go into Oman. That was the Omanis came to us one time not even thinking of the joint commission, and were complaining about the Koreans and the Japanese who had fishing rights in the Gulf of Oman. As it later developed, I didn't know this at the time, the Gulf of Oman is one of the last great untapped fish areas in the world. The Omanis of course, are great fishermen, but they had little dhows and sort of little dugouts with little outboard motors on it and very primitive types of netting schemes, where the Koreans and Japanese came in with a ship the size of a destroyer with huge nets and would take up whole schools of fish. They were paying the Omanis for this because it was done in Omani national waters, but, of course, they could also fish outside of those waters and decrease what was available to the Omani fishermen. We came up with a fisheries project. This was fairly costly and really kind of replaced the wadi because the wadi project when I was Ambassador we finished. I was at the dedication ceremony for it. The fisheries project was to take the Omani fishing industry from A to Z; give their fishermen some instruction on how to fish better, net technology, how to set up some freezer plants that they could put ice in and then ship the fish off to Saudi Arabia or off the Gulf or even to Europe. Some business sense of how to market their fish. But a lot of it was to get them some better boats, to get them some better netting techniques. Those were the three major projects.

Q: Toward the end of your tour in ARP in late '80 comes the transition between the two administrations, the departing Carter and the incoming Reagan administration. How does the transition affect your office? Did you go through the normal exercise of papers for the transition team?

COUNTRYMAN: Of course by then, I was beginning to get some tentative feelings about the possibility of going out to Oman as ambassador. I went out in the summer of '81. As a matter of fact, I was in the very first batch of ambassadorial appointments when Ronald Reagan came in.

Q: How does that work out? Well let's move on to the process mechanism and excitement of becoming an ambassador. Who first broached the issue to you?

COUNTRYMAN: I think, well when we had been in ARP we had sent out a couple of ambassadors to, we sent one to when I was there, to Bahrain. Joe Twinam, who the Deputy Assistant Secretary covering ARP, said to me, "I want to save you for Oman you know." I said, "Marvelous. That would be great." There was a sort of an atmosphere that you know, all things being equal I would probably go to Oman. If I hadn't I wouldn't have been all that disappointed, knowing how difficult these things are. Peter Constable who was the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary, and some time in very early '81, he called me and said that my name was going up on the short list of three to the White House for ambassador to Oman. He called me very shortly thereafter and said, "Come on over and let's talk." He said, "It was very interesting. You know we sent it to an office over there and that is where they sort out whether they are going to have a political appointee." He said, "Our White House liaison came back to NEA and said, before you send up that list for Oman, I hope that you will give a great deal of thought because we have very decided opinions up here as to who should be the next ambassador there, and he happens to be a career officer. It is a career officer that we want." So he sent up the list and the White House came back and said, "You have got it right."

Q: Who is your friend in high places?

COUNTRYMAN: I think we had gone out to Omani national day, and I had taken a group of distinguished Americans out including both Democrats and Republicans. Out to Oman for Omani national day in the summer just about the time we signed the agreement. Omani national day is like in September or October. October I guess it is. I had taken these people out. I think they had come back and said you know, "Countryman seems to know everybody out there. If you want a good man take Countryman."

Q: Do you recall who the head of the Reagan Administration transition team for NEA was and how the process of assigning papers unfolded?

COUNTRYMAN: I think that was Bob Neumann who later went on to become ambassador to Saudi Arabia. He was in charge. On assigning papers, I don't know. I think this is done by the executive assistant to the secretary. I think the transition team goes up into the 7th floor and they sit down and obviously the people who are on the new administration's team know something. I mean they wouldn't be on the team if they didn't have some expertise. So just take, and they do this for the whole world, so I mean for NEA the people come in and just sort of sit down. They come up with the joint list. If you know anything about the area it is obviously you are going to do a paper whatever it is called Current state of Arab-Israeli relations. That is the obvious. You are going to do something about arms sales. You are going to do something on oil and the dollar. You are going to do something about relations with Iraq and Iran. I mean almost any fool could come up with a list and what you call it. It is a question of how you going to do a separate paper. I think there was a lot of horse trading. Is there a separate paper on this or do you do this and include these things. These were some of the bureaucratic. As I recall, there were no surprises for us in ARP.

Q: As you end your tour in ARP, how would you say the various countries that you covered sort of stacked up in importance and problems. Obviously Saudi Arabia was the main one. Oman we had this new relationship. Where did the others that ARP covered sort of sit in the...

COUNTRYMAN: Oman used to be way down the list in importance, but with the access agreement, Oman almost came up to number two after Saudi Arabia. We had a long relationship with Kuwait. Of course, there was a lot, at that time there was not the threat of the Iraqi invasion. But we had a long relationship with Kuwait, and there was a lot of oil there. Bahrain we had a certain amount of importance there because of the U.S. Navy presence. The UAE less important and Yemen, if anything Yemen probably got the least attention. In some ways it should have gotten more. At this time there was still the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, South Yemen, where we had no representation. It was a communist state. So there was a certain amount of attention to Yemen but it was always very much overshadowed by Saudi Arabia because the Saudis didn't like the Yemenis, and the Yemenis did not like the Saudis. But I think at the time I left ARP the pecking order of time and attention was probably Saudi Arabia clearly, then Oman and Kuwait, and then Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE and then Yemen.

Q: Becoming ambassador, there is actually a number of steps between sending your name over to the White House and getting off the plane. How did that unfold?

COUNTRYMAN: Again Peter Constable called me and said, "Be home tonight at seven o'clock, for sure, because you are going to get a call from the President." He said "tonight," I mean, no advance notice. Well, my wife and I never went out, but we had...for some reason we were invited out to dinner that night. So I called her and said Call so and so and we will get dinner when we can because I have to be home at seven o'clock. I will tell you why later on. So I got home early from ARP, like 5:30 to 6:00. I took a shower and I was sitting on my bed at about quarter of seven in my shorts and the phone rang and this voice said, "Is this Mr. Countryman? Please stand by and in about ten minutes you are going to be receiving a call from the White House." So I quickly got dressed. It wasn't appropriate speaking to the President in just my shorts. Sure enough at 6:58 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  I got a call that said it was from the President. It was Ronald Reagan of course. He said, "John this is Ronald Reagan. This is the President. I just wanted to call you and say I would like you to go to the Sultanate of Oman and serve as my ambassador. How does that sound to you?" I really hadn't rehearsed anything. "I am deeply honored. I would be very happy." "Well I understand you are just the man for it. You are well respected and do a good job out there. I am glad that is all right with you, and I hope you enjoy your evening. We will look forward to seeing you in the White House before you go out," click.

Q: As director of ARP you have five or six ambassadors under you. Has this happened before or is this something the Reagan administration brought in, a call from the president to the nominee?

COUNTRYMAN: I don't think it happened in the Carter administration where I had most of my experience. I don't think they did. This was Ronald Reagan's style. Of course, when I would call on him, that is another story. He was very, that was his style. He wanted to have some contact with his ambassadors.

Q: State forwards your nomination to the White House. The President has called you. Then you go to the Hill for confirmation hearings. You're experiencing the whole American constitutional mechanism.

COUNTRYMAN: I went up for my hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Rudy Boschwitz, Senator from Minnesota, chaired the Middle Eastern portion. I went up with Dick Viets who was going to Amman. One of the staffers on the Foreign Relations Committee, who had been a State Department officer, I forget his name. He called me and said, "Rudy Boschwitz is going to ask you some questions on Oman. I am not even going to bother to tell you what those questions are. John, if you can't answer the questions he is going to ask you, you don't deserve to go to Oman." So we went up. Dick and I sat down. Dick went first. He really didn't...I was surprised at how few questions he asked Dick Viets. Dick, of course had been DCM in Tel Aviv and was very well qualified. It was very brief. I thought "My God, what's going to happen now?" Well, Rudy Boschwitz was fascinated with Oman. He asked me all kinds of really detailed questions about the tribes and how the British had gotten in there. I understand there is oil but not very much and the Sultan had been to Sandhurst. I mean these were things I knew. Questions if you knew anything about Oman, if you spent as much time as I did, they were not probing questions, and very friendly. He said, "I would love to come out." I said, "I would be delighted to have you come out Senator. I am sure that the Omanis would be delighted to have you."

Q: What do you suppose was the source of his curiosity?

COUNTRYMAN: I thought he was just fascinated by Oman. It was different. He had seen pictures of the Sultan who looks very exotic in his turbans and all this sort of thing. But he was very friendly. Of course I was voted through, it went fine. Then I was sworn in, in August of '81.

Q: The swearing in ceremony usually takes place on the 7th. floor of the State Department in the formal rooms...

COUNTRYMAN: You have your choice. I wanted to make it not the biggest splash in the world, but I took the Benjamin Franklin, the biggest room there. Then you have to arrange to have it catered. I paid for that, with champagne and very simple hors d'oeuvres, there is someone who helps you do that. Then you can pick who you want to have swear you in. A good friend of mine, Wally Stadtler, who I went to high school with, Antonin Scalia went to the same high school we did, and he had Scalia come in and swear him in. Scalia had not been appointed at the time I was made Ambassador to Oman. But I had been called in by Walter Stoessel who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who congratulated me when I got the nod from the White House. He said, "There is one more career person we have nailed down. That is you." He was always pushing for career people. So we talked a little bit. I had met him before as ARP country director, but he didn't know me very well. He wanted to know someone who is going out to be ambassador, he wanted to know who I was, so we spent not a lot of time but about 20-30 minutes talking about Oman and myself, So I asked Walter Stoessel which he did.

Q: Those are always occasions where your colleague would come up and enjoy the day.

COUNTRYMAN: I had my wife and my daughter and mother-in-law, and my mother and sister. Then after I was sworn in, then the White House said to stand by, you will call on the President on Thursday. The day before I was to call on the President, the air controllers strike hit. The morning I was to go to ARP where I had a little office and I was to hold there. My call to the President was going to be something like 11:00 or 11:30 in the morning, but from 9:00 on I was to be in the office waiting on the call. Of course the office was all alerted. When the White House calls, all other calls are put on hold. So at about 9:10 the White House calls and says the President has a chaotic morning because of the strike. Stand by we may reschedule this. So my wife and daughter and mother and mother-in-law were just told to wait. At about 10:00 I got a call that said it would be 11:00 sharp. So I went over with my family and we had gotten wind, this was in the holding room in the White House. There were a couple of other ambassadors. Our ambassador to Turkey was there with somebody else, and some staffer from the White House came down and asked "Are you John Countryman?" I said, "Yes." So it was a few minutes before 11:00 that we went in. Richard Allen was Reagan's National Security Advisor. You walk in the door and of course here is this phalanx of families who arranged themselves. Richard Allen almost rudely grabbed me by the arm and sort of dragged me over to the President and said, "Mr. President this is John Countryman." The President said without so much as a hello, "John, we really expect you to put that military relationship with Oman on the map. It is very important. I take a personal interest in it. I understand you are the person who is going to do this for us. This is very important" So we chatted about a couple of minor things. He got on to the subject of what my father had done. He was in the newspaper business and so on and so forth. He said, "Well I am sure that whatever pictures he had of me were good pictures." That was it. But I remember that very forcefully, evidently that was on his agenda. I took that as my guidance.

Q: And then shortly after that you go through the pack up and you arrive at post. Who was DCM?

COUNTRYMAN: Steve Buck, who had been the DCM for Marshall Wylie, and I asked him to stay on. Also the secretary for Ambassador Wylie who had been close to Marshall Wylie. I thought I would be a very different ambassador from Marshall Wylie both in style and substance, but both Steve and the secretary were real pros. I remember writing both of them or calling and saying I don't consider you holdovers. You are my first choices.

Q: This is an ambassadorial prerogative to organize the front office any way you want.

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, yes.

Q: How big is the Embassy and how is it organized at this time?

COUNTRYMAN: At that time we had an ambassador, a DCM, two secretaries in the front office. Two consular officers. A secretary, an economic officer, a pol-mil officer, a pol-mil secretary, a USIS officer with a USIS clerk-secretary. Then the joint commission which got into being about the time I got there which consisted of on the American side a director, a program officer, a secretary, a budget person, so there was four on the American side, and we had about three on the Omani side. A Marine who was the senior military attaché<sup>1/2</sup>, and an Air Force Major who was the assistant. They had about three or four enlisted people. Then we had about four communicators.

Q: On the other side who is now the director of ARP in Washington, who will be your liaison?

COUNTRYMAN: Bob Pelletreau. But I dealt a great deal with Jim Placke who was Deputy Assistant Secretary.

Q: When you first arrived in the late summer of '81, other than the military relationship, what were some of your other priorities?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, with the opening of the relationship, all of a sudden there are a lot of questions about Oman. Oman suddenly becomes a lot more important across the board, so I had a really full plate. When I arrived, of course, there was no military relationship, just the papers. But even when I presented my credentials to the Sultan, I had to break a standard kind of diplomatic canon, if you will, that you don't get into substance when you are presenting your credentials [Editor's Note Ambassador Countryman presented his credentials on October 14, 1981]. The military wanted to have an exercise in a couple of weeks with the Omanis and we were against time constraints. Given sometimes the difficulty of the Omanis getting to the Sultan, I asked the Foreign Minister if I could ask the Sultan when I presented my credentials about this military exercise. He sort of rolled his eyes. So I had to do that. So none of the things existed yet. They were all to be done.

Q: So you are actually having to build what you just negotiated.

COUNTRYMAN: Exactly. I was really concerned that we get going on the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the treaty of commerce and amity. I had a superb, absolutely first rate, marvelous USIS officer. I can't remember his name. He had come to me before and wanted to go to Oman. I was waiting for the question because I knew who he was. He said, "You know I am Jewish." And I responded "I am Catholic. So?" He said, "Well." I said, "No, this is no problem. Not with the Omanis and not with me."

Q: But he had served in the Middle East before.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, and was an excellent Arabist, and just had a great PR sense. I called him in the first day after I got my bags unpacked and told him my vision for the hoopla I wanted for this 150th anniversary. He just understood right away. He got brochures, got the money, got Hermann Eilts to come out, banquets, worked with the ministry of cultural heritage.

Q: What is Ambassador Eilts at this time?

COUNTRYMAN: He is retired. But he was, of course, this great scholar. He had written, he had gotten some documentation on the trip on the voyage of the Omani vessel Sultana. He had it published by the Boston historical society. He had discovered that in the 19th century, the Omanis to further their relations with the United States, had sent one of their big seagoing dhows to New York with presents and they called on the President. It was PR deal. They went and got some American machine products and so forth. But this voyage of the Sultana had been played up by the Omanis and had been recorded heavily in the American press with these exotic people with turbans coming into New York and the riches of the east on display and picking up guns and American hardware and this sort of thing. He had been in our office in Aden many years ago. He wasn't ambassador there but I guess when it was under the British it was almost a consulate. He had been accredited to Oman and called on Oman, so he was one of the few people outside of myself who knew something about Oman. He came and gave a whole lecture on the voyage of the Sultana and some historical research on the treaty of amity and commerce. So we did that.

Then the rest of my tour, and that was important. We also wanted to increase trade with Oman. It looked like there was depth and texture to the relationship so that it didn't seem all one sided, that we were only there for military access. So I did a lot with the Department of Commerce. I got a very good, as a matter of fact...I was cited in my efficiency report, because of the way we did things on those days, you didn't say this in so many words, but I got some write up about how I had been particularly attentive to...not diversity because that wasn't a cliché ½ yet...but broadening the base of the embassy. We had a Jewish officer. I had the first woman who had service in Oman. She came in as head of the economic section in the 1984 summer rotation.

Q: Who was that?

COUNTRYMAN: What was her name? Dianne Markowitz. She later went on to be consul in Poznan. She was proposed to me, and what I wanted was not only someone who would be a trade promoter, but I wanted a real economist. I thought there was all kinds of stuff, and it wasn't the fault of my predecessors, but I am not a trained economist, but I know the kinds of things you should know about a country's economy. No one knew the files on Oman better than I did, both from Agency and our reporting. There was trade promoting, but I didn't understand very much about the economy of Oman. I knew they had some oil. I didn't know anything about the banking system. So this gal when she came out did a lot of excellent economic reporting. So there was that too. As it later worked out, and I got a sense of this over time that you know, anything I needed for Oman to enrich the relationship, to help the relationship, something that Washington could do, people would do it.

During my tour I really got very high level attention. The Sultan made a state visit to the States, to the U.S. That was in '82. And in '83, as we were getting ready to go to the run up of the renegotiation of the treaty of amity and commerce, of the security agreement, the Omanis we had some minor problems, mainly from the Omanis feeling kind of isolated. I got George Bush to come on one of his trips and visit Oman when he was Vice President. So it was a very active place with the Sultan going to the United States and George Bush coming to Oman, plus the big celebration of the treaty of amity and commerce. So for my period there, little Oman was getting a lot of headlines in both countries.

Q: Give us a little background. How does one encourage the Vice President's staff to put you on their schedule?

COUNTRYMAN: I got wind of this way back. What you do is you play everybody's chord. I was the Ambassador which means I had a position to visit the other agencies. So I went to the station chief and said, "You know it can't help but help you. I mean George Bush of all people coming out here. You use your channels. I don't even want to see the messages, but encourage the Agency to encourage George Bush to come out."

Q: Because he obviously had the agency connection.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, obviously, and he was the Vice President and they briefed him and so on and so forth. So when somebody goes over to brief the Vice President and says "I understand you are going to be out in Pakistan. Boy our people in Oman could really use a trip. It is a great place and blah, blah." I used my military connections. I went to the head of the CENTCOM, Central Command, General Bob Houston. Of course, they were all for it. So of course the military said you have got to go out to Oman. I talked to the State Department and pushed them. This trip must have been planned for quite awhile because I had a lot of lead time on this to set up my bureaucratic diplomacy. Then I did a long the typical ambassadorial think piece type of thing on the U.S.-Omani relationship the grabber being the Omanis feel lonely and that they are well intentioned toward us, but how the British, although not opposing us, don't particularly help. The incident they had with the Indians about talking about getting too close to the Americans, not that the Indians mean that much, but we needed encouragement and where we stood on the relationship and how we were doing on military access. The last paragraph was how helpful it would be for the Vice President to come and speak directly to the Sultan. as part of his trip.

Q: Did you have any CODELs (congressional delegations) in the four years you were there?

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, yes. Chuck Percy came out. That was a big CODEL. We had kind of...I forget what the auspices of that was, but it was sort of a mass CODEL. I forget, it wasn't a committee. I think it was sort of...H (Bureau of Congressional Relations) said everybody is interested in Oman. Let's fill up an airplane with people who are interested in Oman. So a bunch of people from various committees came out. I hosted them, and the Omanis were very good about that.

Q: Let's just get into some of the process there. You have got a major CODEL coming. You tell the Omanis, you suggest to them you'll host a dinner and the Omanis host a dinner.

COUNTRYMAN: Oh, the Omanis were very PR conscious, and they were very well set up at the various palaces. So for instance when Senator Percy came, I gave a major dinner at my residence one night and invited very senior Omanis to it plus the few Americans I had here. Of course I knew that the Omanis would be told to make sure that they would come. Then of course, we called on the Sultan, and we met with him and his guard in the afternoon at one of his palaces outside of town. The Seeb palace. Then there was a dinner given by the Foreign Minister. The Omanis were very good about this.

Q: At the time you are there, the Iran-Iraq War emerges, if I have the time line right, and that just impacts on everything. How does that look from your perspective in Oman, the start of the Iran-Iraq War?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, of course we had both an Iranian ambassador and an Iraqi ambassador in Oman. It was very interesting that when that was on, the Iraqi ambassador of course I spoke to him because we had relations with Iraq. He was sort of my buddy, you know. I mean he always came over and said hello to me you know. Of course I did not shake hands with or recognize the Iranian ambassador at all.

Q: That was U.S. policy.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. The Omanis of course, had been very close to the Shah and the Shah had helped them in the Dhofar rebellion, had sent Iranian troops to help them. The Sultan had been close to the Shah. The Iraqis had meddled a little bit, not having gotten very far, but because Omani society was kind of Iraqi-Ba'ath-Party-proof, Saddam-Hussein-proof, but there were things that we got through intelligence sources and police sources that the Iraqis had tried to ferment some problems in Oman. It never got even halfway to first base; it never got off the ground, but there had been. So there was a suspicion on the part of the Omanis toward the Iraqis.

Q: How did the Omanis see this conflict, as religious, ethnic...?

COUNTRYMAN: No I think the Omanis saw it strictly as a national conflict between the Iranians and the Iraqis. I think their view was the best outcome of the war was that both Iraq and Iran would lose somehow, if it were possible.

Q: Getting back to your comment that Oman was Ba'ath Party-proof, what variables in Oman are you using to come to that conclusion?

COUNTRYMAN: The Omanis were simply not that nationalist inclined. There had never been because of the British presence there, there had not been opportunity for the Iraqis to prosthelytize the country, to get their message across. People didn't listen to the radio from Radio Baghdad. I don't think the reception was good; I don't think you could get it in Oman. So they just never had a chance to infiltrate. The population in the interior of Oman was...a lot of them were illiterate, pretty loyal to the Sultan. I mean it was not a, and they were away from the Arab nationalist atmosphere of Nasser and his thing. They had their own Omani problems and saw themselves as Omanis and rather self sufficient, so they were sort of immune to wanting to overthrow the Sultan and set up an Iraqi Ba'ath presence.

Q: The Middle East is still a fairly unstable place when you are in Oman. In '82 Israel invades Lebanon, the bombing of the Embassy and the Marines in Lebanon. How are those kinds of events portrayed and impacting on your environment in Oman?

COUNTRYMAN: Because of the history of Oman, there were practically no Palestinians in Oman. A lot of the other gulf sheikdoms because they didn't have an educated populace, they had hired Palestinians and there was at least a Palestinian advisor in various ministries and so forth, and the Palestinian presence was there. There was a sense in which they had to play the more Palestinian line in the local press. Oman, of course, had never recognized the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). That is a very important thing. All the other countries had a PLO representative or some kind of relationship. Oman refused to recognize the PLO because the PLO had supported the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman in South Yemen. They had supported the overthrow of the Sultan, so the Omanis did not recognize them, the Palestinians. We always thought, I pushed the Agency to find out for us, but I had some indications myself, the Omanis had some clandestine relationship with Israel, at least on the intelligence sharing. So what happened in the Levant, what happened in the Palestine-Israel problems was of concern to the Omanis because it tended to poison the general Arab well and tended to...

Q: You were saying the lack of resident Palestinians and Oman's own political history gave these events a totally different presentation in Oman. Now, your Oman tour lasted four years...

COUNTRYMAN: Yes, I was only supposed to be there for three, but Dick Murphy called me as a courtesy, you know, what was I going to do with my life, it must have been a little over two year mark and said, "Would I stay on for the fourth year because the fourth year was when we would re-negotiate the access agreement. In the access agreement, one of the provisions was it would only go for five years because it had been signed in '80. So, in '85 it would be up for re-negotiation. He said, everybody here said we can bring you back here if you are going to stay and not retire and you can advise us, but he said nobody knows the ins and outs. He said, "We want somebody there who can say, well don't you remember Mr. Minister back when we negotiated. Didn't we say," so and so and that never got into the record but we did it anyway. It was our sense that blah would happen. We want that kind of a thing. He said, "Defense wants it and the White House wants it. We all want you to stay." So I said, "OK."

Q: By that fourth and last year, how would you characterize the difference in priorities from when you first arrived in '81?

COUNTRYMAN: I think they were still the same. I would like to feel that I had done much to redress some of those areas where we were really weak. Now one of the things I did in the Embassy,...and I always thought it was one of the greatest compliments I ever got,...Sheldon Krys, who was in charge of NEA/EX, said to me after I had been there about 2-21/2 years. He said, "You know if there were some kind of an award for an ambassador who administered his post the best, you would get it hands down in NEA." Because of the expansion, we did an awful lot administratively. I told you that I had picked the ambassador's residence and chancery. And that had been the best game in town. By the time I was there, we had wildly outgrown it. So I persuaded the Department to...and we had it on the books, of course, I had pushed for this, a new chancery. Before I left, I had gotten the plans approved. Shortly after I left they started breaking the ground for a new chancery and ambassador's residence. But that was all in the future.

But from my time there, I got myself moved out of the second floor in the chancery building. I lived above the embassy. My wife deserves a tremendous...some kind of medal from the State Department. She negotiated really our new house. She found a beautiful house for us on the outskirts of town that had been built by the Omani who has the title of riz baladieh, i.e., the president of the municipality. He was like the mayor of Muscat. A lovely house. She just drove around with my driver. I don't know where she got these tips. There weren't for sale signs, but she heard about it. She went and saw this house and she loved it. I called his office, and they said, "He is going to move into that." So I said, "Tell him the American ambassador would like to call on him." So I called on him. He was so flattered the American Ambassador came a calling. "Of course, I will move someplace else; of course you can have it." We got it for a fair price which, of course, freed up all kinds of room in the building where other people could get better offices. The AID director, the head of the joint commission, his wife was a nurse. I got permission to put her on the payroll, and I got a little outbuilding that was in our compound, got it refurbished, and we had a nurse's office there. In a place like Oman although we had an American medical mission that could take pretty good care of us, and the Omani medical hospital system was not bad for a third world country, but it was still a great morale thing to have. So that was another thing we did.

The husband of the gal who was the station chief's secretary's husband was retired, and had nothing to do. I got him put on the payroll as our commissary superintendent. We opened up a commissary so we could order stuff in. You didn't have to wait for shipments outside like cigarettes, like a PX, liquor and this sort of stuff. So he ran that. It was open a few times a week. People were asking all kinds of questions about Oman. Oman is as large as Kansas. It is not a huge country, but it is a very beautiful country, great differences of vegetation in the desert and so on and so forth. I always thought that one of the prerogatives of the ambassador particularly in a country like Oman, was to get to know his country. I took two trips while I was there. Oman was divided into 12 wilayah, states, like governorates. There was a governor's office that was a kind of a center administration in each one of these 12 wilayah. So I went to every one of them. I went out with the political officer and drove and went to these wilayah and talked to them, saw their hospitals and saw their irrigation problems and wrote it all up. So that by the time I left, someone coming to Oman have a very good sense of the country and not just Muscat.

Q: You've just illustrated the wide range of responsibilities an ambassador has, from dealing with quality of life issues, to focusing political and economic reporting, to representing the United States. Now, you noted you had a number of women officers, the nurse, are there any particular problems operating in this environment?

COUNTRYMAN: No, Oman was very liberal on that. They are Muslim, but they were very, there was no problem on that back then. The women, I never had any regulations I promulgated. But it was...my wife was helpful on that, sort of getting the word out that, I mean there were a lot of beaches, and of course there were a lot of British and Dutch women in bikinis and everything. But when you went to the souq or you went downtown, all the women somehow knew this, and I got the word out very subtly, yes, you didn't wear short shorts or a halter, that sort of thing. You wore reasonable dress with a reasonable knee length and some kind of a little sleeve. I think the only things that impacted was in...I used to advise very strongly that in Ramadan, don't eat in public. Don't be eating an apple in the car as they drive you home. Don't smoke in the car as you are going out. I am a great cigar smoker, and during Ramadan I would not smoke in public.

Q: Another quality of life issue for ambassadors is the annual evaluation report for each person in the staff. Did you allocate that to the DCM? It is a pretty small post.

COUNTRYMAN: The DCM wrote everybody's efficiency report, and I reviewed it. I thought that was a better way to do it because both my DCM's, Steve Buck and then Chuck Cecil...having been a DCM, I knew what I wanted out of a DCM. There were certain things, because you were small there was a lot of you know, presence of the station chief and the military attaché½ tended to deal directly with me, but they were both very, very smart bureaucrats, and I would always want either to have my DCM in on it or they would sort of keep him abreast. Without laying down exact rules, things worked out very well. I mean the station chief would go by Steve Buck's office and say, "I am going in to see the Ambassador. If you need more details I will tell you, but we are going to bug the Iraqi ambassador's office with the Omanis." You know, that kind of thing. The military relationship because the generals and admirals wanted to deal with me, the first military attaché½ I had was not all that good, but then I got this guy, Air Force Colonel Samuel L. Hall, who was absolutely superb. I wrote to the State Department and used my contacts in DOD to make sure I got a star performer. I got a great guy. He had been a navigator on Air Force One, you know, the flight which flies the president around.

He was...I mean not only did he know his military stuff very well, but he was just a very good diplomat, got along beautifully with the Brits, and had a lot of contacts with the Brits. His number two was a Marine Major by the name of John Marr, and he was equally very good. The two of them was good a team as I could possibly imagine.

Q: This is an interesting thing, you now have the access agreement that covers various and sundry things, but there is no U.S. presence if you will, so you have these U.S. military groups sort of coming through the country from time to time?

COUNTRYMAN: There is a U.S. military presence. We had not only the military attaché½ and the assistant military attaché½. I forgot we had a MOS officer, military sales officer, who was an Air Force major. He was assigned about the time I got there. Then we had the Corps of Engineers that came in, because part of the access agreement was expansion of the airfield at Seeb and the building of the prepositioning buildings. So we had a Corps of Engineers colonel.

Q: The job of the embassy is to know what every American, official American in country is doing. How did you, were you satisfied that you understood what groups were coming when exercises were being done?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, I had a number of things. With the Corps of Engineers, I called when I arrived there. The corps was just setting up. I called on the first guy there, and he was replaced by another fellow who later became a brigadier general and was the spokesman for awhile during the Gulf War. But I told them, I said, "Look, I don't know anything about strength of materials or the thickness of concrete, and I don't particularly want to know about it." I said, "It is your responsibility as you deal with the Omanis on this construction project if it gets political, and I expect you to know what political means. I want you to let me know. Because that is what I am here to do. I am to help you achieve your technical goals and keep you protected from political fallout, that is problems with the Brits or problems with the Omanis of a political nature, you come to me and I will solve them for you."

Q: And of course you have an officer assigned to pol-mil relations and it is his job to know what groups are there, what things are planned...

COUNTRYMAN: And not to look over their shoulder, but to be let in on what is going on. We had some minor problems but they were minor problems because we got at them before they became large problems.

Q: Of course it required a lot of liaison with CENTCOM and DOD.

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. And I had when I went out to...the CENTCOM was started shortly after I got to Oman. We used to be under the European theater. So I went to Frankfurt, Germany, and met with the commander of the European forces before I went out to Oman, General Billy somebody. He and I came to a great understanding. He understood, I mean I quoted to him what Ronald Reagan said about the military relationship, about putting the military relationship with Oman on the map. He understood the points that I wanted to make, and I wanted to know what was going on. I said, "You know, I am your pol-mil officer out there." I continued, "If you are going to be planning on doing something, I can just foresee what is going to happen. I am going to be at a cocktail party for the visiting Pakistani minister of posts and the minister of interior, who is very close to the Sultan, will come up to me and say, "Ambassador, I understand that so and so is going on." I have got to be able to answer him right then and there in order to further your military objectives. If I can't give him...because if the answer doesn't satisfy me, it is not going to satisfy him; so brief me in. Let me know what is going on." He was very supportive on that. "If anyone doesn't give you what you need, come right to me, John, and we will fix it for you."

Q: Oman is a small country. What other embassies were there?

COUNTRYMAN: What you would expect. The major Europeans, British, French, Germans, Italians, Spanish. A lot of people, of course, had embassies as far away as Beirut or Kuwait, that were regionally accredited. The Canadian ambassador became a good friend of mine. He was resident in Kuwait. He was accredited to everybody up and down the Gulf. The south Asians, India and Pakistan, Bangladesh, and to give you a flavor for them being there, Pakistanis actually had an arrangement with the Omanis where they encadred, really ran the Navy. A lot of the enlisted men in the Omani Navy were Pakistanis. Because Oman, until the '50s, had an enclave in Pakistan called Gwadar that was Omani. They gave it up. The people there were Baluchis. They had a Baluchi regiment in the Omani army. One of the provisions of their pulling out of Gwadar was that they would have in perpetuity the ability to go to Gwadar and recruit mercenaries to be in the Omani Army. They kept that up.

The Bangladesh ambassador, when I called upon him, was a very delightful fellow. He asked me some questions and I gave an unclassified answer about our access agreement and the United States. He said, "Mr. Ambassador, to give you an impression of my duties here, it is very easy. I have one job and that is to get jobs for men from Bangladesh. And that is my only job. We have very little trade, but I but I am here to present the fact that Bangladesh people work very hard and we can...any kind of a contract and we can provide 50, 75, 300 people for it. Building of road, or anything. That is my purpose to get jobs for people in Bangladesh."

Q: An interesting view of third-country employment. In your personal accommodation you have a cook or other household servant. Were those Omanis?

COUNTRYMAN: No. I inherited them. They worked out very well. I had Christians from Lahore, Pakistan. Before I came to Oman I didn't even know...I had been in Pakistan very briefly when I was in Saudi Arabia,...I didn't know there was a Christian community there. There is evidently a Christian community in Lahore. I don't think they are anywhere else and they are Catholics. Of course, they are very much despised and second class citizens in Pakistan. So my entire staff were these Lahore Pakistani Christians.

Actually, Oman had always been somewhat receptive to some emigration and had a large subcontinent population. They were actually Omani citizens who were Indians who came from Bombay because of the proximity across the Indian Ocean and the old British empire line. You know, very strong ties between Bombay and Oman. There was a large...some of the more wealthy Omani merchants, Khimji Ramdas, was an Indian. Some of these people, it was very hard to get Omani citizenship, but some of these Indians had been there for generations and they were Omani citizens, spoke fluent Arabic as well as whatever they speak, Gujarati, whatever they speak in Bombay, and English.

Q: As requested, you extended an extra year and it is now 1985. How did you approach what you wanted to do next?

COUNTRYMAN: I had 35 years of government service accumulated for extra time, time and a half for hardship posts, unused sick leave, Air Force time, working my way through college in the Post Office, and all that time counted. So I had like maybe 26 or 27 years of State Department time, but adding on the other things I had 35 if I retired in, which I did, retire in '87. But I wasn't interested in fine tuning it to the last year or so. I was more or less, even when I went to Oman, I was pretty sure I was going to retire when I left. My daughter was in the English speaking school there; she was in the first and second grade. She was what, seven, eight. To give her continuity I didn't want her to be a Foreign Service child moving around. My wife had been in the Foreign Service and gave up her career to be my wife. She was wanting to kind of get back and wanted to go back to work. My father had passed away when I was in Dhahran. My mother was alive, and there was a little dip in her health. She is now quite healthy and going on 97. At that time I wanted to spend more time with her. My wife wanted to spend time with her parents. Everything argued, and my view of my career in the Foreign Service is that in my terms which are the only terms that are important, I had a marvelously successful career. I have done very interesting things. I was sent to the posts I wanted to. I had gotten a lot of training. I really had done what I wanted to do. I had no illusions that Oman was the most important post in the world. I was fully engaged and I enjoyed it.

I looked around realistically as to what I could command. Maybe if I could be a deputy assistant secretary, which I was offered, i.e., as the Gulf and Arabian peninsula deputy assistant secretary, maybe I could take that job or go to a place like Saudi Arabia. It really didn't raise my blood pressure in comparison to doing other things. I had always...I think there are people in the Foreign Service who are very dedicated to the Foreign Service as I certainly like to think I was, but I always prided myself on having done a lot of different things. I have been in the movies; I have been in the newspaper business; I have flown airplanes; had been a Fulbright scholar. I have been in the travel business. I have done a lot of things, and I thought you know there are still a lot of things I would like to do other than the Foreign Service. Here I am fifty something with a good pension. I could go out and make a few mistakes and try to do some other things in life. So everything conspired to convince me that I wanted to leave. What I did was to arrange a two year assignment to the then Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, which shortly after I left in '87, dropped its connection with Georgetown University and became an independent think tank.

Q: At the time that you joined, was it at the Georgetown campus or the K Street address in Washington D.C.?

COUNTRYMAN: It was at the K Street address. It was called the Georgetown Center. Bob Newman who had been our Ambassador to Saudi Arabia when I had been country director and had left for the political appointee. He had been head of the transition team who I knew very well. When I looked around and I didn't want to retire directly because I had been in Oman for four years and I had been so busy when I was with ARP, I really hadn't had time to kind of do any kind of reasonable planning for my personal future. I felt the Department more or less owed that to me, so I took this two year assignment. I arranged it myself, and the Department with some reservations because they did want me to be deputy assistant secretary in NEA, but they were very gracious about it, and I came back from Oman and went to CSIS for a year and a half. Then I could have stayed on for a few more months but I for other personal reasons just decided to put in my papers in February or March of '87 and retired.

Q: As a senior fellow at CSIS, which is a think tank, what were your major responsibilities? Writing papers?

COUNTRYMAN: I worked it out...I had an office. There were other permanent staff. Serene Hunter who is the wife of Bob Hunter was also there. There was another fellow who was on the staff and later went on to work in INR in the State Department. But it was a very...Bob Newman was not exactly my boss, but the guy who watched over my office space, or whatever you want to. I mean he didn't order me around, but if he asked me to do something, I did. Quite often CSIS would have a colloquium where there would be a briefing, and he would ask me would you come in and talk on so and so. We are working on so and so, would you look this over or would you do us a paragraph on oil in Bahrain. It was a very fluid, friendly sort of thing.

I had a project, and I worked, not under the direction again because I was really quite independent, but I worked under FSI. There was an office there that was sort of administrative officer Hans Binnendijk who ran it. I kind of reported to them; that was nominally where I was assigned under the State Department system. I kept going forward with my project and they asked me a couple of times to come over to FSI and give a talk. But what I did was being...the project that I was doing was called "oil and security in the Persian Gulf." People had done some writing. There had been some books some writing on this, but I tried to sort of pull it all together and give some added idea to...there had been a lot of oil, but the idea of security, how it fitted in with oil, was important. So I did a lot of desultory writing, and I had for awhile a young lady who was at GWU (George Washington University) who helped me do some research. I put together a kind of a paper which then turned out to be my long introductory address and the sort of guidelines for an all day seminar that I ran at FSI entitled, Oil and Persian Gulf Security, in the latter part of my tenure at CSIS.

Q: Your audience for your work at CSIS is FSI and its need for research. Did you get involved with congressional audiences?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. CSIS had their annual conference at Williamsburg, and I was invited and made a guest there, you know they put me up in a hotel and paid for my food and all this sort of thing. I was still with the State Department so I couldn't take pay, but this was like TDY so I mean it was quite legitimate that they were paying for this. We had a very large...and it was a way for CSIS to invite a lot of people from the Hill who would support them, not financially because they weren't looking to Congress for money, but would endorse them and attend other conferences it would give. This was a conference they had at Williamsburg that lasted for a long weekend. There were a number of people there who got to know me and then asked me to come up on the Hill and give them some further briefings on the Middle East situation. They felt comfortable doing it with me because they knew I was kind of...you know in my sabbatical. I was less...

Q: You were less of a formal State Department guy.

COUNTRYMAN: I remember Nancy Kassebaum from Kansas. She, I took my wife along, and she became friends. At the conference, she said, "Oh, I wish you would come have lunch with me and talk to my staff and really give us a presentation." She kind of gave me a little outline of things she wanted to talk about. So I came up and spent all afternoon with her and her staff. There were a couple of other opportunities.

Q: So in fact CSIS provided another venue for the Congress to get information.

COUNTRYMAN: And of course I was still on active duty with the State Department, so I was not an independent entity, and I would tell people...I knew I was going to be leaving and I was sophisticated enough I thought that I could say well this is really not policy...I tend to feel. I would always be very careful to say this is what policy is, and because I was still wearing the uniform so to speak I would not oppose the policy. But I would sort of skirt around the edges and say well I don't think there is total unanimity about this. The current policy is this, but there are those who feel this. So I can understand where you are coming from when you say that, but you know.

Q: In this period '85-'87, the Iran-Iraq war is really heating up. I mean there are massive combat casualties. Are you commenting on Iran-Iraq war or these larger gulf issues at this time, or is there an interest?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, from my somewhat parochial interest in oil and security, you know, I would just stress the obvious point that we were interested in the outcome of the war because of the question of oil field security in the area that was not at war. This is where the reflagging comes in and you are concerned about the free passage of oil out of Kuwait and Bahrain and the UAE and Saudi Arabia because Ras Tanura the major part of Saudi oil came out of Ras Tanura.

Q: Were you doing any op ed articles or what...

COUNTRYMAN: I did what was, yes, there was a big dustup in South Yemen which was a prelude to some years later with South Yemen being absorbed by North Yemen. Nobody understood. Ali Nasser Mohammed tried to overthrow the government there, and there was a kind of a sense that the Russians were behind it. I have forgotten all the details, but I wrote a couple of articles for that and I was on TV. I believe it was with the local NBC station on Channel 4 with Barbara Harrison and Joe Krebs. They called me and asked me to go on because no one, I mean South Yemen, who knew South Yemen. So I went on and I was interviewed on that, and I wrote a couple of articles for the Middle Eastern journals and for a little petroleum newsletter.

Q: You retired in March, '87. That means you take the uniform off and you look back over all those years. First let's get into what did you do in retirement with this expertise and free time?

COUNTRYMAN: Well, when I decided to retire, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I had a sort of series of desiderata which sort of excluded all kinds of jobs that I might have gotten. I was asked by the Grumman Corporation to join them as a consultant. I had gotten to know some people there over the years. As a matter of fact when I was at CSIS I went to Grumman in New York. The Grumman headquarters is not too far from where I grew up in Garden City. It was a place called Grumman, Long Island. I went out there and met the CEO and spent the day out there looking at airplanes and talked to their people. They offered me a rather attractive job as a consultant to them on the Middle East. We even got to the point of drawing up a piece of paper that I looked at. But I turned it down. I didn't want to travel, didn't want to work for any organization that had more than about four or five people. Although I loved the State Department, I did not want a big operation. I wanted to do something where I had a little bit more control over myself. I was prepared to work nine to five, but I didn't want to work nine to nine, or I didn't want to be called in on the weekend.

If I wanted to take off on Thursday, because I wanted to go to a field hockey game my daughter was playing, I wanted to take off on Thursday. So you put all that, all these things together and I was not a very attractive job applicant. I was asked...I interviewed a number of places, one with Shell Oil company which offered me, didn't offer me, but it was a possibility of a very big salary to go down to Houston and be their government relations man. I turned that down. I didn't want to live in Houston. I was offered, again not offered, but was a candidate for a position with an international student organization. Again, it would require travel, and I didn't want to do that. At the time when I was sort of thinking about what I was going to do, I went to see a guy I met by chance who many years before got me with Harry Lamberton who ran a blue chip kind of boutique real estate firm in Georgetown. I went to see Harry about some real estate concerns I had, and we talked and he said, "You are very interested in real estate." I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you ever think about going into real estate?" I almost sneered. No, No. What he did is he offered me a job in his investment division, which the more he talked about it, the more I thought was interesting. The way he caught me was he said, "You know we have some very, very blue chip clients. Right now we are handling Mrs. Acheson's account, Dean Acheson's widow. She is a lovely lady, but I can't turn her over to anybody. I can't run Mrs. Acheson's account and the whole rest of the company." He said, "I need someone who can handle Mrs. Acheson as a human being. I will teach that person, you John Countryman, I will teach you the real estate, but you have the natural ability to handle Mrs. Acheson as a person, a State Department ambassador." He said, "There are other people like that. It is a very simple system. We are part of the triangle between the bankers, the lawyers, and all these people have extensive real estate holdings most of which, some of which is residential, and most of which is commercial. We buy and sell for them depending on various things. What you need to do is be available to those people and take them around. We will teach you. You will have to get a license." So I did. That is what I did for four or five years.

Q: Mrs. Acheson was a delight?

COUNTRYMAN: Yes. She was... and I sold, actually I sold an Acheson residence in Georgetown for them. I thought it was a thing where I could make not a lot of money but make money, and I did. I wasn't a Donald Trump, but I did it well. Then the Gulf War came. I called Doug Keene who was then the country director. He had been a DCM in Oman after I left. Because I had been out for awhile, I talked to Doug Keene, and didn't sort of offer my services, but I said, "Gee, like the old war horse, gee, this is my area." The long and short of it is I got a call back with the offer would I come back as a consultant, because the Department thought in all kinds of ways they didn't know how long this war was going to last and here we had somebody who knew about the Omani, how we had negotiated the treaty with Oman. Were we going to go up and down the Gulf and have all kinds of other treaties? So I went into Harry Langston and said, "Either I am going to quit or I am going to take a leave of absence." He fully understood. I said, "I think I had better quit and not leave you up in the air," so I quit.

Two weeks later the war was over. Doug Keene I remember was terribly apologetic. Oh, don't worry about me. In this process I had sort of not in preparation for it but I had lunch with a few people and talked around. Well, shortly thereafter I got a call from Peter Constable who was the executive director for Search For Common Ground in the Middle East, an initiative for peace and cooperation in the Middle East, who had just been diagnosed with cancer. He said, "I am going to have to be leaving, John, and we are looking for a successor. Would you like to come over and talk about it?" So I went over and talked to him and John Marks who was president of Search For Common Ground, and I took his place. I was hired as the executive director of the mission for peace and cooperation in the Middle East. That, of course, was an awful lot of fun. I spent a couple of years doing that. We did a series of seminars. We had Israelis and Arabs and Iranians. We had some seminars. We had one in Barcelona and another one in Bologna.

Q: Can you characterize SFCG, who is on the board, how is it funded?

COUNTRYMAN: Search for Common Ground, John Marks is the president [Editor's Note: SFCG website is at [http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg\\_home.html](http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg_home.html)]. You would not know the people on the board. They are a bunch of businessmen, but he wrote a book about the CIA some years ago. He is very much into conflict resolution and had the Search for Common Ground does conflict resolution. It did it in places like South Africa, on abortion in the United States. But one of its projects was peace and cooperation in the Middle East.

Q: So you are one of a number of FSOs that were attracted to that?

COUNTRYMAN: No, I was the only FSO. Well, Peter is but he is obviously the only other one. Helen Akaba who is also a colleague. Her husband was the guy who was on the NSC and later was at one of the think tanks. I will remember his name in a minute. So we had a series of seminars on security, and image of the other, and human rights. I did that for a couple of years, and then decided I had done everything I could for that organization. Another friend of mine who was starting this newsletter called CEO Update that reports on not for profit jobs was just getting started with the newsletter and asked if I would like to join him, and so I have been doing that for the last seven years.

Q: As sort of a summary question, what would you say are the primary skills that the Foreign Service Officer uses or needs to have as he approaches the foreign environment?

COUNTRYMAN: I would think that the best thing a Foreign Service Officer would have would be, and that is why I think despite the fact that you might have to have some specialized knowledge in such things as military matters or oil or Arab culture, that the most important ability that you would want to have is a flexible and penetratingly understanding attitude toward new phenomena. That you be able to understand a broad range of phenomenon out there in the political, economic, security world, and be able to make the right connections. I go back to that very formative experience I had when we were being briefed on the threat from the religious right in Iran and everyone tended to discount it because the mental categories they had set up in their mind was the religious right can never be a threat in the Middle East. I think that is a very serious deficiency on the part of somebody who is got to be awake to newly developing problems that are going on. You know, the there-can't-be-any-problem-over-here mentality. The minute I hear that, I tend to go, what do you mean, there can't be any problem. Let's take a look at over here. What are we talking about. Maybe there is a major problem over here that we never thought about before.

Q: We were discussing the primary skills that the Foreign Service Officer uses or needs to have as he approaches the foreign environment?

COUNTRYMAN: Well I think that's it. You have to remain, if you are going to follow, if you are going to support, defend, and promote American interests, you have to be intensely patriotic in the best sense of the word. But in doing that, I think you have to be capable of understanding the other man's, the other country's, arguments and the way the other people think. Again I go back to, I think I quoted this in talking about working with the Omanis. I was dedicated to getting a Marine Corps-Navy maneuver in Oman shortly after I got there. As we worked out the language for the press release, we had great trouble in describing what the relationship would be between the Omani armed forces and our armed forces during these maneuvers. So I turned to the foreign minister and I said, ' Mr. Minister, what would you be comfortable with if you were saying it in Arabic?' He gave me the word, \_\_\_\_\_(Arabic phrase)\_\_\_\_\_, "in the presence of the Omani armed forces," which gets away from the idea of cooperation, subordination, participation, and it actually translates very well in their language. But I suppose the ability to understand what he was getting at was key to solving, it wasn't a major problem, but it was something I was paid to solve, because we held some kind of press release about a maneuver.

Q: Speaking of these cross cultural issues, I remember at the time, '70s or '80s Congress was demanding that USIS change its name, and using the English translation into Arabic, it ended up being U.S. Information Agency and therefore, the USIA guys were "agents." I don't mean we were, but NEA brought the senior political local from Cairo back to Washington to testify to say please Congress, don't change the name because you are going to create all these problems for us.

COUNTRYMAN: I remember very well, I think it was USIS or someplace, we had the rapid deployment force which was the predecessor of CENTCOM for our troops in the Middle East. Deployment in Arabic is a very good word for it which is "inteshara" which has that same idea of deploying, spreading out. There is another word in Arabic called "tedequil" which means "interference" or "intervention." We got out of Washington, I don't remember who originated the document, I think it was USIS, we got something calling the rapid deployment force "Kwaitedaquin." I saw this and called in a couple of people in the office and said this is terrible. This means "interference" or "intervention." I had always heard the word, and I had used in my talks with the Omanis, "inteshara" is a more descriptive and less frightening word. I sent a cable to Washington and sent it to a number of our other posts and got everybody jumped on the bandwagon saying "Countryman is absolutely right. Get that damn word out of there." No, we were very upset about this. These things are really important.

I think what I was talking about is a kind of a broader concept. It is not just sort of knowing which hand to eat with if you are in a Muslim country or not to smoke in a car if it is Ramadan. It goes deeper than that. It is not so much cultural awareness, it is the ability to look at the country you are supposed to be the representative to and understanding in its own terms and in U.S. terms at the same time, you know what the challenges and opportunities are. What is this country all about? What can the Omanis contribute to American security? What are areas where little things that we do would be helpful to them. I remember when we had the first maneuver in Oman, again the military trusted me very much and would do almost anything in reason that I told them to do. I said, "If you come ashore here, people are going to know that Americans came ashore and you have got to, I want a PR thing that the Navy or Marines do for the local communities down there in Dhofar where you are going to land." We wrote this thing out, and I gave some suggestions.

Q: A civic action project.

COUNTRYMAN: Absolutely. So they came in and they had a whole bunch, they had some Seabees who went up there and they painted practically a whole village. They painted the school and did some repair work on the school and some kind of a police station building. They dug some wells. But went into a couple of villages and you know came in not in uniform but like in work clothes. They had fortunately a couple of people aboard who could speak Arabic. I was prepared to send someone down. But the Omanis sent some people from the Omani army who were bilingual. We went down there and cleaned up these villages. The word got around Oman you know, these Americans came in and it wasn't that these American military guys came in with guns and were sort of what the hell are you doing here. These nice Americans came in in overalls and painted our village and dug our wells for us. Great bunch of people.

Q: The conclusion I'll draw from that is that friends are made over time and not ordered up at a moment's notice when you get into trouble. You are talking about encouraging the various U.S. agencies to help build a relationship with these people so that we may have a future friend when friends are needed.

COUNTRYMAN: Again the military was very good about this. One of the minor arrangements we had with the Omanis was that if, because we had carrier operations all over the area on a permanent basis - we had a carrier usually deployed in the Indian Ocean and occasionally these people would fly a mission, if they ever had a problem, you know, they not be able to make it back to the carrier, well, we had permission that they could land at Seeb or at Masirah. And at one point we had a Navy F-15 that had a problem and landed at Masirah. I had foreseen this because we had this provision. I said, "If this ever happens, I want to know immediately because I don't want the Omanis or the Brits to tell me it has happened. I don't mind them telling me that, but I want to know it so we can immediately thank the Omanis and be very polite about it." So in rapid fire I heard, and I didn't mind if they did this through military channels, through my military attaché, came in and said, "Mr. Ambassador, we just had an F-15 who was diverted to Masirah and landed. The pilot is all right. He is down, but he had some kind of a problem." I immediately sent off a message...he sent a message off to Washington. I sent a message immediately to the admiral. I had been, whenever a deployment came out there, I would go on board the aircraft carrier. They would send a COD, a Carrier On-board Delivery airplane, a C-2, for me and I flew out there and talked to the admiral and briefed him on Oman and welcome him and so on and so forth. I sent a cable to the admiral saying, "Please send me, I know you will do this in a nice kind of way, but it would be very nice if I could send both the foreign minister and the British head of the air force a note on the recovery of the aircraft at Masirah. So I got this nice little cable and so on and so forth, and immediately arranged to have it delivered. So it was nice. The Omanis actually saved an American airplane.

Q: And literally that is what you were there for, to see the opportunity to take even the most unexpected circumstances and turn it into a positive situation. Did you ever have a problem with consular issues, wayward tourists, that sort of thing?

COUNTRYMAN: We had, at that time, now there is a little bit of tourism going on, but in my day there was no tourism whatsoever. The Omanis who were going to the United States were all very bona fide businessmen, or they were people we were sending for training under the joint commission. The only other things were visas and passport issuance. We had a very small American community keeping their passports up, so it was very little consular work.

Q: Finally, if you were addressing a group of high school or college students, would you suggest that a Foreign Service career would be very...

COUNTRYMAN: I did. As a matter of fact I gave a talk a couple of months ago at my high school to the junior class and got a very interesting response. I told them quite frankly that I was not really trying to recruit them to the foreign service, but that I would give them a frank analysis of what I had done and what was still valid in the foreign service. If they thought that this was their cup of tea, then by all means drink it if it sounds like something you would like. It is a marvelous career, but not for everybody.

But I think, I perhaps have a somewhat different view of it than other people in the Foreign Service. I liked the idea of...I have always been fascinated by languages. I currently go to the Goethe Institute here and reconstitute my German. I am taking a course in modern German literature. It is a source of great satisfaction to me that I can still read and speak at least three languages quite well and a fourth one limply so. My German is very good; my Arabic is not bad. My French is fluent but kind of needs halts every once in awhile. My Turkish is in bad shape but I can still get along in Turkish. I think the Foreign Service gives you an opportunity to do that. Now the government doesn't want to have a fluent fool. You have got to be someone who is more than just a linguist. You have got to have intelligence behind your ability to translate the words, but I think for me that was always very interesting. And to learn something about a foreign culture. I think...I have a very clear idea in my own mind of what I think of foreign cultures. I am not hesitant in saying I think, you know, American culture is the best in the world, it is superior. At the same time, I think that before you condemn a foreign culture, you should at least understand it thoroughly. I think where I find a foreign culture is less than acceptable or not as good as American, I know why I feel that way. I think I was always able, I think Islamic culture is a very good example. I think there are some very unattractive aspects to Islam and Islamic culture. But in dealing in an Islamic culture I am prepared to not overlook those, but put those aside and have a very clear picture of how that is affecting my decisions about what I am reporting. I think you have to be very clear about your own confidence in the superiority of your own culture without showing that or without being condescending. Because you lose your effectiveness if you are condescending?

Q: Is there a difference between self confidence if you will, and arrogance?

COUNTRYMAN: I think for instance in being in the Arab world, there are certain things that are done and not done, and I think just the fact that I was prepared to operate on their terms was not a sacrifice for me. It was something I was prepared to do, I think that gains you a lot of points right away. Knowing how to eat properly at a banquet in the Arab world is something that is important. My table manners are good; let's put it that brutally. That is important. It doesn't cost me, I am not sacrificing anything. If I am eating at the French ambassadors, I know how to use the fish knife. But if I am at a sheik's goat grab in a tent, I knew how to eat in a way that will not offend people. I think that is something that you should be able to do. I know the kind of greetings to use that are appropriate and that show my education and sophistication and yet are not improper.

I think knowing something about a foreign culture, and when people talk about it. I remember very much when I was in Israel talking to some Israelis about the Jewish community in Bahrain. They didn't know there was one there. I said, "Yes, and I think they have a minyen [Editor's Note: A minyen in Judaism refers to the quorum of ten male Jewish adults required to perform certain religious obligations]. They said, "Oh, you know what a minyen is." Well, right away, even though I was an Arabist, I demonstrated I knew something about Judaism. So immediately the rest of the conversation was facilitated. I had scored some points. So I think those things multiply themselves over and over. That is why I think it is very difficult to have people in posts, where you have that kind of social intercourse with people, but you don't know anything about the culture. Even if you are speaking in English, the fact that you have a reserve, the ability to pull out the native language and express yourself, it is very important.

Q: Well, John, I have appreciated the time that you have spent with us. Is there anything else?

COUNTRYMAN: No, I look forward to when the manuscript is done. There are a number of names that I have forgotten and for the record.

Q: Well thank you very much.

COUNTRYMAN: Thank you. Thank you for your patience.

End of interview