The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DENNIS G. HARTER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with Dennis Harter. Today is March 17, 2004. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Stuart Kennedy.

Dennis can we start by asking where were you born and gather some of your personal background?

HARTER: I was born on February 4, 1941, in Newark, New Jersey.

Q: Tell me about your family, first on the Harter's side and then your mother's side.

HARTER: My father's parents were German and Irish. My father's grandfather left Germany because of the Franco Prussian War. My father's mother's family left Ireland because of the famines. My mother's parents were earlier settlers; they were English and settled in the South. My mother's great grandfather was a General in the Civil War on the Southern side.

Q: What was his name?

HARTER: Alford. He fought in Mississippi and Alabama. My parents were both residents of Newark, New Jersey. They went to West Side High School. They were high school sweethearts. My father went off to Rutgers University to study engineering, but his father died in the mid-1930s and there was not enough money for him to continue going to school. He dropped out after two or maybe three years and found employment with Public Service Electric and Gas Company in New Jersey. He ended up working for them for more than 40 years. He progressed from working in the underground, which was basically laying the pipes for the gas lines under Newark. Over those forty years he reached the highest ranked position in the company for anyone who never earned a college degree. Just before he retired he was working on the design and planning for what was to be New Jersey's first nuclear power plant. In the 1960's, the project ran afoul of environmental objections and my father said, "This project is never going to get built so I'm going to retire," and he did. At that point both my sister and I were out of school and working and he had paid off his mortgage and had enough money invested to be comfortable in his home. And, that particular plant never did get built in New Jersey.

Q: Your mother, did she go to college?

HARTER: No, she did not. I believe she worked for a couple of years and then married my father around 1936, just before she turned twenty-one. They were married for almost 60 years and they both passed away about a year apart, 1994 for my father and 1995 for my mother.

Q: Where did you grow up?

HARTER: I grew up initially in Irvington, New Jersey. I did my first eight years of grammar school and the first year of high school there and then we moved to Mountainside, New Jersey, a small suburban community which pooled its students at a regional high school. I went to Jonathan Dayton Regional High School in Springfield, New Jersey for the last three years of high school.

Q: Irvington. What was that like when you grew up as a kid?

HARTER: I remember people saying it was a town of about 100,000 people, which would have been a pretty good sized town for the state at the time. But I'm not sure how accurate that estimate was. In the towns, there were no school buses and everyone went to school based on their neighborhood locations. My school was only "around the corner" so I could easily walk to school from the place my parents rented. It was Florence Avenue School. School crossing guards and policemen were on the major street crossings to enable children to get to and from school safely. Students could be crossing guards and I was one of the only two seventh graders permitted to be a crossing guard when I reached that grade. Because I lived so close to school, my sister and I also walked home for lunch.

The town had only one high school which took students from all of the elementary schools in Irvington. The high school was known for its marching band and twirlers and dancers, though we were certainly not up to the standards of today's high school and college performers. I played in the concert band, the orchestra and the marching band as a freshman. That year we were invited to New York City to perform in the Polo Grounds for the half-time show at a New York Giants football game. That year we also marched in the New York City Columbus Day parade, so the school's musical and performance reputation was pretty good at that time.

Q: Let's talk about elementary school first. What were your interests in school as you begin to grow up?

HARTER: I was interested in history and I liked to read and I collected just about anything and everything - from stamps and coins to rocks and shells and comic books. I played Little League baseball which was just getting started in the state - around 1949 and l950. I was a pitcher, but I wasn't really very athletic. When I was in the eighth grade, I was about 5'4" tall and weighed about 150 lbs so I didn't move very quickly. Conversely at the end of my junior year in high school, I was 6'1" and still weighed 150 lbs.

It was in seventh grade that I first learned about the Foreign Service. We had a Social Studies teacher who was describing the role of an embassy and consulate abroad. And I said, "That's for me, that's a great way to improve my stamp collection, by living and working abroad." So, that was my initial thought about the State Department and Foreign Service. My interests expanded when I went into high school and started debating and public speaking in the National Forensic League as part of my after-school activities. In addition to continuing with music, I got more and more interested in international issues, some of which were national debate topics for high school debaters. By the time I was in my junior and senior year of high school, I was convinced that I wanted to go to Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, because that to me was the only place to go to prepare for a Foreign Service career. I was a freshman at the school in the fall of 1958.

Q: As you were going to, still in High School, you were involved mainly in band?

HARTER: Yes, all of the various band groups, the concert band and the marching band in particular, and then the debate and public speaking clubs that were part of the National Forensic League - the original NFL. Those were my two primary activities. I was also in a small jazz group after school as well as the school's dance band.

Q: What did you play?

HARTER: I played saxophone. I started on alto saxophone but also played tenor saxophone some of the time. Occasionally I would play baritone saxophone if they needed one in the marching band and on a few occasions I played the drums or cymbals to help out with making more noise when it was needed at football games. I made the New Jersey All-State band in my junior and senior years in high school playing the saxophone.

Q: In reading, what sort of books did you like?

HARTER: I was basically classically oriented. I read Robert Louis Stephenson and James Fennimore Cooper and Charles Dickens. Sir Walter Scott's adventure stories were also favorites along with the Sherlock Holmes mysteries. I also liked the aviation novels that were written for boys during World War II about the war in Europe and the Pacific. After that I got into a little bit of science fiction, Robert Heinlein.

Q: Did you find yourself reading much about foreign countries and all that?

HARTER: Not a lot outside of classroom requirements when I was in high school. But, I got into more when I was in college and graduate school. In these later years, fiction reading was mostly mystery and espionage novels in addition to international politics issues and all kinds of books written about Asia in particular.

Q: The New Jersey school system you were at, was this a school system where there were a lot of people coming from diverse areas or were you coming from more or less a cohesive neighborhood?

HARTER: Certainly in Irvington, there was a broader ethnic mix to the town population, but there was no broad racial mix like you have in today's society and schools. I remember when I was in grammar school, because one of my friends was Chinese, there was just one Chinese family's kids that went to the school. Now today, that would be what you'd find on most every block, but here it was just one family that had kids in the neighborhood school. They were well represented in the school though. because there were seven or eight children in the family and so they were spaced through all the classes in my grammar school. The only ethnic groups that would have been identifiable at that point would have been Italian-Americans, Polish-Americans, German-Americans. But none of the kids ever identified themselves or their families that way, no one referred to themselves as Italians, or Poles or Germans. I don't believe there were any African-Americans in my elementary school, at least not in the grades closest to the ones I was in, but they were part of the high school population which included students from all over the town. I would say, maybe ten percent of the school at that time. I would suspect at this point it's probably 25 or 30 percent and I don't recall there were any Latinos either. The only real notice one had then about ethnic backgrounds was if you went to neighborhood restaurants, usually Italian or German. For a time, we would occasionally go to a Polish Catholic Church for Sunday mass because, even though we didn't understand any of the Polish language, it had the best choral and organ music among the local churches we had visited.

Q: You graduated from high school when?

HARTER: 1958.

Q: While you were in high school, were you made aware of the Cold War?

HARTER: Yes, I mean we certainly talked about the Cold War in history and social studies classes as part of our current events discussions. We talked about those issues as part of our debate topics. One of the debate topics concerned the value of the U.S. overseas aid programs. That was a national debate topic one of the years I was in high school.

Q: Where did your family fit in the political spectrum?

HARTER: I would say they were relatively conservative. My father voted issues and candidates, rather than actually belonging to a political party. But, I don't think my mother ever voted. My father certainly did every time there was an election. I remember going into the old polling booths with him when I was a kid and I remember being around the voting places which were in all the schools. I remember the campaign posters for Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson. After my father retired, he paid more attention to politics and was a contributor to the Republican Party. His desk was filled with certificates and presidential photos indicating the GOP's appreciation for his donations.

That was a big change from his early years. Before my father became a supervisor and part of the management side of Public Service Electric and Gas Company when I was in high school and college, my father was active in the local union in the power plants where he worked. For a time he was a shop steward and a local chapter union official. His union was the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), at the time one of the largest unions in the AFL-CIO. Sometimes, I would go with him to union meetings and he would tell me about how unions operated. But at that time I was still in grammar school and the discussions really weren't all that interesting to me.

Q: If I recall, the electric workers union was one of the more leftist unions. It was a contentious union.

HARTER: Certainly in the pre-World War II and immediate post-war period, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers was definitely a "leftist" union. They had, I think on occasion, been accused of being Communists, even in the '40s. So, yes they definitely were a very liberal institution.

Q: Did you get any feel for that later on or had that changed?

HARTER: Well, during the summers when I was at Georgetown, I went to work for Public Service Electric and Gas Company and it was a closed shop, you had to join the union. So for a time, I too was a member of the IBEW. I really wasn't active as a unionist at that time, because I was only there for three months of the summer. There was very little the union expected you to do, besides pay your dues. While I didn't get involved in any specific union activities, I did discuss union issues with others on the job and we talked about basic labor relations within the plant. One of the summer's I worked, my start-up was delayed because the workers were on strike.

Q: How about New Jersey politics? Did this come into your orbit at all?

HARTER: Not to a significant degree. I certainly paid attention to what was going on when there were election campaigns. The governor at that time, the particular one that I recall, Governor Robert Meyner, was very popular. I thought it was good to see someone serving as governor who appeared to be an intellectual who could also have a public appeal. He had a quite good reputation in the state at that time. I was also impressed with Adlai Stevenson when he ran for President and I read several books about him at the time. New Jersey was going through a lot of growing pains at that point. New highways and connections within the state were being built as the population expanded rapidly and people in the cities were becoming more mobile and creating new suburbs and towns. I remember for example when I went to Georgetown for the first time in 1958, there was no Interstate 95. From New Jersey you got there going down Route 1 and Route 40. Later we discovered it was more pleasant to drive down [Highway] 301 on the eastern shore of Maryland even though there was only a two-lane bridge across the bay and a one-lane bridge at Kent Island.

Q: Were you a stamp collector?

HARTER: Yes, I was a stamp collector. My mother had been a stamp collector and when I was a kid she gave me her book and I kept at it for probably ten or 12 years. I mean I still squirreled away stamps after that, but I've never really done anything with them.

Q: Well, did find you called on your knowledge of geography from this?

HARTER: Oh yes, that was certainly very important in learning geography and in learning a little bit about the stamps. When you got a stamp book, the first thing you did was buy the little add-on kit that had the flags and had the seal of the states to paste on the first page for each country. Then as you put these stickers in the book it gave you a little bit more of an association with the country and where things were.

Q: How about this Foreign Service thing? Was this general? I mean its children's interest you know to go up and down and all of a sudden to decide.

HARTER: As a youngster I had my thoughts about being a combat pilot but my eyesight would have made that impossible. Once I learned about the Foreign Service in seventh grade I just never changed my mind. It started with that and then, I got into the public speaking and debate issues in high school and that's where again I picked up more concrete interest in international affairs. Public service was always a part of it too. I just thought it was appropriate to work for my country and devote my time to government service. In high school, I thought a lot about trying to bring nation's closer together - perhaps the result of the Cold War's tensions - and I always thought I'd start by studying Russian in college.

Q: While you were in New Jersey did you get into the UN (United Nations) or high school class or something like that?

HARTER: I think there were some model UN activities in high school, but I was more active on that front when I was in university. I participated for two or three years in programs that the Naval Academy convened for universities in the region in which people came in and represented different political positions, or economic positions for countries. But, UN-focused activity and role play was not as big in high school when I was there.

Q: Well in Georgetown, were you Catholic by the way?

HARTER: No. It's funny. I mean I'm not a Catholic. I was baptized as a Catholic, but it never went any further. My father's side of the family was Catholic. Part of my mother's side was Catholic too. Her Catholic mother, however, was about to marry a Protestant and at the time was told by her priest she couldn't go to church thereafter if she did. My grandmother did return to the Catholic church for the last twenty years of her life after my grandfather died. My mother tried to take instructions to join the Catholic church when she was about to be married. When she questioned certain things, she was told you don't question them, you just accept them. My mother couldn't do that so my parents didn't get married in the church. My sister and I were baptized but we never attended church regularly as a family and neither of us ever did so as adults.

Q: So, you were in Georgetown from what, '58 to '60?

HARTER: 1958 to '62 and then I did a Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS) at Georgetown, so I stayed there for 1962-63. I didn't actually get the MSFS degree until 1964. At that time, you had to write a major seminar paper for each of the three semesters of the one-year program. My third paper wasn't done in time to make the graduation deadline for 1963. I went from Georgetown to a second masters degree program at Seton Hall, because I wanted to study Chinese.

Q: Let's start by Georgetown. When you went there in '58, what was Georgetown University like at the time?

HARTER: Georgetown's School of Foreign Service was founded in 1919 by Father Edmund Walsh who thought, following the experiences of World War I, the US needed to be better prepared to meet the challenges of the 20th century, particularly internationally. Again, I chose it because it was the only school that specifically advertised an undergraduate program focused on the Foreign Service. I also applied to Princeton, where my parents wanted me to go because of its reputation and because it was closer to home. But my choice was always Georgetown.

At that time Georgetown was predominately white and male. The Foreign Service School, the Business School, Institute of Languages and Linguistics moved that fall into the brand new "east campus" location on 36th Street NW. The building with the rotating Plexiglas globe in the lobby. It had just been dedicated when our class came in. Among the undergraduate education units, the three schools I just mentioned, and the nursing school were the only programs that admitted women. And, of course, there was a quota on the number of women admitted. Only 25 women were accepted for each entrance class to the School of Foreign Service (SFS). Obviously they were also the brightest kids in the class, because they got screened down to a fair-thee-well just to make that 25 admissions cut. So, every time the class rankings came out, seven or eight of the top ten students were all girls. Nonetheless, it remained, like the College of Arts and Sciences, as a pretty traditionally oriented program. Jackets and ties were required attire every day for the classroom. If you didn't wear a jacket or tie you didn't get admitted to class and the rule was rigidly enforced, particularly in the classes taught by Jesuits.

The school was very structured in its course offerings. The School of Foreign Service had three core programs, but each of them was filled with required courses and very few electives - just your choice of language and two electives in your final year. We all had six three-credit courses per semester. As I said earlier, I wanted to take Russian when I started college but when I went to take a language placement test they had me take it in French, the language I studied (along with a couple of years of Latin) in high school. I remember the instructor at the test said "Well, you took French in high school, so you should take that test even if you are planning to take Russian." Then after I did reasonably well on the French test they told me I could start in second-year French. I thought that meant I'd finish my language requirement more quickly and could take Russian afterwards. But once I finished the second-year level course, the instructors said I would not get credit for that year of French unless I took an additional year. And so, I ended up in French for two years and there was no place in the program to add the Russian courses.

The Foreign Service School curriculum was also different for Catholics and non-Catholics, which I thought favored the non-Catholic. Father Walsh had arranged for the School of Foreign Service to get a number of dispensations from Papal education requirements for Catholic universities. The School curriculum only required two years of religion and philosophy courses whereas at other Catholic institutions the students had to take four years of each. While the SFS Catholic students had to take two years of religion, non-Catholics got to take the history of political theory - starting with the Greek political thinkers up through the Lenin and Stalin's writings of the twentieth century. History of political theory courses were very useful, because material from those classes were helpful in our written and oral comprehensive exams which all SFS students had to take in order to graduate. The Catholic students had to cram all that extra material when it came time to take comprehensives in the senior year.

Q: Were ethics a major?

HARTER: No, not in the Foreign Service School. Ethics was just one of the four semesters of philosophy that one took in the School of Foreign Service. The four semesters were logic, ethics, a history of philosophy and psychology. In the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown, as well as other Catholic universities, you would have to take each of those subjects for a year. As I said earlier, we got our only two electives in our senior year. I took two history courses, the World Since 1914 and History of the Far East. The first course was chosen because the Professor, Dr. Carroll Quigley, was one of Georgetown's top professors and I had very much enjoyed the challenge of his first year Development of Civilization's course. I really enjoyed his elective course, but it was my study of the history of the Far East that convinced me to develop a regional specialty for a future in the State Department. That course directed me toward my subsequent graduate school training.

Q: Going through the school, was Father Welsh still there?

HARTER: No, Father Walsh was no longer there. I got there about forty years after he founded the school.

Father Fadner was the Regent when I entered and I believe the Dean was William Moran. Father Fadner was the SFS Russian history professor and a very imposing figure. He was replaced as Regent by the Jesuit who became my mentor, Fr. Joseph Sebes, who was new to the University when I entered. He was a Hungarian Jesuit who had been in China during the Second World War and he taught the History of Far East course. When I didn't pass the Foreign Service oral exam in my senior year at Georgetown, Fr. Sebes helped me obtain the Regent's Fellowship for Georgetown's one year Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS) program. And then, during that summer between the two programs, he became the new Regent for the School of Foreign Service. And, as part of the fellowship, I worked in his office part-time in addition to my graduate school course work. I took directed reading courses under his tutelage as well as another lecture course during that additional year I spent at Georgetown for my MSFS degree.

Q: During the undergraduate period, was there much contact? You said you had quite a structured set of courses, but was there much contact with all these people in Washington who were particularly knowledgeable about subjects of interest to you?

HARTER: Not an awful lot, no. There was very little in the way of, what you would call today, field trips, where you go visit the State Department or Congress or get involved in anything with the government. A number of my classmates took intern jobs in the State Department or in different parts of the Executive branch, or in the Congress while they were in college. But, these were largely non-paying jobs. I needed to earn money to help pay for my school expenses. Working for Public Service, because of the work schedule they gave the summer employees, I could earn about half of my annual education expenses. Back in those "good old days," my annual education costs ran from $1,700.00 to $2,500.00. That was the total, all expenses for everything I spent during the year. I had a checking account and paid my bills directly - no such thing as credit cards - and because I kept my little bank balances updated as I wrote checks I knew at the end of each year how much I had actually spent to pay for school and for living expenses.

Q: While you were at Georgetown, was the Jesuitical approach to things was that an impediment there?

HARTER: Well, there was certainly a recognition you were at a Catholic school, in the sense that most of the priests wore robes. There weren't a lot of priests on the east campus, but if you went from the east campus up to the library, all of a sudden the numbers of visible priests increased significantly. The academic structure with all of the required courses and the discipline of the classes, I think was part of the era and the Jesuit atmosphere at that point. But, the faculty was largely a lay faculty and there were quite a few very bright and articulate professors. I already mentioned Dr. Carroll Quigley, who had come out of Princeton, and was very well known. Dr. Jules Davids anchored the U.S. History elements of the SFS program and Dr. Walter Giles was one of the leading U.S. Government professors. The Economics Department also had a number of well-known professors. The International Relations major in the School had three basic divisions, History and International Relations/Government had enough course credits to qualify as full "majors" while Economics was a "minor" for all the students.

Q: Quigley is a name that sort of runs through that era I think.

HARTER: His basic course, the Development of Civilization, also the title of one of his books, was a foundation course for all east campus schools and also for freshmen in the College of Arts and Sciences. As I said, he was also the reason I selected the elective course, the World Since 1914, in my senior year. His fundamental thesis on the development of civilization focused on how it was necessary to have an efficient sequence of conditions to create an optimum force for growth and development. For example, you couldn't have an effective industrial revolution until you had sufficient agricultural production that could release excess labor from the farms to begin building skilled trades and factory growth. Similarly, if you introduced large scale health improvements to a population that could not feed itself all you did was increase the prevalence of starvation. He argued that the 18th and 19th century colonial experience in Asia and Africa did not focus on keeping these stages of development in an appropriate order and so many of the colonial areas became poverty-stricken because they could not meet basic food needs before they were being "saved" through European medical advances. This deeper understanding of global inter-relationships reinforced my interests in public service and gave impetus to my desire to join the Foreign Service.

The three required thesis papers were graduate school papers, one each semester - fall, spring and summer - that were part of a required course all MSFS students took. The first paper was to focus on the role of a US Government organization - other than the State Department - and its role in foreign affairs. I selected the office of territories in the Department of the Interior and wrote my paper on the management of the Trust Territories of the Pacific. I spent a lot of time on that paper and turned out a report that was more than 60 pages in length. Only after that did anyone tell me they were expecting a report no more than half that size. My second paper focused on the Boxer Rebellion in China and the role of the foreign missions there. I managed to keep that paper to around 50 pages. My final paper was on the diplomatic struggle at the end of World War II in China and the U.S. role in trying to assist the Nationalist Government. There was so much material to go through on this topic that I had no way to complete the work within the allotted time. What I started at Georgetown ended up as my Master's thesis at Seton Hall - more than 250 pages long - and I excerpted one chapter out of that thesis to complete the final semester paper for Georgetown which gave me the MSFS degree a year late, in the summer of 1964 instead of 1962 when my courses at Georgetown were completed. So, in fact, all of the papers had an Asia or a specific China focus. My career interests kept me focused on these areas.

Q: The students at the School of Foreign Service, what were they pointed towards? I assumed they are pointed in several directions, but what was the feeling there?

HARTER: My assumption had always been that everybody who went to the School of Foreign Service did so in order to prepare for joining the Foreign Service. But, in fact, that was not the case at all. Relatively few people in my class even took the test. Out of my class of 170, I think we probably had no more than 20 take the test, either as seniors or during the next few years after graduation. I think no more than six or seven of us ever joined the Foreign Service and only a few made it their main career work. A lot of students were interested in international business; some went into academia, but I would say mostly international business.

Q: Well, was there an emphasis on service per say, in other words, to go out and do something for fellow earthlings or something like that?

HARTER: There was a bit of that, but I don't think it was a very strong or direct message from anybody in particular at Georgetown. It was certainly something that motivated me as I was growing up, but I did not particularly see public service as something that was being emphasized while I was in university.

Q: You were there in 1960. Did John Kennedy, the election of 1960 hit your campus?

HARTER: Oh yes, very much so. Also too, because Kennedy lived in Georgetown and went to church next door to the Foreign Service School, it all seemed like we were part of the same neighborhood, and community. His youth, his vigor, his fresh approach to politics were all very exciting for people my age at that time and I think it was probably felt even more so in the DC area.

Q: Did his inaugural address's theme "ask what you can do," did that seem to strike a chord?

HARTER: Yes, for me it did indeed. And, I think it redoubled interests in people who already had an inclination to work in public service and it certainly created the commitment of many young people through the Peace Corps.

Q: You took the Foreign Service exam when?

HARTER: I took it when I was a senior at Georgetown in the fall of 1961. Under the rules at the time you could take the test once you were 21 or if you were a senior in college. I wasn't 21, until the following February, but I was a senior in the fall of l961. I passed the written exam, but in the spring of 1962 I didn't pass the oral.

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

HARTER: One question has stuck with me all along since that test. It was a situational question in which the panel chairman asked me to describe how I would respond to the situation he was about to describe. He said I was the American Ambassador in Egypt and I had a Congressional delegation in town. I was hosting a dinner for the delegation with senior members of the Egyptian government whose wives were also present for the function. I didn't think at the time it might have been pretty unusual for a dinner in the Middle East to include local spouses, because I had never focused much on the Middle East and its customs. In any case, as the chairman described the scenario the Senator who was head of the delegation was fooling around with the Foreign Minister's wife at dinner. The question was, "What would I do to handle this situation and defuse the potential embarrassment." I said at the time, "Well, of course it depends on where one is in the timing of the dinner, but if in fact it was toward the end of the dinner, I would suggest an early adjournment to the library for cigars and brandy for all the gentlemen to try and create a break." And he said, "No sorry, the dinner isn't anywhere near that stage." I don't remember how I responded after that in any case. When the panel called me back in the room after its deliberations, the members said they thought I was nervous and a bit tense which they felt hampered my performance. They thought I had "potential" for the Foreign Service and said they liked what I had said were my plans for graduate school if I was not immediately accepted into the Foreign Service. They urged me to go to graduate school and then take the exam again. So, I did go ahead with my plans for graduate school and four years later after I had two Masters degrees and was working on a Ph.D. at American University, I took the exam again and I passed it, both the written and the oral. That was in 1965-66.

Q: Let's talk about graduate school. First though, when you hit Washington and Georgetown, were there African-Americans at Georgetown?

HARTER: There were very few actually. I had a pretty good friend at that time, particularly in my freshman and sophomore years, a fellow by the name of John Coy who was African-American. But, I don't think there were more than two or three out of the 175 in my entering class in 1958. Because we had some foreign students in the Institute of Language and Linguistics as well as the Foreign Service School we actually had more Asians in the class than we had African-Americans. There were, for example, two or three women from Vietnam, Laos, and perhaps Cambodia.

Q: Was Bill Clinton there while you were there?

HARTER: No. Much, much later. He was there probably ten, 15 years later.

Q: When you decided to go to graduate school, were you changing your mind about the Foreign Service?

HARTER: No, not at all, not at all. I just wanted to have a regional focus and I wanted to have a better understanding of the Far East. I wanted to learn Chinese because I believed China would be a major international force that Americans would have to understand better and find a way to deal with. At that time the government had a just started up a program called The National Defense Foreign Language Fellowship Program. It was created, because globally everyone was saying "Americans can't communicate; they don't know any foreign languages." The language study fellowships focused on the non-Romance languages and were very generous in their levels of financial support. Nonetheless, when Congress created the program it gave a preference for scholarship consideration to persons who already had a year of study in that particular hard language. When I applied to graduate schools for Chinese studies in an Asian Affairs program, I had no previous Chinese language study under my belt. As a result, I was not accepted for the fellowship program and without that I couldn't go to any of the Asian Studies schools. Fr. Sebes had convinced me to apply to Georgetown's MSFS program where I was awarded the Regent's fellowship I mentioned previously. But my interest was really to study Chinese. When I went to register, I convinced the registrars I could do my basic graduate school program as well as take an intensive basic level course in Chinese under the Institute of Languages and Linguistics, an extra eight hours of classes each week. In this way, I saw I could get a year of Chinese under my belt and then move on to a formal Asian Studies/Chinese language study program for a Master's degree. So, that's what I did in 1962-63. But during that year, the National Defense Fellowship regulations changed and when I applied in 1963 for the next academic year the preference for students who had a year of language study credit had been removed. I was successful in my application for the government fellowship and I moved back home and went to Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey to study Chinese and to do further academic work on Asia, especially China.

Q: Where were you when President Kennedy was assassinated? How did that event affect your plans?)

HARTER: I was in New Jersey at Seton Hall and I drove down to DC and stayed at a friend's house so I could go to see the funeral procession. His assassination had no effect on my plans for study or for joining the Foreign Service.

After my first year at Seton Hall, I again ran into a puzzling situation with the government fellowship program. During the first year at Seton Hall, I had probably the best grades among my language school classmates. A half dozen of us had the same fellowship but when we all applied for an another year of financial support, I was the only one who did not get their fellowship renewed. I never understood the rationale behind that decision whatsoever. Fortunately, Seton Hall gave me a fellowship under University auspices and that then carried me through the second year of my masters at Seton Hall and I got an MA in Asian Studies in 1965.

Q: How did you pick Seton Hall for your graduate work?

HARTER: Seton Hall was close to my home in New Jersey and it was involved in the development of new Chinese language text books which seemed promising for studying the language. It had only a few prominent academics, and none in my particular fields of study. Subconsciously, I think it was also because I had been unable to go to some of the other Asian Studies schools the year before when I couldn't get the government language fellowship and I didn't want to re-apply to them as I had before. This included Cornell, the University of Washington and a couple of others.

Q: What's the history of Seton Hall and the Chinese language program?

HARTER: It's really very interesting. And, It's not just a Chinese program, its focus was broader - Asian studies. In the mid-1950s, or actually early 1950's, when the French Indochina War was still going on, a well-connected Vietnamese Catholic by the name of Ngo Dinh Diem was living in New York and he was close to Cardinal Spellman. Together with fellow-Catholic supporters in that region of New York and New Jersey they helped put together the Asian Studies program in Seton Hall. If I remember correctly, Diem was actually involved with the ceremonies that officially opened the program at Seton Hall. The school also had a connection to the Chinese Nationalists (Ed: Kuomintang).

Q: Madam Chennault.

HARTER: Right. Madame Chennault and Madame Chiang Kai-shek both had connections to Seton Hall. So, it was definitely a very conservative group. One of the professors at Seton Hall had been the Ambassador to the Vatican for the Republic of China. He was a very distinguished Chinese gentlemen, Dr. John C.H. Woo. He taught Chinese philosophy and Chinese classical poetry. This was a really intensive Chinese study program and I was studying Chinese poetry in Chinese, which to say the least, is more than I am capable of doing today.

Q: What was your feeling about China? I mean at that point we had basically China watchers scattered around. We had our Consulate General in Hong Kong and then we had an Embassy on Taiwan. The prospects of mainland China seemed rather dim.

HARTER: They certainly did. Part of that, however, was what interested me. I have a sort of semi-academic bent, because of all my graduate school studies and the research work I put in for high school and college debate issues. And, so in fact, it seemed quite natural to become one of those China watchers when I joined the Foreign Service. Over the years in the Foreign Service, I had a number of jobs as a China watcher during the times I was in Hong Kong and then later on in China itself as well as in INR, the Intelligence and Research Bureau. But, aside from the tea-leaf reading job of the China watcher, China itself was just fascinating. From the time I entered college in 1958 China was moving into the so-called Great Leap Forward and after some retrenchment went on into the Cultural Revolution a decade later when I was working in Vietnam. The dynamic experiments to motivate society were extremely interesting although they all turned out to be terribly misguided and some policies were just stupid - backyard steel furnaces just don't make a lot of sense. Thirty years later the Chinese Communist leadership acknowledged these had been pretty bad mistakes and much of that legacy from Chairman Mao was repudiated. The loss of life associated with the various purges and political campaigns from the '40s onward were very disturbing. But, historical traditions, the culture and philosophies of old China continued to show through many of the communist experiments. I found all of this intriguing.

Q: As you say, Seton Hall was basically supported by conservative elements, but within the student body was there any thought about, we really should recognize this huge country.

HARTER: Oh to be sure. I certainly felt that way at the time. I mean, I felt we couldn't continue to pretend as though this huge population and territory didn't exist or that it was in fact being managed by a group of people living on Taiwan. That just didn't make a lot of sense.

Q: I came into the Foreign Service even before; recognition just wasn't practical. But, you had to be rather careful about what you said, it came in an article of faith. Did you get involved in debates for example on this subject?

HARTER: Well, that's true and the McCarthy scare about Communists in the government, especially the State Department in the 1950's had made everyone very wary about dealing with the Communists. I didn't get involved in any real debates on China policy, but when I was still at Georgetown as an undergraduate I got involved in an interesting debate about communism and Cuba. Castro's revolution had been successful and there was a great deal of uncertainty about what we should be doing. Castro had his people in the U.S. promoting the revolution and looking for support from Americans. I was asked to participate in a Georgetown University radio program debate with two students from the University of Havana who had been activists in the Castro movement. The topic was, Is the Castro revolution red or green? My job was to argue that it was red and they were trying to explain that it was green. The debate centered around whether Castro was just an agrarian reformer who happened to be a socialist or whether he was in fact a communist and intending to link up with the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. The "debate" was also complicated because while I was trying to "debate" the two University of Havana students were more concerned with making emotional arguments about how good it was going to be for Cuba now that Batista was gone. Back to your question about Seton Hall and recognition of Communist China, there was certainly some discussion of that issue among the students but they were all pretty much committed to the idea that we ought to have relations with mainland China. Aside from me, however, none of the other students had a particular interest in joining the State Department or getting involved in U.S. foreign policy.

Q: Was there any program of sending students of Seton Hall to Taiwan to further their language training?

HARTER: There was no specific organized program per se that I recall, but I know some of my colleagues did go on to Taiwan for additional language studies and immersion in the culture.

Q: I assume that you're studying Mandarin? Was there any thought about taking Cantonese?

HARTER: No. In fact, I deliberately stayed away from studying Cantonese. There were always intervals of time between my studies of Chinese and when I actually could use it so I was regularly losing some of my fluency and struggling to get it back when next I had the opportunity to use the language. Of course, the reading skills deteriorated first and it was more and more difficult to read Chinese texts and newspapers. So, when it came to suggestions to study Cantonese I said no. I was determined just to maintain what proficiency I had in Mandarin without taking on a totally different spoken language.

Q: Was there any relationship between Seton Hall and the Chinese studies department at Yale?

HARTER: Yes, there was a big program connecting the two universities. During these years, Seton Hall received a U.S. Government grant to create a series of Chinese language textbooks. Dr. John B. Tsu, who directed the Seton Hall Asian Studies program, had made the project proposals to the government and he had Dr. John DeFrancis of Yale compiling the books. The project was to create a series of language textbooks using what is called the pinyin romanization system - that is Mainland China's romanization system. The spelling of that romanization system is apparently most closely affiliated with pronunciations for Russian language speakers. Prior to that time, the primary romanization systems for English speakers was the Yale romanization system created during World War II to help the military and government officials deal with the Chinese Nationalists. In this instance, the spellings more reflected American English. Prior to that system, the only English-language romanization system in use was the old Wade-Giles system. That system was written to accommodate speakers of the King's English.

This project was another of the elements of the National Defense Foreign Language Fellowship program. The project made sense because Mainland China had adopted the pinyin romanization system for national language instruction and academics felt it was essential for American language students to become familiar with it. For this same reason, Charles Freeman when he was working on China policy after normalization of relations with the PRC insisted that the State Department and the entire U.S. Government needed to adopt the pinyin system as our standard form for romanizing Chinese. When that decision was made, Peiping became Beijing, Canton became Guangzhou and Chou En-lai, became Zhou Enlai. Some people even thought China would do away with its traditional writing system and rely on pinyin romanization, just as the French imposed a romanization system for the Vietnamese language in the nineteenth century. Prior to that decision, Vietnamese was written with Chinese characters. But the Chinese authorities never went that far and it's primarily used as a teaching tool. Seton Hall also pioneered summer language institutes under the government language fellowship program to try and get Chinese taught in elementary and high schools in the Untied States.

Q: Were you able to run across, during this time, what we would call here at the Foreign Services Institute, area studies? I mean people who, you know, Foreign Service types or others who were experts in the field?

HARTER: Not so much at that time at all, no. Other than an occasional well-known speaker who would come for the entire university community. There were no real programs that I recall either at Georgetown or at Seton Hall which were exclusively focused on the Foreign Service or Asian Affairs policies. The same was true when I did Ph.D. work at American University. During the year I was there on campus, I don't recall any major speaker coming to campus who was focused on those issues.

Q: Were you during this period getting any feel for the enormity of the culture revolution? The various things that were going on in China?

HARTER: There was not an awful lot of information about the Cultural Revolution because China was still a relatively closed society during that period. You would get an occasional sensational translation of a book written by someone who had fled China for Hong Kong but that tended to give you only a limited snapshot of events in a particular locale. China also had an outlet in the United States where it distributed publications in Chinese, English and other languages which described things from a Chinese Government perspective. The publication company had to register and stamp its products as publications from the People's Republic of China and all of that material was very propagandistic. But, at least it was a way to find out about some of the things that were going on and I read both of these types of books regularly. In addition, there was a very well respected publication called the China Quarterly which, while it frequently dealt with more historical topics, generally presented academic studies of China developments. I subscribed to that publication for a few years in the 1960s.

Q: Yes, I was asking why you hadn't taken the Foreign Service exam while you were at Seaton Hall?

HARTER: Again, I wanted to really solidify my Chinese language foundation and deepen my understanding of the Far East and its history and culture. Studying Chinese is not a one-year, or even a two-year process of learning. I was in language classes for a year at Georgetown and then two years in this graduate program at Seton Hall. It was only then I felt I was able to really look at going back to the Foreign Service exam. While I was certainly intent on entering the Foreign Service, I also thought it would be useful to do more work on contemporary Asian politics than I had been able to do at Seton Hall. The program there was far more "classical" in its approach. So in preparation for taking the exam that fall - that would have been the fall of 1965 - I enrolled in a Ph.D. program at American University. I took the exam the first time it was available to me that fall. When I passed the exam in the spring of 1966, I was already well into the Ph.D. program and was in fact finishing the last of my course requirements for the Ph.D. So, it was really for me the only logical time to have resumed the exam process for the Foreign Service.

Q: Why American University?

HARTER: Well, I wanted to get back into the Washington, DC area because of the Foreign Service and I believed it would be possible, if I managed to pass the exam, to finish the Ph.D. requirements while working at the State Department. While I was at Seton Hall, I learned American University, along with Georgetown, Howard, GW (George Washington) and Catholic University had pooled their graduate school programs. The five schools formed a consortium so you received credit in your program at one of the five schools for any class taken at another consortium school. I looked at the various schools, particularly GW and AU and their course offerings on modern China looked very good. I actually did apply to GWU as well in order to have a better shot at a scholarship, but it turned out their Ph.D. requirements would have involved taking a lot more courses than if I went to American University. At American University they gave me credit for having taken two Masters' degrees and so I only had to complete a year's worth of graduate school courses to complete the classroom requirements for the Ph.D. At GW, it would have required a full two years of classes. And, I was awarded a scholarship to American University that covered most all of my courses and other expenses.

HARTER: As I said a moment ago, the Indochina issues were not part of my academic focus, but I certainly kept up with the news and reports about the war. Back in those days of the military draft, one periodically had to fill out selective service forms and let your local draft board know you were still a student. And, as long as you were properly enrolled, it was pretty much automatic that one got a student deferment. I had a 2-S or student deferral through the early periods of our involvement in Vietnam and when I joined the State Department in 1966 I still had a 2-S deferment. When I joined State, I told my draft board I no longer was a student, but I was not immediately reclassified. Some time in 1967, I was reclassified as 2-A, which was for an occupational deferment. After writing to the local board in 1967, I don't recall ever filling out any other selective service forms. However, at some point, I think in early 1969, I received what they called a "notice of intent" from the draft board indicating they planned to change my status to 1-A. I responded, telling them I was already serving in Vietnam as an advisor to the Vietnamese Government, and they restored my 2-A status. I never heard from them again.

The war was certainly an issue and people were keenly aware of it, but my recollection is that it didn't seem to get to be very significant before 1965 and 1966. It was at that time when you begin to have a little bit more attention paid to the war. Academically I was still interested in China more than I was in Vietnam. And, because I was in fairly intense academic programs during those years, I did not get involved in any outside activities that were going on at the time. Although I am sure there were some anti-war activities at the universities while I was there, I suspect they were mostly day-time activities which didn't infringe upon evening graduate school classes. Whatever might have been there did not attract my attention.

Q: How good was your Chinese by the time you had finished the program?

HARTER: I didn't take Chinese at American University but when I finished the courses at Seton Hall, I'd say my Chinese was at a reasonable conversational level. I took my first Chinese language test with the State Department a good two years after I stopped classes. Even though I had not used the language at all since 1965, I got a "strong one plus" score. But, I would say when I left Seton Hall I had a good basic-level conversational skill. It was certainly not the same conversational level you get from taking a more intense language program like they had at FSI or from being in the country and using it regularly, but I think I would have done reasonably well in a day-to-day conversation.

Q: You were already in the State Department by the time I guess the anti-Vietnam protests had gotten going, so this didn't particularly engage you, did it or not?

HARTER: The protests had not hit my radar screen while I was at American University, but my first job in the State Department brought me into immediate contact with the opposition to the war. I was assigned to the Public Correspondence Office in the Public Affairs Bureau. I was given the job of handling all of the public mail on Asia including the referrals from the White House and Congress. More than 90 percent of all the mail that came into the State Department, including the referrals, was focused on Vietnam and the war. We had screeners who looked at the incoming mail first and they responded directly to a lot of the very basic questions by using standard responses which had been worked up in the Public Correspondence Office and elsewhere in the Department. When the questions got to be more complicated or if they came from "important people" those letters were forwarded to my desk. I had a more detailed package of prepared responses to draw upon to handle these letters. But, the war was constantly changing and the questions quickly outdistanced the "standard answers." Ordinarily, when that happened our office would refer the new issues to the country desks, in my case, the Vietnam Working Group, then the largest country desk in the Department, and officers there would be responsible for providing new cleared responses for the questions. The first couple of times I tried that process, it took so long to get cleared language that I knew it would never work. The Working Group was far too busy to do basic public affairs work that was unlikely to be read by more than a handful of people. Moreover, I thought it would be much more interesting to develop the answers on my own. So, from late 1966 until the fall of 1967 I wrote most of the public information that was put out in letter form to the American public about Vietnam. Of course, I had to clear the language with the Working Group and others, but it was a lot faster to give them a draft to modify than to ask them to create new material themselves. And, I got the opportunity to hone my writing skills and to project policy issues for public consumption.

Q: When did you actually enter the Foreign Service?

HARTER: In the fall of 1966.

Q: Then you went into basic officer course?

HARTER: Yes, my class entered in August and my basic training period ended around October, so my first actual work in the State Department would have been in October 1966.

Q: What was your basic training like?

HARTER: It was . . . I don't know how to describe it. It all seemed pretty straight forward. A lot of "dos and don'ts" for working in the Foreign Service I guess. And, we all were given a segment of consular training because most of us would be assigned to consular work to start with. Aside from the testing associated with making sure we understood the basics of consular work, I think most of us were focused on where we were going to be assigned and kept looking for the lists of open assignments so we could put in bids. I don't think the bids ever had any effect on where people were sent but it certainly focused our interests. There were lots of speakers who came in to talk about their experiences abroad or to lecture on specific issues.

One event I specifically remember from the A-100 course was a field trip to the U.S. Steel plant at Sparrow's Point outside Baltimore. We were all told to play the role of economic reporting officers and to find out as much as we could about the facility and its operations and then write up individual reports. I guess because I had worked in a power plant for four summers, the whole place seemed more familiar to me than it did to a lot of the class. I remember writing a very long "airgram" about the facility which got good reviews from our instructors. It was one of the few times in my career that I actually did straight "economic" reporting

HARTER: We were, at that point, in Rosslyn in the new tower that had opened for FSI on Key Boulevard. It was an office building, but it was a brand new facility for FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and certainly far better than my next experience with FSI when I was doing Vietnamese language training. That course was in the basement of Arlington Towers, also in Rosslyn, where we were taught in tiny rooms with no windows and acoustical tile on the ceilings and on all four walls.

Q: It was actually in an underground garage.

HARTER: Correct. That's exactly what it was. It was below the garage level or one part of it.

Q: In fact, if I recall there were times when they had to get us all out of there because the carbon dioxide got a little too much.

HARTER: I didn't have that problem when I was there that I can recall, but it was certainly a dismal place to spend several hours a day learning a language.

Q: How about your class? What kind of people were in it, your basic class?

HARTER: We had a large class with most of us just out of college. There were only a couple of members who came in as FSO-7s because we had advanced degrees and were over 25. Our oldest class member turned 31, the top age for entrance at that time, during the A-100 class. I believe we had about six USIA (U.S. Information Agency) officers in the class which may have been one of the first times USIA officers were a part of the A-100 class. We had about a dozen women in our class of about 60. I guess this was a large number of women for an entrance class because there still were not a lot of women in the Foreign Service.

My A-100 class was one of several brought in that year, probably the third or fourth class of 1966, and at least one more came after us - before the end of the calendar year. One of our number stood out, a "shining star," almost from day one - easily identifiable as "the man most likely to succeed." That was Jerry Bremer. He had a self-confident aura about him and, in addition to what seemed like amazing luck, he seemed to be a "hard driver" in the parlance of those years. As an example of his "luck," the new Director General of the Foreign Service [August 1966-July 1969] was Ambassador John Steeves. Prior to that appointment, he had been Ambassador to Afghanistan [March 1962-July 1966]. On assignment day, Jerry Bremer got assigned to Afghanistan and Ambassador Steeves immediately took Jerry under his wing for the last few weeks of our time at FSI. Jerry just sort of went on from there and became a Kissinger staff assistant which led him further and faster up the ladder. He was the first of our class to make Ambassador.

Q: You know you mentioned women. Yesterday I interviewed a woman, Frances Usenik who passed, came into the Foreign Services as an officer. She had already been a staff person. She came in as an officer in 1954 and she found out that she was the 22nd woman to be brought into the Foreign Service since 1924. So, that's 30 years we took 22 in.

HARTER: I guess the Department was still not sure about women. I believe at that time a woman still had to resign if she married. In fact, one of the women in my class resigned the day after she got her assignment. She didn't exactly fit the Department's ruling. As I recall, her boyfriend was never really convinced she was going to go in the Foreign Service in the first place. But when she went so far as to get an actual assignment - I believe it was a consulate in France - he decided she was indeed serious and he popped the question. Don't know if she was going through the motions for the Foreign Service to get him to marry her, but she certainly didn't hesitate and resigned right away. We had a couple others, among the women who also dropped out very, very quickly though I don't believe it was because they intended to get married. I think they just decided the Foreign Service didn't suit them individually.

Q: Ann Purser was the - I'm not sure it was a rule, but the understanding that if you were a woman and got married you left.

HARTER: Oh, it was more than just an understanding that was a requirement. It was a regulation.

Q: Were they at that time saying - were you married at this point?

HARTER: No, I wasn't married. Several of my classmates were, however. Our group had a couple of "just graduated" college students who were 21 or 22 years of age. And I mentioned earlier one of the class turned 31 during the class. All but one of us were college graduates and I believe two others in the class had advanced degrees like I did. No one had any direct connection to the Foreign Service, though I think some of the students had lived abroad with military parents. Later on in my career, when asked to reflect on my class, I asserted we were probably the most notorious single class in the history of FSI. One of our number was a convicted "traitor"; another had sent drugs through the diplomatic pouch and was subsequently convicted of murder; one male classmate resigned to marry another male in a church ceremony; one resigned from the Foreign Service because the Department would not pay to transfer his live-in foreign girlfriend to his next assignment. All of that was quite a lot for a single Basic Officer's class.Q: Who were your traitor and murderer?

HARTER: The traitor was an USIA officer who was involved in passing secrets to the Vietnamese government during the '70s. When he had served in Vietnam he became very closely attached to a woman who I believe some said saved his life. He hoped to help her get out of Vietnam and in order to do that was hooked into passing documents to a Vietnamese here in the U.S. He was caught through an FBI investigation, convicted and sent to jail for a number of years. The murderer was a classmate who was first expelled from the Foreign Service for sending drugs through the pouch. He was into the drug scene at a post in South America. He got further into the drug scene in DC after he was cashiered for the pouch incidents. One day, the police were investigating foul odors from the apartment he lived in around Dupont Circle and they found his roommate decaying in the closet some time after his death. Our former classmate was subsequently convicted of murder and went to jail. So, I figure that made us a fairly notorious group.

Q: Were they saying that you all stand a very good chance of going to Vietnam?

HARTER: No, that policy came in later, after my class. My class did not have to deal with the Vietnam issue or pressure to volunteer for Vietnam whatsoever. A couple of years, or actually a couple of classes later it became par for the course. At one point prospective entering class candidates were being called and told they would not be called up unless they agreed to go to Vietnam. In those classes, the entire group would be assigned to go to Vietnam. When students finally protested this arrangement, it was stopped. So, yes what you asked did occur, but not in the time-frame for my class.

Q: After A-100, how did you get your first assignment?

HARTER: As the A-100 class came down to its final weeks, one of the big events was assignments day. All of us had a chance to put in bids before that to indicate where we wanted to be assigned. We had been told in the course that assignments were made in two-year cycles for junior officers and that virtually all of us would be assigned to do consular work even though we might have been in different cones - economic, political, administrative and consular were the cones at that time. And, we were told we were all destined to be assigned abroad. So, I believe I dutifully filled out a number of overseas locations where I hoped to be assigned. But, I didn't stop there. As I mentioned earlier, in the summer of 1966 I had just completed my Ph.D. coursework at American University. I was also developing a dissertation topic and knew that I still had to take comprehensive exams before I could concentrate on the dissertation. An immediate fall 1966 assignment abroad would have put all that in jeopardy. I went to one of the faculty advisers assigned to the class and made a pitch to be assigned to the Department. I explained how I could complete my comprehensives the following spring, spring of 1967, and then hopefully I could complete the dissertation within that first two-year tour and go overseas in the next cycle in 1968. Someone obviously took this request further up the assignment chain and when they read out my name on assignments day I was given a one-year assignment to P/OPS/PCD. Nobody knew what that meant and we couldn't find the exact acronym in the P or Public Affairs Bureau listings. It took a while before I learned it all stood for the Public Correspondence Division of the Office of Public Service in the Public Affairs Bureau.

This first job in public correspondence did include China work as well. As part of my coverage of the Asia portfolio, I also dealt with questions about recognition of China, the differences between Taiwan and China and issues of that sort. So, I was able to put my academic background to regular use. There was, however, a very unexpected development as public interest in the war in Vietnam deepened. Many groups scheduled visits to the Department and their programs would virtually always include some form of policy briefing. Not surprisingly, a lot of these groups wanted to discuss our Vietnam policy. There were also lots of school groups in this mix. At some point a few months into my assignment one of these high school student groups was coming in for a Vietnam policy briefing and the officer who had been designated to handle the briefing was unavailable. Since the speaker program was also a part of the Office of Public Services, the person in charge there asked me to fill in. The audience provided rave reviews about my performance and the Speakers Division began to schedule me as the designated speaker, particularly with high school and college groups, for Vietnam discussions. As the lady in charge explained it, she thought it was more effective to have someone in their twenties talking to these groups, rather than somebody who was in their 40s or 50s. The Office continued to get very positive feedback from the students and the group leaders who brought them in. By the end of 1967, I was probably meeting a group each week or at least every other week.

Then, the Office decided to send me out of the Department to meet the groups on their home ground. The Speakers Office would put together a program of live audiences, radio interviews, or press meetings in small towns and cities. The live audiences were either colleges or social or church groups that wanted to talk about Vietnam. I stress talk about Vietnam because a considerable portion of all of these programs was not so much a formal presentation from me, though that was expected, but rather to give the public a chance to pose questions to a government representative. For many of the students or other audience members it was a chance to blow off steam about the war. The Speakers Office was pretty relentless at that time and they worked you hard during your travel. I can remember flying off to the Midwest toward the end of a day's work, getting into the hotel in the middle of the night and being up to do a radio broadcast interview at 6:00 a.m. That would be followed by two or three other speaking programs during the course of the day, with a plane that night back to DC followed by the office the next day. It was not exactly a leisurely pace and it also involved a number of weekend trips where you'd leave on Friday do a program that evening and then a couple more on Saturday before returning to DC on Saturday night or Sunday morning.

Q: Here you are, your first assignment and people are going to ask questions. This sort of thing, going out in front of the public can get quite sensitive. "State Department officials says..." this or that. How did you - what sort of supervision and preparedness did you have for this?

HARTER: Virtually none. There was no supervision of what I was going to say or review of how I would answer questions. After those first couple of sessions in the Department, nobody seemed worried about what I might say or do in one of these public forums. The Office of Speakers Services seemed only concerned about one thing, what was the end result. If you got kudos from the groups you worked with; if the audience reaction was good; if it generated positive feedback about the State Department, that seemed to be all that mattered. At the time, the Speakers Office claimed I got more positive response from audiences than any other person in the State Department doing these sorts of programs. In the spring of 1967, I even went to Mississippi to what turned into a debate with the Chairman of SANE, Sanford Gottlieb, over the war in Vietnam. Although I was only involved in this program for a year, it was very hectic between the volume of regular work writing policy statements about various aspects of the Vietnam war and then making speeches and answering questions about it. Nonetheless, I did pass my Ph.D. Exams at American University and I did get a dissertation topic approved by Dr. Powell, my faculty advisor.

Q: Were you doing this in 1966-1967? This was after the major U.S. troop buildup, wasn't it? How were domestic audiences treating your presentations? Any hostility?

HARTER: I did have some fairly hostile crowds, usually on college campuses. I never got as far as the west coast where the student groups were the most hostile. My assignments were all for programs on the east coast in the mid-west. But, I remember having a fairly intensive discussion at Parks College, which I think was in Missouri. That was probably the most intense public discussion, you know, people standing up in the auditorium and shouting questions at you or yelling out their arguments as you tried to provide responses. My tactic was to stop speaking when there was someone yelling and wait until they finished before taking up my points again. And that usually provided a calming affect or got the audience to turn against those who had been doing all the yelling. I think in 1967 you could still find audiences that would respond positively to reasoned presentations. And, coming from where I did in the Department I had far more facts and hard information than any of the people in the audience. But, I think by the end of 1967 and certainly after the Tet offensive of February, 1968, audiences were just overwhelmingly hostile. So, while I had some contentious outings and confrontational audiences to deal with, it was not the most intense period of anti-war hostility by any means.

Q: Who was in head of Public Affairs when you were there?

HARTER: Dixon Donnelley was the Assistant Secretary and it was his name we put on most of our outgoing correspondence.

Q: This is pretty intense stuff isn't it for somebody brand new to the system?

HARTER: Yes, but I found it challenging and interesting to be able to write about or articulate the basics about why we were in Vietnam. There was no high-level diplomatic negotiations or policy-making involved in this. It was all very low-level, public affairs stuff. The decision to send me out to make speeches was made by people in the Speakers' office of the Office of Public Services. I don't think Dixon Donnelley knew I existed and certainly no senior level people at that time on the sixth or seventh floor of the Department knew there was a 25 or 26-year old officer out there representing the Department on Vietnam in so many different ways. I don't think I ever was introduced to Dixon Donnelly although I did see him at receptions on the eighth floor or at an occasional Bureau staff meeting. One of the advantages of working in the Public Affairs Bureau was this Bureau's responsibility for a lot of the eighth floor receptions and public events. Thus I got to go to receptions where President Johnson, Vice President Humphrey and Secretary of State Dean Rusk were in attendance.

Q: Well, I assume you were able to call upon your debating skills weren't you?

HARTER: Well, yes, I certainly did use them, particularly with hostile groups. If you had a debater's background or a competitive public speaking background along with the huge amounts of information you brought to the stage, it was pretty hard to be overwhelmed by an audience. In fact, you could overwhelm them with the depth of your information and rebut virtually anything they presented with statistics or real-time examples of things that were going on in Vietnam. From that standpoint, your position was really a lot stronger than anyone in your audience.

Q: Did you feel any disquiet about our involvement there at that time?

HARTER: No, no I did not. I believed then, as I still believe now, that it was right and important for the U.S. to be involved in Vietnam. I didn't necessarily agree with everything we did or how we went about trying to achieve our objectives but I certainly believed we had to be involved.

Q: Well, after a year how did your assignment to Vietnam training come about?

HARTER: It was one of those unusual or unexpected situations that arise from time to time on personnel issues. I had a received a notice from my local New Jersey Selective Service Board saying, it was reviewing all potential draftee files and it wanted to know where I was and what I was doing. I responded saying I was in a one year assignment in Washington, DC and I expected to be assigned overseas before the end of 1967. That response was based on how I interpreted my first assignment in Washington. I believed, as they told us at FSI, we all had to go overseas to do our initial two-year consular tours, and that my request to finish off the academic requirements at American University had only delayed that requirement. While I initially had hoped I'd get a two-year tour in DC, the Department had only given me one year and therefore I assumed I had to be assigned abroad like everyone else.

Then, I went to my personnel counselor to ask him to provide a corroborating letter. He said, "Well, no one is ever assigned in the State Department for other than two or three years. So, you may have had a one-year assignment in public affairs, but that would only mean your next assignment would be one year or two years in some other domestic office in the Department and not directly overseas." While he didn't know where I would be assigned, he was sure it would not be overseas and thus he said he couldn't write a letter that would correspond to the one I had written to the Selective Service Board. He said he felt the fact the two letters were contradictory could cause me some difficulties with the Board because it might think I was trying to avoid being drafted. As a solution, he said there was a new program just getting started called Civil Operations and Revolutionary Developments Support (CORDS) and it was for an advisory program in Vietnam. He said they had lots of openings and that CORDS would be interested in a person with my Asian background. If I signed up as a volunteer for CORDS then he could certainly write a letter saying I was going to go overseas. And I said, and I remember these words exactly, "I don't have any real objection to going to Vietnam, but..." And then I said some other things related to finishing my Ph.D. I'd just gotten my dissertation topic approved and passed the exams. But the counselor had already tuned out after I said that first part of the sentence about not having any real objection. And that's how I became a member of CORDS 3 - the third CORDS class in the fall of 1967.

Q: Tell me about getting - I mean this is early days of what became a huge program, the CORDS program.

HARTER: Every six, no it was probably every eight weeks there was a new class that came into the FSI building in Arlington Towers where the CORDS training was held. As soon as one CORDS class finished the so-called Area Studies Course on a Friday afternoon, it divided up with one group going directly to Vietnam and the other staying for 42 or 44 more weeks of intensive language training. The following Monday another Areas Studies class would be brought in to go through the same schedule.

Q: It must have been rather experimental when you were doing this?

HARTER: Yes, very much so. The Area Studies course consisted of a lot of lectures and a few field trips. Our basic course instructors supplemented the instruction by bringing in lecturers who had practical experience in Vietnam. These were both civilians and military personnel. We also were given a time, a week I believe, at Fort Bragg in North Carolina where we got a better understanding of the military's operations and were given weapons training. Previously we were given a weekly opportunity to fire handguns at the AID Public Safety Division firing range in the old DC Transit building in Georgetown. We also spent a week in the mountains of Kentucky at Berea College where we were exposed to social work activities with underprivileged rural families in that region. These latter classes however were all conducted during the time we were in language training and not as part of the initial Area Studies program.

I think at the beginning they were still sorting out the language program and certainly they were adjusting the course content. The textbooks were being revised and in the language classes they were regularly shifting people around to try to match language learning skills so that the students with the highest aptitudes and pronunciation skills were grouped together and the students who had the most difficulty were put together so their more complicated language problems could be dealt with at a slower pace.

Q: How did it work? What was your impression of your class?

HARTER: I thought it worked very well. As I said, the class instruction was divided into two distinct segments. The first segment was what you called Area Studies. When we started Area Studies, the class was at its largest. The class included a lot of retired military personnel and probably some other more senior people from State or other agencies who were being sent out for higher ranking advisory positions throughout Vietnam. That group was also older than the rest of us. These were men who were in their 40s and 50s who had already had a full career in the military. I said they were men because I don't believe there were any women in the group at that time. Subsequently, I believe CORDS did include some women in the program. All of us were working for AID (Agency for International Development). While most of the people in this first group had been specifically hired for AID, I was still a State Department employee on loan to AID.

The second group was generally composed of relatively new Foreign Service Officers and a number of younger new hires, many of whom were ex-Peace Corps volunteers. A number of them had finished their two year Peace Corps assignments and moved straight into the CORDS program which they saw as a parallel program. Some expected the work to be quite similar to what they had been doing abroad in rural areas in Africa and Latin America, albeit with higher pay and greater danger and personal safety risks than they faced in the Peace Corps. As a group, they were not focused on whether we should or should not be involved in the war, they viewed it as continuing to help people who were less fortunate. Their interest was quite functional and didn't have anything much to do with U.S. Government policy on the war. So, probably my CORDS class was reduced to 23 or 24 students by the time we got to the language phase of study. Of that group I would say that 25 percent were ex-Peace Corps.

Q: Not coming then as FSOs? (Foreign Service Officer).

HARTER: No. They were only hired for AID on fixed contracts for the time they were to serve in Vietnam. They could get their assignments in Vietnam extended, but as soon as their Vietnam tenure was finished, their contract ended and they were separated from AID. If they wanted to continue working with AID outside of Vietnam, they had to reapply. They had to demonstrate their service fit AID's global programs and needs. Some of them did get rehired as regular AID employees and stayed with AID for several years. Most of them did not. Nonetheless, there were still a good number of regular FSO's who were part of the language training session, including one from my basic officer's class, Lionel Rosenblatt. All of us, however, were on loan to AID, and were scheduled to work in AID programs in the field, not at the Embassy in Saigon.

Q: You took Vietnamese language for how long?

HARTER: I took Vietnamese for 42 or 44 weeks. It was a very intensive program with no more than three or four students per class. We studied for six hours per day with teachers in the classroom and also had language laboratory sessions with recorded tapes. Because they were trying to train so many people at the same time, during the first few months they were constantly moving people around in the various classes. They were trying to get an optimal matching of language capabilities so that teachers could focus their attention on different language learning issues at the same time. After a week, I was put in what was then the top-rated group of language learners and I stayed in that class until we graduated. Our class covered more material than any of the other classes and we ended up with the best test results. At the end of the training, the linguists who ran the course said our four-person group achieved the highest tested scores of any class group in any language at FSI up to that time. One student earned a three plus/three plus [Ed: i.e., 3+ level in speaking/3+ level in reading]; two people had three plus/three; and the last member of the class had a three/three.

Before the end of the class term, a number of our classmates were recruited to go to Vietnam early. Some of the students from the very beginning had a pretty tough time with this tonal language and the difficult pronunciation. Vietnamese is actually harder to pronounce than Mandarin Chinese because there are a number of sounds in Vietnamese which don't exist in English and you had to learn how to make sounds just like a young child does, by imitation. Some of them were quite strange pronunciations. Anyway, this group of four or five students wasn't doing very well after a couple of months into the program. Senator Kennedy was making a big fuss over the refugee flows in Vietnam, particularly in the northern part of the country where there was a lot of large-scale military operations being undertaken by both sides. The large number of refugees were being generated, particularly in what was then called II [Two] Corps, which is the area around Hue and also in I [Eye] Corps up towards the 17th parallel.

Q: Well, II Corps was below Da Nang, so Hue wouldn't have been there.

HARTER: Hue was also in II Corps; I'm pretty sure it was. Da Nang was part of II Corps as well. I believe I Corps included only the northern four provinces. Anyway, a lot of refugees were being generated and we had very little on the ground to assist them. AID people involved with program management came to the school and said to the guys having a tough time with the language, "Look, we've got an urgent need to get some more people over working in the refugee program and we'd really like to get some new people out there, maybe some new approaches. You're having a tough time with the language, why don't you bag the language and come join us overseas." They didn't just talk to the people in my class, they talked to the students in CORDS 1 and 2 as well. Several students decided to leave the school early, including four members of my class. Unfortunately, one of those four ended up getting killed during the Tet offensive in February, 1968.

Q: He must have been up in Hue. Who was it?

HARTER: Yes, CORDS 1 & 2 were both still at FSI. Since we were only 8 weeks apart, by the time CORDS 3 was ready to graduate, CORDS 1 & 2 had only been gone for a few months before us and CORDS 8 was already on board. The overall Director for the language part of the program was Eleanor Jordan, a Japanese language specialist who had run the FSI Japanese program for some time and I think headed the FSI overseas language school in Japan. The chief linguist for regular classroom work was Charles (Chuck) Sheehan. He introduced himself as Chuck Sheehan, but anyone who knew him reasonably well called him Chick and not Chuck. He was primarily a Chinese language linguist. I met him earlier when I entered basic officer's course as he was the linguist for my Chinese language test.

At the beginning, each CORDS class was assigned an individual linguist. The linguist who worked directly with CORDS 3 was George Beasley. He was also a Chinese linguist and in fact was only a couple of lessons ahead of us in the Vietnamese textbook. George and I would later run into each other when I took the advanced Chinese language training in Taichung, Taiwan where he was then the program director. George later switched to USIA and finished his State Department career with USIA. Although there were other linguists in the program, I remember an Allan Weinstein and a woman named Ute Christof (sp?), but I don't think they were able to keep assigning a different linguist to each CORDS class because there were at least six or seven CORDS classes at FSI at any one time.

Obviously, before CORDS, FSI did not have a lot of experience training people in the Vietnamese language and certainly not in the numbers that were involved in 1967 and onwards. FSI had to recruit a lot of new instructors as well and someone had gone over to Vietnam and brought back twenty or more teachers for the program, most of them young women. I guess that was largely because it was hard to get the Vietnamese Government to agree to let males leave the country when they might be called up for national service.

A former volunteer who worked with an NGO in Vietnam during the earlier years of the war, Charlie Sweet , was one of the people who handled the Area Studies course but I think the rest of the people running Area Studies were people who had previously been doing Asian Studies in the regular FSI Area Studies program. Right now, I can't remember any of their names.

As I said earlier, each day we had about six hours of regular classroom instruction with a different teacher each hour and an hour or two of language lab work. One day a week, we had the afternoon set aside for Areas Studies, which also gave the teachers a break to do some critical analysis with the linguists of how the students were doing in each class. After class, we were expected to review materials and prepare for the next day's classes. One evening a week, right after school, we would gather around 6:00 pm to practice small arms firing. Other than that, we were on our own for the evenings and the weekends, unless we went off on one of those week-long trips.

Q: In your language class, who were the other three or four with you? You said you all did so well.

HARTER: Well, the guy who did the best, who had the three plus three plus Vietnamese at the end of the course, said Vietnamese was his 13th language. He was absolutely phenomenal as a language student. He had been in the Peace Corps before CORDS. In fact, all of the other three in my class were ex-Peace Corps. This particular fellow had been assigned to Ethiopia. He learned two other Ethiopian dialects while he was there. Once when he was going to take a trip to Egypt for a break, he taught himself conversational Arabic. When he started learning Vietnamese, he decided he needed to add more words to his vocabulary beyond the words we were regularly getting each day. He had a goal of 60 to 100 new words a week, and he began introducing these new words into his conversation with the teacher. None of the rest of us had any idea what he was talking about but we had to keep up. So, the other three of us were driven at a frantic pace trying to keep up with him and that's a good part of why we all did so well at the end of the course.

Q: Who was that?

HARTER: His first name was Bob, but I cannot remember his last name right now. The other two guy's names stand out without any problem. A fellow by the name of Norris Nordvold who I later worked closely with in Vietnam, was hired by AID and had a career with them after Vietnam. The last of the group was Chuck Vaccaro. He also was hired by AID after Vietnam but I don't believe he stayed with AID for very long. Chuck and I had the second best scores in the group, 3+ in speaking and a 3 in reading. For some reason I - wait, the other guy was named Bob Russell. He was assigned to III Corps and was stationed in a district filled with former French rubber plantations near Saigon. Again, he was a kind of a crazy guy, and I understand he started fooling around with drugs while he was in Vietnam. I ran into him once either in Vietnam or afterwards and he told me he drove to Cambodia from Vietnam in 1969, which was a really dangerous thing to do. But, he apparently did so. He got in his USAID vehicle, drove across the border into areas which was part of the areas controlled by the North Vietnamese Army and where the Vietcong headquarters were located and continued all the way to Phnom Penh by himself. I understand he came back to DC after his AID assignment in Vietnam and got further into drugs in DC. I heard it just destroyed his brain. But, I have no real idea what happened to him after he left Vietnam.

Q: Were you - from your teachers, from your others around - what were you picking up about Vietnam before you went out there?

HARTER: Well, in addition to the language teachers themselves and Charlie Sweet the NGO volunteer in Vietnam, a number of the people in the program had been there at one time or another. Because we were all supposed to be going out into the countryside for the advisory effort we dealt with rural rather than urban development issues. As I said, we went to Berea College in Kentucky to look at rural services efforts for the poor in Appalachia. It was a good example of how the college and the local community there were integrated and how the people at Berea were working with poor farmers and coal mining families. We had psychology-focused classes designed to assist us in working with foreigners. We had Peace Corps personnel come in and talk about their experiences and to provide "best practices" lessons. And we would get people who were coming back from assignment or on leave from Vietnam to come in and talk about what was going on. We didn't focus very much on actual combat activities or war operations and strategy. What we got was all very much oriented to cultural and social background and then a focus on development objectives and operations.

Q: Was the outlook at that time, was it optimistic or were people coming back sort of shaking their heads?

HARTER: No. It was very optimistic. It was all very very optimistic. Even after the Tet offensive of February 1968. I was still in class at that point, and didn't get to Vietnam until August of 1968. Tet of 1968 was a very traumatic event for Vietnam and for the U.S., but people came back from there to provide a focus on what we were doing in Vietnam, not with the focus of what was changing politically in the United States. And, the fact was, we we're in better shape after Tet than we'd ever been when it came to prosecuting the war and pacification efforts. The Vietcong and the North Vietnamese had made a terrible mistake, in expecting a national uprising. They'd sacrificed so many people who were the local Vietcong leaders in the southern communities. They'd all been exposed; they had been clearly identified as part of the secret network; and they were now able to be directly targeted by the Vietnamese authorities. Those that weren't killed or captured were largely known to us. We had the real opportunity to inflict serious damage to the opposition movement and the groups being directed by Hanoi. The Vietnamese, on the other side, the South Vietnamese leading the Government at the lower levels reportedly also became more cognizant, more aware of what needed to be done to keep the pressure on the enemy and to win the war in the countryside. None of the people coming back to talk to us really talked about the national level political will in Vietnam and as a group, we weren't really focused on that either. We were all focused on local issues and that's where the optimism was, at the local levels, not on the national level. We didn't focus that much on national issues, because CORDS was designed to be a program of grassroots work. And so, most of us when we were going out for assignment, we knew we were going to the countryside. Some of us ended up getting assigned in Saigon and some of my classmates lobbied to end up assigned to Saigon, but by and large we all were expecting to go out and work in the countryside.

Q: You went out when?

HARTER: I went out in August of 1968.

Q: And you were there for how long?

HARTER: I was in the countryside until January of 1970. We all had an 18 month assignment overseas for the CORDS tour. I then extended for six months to take a job in Saigon as the special assistant to Ambassador William Colby who was then the Deputy in charge of the pacification program under the overall Commander, General Abrams. I had originally been chosen by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to be his special assistant, but I made the mistake of speaking my mind to the then policy coordinator at the embassy and he took me out of consideration for that job.

Q: Who was that, do you remember?

HARTER: I think it was Martin Hertz. I told him, after I'd been interviewed and selected by Ambassador Bunker, that no one had told me when the job was supposed to start, but that I hoped I could finish up a major project in the district where I worked, which I needed to complete by the end of the year. Martin Herz reacted very negatively to this statement and, his message to me was, "If you're not prepared to serve at Ellsworth Bunker's command when he expects you to be there, you're not going to serve in Ellsworth Bunker's office at all." He then told Ambassador Bunker I didn't want the job. John Paul Vann, the head of the civilian program in IV Corps where I worked had nominated me for this interview and he was very mad when I told him what had happened. Shortly thereafter, however, the staff assistant job came open in Ambassador Colby's office and he again nominated me for that position. I was again selected and fortunately was not required to be there before the start of the New Year so I could still finish off the project in my district.

In order to take the job with Ambassador Colby, I had to extend my tour. As my time in Vietnam was winding down, I had been talking with the Personnel Officer at the Embassy about getting back into the China area and was applying to study Chinese, beginning in the summer of 1968, at FSI in Washington and so my initial extension with Ambassador Colby was only for six months.

In February, I guess it was in February 1970 I was told I'd been accepted for the Chinese course and would be able to start that fall when the new classes began. Even though I'd only been on the job for a little more than a month, I was really getting a great opportunity to work in the headquarters with Ambassador Colby. So I asked Personnel if I could extend for another year, to take me into the following summer, and then take the Chinese language course opening in 1971. PER (Personnel) in Washington said FSI would not hold open the training slot for a year and that I would have to apply again for the training in the next bidding cycle if I stayed in Vietnam. Since I was assured of getting the Chinese language training in 1970, I didn't want to risk taking a chance on not being chosen the following year for whatever reason and so I said, "to hell with it. I'm going to go back to Chinese, because I don't know whether I'll get the shot to work on China again."

There was another unusual circumstance on the personnel front at that time. When I was looking at job options with my the Personnel Officer at the Embassy, I told her I wanted to transfer from CORDS where I'd had 18 months of experience, into the Embassy for my second assignment in the State Department. She said, that wasn't possible because all of the vacancies were already slotted with people in the language training or direct transfer pipeline from a year ago." This included officers who had no language training or just the basic FSI language training and they had no experience in Vietnam. No effort was made to recruit State Department officers assigned to CORDS for Embassy positions. Instead, the Department was sending brand new officers into the Embassy in Saigon and sending home officers with 18 months or more of field experience and who spoke Vietnamese with relative fluency. While I thought the FSI training we received was really very good and quite comprehensive, it didn't really prepare me for a lot of the work I did on a daily basis. For example, there were no local newspapers to read where I was assigned and what I needed to read in Vietnamese was provincial and district level government documents and reports. And, there is no better way to learn to speak a language than to be immersed in that language environment every day. So my Vietnamese was certainly a lot more fluent at the end of my first 18 months in the countryside than it was when I left FSI's CORDS training. Anyway, what I was trying to point out here is that State Department personnel policy was not making the best use of its officers.

O f course, it may have been the time. When I arrived in Vietnam in 1968, personnel issues, it seemed to me, were handled strangely. You had no sense that anyone in the AID structure in Saigon knew where there were regular vacancies coming open and where personnel were needed to start up new programs or any real semblance of a structure or organization to put people in place. It seemed as though periodically, Saigon would be sent a bunch of bodies and when they arrived somebody would try to figure out where to put them. Two of my classmates when they came in went off on their own and negotiated their own jobs in offices where they wanted to be. And, that was it. This was apparently not an unusual occurrence and for one of the new arrivals there was just acquiescence. And, while it was projected we would all be going out into the countryside, this classmate had lined up a job where he could stay in Saigon.

The other fellow, one of the members of my small language class, ran into a much tougher assignments officer. While my colleague had gone to speak with an office about opportunities in one particular field that interested him, he was not trying to stay in Saigon and avoid working in the countryside. My classmate was not a "sit-in-the-office" type, he was clearly somebody who wanted to be out in the field and he had wanted to use his Peace Corps background in a particular area. He like a lot of others of us had been frustrated by the lack of a real placement system and had just been trying to maximize his usefulness in the program. But the personnel officer over-reacted and said, "You're not leaving Saigon."

Let me explain this a bit further. When we all reported to the main AID office in Saigon we were all gathered for a meeting and were told "you have no assignments." AID's plan was to run us through some orientation sessions and make sure we all had proper payroll arrangements and then the idea was to parcel us out to various locations where there were vacancies. The fellow who had successfully arranged to stay in Saigon already had an office backing his assignment so he didn't get into any difficulties with his bucking the system. My friend, however, had only been asking questions about different assignment options and hadn't signed on with anyone. So he had no one to back him up and say "we want this fellow in our program." As a result, the personnel officer had his say and stuck my friend in the Saigon office in charge of the People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF), a relatively new program designed to train village and hamlet militia to protect their own homes. It was totally different from what he was hoping for. He stuck it out in Saigon for a year but I was able to break him out of that office and arranged to have him come to work with me in the District where I had been assigned.

As I said, the assignments process was really strange. Here's how I ended up in a small district on the coast in IV Corps. The Senior Advisor in the province of Kien Hoa was named Nicholas Thorne. He was an ex-Marine who had joined the Foreign Service as an Admin hand and then was recruited for the CORDS program because of his military background. Kien Hoa is the province at the mouth for the Mekong River where it hits the South China Sea. Right there where all the river branches come out into the sea, those are the various districts in Kien Hoa. It's now called Ben Tre Province. A few months earlier, Thorne had said to his CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone) Senior Advisor in Can Tho, "I want a Foreign Service officer assigned here. I'm going to make him a district senior advisor, because we ought to have a civilian district senior advisor somewhere in IV Corps and right now, there are none." All of the civilian advisors assigned in the districts were deputy advisors in IV CTZ. There were lots of civilian senior advisors at the province level, but these men were almost all ex-military. There were a couple of civilian senior advisors in districts closer to Saigon in III CTZ but in general people had thought until that time it wasn't safe enough to put a civilian in charge in the delta districts. Anyway as the result of Thorne's request, AID either in Can Tho or in Saigon had decided to get one of the members of my class into that assignment. But, the person they had projected against that request was the one who successfully negotiated himself into a job in Saigon.

Anyway, when we finished the orientation class, we were all farmed out to different CTZ Headquarters where the real decision-making was supposed to occur on where we would all get placed. I was part of the group sent to IV Corps and, I think I was the only regular Foreign Service officer in the group. So, when I got to Can Tho, the office had Nick Thorne's request for a Foreign Service officer and, I then became, I guess, the only live candidate. That's how I ended up going to Kien Hoa. The district I was assigned to was Ba Tri District, a coastal district in the middle of the nine districts in the province. It was a pacification show place. In 1965-66, the Vietnamese and their U.S. advisors sought to create some models for development. They were trying to determine what kind of military forces and activity combined with civilian economic and political project mixes might provide the best security and development options for different parts of the country. I don't know who was actually responsible for choosing Ba Tri, but it was certainly an atypical spot, even in the relatively flat southern part of the country. The district was virtually treeless. It had a small mangrove swamp along the coast and beyond that it was nothing more than flat, wide-open rice fields with small settlements scattered throughout the area. It had no tree cover, no places for people to hide if they were going to try and carry on the guerrilla type operations that characterized the war in the south.

During the Tet offensive in 1968, the Vietcong had two conflicting goals, destroy the pacification effort in Ba Tri district and take over control of the provincial capitol, Ben Tre, a big symbol for the VC offensive in the south. Ba Tri was connected to the provincial capitol by a laterite highway and an old French-era bridge where it crossed the main canal that connected some of the Mekong branches close to Ben Tre. Ba Tri and its pacification program were protected by two battalions of the ARVN 7th Division, the Vietnamese regular army, in Ba Tri. The Division headquarters was in Ben Tre where a couple of other battalions were based.

I should also add as a footnote here that the National Liberation Front, the Vietcong's so-called government, was founded in Mo Cay District in Kien Hoa Province. So that made capture of Ben Tre a very important objective and one that would have had great significance for the Vietcong if they could capture and hold the city. Mo Cay district and its immediate neighbors was a very hard nut for the Vietnamese Government to crack. Like a lot of other delta areas, there was lots of tree cover along the rivers and swamps that broke up the rice field areas, making it easier for the VC to hide out, move under cover and harass government forces and civilian villages. In the entire time that I was in Vietnam, Kien Hoa was either the most insecure or next to the most insecure of all the forty-odd provinces that U.S. advisors were rating under the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). And yet I was in one of the safest districts in the entire country. That of course, is why nobody raised any real objections when Nick Thorne said he wanted to have a civilian senior advisor there before one was sent anywhere else in IV CTZ.

Going back to the Tet offensive. The VC (Vietcong) military forces were of course successful in over-running Ben Tre City and taking control of virtually everything in the immediate surrounding area. You will recall there was a famous saying from the aftermath of the Tet offensive that was quoted all over the press - "We had to destroy the town to save it." The place they were talking about was Ben Tre. The VC were afraid the two battalions of ARVN forces in Ba Tri would come and reinforce the provincial capital, so the first thing they did when they attacked the city was to blow the bridge between Ba Tri and the center island district in the province, Truoc Giang District, where the capital, Ben Tre was located. While that gave them a better chance to take on the forces around Ben Tre, it also meant the VC attacks in Ba Tri to destroy pacification progress pitted a reinforced, VC main force company against two ARVN battalions in a district where there were no places to hide. The VC unit in Ba Tri was annihilated. After the Tet offensive, the VC had to rebuild that unit from scratch. Because there was so little for the Vietcong to pull together to stymie the pacification program, the targets we were focused on for the rest of 1968 and 1969 had all been much further down the line in the more gradual plan that had been put forward to take control of the district. Because the Tet offensive had been such a devastating blow to the communist forces, the Vietnamese Government decided to remove the ARVN battalions and to concentrate military protection for the district entirely in the hands of locally recruited military units, the Regional Force (RF) Companies and the Popular Force (PF) platoons. The pacification effort moved rapidly through all the remaining target villages and hamlets in the entire district. I believe we had basically accomplished all the goals to establish a government presence in all parts of the district by the end of 1968. And, by early 1969 we had conducted village and hamlet elections that weren't scheduled to take place until sometime in the 1970s under the original plan. We had recruited and trained 5 RF companies and probably around 60 or more PF platoons to provide protection for the district. Thus, a combination of terrain and poor Vietcong tactics turned the situation in Ba Tri very much to the advantage of the Vietnamese Government. With the large Regional Force presence, the District was often called upon to provide mobile forces to operate in other districts and under the Vietnamization program which President Nixon popularized, U.S. helicopter resources would be used to bring Ba Tri's Regional Force units into military operations in neighboring districts, usually just for a single day operation, though occasionally for a couple of days. This sort of military operation made our field unit advisors very important. They were the ones who could get helicopter gunship and fighter aircraft support and medevacs for wounded soldiers because their radios could connect with American military in the air over the southern part of the country.

Q: When you arrived there what were your duties?

HARTER: I was initially assigned as the Ba Tri Deputy to work with a U.S. Army Major who was finishing up his advisory tour as District Senior Advisor there. Previously he had been the S-3 (military staff designation, officer in charge of operations and logistics) for the provincial advisory team, the operations officer, in Ben Tre. During the Tet Offensive, it was he who said "we had to destroy the town to save it." Just before Tet, the Province Senior Advisor, a Foreign Service Officer, on his way to the local airport said , "Nothing ever happens at Tet, I'm going on holiday." While the Major's comment made the international news, the Senior Advisor's comment became the inside joke for the province team. The number two, the Provincial Deputy Senior Advisor was U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Dare. When the attack began, he left the advisory compound and went across the street to the Vietnamese Province Chief's house. He went into the bunker in the basement of the house and didn't reappear until the Tet offensive was over and the VC had left the city. That left the S-3 Major, Major Lizardo, in charge of defending the advisory compound. These two residential compounds along the river comprised just about all the territory that was not over-run by the Vietcong in Ben Tre.

When I started in Ba Tri, I was to overlap with Major Lizardo for several weeks and to work as his civilian deputy. I had two Vietnamese counterparts. The first was the Deputy District Chief for Administration, a French-trained Vietnamese bureaucrat who was in charge of the civilian side of the local government, though in reality this meant largely that he managed the paperwork. My second counterpart was a Vietnamese ARVN Major who was the actual District Chief. Major Thanh had been an NCO (no-commissioned officer) in the French Army during the previous war period and then became an officer under the new Vietnamese army. He was relatively young, at that point probably only 40. Officially, he was Major Lizardo's counterpart, but we shared the duties of working with Major Thanh. Part of this was because I was going to be taking on the Senior Advisor responsibilities after about two months. But the other reason was simply the nature of how the District was run. Major Thanh ran the district's military operations, but he also made all the decisions which determined how the district was managed. Thus, in order to have any impact on what was happening on the civil side, I really had to work directly with him. Moreover, I spoke Vietnamese and the two Majors, Lizardo and Thanh only spoke basic GI slang in the other's language. Although other U.S. advisors who spoke Vietnamese had come into the district and worked on one project or another, none of them had ever been assigned to stay in the district and work directly with the local authorities. So the two of us were able to communicate directly and I often passed on Major Lizardo's suggestions to the Major and vice versa.

Once Major Lizardo left and I was officially his counterpart, I would generally accompany the Major Thanh in his visits to hamlets and villages around the district. We'd each travel in our own vehicle but then we'd join together to talk to local officials, businessmen, farmers, etc to learn about what was happening in a particular area. We'd ask about VC activities, try to find out about local problems and talk about government programs. Around mid-day, we'd generally have lunch with some of the local officials and then we'd either have a mid-day break there or back at the District headquarters before spending much of the afternoon reviewing things at the District compound. My ordinary work day started around six in the morning and I generally finished up around 8:00 or 9:00 pm. Some nights we'd have a movie from the U.S. military and we'd set it up outdoors in the compound to show to the military families who lived there with us. We had electricity in the compound from our generator for about four hours each evening and thereafter operated with Coleman lanterns if anyone stayed up late. Some nights the Vietnamese Operations Center there would get reports from outlying military units of VC movements in the District. Then, if the VC units were in range, the Vietnamese would often fire artillery into the night. That control room was immediately adjacent to my bedroom and with the sound of the artillery, I'd have to get up and quickly determine where they were firing so we could get on our radio net to alert American aircraft that we had artillery fire in the area. Some days then were a lot longer than the average 14 or 15 hours that I usually spent on the job. And, of course, there was work to do like this every day, including the weekends. The only weekend days I had off were when I was traveling out of country on R& R (Rest and Recreation) trips.

I've said a couple of times, the reason Ba Tri was the first District in the Mekong Delta to get a civilian senior advisor was because it was "pacified." But as I noted earlier, we frequently had reports of VC troops moving through the District in the late night/early morning hours. One evening, the main force VC unit that operated in our part of the province was spotted passing through the District by one of the local Popular Force platoon ambush units. Amazingly, the local unit engaged the enemy with gunfire. I say amazingly because this was a small ambush unit and the unit passing through probably had between eighty and one hundred men and for the most part, Vietnamese ambush parties let any enemy movements proceed unmolested because it was safer that way. Anyway, the local forces engaged the enemy and reported the contact to the District headquarters a few hours after midnight. The VC were so surprised by the ambush that they moved into one of the village housing areas and took over that area for self-defense. After he had been notified, the District Chief contacted his Regional Force outposts and by six in the morning he had four or five Regional Force company sized units surrounding the village exchanging fire with the VC in the houses. I assembled my Advisory unit team and sent my Deputy, Captain Echeverria, an NCO, the radio operator, Private Sowders, and the interpreter out with the District military force that joined the attacking forces. I went with the District Chief to the Command Post he set up back behind the fighting area and the tactical struggle was enjoined. The District Chief had notified the Provincial authorities about the bottled up enemy force and the Vietnamese offered to send air strikes against the VC unit. The Major refused this offer, saying the VC were in a populated part of the village and he did not want civilian casualties. He also decided not to use his 105 artillery tubes because he could not be sure this too would not lead to unnecessary civilian losses. Instead, he tried a couple of probing attacks along the edge of the houses and looked to the idea of a frontal assault as his main tactic. During the firing, the American advisors, particularly the young radio operator were actively engaged in firing at the enemy. Unfortunately, Private Sowders was too eager in his desire to engage the enemy and while firing his own weapon he was exposed to enemy fire and seriously wounded. Captain Echeverria gave the radio to the NCO and along with the interpreter tried to line up a medevac flight to get Private Sowders out of the combat area. The two of them tore a bamboo door off of a nearby house and using that as a stretcher carried Private Sowders out of the fighting area to a place where a helicopter could come in and get him. He was successfully picked up but he died enroute the hospital. Afterward, I wrote Captain Echeverria up for the Silver Star and the interpreter for the U.S. Bronze Star and both nominations were approved and the awards presented. This surprised the Captain because while he appreciated my writing the award nomination for him said the military would never approve an award that had been recommended by a civilian. But the big loss was Private Sowders. He was our youngest team member, only 21, and just married before he came to Vietnam. Although it was going to be done by someone in the military chain of command, I felt I also had to write to his wife about the loss she now had to face. That was the only time I had to write such a letter but it certainly was a difficult thing to do. The rest of our team throughout the eighteen months I was there was remarkably lucky. Only Captain Echeverria's replacement, Captain Donohue, suffered a serious war wound and had to be medevaced and subsequently taken out of country for treatment. He was coming back from an operation with a Regional Force company which had not had any enemy contact when he was wounded as the result of the detonation of an artillery shell booby trap that had been placed on a rice paddy dike. It was really unfortunate because everyone had seen the booby trap and had deliberately gone around or over it when one of the Vietnamese soldiers stumbled into it and detonated the charge. Captain Donohue got hit with shrapnel behind one ear and by the time he was taken out of Vietnam for further medical treatment he had not recovered his hearing in that ear and had some problems with balance. So, to get back to my point, although Ba Tri was a pacified district, the war was always there and you simply could not assume nothing was going to happen.

Before we go any further, I should note how many people were involved in our local advisory effort. This was a very large district team. We had eight or nine men assigned at the district compound headquarters and then we had subordinate units - groups of five - who stayed out in the compounds of the regional force companies who were now the main Vietnamese military forces in the district. These are the teams I was referring to earlier when I said they'd go out on operations with the Regional Force companies and use their radio links to American support forces in case there was contact with enemy forces.

Q: These are Americans?

HARTER: That's right, these were groups of five Americans. Usually one officer and four NCOs, different grades of sergeants. We sometimes had Army Captains heading the five-man teams; sometimes they were lieutenants. Although the plan was to try to keep a captain on those team assignments, we ended up with a lot of lieutenants, because our team requirements expanded so quickly. As I said earlier, as the district became more and more pacified, the national plan was to reduce the ARVN presence and replace the regular army with local force units. So, when we lost the battalions, when I first came in the summer of 1968, we still had one ARVN battalion in the district. That battalion left, I think by the end of the year, but certainly by January 1969. So, our regional force company and popular force platoons that were assigned around the district had to expand. We went up from initially two or three regional force companies when I arrived to five before I left. We went from popular force platoons, maybe 20 odd of those units to 60 or more popular force platoons by the end of 1969. Each of these units had distinct responsibilities. The regional force companies were set up in bases scattered throughout the district and they were to provide rapid response in the event of any trouble in the district. The popular force platoons were more locally centered and they focused on securing lines of communication and village areas with larger population concentrations. Also in that mix was the group I mentioned my classmate had been associated with, the People's Self Defense Forces (PSDF). This group was composed of local hamlet residents who were given only rudimentary military training, wore regular clothing - black pajamas - and they were only expected to try to protect their homes if the VC tried to get into the hamlets. They were just a little local gendarmerie or militia that would be used in the event of a hamlet emergency. They were pretty hopeless as a real defensive force because they were really too poorly trained to be very effective and the weapons they had to use were the bottom of the line hand-me-downs which had already passed through ARVN and the RF and PF.

I should also finish up what happened in the big battle with the main force VC company that was caught in the District. As the afternoon wore on, the District Chief's idea of a frontal assault was not approved by the provincial authorities. He asked for additional military forces and was turned down. In the meantime, the VC were utilizing their own network to provide a way out for the entrapped unit. Reports came in to the District Command Post of isolated incidents in other parts of the District. A hand grenade incident in a market place. Another being thrown near a military outpost. As night began to fall, the District Chief pulled his forces out and sent them back to their static security positions to protect different parts of the district. Once it was dark, the VC unit pulled out. We later learned they had lost their company commander and some other senior military leaders during the fighting. And, they certainly learned it was not just going to be all that easy to march across Ba Tri District in the middle of the night without risking some kind of contact. Still, it was disappointing to see such a well-staged military operation that had the opportunity to destroy a main force VC unit end up with the VC walking away. Unfortunately, that sort of indecisive combat characterized a lot of the fighting in Vietnam.

In addition to working with the Major, my job was also to work with the civilian administration and look at the development of the political, economic and social units within the villages and hamlets in the district. This was all to fit into a national plan of elections and village development. I had what they call an AIK or Aid-In-Kind budget that I could work with. At its peak, I think it was close to $2,000.00 a month that I could spend at my discretion to stimulate development projects. This would be anything from helping to get supplies for a new maternity clinic, supplies for a school, or even lending money to put concrete floors in a pig sty. The biggest project we got involved with was providing some funds for building a new dam near the district capital to prevent salt water intrusion into the inland crop producing areas. A lot of the very small scale self-help projects that were being promoted were associated with Vietnamese Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre. These teams of young men and I think perhaps occasionally some young women were scattered around the villages and hamlets at the early stages of pacification development work. There goal was to try to get the local people to work together and identify needed projects, while at the same time trying to foster loyalty to the GVN. The teams consisted of young Vietnamese mostly from the cities who dressed like the peasants in black pajamas and worked alongside them. There goal was to encourage the local villagers to establish schools and the RD cadre did some of the early classroom teaching. They also tried to teach the farmers better farming methods - especially to introduce hybrid rice strains from the International Rice Institute (IRI) in the Philippines, to teach better hygiene, to help people with health care and maternity issues, and to explain the rudiments of self defense for the villages and hamlets. The RD teams were supposed to take care of themselves in the field and to help protect the village but they very quickly became prime targets of the VC because they were keeping the VC from getting at the local population.

At one point in Ba Tri we had, I would guess, as many as eight to ten Revolutionary Development cadre teams spread out in the district. By the time I left in January 1970, all of them were gone and had been gone for at least half a year. By that time, we were considered to be secure, a model, a showplace, and for the last several months I was there, it was a place to bring officials from other parts of the delta to see what could be accomplished. As the Vietnamese altered their presence in the district to rely more and more on local self-generation, the U.S. was engaged in a similar program which we called Vietnamization as we tried to reduce our footprint in the country beginning in the latter part of 1969. As I said before, I had a very large American advisory team. At its pinnacle, the team had as many as 35 Americans, counting the little five-man teams I had scattered around in the district and my headquarters team. By the spring of 1969, I had brought my classmate from Saigon to work as my civilian deputy, thus making us probably the only district team in all of Vietnam with two civilians running most of the programs. With Vietnamization underway, we first dispensed with the teams working with the regional forces and then began reducing the headquarters team. This was the project I wanted to complete before I took on the proposed job with Ambassador Bunker. By the fall, we were down to two civilians and a military advisor who worked on intelligence issues. The lieutenant did such a poor job I kicked him out of the district and he was sent back to Saigon to work at the airport. At the end of 1969, my civilian deputy succeeded me and remained as the only American advisor assigned to the district. He stayed for several more months and was replaced by another advisor who was there by himself. I don't believe he was replaced.

Q: You were really presiding over a success?

HARTER: Yes, at the time we certainly saw it that way.

Q: How did you find these revolutionary teams of young Vietnamese?

HARTER: By and large they were very good. They were very enthusiastic, particularly the newest ones. They had problems dealing with the peasants, because many of them were city kids and they tended to look down on the rural people. There were attitude problems from time to time but as they got more acclimated to the rural areas they became a lot better. And, this was a better alternative for them than being in the military. By and large they wanted to be seen as doing well at what they were doing so they didn't end up getting drafted. In the end I think a lot of them did get drafted just simply because the war situation got so much worse over time for the Saigon Government. But, I found by and large these kids were really, really quite good. I call them kids but they were probably only five to six years younger than I was.

Another Government program designed to assist the rural areas came out of the Education Ministry. The Ministry recruited teachers as part of a national service plan, mostly young women, and sent them to the countryside to help set up school programs for the villages. As I said, when the Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre, came to work in a village they started up some basic education classes in whatever facility they could find. They had elementary text books and basic teaching materials to work with. The idea was that once you got people started on the education front you could try to get the villagers to pitch in and build a small schoolhouse which could pull in students from the various hamlets in the village. Further, as the GVN operations extended services into these areas when they were more clearly becoming "pacified" the Government program would help build regular school buildings out of concrete and rebar. At that point, the Ministry of Education would begin to dispatch regular teachers from outside the area to serve in the schoolhouses. This was not an easy transition. You had these young women, fresh out of some kind of educational training by the Ministry who probably had never been away from home and family before and they were terribly home sick. Some of them were college graduates, but most of them were high school graduates who were anywhere from 16 to 19 years of age, city dwellers, being sent to rural areas to lives of hardship and poverty. Looking at Ba Tri, we had lots of people that lived very close to the poverty line, particularly among the farming community. Because we were a coastal district there was a lot of salt intrusion that affected the rice fields and we had a lot of problems getting really good rice crops. Because there were very few trees, we had no coconut industry and fishing to produce income for a family was difficult because there was a lot of expense to put together a boat, motor, fuel, nets and other supplies before you could even start getting any fish. So, those people who made their living off the land didn't make a very rich living. There was no big push for big vegetable growing efforts to supply cities because of the security questions, the lack of good transportation, and again salt intrusion didn't make it easy to grow vegetables except right next to people's homes where they raised vegetables for family food and not much for the market. Salt, however, did create an industry for the district because we had some people who lived close to the coast who made their living by scraping dried salt off of the fields after the salt water had evaporated. This salt was used to produce nuoc mam and it was used to salt and preserve fish.

Nuoc mam is the Vietnamese fish sauce. It's made by simply throwing salt and water in with a bunch of anchovies in a large ceramic jar and letting the mix ferment in the sun. Then you take the liquid run-off from the fermentation process, and bottle it and sell it as "anchovy water", the translation of nuoc mam, for cooking.

Q: If you'll look at the ingredients of Worcestershire sauce, there's an anchovies base to it.

HARTER: That's interesting. I'd never noticed that on the label. I think there's a lot of those kinds of sauces throughout the world, I mean it's not only Southeast Asia, where they make sauces from fish. I'd guess they do that also in parts of Africa and South America too.

Q: How did you get on - I mean here you are, with no, you know, this is your first real experience of this nature.

HARTER: Yeah. I was a neophyte in all of this. Many of my classmates had been in the Peace Corps, had lived abroad with their families. Some only had academic-year-abroad experiences in college, but even that was more than I had. I'd visited EXPO when it was in Montreal (1967) and had been to that city for a college debate tournament at McGill University. But my travel to Parks College in Missouri was the farthest west I had ever been before stopping in California to see Disneyland on route to Vietnam. Each CORDS class had a week's training in Taiwan to become more familiar with rural agriculture in Asia before we reached Saigon. And I took a couple of days to help a friend of mine settle his wife in Manila before we both went on to Vietnam. That was the extent of my international experience. And, here I was in the countryside in Vietnam supposed to assist the local government run better programs to help the people.

Q: Well, how did you find yourself - you're not a country kid anyway.

HARTER: No, not at all. Not at all.

Q: How did this work and how did you work with your Vietnamese counterparts?

HARTER: Well, it was all a combination of things, trying to put into practice the lessons you picked up in the classroom and trying to do things that seemed to be sensible for the situation at hand. The district environment was also pretty confining at first. When I first got to the district my office and my bedroom was a bit smaller than this room and I shared it initially with Major Lizardo and his military deputy, a Captain; the three of us lived in it and slept in it. The room was part of the District headquarters and was the District Chief's house as well. When Major Lizardo left we were only two in the room, but within a couple more months we had expanded the advisory team's part of the building and the Captain could move into that section across the small courtyard with the other military personnel. And all of them at that point had individual small rooms of their own and I was by myself in the room attached directly to the District offices and the District Chief's house.

Q: You're talking about a 20 foot by 20 foot room or something?

HARTER: Yes, it was smaller than that, maybe 12 by 12, and it had no windows. It had a wooden door that opened onto a small courtyard and a screened door you could use to get some air into the room. So yes, that's where the Major, myself, and the military deputy all worked and lived. On the other side of the courtyard was a smaller building which comprised our kitchen and dining area and there were a couple of rooms shared by the NCOs and the enlisted men and our radio communications room. We had a latrine at the back end of the building with an indoor toilet and a shower that consisted of a pull cord that released water from a 55 gallon steel drum on the roof of the building. You could get hot showers in the evening after the drum had baked in the sun all day long but an early morning shower was always cold, cold, cold. The overall compound headquarters building thus had a wing for the U.S. Advisory team, a main entrance area for the official business and offices of the District - where the public came to do business - and then a wing where the District Chief was housed. My room was between his house and the tactical operations center for the district, the military communications and battle planning area, which operated 24 hours a day and which coordinated night-time artillery fire whenever there was some report of VC activity within range of the District's 105mm artillery pieces. Originally everything was inter-connected but they made it all work by sealing off some of the connecting doors so you couldn't go from one section's living area into somebody else's office or home.

Still, it was a compound with the district headquarters and our living quarters in the middle. This was surrounded by a small group of multi-room bamboo and thatch houses where the District compound military men and their families lived. All this was enclosed within an eight foot high berm of mud that was topped with barbed wire. The compound inhabitants were all around us and we had generally good relations with all of them. There was one incident, however, that I will never forget. I told you Norris Nordvold had come down from Saigon to be my civilian deputy. He had been a classmate at FSI and was a former Peace Corps volunteer who had served in Africa. Norris brought with him a wooden statue from Africa which he kept in his foot locker in his small room in the district team living quarters. One day that statue disappeared and it was obvious that only someone living in the compound could have stolen it. Norris decided he would try to get the statue back by claiming it had magical properties. That night after dinner he went back out behind our house to an area facing most of the other compound houses where the Vietnamese lived. He proceeded to offer prayers and small offerings of fruit and cigarettes to a fire which he had built. He told the curious Vietnamese onlookers that he was praying to the missing statue and asking that it punish whoever had been responsible for stealing it if they failed to return it to its proper place. After about ten or fifteen minutes, he finished and we all went back into our respective houses. Early the next morning, a small boy was found drowned in the concrete well which was immediately behind our house. The child was probably not yet five years old and the sides of the well were probably three feet high so no one could understand how he ended up falling into the well. Shortly thereafter the child's father returned the wooden statue which he had stolen the day before and asked Norris' forgiveness. That's a bit of a digression from my description of the compound and how the team lived, but it certainly had a big impact on all of us. It certainly created a much deeper appreciation for the power of superstition.

Q: First place, what about during the time you were there, the supervision from Saigon or elsewhere?

HARTER: Supervision from Saigon was negligible. Supervision was primarily from the province and occasionally from Corps. We did, however, get visitors from Saigon and occasionally from the U.S. One of our VIP visitors was Secretary of State Rogers. He came for a short visit and the District set up a briefing and a bit of a Potemkin Village tour which I conducted for him as I drove a Jeep through various set demonstrations of local activities. These included driving into a village where he could see a local market, stop in and see the school and maternity clinic and then drive by a rice field that was being cultivated and watch a group of People's Self-Defense Force members undergoing some basic training. The latter view was interesting because all these older men were in their traditional black pajamas and were engaged in an exercise with their old rifles. Secretary Rogers turned to me and send, "They're all wearing black pajamas. I thought the VC wore black pajamas. How do you tell them apart?" I'm not positive I kept a completely straight face but I know I tried when I told him "That sir is the big problem, telling them apart."

Q: Where is the Corps, Can Tho?

HARTER: Can Tho was the CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone) headquarters. But it only got really active when John Paul Vann was transferred to IV Corps. Before that the Corps leaders would occasionally ask some of us in the districts to go to meetings in Can Tho, but after going there for one set of meetings I tried to avoid them. I thought at the time they weren't very useful. Now, John Paul Vann was a very different story. He was a real activist, a totally involved individual. Where his predecessor largely stayed in Can Tho and held meetings and "pushed paper," Vann got out into the provinces and districts to see what was going on and to give personal instructions to the people on the ground about how he wanted things done. Unfortunately, I got on the wrong side of John Vann the very first time he and I met. Although our relationship later on was fine, and, as I said earlier, he nominated me among all the other civilian advisors as the IV Corps candidate for a job in Ambassador Bunker's office and then Ambassador Colby's office, we certainly started off on the wrong foot.

Q: How did that happen?

HARTER: Well, as I told you the Province Senior Advisor who put me in Ba Tri was Nick Thorne. A few months later, after having too much to drink, he wandered out of his house in Ben Tre in the middle of a mortar attack and received shrapnel wounds. He was medevaced to Saigon and then to Bangkok and never came back to Vietnam. He was replaced by a man from my large, starting class at the CORDS Training Center. His name was Albert Kotzebue, but everyone called him Buck. He joined CORDS after a full career in the military which started during World War II. He was the first American officer to meet the first Russian officer at a bridge in Germany when the two eastward and westward marching armies came together in 1945. During the first eight weeks of the CORDS training he and I were bridge partners doing our breaks at lunch time. We got to know each other pretty well and I guess he basically had a lot of confidence in what I was doing in the district. He did not try to manage the district from Ben Tre and did not get involved in any of the things I was doing. I don't know how he managed the other District teams, but with me he just basically said, "Let me know when you have problems."

And, the first problem I had of any significance, at least as far as CORDS activities was concerned, resulted from an early instruction issued by John Paul Vann. Shortly after Vann arrived in CORDS IV Corps Headquarters, he said, "I want every senior advisor once a month to write a letter to his counterpart and tell that counterpart exactly what he has done right and wrong during the previous month." I went right to Kotzebue and said, "You know who I work with; you know his big ego and his feelings of being looked down on by other ARVN officers because he was an NCO. You know, I cannot write a letter to him and expect it to have any possible positive results. He'll stop working with me completely and try to get me removed."

Q: This is a Vietnamese?

HARTER: Yes, this is a Vietnamese. He's diminutive, maybe 5'3", and I'm six one. He's come up through the ranks; he feels very important in his position; he's doing a pretty creditable job; he is very active, very involved and gets out and around the district to show the flag and find out how things can be made better. I continued talking to Kotzebue saying, "He's not as corrupt as a lot of the other people around here; he is not going to respond positively even to a letter that includes positive things if I say something negative to him in writing." At this point, I looked Buck in the eye and said "I cannot do this." Kotzebue agreed and said, "You're absolutely right, he is the wrong person to do this with. Don't do it, don't write the letters. I'll explain to Paul Vann why you're not doing it."

At that point, I went back to the district and promptly forgot all about the issue. Unfortunately, I think Buck did too. Some weeks later Vann came to the province for his first visit and he wanted particularly to come to Ba Tri as the pacification showplace. The district chief welcomed him and did part of an overall district briefing on what had been achieved and where there were still some problems to be overcome; Major Thanh left and I did a second part of the briefing describing the overall situation from the American perspective. Vann appeared to be very pleased and complimented me on the presentation and on how everything appeared to be coming together very well in Ba Tri. Then, after looking again at the briefing maps he turned and said to me "can I see the letters you've written to your district chief?" And I simply said, "I've never written any letters to the district chief", and, before I could say another word, Vann went through the roof. Vann fumed, "Who do you think you are? You're no different from anybody else who's under my command. When you get an order, you obey that order; you follow the instructions to the letter. For the next three months I want a copy of every letter you send to your counterpart on my desk the same time you deliver it to him." He stormed out of the District office where we were doing the briefing and, along with Kotzebue and a few others from the CTZ Headquarters he got back on his helicopter and left.

The next day, I went back to my boss in Ben Tre and said, "What happened? I thought you were going to explain this to him?" He said, "I never got around to doing it, so Vann didn't know why we had decided it wouldn't work to give Major Thanh the letters." At that point, I said, "O.K. I'm going to write those letters and I'm going to deliver them to you and to John Paul Vann, but I'm still not going to give the letters to the district chief. I still think if he gets a letter from me he'll go off his rocker and it won't accomplish a thing. But, I'll write the letters for John Paul Vann." Kotzebue agreed that was the best way to do it and he kept my secret for the next three months, after which Vann told Kotzebue I didn't need to send Vann copies of any more of my letters to the District Chief. After that Vann and I had a good relationship but I don't know if he was ever aware that the letters he read during those three months had never been handed to my counterpart. When I say we had a good relationship, it wasn't that we had a lot of direct communication or that we were personally close. Vann was never in any one spot all that long. He came in and out of the district a couple more times while I was there and we always had good communications and understanding when it came to talking about what was going on. I think Kotzebue also gave him favorable reports on my performance.

Q: I might add just parenthetically that this job, I mean the aide to Bunker was considered a great plum and there were certain people who use to call this the beauty contest, because very personal people like Walt Cutler and others would be offered up. This is a very prestigious place. These are people who have been in the field and serving.

HARTER: I think Bunker was also very interested in trying to get someone who had been more involved in Vietnam programs working in his office. What I mean to say is I think what probably impressed him more than anything else about me as a candidate was that I had spent, close to a year and a half in the countryside; I knew the pacification and war issues, particularly the Mekong Delta issues, quite well. I had direct first-hand experience with the political and economic and social consequences of the war. The people in the embassy who did political and economic reporting on the situation in Vietnam didn't travel that much and when they did, they were largely in and out of the bigger cities. I don't think an Embassy political reporter ever came to Kien Hoa during my tour because they would have naturally gravitated from Ben Tre to Ba Tri and none ever came while I was there. I think Bunker probably found it refreshing to think he'd have someone in his office with that kind of local background. And, although neither of us ever mentioned it in the interview he conducted, Bunker had visited Ba Tri twice while I was there so I had gone around the district with him and talked about what was going on.

Q: What was the political situation in the Delta as you saw it? How was the government's reach there from your perspective?

HARTER: Again, I got to see probably the best of what there was to see, because Ba Tri was a showplace and we got VIP visits and we got the resources to make the programs work. President Thieu came to the District a couple of times - which is why Ambassador Bunker was there - while I was the District Senior Advisor. I think it would have been pretty rare for the President of Vietnam to go to a small district more than once. There were forty provinces and if all had several districts like Kien Hoa, that would mean maybe 250 districts to visit, but he went to Ba Tri twice during the 18 months I was there.

I was impressed by the President, because he had a very common touch about him as he traveled in the district. I had no idea how he performed elsewhere and especially not what he did in Saigon. Although he was in a very nice starched, well-pressed uniform he didn't put on airs. On the other hand he didn't try to appear in farmer's clothing and pretend he was the same as everybody else. Nonetheless, he had an easy and common communication with the people in the countryside. I'm sure they were all in awe of him as he arrived and they got to see the President of their country but he didn't just march on through for photo-ops. He had done some homework and had an idea of what was happening in his programs.

One of the programs that he visited, I guess it's a tried and true Revolutionary Development, Peace Corps-type project, was the piglet loan program. It was a tremendous example of how a small investment in a rural environment could lead to a very dramatic change in an individual's or a family's life. Under this program, the government would give a family a couple of female piglets to raise. When the piglets got bigger the government brought a boar around to impregnate the young female pigs. After the next generation of piglets was born and weaned, the family was allowed to keep some of those piglets and I think under the program they also got to keep one of the original pigs they had raised. Then the government took the rest of the piglets and at least one of the original pigs and lent them out to other families. But, this was a way in which a family all of a sudden went from being a subsistence farmer to somebody who had the opportunity to earn income by raising animals for sale. Income that they could continue to generate through each successive generation of piglets. It was a tremendously successful program.

I can remember Thieu coming down with Ambassador Bunker and other visitors to talk about this program in the villages and hamlets. Seeing him go out and look at the program and talk with the families who had the piglets. And hearing the farmers in return just honestly expressing - hesitantly, a little in awe of the President being in their village and in their house - how this had changed their lives. It's the kind of program you could use today in rural Iraq and Afghanistan though you'd have to chance the animal to something other than a pig to match Muslim sensitivities. This is the sort of opportunity that gets a family's whole economic situation turned around. You can do it with chickens; you can do it with a variety of different animals. The pig program was just the one that was the most successful in Vietnam.

Q: How about the green revolution, the rice?

HARTER: We got the opportunity to promote that as well, but this was a tough sale for the peasants in Ba Tri. Introducing the IR-8, and IR-9 varieties of rice at that particular time was really tough, particularly because Ba Tri district was a district largely filled with subsistence farmers. Moreover, because of the salt intrusion problems, we didn't get two or three crops a year on a regular basis like some of the prosperous inland areas could get. We could only count on one rice crop a year, and any more than that was considered a real blessing. So, telling somebody to try a new brand of rice that would produce greater returns in a shorter period of time and maybe give them a chance to try for a second crop or a third crop in the same fields was a very, very risky sale. If the weather and the other factors essential for the rice crop didn't work out, the farmer had nothing to show for his experiment. And, that meant a very difficult time for the farm family. You could only got a few people each growing season to try the new rice and a big success on one crop was only that, a big success on one crop. It didn't necessarily convince the same farmer, let alone his neighbors, that this new rice was worth a full time commitment in his fields. Each crop season only a few farmers would agree to plant the new rice in their fields in Ba Tri, or at least try it in a small section of their fields. In other districts where the conditions were intrinsically more favorable, farmers were more willing to take a risk and they did find the new strains from the Philippines were very productive in Vietnam. Of course, not everyone agreed that the rice tasted as good as the traditional varieties so you couldn't always get complete agreement to go with the new rice.

Q: What about fishing?

HARTER: Fishing was generally small scale and confined to the rivers and the immediate coast line. Nobody went out for more than a day and usually always in sight of land, even though that land was flat and got out of sight pretty quickly as you moved out to sea. It was a particularly profitable enterprise for only one of the 16 villages in the district. This village was on a river and near the mouth where it entered the South China Sea. It was never a really prosperous village, but it was the one village that did make money out of fishing. Thanh Phu, the district across the river on Ba Tri's southern border was much more active in fishing both the river and the ocean. But it was also a much more active site for the VC. And so, eventually quite a number of fishermen from Thanh Phu fled across the river

The arrival of the refugees in the district created a couple of new and interesting problems for me. First, I was targeted for assassination by the VC as a result of work I tried to get started in the refugee community which was focused on teaching refugee women how to use sewing machines. Secondly, I planned to set up a fishing cooperative using the boats the fishing families had abandoned in the neighboring district when they fled across the river to Ba Tri. Neither of these efforts really got off the ground, but they provided some real challenges and in both cases threatened to get me killed. In the first instance, being targeted directly by the VC and in the second case getting shot at by the U.S. military aircraft.

I had become acquainted with three young Vietnamese school teachers who had been assigned to teach school in the village where all the refugees were located. After determining they knew how to use sewing machines, I asked if they would agree to teach the skill to some of the refugee women if there was any interest. They agreed and I used my AIK funds to purchase a sewing machine and several women agreed to learn. I am not positive, but I believe they had already held a couple of classes when an armed VC unit entered the village one night and gathered a number of the residents together for a propaganda session. Although the VC did not specifically say they were going to kill me because of the plan to teach women to use sewing machines, when they came into the village they told the villagers they assembled no one was to get involved in anything that I was encouraging because the Americans could not be trusted. The VC also said they would kill me the next time I came into the village.

Word of the event reached the district headquarters the next morning and I was told about the threat by district officials. I was initially very upset because I thought the VC had not considered anything I had done up to that point to be worth a threat on my life and I certainly didn't think a small sewing program merited so much attention. But, after I got over that little bit of ego, I realized I could not simply let the threat stand unchallenged. So, contrary to the advice of my military colleagues I waited until it was relatively late in the day - after 5:00 pm - and it would be getting dark within a couple of hours, I got in my International Harvester Scout that only USAID civilians used and I drove alone down to the coastal village about 20 minutes away from the district headquarters. I went directly to where the school teachers stayed and spoke with them and told them not to be concerned about the VC threat and that I intended to continue to support the school and the sewing program. I made sure I walked around in the area and said I was there because I had heard of the threat and wanted to know where the VC were who were unable to come out to confront me. Although this was all a bit theatrical I'd guess from the Vietnamese perspective, I wanted to make sure the local residents knew I was still going to try to keep active in their village. After about 30 or 40 minutes of walking around and talking to people, I got back in my vehicle to drive back to Ba Tri's district town. It was only then, as I was driving back, that it dawned on me how potentially stupid my action was. Along the road back to the district town, there was a rather large bend in the road where all vehicles had to slow down to make the turn. As I approached that area, I noticed a Vietnamese woman in typical black pajamas standing off on a rice paddy dike about ten or fifteen yards from the road. She had one hand on her hip - but no baby in her arm - and I thought this seemed like an unusual position in which to be standing. As I slowed to make the turn, her arm dropped to her side and I immediately thought - That's a signal to the VC to ambush me on the road - but it turned out to be nothing more than my imagination and I drove back to the district compound perhaps a little more considerate of what my life might mean and I tried to avoid doing stupid things like driving out alone toward dusk. And, no, I wasn't carrying any weapon. I had decided soon after I arrived in Vietnam if I was seen walking around with a weapon all the time, the village people weren't going to have much confidence in the local security situation. So aside from a few occasions when I had to drive to the provincial capital for early morning meetings and I basically was the first vehicle on the roait was still pitch dark and the road barriers were up at all the PF checkpoints - I never carried a weapon. Like most of my colleagues at the CORDS training center I purchased a personal weapon - a Walther PPK - because the AID instructors told us we wouldn't be issued weapons in Vietnam. While that might have been true if we worked in some advisory offices in Saigon, all of us out in the field virtually had our pick of weapons. I inherited a folding stock M-2 carbine and a Swedish K 9mm sub-machine gun from my predecessor, Major Lizardo. These were weapons he had acquired from CIA personnel who were working in the province capital. Anyway, I am digressing from the second part of my story about the refugees.

When I learned the refugees from Thanh Phu District had largely left their fishing boats behind I kept trying to figure a way we could get them over to Ba Tri so the people could resume fishing. Discussions with the Vietnamese military didn't produce any interest in a cross district military operation just to liberate some fishing boats and risk people getting killed. I thought if I could get the boats I could set up a cooperative which would maintain control of the boats but allow the fishermen to use them to earn money and eventually buy them back with the objective of using the money they provided for renting the boats to start small capital funds for other needed projects in the village.

Then all of a sudden a different opportunity arose through the U.S. Navy. One of the outlying teams in Ba Tri was a U.S. Navy advisory unit that worked with a Vietnamese Navy riverine patrol force set up near the mouth of the district's southern river with the South China Sea. These units would patrol along the coast and along the river to try to prevent the VC from re-supplying their troops by sea, since we were a long way from the Ho Chi Minh trail supply lines. They would stop the local boats and make sure they were licensed and not carrying contraband and try to maintain control of the coasts. Anyway, the U.S. Navy unit got word that a U.S. Navy PT boat team was prepared to come to the base in Ba Tri and conduct a joint exercise with the Vietnamese Navy designed to search for signs of VC riverine activity in neighboring Thanh Phu. I saw this as my big chance to get into Thanh Phu and to arrange to tow out the fishing boats. So I arranged all this with the Navy advisors in the District and we started off early in the morning to enter the canals on the other side of the river. Our District Advisory Team had a 16 foot long fiberglass Boston whaler that had been ordered through Saigon for a lot of the districts that were located around the delta. It was supposed to provide us an emergency "vehicle" to get out of the District if there was a major military fight. So I took one of the team interpreters and one of my NCOs and we got in the Boston whaler and attached ourselves by rope to the back of one of the Vietnamese patrol craft. As we entered the canals I began to see the fishing boats moored along the docks where some of the local village houses were close to the water. I started marking the boats on my plastic map overlay with my crayon marker. The idea was we'd finish our patrol run and then pick up the boats I'd marked on the map and tow them back across the river.

Unfortunately, all of that proved to be a pipe dream. About half-way into the operation, a single VC soldier came up from a spider hole along the side of the river and fired a B-40 rocket that hit the Vietnamese boat that was towing me. The VC immediately dropped back into his spider hole and was completely invisible. But that was the signal for all hell to break out on our side. As soon as the B-40 struck the boat every Vietnamese and American weapon on board the various boats was turned on the shore and fired on automatic. The din was amazing. When the enemy rocket hit the boat, a Vietnamese sailor fell overboard into the canal, although at the time we thought he might have been wounded by the shot. I instructed the interpreter to cut us loose from the Vietnamese ship and directed the sergeant to move our boat so we could get the sailor in the water. We did so and got him back on board his ship but by that time the U.S. Navy OV-10 aircraft decided to get into the action. They had come along on our operation to serve as spotters for potential enemy activity and to provide air support in the event we ran into a large concentration of VC. As my Boston whaler and its crew was maneuvering around in the water to stay out of the line of fire and to avoid the milling patrol boats, the OV-10 aircraft started strafing runs to hit the river bank area where the VC was likely to have fired the shot. The result was machine gun bullets hitting the water on both sides of our little boat until the U.S. Navy patrol boats could get the aircraft to back off because there was only one VC involved in the action and he had long since disappeared. Once the shooting had stopped, the U.S. Navy advisors conferred with the Navy PT boat team and they agreed we would continue on with the patrol. But, they quickly decided we would not go back out of the District on the canals we had come in on so we wouldn't risk a return ambush by a reinforced or at least alerted VC force. So, all the boats I'd marked on my map just stayed where they were in the canal and the other route we followed to get back to the river produced not a single wooden candidate for liberation.

Q: What about, there wasn't much U.S. military in IV Corps?

HARTER: No, the U.S. military was largely excluded from the delta. A part of the US 9th division was based in the province immediately north of Kien Hoa just outside My Tho, the big river trading city of the northern delta. The U.S base was west of the city at a place called Dong Tam. That province was actually in III Corps, but since Kien Hoa was the northernmost province on the coast in IV Corps, the 9th division sent a company of U.S. forces to help in clearing out the Vietcong in Kien Hoa. This unit was based in the district immediately north of mine on this central island in the province. As I said earlier the districts that made up Kien Hoa were totally surrounded by rivers and canals that connected the rivers. We had been connected to the mainland by the bridge that had been blown at Tet in 1968. All the time I was there, the bridge did not get rebuilt and we had to cross the river on a temporary ferry that had been brought in once order had been restored after Tet. This district, it was called Giong Trom, and my district Ba Tri were on the middle island and the other districts in the province were arranged above and below it like jaws around the middle island of the district. The other district names I remember were Thanh Phu and Mo Cay which I mentioned earlier, Truoc Giang District where Ben Tre was located, Ham Long district in between Thanh Phu and Mo Cay and Binh Dai which comprised the whole upper jaw around the middle island which would make a total of seven districts in the province. Anyway, the 9th Division was sent down to assist in the destruction of the Vietcong military forces that remained after Tet. When the unit was based just north of our district, my NCOs used to go up there and trade or scrounge U.S. food from the mess sergeants. That way we'd occasionally have U.S. steaks and other frozen meats and we'd get trays of eggs and other items that were hard to find in the local markets. I actually developed a taste for duck eggs and Vietnamese noodle soups for breakfast.

Earlier, I said Kien Hoa was one of the most insecure provinces in the entire country and even after the Tet offensive failed in the province there were still a lot of main force VC units, including one in Ba Tri, and forested areas where the ARVN forces didn't go to challenge the VC units. The province was so dangerous that I was the only civilian to spend an entire 18 month tour in a district there without being medevaced for either war injury or severe illness. One of my civilian colleagues in Giong Trom died from disease, he was from CORDS 2. Three other civilian deputy senior advisors were injured in mine incidents in their districts; their vehicles were blown up on district roads. The 9th Division was there probably six or eight months of the time that I was in the district, operating in Giong Trom and occasionally in other parts of the province. And then, they too were pulled back as part of the Vietnamization process in the latter half of 1969 and they did not operate in the delta anymore. The division did not have a very good reputation and their commander was considered to be one of the big "body count" advocates. He didn't seem to care about civilian casualties and chalked up everyone in black pajamas as VC. He was known for sweep operations that produced lots of "death and destruction" but not much to help the pacification process.

Q: Did you have much conference with fellow, district advisors from other places?

HARTER: No, there was no real interchange that way. The folks in Can Tho may have been trying to encourage that by having periodic meetings in the CTZ headquarters but the meetings were so boring I didn't go. We had good monthly meetings in Kien Hoa where the province assembled the senior advisors and the provincial department heads to talk about provincial issues and programs. You'd get the latest instructions from Saigon and have discussions about the results from the Hamlet Evaluation System to see where additional emphasis need to be directed. We could also go around and have individual meetings with the different provincial offices - New Life Development, PsyOps, Military Intelligence and Operations, Public Affairs - and try to get your district ducks lined up in the provincial pond; figure out what you needed to do; what other supplies you could beg, borrow, or have your NCO steal; and who you could talk to in the various other divisions of the advisory team to cajole the extra support you needed for your local programs, things like that. Because I was the only civilian District Senior Advisor, I didn't get to talk with the other civilians because my counterparts from the other districts at these provincial gatherings were all Army Majors or Captains. It was actually only when I got to Saigon and I was working with Colby that I was able to help bring some of these civilians into a dialogue in Saigon with Colby and with other people in the senior CORDS management so that they would have a better idea of what CORDS civilians were actually doing on the ground. We would do this sometimes over dinner at my house or sometimes just in meetings in Colby's office. But, that was the only time I can recall really having a bunch of other civilians who were working in the countryside exchanging views with one another.

Q: Dennis, you've came to Saigon. You've already talked about that you did not go as aide to Bunker. But, we'll talk about working with Colby. You were in Saigon from when to when?

HARTER: From January of 1970 until late June, maybe early July.

Q: I don't know if I asked, but this goes way after you were there, really at the end. But, I interviewed a long time, Terry McNamara who was Consul General in Can Tho when he had to evacuate by sea. He had some scathing things to say about the CIA and how they sort of got out all the Americans and left their other people. I mean, they didn't do a very good job. What was your impression of the CIA operation where you were, or did you have any impression?

HARTER: We didn't have any CIA personnel in the district. When I first arrived in the province, I did meet some CIA people who worked on intelligence issues there but we didn't have any regular connections after that except for an occasional beer together in the club when I came up for provincial meetings. The CIA was involved in creating a special program designed to target the underground VC government structure called the Phoenix program. Together with the military intelligence people they pulled together all the information we had on individuals and units and funneled that information into local District intelligence units called DIOCC's - I believe that stands for District Intelligence Operations Coordinating Center. These centers were designed to bring intelligence together for the district and for the province and then the local military and intelligence personnel could try to collect more information to enable them to locate these individuals and capture or kill them. Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), a hard-nosed Vietnamese military strike team, and other units were used to go out and get the VC cadre. In a sense, the idea was to instill a sense of insecurity and fear among the VC so they could not operate as freely as they had in the past. Of course the goal was also to eliminate them, not just make them afraid. But, by making them afraid of being caught in the villages, the VC were far less able to operate. So I had one of these DIOCC's in my District and a US Army lieutenant was assigned to work with the Vietnamese military in the district and help them develop a good intelligence collection and targeting system. But while this was a CIA program at its inception, it wasn't being staffed or run by the CIA at the district level. When I first got to Ben Tre, I did hear some stories about the way the CIA people in the province during the Tet offensive had gone off on their own instead of staying in the compound with the military advisors. But, I didn't have any dealings with anyone from the CIA when I was in Ba Tri.

Q: O.K. You're back in Saigon. What were you doing?

HARTER: Well, I was one of the special assistants or executive assistants to Ambassador William (Bill) Colby who was in charge of the CORDS program and the deputy to General Abrams. There were three assistants in the main office. The senior man was Colonel Sam Smithers and he was in charge of our group and liaison with the military both on the advisory and the combat side. An USIA officer by the name of Everett Bumgardner was the second assistant. He had been in and out of Vietnam for at least a decade. He spoke Vietnamese and had contacts throughout the Vietnamese hierarchy and society. Just before I left the office, Ev, everybody called him Ev, was replaced by Frank Scotton, another USIA officer with a long association with Vietnam. I was the third assistant and I came in to replace Bill Stewart another FSO who was probably my grade level, I guess a (FSO) six or a five. Bill subsequently left the Foreign Service and joined Time Magazine, spending several years in Asia as a correspondent. Bill was also the one who introduced me into the famous house at 47 Phan Thanh Gian, the house that originated the light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel parties.

Q: Did you go to that New Year's Eve party?

HARTER: Yes, that's the one I'm referring to. But, no, I did not go to the one in 1970. I arrived a couple of days after New Year's to begin work in Saigon.

Q: I went to the 1970 one, yeah.

HARTER: Bill Stewart introduced me to the house, but I didn't just move in when he left. Bill's replacement in the house had already been identified and I had to wait my turn, as well as to see if the other roommates would agree to let me join the household. When the next member left, I moved in. Fortunately, I didn't have to wait very long. And so, for probably five of the six plus months I was in Saigon, I lived at 47 Phan Thanh Gian. As an aside, Phan Thanh Gian was a leading courtier of the Nguyen Dynasty who negotiated early agreements with the French which resulted in the French eventually taking over the southern part of the country in the middle of the nineteenth century. He committed suicide when the French invaded the areas in the south which were under his leadership.

Q: Could you talk a little about that and your feeling, I mean using David Halberstam's sort of the best and brightest in the Foreign Service, young officers, which is a different dynamic than the older ones, of which I was a middle age representative. How did that work and what sort of things were you talking about there? How things are going? Because, young people, you know, provide a different feel than I think you get as you're farther up the ladder.

HARTER: Well, we did have an interesting mix of people doing a variety of different things but all very much I believe looking to be involved in government service, though I was the only one of that immediate group who actually stayed with the government. One of the people in the house and the one I actually replaced in the house when he left Vietnam was David Sulzberger, son and nephew of the New York Times Sulzbergers. David was an AID direct hire and worked AID's new life development program, trying to translate national program objectives into something which could be used in the provinces. I think he was responsible for the house being sort of a magnet for young journalists who were in and out of Saigon all the time trying to follow the war. Another of the roommates was Seton Shanley. Seton was a Foreign Service officer on loan to AID and was a civilian member of the coordinating group in Saigon working on the Phoenix program. Like me, he worked in MACV Headquarters at Tan Son Nhut Airport.

Q: Seton had studied to be a Jesuit?

HARTER: Yes, that's correct but it's my understanding he left the Foreign Service shortly after Vietnam and returned to the seminary. I believe he may have entered an order.

Q: I think he's married to a Vietnamese, but maybe I'm wrong.

HARTER: Not while I was there and not as far as I've heard. He certainly left Vietnam single. The other roommate who was there while I lived in the house was Gage McAfee. Gage was from a well-to-do family of lawyers in New York City. Actually, I think Seton's father also was a lawyer. Gage was trained as a lawyer and he was Ambassador Colby's special advisor on legal issues. He was working with the Chief Justice of the Vietnamese Supreme Court. The Chief Justice was involved in writing a new constitution and particularly a Bill of Rights for the Vietnam and Gage was his advisor.

Although I was not living in the house in January 1970, I often went there after work to talk and to get to know my future roommates better. We did have a lot of conversations about what was going on in the war and about what we were all doing. At that time, quite a number of my civilian friends and associates were skeptics and often quite sarcastic when we talked about the war. But I think there was still a great deal of optimism among the people who worked in Saigon. And, we certainly did not slack off in our commitment to trying to make our programs work better. Although there was a lot of posturing among the members, it did appear as though the National Assembly was beginning to function as a legislative body and not just as a rubber stamp for the Executive Branch. We all thought the Executive Branch was too dictatorial but we could see some of its power being tempered. Based on what Gage told us, there was also progress on the constitution and legal reform to protect civil rights was underway. Those of us who had come from the countryside like myself or who had other contacts with people in the countryside, felt there had been positive changes after the Vietcong failed in their takeover efforts at Tet two years earlier. Unfortunately, we were really out of touch with what was happening in the United States. So, we didn't realize that the United States mood had totally changed. And, even our young journalist contacts and friends didn't talk much about that, preferring to try and ferret out comments from us about what we saw happening or talking about the military operations they had accompanied. The journalists though, because they had been on these operations, had a much more jaded view of the battlefield success that was being reported. They had no respect for the MACV press briefings "the five o'clock follies" and very little confidence the war could be won militarily. Their conversations with the ordinary soldiers gave them a different perspective about how much of the fighting to take over territory from the VC and North Vietnamese rarely resulted in any real gains and how one unit after another seemed to be fighting on the same battlefields month after month against enemy units that always were able to reclaim the territory when the U.S. units moved on.

Q: I was there at the same time, of course. My feeling was, they're doing as well as the Lincoln government during the Civil War, you know. Things were operating and I thought they would bring it off.

HARTER: Yes, and the civilians who had an understanding of how the Phoenix program was to work felt it was the right way to go, taking the fight directly to the VC cadre who were trying to create a parallel government operation in the hamlets and villages. We saw this as a big morale booster for officials in the countryside and a real worry for the VC, making it harder for them to move in and out of populated areas to try to propagandize and collect taxes. And, in many cases the Vietnamese and US units that went after the VC were going into areas where the VC ate and slept and felt they were safe. Once they too had to face the threat of a midnight wake-up call, it was felt they would be a lot less active in GVN controlled areas. If the GVN could do that effectively, it would be a major tool to re-establish its own presence in the countryside. Now when I say this, it's important to acknowledge that some of the younger people in Saigon saw the Phoenix program as a real danger and felt that it would make the government as brutal in its handling of the enemy as the VC had been toward those working for the government.

Q: Now when you're working for Colby - first place, describe how Colby operated and the atmosphere he generated around him.

HARTER: He was probably one of the most serious and yet open people I have ever worked with. When I first joined his staff and we were discussing my role, he sat me down in his office and said, "This is MACV Headquarters, all the military go home at 5 o'clock. Unless you're working on a special project for me that doesn't require you to interact with other people in this building, I want you going home the same time that everybody else does. And," he said, "don't feel that just because I'm here you have to stay. I can take care of myself." And, from time to time when I was still working on a project that he had assigned, he'd stop by my office and ask me if I was sure I needed to still be there after 5:00 pm. Colby was also very open and receptive to new ideas and he was constantly trying to get more feel for what was going on in the countryside.

Whenever possible he'd try to leave town on Friday night to visit various provincial and Corps headquarter areas. And, he'd usually take one or more of his staff members with him to give him more eyes and ears on the ground. We'd fly out at the end of a Friday's workday, come in to a province or district and spend the following day talking to people, Americans and Vietnamese. We'd have meetings, visit projects, try to have informal sessions to learn what was going on in the area and particularly look for things that needed fixing. Because so much of his time in Saigon was tied up with meetings and high-level sessions, Colby rarely had a chance to get a real feel for programs as they worked on the ground without these trips. But, here too, he also was a prisoner of his rank and status and was constantly dealing with the top officials in the areas he visited. On these trips it was rare for him to get a chance to talk to the people who had direct experience in advisory efforts with the Vietnamese at the "basic levels." So, one of the things I tried to do was to get lower level civilian advisors from the districts to meet and talk with Colby when they came to Saigon.

Q: You didn't feel that - the military assistant can get pretty nasty. Lieutenants report to captains, captains report to majors, etc. Each level is more aware of what's up the people at top want to hear and it tends to stifle, particularly the captains on down from getting out and around. But, this wasn't happening on the CORDS side?

HARTER: I don't think that was happening on the CORDS side, particularly not where Colby was concerned. Colby wanted to hear what was going on from as many different people as he could. So, sometimes when we were going out into the provincial meetings, I would try and get in touch with some of my CORDS colleagues and try to see if it was possible to have an informal meeting with some of them beforehand or after he'd had his regular briefings. Colby met regularly with people at the embassy to talk about what he'd learned in the countryside. I know he had regular meetings with Ambassadors Bunker and [Ed: Samuel] Berger and with the other people who were focused on the political developments in Vietnam. He also was very quick to meet with top officials of the Vietnamese government and to use his influence to try and get things changed. He was the one who assigned McAfee to work with the Vietnamese Chief Justice on the new constitution and he kept pushing Thieu and others in the leadership to make this a priority.

My job at MACV Headquarters was mostly focused on the advisory effort and involved working with other people in the headquarters. I didn't have any real dealings with Vietnamese officials very often. The only Vietnamese I had any contact with, and that was fairly irregular, was the President's personal advisor, Hoang Duc Nha. Bill Stewart, my predecessor used to see him more regularly. Sometimes, however, when we felt it would be useful to give some program a push from the top, I'd go and talk informally to Nha about some of the CORDS issues and see if he could give some momentum to Vietnamese efforts in the provinces and districts. So, he was my primary contact with Vietnamese government officials at that particularly time. The rest of the work was mostly internal coordination with Colby and with the various people at the CORDS headquarters. I'd occasionally be asked to review some program reports and get comments from different offices and then prepare reports for Colby that he would use in meetings.

Q: How were we treating the accusations, perhaps well-formed problems of corruption at the highest level?

HARTER: The corruption issue wasn't part of my portfolio and I never worked on any issues involving Vietnamese official corruption. My friends and I talked about it but, I didn't have any first-hand knowledge of how that was being handled either in CORDS or through the Embassy. I know there were discussions at the CORDS headquarters about corruption and that was translated into proposals for the Embassy to approach the Vietnamese government. I know Colby talked about corruption problems and pointed out individuals who were weakening the GVN image when he met with President Thieu. Colby also asked about corruption problems whenever he visited units outside Saigon. He was interested in corruption and malfeasance as a local issue and on whatever information the localities could provide about how it affected the resources available from higher levels, most particularly from Saigon. Colby never hesitated to tell Saigon officials about what he learned in the provinces, good or bad.

Q: Talking about CORDS - I mean, here we were recruiting young men and some young women, you know, pass the Foreign Service exam and all. I mean, these are people who sort of rate high intellectual endeavors as opposed to the Peace Corps or military life. I would think there would be some problems of people, who were just plain, not ready for living in bunkers or getting mortared and all of that.

HARTER: I don't know anyone personally who got to Vietnam and then threw it all in and said, "This isn't for me, I am leaving." I gather there were some who declined the invitation to join the Foreign Service when they were told, their only option was to go to Vietnam. And, it was people in this group who complained about the recruiting process and got it changed so that incoming classes didn't all end up in Vietnam. I suspect there were more people in this group who said, "Forget it, I'm not going" as opposed to people bailing out right after they arrived in Vietnam. But, most people I knew who went out to work in Vietnam had at least one harrowing experience during their tours It wasn't always necessarily as bad as living in bunkers, but there certainly were times when you did end up in a bunker, or where you ended up in situations in which your life could be at risk. Like I said the last time, where you drove roads early in the morning and you had to get from point A to point B you really had no idea whether those roads were safe or secure or if you'd have any opportunity to protect yourself in the event there was a threat. All of us, of course, had the option to have guns for self-protection. I mean we had weapons available to us outside Saigon. I don't think anyone in Saigon ever offered me a weapon and there were no weapons at 47 Phan Thanh Gian for us to use in the event we had to protect ourselves there. When I was in the District, I didn't think that gave me the right image as an advisor and so I did not carry a weapon and certainly I never let it be seen that I had a weapon with me or in my vehicle on the occasions I did have a weapon there. There were a few occasions when I made sure I did have a weapon with me, but by and large I didn't travel with one.

Q: Were there any particular issues that you found you were engaged in?

HARTER: During the time that I worked with Colby, I don't recall any specific program or issue I was asked to develop, but then it was a pretty short tenure, only six months or so. I came up with some ideas and some suggestions like getting Colby together with civilians from the countryside. I mentioned when I was in grammar school, I was a member of the school safety patrol. I thought that a safety patrol would be a good thing to introduce in Vietnam. If you remember, traffic in Saigon was terrible, even though it was nothing then like it is now. I saw a safety patrol as a way to cut down on traffic accidents and eliminate some of the traffic chaos around the schools at arrival and dismissal times. I saw it too as a way to develop respect for the government and a respect for law and order among the school kids. Colby liked the idea and it got proposed to the Vietnamese and it was started up in Saigon a couple of years after I left.

Q: Well, you were there when we had announced the Vietnamization thing and essentially you were there when the first sort of major troop withdrawals were taking place. Was there disquiet concern about this?

HARTER: I think there was a certain amount of concern in the headquarters, particularly about whether or not the South Vietnamese military would be able to stand up to the same kinds of challenges that the American military had. People were concerned whether ARVN would be willing to move out to react to a threat or an actual attack or whether it would just sit in defensive positions and wait for something to happen. I think the initial responses and reactions from a number of the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam and particularly from Vietnamese Marine units were viewed as positive. These units did not just wait for something to happen.

The Vietnamese marines, at the beginning had a pretty good reputation and so did the Vietnamese Airborne units. Given proper supplies and air support they were capable of engaging in operations that were successful and I think some of the Vietnamese military leaders were surprised their units would get out of the barracks and actually do something. There were always exceptions - units that didn't do well at all, but that was usually the result of poor leadership rather than inadequate troop performance. As I mentioned in the previous session, Vietnamization started while I was still in the district and affected the advisory program as well as the U.S. combat forces. Over half a year, my team went from over thirty persons down to two civilians, and when I left, only one civilian. The only other group still in the district was that naval advisory group down on the river working with the Vietnamese Riverine Forces.

Q: Were we concerned in CORDS and all that among the Vietnamese staff that there might be a significant undercover North Vietnamese, sort of spies?

HARTER: I guess there was always a certain feeling that was possible and that loyalties are bound to be stressed in any kind of a conflict where families were split on both sides. I still don't want to call it a civil war, as many of the critics did and still do. Yes, the people involved were all Vietnamese, but they had very different political and social systems involved on both sides. And, once there was no chance for reunification based on an equitable balance of sharing power, two very different states came into being. Historically, there had most always been two or three different regimes operating in the territory that was Vietnam. The Vietcong were not independent actors; they were directly run by Hanoi. Many of them were from the old anti-French resistance, but they were also followers of Ho Chi Minh. After the North's victory in 1975, those who didn't respond to Hanoi's beck and call were moved quickly out of the way. Those southerners who were among the top Communist leaders stayed with leadership group and some eventually got to have important positions at the top, particularly on the government side. But getting back to your question about spies, I guess one always had the thought there could be spies operating around you, but I never paid a lot of attention to that as a day-to-day issue. Moreover, MACV Headquarters was almost entirely comprised of Americans.

Q: How about the press, the American press? Were they sometimes setting the agenda on what tissue Colby might be responding to or concerned about?

HARTER: Well, I suppose there was a certain amount of that. The 47 Phan Thanh Gian house I lived in was a sort of gathering place for young journalists. And, a lot of the young stringers, people who were not regular employees but who wrote stories that they tried to sell to the news organizations often congregated at our house when they came in from their various trips with the US military. While these journalists were not "employees" they often were affiliated with one of the news magazines, Time or Newsweek or US News, or with some of the newspapers and worked exclusively for them. They just didn't get any of the regular employee benefits and for the most part, they had arrived in Vietnam on their own and latched on to jobs only after arrival. From this group, you'd hear grumblings about the military orchestrating this particular trip or that. The U.S. Military would take the press out to see the troops in the field and some of that turned out to be too orchestrated for the younger journalists. Because these journalists went out with main force U.S. units, they were out in the real combat zones. So, you'd hear their concerns that the security situation was really pretty tenuous when you got out of the bigger provincial cities and towns. And, a lot of them would talk quite regularly about how difficult it was to see the South Vietnamese government forces being able to prevent the North from invading the country and taking over once the U.S. troops were gone. Where a lot of the advisors at MACV seemed to have positive feelings about the Vietnamese military's capabilities, the younger journalists had no real confidence the South Vietnamese would be able to stand up to Hanoi's regular troops. Most of them felt the only thing that was keeping the South in the fight was the U.S. presence. Once the U.S. forces left, the South Vietnamese would have to depend upon the US commitment to provide weapons, supplies and air support in order to survive, and the young journalists didn't seem to think that would be possible.

Q: What was your impression of young correspondents? Once there were some demonstrations against the government, I can't remember what it was about, and the demonstrators had black arm bands on or something. A bunch of young American press people put black arm bands on and were in the crowd. Anyway, they got arrested. One of them, I think was John Steinbeck's son. And, I had to go and such and bail them out. It just seemed kind of, I mean these weren't serious folk, they were having fun.

HARTER: Yeah. Well, I mean some of it was like that, sort of kicking back and blowing off steam when they were in Saigon. I know that some of the guys in my house grew marijuana in flower pots in the back yard and so there was always a supply of marijuana available when the journalists came around and they also brought little packages they had purchased on the streets or in the countryside. There was also a lot of music in the house and a lot of that was from the hippie scene in the US and sometimes the dialogue got a little fuzzy. But, by and large the people I met and dealt with in this group were all very sharp. And even the ones that didn't stay with major publications beyond a year or so - I'm talking about the stringers, not the regular journalists - these young reporters were really good journalists, good investigative reporters, people who were interested in what was going on. Some of the more serious ones continued on to very responsible positions. Bob Kaiser of the Washington Post started out in Vietnam as a junior reporter.

He later was in Moscow, in a number of different places there and later a senior manager in DC. Some of the old Washington based reporters came through too. When I was in the district, one of the visitors who came in on his own was Joseph Alsop. I'm still not sure how he got directed to Ba Tri on this particular visit to Vietnam, but he came in late one afternoon and I took him around to see things in the district and talked to him about pacification. He wrote a column about his visit to the district and about me personally as part of the series he produced from that trip to Vietnam. You did have a feel that the journalists, while critical - I'm not referring here to Joe Alsop, because he supported the war - were really quite serious about what they were doing. Dan Sutherland was a Christian Science Monitor correspondent and he came down to the district too. I later used to see him regularly in Saigon.

He stayed with the (Christian Science) Monitor and then later went with the Wall Street Journal and I ran into him again years later when he was covering China. Karen House was there then too and she was just getting started. I can't recall whether she was with the Wall Street Journal then or not.

Q: You mentioned that things were going relatively well. This is the post-Tet period. But, you weren't picking up what was happening back in the states. Was anybody coming back to you and was taking you aside and saying, "You know, things aren't going well back in the United States."

HARTER: No, I didn't get that feedback. Even talking to some of the journalists, I don't recall there being a lot of that information coming through in any of the discussions we had. Of course, some of the stories about the demonstrations in the U.S. made it to Armed Forces Radio or the Stars and Stripes, but I think the military would not have played that up too much. So I guess we were largely unaware - I should say I was unaware - of how divisive the war had become and how people in the US were pushing the government to get out of Vietnam.

Q: You left when?

HARTER: I left in the summer of 1970 to get Chinese language training at FSI so I could get back into a China focused career.

Q: While you were in Saigon were you able to tap in what was happening in Cholon the Chinese district of Saigon?

HARTER: I went there a few times for meals, to see some of the local sights but not for anything related to its political or ethnic history. While I was still working in the District, on a trip to Saigon I visited an art exhibit and found a Chinese painter who copied classic Chinese paintings in a traditional style. He mixed a combination of traditional ink and oil paints and painted on canvas rather than silk or paper. I bought one or two paintings and then after I was assigned to Saigon I hunted him up in a little garret in Cholon. I bought a few more of his paintings, but that was about my only real involvement.

There really wasn't a lot of free time, either when I was in the District or when I was in Saigon. In the District, you worked seven days a week with only Sunday likely to be relatively uneventful. And, you worked until all hours and never knew if or when you'd have to get up in the middle of the night to provide coordinates for American pilots who might be flying in areas where all of a sudden our District forces decided we needed to fire artillery. In Saigon, we had a pretty full five-day work week and then at least once or twice a month Colby would go out to the countryside on the weekends and I would accompany him. Because he sent me home early during the week, I often did have time to enjoy group dinners or drinks with other people in town but by and large it didn't seem like there was an awful lot of free time. A couple of times my roommates and I drove from Saigon down to the beach in Long Hai to swim. Long Hai is close to Vung Tau, the well known beach resort. Long Hai was on the other side of a small peninsula from Vung Tau. It was much more isolated and didn't have any of the restaurants and night life of Vung Tau. There used to be an old villa style hotel but the war had closed it down a long time before then. When I was there, the Australians had a military unit based along the main roadway and they provided the main security and reaction force for that area. I can recall on one occasion driving out to the beach when helicopter gun ships were putting rockets and machine gun fire into the hillside which was set back a few kilometers from the beach. And I was thinking, maybe it wasn't as safe a place as I thought it was.

Q: I drove down to Ba Ria-Vung one time, drove down with Ernie Sherman who was later Ernie Heck. As we drove down we watched there was Australian artillery bombarding up in the hills. I kept thinking gee whiz.

HARTER: Yeah, you had to go past the Australian encampment to get to the beach. That was the district they were working in. When I was in Ba Tri, a couple of Australian warrant officers were assigned to the district team and they would rotate among the regional force companies and our five-man training teams to provide some special small unit training They spent several months in Ba Tri. They were very sharp fellows.

Q: How did you get this language assignment and wasn't it predicated on receiving an ongoing assignment? How was Chinese language constituted when you took it?

HARTER: Yes, I believe the rule was for selection to language training you were supposed to have a specific language designated slot to go into once you completed the training. For Chinese, that was usually an assignment that was two years out from your start of language training because there was a second year of training after Washington which took place in Taichung, Taiwan. That didn't seem to hold in my case, because I was never slotted against a specific overseas post vacancy when I started in FSI. I can't be sure, but this may have been because I was coming out of Vietnam. One of the "benefits" one was supposed to get for volunteering to serve in Vietnam was a "guarantee" you could get whatever job you wanted after you were finished with the Vietnam tour. It may very well have been that my selection for the Chinese language training program was jut my "reward" for having served in Vietnam. Other than that issue, however, I went through a regular bidding cycle through the Personnel Office at the Embassy in Saigon with Chinese language training listed as my first preference.

When I went back to FSI, the program was conducted very much as it was when I studied Vietnamese. We still had largely one-on-one training. When I started the class, a young first tour USIA officer, Bob Geyer, was also studying Chinese. In order to help me break away from Vietnamese - just about everything I tried to say in Chinese at that time came out as a mixture of Chinese and Vietnamese with, I suspect more Vietnamese than Chinese - they put us together for some of the speaking classes. But, because he was a junior officer, he had only a very short time in language training before he started his regular assignment. And, as soon as his time was up, then all of my classes were one-on-one. From the beginning, I was already taking separate reading classes because of my previous study of Chinese and the Chinese characters were all brand new to him. So, I actually did have some one-on-one instruction right from the start.

Bob Geyer and I did run into each other again in Taiwan a couple years later. The only other group studying Chinese while I was there was a group of young navy enlisted men who were going to be monitoring radio broadcasts once they finished training at FSI and at the Army Language School in Monterey, California.

The training classes were very structured, very organized. The Chinese program had been in existence for a long time and the teachers were "veterans" unlike the Vietnamese language set-up with brand new teachers and lots of new material being written as we were studying in class. We used Chinese newspapers and some textbooks for reading. The materials for the speaking classes were quite often locally created materials, FSI created materials, as well as some of the Yale-Seton Hall textbooks which had been written by John DeFrancis while I was at Seton Hall. But, I used those textbooks only when I was studying with Bob Geyer, trying to get back the basic vocabulary because I was already at a more advanced level. This training was all at the Foreign Service Institute. That was again the same place where I took the Basic Officers Course, it was in the Tower on Key Boulevard in Rosslyn.

As I said, Chinese training was a two year program - a year in Washington and then a year in Taiwan. While I was at the school, my Personnel officer told me all the slots were already fairly well subscribed for the next year's Taichung Language School class. Taichung was undergoing some refurbishment and it apparently couldn't really handle a lot of additional students. So, Personnel suggested it would be useful if I deferred the Taiwan segment of my language program for at least a year. Although they said this was a "good idea", I didn't notice anybody else breaking the two year track just to work for a year or so in the Department. It may have been a necessity based on the space issues, but I'm not really sure it was a good idea. Once again, I was going to break up my language training time with a period where I would not be using the language. But that was not the only unusual arrangement that was necessary to deal with. When I finished the year at FSI, they gave me the regular reading and speaking test, but then the linguist and the senior teachers with whom I had been studying came to me and said they were not going to give me the 3/3 grade I had earned. Chinese, as one of the three so-called hard languages along with Japanese and Arabic had been set up as two-year programs because people did not generally finish the first year with the minimum professional proficiency level - 3/3. And the rule had been set that once you earned a 3/3 you couldn't get additional training unless they had decided to designate you for interpreter level training. So, after confirming I still wanted to go to Taiwan for the advanced course, the group said, "We're going to give you a two plus/three and that will enable you to still to continue on to FSI Taichung in the future."

I wasn't told I would not be permitted to continue on to Taiwan until fairly late in the first year of training. I didn't have a chance to get involved in the usual bidding. In fact, no one had even suggested there was any need to bid on Taichung because the whole language training assignment in Chinese was generally for a two year program. I believe it was my Personnel officer who told me the Department had scheduled me to go to INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) where they had found a China-related job for me

So, I went from FSI to a one-year assignment in INR's Asia office. It already had a couple of people working on PRC issues and so I discovered I was to be given the peripheral areas - I was to cover Mongolia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the UN General Assembly debate issue over China's UN membership. Personally, I think Washington all along intended to send me to Taiwan but the construction issue and the existence of a large pipeline of students made it necessary to cut somewhere and I became expendable. I don't really think there was a vacancy in INR in the Asia office, I think they just pulled together a portfolio that had some relevance to China and slipped me into it. While I was there, the office was directed by Paul Popple and Mort Abramowitz with Evelyn Colbert serving as the Deputy Office Director throughout. At that time, a number of the INR personnel were long-time GS civil service officers, like Pat Barnett who covered a number of the Southeast Asian countries. There was another GS woman working there on Southeast Asia, but I can't remember her name. The other FSOs in the office included Peter Smith, Nancy Bateman, Alynn Nathanson, and Ed Barber. The first three all worked on China issues and Ed on Southeast Asia. Stan Brooks was head of the North Asia Division in which I worked.

Over the years, the vote at the UN on the Nationalist Government on Taiwan's continued representation as "China" had narrowed considerably. The People's Republic of China had been gaining diplomatic recognition at Taiwan's expense for several years. After 1949, each year at the UN the US led the fight to keep Taiwan's membership and 1971 was no different. Traditionally, we had used procedural measures in the General Assembly to make it harder for those who supported the PRC to win the vote. We would raise a procedural vote in advance of the regular vote on seating the PRC which if successful by a majority vote would classify the vote to seat the PRC as China as an "important question." As an "important question", it was necessary to have a two-thirds majority to be successful.

When we had our first in-house discussions about the coming fall vote, it was clear a lot of people believed this was going to be the toughest year of all to maintain Taiwan's seat. As the Department often does in these situations, it created a three-man task force headed by Harvey Feldman with Linwood Starbird and another officer, all from the "China" (Republic of China not the PRC) desk to develop the strategy and tactics to win support for the Nationalists and to keep a running tally of committed and undecided votes. The International Organization (IO) Bureau clearly took a back seat in this process each year and USUN served as the "enforcer", the arm twisters who tried to get and maintain votes to support Taiwan holding the seat. I wasn't directly involved in the vote getting and vote holding process, but my INR responsibility included review of all the incoming vote gathering cables from USUN and worldwide capitals as well as intelligence reporting. I too kept a chart of decided and undecided votes and I was more and more convinced, and reported such to my INR superiors, the Nationalists were not going to be successful. These reports apparently were shared with EA (East Asia Bureau), it's name had not yet become EAP (East Asia & Pacific), and with people on the 7th Floor because the conclusions I reached were different from the ones being reported by the Task Force. Needless to say, the Task Force and EA were not terribly happy with the fact that INR was reporting quite opposite conclusions and a situation arose that enabled them to do something about it. Just as we were coming to the last couple of weeks before the vote, the third person on the task force had either a serious illness or a death in his family and he had to go on emergency leave. EA promptly got permission to pull me out of INR to join the task force.

Q: So, you were in the enemy camp?

HARTER: EA got its extra body to do the work on the task force and simultaneously ended the run of INR reports to the Secretary which projected we were not likely to win the China vote for the Nationalists. For the last couple of weeks, maybe a little longer, three weeks or so before the actual vote, Secretary Rogers was only getting the EA report saying the vote was going to be close but claiming we'd win. As it turned out, we didn't win the procedural vote to make it an "important question" and the Republic of China lost its UN seat in the fall of 1971 by a handful of votes.

Q: Of course, this vote was in the wake of the Kissinger opening to China wasn't it?

HARTER: Yes, I'm pretty sure that is the appropriate timing, because this was - - I went into language training from '70 to '71 and it was the fall of 1971 when the UN vote took place and Nixon's visit was in early 1972.

Q: I think it was '72. So, what happened? Did anybody say whether you were right or wrong or was it sort of a - I mean how does?

HARTER: I know Mort Abramowitz and Evelyn Colbert were both very pleased INR had the count lined up correctly for that particular analysis because it gave greater credibility to our overall reporting. I think both of them complimented me on my analysis and that was it, nobody made a big deal about it.

Q: I assume the major player in this process would be our mission to the United Nations. I mean they are supposed to be meeting in the delegates -

HARTER: Oh yes, USUN did all of the day-to-day work in terms of getting out the vote for the Nationalists and trying to hold on to votes from previous years. They were also turning in guardedly optimistic reports of success for the ROC being able to hold on.

Q: Maybe they were messengers trying to get to people and so they couldn't - they were looking for positive signs rather than negative signs.

HARTER: Yes, I think that's true. Their job was primarily one of going out to caucus the delegates and gather up the needed votes, getting the other delegates convinced this was the right way to go in maintaining the seat for the Republic of China.

Q: So, in a way in something like that, it's not as objective a looker at the situation as - how about CIA? Not just in this, but in other relations. Did you get involved with CIA at all?

HARTER: No. I can't recall any specific involvement at that time with them. I know we had occasional meetings where we talked about sharing information and we had discussions about assessments that were being written but I had no regular work with CIA personnel. I mean, we did review assessments as they were being written and thereafter but, I couldn't tell you now what the assessments were about.

Q: When you were both in INR and EA, was there sort of talk, well I'm sure, other times about, gee we should get around to recognizing Communist China?

HARTER: I think several of us believed we ought to recognize the PRC. We certainly discussed the issue with Mort Abramowitz and Stan Brooks and the office probably produced analyses stating that idea had growing public support. Those reports would have been written by Pete Smith or Nancy Bateman, both of whom had direct responsibility for the China issues in the office. Pete and I were in language school in Taichung together after that but he later left the Foreign Service for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). I don't think Nancy stayed with State either, but the more I think about it, she may have been a Civil Service INR employee, rather than Foreign Service. Aside from my involvement on the task force, I never had any association with the front office of the East Asia Bureau or with the China desk. During the run-up to the UN vote, I attended regular EA meetings to discuss where things stood on the UN vote. I went to the meetings but Task Force Director Feldman made the team's presentation on the vote tallies, because he was in charge of the unit.

Q: Was anything happening during this year that you were with, particularly with INR on Mongolia or Hong Kong or Taiwan?

HARTER: No, aside from the UN it was all pretty slow during the time I worked in INR. There were no big issues I can recall for any of those areas. Later on when I was working in the East Asia Bureau there were proposals about normalizing relations with Mongolia. That came up from my recollection in the early 70's, no, I mean 80's.

Q: If I recall, in the '60s at one point we were talking about recognizing Mongolia.

HARTER: That was not something that I am aware of. Even back in the '60s it must have been really tough, because at that point I wouldn't think there wasn't very much the Mongolians could do on their own. They would just have been dependent on Moscow for everything, including their foreign policy.

Q: There really wasn't. I think it was just a matter of - there was a recognition of some other country or something and this is sort of a throw away. Like recognizing Belarus or something like this which we had at that time, I mean technically. Ukraine had a -

HARTER: When I was working in the East Asia Bureau, when I was a special assistant to Dick Holbrook. I went up to the UN in New York to do the EAP (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs) liaison work during the UN General Assembly sessions. One of the things they had me do was to call on a representative of the Mongolian delegation to ask him if they had a response yet to our message from the previous year, which proposed a discussion about normalizing relations. After a year they hadn't even responded, so I mean, there really wasn't a lot of activity to build a relationship.

Q: I may be wrong in that '60s things. I remember interviewing Bill Brown who says that he had been trying to go to Mongolia.

HARTER: I think that was the '70s though. Yes, it was in the '70s. Bill Brown and Alynn Nathanson, one of the names I mentioned of people working on China in INR, was another in that program. She and Bill Brown were chosen to learn Mongolian. They sent them some place abroad to study. Was it to London?

Q: I think they went to London.

HARTER: Yes, that's where the Owen Lattimore Center is located. It's London and the Lattimore Center was focused on Mongolia. That was Owen Lattimore's special interest.

Q: Yeah. Bill wrote a history of Mongolia.

HARTER: This would have been, you're not very far off on your dates, because this would have been the mid 1970s when they went. Alynn was one of the analysts in INR in 1971-1972. And, I think it was late 1972 or shortly thereafter that she and Brown and maybe a couple of others went to study Mongolian.

Q: After you had your year's interlude, were you able to keep up with your - I mean I almost think that you, you know, you learn a language and you're on a roll and then all of a sudden they yank you out. I mean it's not that easy.

HARTER: Precisely. It's not easy to keep command of a foreign language when you don't have an opportunity to use it. And, that's the thing that just has sort of gone up and down with me on Chinese. When I was in graduate school I went at it continuously for two to three years and then nothing after 1965. Then I went into Vietnamese in 1967 and was involved with that language in class and on the ground for 3 years. Then back into Chinese for a year and nothing for the following year. At the end of the summer of 1972, I went to the Chinese program in Taiwan and after about eight or nine months the linguist said, "We're looking to develop some people to interpreter level in Chinese, because we really feel this is going to be very important for the future." The fellow I mentioned earlier, Pete Smith, was already in that program. He had been to Taiwan for study a few years earlier and when I was in Taichung for my first year, he was in the interpreter class as part of his second go round at the school. The linguist said - I think I mentioned before this was George Beasley the same linguist I had for my Vietnamese training.  he and the teachers thought my training results had been good enough that I should also be in that program. So he was recommending to the Department I be assigned to Taichung for two full years. I said, "O.K. I guess my Chinese is going to get really good and I hope I'll now get to use it and not forget it."

Here again, I don't think the personnel system was functioning according to the norm. When I went to Taichung, no one mentioned that onward slot I was supposed to fill when the classes ended in 1973. I think the Department had placed all of the other students a long time before, because they had been in the straight two-year program. So, when there was no obvious slot for me to fall into, Personnel in Washington came up with the idea I should spend an additional year in Taiwan or the language school linguist recommended I be extended on the grounds there was to be an increased need for interpreter level Chinese speakers. To keep it confused, the personnel system never came up with the actual assignment orders extending me in Taiwan, I just stayed on in Taichung taking classes after the first year program ended. About four or five months into my second year, personnel confirmed my assignment for two full years by actually issuing written orders. Then, maybe a month and a half later they broke the language school assignment and sent me to Hong Kong. I became part of a three-way position switch, almost like a late season baseball trade during a pennant race. Nick Platt, a political officer in the U.S. Liaison Office, USLO, in Beijing had an unfortunate automobile accident and killed a Chinese citizen. So, the Department had to pull him out of China. To replace him, they took Lynn Pascoe from the Hong Kong Consulate General political section. Finally completing the swap, I was sent to fill Pascoe's position in Hong Kong. Lynn and I had been together in language school in Taiwan my first year there.

Q: Where were you in this series of assignments when the news came that Kissinger was going to China?

HARTER: I guess it was in 1971 that it happened - before Nixon went to China in 1972. At that time, I was still in the State Department in INR. Then, the various other meetings and the discussions that led to the Liaison Office in 1973, that was while I was in Taiwan. As the US-PRC relationship was getting off the ground I was in Taiwan in the language school.

Q: That must have, given quite a boost to being a, I mean before our Chinese language officers were stuck in the periphery, you know, sort of observing. That must have been quite a boost of morale wasn't it?

HARTER: It was indeed, yes, people in the Department were quite enthusiastic about the new opportunities. Although, intriguingly enough I did not end up getting to China for another fifteen years, not until the end of the 1980s. I was sent to Hong Kong. Hong Kong was still the premier China watching post, not Beijing. The Liaison Office had no files and no local employees with long historical memories who knew China inside and out. With a very low-ranking status in the overall diplomatic hierarchy - on the diplomatic list, USLO was not listed among all the embassies. It was just ahead of the Palestine Liberation Organization on the diplomatic list. USLO officers had only very limited access to PRC officials. They couldn't really travel much outside Beijing. Most everything was still off-limits for diplomatic travelers but USLO seemed to be limited even more so than others. In fact, sometimes when we were allowed to travel from Hong Kong to the PRC, we got more opportunity to get around in the country than the people from the Liaison Office did.

Q: I want to go back to Taiwan first. You were there at a sort of crucial time for the Taiwanese as we'd opened relations with Mainland China. What was your sounding of the attitude that you were getting from your teachers or others at that time?

HARTER: One of the things the State Department did when it set up the language program in Taiwan was to separate the language school from the Embassy. And while the Embassy logically was in the capital, Taipei, the language school was in central Taiwan, in Taichung. We had our own little enclave in the city with small groups of houses near the school that were rented for the students. I lived a bit further away but I was located next to two other houses which were rented by the school for student housing. There was also a very large American military presence in and around the city centered at CCK airbase outside town. But, inside the city there were also a couple of compounds where military families resided. Some of our students were also in these compounds. We had a great deal of interaction with the US military and we were allowed to use the local PX and commissary that were on the base. Our school's students also usually had a slow-pitch softball team that competed in the league organized among the military at CCK. We actually had military students studying Chinese at the school - that is U.S. Air Force and Army personnel who were in the attachï¿½ training course. They had studied first in Monterey, California and then went to Taichung for their advanced language training.

So, that's sort of long way around your question. But I sketched that to illustrate that the purpose of setting us up in Taichung was to minimize any contacts we had with the Taiwan government and to keep us away from the normal conduct of diplomatic relations. The whole idea was that we were to be students and not to get involved in any kind of liaison responsibilities with the local government. Our School Director and his Administrative Officer dealt with all of the Taichung Government issues that might have affected the school or the students. As you suggested earlier, our conversations with the teachers and with household servants provided the primary contact with the people on Taiwan and the main way you would get a sense of how people were viewing the new China policy. Of course, at the beginning, we still were keeping the Embassy in Taiwan, and we were still recognizing the Nationalist Government as the Government of all China so for the most part this didn't have the same impact as when we reversed the diplomatic recognition policy and the government on Taiwan became a second-class organization diplomatically. We didn't have demonstrations like Roger Sullivan experienced when he came to Taiwan to tell their leaders we were switching diplomatic relations to the PRC.For the most part, I think the local feeling was the U.S. had to do what it did and that it was important for the US to talk to the PRC officials - just as long as the US kept the embassy where it belonged, in Taiwan. For the mainlanders on Taiwan, keeping the embassy in Taipei and recognizing Nationalist China, the Republic of China was still demonstrating we were sticking with the real China. When you talked to Taiwanese, people who were born and raised and grew up in Taiwan and didn't have this connection with the Nationalist Government or who had not been part of the group that left the mainland in 1949 when the PRC was founded, you got a little different perspective. You got a sense that well, as long as the U.S. was dealing directly with Beijing, Taiwan was perhaps a little bit safer and a little bit more secure. Some Taiwanese I talked to thought the US move would prevent the Chinese on the Mainland from following through with their long-term plan to take over Taiwan, or at least launch staunch some kind of attack to drive out the Nationalists. Some continued to believe the old mainlander group would be co-opted or absorbed into the Taiwanese population which outnumbered them 20 or more to one and that this would enable the Taiwanese to take over the island government and then keep Taiwan separate from the mainland.

Q: The Kuomintang was still in power, wasn't it?

HARTER: It was the only power, there was nothing else. Taiwanese who wanted a political career had to join the Kuomintang. There was no Taiwanese political party and certainly no opportunity for independent Taiwanese political figures to become elected. Chiang Ching-kuo, the son of Chiang Kai-shek, was in charge and was generally respected, even by the Taiwanese. They saw him as fair and even-handed and didn't see him as focused entirely on supporting mainlanders or looking solely to retake the mainland. There was not a lot of grousing about him in particular, but there certainly was about the overall Nationalists monopoly of power. There wasn't much opportunity for a Taiwanese to move up to the very top levels politically. Only a very few Taiwanese, who had long established their reliability as KMT (Kuomintang) members, got into "leadership" positions but even then, they didn't have any independent power to operate outside of Party direction.

Q: Were there any other people who are still around, maybe retired recently or in language school with you at that time?

HARTER: Lynn Pascoe was still active quite recently. I'm not sure, I guess he may have just retired. Peter Smith I mentioned, left the Foreign Service quite a while ago. Sylvia Stanfield was there part of the time I was there and I believe she is a diplomat in residence down in Florida right now. Two military students, Jack Liede from the Army and Doug Lovejoy, he may have been Air Force, both of them have retired as well. Jack, was a Brigadier General when he retired and had been in charge of military intelligence units abroad. I believe he was the senior defense attachï¿½ at the Embassy in Beijing for awhile. I think Lovejoy spent a lot of his subsequent career as an instructor in the military academies.

Q: Would you describe for us the approach the Taichung school took on language training? Did you find you had to learn an awful lot of ideographs and Communist jargon?

HARTER: Yes, but that had started when I was in Washington. We had to learn both standard, or traditional Chinese characters and spoken language as well as the mainland's simplified characters and its different, as you said, Communist jargon and the special phrases that were used. Newspapers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Overseas Chinese communities were generally written in traditional characters. So, our language school classes provided us both versions simultaneously. After you had a basic understanding of Chinese characters you were introduced to the simplified ones and then you studied, you had reading classes which each day would do the two different writing systems. These were usually not during the same hour, but a different class with a different teacher for each system. Again, FSI Taichung still had sufficient resources to permit us to have one-on-one classes. One student, one teacher and you went six, sometimes seven hours a day for these one-on-one classes. And every hour you changed teachers. There were enough teachers there that you generally never had the same teacher twice in one day. Every couple of months, the school would give us a week off to do familiarization travel on the island. We'd usually travel with a couple of students and a teacher and try to get a better understanding of Taiwan as well as develop better conversational Chinese.

Q: Were you married or were you a bachelor?

HARTER: Yes, by that time I was married. I got married after I left Vietnam to a Vietnamese woman who joined me here in the states after I left in the middle of 1970. In Taichung, my family consisted of a wife and one son who had been born in the United States in 1971. Subsequently, a second son, a child from her first marriage, got permission to leave Vietnam and joined us just for the last several months we were in Taiwan. So, there were four of us in the family when we went to Hong Kong in 1972.

Q: What was her family background?

HARTER: Her father had been a Saigon Government Minister, Transportation I believe, under the Diem regime. He had been, as I was told, falsely accused of corruption and was forced to step down. He was apparently exonerated after he resigned, but the experience soured him on the government and he refused to work for the government thereafter. Her father's side of the family was related to the royal part of the Nguyen family, the last dynasty of imperial Vietnam and that part of her family came from Hue in Central Vietnam. I think it was her father's grandmother who was the sister of one of the emperors. My wife's mother was from a northerner family, but I don't know what province her family came from. As I understood it, they had been in the south for quite some time and were not part of the group of northerners who fled to the south when Ho Chi Minh took over in Hanoi in 1954. Before I came to Vietnam, she had worked for Vietnam Airlines when the company first started. She and the wife of Nguyen Cao Ky had been stewardesses together on early flights.

Q: Nguyen Cao Ky was Vice President...

HARTER: Yes, Vice President under President Thieu and Prime Minister before that. The two women had been airline stewardesses with early Air Vietnam flights and that's where the future Mrs. Ky and the Air Force pilot first met. The two of the women left Air Vietnam and my future wife went to work for Pan American which was the major U.S. airline operating across the Pacific and into Southeast Asia at that time. Pan Am was also the only U.S. airline that flew to Vietnam so it had a huge business with the military. When we first met she was part of the Embassy and CORDS party circle. She was fluent in English, as well as French and Vietnamese and had a lot of contact with Americans through her work with Pan Am. She was the Pan American manager at Tan Son Nhut Airport. She was one of the only Vietnamese in the country who was allowed to handle U.S. dollars, as well as Military Payment Certificates (MPC) which all U.S. personnel used in Vietnam instead of dollars. This system was designed to control the black market in U.S. currency and MPC issues were regularly changed so that any Vietnamese who had managed to collect the currency would not be able to exchange it for the new version. As is always the case in these sorts of situations, the Vietnamese who figured out ways to get MPC and even U.S. dollars also found a way to exchange MPC when they had to. In addition to handling U.S. currency, she also sold tickets in Vietnamese piastres (dong) and all other international currency as part of her job. At the end of each day, accompanied only by a Pan Am driver, she would bring all the receipts from Tan Son Nhut to the bank or to the Pan Am downtown office, I can't remember which. She would travel some days with 75 to 100 thousand dollars in cash, just the driver and her, and I didn't know she did it for a long time. Once she told me about it, I was scared to death she was going to get robbed or shot, because she did it every day and there was really only one direct route from the airport to the downtown area. Fortunately, nothing never happened.

Q: How did your wife, adjust to living in Taiwan? Was there any problem or anything like that?

HARTER: No, certainly no problem with the local people. And, while she got around in the town on her own, she was still spending a lot of time raising the two children. Of course, she had local help for that too. Taichung was a small, provincial city, it wasn't terribly big back in the 1970s. But while it certainly was not the kind of metropolis that it is now, it had certainly grown from the time I first visited it in 1968 during my CORDS training. It was a decent sized city, probably the third or fourth largest after Taipei and Kaohsiung and perhaps about the same as Tainan in the southern part of the island or Keelung in the north. Still, even in those terms, it was a pretty small town, no really big buildings and still some agriculture and rice fields within the city area. The Taiwan Government had set up its first export processing zone in the south, in Kaohsiung which is close to Tainan. After this proved to be a tremendous success, another zone was created on the coast in the central part of the island near Taichung. That generated a whole new growth in the central part of Taiwan, but that was much later in the 1970s. The road network was still very narrow, highways were rarely more than two lanes even though they were very heavily traveled. The main highway between Taipei and Taichung was two lanes wide and when you drove it you were always worried about coming up on a truck moving in the opposite direction and passing on your side of the road. There were a lot of accidents on Taiwan's highways.

I was there when they opened the second of the east-west cross island highways that went through the mountains of central Taiwan to connect the two coasts. The first of the highways was in the central part of the island near Taichung and it went across to Hualien on the east coast. The new one was called the Southern Cross Island Highway and it started out a little north of Tainan and came out near Taitung. As I said earlier, one feature of the language program was our periodic familiarization trips on Taiwan. A week out of the language classrooms was a real break and everyone looked forward to these weeks. On one early trip, I had taken my family and my own car and, joined by another student, Stan Ifshin, we drove across the central highway to Hualien. We passed the famous Taiwan mountain Ali Shan and went through the Taroko Gorge which is Taiwan's marble producing center. As the new road was scheduled to open just about the same time we were to have a trip break, a group of us decided to try out the new road. The Central Cross Island Highway had been in operation for quite some time and, while it was narrow and had a lot of twists and turns through the mountains, it was paved and there were no areas that seemed to be life-threatening. The worst road in that category was the eastern coastal highway which was one way traffic on a single lane road cut midway up a huge cliff that seemed to drop directly into the ocean.

The Southern Cross Island highway turned out to be one hellish road. It too had been cut along the side of the mountain cliffs but aside from the area closest to Tainan it wasn't paved. The construction crews had just basically chopped the rock off the cliffs and spread the chipped rock on top of the cuts in the hillsides. The road was considered so potentially treacherous that the cross island bus line started buses from each end and had them meet midway and return home every afternoon just to keep the buses closer to the cities on each side of the island. At one point on our first afternoon of travel when we had gone only a little past the half-way point on the highway, we had two flat tires in the space of 40 minutes on the sharp rocks. But, I must say we were pretty lucky. Even though we had the second flat and no further spare tire we were not too far from a roadside construction shack when the second flat occurred. The construction shack was still outfitted with bunks and a kitchen and there were still some members of the construction crew living there. They welcomed us to stay with them for the night and told us we could catch the bus in the morning which would take us to Taitung. After we had dinner with them, another vehicle came along headed east and we were able to get the driver and his passengers to agree to take our driver and the two flat tires ahead to Taitung where they could be fixed. The rest of our group, two teachers and three or four students then spent the night in the construction shack.

The bus came the next morning headed west and dropped off the driver and the two repaired tires and we promptly put one tire on and got on the road. Because we had passed the half way point on the road, we were able to start off toward Taitung with the cross island bus still behind us. And shortly thereafter we had our third flat tire. At that point, we decided to take the bus across to Taitung. We took the flat tire with us to be repaired in the event there was more trouble for the driver and our vehicle. But he managed, without the extra weight of five or six people, to drive the rest of the way across the sharp rocks without any further misfortune. Even with all the anxiety of flat tires, it was still a great trip with truly beautiful scenery. It was always good to get away from the language training routine where you were just constantly in the classroom six or seven hours a day and studying in the evening at home.

My first year in Taichung I was closest to the two students who lived next to me as our group of houses was off to one side of the town. Both worked for the CIA, so I won't name them. There were also students who worked for NSA as well as some of the military students I mentioned earlier. The three families lived in what were called Japanese houses because they had been built in a Japanese style during the time when the Japanese ruled the island. Most of the other students lived in houses that were of a more recent vintage and were two-storied while ours was a single story house with wood-plank floors in the rooms and terrazzo hallways. They also had gray tile roofs. The houses had originally been part of a compound of sorts as they had doors in the walls between the houses which connected the yards to one another. We were always going back and forth between the houses. I had one of the end units and the family on the other end had a couple of young daughters who loved to play with our baby son - he was about 18 months old when we arrived in Taichung. The couple in the middle didn't have children but adopted a baby from a Taiwan orphanage shortly after they arrived. After he graduated, he was able to adopt his daughter's newborn sister from the same orphanage so he ended up with two natural sisters in the family. Unfortunately after our Taichung days, I never saw either of these families again.

The second year, I was closest to a USIS officer by the name of John Thompson. John was a phenomenal language student. He had studied Chinese for several years before joining USIA and had lived for a time in Taiwan while he was studying. During that time, he earned money by writing subtitles for Chinese films, so you can imagine just how good his Chinese was. John had previously been serving in Indonesia and had fallen in love with a Chinese woman who lived there. My wife and I helped the two get married in Taiwan and then the two women were particularly close because they were the only two Asian spouses among the students, even though one was Indonesian Chinese and the other was Vietnamese. Once when they were shopping together in the town, the sales clerk insisted upon speaking Chinese to my wife while ignoring the real Chinese woman who I guess she thought didn't look Chinese enough. We stayed in touch for several years, and my sons on a couple of occasions baby sat for the Thompsons, who by that time had two boys of their own, while the four adults went out together.

Aside from the trips, we also were pretty close to each other based on the classroom activities but also in a social sense. A couple of years earlier, that situation had gotten a little too close and there were a few divorces and remarriages among the couples involved. Our social closeness was fed through the softball team, weekend volleyball games at one of the student's houses, and seasonal parties in which we all generally participated. Our school holiday party included putting on skits and plays and one year I directed the students' play, to the point of prompting the actors while lying on my back behind the sofa that centered the stage set. I also hosted a Chinese New Year's gambling night - no actual money involved - for the teachers and students where we had a variety of different Chinese gambling games that people could try along with a lot of traditional lunar new year foods.

Ping pong diplomacy was not an exclusive invention of the mainland and our teachers at the school included some pretty fierce competitors who used to compete with each other and the students during our mid-day lunch breaks. Several of the teachers had been language instructors on the mainland, including a couple who had previously worked for the Embassy school in China, but the younger teachers were Taiwan trained. Only a few of the younger teachers were actually Taiwanese as it was generally felt it was better to have Chinese speakers who had been raised with the mainland dialect at home. One of the Taiwanese instructors was hired specifically to teach Taiwanese and students slotted for Taiwan assignments were generally given at least some Taiwanese - though the USIS officers were the ones who got the most training. Some of us were closer to our teachers than others and visited them in their homes and had them to our homes as well, but as a rule there wasn't that much fraternization between the students and the teachers outside the school environment. I hadn't realized I had become that close to one of the teachers until the day he had a heart attack and called me to come to his assistance rather than any of his other colleagues or friends.

Although we were all studying Chinese and the China field was a very narrow specialty in the Foreign Service, it was surprising that few of us ever served together later on. Jack Liede and I both went to Hong Kong after Taiwan so we were together for part of my first tour there, him in the Defense Liaison Office and me in the Political Section. Sylvia Stanfield also went to Hong Kong after she finished the Taichung training and so we both were in the political section together for a time. Barbara Schrage, who was in the school during my second year ended up following me into a couple of posts, including one on the China desk and one in Hong Kong, but we never ended up working together. Aside from Jack Liede, I never worked with or saw any of the military attachï¿½ students, or the CIA or NSA students.

Q: You went to Hong Kong and were there from when to when?

HARTER: I went to Hong Kong in the early summer of 1974. I went there on a four year assignment, two years, home leave and two more years in Hong Kong. So, I ended up leaving Hong Kong for an US assignment in the summer of 1978.

Q: What Section were you assigned to and what were your assigned duties?

HARTER: I originally came in as the number two of three in the internal reporting unit in the Political Section - the section basically for the China watchers. The other half of the office, the external affairs unit, followed Chinese foreign policy while we tracked the Party and Government operations at the national and local levels. My boss the first year was Sherrod McCall who has been retired now for some time. I then took his job for the remainder of my tour. His counterpart in charge of the external side was Jay Taylor; he's written several books on China. Jay was replaced by Richard Hart who previously had been working at the Consulate on Refugee issues - the Chinese who were coming into the colony from the mainland, not the Vietnamese who would be the major focus for the incumbent of that position a couple years later. Since I was there for four years, there were also changes in the Political Section Office Director position as well. I started initially under Wever Gim. Wever was a Chinese American, one of the earliest Asian Americans taken into the Foreign Service. Wever's name was one of those INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) creations. When his family arrived in the U.S. his name was pronounced in Chinese and the INS guy said, "Sounds like Wever to me!" And so his first name became Wever. After that it was Stan Brooks, who had been my office director in INR and finally Donald Anderson.

When I first got there I was working with Sherrod McCall on analysis of internal developments in China. Sherrod did national issues and I did provincial issues. My responsibility was to look at developments in all the various provinces of China. There was a third officer, Mark Mohr, who covered some of the specialized issues. He looked at political-military issues and a couple of other topics. So internal PRC affairs were covered by the three of us. There was also an Economic Section that covered mainland affairs, but it was a smaller unit, and for part of the time was directed by Lin Starbird who was on that China Task Force I referred to earlier when we were trying to determine if we could ensure the Republic of China's seat at the UN.

Sherrod was a great boss who spent a lot of time working with me to sharpen my analysis of events in China. He was also an excellent drafter and editor and he really improved my writing - so much so that when Stan Brooks became the Section Chief he noted the significant change from when I had worked for him in INR. One of Sherrod's most important contributions to my work was to get me to stop writing my reporting messages long-hand on those legal size yellow tablets. Sherrod said I had to think at the typewriter and get my material down more quickly. It took time but I became more proficient under his direction and I was soon turning out my reports much more rapidly. Of course, as you well recall, we were all using manual typewriters - only the secretaries had electric typewriters and then not all of them were so blessed. You also recall those terrible telegram forms, the green ones with the carbon copies and how hard they were to prepare and type and then correct if you made a mistake. Today's officers don't realize how difficult it was to get those messages into useable form for the communicators.

Q: Mainland China during a lot of this period falls into different things like the Great Leap Forward, etc. etc. Where in 1974 while you were looking internally was China at that point?

HARTER: The Great Leap Forward was in the mid-1950s, the big events for this period were related to the Cultural Revolution. And, I would say this four year period was probably one of the most interesting periods of the modern Chinese era. It was a time in which the fundamental changes that you now see dominating the Chinese scene were all in their gestation stage. This was the period when Zhou Enlai convinced Mao Zedong to start winding up the Cultural Revolution. Mao rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping for the first time in the decade following his purge during the Cultural Revolution. When Deng returned, he became sort of an understudy to Zhou Enlai. But, Zhou Enlai died before any such transition could take place. There was still a great deal of opposition to ending the Cultural Revolution and those who had gained their power and influence during that period did not want to relinquish it. This group was led by the so-called "Gang of Four" - Chairman Mao's wife and three other three key party cadres from Shanghai who tried to push the whole revolution leftward again. They successfully conducted a criticism campaign against Deng Xiaoping and he was purged for the second time for his rightist tendencies. However, before the leftists could consolidate this triumph, Mao Zedong died. Although Mao had selected a personal successor to lead the Communist Party neither he nor the Gang of Four could really take control. Hua Guofeng, Mao's successor, collaborated with Deng Xiaoping and other senior Party leaders to purge the Gang of Four and restore Deng to prominence. Hua was then slowly eased out of the Party Chairmanship and he was replaced by a Deng ally, Hu Yaobang. Before the Cultural Revolution, Hu had been head of the Party's Youth League. Deng turned over running the government to a former governor of Guangdong and Sichuan by the name of Zhao Ziyang who as Premier, under Deng's direction, led the way to transform the economic structure of the nation. During these next few years, there was a steady pressure against the forces that had taken control during the Cultural Revolution and an easing back into power of those who had been purged by the ideological leftists of that period. So a very dramatic period: Deng's return from the Cultural Revolution purge to a government role under Zhou Enlai; Zhou's death and the Gang of Four's successful manipulation of the aging Mao Zedong to force another purge of Deng; Mao's death and the ousting of the Gang of Four coupled with Deng's return and the successful "reversal of verdicts" against others purged in the Cultural Revolution and the simultaneous removal of the "leftists" all came about during my tour in Hong Kong as a China watcher. The economic and social experiments which Deng Xiaoping undertook to open up China to the outside world, particularly on the economic side, then led to the creation of the special economic zones and a recognition that it was important to be a part of the world economy.

Because Sherrod McCall left at the end of the summer of 1975, I became the head of the internal unit at a most interesting time. At that point, my job shifted to cover national politics and I re-divided the portfolios for the other two officers in the internal affairs unit, Mark Mohr and Rick Bock, so they shared provincial and topical assignments. As I said before, the US Liaison Office (USLO) officers were stationed in Beijing and they could observe the daily events reported in Beijing, but they didn't really travel, and they didn't have a chance to talk to Chinese officials very often. They were there, but they were not very operational in normal reporting and analysis terms.

Q: Were they able to read the wall posters?

HARTER: Yes, they could get out and do that, absolutely. And that was very important. They could also talk directly to personnel at other embassies who had access to Chinese officials and who also had better travel opportunities. So, I'm not saying they didn't do significant reporting, it's just that the post was still not considered the premier China-watching post. China-watching was still considered to be Hong Kong's responsibility during this time.

Q: That became quite an art didn't it?

HARTER: Yes, it certainly was. It was a tremendous art form then - historical allegories, cartoons, satires, and of course the written word. I still have a collection of photographs that were informally taken in Beijing and Shanghai an a few other provincial cities depicting wall posters and people reading them. This included the period when Deng was purged by the Gang of Four and then the posters when they ended up purging Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, and the other members of the Gang of Four. The caricatures of the Gang of Four were particularly lively and imaginative. Some also cover posters from the democracy movement which occurred later. This was a period of tremendous change and upheaval. And you knew what was being written at the universities and on the streets was being read, and read probably by people at very high levels. It was a difficult to do analysis of developments in China but we regularly received commendations for our analytical work from the East Asia Bureau, from the Secretary and other people in Washington. So we had a pretty good audience for our reporting.

Q: Let's talk about - first just to finish up. Would you explain what the wall poster movement was? What generated that?

HARTER: The wall posters originally were part of the mass campaigns directed by the Party. They had been used in the past and in the '50s and '60s to purge those already discredited by the Party authorities and to develop mass support for the campaigns. In the early days, these were part of the mass campaigns organized by the Party - sloganeering for the Great Leap Forward, the anti-Soviet campaigns and of course the Cultural Revolution itself. During the Cultural Revolution you had people targeted by personal attacks and posters but they were largely part of a larger Party-run effort more than expressions of public concern or criticism. They were used during the Cultural Revolution to discredit individuals and they were used by all sides. It was only later that the posters became more of a public expression of intensity or even rebellion. That was most evident during the Democracy Wall movement and again later in the 1980s after the death of Hu Yaobang which led to the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989. But the involvement of students and ordinary people in the poster writing campaigns of the late 1970s were clearly the start of this form of individual or group expression and the start of real criticism of the government and the party. During the seventies, the poster campaigns were designed to generate public support for the downfall of the Gang of Four. They used all sorts of caricatures of the people being criticized. Because Jiang Qing had been a 1930s movie actress and then, as Mao's wife, associated with a series of dramas, operas, ballets to commemorate the revolutionary spirit she was portrayed and written up as "the white boned demon" a traditional opera figure. Posters showed a caricature of her head on top of the body of a snake. Then written below these drawings would be the criticisms of specific actions she had taken, to purge good people, to elevate her cronies, to undermine Mao and the revolution etc. During this period, there was certainly no critique of Chairman Mao, as there would be later on, and many of the posters continued to praise his contributions while pointing out how Madame Mao had distracted him and corrupted his policies.

Q: As this was going on, we're talking about 1970 what?

HARTER: Well the whole thing started in 1974 with Deng's re-emergence and the posters and the purges of the "Gang of Four" would have been in 1978 which is when I left, summer of 1978.

Q: Was there within this a certain amount of democracy? In other words, were local people beginning to put up their own wall posters?

HARTER: Yes. There were people who did, because they felt that this was a part of a new openness and individuals were putting up posters and student units at the universities were putting up posters. During the period, particularly in the latter phases when the gang of four was purged and Deng Xiaoping came back there were discussions of political change. Deng had proposed major changes and "four modernizations" for China - agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense - and at the end of 1978, Wei Jinsheng put up a poster on the Fifth Modernization, Democracy. It was posted on a wall outside of Beijing University and that became the center for this sort of expression. The location became known as Democracy Wall and activities there just grew and grew. The Chinese media made much of Deng's early post-Liberation slogans "seek truth from facts" and "it doesn't matter if a cat is black or white so long as it catches mice" and the students took these slogans as the impetus for spelling out all sorts of complaints about the Party and how the people were being treated. Unfortunately, because the party and government leaders were not ready - the government and party personnel were still largely synonymous - the Beijing University location was gradually closed down and the posters were moved to a more obscure location where to enter one had to register and the wall posters there died out by the end of l979. There was no indication the leadership was ready for any real relaxation of control, and there was certainly no commitment to a western style of democracy. There had been a change of people at the top and a greater flexibility in how these new people wanted to deal with the rest of the world for China's economic benefit, but there was certainly no intention to move for political change. There was no plan to change anything politically. So, Deng and the others said enough is enough and they just closed it all down and arrested people and sentenced them to long terms in jail.

At this time there were a number of very well-known poster-writers, like Wei Jinsheng, who achieved great readership not only in China, but outside, because the journalists who were in China, all began to go out with their interpreters to photograph, to copy down the posers, translate them and publish them abroad. So, you had big articles coming out of the New York Times, the Washington Post, and LA Times all about these wall posters. There were appeals for democracy and freedom as well as named criticisms of some of the leaders for their politics, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. The posters in these instances served the Party well as it made it easier to eliminate leaders who had been "leftists" in the Cultural Revolution but who tried to hold on to their positions afterward.

Q: Now we move back to you in Hong Kong. How did you get your information? I mean for example, were there duplications of democracy wall in other parts in the provinces and all that?

HARTER: Yes. There were certainly some big character poster displays in most all of the provincial capitals. The campaigns for example in the major cities like Tientsin and Guangzhou not surprisingly focused more on local than national issues. In Shanghai, because it was the base for the Gang of Four, there was a lot of criticism of them in particular. As had been the case during the early Cultural Revolution when different groups struggled against one another, there were "old scores" to be settled and a lot of what we heard about in the provinces was one factional group getting back at another that had suppressed them during the Cultural Revolution. In addition, there were still quite a number of people crossing the border from China into Hong Kong. People took advantage of the unsettled political situation to flee to Hong Kong which at that time still had what they use to call the "touch-base system." If you could cross the border, get through the New Territories on the Kowloon side and reach a certain point, I can't remember now whether it was on Hong Kong Island or in Kowloon itself, as long as you got there you were "home free" and the British would accept you as a refugee and permit resettlement in Hong Kong.

I mentioned earlier that Dick Hart first had been the head of the Refugee Office at the Consulate General and this subsequently created a problem for him with the authorities in China. All of us knew PRC officials paid attention to us and knew what we did. Once the Liaison Office had been established in Beijing, we periodically tried to send people from the Consulate to visit Beijing and simultaneously do a little traveling in China. My boss, Sherrod McCall had gone in 1974 and the next person in line was Dick Hart. Dick's application sat, and sat, and sat and Chinese officials never did anything about it. We'd ask the China Travel Service in Hong Kong and they'd say, "Beijing officials are still considering the request." So, finally the Consul General decided - its been six or seven months since our first request for his visa and we haven't had anybody go into China - Harter, you're next in line, we'll put your name in and see what happens. It was instantly approved.

When our liaison staff got the written approval, the word came back from the PRC officials; "your people at the Consulate General don't have a 'right' to visit China. We agree you can visit from time to time, but we'll decided who visits and when. And," they said, "we know what Mr. Hart's job responsibilities were." The Chinese were letting it be known they were not happy that Dick had been helping mainland refugees and occasionally worked to get someone of interest out to the United States. So, I got a chance to travel to China for the first time in 1975. It was a period where things were still very controlled. It was before the death of Premier Zhou Enlai and Madam Mao's group was still a very powerful force.

Q: But, Zhou had died?

HARTER: No, Zhou didn't die until early the next year, 1976. So, I went in and how and where I was to travel was very structured. I asked to visit a lot of different places besides Beijing. The answer was no, no, no, no, no, except for Shanghai and Guangzhou. The only travel "concession" was to permit me to travel by train leaving Beijing all the way back to Hong Kong. But, they wouldn't let me get off the train except in the two approved stops, Shanghai and Guangzhou, and both were approved because one generally switched trains in those locations. I wasn't permitted to have any meetings in those cities with local officials but I did manage to stay overnight in the Peace Hotel in Shanghai before I caught the train to Guangzhou. When they put me on the train in Beijing, they put me in the soft-seat car, the soft-sleeper car which normally is for all the foreigners and high ranking officials inside China. They put me in a four-person compartment by myself and nobody else was permitted anywhere near me. On the train, there were scheduled times for meals, but the schedule they arranged for my meals was set up after everybody else had eaten. So, I didn't have any contact on the train with anybody else, with two exceptions. On the ride between Shanghai and Guangzhou, a very high-ranking military officer came in and sat in my compartment. This was a time when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel didn't have identifying insignia or ranks on their uniforms. You judged a military man's rank by the quality of the cloth of his uniform and by how many pockets he had on the uniform. The man who came into my compartment had two breast pockets and two lower waist-level pockets and several pins on good material. He chatted with me for part of the time that it took to travel between Shanghai and Guangzhou. He got off at an intermediate stop and that was it, I was by myself once again.

The other time I had "contact" with Chinese on the train was a less pleasant experience. I was hungry at the time of the mid-day meal and about five or ten minutes before I was scheduled to eat I went to the dining car. Two Chinese passengers were still eating. The staff on the train made them get up and leave, because I came into the dining car. Aside from service performed by railway staff, those were my only contacts with Chinese during this entire on-the-train experience which lasted for more than 3 days.

Q: It's interesting, because when you look at our officers in the Soviet Union, sometime would get permission to travel and they had a wonderful time, because they'd be out on the train and they'd meet all sorts of people. Normally, things are controlled, but there, I mean, the people would put on pajamas and people would ask all sorts of questions, even in more difficult times.

HARTER: This was just absolutely out of the question. You just had no access whatsoever. And, as I said, at all the various train stops you could not get off the train. One of the features of the Chinese train station stops was the peddlers who would sell local snacks. About the only thing you could do was to hang out the window and look for what was being sold. Then you'd have to call out and point to somebody and order one of the local snacks just so you could try it. Now I must admit, none of these were prolonged stops so you weren't being prevented from doing a lot of wandering around or talking to people. Each stop along the way was only to let people disembark and board for the next leg of the trip. But , it was made absolutely clear, as a foreigner, you were not allowed to disembark. During this period, a number of the cities were troubled, there was fighting and unrest in the cities. Rural areas were also not excluded and many of them were still suffering from mismanagement so there were food shortages and struggles in the countryside too. As a provincial analyst, that's what I spent a lot of time looking at and describing for Washington readers. So, in a way, you could understand why the Chinese were not eager to let you off the train.

Q: How did you get your information?

HARTER: We got our information from refugees, from reporters who were in and out of China, from diplomats who actually had embassies in China and who then would come in and out of Hong Kong and the China watchers at other consulates and commissions. Before I arrived in Hong Kong, a group of China Watchers had set up a weekly luncheon meeting to review developments in China. It included a lot of the journalists, Jay and Linda Matthews, Joe Lelyveld and Fox Butterfield, Dan Sutherland, David Bonavia, Tiziano Terzani, Sydney Liu, David Chen, David Aikman, Ross Munro of the Toronto Globe as well as the local diplomats and a couple of people from the Hong Kong Government who did China watching. Because there was so much going on and so much interest in trying to learn about it, the group kept getting bigger and bigger. I think there were a dozen regulars when I started and after a year or so we were up over thirty people coming each week. That became a bit much and while I still would go some of the time, I organized a different smaller group made up of representatives of Consulates and Commissions who were most serious about the China watching work. I used similar groups with varying country memberships in later postings as a way to get a broader look at local developments. Anyway, with the smaller group we could really concentrate on important issues without just feeding information to people from consulates who didn't have any other sources or answering questions from a group of journalists. I'd then just meet with the journalists one on one to share opinions and information.

Several of these journalists wrote books about China during this period and they'd often pump us for anecdotes or stories they could use. I remember Jay Matthews, who is now the education writer for the Washington Post, included one story in his book I had related to him which I called "the Umbrella Theory of Courtship in Revolutionary China." While I was visiting Shanghai in 1975, I'd taken a walk in the rain along the Bund, which is part of the old foreign settlement area from pre-war Shanghai. This stretch along the river was filled with young couples standing and talking in the rain. All were carrying umbrellas to ward off the rain but I noticed that some had the umbrellas raised high above their heads while others were lower. Some used only one umbrella to shield the two young people and that seemed to suggest a greater degree of intimacy and affection. But I then concluded that the ones who were the most serious in their mutual affection were the ones who used two umbrellas but who had brought them to shoulder height and formed them into a sort of shell which protected them from the eyes of their neighbors or those passing by. My "umbrella theory of courtship" thus concluded that the degree of intimacy between the young couples was reflected in the heights of their umbrellas until the penultimate stage when they shared one umbrella and the final stage being the two umbrella shell formation.

Another big asset we had the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) and its monitoring and translation of provincial radio broadcasts.

Q: FBIS.

HARTER: FBIS monitored Mainland broadcasts and we'd review daily translations to try to piece together information about political campaigns. Sometimes there would be local newspapers that had been picked up in the provinces by people from different consulates so we'd share that information as well.

Q: What about the Chinese staff, the Foreign National staff? I would imagine that these would be a prime source?

HARTER: Yes. They were also a very important. They would look at the local newspapers, the local PRC newspapers which reflected Beijing policies. We had a couple of analysts who worked on those issues. But what was most important was their institutional memory of what had been going on in China over the past twenty years.

Many of the local employees, particularly in the Consular and Admin Sections had been there for more than twenty years. The Economic Section analysts were also ones with long tenures. Our chief analyst was a good bit younger but he'd been at the Consulate long enough to know the ropes very well. His family had left the mainland when he was a small child and he'd grown up in Hong Kong but he was always fascinated by the mainland. He was one of the most knowledgeable people I've ever worked with on China affairs. His name was Vincent Lo. Later on, when it got closer to 1997, he emigrated to the U.S. with his family. We had huge subject files, biographic card files on all the various people in the Chinese leadership at all levels. We had files which tracked leadership appearances, who showed up, when and, at what event. This was used to try to determine - particularly when people did not appear where they should be - about possible purges, transfers and power shifts. The local employees would keep track of all of this and Vincent would regularly come up with reports suggesting where changes were about to occur based on this record keeping. I would direct the local employees to look at specific issues and personalities. We'd create a series of watch lists of things that one tried to keep up with. Then, you would periodically review these materials with them and look at who was appearing and what was going on. Then you'd factor in items you've read or heard about from other reporting and try to create patterns of where political activities were taking place. We had a very elaborate system for cross-checking and cataloging information.

Q: Who was the Consul General back then?

HARTER: When I arrived, it was Chuck Cross. He was the Consul General and his Deputy was Norman Getsinger. Then when Getsinger left the Deputy was Burton Levin. Tom Shoesmith was the Consul General after Chuck Cross. He later end up in the EA Front Office as the Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary covering China and then he went to Malaysia as Ambassador. In the early eighties, Burt became the Consul General and he was the one who asked me to go back to Hong Kong in 1982 to reorganize the China Reporting Section. By that time we had normalized relations with China. Hong Kong no longer had the primary responsibility for China reporting. That was Beijing's job. But, there was certainly a feeling Hong Kong had a role to play because of its unique location and resources. Even though we had an Embassy in China and we had Consulates at Guangzhou and Shanghai, those who focused on China affairs felt Hong Kong still could contribute to the reporting and analysis. But that's jumping too far ahead, it was late 1981 or early 1982 when Burt asked me to return and refocus Hong Kong's China reporting.

In the mid-1970s in Hong Kong you had the feeling you had a real audience in Washington for what you were writing. The China situation was dynamic and fluid and China had become a major Washington focus because of the Kissinger-Nixon trips which opened up a relationship with the PRC. Everyone knew it would only be a matter of time before full normalization of relations would take place. It was just a question of when. Of course in Hong Kong, we were cut off from that debate and we had no knowledge of the discussions going on back in Washington about normalization. That was certainly a distraction, particularly for those working on the external or foreign affairs side of the Political Section, because Hong Kong was not included as an addressee on any information about those types of policy discussions. But, for those of us "reading the tea leaves" and interpreting the leadership and political dynamics of China, there was a feeling your analysis was certainly being widely read and was being used in the decision-making process back in Washington.

I want to stress that our ConGen China Watcher team had a very good idea of where China was going. Vincent Lo, our chief FSN (Foreign Service National) analyst and I worked a lot on trying to project China's next steps to reform the country. And, shortly before I left, we collaborated on a think piece about the likely direction of China's political steps and we accurately predicted a couple of years in advance the appointment of Zhao Ziyang as Prime Minister of China. Unfortunately for Zhao, he ended up on the wrong side of Deng Xiaoping during the 1989 demonstrations in Tiananmen. And, when more conservative leaders and the military convinced Deng he should clear the square and end the student demonstration, Zhao was dismissed and put under house arrest until he died more than a decade later.

Q: When you arrived there what were the changes? What was your view of the direction of events in Mainland China? I mean, were they going to the left, was the situation in doubt? Were things going to become more friendly towards us or what?

HARTER: Well, during the time that I was there it went back and forth in very sharp swings. As I arrived, Zhou Enlai was still alive and the Chinese leadership was bringing back Deng Xiaoping so it was a swing to the right. Politically, it looked like they were going to open up a bit more, but as soon as Zhou died things went into a swing back across the center and hard to the left with the purge of Deng and the ascendancy of the Gang of Four. That lasted until Mao's death in the fall of 1976. That immediately resulted in a bumpy shift back toward the center that kept moving further and further right with Deng's ascendancy and the purge of the Gang of Four. Things were bumpy because nobody wanted a wholesale purge within the leadership and it took several years to remove many of those high ranking officials who had ascended as a result of the Cultural Revolution. Dumping Madame Mao and her immediate cohorts, Zhang Chunqiao, Wang Hongwen, and Yao Wenyuan, was relatively easy because they were not very popular but the others were scattered around the country in positions of influence which made it hard to get rid of them all at once. I think there was a great deal of optimism in China when Deng Xiaoping returned because he was seen to be less doctrinaire. There was no question the Communist Party was going to be in control, but it was a pragmatic control, the basic focus was results. Deng Xiaoping's phrase "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white so long as it catches mice" had been used against him in the Cultural Revolution with the leftists arguing he wasn't willing to follow Mao's line and would be all over the place with his policies. But that "pragmatism" was what China needed, and perhaps needed most at this particular time in order to get back on its feet.

Q: Were you picking up stories, there was almost an avalanche of accounts in the 1990s that came out of China of people who were caught up in the -

HARTER: Caught up in the Cultural Revolution, that period? Yes, there certainly were lots of those first-hand accounts that we heard. In fact, though, some of the stories about the mass campaigns and the purges had come out much earlier. I can remember reading some of those early first-hand stories when I was in graduate schools in the 1960s. But, the ones with a strictly Cultural Revolution focus were indeed the ones coming out in the mid to late 1970s.

During those years, a considerable number of American and foreign journalists covering China were based in Hong Kong. They could not live very easily or very well in China and if they did live there they tended to have a harder time getting stories than those who worked on the outside and came in from time to time. Although I had good relations with most all of them, one, Eddie Wu, I considered to be a good friend; our families did a lot of things together. Eddie was the number two correspondent for the Baltimore Sun. Eddie was a Burmese Chinese and had gone from working with the U.S. Army during the Second World War and helping us in the Burma-China-India Theater up to Beijing in 1950 after the Communists took control. He bounced around working for various embassies as an interpreter/translator, I remember him saying the Dutch Embassy was one of the places he worked at that time. He got to know the ins and outs of Beijing and Chinese officialdom and then gradually moved out of China to Hong Kong where he joined up with the Baltimore Sun. The chief China Watcher for the Sun was Arnie Isaacs. Eddie and I would talk all the time. He had a lot of contacts with people from the Mainland, including people who had recently managed to get out. He worked to relocate them in Hong Kong, helped them find employment and such and got to know a lot of their personal stories as well as what was happening in a number of places around the country. Our conversations gave me the opportunity to tap into some of those stories and contacts.

Q: Were we looking towards people sharpening their daggers for when the time came? I mean, an awful lot of people were almost destroyed by their neighbors. I would think there would be an awful lot of concern about revenge.

HARTER: Well see, that was part of what we were looking at in the provincial areas when I first arrived. A lot of these fights were going on in some of the provinces as a direct carryover from the Cultural Revolution. Factions were still trying to settle scores between factories, within factories, within work units where one group had gained the ascendancy over another during the CR period but now was experiencing what the Chinese were calling a "reversal of verdicts" with those "ins" now becoming the "outs" and vice versa. Groups that had been up or down at one time or another were trying to exact vengeance against the people who had criticized them and who had pilloried them in an earlier period. This was going on quite regularly, particularly in provinces along the coast, like Zhejiang and Fujian.

Some of these places got to be pretty wide open. There were entrepreneurs developing private businesses, smuggling operations involving products going to and from Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as the rise of groups in these cities who, if they had been in Hong Kong, would have been called gangsters. I remember writing a piece about a little town in Fujian called Shishi. Not such a little town, it probably had a hundred and fifty thousand people or thereabouts at the time. But Shishi was one of those places where they smuggled all kinds of goods from and to Taiwan. There was fighting to control markets and lucrative trade as well as the CR score still to be settled. We'd get reports from travelers who had been through and we'd review the provincial radio broadcasts as they reported on local events. We'd also occasionally see local newspapers and were able from that to piece together the violent activities that were taking place there as well as all the smuggling and profiteering. I remember writing a report about Shishi, saying about the only thing you couldn't find there was a Nationalist (Taiwan) flag. And, I sarcastically claimed that was only because they were still trying to reproduce the design at one of the local factories. In fact, you could do just about anything in Shishi that you wanted. The local party and government leadership was corrupt and ineffective and shared in the smuggling profits and got involved in the fighting. Ordinary people were involved in all sorts of illegal trade and gangsters who had smuggled guns in from abroad were robbing banks. It was a wild little town for a couple of years before provincial authorities stepped in and toned things down. But the factional fighting itself continued for more than just a couple of years in places like Fujian and Zhejiang where there was a lot of physical clashes. Some of the very senior Cultural Revolution figures didn't lose power and influence until they died several years later. They were so well entrenched in the system it would have been too disruptive to have tried to force them out before they died.

Q: I realize this wasn't in your particular area of interest, but you were there when Vietnam fell. How did this hit you and your wife and all and then what was the general prognosis? What did this mean? Did this mean - we had considered China and Vietnam are closest lips of teeth or something like that. How did this play from your perspective in Hong Kong?

HARTER: Well, there were several issues involved. First, there was the U.S. Government policy which said USG personnel should not complicate the evacuation process by returning to Vietnam. Second, there was the personal situation where individuals who had served in Vietnam felt they had to help former associates or family members to get out. I was one of the individuals who followed Secretary of State Kissinger's instructions and did not try to go back in as the country was collapsing. Personally, I had been in to Vietnam as a visitor just after the lunar New Year in 1975, and I was able to arrange for my wife's family to depart while I was in Hong Kong.

Not too long before the fall of the country. My wife and I went right after Tet, the 1975 lunar New Year celebration. My wife's brother had died just after the western New Year's. It was a tragic case. He was a bright young man and worked as a translator with the Americans at MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam). But, he got sick during the Christmas holidays. His family took him to the main hospital, a civilian hospital, not one connected to the military. When the hospital discovered he was in the military - he had an ARVN rank - the family was told he had to go the military hospital. Before anybody had even looked to see what his problem was, they had him shipped over to the military hospital. The military hospital was, as usual, inundated with people with war wounds. To the doctors there, he was just another "sick" patient and not somebody who needed a lot of immediate attention. He was shunted off to some room and he died two days later, from meningitis. If properly diagnosed, the disease could have been treated and he could have been back home or at work in a couple of weeks. He was already preparing for a post-war career and had been translating popular U.S. novels of the day into Vietnamese - he'd done a couple of Frederick Forsythe novels and some others. He left behind a wife and three kids; the oldest one a little over three. My wife and I were there in February because we couldn't go when he died a few weeks earlier.

While I was there I went in to visit with a friend of mine who worked in the Political Section at the Embassy, Lacy Wright. Lacy and I talked about the general political situation and the military confrontation. He said, "Our basic assessment is the (Vietnamese) Government is going to come under a lot of pressure in the provinces, particularly in II Corps and it's conceivable we're going to lose a provincial capitol in the highlands. But, basically the rest of the country is in good shape. The government seems to be in good shape; they've got a good forward strategy in the placement of military personnel and aside from the fact the enemy can pick a target and concentrate its forces on that target and give the government forces a hard fight, most think we'll still do alright, it won't be really bad." So, I'm guessing this was the American Embassy's official position in February. And of course by April 30th it was all over and Hanoi's forces had overrun the country down to the delta and occupied the Presidential Palace in Saigon. When we had this discussion, I nonetheless said, "If things get really bad, can you keep an eye out for my in-laws?" He said, "Sure, no problem, just tell them how to get in touch with me and I'll see they're taken care of."

In one of those unusual coincidences where everyone seems to be related, Lacy was dating someone related to my wife's family. My wife's "aunt" was Lacy Wright's girlfriend. So, where others felt they had to go back to Vietnam to try to rescue family members or to help former associates when Vietnam collapsed I did have that immediate pressure to go back in. When the II Corps highland provinces collapsed, I called Lacy on the phone and he reiterated his commitment to help them out. As the situation deteriorated in April, Lacy moved my then mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law and three kids into his house and told them to stay there until he told them it was time to go to the airport.

When Ambassador Graham Martin decided it was time to evacuate the Embassy dependents, and people associated with the U.S., it was pretty close to the end. Before that he had refused to permit a structured exodus or much planning for one because he said it would demoralize the Vietnamese if they saw us pulling out. Actually, at that point, the Vietnamese had already seen the writing on the wall and they were more than demoralized. They were panicked and were looking for every possible way out of the country before the Hanoi troops reached Saigon and moved down into the delta. Lacy managed to get the family gathered at Tan Son Nhut and they were evacuated on the second Embassy evacuation flight.

I had no idea that anything had even happened until my sister-in-law called me from Clark Airbase in the Philippines and said, "We're out and we're on our way to California." That "we" included my mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, her three kids, Lacy's girlfriend and her parents. All were evacuated under my name, just one big family sponsored by me. They were sent directly to California via the Clark refueling stop. They didn't go through any of the refugee processing centers or any of the other special arrangements which the U.S. Government was hurriedly trying to set up to deal with the influx. Our group was just dropped in California. The reason they ended up in California was because the family on Lacy's side of the group had a son studying in California. With virtually no forewarning he woke up to discover all of these other people moving in with him. He already had a wife and young baby living in a very small apartment over a garage. Now, he had four infants and another dozen people all staying in there with him. My friend from language school, John Thompson, was a big help because he had a place in California where I could relocate my more immediate family group. She also had a Vietnamese friend who worked as a stewardess for Pan Am who was based in California and she and her boyfriend who worked for the telephone company helped keep an eye on everyone until my wife and I could get back to California.

A couple of days after they arrived in California my wife and I arrived to separate the two parts of the group. I moved my wife's relatives out into the other apartment while the others remained with the son and his family. Then I visited the British Consulate in San Francisco to get visas for all of my wife's immediate family to come back and live with me in Hong Kong. It took a little bit of time because all of them were traveling on international refugee travel documents - they didn't have any real status in the U.S. INS system - and the UK wanted to make sure these people were all going to be appropriately taken care of and not become a burden for the Hong Kong Government. My wife's employment with Pan Am was a big help because we got discounted tickets to get to California and then again to bring everyone back to Hong Kong. Now, however, my family of four had grown to a family of ten in a four-bedroom apartment. It was a good size apartment, but it quickly became crowded. My wife and I and my two kids kept the two bedrooms we had been using and then moved the mother and her three children into one room and my wife's parents into the other. We lived that way for the next year, until it was time for me to return to the U.S. on home leave. My father-in-law got a job with the French Government radio station in Hong Kong, the French Version of VOA, broadcasting news and commentary about Vietnam issues to listeners throughout the region. He also did some volunteer work with some of the refugee groups in Hong Kong. His wife helped out at home and, along with our regular Filipina amah, did the cooking. My sister in law had her hands full with her three kids.

From the policy side, there was obviously a great deal of concern among our contacts of how much further the takeover of the south was going to go. I mean, obviously, not only did Vietnam fall, but the communists also took over in Laos and Cambodia in short order.

Q: We're talking about the dominos.

HARTER: All of these countries had been part of an ongoing conflict in the preceding decades both before and after the French had left in 1954. And, it was already quite clear the new regime taking over in Cambodia was in a special category all by themselves. There was no fraternal brotherhood operating here and the Khmer Rouge was already fighting with the Vietnamese Communists as they moved into the areas in the Mekong delta adjacent to Cambodia. There were a number of quite nasty cross border clashes with significant casualties. The Cambodia takeover also produced an unusual personal story. When I had been in Vietnam just after Tet in 1975, I had purchased some lacquer objects, including a lacquer table that had to be shipped to me by sea to Hong Kong. The ship it was loaded on to come to Hong Kong was the Mayaguez and it arrived just before the fall of Vietnam. On May 7, about a week after the fall of Saigon, the Mayaguez left Hong Kong on a routine voyage back toward Southeast Asia. Khmer Rouge military forces seized the ship as it passed into the Gulf of Siam. U.S. Marines were subsequently sent to try and rescue the crew and others and a number of the Marines were killed there on an island where the Mayaguez crew was being held. Later on when I was serving in Hanoi after we had normalized relations, our POW/MIA investigation teams were actually operating on that island trying to recover remains of the Americans who died there trying to liberate the Mayaguez and its crew.

In the aftermath of the Communist victories in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia the non-Communist nations of the region were able to prevent any further southward movement of the Communist forces. The Thais, in particular, had used the Indo-China war period to strengthen their own capabilities and to build up their economic power. They prepared to defend their borders, shifted defensive forces, assembled aircraft at advance airfields, etc., as the Lao and Khmer Communists took control of the other side of the Thai border. I still believe the United States assistance to the South Vietnamese in their struggle against the North over the previous decade, made the difference for the Thais and those other nations on the Southeast Asian mainland to be strong enough to stand up to the threat of North Vietnamese forces. In the 1960s, these countries didn't have the social, economic or political cohesion, to say nothing of the military wherewithal to defend themselves against Hanoi's forces if they decided to keep moving forward. So, while those of us who had served in Vietnam were greatly disappointed at the outcome of the conflict, there was still some sense of satisfaction there was no further advance into the neighboring countries. I think some, myself included, felt a certain resentment that the political forces in the United States had undercut the southern resistance against Hanoi's invasion. We failed to fulfill the commitments we had made when our troops were removed in 1972. The U.S. political arena was in a shambles, the President was totally discredited, Congress no longer supported any of the President's policies , the American people wanted out of the war and had no desire to continue involvement even if it didn't mean the presence of American troops. Now, I don't know if Nixon's commitments were sincere, maybe they weren't. Maybe his promises were just a part of his planned way to get out of Vietnam and claim credit for ending the war. Maybe he was willing to promise anything just so we could remove our troops. Nixon's reputation for deception and double-dealing had certainly been strengthened by the Watergate revelations, so maybe the commitments to provide supplies and air power to help the Saigon Government were whole cloth from the beginning.

Having said that, I and others felt disappointed the American Government had not been involved in trying to block Hanoi's advance. I'm not sure there was any way the South Vietnamese regime would have been able to build enough public support to stand on its own even given another couple of years of ammunition and armaments. The reputation of the government was poor - incompetence, corruption, nepotism, no real macro-economic development strategy. On the other hand, none of us had any confidence that whatever Hanoi was going to bring in from outside was going to be anything better for the people in Vietnam. I stress here bringing the regime and policies in from outside. This was no civil war. The southern communist cadre were all tools of the north and when Hanoi's forces took over the southern cadres largely were pushed aside. Historically, Vietnam had not been a unified country, even before the French operated three different zones for the country. Although some southern officials took on important roles in developing the Hanoi economic modernization effort in the late 1990s the people in control were northerners. I felt that way in the '60s and '70s and still feel that way today. I don't think there has been any evidence produced since then to contradict my feeling.

Q: In your looking, although you were looking at internal matters, were you picking up early on the enmity between Vietnam and China? I mean, I think while you were there the war took place didn't it?

HARTER: No, the border war actually didn't take place until I was back in Washington. That was in February of 1979.

Q: Were you picking up, the whole idea was, this was these Vietnamese Communists and these Chinese Communists were really on a roll. And somehow the North Vietnamese were staying the firm allies of the Chinese?

HARTER: No, I did not have that feeling at all. Disagreements and clashes between China and Vietnam had erupted before the border war. The Chinese on several occasions had stopped the supply of Russian equipment through China over the roads and rail lines because of disagreements between Hanoi and Beijing. The PRC restricted the amounts of Chinese military assistance going in. In fact, one of the reasons there was such a long debate in the U.S. about the mining of Haiphong Harbor was because the Russians had to bring all of their supplies in by sea to ensure they did not get stopped by the Chinese. Military and political advisors in the U.S. felt we could end up with a much wider and much more difficult conflict if Russian ships got sunk in the Gulf of Tonkin or Haiphong Harbor. The Sino-Vietnamese relationship was tendentious at best.

Like a lot of people, in the beginning I saw the Chinese and Russian hands behind Hanoi's moves against the South Vietnamese Government. But by the time, I would say the early '70s, I didn't see Hanoi as being controlled or dictated to by outside forces. When it came to propaganda and the style of revolutionary activity, you could see connections between how Vietnam and China operated in similar fashion. There were also great similarities between their propaganda activities and the ones the Saigon Government used. Vietnamese cadre, including Ho Chi Minh had learned a lot of their tactics and operational skills in China and Chinese cadre were helping train people in the north. But Taiwan psywar specialists were also involved in working with the Saigon Government and both the PRC and Kuomintang people were basing their training on what they had learned from the Comintern. The Comintern had worked with both Chinese groups in the 1920s and 1930s when they were cooperating in their first United Front.

In fact, that was my fallback PhD dissertation topic. After I arrived in Vietnam, the topic which had been approved by Dr. Powell at American University had already appeared in an analytical study by a well-known China specialist. So this interesting parallel psywar training became my new topic. I was going to do a comparative study of psychological warfare techniques used by the Vietcong / North Vietnamese and the Government of Vietnam as derived from their two sets of Chinese instructors. But, I never got around to do write on that topic either.

If you look at the split between the Chinese and the Vietnamese, I think the Chinese had already decided that Ho Chi Minh was not malleable. He couldn't be controlled or manipulated and, in fact, it looked like he was doing a better job of playing off Soviet and Chinese influences and direction. Bottom line, Ho was a nationalist and did not intend to follow any other country's direction. On the other hand, there's no question in my mind that he was a Communist through and through and had been one for a long time. I know there are a number of historical studies where the authors have argued we could have kept Ho from turning Communist by cooperating with him and opposing the French resumption of control at the end of World War II. From my perspective, we didn't necessarily do the right thing with regard to Vietnam at the end of that war but that lack of US support wasn't what made Ho a Communist. He'd signed on for that course a lot earlier. Ho would have happily used us in 1945 to gain control of the whole country, but would have then continued to proceed with creating his Communist Party-led society right on down the line. He would have turned his back on us as well as he turned his back on anybody else who's views differed from his own. There were lots of non-communist nationalists that never made it out of the 1940s because they disagreed with Ho. Ho Chi Minh was definitely a Communist. What made him successful was his ability to tap the anti-colonialist, anti-foreign, nationalist spirit of the Vietnamese people. That was unfortunately one of the things we didn't recognize early on - the nationalist appeal that set him apart from all the others. And, the ones who were in the south all ended up being tainted because of their associations with foreigners, whether it was the French or the Americans.

Q: After the 1972 Peace Accords, many Vietnamese speaking FSOs returned to Vietnam as observers. Did you come back came back during the Peace.

HARTER: No, I did not. I did not do that. While we're still talking about Vietnam, I'd like to relate a brief story that occurred while I was in Hong Kong and relates to the fall of Saigon. As the South Vietnamese forces were in panic and retreating from the highlands and the II CTZ coastal areas, Congress was evaluating whether it should send additional funds and equipment to the Saigon government. As the North Vietnamese launched their big invasion of the South in 1975, a couple of Congressmen came through Hong Kong enroute Vietnam to do some "fact-finding" related to Executive Branch proposals to provide additional financial aid and military supplies to the Saigon Government. I don't recall the names of the two Congressmen, though I am pretty sure the senior member was from the Midwest. I met them late in the evening at the old Kai Tak Airport on the Kowloon side in Hong Kong and proceeded to explain to them what was going to happen during their overnight stay. Their hotel had been booked and a hotel car had been sent to take them to the hotel. After a complimentary breakfast at the hotel, another hotel vehicle was scheduled to take them to the airport early the next morning where they would then fly directly to Saigon. When I finished the explanation, I told them I was now going to give them their day's per diem for Hong Kong and I requested they sign for the funds. Before I could hand over the envelopes, the senior Representative questioned why, based on how everything had been arranged at no additional cost to them, he needed to have per diem. I responded saying there was really no additional expense he would incur but this was the amount of money which every traveling official member or staff was entitled to receive. He refused to take the money and signed the form indicating that he would not take it. His colleague promptly followed suit, though I don't know if he would have done so on his own without the first Congressman's actions.

That was the only time in my Foreign Service career when a member of a traveling Congressional delegation, whether member of Congress or staff, ever turned down per diem. And I must say this man's attitude really impressed me. I wish I could remember his name so I could give him the recognition that act deserves. There were certainly many occasions when there were no expenses these "official" travelers had to pay, but they were always ready to take their per diem. I've retold this to Foreign Service colleagues over the years and all of them agree this was unique. None of them had ever heard of anyone turning down per diem, even if it was completely clear he or she had no official travel expenses to cover with the money. In fact, traditionally in the Foreign Service, you hear lots of jokes about how Congressmen and staff make a special point to cable posts in advance about their per diem requirements so there would be no delays in receipt of the funds on arrival.

Q: OK. Where did you go in 1978?

HARTER: In 1978 I came back to Washington to be the Deputy Director of the Office of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (VLC) Affairs in the East Asia Bureau. We had at the time an Office Director, a Deputy, a person who covered Vietnam, a person who covered Laos and a person who split time covering both Vietnam and Cambodia. So, there were five of us all together. I was there from 1978 to 1980.

Q: OK. Now in this period, well, let's start when you arrived. What was the feeling about this?

HARTER: Well, at this point, we were already informally talking with the Vietnamese about normalizing relations. When I interviewed for the job, the Office Director was Frederick Z. Brown. He subsequently worked for the Foreign Relations Committee and then went on to run the Southeast Asia program at John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies here in DC. Fred selected me for the job, but when I arrived the Office Director was Steve Lyne. Fred had moved on, if I recall correctly, to become Director of the Office of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore (IMBS). The talks had started in the spring, very informally in New York, in Geneva, and it was a very curious back and forth dialogue with each side arguing a position that remained largely unchanged for some time. The Vietnamese wanted the restoration of the Kissinger-articulated commitments from President Nixon which were made during the Paris Peace Talks. The Nixon offer was to provide reconstruction assistance to Hanoi in return for the North proceeding with normalization. The U.S. declared that agreement null and void because Hanoi had invaded Vietnam to conquer the south and we wanted the Vietnamese to agree to talk about normalization of relations with no preconditions. That posturing went back and forth for several months.

Q: What was the feeling? They must have had very poor American-hands, because from an American perspective, this wouldn't fly in a thousand years.

HARTER: Well, I don't think the issue was a failure to read us correctly. I think they insisted on this position because there were people at the top in Hanoi who felt this promise was owed to them for allowing us to get out of Vietnam. To them Kissinger and Nixon made a formal commitment and they believed the U.S. would eventually agree. This was not so much a bad reading of us, as much as an insistence on their part this was their due.

It was looking at the issue from two different perspectives, much like we and the Sino-Soviet forces looked at Vietnam from opposite perspectives that reflected our own biases. During and after the war, a lot of Americans argued the U.S. never should have gotten into the war in Vietnam because the U.S. should have recognized this was a civil conflict among Vietnamese and not, as the American Government argued, a further projection of the international communist threat. But, at the same time that we were looking at it from one perspective, the Chinese and the Russians were looking at it from their own perspectives. They felt that Ho Chi Minh was on their side and that Ho Chi Minh's victory in Vietnam would advance the goals of the global Communist revolution (Soviet view) or would help advance Chinese goals to get a greater degree of influence in Southeast Asia (PRC view).

Ho Chi Minh was just smarter than the average player in that particular game, because his ultimate goal was to end up his own man. So in the post-1975 period the Chinese were already having serious difficulties maintaining their influence with Ho and Russian influence also had had its ups and downs. At the same time, the Vietnamese were extending their influence and control over the Communist Party in Laos and trying to sort out how to alter the deteriorating relationship with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The hostility there between the two communist regimes had not been expected, though traditionally the Vietnamese and Khmer had been adversaries for a long time and up until the eighteenth century a lot of the Mekong delta that we knew during the war as IV Corps had previously been part of Cambodia and not Vietnam.

The initial period as I said, was one that went back and forth with the Vietnamese just continuing to insist on this requirement for payment of compensation. At issue was not an insubstantial amount of money. It was more than three billion dollars which went a lot further in 1978 than it does now. But just around the time I got to the desk in the summer of 1978, the Vietnamese changed their tune and said, "We still want to discuss the US obligation to provide us with war damages compensation, but discussion of that issue is no longer a pre-condition for normalization of relations or for talking about the process of normalization." So, during the summer of 1978, there were two parallel sets of normalization negotiations going on - one with the PRC and one with the SRV. My boss, Steve Lyne was working with Assistant Secretary Dick Holbrooke and the Deputy Assistant Secretary who was responsible for Southeast Asia, Robert Oakley. Steve and Bob Oakley were the regulars on the U.S. negotiating team. By that time talks were held mostly in New York City at the United Nations and we didn't bother trying to meet the Vietnamese either in Paris or Geneva.

I was given a special assignment to coordinate with all of the Department's other Bureaus and all of the other US Government agencies that would be interested in having officers in a US Embassy once we established relations with Hanoi. This task involved all of the basics for opening an Embassy. I was asked to review what we needed for communications; what we needed for space and housing; what was the basic mix needed for personnel staffing; what other agencies needed to be there; what kind of a mission we needed to put together and how it would operate. To bring that to closure, I conducted a series of meetings into the fall of 1978 which resulted in the compilation of a basic primer on what was needed to open a mission in Hanoi. The document was bound in a red plastic binder and kept in the VLC and EA Assistant Secretary's Office.

One of the key issues to get settled early on was the state of U.S. Government owned property in Vietnam, the old Embassy property among others in Saigon, and old property in Hue, and even a couple of properties in Hanoi which were left over from the 1950s when we had both a Consulate office property and a Consul General's residence. The FBO (Foreign Buildings Office) pulled out all their old records and compiled an extensive list of all these properties as party of the team drafting process.

Once this package was completed, in the fall of 1978, I was scheduled to go to Hanoi to sit down with a Vietnamese counterpart and start evaluating the property. The old U.S. Consulate Building in Hanoi had been left under British protection in 1954 when we left, but it subsequently had been occupied by the Vietnamese authorities and no one knew if the building was salvageable. We knew the Consul General's house was currently part of the Polish Embassy compound in Hanoi but no one had looked at that property either. It was maybe a week, no more than two weeks before I was scheduled to go to Hanoi, that the trip was indefinitely postponed.

While I was working on the mechanics of opening up in Hanoi, the "political" talks were on going as was the dialogue with the Chinese about normalizing Sino-US relations. My trip and ultimately the normalization effort with Vietnam fell victim to the realities of events that were unfolding in Southeast Asia, as well as some imaginary issues which the U.S. negotiating team focused on China normalization put up as obstacles.

Let me start with this latter problem the "imaginary" problem. The Chinese had made direct statements to U.S. officials indicating they were not concerned about the U.S. effort to normalize relations with Vietnam. Based on my academic background, my recent years as a China watcher and my own reading of the Chinese statements and their context I believed the Chinese were speaking frankly, there was no problem. As I saw it, so long as the U.S. was going ahead with a straight forward normalization of relations, no secret deals, no payment of reparations to Hanoi - because there was no parallel quid-pro-quo in the U.S.-PRC normalization talks, then Beijing didn't have a dog in the fight. I made this point to Steve Lyne and through him to Bob Oakley and Dick Holbrooke as we pressed forward with the negotiations.

Although both normalization tracks had been approved by the White House, the two tracks were being separately managed. The main focus for the Vietnam negotiations was the State Department and the State Department operation was largely directly managed by Dick Holbrooke, with Lyne and Oakley handling the regular talks. Others at State were also supportive and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was obviously on board. Although there were State Department personnel involved in the process of normalization of relations with China, the main focus for that effort was the White House itself and the NSC (National Security Council) in particular. The chief participant at the NSC was an academic from Michigan, Michael Oxenberg. Roger Sullivan, the EA Deputy Assistant Secretary who covered China, was part of that group.

As we moved into the fall of 1978, this group was uncomfortable with the Vietnam normalization effort and argued we could not move forward with Hanoi because the Chinese would ultimately balk at this move and refuse to normalize with the U.S. if we normalized with the Vietnamese at the same time. Ultimately they were correct, there was an obstacle from the China side, but it was their artificial argument that became the obstacle. Every time there was a perceived Chinese hesitation in the normalization talks, this group said it was because of the Vietnamese talks. I never saw any concrete evidence that indicated the Chinese did not want us to normalize with Vietnam. I think the Chinese might have been put out if we normalized relations with Vietnam before we concluded the agreement with the PRC. But, there was certainly nothing pushing us to do that. We certainly could have held off the Vietnamese agreement until the one with Beijing had been completed. As this issue continued to crop up in the NSC reporting on negotiations, the White House cooled on the Vietnam talks and the State Department was told to slow the talks.

As we backed away, we did it in such a way so it appeared the Vietnamese had abandoned the process based on their actions in Southeast Asia. When my trip to Hanoi was put on hold, we had just had a meeting with the Vietnamese representative at the UN and Bob Oakley had asked him a series of questions about Vietnamese actions in Southeast Asia. There were three major questions, though I am not sure if they had an order of magnitude or a ranking. If they did, I am not trying to list them that way. Oakley asked the Vietnamese at the UN to explain the significant build-up of Vietnamese troops along the border with Cambodia which we had observed from our satellites. Of course, we had known about the periodic clashes that had occurred since 1975, but this was a very significant build-up along the border. Oakley's next question was to ask the Vietnamese why they were expelling ethnic Chinese and sending them out into the South China Sea on big boats, a few thousand per ship.

Q: These are ethnic Chinese coming out of?

HARTER: These were ethnic Chinese who were living in Vietnam, had been living in Vietnam in many cases for centuries. Among Vietnam's many ethnic groups, this group was called the Hoa., The Chinese were just systematically being gathered up and expelled. There of course had been an exodus of Chinese in 1975 just as there had been of ethnic Vietnamese who didn't want to live under the communists. Some of the Chinese who left in 1975 had been resettled in Taiwan, though not all that many, and others joined extended families in Southeast Asia and other regions including the US. The Hoa in the south, primarily in Saigon's Cholon district had been traders and merchants and they fared especially poorly under the communist takeover. But this situation in 1978 was very different from just a change of how one could operate a business. Houses and personal property were being confiscated and others, particularly in Hanoi and Haiphong in the north, seeing the handwriting on the wall went to the border and crossed directly into China. The numbers going into China quickly exceeded 100,000 and, if I remember correctly, I think the PRC claimed to have resettled over 300,000 ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in about two years. Oakley's last question was to seek an explanation of the "special relationship" which had been created by the Soviet-Vietnamese Mutual Defense Agreement that Hanoi and Moscow had just signed. All of these turned out to be very significant questions. As I said, these were legitimate issues which should have played a role in determining how, and even if, the U.S. was to proceed with the normalization of relations with Vietnam. But they were being asked in part because the U.S. wanted to put some distance between us on the normalization issue because of the NSC's portrayal of normalization with Vietnam as an obstacle to normalization with China.

The Soviet agreement was pretty obvious, because in fact, it very shortly involved the stationing of Soviet military personnel at Cam Ranh Bay, the naval base established by the U.S. in II Corps, and the use of that facility for 25 years. I guess you'd call it a 25-year lease, since the agreement expires this year. Soviet military instructors and military personnel entered Cam Ranh and many moved all through the country. In fact, shortly thereafter, even the Vietnamese did not have much access to Cam Ranh Bay and the Soviets kept all but a contingent of Vietnamese laborers out of the base. The Cambodian invasion in late December 1978 was the direct answer to the question about the border build-up, as the Vietnamese sought to displace the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot who had been such a thorn in the delta. With the Soviets covering their back, the Vietnamese at least felt they could attempt to remove the Chinese influenced Khmer Rouge and replace them with a group more beholding to Hanoi. The expulsion of Chinese was clearly designed to eliminate any possibility of a fifth column being used by the Chinese when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, and simultaneously to distract the Chinese and create obstacles to a military build-up along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier.

Q: Were the Soviets using Vietnam as their China card or something?

HARTER: In a sense, yes. The Vietnamese would provide them with an opportunity to have a southern flank against the Chinese. There had been a lot of border clashes between the Russians and the Chinese over the years. Both sides had significant forces along their long border. There had been clear hostility and jockeying for supremacy in leading the international Communist movement. The Soviets also were looking to keep China blocked from moving into Southeast Asia and, I believe, the Soviets still had some hope they'd be able to take advantage of instability in China in the aftermath of the death of Zhou Enlai and the death of Mao Zedong to advance their own programs. I think the Soviets hoped to use the Vietnamese in a blocking position against Chinese expansionism and to give themselves an additional entrï¿½e into that region. The naval base would also provide a strategic footprint which could cause problems for the US as well. But the Soviets also overlooked the ultimate Vietnamese goal to dominate the three states of Indochina and from that base to project Vietnamese and not Soviet influence into Southeast Asia.

Q: Was the Pentagon playing any role in this interpretation?

HARTER: No, not from what I saw. Although I consulted with the Defense Department and a number of other agencies about their interest in Embassy staffing positions, I didn't see any of them playing any direct role in the Vietnam normalization talks process. (I didn't know who else was involved in the China negotiations other than State and the NSC.) Defense did not have an interest in being part of the Embassy staff in Hanoi. Finishing my earlier thought, the policy issues which we raised with Hanoi were legitimate concerns about Hanoi's objectives and behavior in the region. And, given what they were doing or about to be doing, it would have looked strange for the U.S. to be normalizing relations at the same time. But, I don't think these issues were the ones that terminated our normalization efforts. The torpedo was the one launched by Mike Oksenberg who said the Chinese would object if we normalized relations with China and the White House decided to put Vietnam on the back burner so we could complete our arrangements with China. I tried to argue against this interpretation with Oakley and with Holbrooke but by then it was probably already too late to turn the White House view. The geopolitical issues we raised with Hanoi gave us a cover to mask that decision.

Q: Well, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you do have the feeling of people I've interviewed that somehow the relations with China on the part of with a certain group of people, became so engrossing that they found themselves, as you put, imagining things or willing to move ahead - and screw anybody else.

HARTER: Yes, I felt that way. I certainly felt that way. But, again I accept the reality that a continued move to normalize relations with Hanoi or the completion of the process in the midst of Hanoi's actions in those other three areas would have put us in a difficult position.

Q: This is particularly the early group that was involved in the opening of China?

HARTER: I strongly felt that way, because I too felt I was a legitimate analyst of Chinese actions and motivations. I had spent the last four years intensively examining the domestic political scene in China; I'd returned to involvement with Vietnam issues for the past several months and I could see the inter-relationships and problems that existed between the two countries. The Chinese felt they didn't get enough deference from Hanoi for all of the contributions Beijing had made to the victory in the south. Hanoi didn't like the Chinese support for Pol Pot. China was concerned about Vietnam's flirting with Moscow and its go-it-alone approach to activities in Southeast Asia. They had territorial conflicts over their mutual border and over ownership of islands in the South China Sea, some of which China had liberated from the South Vietnamese in early 1974, only a year before Hanoi took control of the south. As I saw it, the Chinese had no reason to dump normalization activities with us just because we wanted to normalize with Vietnam. The Chinese had very real reasons why they wanted to normalize relations with us and it had very little to do with the Vietnamese. The major reason China wanted to normalize with the U.S. was to keep the Soviet Union from interfering in China. In addition, China saw the U.S. as the economic giant that could help China move into the world economy through trade and investment. Deng Xiaoping's shift away from the Maoist ideas of autarky, self-reliance and self-development, wasn't going to happen without significant external support and the US was to provide that funding. Those two goals were driving China to normalize relations. So, I think any complaint about U.S.-Vietnam normalization would have been pro forma and it would not have reflected any serious concern about where that normalization might lead. Personally, I didn't expect there even would be a pro forma objection.

Now, having said that, many people will still frame the issue as to whether the U.S. should have normalized relations with Vietnam just before or on the heels of a Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia?

Q: Was this pretty much - were we thinking that this was going to happen?

HARTER: Well, there was certainly a feeling that this military build-up was far too extensive to be designed just to teach Pol Pot a lesson along the border. The border areas had traditionally been areas of controversy of delineation of who lives where. There were Vietnamese on the Khmer side of the border and there were Khmer on the Vietnamese side of the border. None of them suffered each other very well. The Khmer were persecuted in Vietnam and the Vietnamese were persecuted in Cambodia. Given the size of the forces they had on the ground, and I can't tell you at this point that I remember how large a force it was, but it was obviously a very significant force, because the Vietnamese rolled into Phnom Penh in nothing flat. It was at this point that the Chinese played politics on the Vietnam front. After normalizing relations with the U.S., Deng Xiaoping came to visit in January 1979. Deng met with Carter Administration officials did some touring got to wear a cowboy hat. But one of his main objectives was to tell the U.S. he was going to attack Vietnam.

Q: Don't I have the mental picture of Deng Xiaoping with a cowboy hat on from that January 1979 trip?

HARTER: Yes, that's it. That's from this same trip. When I mentioned it, it was because I too specifically remember the Chinese delegation went to Texas and Deng went to a rodeo where he sported a ten-gallon hat.

Q: It somehow could have been. During this time while these talks were going on, a movement that became very powerful was the missing in action (MIA). I would have thought that opening to Vietnam could be played either way. One was they're not doing enough or the other one is, if we have relations we can really get in there and settle this thing or something.

HARTER: Yes. Well, I credit Bob Oakley, the Deputy Assistant Secretary who was handling the major parts of the Vietnam negotiations with making a brilliant move to completely separate the MIA issue from normalization. He talked about it in terms of there being no quid-pro-quo for normalization. The MIA issue was to be dealt with as a distinct and separate issue. He acknowledged the issue as a national priority and President Carter had made a point of emphasizing its importance to the American people. But Oakley insisted it had to be worked on independently and did not need to be a part of the normalization process. Accounting for MIAs was a humanitarian operation between the U.S. and Vietnam and it could be handled through sharing of information on loss sights and prison records, etc. None of this was related to normalization. But all of this planned cooperation stopped once Vietnam invaded Cambodia and the issue of normalization was put off for a long time. This enabled the groups who believed there were live POWs still in Vietnam and who distrusted the Government to recover the MIA remains to gain traction and to increase their public position. After President Carter left office and Ronald Reagan became President, the NSC and the State Department stood the policy of MIA accounting as a humanitarian issue on its head. They succumbed to the pressures from the MIA constituency in the U.S. and the policy became "no normalization of relations until there was a full accounting for U.S. POWs and MIAs." Reagan came in and the policy people around him totally linked normalization with the MIA issue. This was largely the result of the efforts of one major individual outside of the government, Ann Mills Griffith, the head of the League of Families. The League was probably the most well-known of all the MIA-focused organizations, although both the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) and the American Legion were both deeply involved in this issue as well. Among the independent organizations, Ann was probably the most articulate and the most focused. She had a healthy skepticism about how much the U.S. Government was actually working on the MIA issue. Her key ally in the government who also seemed to subscribe to this line was Richard Childress. Childress worked first at the Defense Department and then at the NSC. Childress basically played the Ann Mills Griffith line within the U.S. government and turned the policy from what Oakley had helped to set - MIA accounting is a humanitarian issue which should not be a part of the normalization process. Together, Griffith and Childress forever linked these two issues so normalization of relations with Vietnam was a hostage to accounting for POW/MIAs. For the two of them, making progress on MIAs became a totally moving target. It could be anywhere from Vietnam returning live POWs, to the full accounting for every MIA, to a variety of steps which combined returning remains with closing out other cases through detailed reporting on why remains could not be obtained.

The MIA issue was made more vivid during the period by the discovery of Bobby Garwood. Bobby Garwood was a young marine who, after he was captured, went over to the other side and cooperated with his captors. When the war ended, Garwood elected to stay in Vietnam and he lived there for a couple of years. Then one day in 1979 he came up to - I believe it was a Swedish aid worker. Garwood told him he was an American and wanted to go home. All of a sudden the MIA issue leaped to the front pages. From the perspective of the League and other such organizations, here was the proof the Vietnamese had kept people behind. Garwood tried to avoid being court-martialed by intimating he had information about other POWs but none of the information he provided checked out and he was eventually court-martialed and demoted. I didn't work on the MIA issue directly during my time on the desk, the Vietnam Desk Officer, Mike Owens, had the primary responsibility for it. So I never saw Garwood's testimony or a lot of the DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) reviews of his material, but I do know the general conclusion was there were no live POWs - no supposed live sighting ever panned out. Finally, it became very difficult to get a bilateral effort on MIAs started on humanitarian grounds when the U.S. and Vietnam were so totally divided after the invasion of Cambodia.

Q: Well. I'm trying to capture the attitude. At this point we're talking about 1978 to 1980. You were there looking at this prisoners of war (POW) issue. It never made sense that after the war that somehow or other, as the story was portrayed, there were people kept in bamboo cages out in the jungle or something, American prisoners. But, this became an article of faith with a significant portion of the American public. Sylvester Stallone made a whole movie career out of it. Did you all feel that this made sense or was it a possibility?

HARTER: No, it didn't make sense to me why the Vietnamese would hold on to U.S. prisoners. I personally thought there could be people like Garwood, people who stayed behind; people who at one time or another had worked with the other side - the North Vietnamese or the Vietcong. During the war there were reports of sightings of what used to be called "salt and pepper teams", a couple of white and black Americans working with Vietnamese forces, helping them stage ambushes, propagandize the American patrol units, things of that sort. There were also military deserters, usually people on drugs who dropped out of the military and even out of society and went into hiding in Cholon and other places in Vietnam. Some of these people could have still been alive at the end of the war and decided to stay there. And, for whatever reason, maybe they had a technical skill that the Vietnamese appreciated and the authorities decided these individuals could stay. Some of those people did leave in 1975 along with the major evacuation and others were probably forced out in the following months. But it was still possible to my mind that some didn't necessarily go. After the Korean War we had some prisoners who stayed in the North of their own volition so there was no reason some wouldn't have stayed after the Vietnam conflict ended. Vietnam was a far more hospitable place to try to make a home than the northern part of the Korean peninsula. As I said, it just didn't make sense to me why Hanoi would want to hold on to any prisoners. I couldn't see Hanoi holding people just to make it easier to twist the Americans to come up with the Nixon-Kissinger reconstruction compensation package. Any such effort would have antagonized the Americans and it would not have sprung the money.

Q: Your office was also responsible for policy toward Cambodia. This invasion of Cambodia is eminent. What were you getting at that time about Cambodia and Pol Pot and all this? What was the attitude and was there a feeling, you know, jolly for the Vietnamese?

HARTER: We had the brief military run-in with Pol Pot's forces I mentioned earlier with the SS Mayaguez and the U.S. Marines attempt to rescue the crew on the island where the boat was moored. The Marines came under heavy fire and took casualties and lost helicopters to enemy fire. I don't recall the exact casualty number, it was certainly double digits, but I don't think it reached 25. A couple of Marines were also inadvertently left behind and they were eventually executed by the Khmer Rouge

Q: So Marine casualties were almost equal to the size of the crew.

HARTER: The island was subsequently included among our MIA recovery sites and we did send a team there, I think a couple of times, looking for remains. When the Khmer Rouge took over and the remnants of the Lon Nol regime fled the country, no one knew exactly what to expect. But certainly nobody had any idea it would turn into the absolute horror that marked the Khmer Rouge era in Cambodia. Refugees who crossed into Thailand provided the initial reports along with the Khmer Rouge's own radio broadcasts. The Khmer Rouge made a political decision to turn society back to a more primitive time and to attempt to recreate a natural agricultural environment on which to build a communist society. It was Mao Zedong's attention to the rural life and community to the nth degree. For the Khmer Rouge there was no utility to technical, industrial or book learning skills. So, cities were abandoned. When the Khmer Rouge told people to leave Phnom Penh, for example, they even emptied the hospitals, and made people march into the countryside. They wanted a revolution based on an ideal Communist agrarian society founded on manual labor in the fields. And so, intellectuals, artists and people associated with the previous governments were rounded up. Some were killed right away and some were thrown in prison. This was largely the fate of those who had been associated with the previous government. The artists and the intellectuals were given an opportunity to learn to work with their hands in the fields, but because they were not trusted they were mistreated and ill-fed and many of them died from disease, malnutrition, and mistreatment.

On the desk, this issue was, of course, covered by the Cambodia Desk Officer. When normalization of relations with Vietnam was no longer on the front burner, my focus in the office shifted to refugees, most particularly the refugees expelled from Vietnam into Southeast Asia - the boat loads of Chinese - as well as the Vietnamese who fled on their own. To try to deal with this issue, the Department created a small three person task force to look for ways to facilitate bringing some of these people to the US, primarily for family reunification purposes. In addition to myself, representing EA, there was an officer from the Consular Bureau, Sue Patterson, and an officer from the Refugee Bureau, Jere (pronounced Jerry) Broh-Kahn. Together we created a plan which has continued pretty much all the way down to the present time. It was based on family ties, association with the U.S. or the GVN (Government of the Republic of Vietnam) during the war and some other specialized categories designed to take these individuals and their families out of the refugee camps that sprung up across the region. Other developed countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, the UK, Sweden, etc all created similar programs. But in addition to taking the people out of the camps - which of course was critical to convince those countries which had allowed the camps to be established Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, etc. - we also created a program for direct emigration from Vietnam to the U.S. This initially started with family reunification efforts but later was expanded to include Amerasians - children born of American fathers and Vietnamese mothers - and the South Vietnamese who had been put in re-education camps by the North after 1975. This proposal was given to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) which brokered the initial agreement with Vietnam and then served as the intermediary for a program that brought U.S. voluntary agency representatives into Saigon to screen candidates for the U.S. emigration program. This program was the only direct contact between the U.S. and Vietnam for a number of years until we were able to create a new link through the MIA remains recovery effort.

Q: And this was the Orderly Departure Program?

HARTER: Yes, this second phase of the program we put together was called the Orderly Departure Program.

Q: Were you doing that or was that a development after you'd left?

HARTER: No. I was responsible for putting that program together along with these other two people. We created the idea for the Orderly Departure Program as a way to cut down on the flow of boat people, by then largely self-generated by individuals and families and in small boats which were more subject to the weather hazards and to rape and pillage by pirates. These two factors resulted in considerable loss of life at sea as well as trauma among those who survived the hazardous journeys. This program was created in the spring of 1979. As I said, we wanted to slow the flows directly into the refugee camps from the boats on the high seas and to make it into a regular emigration opportunity. As it was established, we provided the Vietnamese with lists of people who we believed were qualified to enter the U.S. At the same time, the Vietnamese Government sent us lists of people they thought we should take and the actual process of emigration ended up being a combination of people on both lists.

Q: The Orderly Departure Program, one you might explain what it is. But, I mean this required extraordinary cooperation with the Vietnamese. How did that come about?

HARTER: Right. The cooperative work with the Vietnamese didn't take place right away. That took some time. As I said, the policy and the procedures we devised were originally for the refugees, they were designed for the people in the camps. But, from the camp program it extended to a system of interviewing people in Vietnam before they left by boat. I think the Vietnamese agreed to this arrangement because the refugee departures gave Vietnam a bad name internationally and it was disruptive to society in general. The operational details, the interview system, the UNHCR role, the recruitment of personnel, and the negotiations with the Vietnamese all took place after my involvement with setting up the methodology for ODP. We simply came up with the plan and how to make it work. The negotiations and the actual modalities were done by others. When I was working on the program, the only functional element was the selection of people from the camps.

Another part of the refugee issue, was finding the funds to support the camps in the so-called "first asylum countries." Under the auspices of the UNHCR, the US and other countries in the developed world convened a series of pledging conferences in Geneva over the years to raise money and fund the maintenance and operation of the various camps in Southeast Asia. If it wasn't for the international financial contributions, it would have been very difficult to convince the Malaysians, the Indonesians, the Thai and the people in Hong Kong to agree to let these people stay while they were being screened for resettlement. As you likely recall, we're talking about a few hundred thousand people during a period of about six years. Although occasionally there were still "push offs" where boats were not permitted to land in one country or another, by and large the international funding made it possible for the refugees to reach shore with some expectation of international assistance. Thereafter, it was the various national resettlement programs that began to screen the arrivals and sort them into eligible and ineligible categories. Fortunately, one country's "ineligible" did not necessarily mean the person was stuck in the camps. Although there was a residual population that was not readily eligible for resettlement, it all was worked out over time. So, I also worked some of the time on this international dimension of the refugee program. I went to a couple of the Geneva meetings and did liaison work with some of the ASEAN countries and their ASEAN representatives, both in Washington, DC and at the UN in New York.

One thing I should go back to just briefly. In 1978 when we were talking about normalization of relations with Vietnam, I was one of the first persons to go back into the old South Vietnamese Embassy off Massachusetts Avenue. At that time, there was no Department policy to try to maintain foreign diplomatic facilities that were not in use. The Vietnamese building had been vacant and unused since the spring of 1975. When I went in for the first time, I found a building that was basically the same way it was when the South Vietnamese Ambassador and all of his staff abandoned it over three years before. There were moldy paper coffee containers, bits of food stuck to plates, and of course falling plaster and paint. The building had really suffered the ravages of time. No electricity, no water, leaks in the roof, all contributed to the building's decrepit appearance. And you saw nice, pre-war and wartime South Vietnamese lacquer ware that was all cracked and crumbling because of the constant changes of temperature and the moisture. So, it was a very interesting experience to have this opportunity to visit the South Vietnamese Embassy. The FBO (Foreign Buildings Operations) people also had kept a couple of South Vietnamese owned vehicles - including the Ambassador's Cadillac - in a warehouse in Virginia. I guess if the Vietnamese came to look at the property at that time, they would have been very disappointed in its condition. But, of course, they didn't come until fifteen years later and by that time the Department had changed its policies and had taken over vacant diplomatic properties and maintained them, put them to use, until such time as they could be returned to their original owners. The Vietnamese Embassy went through that transformation some time during the 1980s and it had been in use by the USG for several years before it was visited by the Vietnamese UN staff in l994.

I also visited the Cambodian Embassy which was out near I believe it was 16th Street a ways north of Columbia Road or thereabouts. That was a huge property with a lot more land than what the Vietnamese had off Massachusetts Avenue. It too had suffered from its lack of occupants. The U.S. had tried to move items from the offices into a storage room and put a gate in front of it, but the place was always getting broken into because it was off the beaten path for ordinary Embassy security patrols. Items had been looted from the house and from the secure storage room.

Anyway, lets go back to where I was earlier, working on the refugee issue, but this time it involved Cambodia - or as they were then calling it Kampuchea. Following the Vietnamese invasion, Pol Pot's forces were in headlong retreat from the eastern part of the country near Vietnam. Pol Pot's retreat included a torching of the fields, destruction of the rice and other crops to keep them out of the hands of the Vietnamese. In addition to his earlier, mass movement of people away from the cities he was now forcing the population to move with his military forces so they could not provide information to or cooperate with the advancing Vietnamese forces. By the fall of 1979, large numbers of refugees were gathering along the border with Thailand. Reports from the Thai Government and Embassy Bangkok personnel who visited the border indicated there was mass starvation and many were dying each day from lack of food, adequate medicines and safe drinking water. Khmer Rouge military forces were mixed in with the civilians, making them potential targets for attack by the Vietnamese and increasing the risk of contact with Thai forces during Vietnam's "hot pursuit" of Khmer Rouge fighters. During the time I was on the desk, there were a number of occasions when Vietnamese forces shelled across the border into Thai territory or actually sent their forces into Thailand to attack Khmer troops.

This situation began to draw the attention of international relief organizations and the international governments who generally support them, though it was still not as big a focus as the Vietnamese refugee issue. The border situation began to get some resonance on Capitol Hill as well. Dick Holbrooke went to the Hill to talk about this issue. And, then a Republican Senator from Missouri, John Danforth made this an issue on the floor of the Senate and said he wanted to see what was happening along the border. Because he was a Republican, the Democratic Carter administration did not want a Republican going off and getting involved in this all by himself. They convinced two other very new senators, Max Baucus of Montana and Jim Sasser of Tennessee to participate. However, Danforth's objective was not just to go to Thailand and see the border area and help the people there. He wanted to find a way to get inside Cambodia so he could get the approval of the Vietnamese and their new puppet government in Phnom Penh to set up relief programs for needy Khmer throughout the country. Danforth's goal was to supply the refugees along the border from both sides of the border and to do what he could to provide assistance to other people in need in Cambodia who had not yet gone to the border seeking assistance. At this point, this was essentially an U.S. initiative and there was no international program yet underway to assist the starving people at the border. Of course, a few local and international NGOs were there and working but they were drawing on their own agencies' budgets and weren't getting large donations from the donor community.

As the Department began to look at the Cambodia problem we discussed the situation with the Thai Government. The Thai wanted us involved if there was any potential of the situation spilling over the Thai border, whether it was starving Cambodians or the Vietnamese military forces. We talked to the other members of ASEAN - though less than we talked to the Thais - but their primary focus was making sure that we continued to support financially the Vietnamese refugee camps and keeping the US and other resettlement countries focused on preventing a residual Vietnamese refugee population being left in Southeast Asia. Beyond that, the rest of the ASEAN countries deferred to Thailand as the country most affected. Having obtained the Thai agreement to talk to the Cambodians, the question was how to go about approaching the two regimes when we had no direct diplomatic contacts. Mort Abramowitz, who was the U.S. Ambassador in Bangkok became the focal point for the liaison effort through the Vietnamese Embassy there. Once the three Senators were on board with the trip, Holbrooke assembled the Department support team which included myself and a Khmer speaker, Tim Carney. Along with three staff members supporting their respective Senators, this was the delegation which went off to Bangkok to discuss the Khmer starvation issue. The Vietnamese Embassy located just across the street from the Ambassador's residence in Bangkok was the site of our meetings. The Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach, happened to be in town at the time and we met with him and with the Vietnamese Ambassador to Thailand. Interestingly Thach became the prime mover on the Vietnamese side in the 1990s when we were able to resume discussion of normalization of relations. The U.S. side presented its request to Thach seeking his assistance in getting a message to Phnom Penh requesting permission to visit the capital to discuss the issue of humanitarian relief for the starving population. Thach was a very experienced diplomat. He explained how the Vietnamese had been invited into Cambodia to assist the Khmer people and that once they had helped to drive out Pol Pot, the Khmer had formed their own government. Thach suggested we deal directly with them - a major goal for the Vietnamese was to get the international community to deal with the new puppet government and abandon Pol Pot, something they expected to be relatively easy given Pol Pot's record of brutality and genocide. After some additional discussion, Thach allowed himself to be persuaded to relay the message to Phnom Penh. While the message was being passed, the U.S. delegation went up to the border and walked around among the camps. We actually walked across the border into Cambodia, we were on the Cambodian side of the border and saw the starvation, the misery and suffering of the people who had walked across the country seeking help.

Some of the relief agencies had gotten to the camps. They had distributed plastic sheeting which was being used for shelters, to collect rain water, to sleep on, etc. and they passed out some water buckets and some other very basic items, because the people there basically came with nothing. It was evident there were dozens of people dying each day and more and more people were coming into the area all the time, putting a further strain on the limited resources available to assist them. The area was also unsafe, because it was mined and booby trapped because of the fighting between the Vietnamese and the Khmer Rouge. So there was also a danger for the aid workers and the Khmer who were moving into the area.

When we returned to Bangkok, the Vietnamese told us the Khmer authorities had granted permission for us to visit Phnom Penh for a meeting. Holbrooke demurred because we had no diplomatic relations with the new Cambodian regime and felt it was too high a profile for him to go. So he sent Carney and myself to accompany the three Senators and their staff members. There was also a military officer who was the escort for the Senators because they were using a military flight to get to Southeast Asia and he also became part of the group. The U.S. Air Force plane then flew to Phnom Penh. If I remember correctly, the Cambodians and Vietnamese didn't want us flying in directly from Bangkok and so were routed along an air corridor that brought us east of Phnom Penh and we landed after an approach from the Vietnamese border region rather than from the Thai border on the west.

This is in the fall of 1979. We were the first Americans, the first official Americans back on the ground after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and actually the first after the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975. It was a truly eerie experience. When we landed at this airport, there was nothing else around aside from the people sent to meet us. We were put in a couple of vehicles and were driven into town. There was virtually no one around as we went down the highway into town. You recall, Pol Pot had evacuated Phnom Penh after his 1975 victory and the city was only now just being repopulated. As we entered the city proper, there were still very few signs of life. You would pass side streets with trees that had fallen several years before still blocking the roadway because nobody was there to use the roads. You'd see a house where the first floor would be occupied, but not the upper floors. Two or three houses down you'd see the upper floor occupied, but not the lower floor. The houses in between were empty. The streets were littered with appliances - stoves, refrigerators, air conditioners - that had been in these houses before but Pol Pot's crowd had torn them out as symbols of the decadence and corruption of the modern society they wanted to get rid of. We were taken to a hotel on the river which had been restored as the guest house and the Cambodians who had met us at the airport pointed proudly to their building and said it had running water, electricity, telephone service, etc. But of course this only applied to a very few buildings in the city. They also made quite clear that we would not be meeting with any Vietnamese that all of the sessions were to be with Khmer officials of the new government. The Cambodian official who met us and who brought us to the hotel and then subsequently to our meetings with the Foreign Minister was Hor Namhong. He had been a member of Sihanouk's Foreign Ministry years before but had left when the Lon Nol regime took power. He was now the special advisor to the Foreign Minister, Hun Sen. The Foreign Minister and many of the leaders of the new government were themselves former Khmer Rouge or Khmer who had been living in Vietnam and were sent back in with the invading Vietnamese forces to set up a new government. The Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister, Heng Samrin, had both been high ranking members of Pol Pot's regime but they found out they had been targeted for a purge a couple of years earlier and had fled to Vietnam. Although we were not sure of this, the other Khmer Rouge leaders thought these two were too close to the Vietnamese and Pol Pot didn't trust anyone who was close to the Vietnamese.

Hor Nam Hong told us to rest a little bit, freshen up and then we would have our meeting with the Foreign Minister. So, I quickly washed my hands and face and went up to the roof of this building just to see what I could see. The roof of the building was still littered with items that had been ripped out of the rooms and discarded there by the Pol Pot soldiers. As I was standing up there looking out at the river, the interpreter who had been assigned to work with us came up and said, "Don't tell anybody, but I used to be a Sergeant in the Lon Nol Army. I was trained at Fort Bragg as an MP. Don't tell this to anybody, nobody here knows. I've kept it hidden now and through the Pol Pot period when I worked in the fields like everyone else." Obviously, I kept his secret, but it was just a small personal story of how people survived in that society.

After about half an hour, we were picked up and taken to the meeting with Hun Sen. We sat down at a long table in the usual fashion, one side opposite the other but our group was larger than the Cambodian group and I ended up at one end of the table where I could see both sides as the talks were conducted. Let me digress a bit from the substance to describe Hun Sen. And, yes, this is the same man who is today running the government in Phnom Penh. He has been the face of the Vietnamese puppet regime and then the successful leader of the government that was established many years later when the Khmer opposition groups joined the Phnom Penh Government in new elections following the withdrawal of the Vietnamese military forces. I don't think I have ever seen a more intense-looking individual. No smiles, only grimaces, a grim face that was highlighted by a scar that cut right across one eye and down the side of his cheek. If at the time you wondered what a poster boy representing brutality might look like, he would have been a candidate. The Prime Minister, Heng Samrin, was in the background. Nobody saw him. He was in charge but the public face for the regime was the Foreign Minister.

The Senator's led by Senator Danforth made their pitch to Hun Sen offering to bring in international assistance to help the country, focused on the immediate starvation problems along the Thai border but also, he said, designed to help people throughout the country. He made clear this was not going to be Americans running all over the country. Assistance to the Khmer people along the border, he said, would largely go through Thailand because of the ease of transportation networks to bring supplies to that region. But Hun Sen was quite clear that in order for that to happen there had to be something in return. The quid pro quo was the establishment in Phnom Penh of an international assistance presence which would be able to assist poor Khmer who were in the center of the country or in areas where they were trying to move people back into the few cities that had existed before in Cambodia. What Hun Sen's side wanted, of course, was to parlay that international assistance presence into a more formal government relationship that would give legitimacy and credibility to the new regime which to that time had only been acknowledged by Moscow and some Eastern European countries. Although we had no authority from anybody to reach an agreement with the Phnom Penh regime, we did walk out of the meeting with a tentative agreement. The local authorities would permit assistance to be delivered to the people along the border and the Senators would go back to Washington and try to drum up support for an international aid presence in Phnom Penh. So now, there was a new international dimension to Southeast Asia - international support and resettlement for Vietnamese camp refugees and now an international feeding program for starving Khmer. The idea was largely welcomed by the NGOs and by a number of international agencies, but it became a real problem to generate movement out of the UN.

After our session ended last week, I told you the United Nations for several months refused to call for a donor's conference on Cambodia relief. Each time the issue came up, the Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, procrastinated and refused to move forward. What we didn't know was that Waldheim was being blackmailed by the Soviet Union because of his World War II Nazi party membership and activities. Waldheim was doing Moscow's bidding on a whole range of issues. But, this was only revealed many years later. In any event, we were just batting our heads against a stone wall. Waldheim argued the UN was already over-burdened by the refugee issue with problems in the Middle East with Palestinians, in several African areas, and the very large program for Vietnamese refugees that was larger than all the others combined. Every time the Cambodia issue came up he kept saying the UN couldn't do any more with refugees. So, even though the fundamentals for an understanding and agreement had already been worked out - the Vietnamese and the Cambodians would allow food aid along the border and would facilitate international presence in Hanoi for relief operations inside the country.

This was the fall of 1979 and we were in the midst of the annual General Assembly session. I had been sent by EA to work at the UN on a variety of programs and largely to assist Dick Holbrooke when he was in town to meet with Asian officials. I had one primary task, and I'll get back to that in a moment, but I want to close out this section on the Cambodian relief issue. One of the senior staff people on the NSC people came up to New York and he had been scheduled for a meeting with Waldheim. He was going to review a variety of U.S. concerns and not just Asian issues. I have tried for weeks to remember his name and I cannot. Before he was to go over and see Waldheim early that morning I saw him and asked him to stress to Waldheim the importance of getting an international assistance program started for Cambodia. Without an international donor conference being convened to pledge funds, I argued, the hundreds of people dying each day would soon reach thousands. There were already twenty to thirty thousand people on the border and more were coming every day. NGOs and international agencies could not keep up their programs on the border without a new influx of money from UN members, so it was imperative, I said, to get a conference convened. I saw him after the meeting, and he said, he had made the pitch as strong as he could, in fact, he said, he made it his primary pitch to the Secretary General, pushing his other issues to the background. The next day Waldheim announced the convocation of a conference in Geneva to talk about raising an international relief fund for the Khmer. After all these weeks of stalling, Waldheim turned around and approved the Conference. I felt a great deal of relief and accomplishment, but after I learned of Waldheim's work for and with the Soviets, I concluded the only reason he felt comfortable supporting a U.S. or western initiative was because he had done something to support a Soviet requirement just before it.

A little while ago, I mentioned I had been sent to New York to work on one specific issue in addition to the more general work for the EA Bureau and specifically to support Dick Holbrooke. I was asked to go to New York because the key issue for that fall was the Cambodia credentials issue. It was certain the Vietnamese puppet regime, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was going to try to take over the seat from Democratic Kampuchea (DK), the Pol Pot crowd. My main task was to liaise with the ASEAN representatives and help develop a strategy to block the PRK. Because we were going to need a lot of Third World support, the U.S. was not going to take the lead but would support ASEAN as the regional entity most affected by the Vietnamese invasion. In addition to blocking the PRK, we also had to ensure the DK maintained the seat even though it really only controlled a small portion of Cambodian territory in the mountains and along the border with Thailand. An empty seat, a strategy the Vietnamese and their allies would try in subsequent years would have eventually led to a PRK seating because it would have been a lot easier several years down the line to demonstrate the PRK control of the country and the absence of any DK presence would have made that more obvious. Working primarily with a young Singaporean diplomat who had served in Cambodia during the war, Kishore Mahbubani, we put together a plan and sold it first to the other ASEANs and then to the U.S. and its western allies. The man who took the lead in this presentation was the Singapore Ambassador to the UN, Tommy Koh. Koh later became Singapore's Ambassador to the United States as well as its Foreign Minister and he is currently an international businessman. Kishore also was very successful as a diplomat and became Permanent Secretary of his Foreign Ministry and ultimately Singapore's UN Ambassador. We based our strategy on the principle of the sovereignty of governments and that it was improper to displace a sovereign state by force of arms as the result of a foreign invasion. This, not surprisingly, played well in the Third World where smaller states were constantly seeing themselves threatened by bigger neighbors. Of course, the Vietnamese and the Heng Samrin regime argued there was no "invasion" and that the Vietnamese had been "invited" to assist the down-trodden Khmer people. They also pointed to the terrible brutality of the Pol Pot regime and argued they had done Cambodia and the world a favor by putting an end to the slaughter and misery caused by the DK regime. But, those arguments were not sufficient to build enough votes to eliminate the DK representatives and our strategy was successful. Over the next decade and more, the ASEAN team got bigger and bigger numbers of votes to maintain the DK seat in the UN General Assembly as they gradually turned first year abstentions into positive votes. So for my three or four weeks at the UN in 1979, I felt pretty good about what had been accomplished. Of course, the United States Government and the State Department took a lot of criticism from human rights advocates who could not stomach our support for the DK in any shape or form. But, although we had to hold our nose as we did so, it was more important to vote to keep the DK around than to end up acknowledging the Vietnamese invasion. That could have made for a lot more problems in the region as well as in the overall international community. By establishing this as a fundamental principle, we in effect made the case that aggression against a neighbor would not be condoned by the international community and, as a proper stance for the United Nations, pressed for peaceful negotiations as the primary tool to resolve international disputes.

Our successful UN effort had an additional effect and that was the gradual international isolation of Vietnam. Based on the international condemnation of the Vietnamese invasion, the U.S., Western Europe, China, Japan and the other non-communist nations of Asia cut off trade and other economic connections with the Vietnamese. This meant Hanoi was pretty much locked into a Soviet-Eastern Europe connection for international trade and as a potential source of development assistance. Aside from maintaining embassies in the region and across Europe, the Vietnamese had no ties, no economic relationship with any western or any other significant Asian country. This international isolation, the continuing cost of the war, and the weight of Vietnam's own domestic economic mismanagement through the imposition of a Socialist/Communist economic programs led to the eventual collapse of Vietnam's economic system. This occurred around the same time the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites were hitting the same economic wall in the late 1980's. This economic collapse in turn convinced the Vietnamese to try a more open model of economic development, as the Chinese had done in 1979, and to get out of Cambodia through a political dialogue with ASEAN and the US. The latter dialogue then led to the normalization of U.S.-Vietnamese relations in 1995 where again I had an opportunity to play a role.

Q: What was happening on the ground while you were doing this? Because, there is this peculiar thing we weren't supporting Pol Pot, but we had another small, I mean we were supplying arms and carrying on a little war weren't we, or not?

HARTER: No. We were not supplying arms to the Khmer Rouge and not even to the non-Communist forces that were created a few years later as we tried to build a coalition of Khmer forces that would not simply show the face of Pol Pot and the DK as the opposition to the Vietnamese imposed regime. We limited US assistance to non-military items, but we were certainly not inhibiting our friends and allies in ASEAN from providing the military assistance. On the other hand, I don't doubt some U.S. weapons that had been in the hands of the Thai military ended up in with the Khmer Rouge or the forces of Sihanouk and Son Sann. And, during this period, the Khmer Rouge was being supplied by the PRC.

Q: Was the CIA involved in this and were you connected, were you doing?

HARTER: I didn't have any contact with the CIA on this issue at all. Whether or not they were involved in the process of helping the Thais who were helping the Khmer Rouge or working directly with the non-Communist resistance, I just don't know.

Q: Listening to you talk about our policy then, you can't help but refer to what's happening today. Essentially, we went into Iraq last year in order to dispose a horrible dictatorship. I mean, there were excuses, but the main thing was that we figure this was a menace, but also much that was what Saddam Hussein in Iraq was doing to his people. Pol Pot was doing, whatever he did was twice as bad as what Saddam Hussein was doing. But, they are both horrible people and horrible policies. But, in a way it almost seems to be we were speaking out on two sides of our mouth.

HARTER: Well, you certainly could make that same argument on the grounds that we and the international community condemned the Vietnamese for invading Cambodia and deposing Pol Pot. While we currently can claim some international support based on Saddam's supposed build-up of weapons of mass destruction, you're right, it is still an invasion and the overthrow of another nation's government. There is a bit of a difference, however, in so far as the US has indicated its intention to help develop new national elections for the people of Iraq and has committed to the withdrawal of US forces from the very beginning. It took Hanoi several years to declare an intention to remove its forces - I believe the target was 1990 - and there was no question of the government in Phnom Penh being anything but a Vietnamese puppet. The regime was installed directly by the Vietnamese when their army moved across the border. It was only much later on that "elections" were held to validate the leadership Hanoi had installed.

Q: Was there concern on your part or other people dealing with this about this implicit support of Pol Pot?

HARTER: Yes, absolutely. Initially much of the focus on Cambodia was to help the refugees on the border, finding ways to get assistance to these people, and not the politics of the situation. Even during the first year UN vote to keep out Heng Samrin's PRK regime, there was not too much dissent or criticism based on the implicit support for Pol Pot. But that was not ignored for long and public criticism of the US was stimulated by the NGOs and human rights activists in particular. Other countries, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and nations in Western Europe faced similar pressures domestically to cut ties at the UN with Pol Pot. It was never a case of arguing in favor of seating the PRK in these critiques, it was just simply the idea of having to support Pol Pot. But, as I said earlier, in the UN context, an empty seat formula would have eventually led to the seating of the PRK and the US and ASEAN did not want to take that risk and so we all agreed it was better to keep the DK around at the UN.

Going back just for a moment to your Iraq-Cambodia parallel, I certainly hope the parallel does not suggest there will be a similar requirement for American military personnel to continue on in Iraq the way the conflict continued for the Vietnamese in Cambodia. The Vietnamese had significant numbers of military personnel in Cambodia throughout the 1980s and into the first few years of the 1990s. But, as in the case of the U.S. and its withdrawal from Vietnam, domestic pressures in Vietnam were part of the government's final decision to abandon their military presence in Cambodia. I suspect it will again be U.S. domestic issues that will take precedence over any longer term plan to assist in providing stability in Iraq. When the U.S. military forces do leave Iraq there will still be a tendentious political situation and the outcome will still be very unclear.

Q: While you are looking at Vietnam during this time, were you seeing any new developments? By this time Hanoi was trying to absorb South Vietnam. Were we seeing it or were we seeing that Hanoi was, is hand was so heavy that it really didn't make any difference what maybe the South Vietnamese felt.

HARTER: From the interviews in and out of the refugee camps, one of the things that was obvious, National Liberation Front, that is the southern Communists all pretty much disappeared. This was the group the anti-war crowd pointed to argue there was a civil war in Vietnam. Only a few of them were co-opted into the national leadership. Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, who had been the public persona for the National Liberation Front during the war, became a Vice President in the Hanoi Government and remained active into the new millennium, serving still as an international figure to represent the Vietnamese government. But she had no political power or constituency to contend for power. One Southerner who had moved to the North after the 1954 French departure, Vo Van Kiet, afterwards emerged as an important leader first in Ho Chi Minh City and then later as the Prime Minister in Hanoi. Another, Nguyen Van Linh, who had been sent back to the South, later became the General Secretary of the Party. But even though these men moved Vietnam's economic reform policies to the forefront in the 1990s, they were long-time Communists and, during the war, had been taking directions from the Hanoi Party leaders.

The people who were running the Government in Hanoi weren't Southerners who had been in the South all of the time and who had been more or less leading an independent, anti-Saigon government campaign down there. Many of those people were wiped out in the 1968 Tet attacks and those who survived largely disappeared. The Hanoi Party apparatus took over the running of the country by sending its cadre to the south to take on the important jobs. Re-education camps were established by the Hanoi authorities to deal with those people from the former regime who had not fled the country. The Vietnamese took all the senior military and civilian personnel who were still in the country and sent them away for periods of re-education, the higher the rank or position the longer the term of imprisonment. For many of these people it was a death sentence. The camps required daily labor and provided minimal food and health care. Relatives who visited these camps when special visitation opportunities were permitted witnessed and documented the harsh treatment. Later on, after we had established the Orderly Departure Program, the U.S. Government successfully lobbied to take a lot of these people and their families to the United States.

Even senior enlisted military personnel, technical people who worked for the government were sent away although generally for only short periods of time. South Vietnamese military men, even those of very low rank, found it difficult to get jobs or any kind of employment in the new Vietnam. They had no access to land; they had no access to the new economic zones, established to resettle city dwellers back in the countryside to open up new agricultural lands. Some of the former South Vietnamese military were sent to areas that had been mined during the war to clear the mines or to develop and re-claim wasteland but that too was a dead-end street even for those who survived the hardships. Even today the cyclo (pedicab) drivers in Ho Chi Minh City and other provincial cities in the south are former South Vietnamese military. Former South Vietnamese military men in their fifties and sixties who have never held any other job since the end of the war. Economically, Hanoi outlawed private enterprise and trading activities and confiscated businesses and shops. Factories were nationalized. Lands were redistributed with a view to creating cooperatives and collectives with state management.

It was the typical economic and political set-up of a Communist society. Internationally, Hanoi had signed on with Moscow, thanks to the 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, but its other relationships were driven by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the subsequent "lesson" from the Chinese.

Q: When did the China invasion come about?

HARTER: It was February of 1979. It came during our long weekend for Washington's birthday, President's Day weekend 1979. And, it came in the midst of an absolutely horrendous snow storm. I had learned about the invasion from the TV or the radio. I got up very early in the morning - probably around 3:00 am - and it had been snowing for some time. It was still snowing quite heavily. I was living in Reston in a townhouse and I shoveled all of the snow between my house and the car for about two hours, thinking I had to get to the office. As I reached the car and looked beyond it I could see nothing else had been shoveled and the streets had not been plowed at all. There was already close to two feet of snow on the ground and there was no way I was even going to get out of the parking area. Around 8:00 am I phoned in to Steve Lyne and said, "No way can I make it through this." He had just arrived from his home which was either in Bethesda or Chevy Chase. He'd been able to get on a bus and ride in on the main road into the city. Our Laos Desk Officer, Ed McWilliams who lived off Route 50 between Arlington and Falls Church walked the several miles from his house to the Department. And, the two of them basically stayed there in the office for the next three days trying to deal with the invasion issues while the rest of us waited to be dug out. I didn't get in to the office until Thursday. I had tried to drive in on Wednesday but the roads were so icy and treacherous that I didn't even get out of Reston. There wasn't anything the State Department was going to do about the Chinese invasion of Vietnam but if there were a couple more of us in the office we might have been able to provide information to senior Department officers in a more timely way.

Q: Had there been signals that this was coming, either from our China desk or from your desk or from the CIA or the military?

HARTER: Yes, intelligence had recorded the border build-up over the previous month and weeks. And Deng Xiaoping had made it quite clear during his late January visit he was going to invade Vietnam. The Chinese were the ones who "trumped" Hanoi's political plays over these last few months of 1978 and the first two months of 1979. China had successfully normalized relations with the U.S. but Vietnam had not. Hanoi got its treaty with the Soviet Union and had invaded Cambodia. But then, Deng came to the US and shortly thereafter invaded Vietnam, making it appear as though Washington had blessed or at least acquiesced in this endeavor. China emerged as the champion of the underdog while Vietnam came across as a bully and lost much of the cachet in the Third World it had earned by defeating the U.S. and capturing the southern part of Vietnam

Q: What was behind it?

HARTER: Beijing had a two-fold purpose. First was to provide support to its ally in Cambodia. Second, it really did want to teach the Vietnamese a lesson. China wanted Hanoi to know quite clearly it could not operate with impunity in Southeast Asia on its own; the Soviet treaty was not a real protection; and an effort to occupy Cambodia ran the risk of still greater Chinese pressure on the border. Yes, I think the Chinese were also upset about the expulsion of the Hoa from Vietnam, forcing China to deal with a lot of Overseas Chinese who were not ready for life under the Beijing system either. China was also concerned about Vietnamese actions along its northern border where the Vietnamese had made claims to Chinese territory and occasionally harassed Chinese villagers. But, overall Cambodia was the main issue, calling Hanoi short on its ambition to dominate the region and letting it know that China was next door and no Soviet troops were likely to be able to help the Vietnamese.

But it's also important to note that the "lesson" cut both ways. The Chinese lost a lot of men in these battles along the border. The regular Vietnamese army and the local militia units in the area stood up quite well to the Chinese forces and, while Hanoi gathered a number of regular army units around Hanoi to prevent a drive to the capital, it did not have to withdraw forces from Cambodia. The Chinese invasion force was large enough to overrun the border and several large towns close to the border were leveled. They also lost the areas where they had tried to encroach on Chinese land and the Chinese forces sat atop all the hills in the northern region for quite some time. In addition to losing a lot of men, the Chinese also discovered their communications, their basic infantry weapons, and their tactics were out of date. They were still using bugles to signal their forces to advance and their logistics system was not efficient, still moving a lot of supplies by hand. Troops from several different Chinese Military Regions had been used in the attack and they did not coordinate well with one another. The Chinese had not paid a lot of attention to their military forces and it showed and Beijing had to go back to the planning rooms to figure out ways to modernize and upgrade their military.

The military had been totally politicized by Mao Zedong over the years following the Korean War. The PLA had been the primary group sent out to shut down the Red Guard excesses during the Cultural Revolution campaigns and again when the Cultural Revolution's stalwarts, the Gang of Four, were themselves removed. When the Cultural Revolution had gone too far, the military had to take over factories, control local factional fighting, and take on the management of cities and provinces throughout the country because many of the older Party elders had been purged by Mao and the Cultural Revolution as "rightists" and "capitalist roaders." The Chinese military, even when I was in Hong Kong in the mid to late 1970s, still retained many of these roles they had assumed a decade earlier. No wonder they did not have the quality of military forces to match evenly with the Vietnamese who had been fighting the French and the Americans at least since 1945.

Q: This war, reading accounts of the cultural revolution that came out later by autobiographies, this war was terribly unpopular too. Saying this war apparently caused considerable disquiet with the young people, particularly the intellectuals, young men who were sort of like our Vietnam War.

HARTER: I'm guessing it was not a popular war in China because there was still too much uncertainty at home. But that feeling was not readily apparent at the time, at least not to me where I was sitting. I think some people were pleased to see Hanoi get a come-uppance after its cavalier behavior toward the South Vietnamese and the boat people. It also wasn't all that apparent what Beijing's military objective was, I mean how far did Beijing plan to go with the invasion. Did they intend to take over a major northern city, drive to Hanoi and make the Hanoi leaders flee the city, occupy more territory than they actually did? Were the significant Chinese losses responsible for making Beijing stop where it did rather than that being the "limit" of Beijing's original aims? I'm not sure even scholars today have answered those questions. But aside from an occupation of territory a dozen miles deep into Vietnam, the Chinese really didn't go much further and they never forced Hanoi to cut back on its forces in Cambodia.

Q: How did we feel about this thing? You know, from your perspective, but what you are getting from others?

HARTER: Well, even for those of us who had spent a good deal of time working on Vietnam issues, I think there was a feeling that it was good for Hanoi to get taught a lesson by the Chinese. Vietnam had been throwing its weight around for the past several years since the overthrow of the South Vietnamese Government in 1975 and a lot of people were repulsed by the re-education camps and the boat refugee sagas. And, by signing on with the Soviet Union, Vietnam cast itself more as an enemy country than a potential friend to the United States. China, on the other hand, was on a bit of any upswing because of the normalization of relations and a generally good feeling about Deng's visit to the United States. Yes, China had invaded Vietnam, but Vietnam had invaded and was occupying Cambodia, so I'd say there was very little reason for Hanoi to get much of a sympathy vote from people in the US Government or among the general public.

Another important development helped deepen the ties with China shortly after the Deng visit and the invasion of Vietnam. The spring Congressional recess found China as the top venue for Congressional delegation fact-finding visits. There were so many delegations signed up to go to China during the Easter break in 1979 that the China desk didn't have enough escort officers to accompany them. And, even though I was working on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia affairs, I was pressed into service as a Chinese language officer to accompany a delegation to China. After the normalization of relations, this was the first favorable opportunity for the CODELS (Congressional Delegations) to go there. No one wanted to go to China in the winter and normalization wasn't official until January 1, 1979 so the Christmas recess didn't make sense either. The Easter recess provided the first opportunity and I believe there were between five and nine different delegations that went to China stretched across the two-week break period. Just as an anecdotal aside, let me relate a little story from that trip. Everyone knows the military always tries to maintain the very best relationship with the House Armed Services Committee. These are the men and women who pass on the military budget and do all the rest of the work that supports the military. So, whenever the House Armed Service Committee wants to travel they get super treatment. Melvin Price was the Chairman of the House Arms Services Committee and he was a very senior member of the Congress and the Democratic leadership. But, there were so many delegations with very senior people who had signed up earlier to go to China that Mel Price's ranking on the list of candidates for military planes dropped to the worst plane in the fleet. While others flew in Boeing 707s configured for VIPs, we got the converted tanker aircraft with the seats facing backwards and only two side-facing windows in the entire plane. The House Armed Services Committee ended up on the worst plane in the USAF passenger fleet.

I thought it was really quite amusing to see the House Armed Services Committee traveling under these circumstances. Now, there were a number of very interesting and amusing things that occurred during that particular trip. It was Easter and of course we had the Embassy in Beijing for the first time and among the delegation was a Congresswoman from Colorado by the name of Pat Schroeder, who later ran for President. Pat Schroeder decided she was going to do something for the kids at the U.S. mission Beijing. So, she brought a full-size rabbit suit with a huge head to help the kids in Beijing celebrate Easter. On the day we were going to the Embassy when she'd have a chance to meet the kids, we started our program with a trip to the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs outside Beijing. This meant the rabbit outfit was on the bus as we went out to these sites. So pictures were snapped of Mrs. Schroeder and other members of the delegation wearing the rabbit head at the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs. Some of the press in Beijing learned about it afterward and some may have made reference to it in articles they wrote, but I don't think any of them were able to get "hard evidence" of what had taken place. There were also a couple of other incidents which demonstrated how Congressional delegations occasionally let down their hair outside the regular routine of business and official meetings. For example, every time we visited a different factory or commune there would be welcoming signs at the entrance. A Republican Congressman from Alabama was always doing "Kilroy Was Here" poses behind the signs with just his hands and part of his face sticking up from behind the sign.

This was also my first experience as an escort for a Congressional delegation. During the military briefing for the delegation about how the travel arrangements for the trip were being planned, the military stressed the lack of hygiene and cleanliness in China and how it would be very tricky to find potable water and good quality food. So the military was prepared to provide just about any standard American snack food to make the Congressmen and women feel at home. I have never previously or since seen a group so concerned with its snacks. We traveled to China - not counting the liquor, bottled water, soft drinks and beer - with 21 foot lockers full of snack food. We had potato chips, pretzels, canned peanuts, Hostess cupcakes, some varieties of canned meat hors d'oeuvres, canned salmon and smoked oysters and a bunch of other things I've probably overlooked. As soon as we landed in a city and were taken to our hotel, the military escorts assembled all of the food and drink in the control room so the members could and did fill up on snack food. And, once they returned from the evening meal, the same spread was available until they all turned in for the night. After all, nobody could foretell what the Chinese would turn out for each meal and whether the various Congressional palates could survive it. But, as I said, I've never before or since seen a Congressional group travel with so much extra food as this particular group did.

But while I'm focusing on some amusing aspects of the trip, I must also say that the delegation worked hard and they had serious meetings with Chinese government officials. They raised international issues and bilateral relations concerns as well as issues that affected their local constituencies. They asked the Chinese about the invasion of Vietnam; and they wanted to talk about how China's modernization effort was starting to develop. A Congressman from Northern Virginia, Paul Trible, was on that delegation, along with his wife. He later became a Senator and was unsuccessful as a candidate for Governor here in the state.

It was a very interesting experience for me. I had another opportunity to work with a Congressional group later in 1979, or maybe 1980, when we finally held a fund raising conference in Geneva to aid the starving Cambodians. I was sent along with the delegation led by Deputy Secretary Warren Christopher to support the team. I thought it was a really good idea to get members of Congress to participate in these delegations. It gave the Congressmen more of an exposure to and an understanding of the kinds of issues that were a part of the international dialogue. Their exposure to the issues generally also meant extra voices and support when it came time to vote the budget monies needed to meet the international obligations.

I want to recount another amusing anecdote from that trip to Geneva. The pledging conference was being held in the old League of Nations Building. The League of Nations Building, in addition to its big assembly hall, had a lot of smaller meeting rooms, just like the kinds of rooms the Congressional committees would meet in on the Hill. Our Congressional delegation, probably three or four members, was meeting sequentially with all of the five ASEAN Foreign Ministers and I was there to assist them. Although I don't recall the names of any of the other Congressmen in the group, the focal point for this story was Maryland Democratic Congressman, Doc (Clarence) Long. Doc Long apparently was not a person to sit still and listen to a lot of other people talk for a long time. The Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Foreign Minister Mochtar (Kusumaatmadja) was making a presentation. While Doc Long was apparently not much for listening, Mochtar was certainly known for being loquacious. He was a very distinguished statesman and very savvy, but his presentation kept winding on and on. Because the room where we were meeting was some sort of committee room there was a gavel on one of the main desks. During this extended presentation from Mochtar, Doc Long reached over across the table, grabbed the gavel and pounded it a few times on the table, saying "Mr. Foreign Minister I'm afraid your time is up, we're going to have to move on to the next person here and continue with our discussion." Mochtar was absolutely flabbergasted; he didn't know what to say and I guess he just said, "Thank you", and got up and left the chair for the next speaker. I had never seen a Foreign Minister treated that way before and I'm sure Foreign Minister Mochtar had never been gaveled into silence either. When I later recounted this story to other members of the delegation they couldn't believe Doc Long's behavior, but they all found it amusing.

Q: Well tell me, one of the things that are always a fact of life is that being on these delegations with Congress allows you to talk to them. Did you find yourself pumped a lot about your knowledge of China and all? I mean was this a good time to get your pitch in and all?

HARTER: Yes, very much so. Even though, I was working on Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia when I went to China with the House Armed Services Committee, the members expected me to know everything about China. China had been closed since 1945 and these groups of Congressmen and women who went in Easter 1979 were among the first to get into China, meet Chinese leaders and travel around the country. The trip was important for them and gave them stature among their colleagues and gave them a new subject to raise with their constituents. They were especially interested in contrasting what we were seeing in 1979 with what I had seen during my first trip in 1975. They also had questions about how the government and the economy were run in China. Our delegation started in Beijing and we met with a Vice Premier, with Foreign Ministry people and some other government officials. The delegation then flew to Shanghai, to Nanjing, and finally to Guangzhou in the south before we exited through Hong Kong. The biggest problem the Chinese had at this time was keeping these several Congressional delegations from tripping over one another. So, they all got sent to different places at different times, because they were all traveling during a ten-day to two-week recess window and I think the planes were probably crisscrossing in China. I took notes during all of the meetings and at the end of the trip, I wrote the trip report for the delegation which was then published as a Congressional document by the House Armed Services Committee.

Q: Did you suffer from what, people who served in Beijing, later use to describe as death by duck?

HARTER: No, I think we only had one duck meal in Beijing. I must say, however, this was still the period when the Chinese had big welcome and return banquets for all the visiting official delegations. The big banquets in Beijing were held in the Great Hall of the People alongside Tiananmen Square and there'd be a hundred or more tables of ten or twelve in the room, not all necessarily in use. You had one or two members of the delegation and representatives from the host country divided up at each table. You would have 15 or 20 courses, including two or three soup courses. There were hundreds of wait staff for the meals and it was just one course after another. They would just keep bringing out food and people would be drinking toasts. Now over the year's this system has changed and the banquets are not so formidable, but back in 1979 it was still the old-style and you did the huge banquet to welcome the visitors and they in turn provided a return banquet in the same venue the following evening. I don't think anybody in the delegation got ill from the Beijing banquets or the other meals we had but then they were always fortified by their before and after dinner snacks and drinks. Death by duck, as I recall largely came up as an issue a couple of years later as the U.S. tourists began to hit China, particularly senior citizens who wanted to see China before they died and they couldn't handle the high fat and grease content from the roasted Peking Duck dishes. Even with that reputation, however, nobody passed up an opportunity to eat Peking Duck at one of the Beijing specialty duck restaurants.

Q: Well, the problem was I'm told, _____ people working in the commercial section later. I mean they could eat them, but they would go to these dinners maybe three times a week. I mean, enough is enough.

HARTER: Oh yes, that's certainly true. If you worked in the Embassy or the Consulates you might have to go to banquets a few times each week. When I was in Southern China later on as Consul General, I was going to official functions easily three or more times a week. A lot of this was business oriented. U.S. companies coming in and hosting a banquet or a return banquet and the Chinese officials and business representatives doing the same. That was the business and commercial side of things. In addition, as Consul General you also had special gatherings for official visitors and Consular Corps activities focused on international visitors or linked to the local government activities. After awhile, these gatherings could indeed become deadly. But, by this time, there was a much smaller menu. You didn't get pushed to eat as much as you did in the earlier Great Hall of the People banquets with 15 to 20 courses. In the late 1980s and early 1990s when I was in Guangzhou you were down to probably six or seven courses, but there was also a lot more drinking of toasts by that time, which created a different sort of problem.

Q: Well, one place, before we knock off this session, you haven't mentioned is Laos, which we actually had relations there during this 1978 to 1980 period. Could you talk about Laos?

HARTER: Well, as you say, quite correctly, we never closed our Embassy in Laos in 1975, we just stayed on and neither the Lao government nor the Vietnamese who were working very, very closely with the Lao tried to push us out. We had property problems - the Lao confiscated some diplomatic property that we owned; we had harassment of our communications and restrictions on movements across the border; we had very limited staffing options because the total number of official Americans permitted in the country was limited to perhaps a dozen people. But, we kept the Chargï¿½ in place and nobody told him to leave. The Chargï¿½ came out, attended the periodic Chiefs of Mission meetings; he reported on the situation in Laos; and each time he left he was permitted to return. Before I left Hong Kong in 1978, I visited Laos to give me some better understanding of the situation before I started the job as Deputy Director of the Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs. I spent a few days there, flew up to Luang Prabang to see the old royal capital on a local Lao Aviation flight which featured passengers in the back of the plane and baggage, including live chickens, in the front of the plane.

Vientiane, the Lao capital, had clearly regressed since the communists had taken over in 1975. The main market was a huge enclosed area that had been built during the war with international assistance funds, probably ours, but it was empty. There were a few little shops, stalls along the side street there selling foodstuffs, some clothing, daily use items. There were still a couple of gold ornament sellers, the last of a relatively large group that had existed up until 1975. The Embassy reported a couple of weeks later that the last few sellers had fled to Thailand. The pace of life in Laos was also very different from what I had experienced in Vietnam back during wartime. Life moved at a very slow pace and you saw very little of the dynamism and bustle visible in most other places in Southeast Asia. I had not visited Laos in the pre-1975 period, so I really couldn't compare it directly that way, but other people who had that experience told me Laos had always moved at a slower pace.

The Australians had a fairly large diplomatic mission which also included an aid element. They had a small clubhouse, a gathering place along the river, the river which divided Laos and Thailand where members of the diplomatic community would sit on the veranda to chat and have drinks. Periodically, diplomats said, Lao soldiers nearby could be seen at dusk shooting at Lao civilians who were trying to swim across the river and escape to Thailand. Some would be killed, others who were wounded might be brought back to the Lao side. While Laos certainly was not "moving forward" under the new regime, you did not have the feeling the country was unable to feed itself or to survive. Nonetheless, life was certainly hard and there was still a great deal of tension between the Lao Communist officialdom and the ordinary citizens who largely preferred being left alone. After the disastrous Khmer Rouge victory and the imposition of Pol Pot's "agrarian socialism" followed by the Vietnamese invasion of the country, Cambodia certainly was a basket case. Laos seemed to be sort of muddling through at a very, very low standard of living.

Two young Political Officers in the Vientiane Embassy shortly thereafter returned to Washington and joined the EA Bureau. Ed McWilliams became the Lao Desk Officer about the same time I joined the desk and Wendy Chamberlin became a Staff Assistant to Dick Holbrooke in the EA Front Office. Wendy most recently was our Ambassador in Pakistan and was a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Narcotics Bureau. When I left VLC, I moved into the East Asia Bureau's front office as Dick Holbrooke's Executive Assistant and subsequently, with the change of administration, held the same job under John Holdridge when he became Assistant Secretary [May 1981-January 1982].

Q: Did maintaining a presence in Vientiane play any part in our calculations or was it just, I mean it was just showing the flag?

HARTER: Yes, I think that was pretty much it. I don't think there was any calculated policy decision that said we had to hold on to a presence in Laos. I think it was fortuitous that the situation did not appear to be sufficiently threatening that we felt we had to close the Embassy to protect the lives of the American personnel. I think if we had closed the Embassy when the Pathet Lao came into the capital to take over, we probably wouldn't have gone back in. There was no real motivation to go back in, it was just sort of, well we were there and since they weren't making it unbearable we might as well just stay there. I don't know if this had anything to do with it, but perhaps the fact the US had been involved in brokering the Pathet Lao into the Government coalition at the time of the Geneva Talks of 1962 meant they had less of a dislike for us than the North Vietnamese had.

Q: Let's pick up your career in 1980 and talk about the transition from the Carter Administration to Reagan Administration. How did you get this job?)

HARTER: In the summer of 1980, Dick Holbrooke's Executive Assistant, Ken Quinn, was leaving the office and I was winding up my two-year stint in VLC. Holbrooke was interviewing candidates to replace Quinn and I was interested and applied. I don't recall how many people were interviewing for the position or whether Holbrooke had any special interest in me because of the Vietnam desk background, but he ended up selecting me for the position. I knew, of course, that with an election coming up in November there might be a change of administrations and I might only be in the job for a few months. But, I thought it was worth the risk because of the broader exposure I'd have to EA issues and that I'd get a better idea of how the Department worked. The idea of a one-year assignment was attractive to me because I really wanted to return to work on China.

Let me insert something here related to my VLC work on the refugee issues. Unfortunately I just noticed in the paper this week that Frank Sieverts died. When the Refugee Bureau was being established during this period, Frank was one of the key people working on Vietnamese refugee issues. He was the point person when we went to Geneva for UN donor assistance conferences and he was involved in pulling together the international response for Khmer relief as well. Frank knew just about everybody on the Hill and was always working with members and staff to drum up support for the refugee needs. He was highly respected by the NGOs who looked to him to set them straight on what could and could not be done in the various locales. Frank was just tireless. I don't think anybody ever contributed as much to the overall issue of care for refugees as Frank Sieverts.

Q: What were your duties in Holbrooke's Front Office?

HARTER: He was the Assistant Secretary for East Asia.(EA). Although he had been involved in the normalization effort to establish relations with the PRC, he had been the point person in the Carter Administration to conclude the normalization of relations with Vietnam. And again, as I'd mentioned in our previous discussion, since that was primarily a State Department focused operation, it fell victim to the NSC-directed effort on China normalization. As I noted earlier, Holbrooke was also deeply involved in the new policies toward Cambodia so I guess you could say Southeast Asia took up a lot of his attention during the Carter Administration.

Q: Did Holbrooke - Holbrooke wasn't seen as China normalization screwing up, being screwed up by recognition of Vietnam or was he conflicted by different advice?

HARTER: I don't believe he felt normalization of relations with Vietnam would complicate the normalization with China. But, he was getting advice to that effect, certainly from Roger Sullivan who was the Bureau's Deputy Assistant Secretary covering China, and he was getting the negative feedback from the White House NSC China officer, Mike Oxenberg who was the primary advocate of this view. At the end, I think it basically came down to who had the most clout to push their view to the fore. And, it was clearly the White House staff that had the clout, and were able to successfully argue we should not in any way jeopardize a smooth normalization of relations with China. Again, as I said before, there were very legitimate reasons why we needed to ask the Vietnamese about their policies in the region before we committed to the final normalization steps. And, there is a legitimate question of whether we would have looked really foolish to have normalized relations with Vietnam in the fall of 1979 in the midst of a massive expulsion of refugees, a new alliance and base agreements with the Soviet Union, to say nothing of the imminent invasion of Cambodia. These issues gave us a convenient out not to move ahead. But the reason we stopped was because of the presumed obstacle we were creating which would have interfered with normalization of relations with China. To me that was just a red herring. It wasn't real.

Q: This is an often heard argument; it was used with dealing with Russia and the Baltic countries you can't do anything there because it will upset the Russians and all. What was Mike Oxenberg's background?

HARTER: He was a China specialist out of the academic world. He'd been at Michigan, had been active politically with some of the foreign affairs people during the Carter election campaign and he got picked to go to the White House.

Q: Well, you've been dealing obviously with Chinese affairs for some time. How did you find him?

HARTER: Well, I thought he was absolutely right to be pushing ahead on normalization with China. From my own academic background on China, I too believed we needed to deal with the realities of China and not remain linked to Taiwan as the sole representative of the Chinese people. Particularly, at this time when Deng was turning China in a new direction, there was an opportunity to really engage with the Chinese on a whole range of issues, regional issues, global issues that could help shape how China emerged into the world. And so, I thought it made a lot of sense to go ahead and establish full diplomatic relations. At the same time, I was ticked off at Oxenberg because I thought he pushed a false argument to stop us from dealing with Vietnam. The other issues that I just discussed not withstanding, I believed we also ought to be normalizing relations with Vietnam to try to close that earlier chapter of hostility. But when we stopped moving forward on normalization and set up a block to the Vietnamese installed regime in Cambodia, we simply froze the clock for the next dozen years until Hanoi opted to move its forces out of Cambodia.

Q: OK. You are working for Holbrooke. How did you find him at that time? I would note that now, in April 2004, he seems close to presidential candidate Senator John Kerry and is rumored to be a prospective Secretary of State.

HARTER: Well, he was still young and brash. He was a couple of months younger than I was and had joined the State Department a bit before I did. He'd had a much different Vietnam experience, working in the Embassy and then going to the Paris Peace Talks where he and John Negroponte had been key staff people for Kissinger. We had a shared background and interest in that particular part of the world. As an individual, he was certainly irreverent, and regularly poked fun at his rivals and superiors. He was constantly on the telephone. I've never known anyone to spend as much time on the telephone. He would stay in the office for hours after the normal close of business, doing nothing but talking on the phone. This was his "political" time where he schmoozed with other "players" to find out what was going on and to insert his own thoughts into the process in other parts of the government.

Because I was a single parent at that time, I was concerned about how my own work schedule would enable me to get home to the children. After a couple of nights of late duty, he turned to me one evening and said, "I've got staff assistants who are going to be here to take care of me until I leave, unless there's some kind of special issue that we've got to finish up, I'm perfectly amenable to you leaving at 7:00." So, I would leave at 7:00 pm and drive to Reston and have dinner with my kids before they went to bed. So, although he clearly could be very demanding from a performance perspective, he was also understanding enough to acknowledge that after 7:00 pm most of the Department was no longer working, except for those dealing with a crisis task force, and that people needed to deal with their personal lives outside the building. Still, it was a regular 12 hour day, as I was usually in the office by 7:00 am, except on Saturdays when I usually worked from 8:00 am to about 1:00 pm.

Q: What does an EAP Staff Assistant do? What is the SA's view of a bureau's workings?

HARTER: As Dick's Executive Assistant, I was expected to coordinate the running of the office along with his personal Secretary, making sure the Staff Assistants knew their responsibilities, had workable rotating schedules, got the daily paperwork to Holbrooke in a timely fashion. The Secretary controlled his outer office, screening visitors and calls and I sat on the back side next to a separate door, where I could provide him with access to other people he wanted to see quickly or to join in on already started discussions. I sat in on weekly meetings of other agency officials who worked on EA issues - NSC, Defense, CIA, etc. - and kept track of issues and taskings that grew out of those sessions. I tried to provide advance guidance to Bureau offices about what was likely to come up in our weekly meetings or to flag issues Dick wanted to discuss. Occasionally I would task desks to provide materials Dick needed and sometimes I tried to prepare things myself to meet his requirements, particularly if the issues were ones that had been developed in the inter-agency meeting sessions. If Dick traveled on EA business, I usually accompanied him to provide staff support and I would accompany him to meetings on the seventh floor when it was possible to include staff. I served as an informal liaison with other Bureaus and tried to make sure that issues with multi-Bureau involvement were being moved through their offices in time to meet deadlines. If one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries missed a big meeting, I'd try to keep them appraised of decisions that had been taken or how issues were discussed.

After Carter lost the election, the Administration, of course, was winding down. Holbrooke was still trying to do a variety of different things, including getting the Cambodia relief effort on track and making sure the UN seating debate resulted in the PRK being kept out. He maintained a very active connection with people on the Hill. After the three Senators went to Cambodia, a group of Congresswomen took a delegation to the border and I believe another Congressional group followed them a few weeks later. I didn't go again but Tim Carney went with the Congresswomen and I think they took another State Department person as well. They too returned committed to finding ways to assist the Khmer refugees on the border and this was another part of Holbrooke's final work. During this period, the situation in the Philippines began to look precarious. There was increased military activity and proselytizing by the Communist New People's Army (NPA). The Philippines economy was falling under the control of Marcos cronies and the corruption problems were increasing. Marcos' popularity was falling and his health began to be an issue. In fact, Marcos internationally wasn't doing all that well either.

So, Holbrooke decided he needed to have a personal conversation with Marcos to try to advise him on the need to alter his political and economic policies. In the midst of the Christmas-New Year's holidays Holbrooke took off for Manila and I went with him. The Marcos' were at his vacation retreat in Ilocos Norte, his home province. Before we met with him Marcos sent us off on a tour. We took a helicopter and landed on an island in the midst of a volcano's lake. After we left the island, we were taken on a tour of sites in the province which were related to President Marcos early years. Mrs. Marcos served as our tour guide in her custom-equipped tour bus. She guided us through his home town museum which included dozens of life-size statues of the President in different barong Tagalog worn for special occasions throughout his career. On the bus, Mrs. Marcos made sure Dick had one of the Philippines' delicacies - balut - an egg with a partially developed chicken embryo. I managed to avoid eating it, but I'm not sure whether Ambassador Murphy joined Dick or not. Then we had a more regular box lunch before returning to the Marcos villa.

All of this was just prelude to the big conversation with Marcos. The President was waiting for us on the terrace of his vacation home. Mrs. Marcos left us and it was just the three Americans, Dick Holbrooke, Ambassador Murphy and myself sitting with the President at a round cast iron table. Marcos was brilliant. He anticipated everything that Holbrooke was coming to talk about and simply said it all first. He described how he was going to open up the political process more; how he would deal with the corruption and cronyism issues; how democratization would broaden out and get the people more supportive of the government; how greater support from the public would make the Army's efforts against the NPA (New People's Army) more successful; how he planned to stimulate economic investment from abroad and make the traditional agricultural crops more marketable; he explained how he wanted to continue the bases agreements but with a bit more money for the Philippines; how he wanted to use surplus U.S. bases to build new industrial zones, using the model of Taiwan's export processing zones. He just, as I said, anticipated everything Holbrooke intended to identify as a problem. Marcos identified the problems and discussed just how he hoped to deal with them, building a stronger rapport with the Filipino people and thereby silencing his international critics. I was very impressed. Only later did I learn from talking to others, that Marcos had mastered this technique many years before and had been successfully using it against his American critics for some time.

The Marcos meeting was a definite highlight for the trip but the New Year's Eve party at Malacaï¿½ang was the piece de resistance. Malacaï¿½ang is the name of the Presidential Palace in the Philippines and it is located on the water in the old part of the city. The party was about the wildest thing I've ever seen. There were a few hundred people in attendance and the Filipino guests represented the cream of the local society and the richest and most influential people who surrounded the Marcos family. The Marcos' had three children who at that point were in their twenties with the youngest, Irene, maybe still a teenager, so there were also a lot of younger people there from the big families and not just the older crowd. We pulled up to the entrance to the building and were ushered through the large front entrance doors and up the big staircase that dominated the foyer. At the top of the stairs we turned and entered a huge banquet room that was set with what seemed like a few hundred tables each of which sat ten or twelve people. The tables were elaborately decorated, fancy candle holders and large floral centerpieces constructed entirely of seashells. Each centerpiece was hand crafted and was about 14 to 16 inches high and perhaps 12 to 14 inches wide. Amidst the place settings souvenir Filipino peso coins had been scattered about the table along with noisemakers and other paraphernalia to be used when midnight arrived. The women were all dressed to the nines. Although I don't recall any of the specifics about the menu, I do recall it was spectacular.

Not unexpectedly, Mrs. Marcos was the star of the show. Mrs. Marcos is an accomplished singer and loves to sing. So, she was soon called to the floor by popular acclaim to begin a series of solos and duets of Filipino and American standards. Her partner for the duets was the Air Force Attachï¿½, who managed to sound quite professional. I learned later he was invited to all of the special Malacaï¿½ang events that included large numbers of U.S. guests just so he could join in the duets with Mrs. Marcos. I don't know if he was selected for the Manila Air Attachï¿½ position because of his voice but I'm sure the military attachï¿½s had good access thanks to his vocal talents. So, following the banquet there were lots of songs and some dancing as we approached midnight.

The dinner party was the formal phase of the evening's entertainment and it was scheduled to conclude just shortly after midnight when most of the guests would leave. After that, intimates of the Marcos' would stay and adjourn to the disco room in a different part of the palace for a final fling that was scheduled to last into the wee hours. Those who were not invited to the special party in the disco room, however, were mostly going off to family celebrations or other big parties, but they had to put in the first few hours up through midnight with the Marcos'.

What transpired next was something I had never expected to see. Let me reiterate, this group was the elite of the era's Filipino society, but they quickly turned into a band of scavengers. As people prepared to leave, they stripped the tables of everything that wasn't nailed down. Many of the attendees had prepared in advance and had brought large plastic trash bags to haul off their loot. The big centerpieces where dropped into the bags along with all of the other table decorations and other items which had been placed along the walls also disappeared into the bags. No one ever made the slightest protest about what was happening, so I guess it was considered a normal occurrence, but it certainly floored me. I've never been to a function in which the elaborate decorations for a formal event became fair game as souvenirs for the guests as they departed the event.

Q: Had anybody warned you about dealing with Marcos? Did you recognize this as part of a routine? He will answer all this stuff, but he won't do it or something like that? It sounds like a technique that he had.

HARTER: Others told me later that Marcos was a real master of this particular approach. I was really a neophyte when it came to the Philippines. I had gone to Hawaii with former Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Holbrooke a few months earlier when President Carter did not want to have Marcos come to Washington, but I didn't sit in on the meetings between Marcos and the others. But, Ambassador Murphy certainly knew Marcos very well and from his discussions over the previous weeks and months Marcos would have known what the issues were that he would have to address. There really wasn't much else - anything that hadn't been raised with Marcos before - that Holbrooke could have thrown on the table. Moreover, both he and Marcos well knew Holbrooke would only be sitting in Washington for another couple of week before he was out and Reagan's people would be coming in.

Q: Was there any thought at that time that Marcos may be on the slippery slope or were you seeing another -

HARTER: Yes, I think there was certainly that concern in Washington and there was certainly a great deal of dissatisfaction growing in the Philippines. Marcos was still running the country under martial law, but the communists were gaining ground. The key opposition leader, Benigno Aquino, was still in jail and the Philippine economy was in very bad shape. As a matter fact that was the main reason why Holbrooke wanted to go out and talk to him. Ambassador Murphy and the Embassy had reported the domestic situation was a lot more complicated and more difficult to remedy. Marcos still managed to hold on for several more years, even after his regime was involved with the assassination of Aquino in 1983 as he returned from exile in the United States. When Marcos had to flee the country in 1986, it was one of his closest associates, the former Defense Minister, Enrile, who called out the military to join with Corey Aquino's public demonstrations to push him out of the country. Enrile was from his home province and they had been together in Ilocos Norte for years.

Q: While you were working for Holbrook what other sorts of issues arose; did Korean affairs -

HARTER: Before we leave the Philippines, I wanted to add a couple of words about former Secretary of State Dean Rusk. I had joined the Foreign Service when he was the Secretary of State and I had seen him on the Eighth floor at a couple of big receptions that first year when I worked in Public Affairs. I had admired him and felt his strong position of support for the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was the correct policy. But I never knew him as a person. On this occasion, the trip out to Hawaii and back provided a wonderful opportunity to talk to him from time to time. He was very accessible, but mannerly in an old school way. I remember we talked about playing bridge, though we didn't actually have enough people around for a foursome, and about the things he had been doing since he left the government. I was in the session where Holbrooke went over with him some of the issues to be raised with Marcos and he got them all down very quickly.

Ok, now back to Korea. do remember there were a couple of times when Korean questions were very much the main focus of EA Bureau activity, but I regret to say I cannot recall exactly what the issues were. I do remember participating in a big meeting with Holbrooke, some people from outside the Department and members of the Korea desk. Mike Armacost would have been the DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary who covered that area for Holbrooke so he too was likely involved. The reason I remember this meeting, although not the subjects being discussed, was because of what happened immediately after the meeting. I was pretty new to the office, and didn't really know a lot about what was expected of me and I thought it might be expected that I'd keep some sort of record on what happened in the meetings. So, after the meeting, I wrote up an outline of the issues that had been discussed along with some of the things people were supposed to be doing next. I sent it over to one of the people on the Korean desk that I knew and asked him to take a look at what I had written to see if I'd gotten everything right, because Korean issues were largely new to me. I remember Bob Rich coming down on me like a ton of bricks saying, "Hey, who do you think you are getting involved in Korean affairs?" And, my comment was, "All I was trying to do was be helpful and put some things together to keep a record of what happened in the meeting." He made it clear if it involved Korea then the Korea Desk would take care of it and nobody else need get involved. I never took the issue to Holbrooke to find out if I should have been doing this or not, but I certainly didn't try to do anything else on Korea.

Q: Who was Bob Rich?

HARTER: Bob Rich was the country director for the Korea desk. He ran the desk. Then he subsequently became Mike Armacost's DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) in Manila. He's long since retired. He was an Ambassador in Central America, one of the Central American countries, Honduras or maybe Belize. But, I know he was the Deputy in Manila. I remember that, because at the time I was dating the lady who was Mike Armacost's secretary. We had worked together briefly in Hong Kong and when she was ready to leave there I helped her get the job as Armacost's secretary in the EA front office. She had a few run-ins with Bob in EA, and then a few more times when Armacost took her to Manila as his secretary and Rich was the DCM This lady and I subsequently married in Manila, and she joined me in Hong Kong for the remainder of my next tour there. She worked with Armacost and Rich in Manila for a year and a half.

Q: Well now, how did the transition go? I mean, you had the quite liberal administration of Jimmy Carter being replaced by the quite conservative administration of Ronald Reagan. From your view how did it work in Asian affairs?

HARTER: I thought it worked reasonably well. There was continuity among the EA Deputies and that helped a great deal. There was only one political Deputy among the four, and of course she was a guaranteed departure. Her name was Ginger Lew. But, the rest of them were career State Department people, although Armacost had come in laterally from an earlier stint as a White House Fellow. Although these men were negotiating for their own onward assignments, expecting a new Assistant Secretary to want to have his own team, they still functioned well together and maintained the continuity of the office. The complicating factor was the nomination of John Holdridge, a career Foreign Service Officer, as the Assistant Secretary for the East Asia portfolio. Holdridge had worked at the NSC and had good connections with people in the new administration - particularly Vice President Bush with whom he had worked in China - and so he had been tapped by the professionals to fill the EA post. Holdridge's problem was his China background.

Q: He'd been very much involved in the opening to China with Kissinger.

HARTER: Yes. He went to China when we opened the Liaison Office. He was one of the two Deputies under the USLO (U.S. Liaison Office) Chief, George Bush. So, his connections to the opening to China under President Nixon was specifically his association with Vice President Bush. I actually had had some contact with him when he was the head of the Liaison Office, having served as his Control Officer when he came to Hong Kong for a visit and then subsequently having a brief chat with him at the CIA when he was at Langley.

So, Holdridge's connections were, first of all, State Department; second of all Vice President Bush. I don't know how committed President Reagan was to the whole China relationship, the relationship with the PRC, because his earlier contacts had all been with Taiwan and its leaders. Clearly George Bush was interested in the new relationship and wanted to maintain it. But, there was a struggle among groups within the Republican Party that were trying to influence the White House policy and others who already had influence with the White House who wanted to take the China relationship in a different direction.

John Holdridge's China background was viewed as a problem most particularly by Senator Jesse Helms, who was then on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Jesse Helms didn't like the China policy and had been the key figure pushing for the Taiwan Relations Act which guaranteed U.S. military support for Taiwan after normalization with the PRC. He had no confidence in the way he expected John Holdridge to lead the EA Bureau. Helms decided to make his point by stalling John Holdridge's confirmation. Week after week went by and no hearings. Holdridge basically twiddled his thumbs through February, into March, and it may have actually lasted until April before he went before Helms and the Committee in order to be confirmed. This was particularly frustrating, because Holdridge was one of the earliest names identified by the incoming Reagan Administration for the new team. Under the rules for the transition and for work after the new Administration took office, a named, but unconfirmed nominee could go to the office and read in but the person wasn't allowed to do anything related to policy activities and so Armacost was Acting during this period. Eventually, someone brokered an arrangement with Helms to get the hearings scheduled, and when the hearings did occur they weren't that confrontational from a personal or a policy sense. Helms did, however, make his point and throughout the Reagan Administration there were constant hiccups with China policy over Taiwan-related matters. The Department was always sending someone out to Beijing to reassure the Chinese that the President fully intended to follow the normalization agreements.

The rest of the transition, as I said, went very well. We had continuity through this initial period with the Deputies and we were fortunate there were no big Asian crises that I can recall during those first few months. I mean it was not like the sequence of events we'd had a couple years earlier at the end of 1978 and the beginning of 1979 with invasions of Cambodia and then Vietnam and the escalating refugee flows. Mind you, these issues had not gone away and the refugee issue in particular seemed to be a problem with frequent peaks, along with the food relief issue in Cambodia. These were issues which had to be watched closely, but there was no need to create policy initiatives to deal with them. The policies in place were working and so they were maintained.

As in previous years when they had ASEAN meetings, I traveled to the ASEAN meetings in Southeast Asia and participated along with Holbrooke and Holdridge in these delegations which were led by Secretary Muskie and Secretary Haig respectively. During the Muskie-Holbrooke trip, I recall spending most of the pre-arrival flight to Malaysia working on getting tanks from the Pentagon for early delivery to the Thai to help forestall their concerns about Vietnamese troops moving through Cambodia and up to the Thai border. ASEAN Foreign Ministers meetings were also known for their "entertainment" segments at the final banquet where all of the Foreign Ministers were expected to "perform". This tradition unfortunately has gone by the board and I think Madeleine Albright may have been the last Secretary of State to "perform", winning high praise for a rendition of a popular show tune which was reworded to have particular relevance to the ASEAN session. The last time I was involved was as part of Secretary Colin Powell's back-up singers. For the Muskie trip to Kuala Lumpur, we spent a lot of time trying to locate an Atlantic Ocean lobster so Secretary of State Muskie could hypnotize it. No one was sure whether the Asian lobster - no big claws like the ones in Maine - would be susceptible to the hypnotism technique. In the end, however, Muskie did something else.

The ASEAN meetings at that time were almost exclusively focused on the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and continuing the ASEAN strategy of blocking Hanoi efforts to get the PRK recognized at the UN. As the PRK maintained its control in the country, the nominal head of government, Heng Samrin moved more and more into the background and the Foreign Minister, Hun Sen, whom I mentioned before, became the new Prime Minister.

Q: Isn't the transition between Administration's one of those times when the bureau turns out reams of briefing papers? How was that process handled? Was there a transition team assigned to EAP? Anyone interesting on it?

HARTER During the transition period, a group of people associated with the newly elected President's campaign would be sent to the State Department to review policy issues and to get a feel for personnel assignment opportunities for the new administration's political appointees. All of the Bureaus in the Department were tasked to provide policy papers on issues within their jurisdictions so the transition team could review them. This often involved several revisions as people tried to accommodate what was known of the policy preferences of the new Administration. Occasionally, one of the transition team members would ask people from the Bureau front office or the office directors to meet with them to discuss policy options. Jesse Helms top staffer, John Carbaugh, was one of the people at the State Department and I know he did pay attention to the Asian issues. The only other name I recall from that period was Elliot Abrams but I don't believe he had any dealings with the Asia policy issues. Abrams was certainly looking for a job and there was certainly some who thought Carbaugh might get the job which Holdridge had been named to, but Carbaugh ended up going back to work with Senator Helms.

Q: Well, was there any difference or change, how did we look at the Mainland China versus Taiwan under Holbrook and Holdridge?

HARTER: Well, the problem for the new Administration had been complicated by candidate Reagan's statements about support for Taiwan. His statements about Taiwan were really upsetting to the Chinese. So much so that Holdridge and then separately Vice Presidential candidate Bush went to China to talk to the Chinese and tell them the President would continue to uphold the Shanghai Communiquï¿½. In effect, Holdridge and Bush told the Chinese to disregard what the President is saying, claiming it was just campaign politics. And, in fact, once Reagan did take over as President much of that issue disappeared as he did , in fact, uphold the One China principle which Beijing wanted. As President, Reagan still would say nice things about Taiwan from time to time, but these comments did not threaten to disrupt the relationship. One issue, however, kept cropping up that would bother the Chinese. They were concerned because various groups in the US kept trying to invite Taiwan leaders to the US for visits that would have created the impression Taiwan was a separate entity. Fortunately, those were largely finessed and no serious repercussions resulted.

After a year as Executive Assistant, I went to work on the China desk. I had spent three years in the Department, so my first thought had been to go overseas. My VLC boss, Steve Lyne, convinced me to seek out a DCM job in Africa to get more management experience. So, I bid on three of four vacancies in Africa. Within a week of putting in my bids, I was offered one of my lesser choices as DCM. Since that opportunity seemed to come up so easily, I decided to turn it down and see if I could get my first choice post which I believe was DCM Kigali, in Rwanda. Back then it was considered a very desirable post to serve in the AF Bureau, and it did not have the strong tribal conflicts of the last decade or so. In retrospect, I wonder if AF was actually testing to see how interested I was in the Bureau with that first DCM offer, because no further offers were made after I turned down the first one. It was getting late in the bidding cycle and I had no onward assignment when suddenly an opening appeared on the China desk and I immediately took that opportunity.

Q: Looking at this early period, I'm sure, I mean please correct me if I'm wrong. I assume Reagan came at China policy from the right wing of the Republican Party, I mean this had been part of his upbringing and all. Did you have any feeling that there were people on his campaign staff who came out of the Senator Nolan wing or the Madam Chiang Kai-shek group, who were influential on the campaign, but they were quickly shucked and thrown aside when he took office?

HARTER: I don't think they got disconnected as part of the President's coterie of long-time friends and associates, but they did not get positions in the Government. After the election, the George Bush/John Holdridge view of China predominated. Although sentimentally Reagan felt close to Taiwan, I think he also was convinced by Bush and others that the PRC was a reality we had to deal with, just like everyone else in the world was dealing with it. Moreover, China had a very helpful role to play in the triangular relationship with the Soviet Union. And, if Reagan had any particular negative focus on one country, it was the Soviet Union. Thus, China's anti-Moscow position and its relative weight internationally meant it was clearly a more important foreign policy tool than Taiwan. Much as his heart may have been in Taiwan, his practical sense told him he had to deal with the PRC and not try to stand the policy on its head.

Q: I would imagine that to everybody's relief Carter took a couple of contentious issues off the table - one was the official recognition of China, second was the Panama Canal Treaty. For people dealing with China, the fact that we already recognized them reduced the influence of any de-recognition group, right?

HARTER: Yes, simply put I think that argument carried a lot of weight. We've already done the deed, there's no point trying to go back. This didn't mean we simply followed a pro-China foreign policy. There were still issues on which we would push against Chinese interests and objectives. On Cambodia, the Chinese were locked in with Pol Pot and we kept trying to loosen that link and get them more directly supportive of the non-communist forces. And of course, you'll recall under the Carter Administration US foreign policy began to focus on human rights issues, so right away we had many contentious discussions about China's human rights performance. So, the Republicans in the Administration and in academia who previously you would have identified as pro-Taiwan suddenly began to pay a lot of attention to human rights issues. Even though they originally were not very favorably inclined to pushing human rights as a foreign policy concern, they used it as a vehicle to target China. Jesse Helms rarely talked about human rights problems, except when he talked about the PRC.

Q: At the time Reagan took over and all, where did Taiwan stand, democracy-wise?

HARTER: There really was none from a practical perspective. It was still all one party rule, the Kuomintang from the pre-1949 leadership of Nationalist China. The senior people in the Legislative Yuan and in the Executive Yuan were all old timers who had served in the Government on the mainland. Chiang Kai-shek's son, Chiang Ching-kuo, had succeeded his father in the late 1970s as President, after serving as the Prime Minister under his father. The younger Chiang gradually opened up the restrictions on public activity and welcomed more Taiwanese into the political system, slowly building a native base within the KMT, as well as permitting opposition groups to form. He groomed a Taiwanese successor who took over when he died toward the end of the 1980's but at this stage everything was dominated by mainlanders and the KMT Party apparatus.

Q: Well then, by the way, I've heard people say that John Holdridge was a briefer of the first order. Did you find this? I've heard some people say, I'm very good at briefing people.

HARTER: Yes, he was a good briefer. I'm not sure he was any better at it than some other people who were in that position. But, his style was quite different. It was much more formal, much more constrained. He had a strong, booming voice. I suspect the formality of style was from his military background. He was a West Point graduate. He had been in the artillery and so he had a hearing problem and that may have accounted for his tendency to speak more loudly than others. Some thought the loud voice and the formal delivery was a bit pompous. But I didn't see it that way and I agree I think he was a good briefer and a polished speaker.

Q: I'm told, back to Holbrook, that people were saying that he'd be on the phone, but he'd be doing all sorts of other things at the same time. He was a multi-tasker.

HARTER: Yes, he'd often be reading briefing materials while carrying on a very different phone conversation. Holbrooke was also much more impatient than Holdridge was. He always wanted something done yesterday. Holbrooke also was a bit disorganized and had trouble keeping track of papers. The combination could produce some tense moments where he'd just fly off the handle because things hadn't been done as fast as he wanted it or he didn't have something where he thought it ought to be. Holdridge appeared more relaxed because he was better organized and knew where things were and had thought through what he wanted to do. That didn't mean he couldn't get angry, but it did mean he wouldn't just get very upset over some little issue.

You had the feeling that Holbrooke sometimes started talking about an issue and that articulation of the issue led him in a particular direction that then ended up as a policy proposal. It was not that he had thought it all out and planned it beforehand, it just grew with his verbal presentation. But Holbrooke, like anybody else going up to brief the Secretary or the Under Secretary for Political Affairs didn't just wing his presentations. He had his briefing papers and his outlines of what he wanted to do. The more free-lance "policy decisions" were ones that came up while he was talking with people at his own level, as in the weekly EA-focused inter-agency meetings.

Q: Well then, you moved over to the China. Who was on the China Desk or involved in Chinese affairs at that time and what was your position?

HARTER: Well, the Deputy Assistant Secretary who had the China portfolio was Mike Armacost, although, Mike left in 1981 preparatory to being the Ambassador in Manila in 1982. He was replaced by Tom Shoesmith, who had been the Consul General in Hong Kong for the latter part of my time there after Consul General Cross left. The head of the China Desk was Bill Rope and his deputy was Scott Hallford. Scott and I had been in Taichung at the language school together and we were both in Hong Kong right after that. He was on the economic side initially. Then, when the Political and Economic Sections were combined into the China Reporting Section, an economic section officer got to be the Deputy because the senior political officer became the head of the new combined unit. So Scott was then the Deputy Chief of the China Reporting Section and I worked under him as the head of the Political unit.

With the new Embassy and Consulates opening in China, the China Desk was growing. We had 12 or 13 officers and usually three secretaries and one or two interns. So, when I was asked to come down there, even though they had a Deputy, Scott Hallford, they were rearranging the responsibilities so we ended up with three Deputies. At the top were Bill and his Senior Deputy Scott, and they worked on a lot of the real nitty-gritty bilateral issues, including arms sales to Taiwan. There were still residual issues with the new Administration about how much flexibility the U.S. had to deal with Taiwan under the Shanghai Communiquï¿½. With President Reagan and Senator Helms frequently making statements about Taiwan there were real concerns with the Chinese about how much we intended to adhere to the Communiquï¿½. Scott and Bill focused almost exclusively on those issues. Richard Mueller, who also had been with me in Hong Kong after Scott left on the economics side was the new Deputy for Economic and Commercial issues. My job was the Deputy for Political, Consular and Cultural issues.

There were always three other officers in this unit and sometimes more. Soon after I arrived, Vice President Bush was off on another trip to China to try to tone down PRC concerns about U.S. policy statements on Taiwan and to reassert our commitment to the Shanghai Communiquï¿½ and the Joint Communiquï¿½ on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations. I was put in charge of assembling the briefing book for the Vice President and it was one of those State Department last minute crunch jobs. I had no more than 72 hours to put the entire package together. While I could task out some of the writing topics to other parts of the Department, most of the writing had to be done on the desk and then cleared in the Department. I ended up writing a lot of the background material myself while Bill and Scott handled the primary discussion papers for the meetings with Deng Xiaoping and other top Chinese leaders. Before I left the desk the next year, there was one other major contretemps with the Chinese over the volume of U.S. arms sales to China and Bill Rope and others on the desk had to put a new batch of material together which crafted a bit of a tightrope walk on how we would maintain our arms sales to Taiwan while simultaneously meeting the requirement to reduce arms sales "over time". That package resulted in the 1982 Communiquï¿½ which was signed during President Reagan's visit.

I just said I left the job after a year, but when I was assigned it was actually a standard two-year State Department assignment. The assignment was broken after a year in order to reorient our China reporting in Hong Kong. I'll come to that later.

In addition to the big bilateral issues with the Chinese, there were lots of other problems that arose during my time on the desk. One issue in which I was directly involved was the back and forth negotiation to get an American citizen scholar freed from detention in China. This young woman had been doing research in China and got involved with a Chinese man at her school. According to the Chinese charges, he ended up bringing her "classified" documents which were found in her possession when her apartment was searched. She, of course, considered them as academic research materials even though they had Chinese classification markings on them indicating they were for "internal" (meaning government) use. After she was arrested, we had some difficulty getting initial access to her. Thereafter, we had to arrange some way to get her released, and hopefully also her Chinese colleague, who over the period before their arrest had become her planned fiancï¿½. In fact, if I recall correctly, they had asked permission to marry in China and that was what likely triggered the government's attention to them.

From the desk, we directed the Embassy's interventions with the Chinese and over several weeks of dialogue managed to get her released. When she returned to the U.S., I interviewed her over a couple of day. The two of us had a long discussion about her particular situation and how she was able to work and study in China. We also talked about how she and her fiancï¿½ had managed to study together and then reviewed the trial and prison period and how she had been treated. It was a fascinating opportunity to see how the Chinese security system worked. Afterward I recall writing about how her case pointed to future problems we were likely to have as more and more U.S. students went to China for study and research.

As I recall, she seemed to me to be rather naive about how things operated in China, but there was no denying she had gone through a very traumatic experience and I really empathized with her. I had no doubt she was quite serious about her emotional commitment to her fiancï¿½. Because she was anxious about her fiancï¿½, we also spent some considerable effort trying to convince the Chinese to release him as well. While she had been released and expelled from China after being convicted of having improperly accessed Chinese documents, he had been sentenced and was serving a prison term which had several years to run. Senior U.S. officials made appeals to the Chinese for his release and his detention was a topic every time the Secretary of State went to China. He served a couple of years doing prison labor and then as a humanitarian gesture the Chinese government permitted him to leave the country. After he arrived in the US, the two did marry, but I have no idea what has happened to them since. Her name was Lisa Wichser and she was originally from Indiana.

But, it was a period where the relationship clearly still had to sort itself out. We'd made some progress during the initial travel of the Vice President and we continued to reiterate our commitment to the one China principle of the Joint Communiquï¿½ on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations. We had problems from the very beginning of the relationship with the Chinese over the Taiwan Relations Act and our continued pledge to Taiwan to provide arms to meet their defensive needs. But these issue intensified when the Republican administration came in and the question of arms sales really was on the front burner. One of the things that bothered the Chinese the most was the fact that the Reagan administration seemed much more committed to providing all kinds of weapons to Taiwan with very little attention to the idea we were supposed to be reducing our military involvement there. We had to devise a formula that somehow would satisfy both sides - the US and China - about arms sales. Let me say here, it was a very artificial formula because both sides to this day still interpret it completely differently. I can't give you a full description of what the desk put together, but Bill and Scott were the ones who worked most directly on the issue and one of them, I believe, came up with the original formulation we ended up presenting to the Chinese. Internally, the issue was how to maintain arms sales at a rate satisfactory to the Republicans in Congress like Jesse Helms and keep the Taiwan officials from complaining too much about the comparative strengths of the two opposing military forces. At the same time, the formula had to meet our commitment in the Shanghai Communiquï¿½ to reduce our ties to Taiwan. The new 1982 Communiquï¿½ specifically committed us to reduce our arms sales to Taiwan over time. But, as I said a moment ago, we interpreted that formulation very differently from the Chinese. They expected if we sold $100 million worth of weapons in 1982, the following year it would be less than $100 million, and the next year would be lower too in absolute dollar terms, and so on until the amount was negligible. The US formulation was nowhere near such a straight-line projection and we created different calculating bases which included sales over a number of years and then each year would point to a different calculation than the one the Chinese had used. We also argued that we could replace obsolete weaponry with new items on the ground we were still maintaining a basic one for one swap of items, say one obsolete destroyer being replaced by a more contemporary one though not necessarily with all the bells and whistles that a destroyer might have in the U.S. Navy. The Chinese also did not accept this concept.

Q: What were you picking up about China at this point? You're going back to this conversation or debriefing you had with this Chinese woman who was imprisoned. Were you seeing the central government trying to maybe make or increase better relations with the United States, but the security apparatus or defense department trying to screw it up or not?

HARTER: Well, there were certainly some disconnects, but these were not focused on the U.S. or on foreigners in general. There was still internal debate within China on a wide range of issues and different leaders would come together on one issue but not another. So Deng was constantly having to move back and forth in kind of zigzag pattern trying to reach an overall economic goal. I stress here an economic goal, because I don't believe Deng ever was anywhere near as committed to opening up the political system and certainly not to the extent that some, like the students, wanted which would have led to a far more pluralistic political system. No, I think Deng himself was a natural ally of those who wanted to maintain the supremacy of the Communist Party and that meant making sure there were no other competitors. So, yes, the security services had their agenda to try to cut down on the corrupt influences of western ideas and political systems. They wanted to make sure there was no widespread availability of political materials that would challenge the Communist monopoly of power. The PLA was their natural ally, along with many of the Party elders who remained in positions of influence despite Deng's efforts to get them to retire to an advisory role in the Party and Government apparatus. Deng's experiments with the economy continued to provide new ways in which people could earn money outside the socialist system and they did encourage foreign investment, even to the extent of making parts of the traditional socialist economy available for sale and development by private investors. China's national airlines all of a sudden found its monopoly divided by a number of regional carriers that quickly claimed international status on their own. The influx of foreigners, including students and teachers, journalists, businessmen, even a lot more foreign diplomats brought lots of new material onto China's campuses, and into business enterprises and government institutions. The campuses became places for political and economic discussion groups that were largely unmolested. For a time, there was just the occasional check on the intermix of the two cultures, like Lisa Wichser and a very similar case involving a French student. But, when student perceptions of liberalization spread to the more public discussions like Democracy Wall, the regime was always on the sidelines waiting until it felt there was a little too much steam being let off, and they quickly ratcheted down the political screws. There were a number of times after 1979 when the Chinese allowed the spigot on political dialogue and discussion to flow relatively openly, but they were always watching it closely.

Nonetheless, this was still considerably more open and free-wheeling than the kinds of debates and campaigns which had been run in the 1940s and up through the Cultural Revolution. It was different in two ways. In the 1940s, Mao had few if any challengers and once the revolution had succeeded he was able to point the society in just about any direction he wanted. At that point, some of the campaigns were designed to smoke out the remaining elements who did not subscribe to Mao's philosophical bent. The 100 Flowers Campaign and the Anti-rightist Campaign were designed specifically to take out the opposition among the intellectuals who still remained. Purges of PRC Government leaders under Mao were also designed to punish those who did not subscribe to Mao's Party line. And most of those individuals had no opportunity for redemption except when Mao's more extreme policies created economic hardship and he was forced to retrench and bring back some of those who had earlier been dismissed. Deng's more open social and political dialogue was more the direct by-product of the economic opening to the outside world. It wasn't a conscious campaign to smoke out the opposition or to target people who were not full-fledged supporters of the Communist Party line. And so too then was the decision to halt the political commentary a more spontaneous event. There was no pre-determined point where the military would step in or where posters would no longer be permitted. Those decisions were ad hoc and usually resulted from a number of Deng's more conservative allies convincing him that the scope of debate had gone beyond permissible levels. The group of political leaders around Deng, as I said, would not uniformly support each and every initiative and different coalitions were brokered to move policies forward in the highest decision-making body, the Politburo of the Communist Party. To better direct the reforms, Deng took the unprecedented step of withdrawing from the top positions of power so that younger men could move into leading positions and he tried to get other leaders to follow his example. Some did but others resisted and held on to their posts. Deng was unfortunate in that the two individuals from the "younger generation" he counted on to lead the country along his lines both turned out to be more liberal than Deng or his other allies wanted. Both were removed from power before Deng himself passed on. Hu Yaobang, his successor in the Party leadership fell first in 1987, and it was his death in 1989 that the students were commemorating in Tiananmen Square. The Government leader, Zhao Ziyang, the person I said we had picked as the next Chinese premier when I was in Hong Kong, shifted from his Prime Minister post to replace Hu in the Party and turned over his Government portfolio as Premier to Li Peng who was actually a much more conservative leader. Zhao sided with the students in Tiananmen and urged Deng to permit them to continue to pursue their proposals for reform. The last time he went to see Deng to argue this position, Deng had already met with conservative leaders and had made his decision to disperse the demonstrators, so when Zhao arrived he was arrested and he has remained under house arrest until today. I said this was the "younger generation" that Deng was trying to move to the forefront, but these men were born in the second decade of the twentieth century and their only claim to a "youthful" status was in comparison to Deng and Ye Jianying, Li Xiannian, Chen Yi and Zhu De who were all in their eighties and nineties by the 1970s and 1980s.

Q: What about - this is the beginning of this almost avalanche of students coming from China to the United States. I know I had a brief stay attached to INS and I use to get a stack of cables every day asking for permission for Chinese students, which were granted. But, I would think that the Chinese would be concerned about this, because America and particularly at the universities is infectious as all hell as far as democracy and openness goes.

HARTER: Well, in the initial period immediately after normalization, the ones coming to the United States were all the children of the leadership, the group pejoratively called "cadre kids". The student who came to the US were all people associated with the prominent party and government officials and their families. So, initially this was not the sort of person who would end up as an activist for democracy. Most of those students were in fact home grown, with no real connection to foreign training. While the first group of students, the "cadre kids", weren't likely to go back and rock the apple cart, the next wave of students tended not to return to the PRC right after they finished school. Many of these students were in scientific and technical fields and they found lucrative job opportunities here which enabled them to continue to study and learn while they earned money. I think it was really only around 1989, when China seemed to be more open and there were more opportunities coming up in China that you found a lot of students going back to China directly after studying abroad. But after Tiananmen, that situation reversed itself and more of the students elected to stay here for an extended period before returning to China. And, over time some of these students went back, but others didn't and they opted to stay abroad permanently. When China's economy really began to take off in the late 1990's, many felt this more open and prosperous society provided them with a new incentive to return. A few years later, the same phenomenon hit Indian students in the US, who by and large had been staying and settling in the US after graduation. With India's rapid economic growth after 2000, Indian students were much more likely to return to India than to stay for an extended period in the US. But, getting back to your original point, those non-"cadre kid" students who opted to return to China soon after graduation were certainly watched and for a time found it difficult to get positions that required Party clearance or approval.

Q: What about - did you get involved during this year you were dealing with Chinese affairs with the defection of tennis stars and others?

HARTER: Yes. Yes, that happened in 1982, just as I was leaving the desk. As I understood it, when she was playing at a tournament in California she contacted the wife of a State Department official whom she had met playing at a tennis tournament in Hong Kong. This definitely created a hiccup in the relationship.

Q: She was a tennis star?

HARTER: She was a tennis player, I'm not sure you could call her a star, though she was probably China's top player at that time.

Q: But, in a way when you get something like this, you know that after all the huff and puff is done, we're not going to send somebody back. I mean, how can you deal with this?

HARTER: Yes, the Chinese made a big fuss over it. They canceled a number of cultural and sports contacts. But this is the kind of problem where both sides know there is no way to change the eventual outcome. Even though the US took its time in deciding on her application for political asylum, we did eventually approve it. I think that was the part that angered the Chinese more than just letting her stay in the US. Here the US granted her asylum which is usually based on a "fear of persecution" in the homeland if the applicant were to return. This lady was one of China's elite and yet she could claim potential "persecution?" That really incensed the Chinese. Like a lot of issues that have an emotional commitment by one side or the other, these issues pale in comparison to the overall relationship and the rationale for why each side wanted to improve relations with the other. So Hu Na too slipped from the headlines and by the time she decided to resettle in Taiwan she wasn't much of a story any more and the US-PRC relationship had moved back onto its more normal track.

Q: Did you yourself have any contact with the Embassy of China?

HARTER: Yes, I did have some contact with the people there. I attended receptions and functions at the Embassy, had some meetings there. During that year, I went to China with a delegation and earlier I had gone with Secretary Haig when he traveled to China on his first trip as Secretary of State. Because of the office hierarchy, Bill Rope had more of the direct dealings with the Embassy on our top bilateral issues and also had more of the social contact. I had specific responsibility for contacts with the Embassy when the Wichser case was active, including when we called in the Chinese DCM to press for her release.

Q: I was wondering, did you get any feel from your colleagues about the Chinese Embassy at that point? I mean, did they have - their people were they still kind of strangers in a strange land or did they have that feel about what made America tick?

HARTER: Well certainly they did not have much experience with the American life style or with our cities and people, but they had a core of cadre who had been working on US-China issues for long periods of time. There system tended to permit more specialization and work on one country than ours did. Some of their people would move around the other parts of the English speaking world to improve their language skills and to learn about the American relationships with Canada, the UK, Australia. They had think tanks associated with the government where Chinese diplomats could be seconded and do research and write papers for the Government on US policies. Over the years, we also had bilateral and multilateral meetings where their personnel and ours could get better assessments of each other. We'd meet in Geneva, , New York, Warsaw. Don Anderson, the last of the Political Section Chiefs I worked for in Hong Kong during my four year tour had been the interpreter for our talks in Warsaw with the Chinese which were conducted by Ambassador Gronouski, previously the Postmaster General of the United States under President Kennedy.

Q: He got, some Senator gave him, gave the State Department hell, because so, what do you have a Chinese speaker doing in London at the time. And the answer of course was, he was kept in London and pulled out to interpret.

HARTER: This was our way of building an "advance team" for the future relationship with China. Of course, we were dealing with the Republic of China on Taiwan for all those years after 1949, but we also had China watcher posts in a variety of other locations. We had the whole China Watching mission in Hong Kong and a slot in Singapore and Bangkok in the 1970s. We also had officers posted in both Paris and London where we would report on China issues and generally broader Asian matters through our liaisons with the Quay D'Orsay and the British Foreign Ministry. Both France and the UK had embassies in China, and we'd pick their brains about developments there.

Q: How were relations between the desk and, the American Institute of Taiwan?

HARTER: Yes, I'd say the overall day to day business was very good. It was largely staffed on both sides by State Department/Ministry of Foreign Affairs professionals. There were political appointees from time to time, particularly in the AIT office in Washington, but most of our staff was composed of Foreign Service officers who had served in Taiwan or on China affairs before. We could not, of course, have official Americans working in a private organization, so we filled the slots through a regular State Department bidding process that required the selected officer to resign from the Foreign Service and then join AIT's staff. After the officers had completed their tours in AIT Taipei or Washington, they were rehired by the Department. Other nations with unofficial relations with Taiwan used similar systems. Officers/Employees went in and out of the State Department and AIT on a regular basis and there was then a regular flow of contact and information between the Department and AIT. The Department still maintained a Taiwan desk in the EA Bureau but it's communications with Taiwan went through the AIT Office in Washington.

Q: Well, as a China hand, was there a concern that you might be tainted by going to AIT and coming back and later serve in China or not?

HARTER: There may have been a feeling like that, particularly at the beginning when the whole idea of AIT was relatively new, but people did go back and forth and sometimes directly from an assignment in China to an AIT tour in Taiwan and vice versa. So, the problem was largely one of perception and not one that occurred in practice. This didn't mean that everyone just moved back and forth at will. People did tend to specialize after a time. And some people didn't do tours on the mainland because they developed a career focus within the AIT system. And, similarly, some people after they finished their language training classes in Taiwan, never returned via AIT and stayed in the China mainland/Hong Kong assignment circuit. There was occasional grating of the system, however, largely when a political appointee ended up as the AIT Director. Then, you had the feeling the political appointee was looking to create his own Embassy status and he'd push to bring in more official contacts with Taiwan. Of course, the Taiwan authorities were trying to do that all the time and one of the problems we had on the desk was to keep the crowd on Taiwan from bringing U.S. and Taiwan officials back and forth on official business without going through AIT as an intermediary.

Q: With the Chinese Embassy here, was it the sort of thing where you could make friends or acquaintances?

HARTER: Yes, it actually was possible. Many of the Chinese officers had been working on American Affairs in Beijing for a decade or more even though we had no direct relationship other than the last few years of the Liaison Offices. These people had handled visitors and traveling delegations and got to know a lot of the American diplomatic group that worked on Chinese affairs. While it wasn't as open a relationship as you'd have with a lot of other more sophisticated and less controlled Missions, it wasn't impossible to have relationships, though they were largely business focused. During this early period of relations, they did not include much in the way of real social interchange, contact among families and that sort of informal relationship. You had office meetings, occasional working lunches, some group discussions, a quick phone call followed by an office visit, things like that were certainly possible. The Chinese of course, had purchased an apartment building on a little circle off Connecticut Avenue near Kalorama Road to house their staff and open their office.

The Vietnamese have done the same thing over the years in their dealings with the United States. The people who were sent here to open the embassy in the mid-nineties were people who had been working on U.S. relations for the past fifteen to twenty years. Some had been involved in the abortive efforts in 1979. Vietnam's first Ambassador, Ambassador Le Van Bang, had previously been Vietnam's UN Ambassador and he had conducted the working dialogue with us to normalize relations. Prior to that, he had been working in the Americas office in the Foreign Ministry off and on for about twenty years. So, they have a totally different way of structuring their Foreign Service career paths. The head of the America's Desk in Hanoi's Foreign Ministry when I first went to talk to them in 1994 had been working on American Affairs for most of his career. He had gone to university in Cuba, was there during part of the U.S.-Vietnam war. He joined the Foreign Ministry and was assigned to Cuba where he served as an America Watcher, just like I had been a China Watcher during my Hong Kong tours. He then worked for a time under Ambassador Bang on the American desk and eventually moved up to head the desk. After normalization of US-Vietnam relations, we worked together for a time in Hanoi where I was the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). He was then assigned as Vietnam's first Consul General in San Francisco so he continued to stay with the Americas portfolio with virtually no experience in other regions of the world.

Q: Did you find that the Chinese Embassy knew how to play Congress?

HARTER: No, not at all. The PRC officials were all terrible when it came to dealing with Congress.

Q: The Nationalist Chinese could play Congress like a violin. I mean they've been doing this for years. Next is probably the Israelis and probably the Korean Tongsun Park. Do you want to talk about this?

HARTER: The Chinese were absolutely terrible. Based on their domestic experience, how the Chinese Government operated, the diplomats who came to the United States were only prepared to deal with the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government. And, certainly for the first few years, that was largely confined to dealing with the State Department and the White House. They also had no concept of how to deal with the press. In China, the legislative branch of government was not important and these diplomats initially saw the U.S. Government through their domestic perspective. They had to learn from scratch about how to conduct a public-focused diplomacy; involving both Congress and the media as a way to influence policy and public opinion. I'd say it took them a decade to begin to feel comfortable in their public persona. All manner of consulting firms wanted to advise and represent the PRC and the Chinese diplomats were barraged with offers from all the top firms. The Chinese would listen to all the proposals and they would have discussions here and there about how some particular program might be used to advance China's objectives, but the Chinese were not going to pay the kind of money that the Washington firms expected. So all of this toing and froing with the consultants didn't really pan out and the Chinese didn't have anyone to hand-hold them through the process of getting to know how Washington operates. They largely operated on a trial and error basis, as they tried to learn the ways of Washington. That certainly held up their effectiveness for some time.

Q: I'm told that this is true of India for example. The India Ambassador and their staff, I mean it's probably changed now, but as some other embassies tended to go and think that the State Department was the center of power.

HARTER: Yes, at the beginning, for the PRC it was the State Department and the White House. They just expected us to get things done to meet their needs. They'd hand us a problem and expect us to take care of it for them.

Q: You went on a couple of trips. Did you go with George Bush?

HARTER: No. I did not go on that particular trip. I'd prepared the materials for it, but did not go. Bill Rope went on that trip. I did some briefings and attended some meetings at the White House or the Old Executive Office Building where the NSC works, but no I really didn't do anything else on high-level trips. I went with a congressional group and I did a trip to China on my own.

Q: With congressional groups, China has always been a great fascination to the United States and you can put on a grand show. How did you find that worked? Did the Chinese make an impact on Congress or was this a boondoggle?

HARTER: Well, all of the Congressional travel I was involved with had a boondoggle aspect to it, but it wasn't all play and no work. I mentioned earlier the way the first House Arms Services Committee delegation traveled with all of the snack foods, liquor, beer, soft drinks and bottled water. But, I found that while they liked to relax and they liked to shop and do touristy things, they were also quite good at sitting down and actually having a serious meeting.

During this time general frame, I had two interesting trip experiences. First, I traveled with Secretary Al Haig and Assistant Secretary Holdridge on a three-nation Asia trip that started in China. After a day's preparation in Hong Kong among the delegation members, we went to Beijing for a series of high-level meetings where the Secretary had his first dealings with the top Chinese leadership as Secretary of State. We then went to the annual ASEAN meeting where the so-called dialogue partners met with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers after they had concluded their annual meeting. From there, we went to Australia for an ANZUS meeting - we still had a functioning ANZUS dialogue then as New Zealand Labor Party leader Lange was still in the opposition. Once the ANZUS session finished, I stayed with Assistant Secretary Holdridge for a quick trip to New Zealand and Fiji before we returned to the U.S. I was Holdridge's Special Assistant at that time.

A few weeks after we returned, Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon and Senator Paula Hawkins, a first term Senator from Florida were preparing a trip to China, Australia and New Zealand. It was a small, tight-knit delegation that included spouses, and a few key staff people, and the Hatfield's son Mark, who was then working at the White House. Somehow, even with this small group, they merited an Air Force plane, and the requisite military escorts. At the last minute, they opted to take along a State Department "expert." I'm not sure they really expected to get an "expert" but they wanted one person who could cover all three of their destinations. In retrospect, perhaps they felt by asking for one person to cover the three countries they could avoid having to take anyone at all, which clearly had been their first preference. But, because the China relationship was so new, the State Department put a lot of pressure on Congressional delegations to take along a State officer. Anyway, in this case, the Department came up with me to accompany them and they were able to point to my recently concluded travel with Secretary Haig to demonstrate that I was an appropriate "expert" who could handle both China and the ANZUS area.

These two trips were particularly stressful because you had to be prepared for both the heat of Beijing and the wintry weather of Wellington within a few days of each other. But, going back to the original point of discussion about work versus boondoggle, Hatfield and Hawkins had a scheduled day of rest and tourism after each day of official work and meetings. It would just alternate back and forth. You'd go to Beijing or one of the other cities in China and you'd really focus on a variety of very specific topics and discussions with a number of different officials, visit sites and wind up with an official social event, and then you do a visit to the street markets or tour the Great Wall, etc. Senator Hawkins was a really serious shopper - not to say that Mrs. Hatfield couldn't hold her own in that category. I recall during our Hong Kong stopover, going out with her to assist her in purchasing a rosewood dining room set which she wanted delivered to Oregon for their residence there. But as an example of the boondoggle aspect of the travel, we routed our refueling stops out of New Zealand enroute the U.S. just to target some shopping opportunities. This was one arrangement I'd never heard of before. We actually routed our re-fueling stop through Papua New Guinea, even though it was a little bit out of the way coming out of New Zealand, in order to enable them to get to a native handicraft center which was about five miles from the airport. When we landed at the airport, the Embassy had to make some special arrangements for us because we had no visas whatsoever to permit us to visit Papua New Guinea. Nonetheless, after we landed a small bus met us and drove us to this handicraft center where everyone proceeded to make at least a few small purchases. The exception was Senator Hawkins who couldn't resist a very large carved alligator. It must have been six or seven feet long and solid wood. She decided it would make a perfect coffee table for her home in Florida. Now I said that earlier on this trip, Mrs. Hatfield had purchased an entire rosewood dining room ensemble, but that was being shipped sea freight to Oregon and she had paid for that shipment. Senator Hawkins' alligator was wrapped up, put on the bus and, with all of the other sundry purchases was put on the Air Force plane where it traveled back to the U.S. Then, from Papua New Guinea, we slipped into Clark Airbase in the Philippines for another refueling stop and a visit to the big military PX (Post Exchange). This involved some additional shopping, a few appropriate American snacks that had been missed because we had been out of the country for about ten days or so. We made another stop in Oregon, because at least part of the Hatfield contingent was not going back to Washington, DC, and then we flew back to Andrews Air Force Base.

Even though I'm making a big point about the shopping and tourism items here, I want to emphasize that these two Senators did take their work seriously. As we traveled to each country, they reviewed Department and Senate staff briefing materials, asked me questions about various issues, and then proceeded to use this material as the basis for their discussions in the three countries. They talked about bilateral relations issues, they asked about domestic policy and trade issues, and narcotics problems - a specific concern of Senator Hawkins - were raised. They met with political leaders in Australia and New Zealand, a Vice Premier in China, a variety of Foreign Ministry officials and municipal officials in our China stops. They made a point of meeting with opposition Labor Party leader Lange in New Zealand because it was well known that the Labor Party opposed the country's ANZUS link to nuclear weapons and that a Labor Government would put the ANZUS agreements in jeopardy. They certainly did not change his mind, but Senator Hatfield, in particular, made good arguments about how important we thought the ANZUS relationship was for peace in the Pacific region. Throughout the trip, I took notes of their conversations and assembled a basic trip report for them, just as I had done for the House Armed Services Committee. I don't recall whether it was ever published by the Senate as a Senate document, but it did get submitted to some office there. As I said earlier, I was also impressed by how Congressional members of some of our official US delegations either at the UN General Assembly or to some of the pledging conferences I attended in Geneva contributed constructively to the delegation work. But the delegation that impressed me the most was the one I had only a very brief association with when I was in Hong Kong, and that was the per diem story I related to your earlier that took place in 1975.

Let me just stop for a second here. OK. But by noting that particular story from 1975 during my tour in Hong Kong, it reminded me of another story which I did not relate when we discussed my first trip to China that same year. My wife, a Vietnamese-American was not able to enter China at the same time, and where I entered through the elaborate train transfer system at the Hong Kong-PRC border, she flew directly to Beijing. The Liaison Office at that time was being closely watched because of some incidents which had occurred there and elsewhere around the diplomatic compounds and so there were Chinese military guards in front of the entrance gates. Our visas had been issued in Hong Kong, but the normal procedure was that these visas had to be replaced once the visitor arrived in China by the local authorities which for us was the Foreign Ministry in Beijing. So, we had dutifully turned in our passports to the Liaison Office staff person who was responsible for getting them to the Foreign Ministry.

All of this is prelude to saying that when my wife and I for the very first time went to the Liaison Office, we were in a taxi, and we had no official documentation. The two Chinese military guards took one look at my Asian wife and they stopped us and demanded our documents. I tried to explain they had been taken to the Foreign Ministry but the guards were convinced I was trying to smuggle a Chinese citizen into the Embassy. So, they stopped us in front of the gate and they would not let us in. Here we are, standing in front of the old Liaison Office gate, with the main office building just inside and to our right and the USLO Chief's residence set a bit further back at the end of the driveway where its front entrance was clearly visible from the gate. I t wasn't a very big gate and you could see through it and over it but it was closed and the Chinese guards had control of one of the ways to open it to let people in or out. As we're standing there, I'm arguing with the Chinese guard and he keeps saying "No you can't go in because she's a Chinese." In the meantime the other guard contacted someone a bit higher up on the local area hierarchy and another soldier soon appears, but he was no more willing to permit us to enter than the two original guards who had been stationed at the gate. At this point, we had been at the gate for about 15 minutes or so and we could see Barbara Bush walking out of the USLO residence in the back. My wife had the presence of mind to yell over the gate, "They won't let us in!" Hearing this, Mrs. Bush sees a crowd at the gate and my wife waving and she goes back inside and gets her husband. George Bush came out to the gate and I explained to him what was happening. He went into the Liaison Office, got one of his interpreters and some staff people and they all rejoined us at the entrance gate. The whole discussion was repeated two or three times, but the Chinese guards won't budge. They refused to do anything without some higher authority being involved. Finally, George Bush has his interpreter tell them he is going inside to call the Foreign Ministry to protest this unacceptable behavior where Chinese guards are preventing American citizens from entering the compound. He went back inside and a couple of the local Chinese staff at the Liaison Office stayed outside to continue to work the issue with the Chinese guards. It probably took an hour or so but eventually word came down through the guard's chain of command that we could enter the compound. Later in the day, we got our passports back with the appropriate Ministry of Foreign Affairs visa and we had no further problem going in and out of the gate.

But, this isn't the end of the story. The incident at the gate was reported all the way back into the Foreign Ministry and eventually got to the highest levels of the Chinese leadership. But it was not solely because of us being stopped at the USLO entrance.

Totally unrelated to what had happened in Beijing, the following day the head of the Liaison Offices' wife was invited to a tea at the White House. She went to the wrong gate at the White House. The gate she went to did not have her name on the list of people to be admitted that day.

Q: We're talking about the Chinese?

HARTER: Yes, This is the wife of the PRC Liaison Office Chief. She was invited to a tea at the White House. She came to the White House; she went to a gate other than the one that had the list of names for admission. They refused her admission to the White House. The Liaison Office in Washington reported this incident back to the Foreign Ministry. Chinese minds go to work on these two totally unrelated events. Chinese conclusion, this incident at the White House is retaliation for what happened to Harter in Beijing.

I mentioned in an earlier session when we discussed my trip to China how I had been given permission to visit China very quickly after the Chinese had made their point about how we didn't have a right to visit and they would decide who could and could not enter for liaison work between ConGen Hong Kong and USLO Beijing. There was another factor which affected the timing. Beijing agreed it was important that I come and break the blockade of Hong Kong visitors and so they didn't want to delay the visit. But they wanted me in and out of Beijing quickly because Secretary of State Kissinger was due in Beijing for meetings with the Chinese leadership and they didn't have enough people there to handle his visit requirements and also look after me. So I left after a couple of days in Beijing and Henry Kissinger arrived the afternoon of the day I boarded the train for Shanghai. On Kissinger's first night in Beijing, Deng hosted a welcoming banquet. At the Great Hall of the People, when there is foreign guest invited for a banquet, the guests walk up the steps and through the main entrance door. At that point, a Chinese dignitary representing the host organization will escort the foreign guests to the entrance to the main dining room where usually the official host will be waiting to escort the guest into the room and to his appropriate place at the head table. As I was later told, on this occasion, Deng Xiaoping greeted Henry Kissinger at the door to the entrance of the Great Hall of the People and they walked into the banquet room together. Through his interpreter, Deng Xiaoping says to Kissinger, "We're very sorry about what happened at the Liaison Office gate the other day. It was a mistake on our part, it shouldn't have happened." The Chinese had internalized the incident at the White House and decided we had retaliated for what had happened in Beijing. Chinese officials also felt they could not start off their meetings with Kissinger with this event hanging over them. And so, Deng Xiaoping apologized for the events at the USLO gate a couple of days earlier.

Q: Did he even know about it?

HARTER: I'm not sure that he did at the time Deng mentioned it. George Bush may have mentioned it beforehand, but I suspect Kissinger did not know the events in Beijing until after the dinner with Deng. Some time later, I got this last part of the story about the apology directly from George Bush. Anyway, I just recalled this story as we were talking about 1975 and thought it would be an interesting sidelight to keep on the record.

Q: No, no. It's very interesting. It shows how short the Chinese decision-making loop was at the time and I, suppose, how one party may misinterpret an incident. Of course, at basic people who are stuck guarding the gate usually are not, I mean, guys aren't the brightest people. I mean, they're - having been an enlisted man myself I know I never, I could always avoid guard duty.

HARTER: You don't question orders. Your instructions say

Q: But, you don't question orders and so you realize you're up against - this is something I always use to tell my junior officers when I was in Korea and Vietnam and all, don't mess around if there's a curfew. Because the guys out there aren't going to be terribly, I mean they're told to shoot if you don't do what they want you to do and just don't mess around. Did you get any feel for Alexander Haig as Secretary of State on China?

HARTER: Well, Secretary Haig seemed very interested in the whole idea of the three-way relationship between the U.S., China and the Soviet Union. I guess as a student of international politics he appreciated how we might try to use the enmity and antagonisms between the Soviets and the Chinese to advance our own interests. But, I don't recall there being anything special that one would associate with Secretary Haig and policy initiatives toward China. As I said earlier, the big issue at the time was arms sales to Taiwan and how we could craft a statement of principles to meet China's expectations that arms sales would decline and the USG could meet obligations imposed by Congress to sell defensive weapons to Taiwan whenever they were needed.

Q: Just on a personal note, but I like to get these. You mentioned that during this time we are on the China desk you were a single father.

HARTER: Yes.

Q: What happens when they go to you and say, "Dennis, you're going to leave tomorrow with the Senators or something?" How do you work this out?

HARTER: I was very fortunate. After Saigon fell, I had moved my former wife's family into the apartment with us in Hong Kong. I returned to the U.S. in the summer of 1976 on home leave orders and found a condominium in Reston for the extended family that was less than a half mile from where I owned a town house. It was a sweetheart real estate deal at the time, so I went ahead and purchased it and got the family re-situated there that summer. Two years later, I returned to Reston to live while I started work at VLC. When I returned in 1978, I was already a single parent, but I did bring my Filipina housekeeper from Hong Kong back to help out because the two boys were still only 7 and 8 years old. Those first couple of years, if I had to go to New York for a week or so at USUN or travel with some delegation, the Filipina lady was there to look after the children. In 1980, however, she decided to marry an American man she had met through her church and so she left us, just about the time I was starting to work with Dick Holbrooke in the EA Front Office.

At that point, the boys had become a lot more independent, and when I asked the kids what they thought I should do about the lack of a housekeeper - she had been preparing all the meals and taking care of the house, etc. - they said I didn't need to get somebody else. They thought the three of us could take care of everything by ourselves. And we did pretty well. I'd call them in the afternoon after they returned from school and would tell them what they needed to do to help get dinner organized - washing vegetables, setting the table, and getting the basic meal preparations done - so I could cook it when I returned home. And, if I had to go on a trip overnight or for an extended period, the boys would go to live with their grandparents, aunt and cousins until I returned. They were still close enough to their school that they could walk there every morning and return at night and the grandparents were always at home waiting for them.

This two year period when I worked in the EA Front Office and on the China Desk was also complicated by the seasonal sports schedules. Both of my sons were active in Cub Scouts and sports, basketball and baseball in particular. The baseball season was a summertime competition, the Little League, so it was a question of trying to get home in the evenings in time to catch their games during the week as well as on the weekends when there was often work to do in the office.Basketball was the most complicated because it was held during the school year and games would often start fairly close to the end of school and certainly not much later than 6:00 pm so that the players could get home, do their homework and get to bed at a reasonable hour before the next day's school classes. It wasn't easy to make the games but I certainly got to a good number of them. And, of course, the two boys were on different teams or in different leagues so there were twice as many games to try to catch. They were very good about my missing games or coming late.

Actually, the kids had a very unusual Foreign Service experience. They had four years in school in Hong Kong, followed by four years in school Reston, Virginia, and then back to Hong Kong for another two years. Most Foreign Service kids over a decade were in at least three or four schools and occasionally as many as five schools based on regular tour rotations. And, to make it even better, the second time they were in Hong Kong, a lot of the kids who were in their classes from the first tour were still there and two families who had kids in Cub Scouts with them in Reston also ended up assigned to the Consulate General in Hong Kong the same time we were.

Q: Well then, off you go in 1981 was it or 1982?

HARTER: I went back to Hong Kong in 1982. Burt Levin, who had been the Deputy Consul General just as I was finishing up in Hong Kong in 1978, was now the Consul General there. He returned to the Department on consultations in the spring of 1982 and asked me to join him that summer as head of the Political Section. He was concerned because Hong Kong's role as a China watching post had been seriously eroded as the result of the normalization of relations and the opening of an Embassy in Beijing as well as Consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou, the latter only a few hundred miles up the Pearl River from Hong Kong. Hong Kong's Political and Economic Sections had already been raided for personnel slots for the new posts and the Embassy and Consulates were already churning out all kinds of reporting. With a new, more open China, diplomats in China could travel and had greater access to Chinese officials and others throughout the country. Burt saw Hong Kong becoming marginalized, but he and other senior officers still believed Hong Kong had a role as a China reporting post. Burt felt I could develop that new role based on my recent four-year experience there. I had enjoyed my year on the desk and my four years in Washington, but I too was anxious to go back overseas. Moreover, the structured layering of the China Desk with its three deputies system had left me out of the biggest of the bilateral issues and that was also a bit frustrating. That arrangement was not likely to change even though there were new people coming in. The EA Front Office people who knew China affairs, Assistant Secretary Holdridge and Deputy Assistant Secretary Tom Shoesmith, both agreed Hong Kong had a role to play in China reporting and both encouraged me to go back to Hong Kong. But no sooner did I get to Hong Kong in 1982 than British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher made statements about the return of Hong Kong to China and she traveled to Beijing to propose the start of negotiations between Britain and China over the return of Hong Kong to PRC sovereignty.

The talks began in 1982, but the actual return date was 1997, 99 years after the lease of the New Territories. This marked the first time the USG was looking at the situation in Hong Kong as something other than a question of textile imports and quotas. Previously, that was the only real issue in our relations with Hong Kong, although we of course did deal with refugee issues, first the refugees from China and then the refugees from Vietnam. But these were largely "international" issues in Hong Kong and while they had an impact on the local population, they weren't really Hong Kong issues. Our Economic and Commercial Sections had wide-ranging contacts in the business community and in the Hong Kong Government with those who dealt with textiles, but we never had much to do with the other parts of the Hong Kong Government or with popular organizations in Hong Kong. We had never been involved with the education system; we'd never been in to talk to people in the local councils or the district administrations. Politically, we were starting out at ground zero. Over the years, we also had very limited contact with the PRC representatives who were in Hong Kong. Actually, that's an interesting story in itself, going back to my first tour in Hong Kong in 1974-1978.

Because we had diplomatic relations with Taiwan, we did not have any kind of regular access to any of the PRC people who were in town, for the most part under the aegis of the New China News Agency (NCNA). If Britain had a Hong Kong issue to discuss with China, they would meet with the NCNA representatives in Hong Kong and messages would get relayed up to Beijing for resolution. Of course, the British could use their Embassy in Beijing to do this, but the PRC preferred not to deal with Hong Kong issues that way, I guess to keep from making the sovereignty issue so prominent in the pre-1982 periods before they were discussing Hong Kong's return to mainland control.

Separate from the NCNA operations, China ran a "united front" program in Hong Kong to deal with non-communists and to promote PRC policies indirectly. The "united front" organization was largely centered in the labor unions, some of which were dominated by the Communists and their supporters, and the newspaper groups led by the Wen Wei Pao and the Ta Kung Pao. The Ta Kung Pa" was run by Fei Yimin. Fei was from an old conservative Shanghai family, but he had been a long-time associate of the Communists and he was used by them to influence non-communist intellectuals and students. Fei moved to Hong Kong after 1949 and took on publishing the newspaper. He had played a role in helping to keep things from getting too out of hand during the Cultural Revolution's spillover into Hong Kong and he had regular dealings with Hong Kong Government officials. While we could not see the NCNA cadres, we could see Fei. He would see us in his offices and talk about PRC policies in Hong Kong and around the globe and we'd discuss U.S. activities as well. Occasionally, he would agree to meet us socially, but usually, if we ended up having a meal together, it was in his offices. Fei was a good source for PRC policy guidelines and gossip on issues in both Hong Kong and the mainland. He would occasionally embellish stories so one had to be careful about subscribing too much credibility to everything he said. But, particularly in the early years when the Liaison Office had limited access anywhere in China, Fei was quite valuable as a source of information. By and large, the New China News Agency officials wouldn't see us, though there were occasional exceptions. I don't think we had any meetings with the NCNA during the time Wever Gim was our Political Section head. A new Consul General or a new head of the Political Section could get to see one of the Deputy Directors at NCNA. If we had one of those meetings, I would usually go along and take notes with either Stan Brooks or Don Anderson when they were leading the Political Section.

After we normalized relations in 1979, the opportunities to deal with NCNA expanded, and we could occasionally get NCNA Deputies to attend Consulate General functions. I had my own regular contact with one of the NCNA correspondents and then later with some of their foreign affairs office people, including one who was the daughter of a high ranking military man in Beijing. When I returned to Hong Kong in 1982, I resumed these contacts, including contact with Fei Yimin and one of his sons who was also working at the paper. Moreover, we could see NCNA officials regularly and at our request. Similarly, our Economic and Commercial people were able to get access into the PRC-run commercial entities, from the Bank of China through the various merchandising operations that China had opened in Hong Kong.

It was a bit ironic, I had been brought back to Hong Kong to try to rebuild the ConGen's China reporting credentials and we now were starting an entirely new focus on local Hong Kong issues and the bilateral negotiations between China and the UK. On the negotiations issue, the basic USG policy was to stay out of the negotiations and to urge both sides to keep the stability and prosperity of the Hong Kong people at the forefront of the negotiations. We did not want to take a position that favored one side or another, but in reality it was very difficult to avoid being seen as supportive of the British negotiating position. And so, while U.S. officials tried to maintain an impartial stance, the PRC regarded our intentions with some suspicion. The British and the Chinese were often at loggerheads and there was a real dearth of contact among the various players in Hong Kong who represented concerned elements in the negotiations. This included the two direct negotiation partners - Britain and China - but it also involved a variety of very diverse groups in Hong Kong. These groups would often vilify one another in the media and they advanced arguments about Hong Kong's future in stove pipes. There was very little cross fertilization of ideas and very little common ground of policy understanding. Because we were out talking to people in all of these groups and getting a variety of opinions about Hong Kong's future, it seemed remarkable how little the various people talked to one another.

After several weeks of the Section producing reports on a variety of these separate views on Hong Kong, I decided to try a little cross-fertilization. After hearing my ideas, Burt Levin and his Deputy, Dick Williams, authorized me to try to put together small dinner parties that would assemble some of these individuals and try to get them to communicate. Burt decided not to participate so as to lessen the image of this being a USG-authorized function and we decided we were likely to get higher level attendees if the Deputy CG was the host rather than the head of the Political Section. I wasn't certain we could get the individuals to come to the same table, even if it was a dinner table, without risking some thoughts that we were "interfering." It was also possible that once the people gathered there would be no real conversation and we'd never have a second opportunity to try this approach. But, we went ahead with the plan and brought representatives from NCNA, the British Foreign Office representatives in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Government executive and legislative branch officials, academics, journalists, local government administration representatives and business leaders to the table. It didn't take us very long to get the conversation started and the guests were quickly speaking out on their views of the Hong Kong situation. The participants soon found areas of common ground even as they articulated confrontational views on a variety of topics related to Hong Kong's future. The first dinner proved to be very successful and both the NCNA and UK Foreign Office people from Hong Kong expressed how useful they thought it was for them to hear differing views in a non-political setting. Other participants were equally enthused and the word got out about the dinners so we never had a problem finding willing invitees, eager to participate in the discussions. We were able to bring different participants together on three or four more occasions over the next few months as a way to encourage more dialogue among those with direct interests and roles in Hong Kong's future. Although I don't know if anything came up in those sessions which made its way into the "Final Settlement", I do know we had discussions of a number of very controversial issues that as they progressed became less combative and more nuanced and blended among the representatives of the two sides. The next day, I would write up these sessions in reporting messages back to the Department.

As I developed my own contacts in the local community, I discovered my Political Section colleagues and I were all operating at a distinct disadvantage. All of us were FSI Washington and FSI Taiwan trained Mandarin speakers. Hong Kong was largely still a Cantonese speaking city so quite often our language officers were taking FSN (Foreign Service National) interpreters with us so we could converse with some of the local Hong Kong officials who were not part of the British educated elites.

Q: How did you deal with the cadre of Hong Kong nationals who had been translating, I mean you know, you build up this very impressive group of experts, a part of the China watchers. What was happening with them?

HARTER: When I went back to Hong Kong in 1982, many of the local employee specialists were still working there. The senior Political Section local was Vincent Lo and he had another assistant who had come out of one of the Hong Kong University staffs. The senior people on the Economic Section staff were also there and they too had added some younger assistants. Vincent, like many of the other local employees, eventually emigrated to the U.S. He'd worked for the U.S. government long enough to qualify for the special service visa and so he took his family and came to the United States in the late 1980s. I believe he settled somewhere in this area, but I've never really had any contact with him beyond an occasional Christmas card maybe 15 years ago. Vincent, like many of the other local ConGen employees of his generation, had fled China with his parents as a young child some years after the Communists came to power in 1949. There were quite a large number of such people in the overall Hong Kong population. Because of this background, many felt very insecure about their futures once the PRC took over in 1997. Almost from the start of the Sino-British talks on Hong Kong's future, many people with this background or who were associated with the Hong Kong government were making plans to find alternate residences abroad.

In the two years I was in Hong Kong, there were a lot of times when public confidence was deeply affected by local perceptions or press perceptions of the degree of progress in the talks about Hong Kong's future. The Hong Kong dollar went through a number of troughs, the worst of which virtually cut its value by a third in one afternoon which marked the end of a multi-day session of the bilateral UK-PRC dialogue. For the preceding sessions, the British spokesperson who reported to the press about the state of the talks had used a formula which was bland but at least positive sounding. On this particular Friday, however, he didn't use the same formula and the press and the Hong Kong community interpreted the somewhat different comments as the sign of a great failure. It was probably true that up to that time, this had been a more contentious session between the two sides and there was probably reason to think that the results were therefore a bit of a disappointment to the negotiators. Even though it might not have been as successful a round of talks, however, it would not have hurt for the British to use the same phrases about "frank" and "cordial" talks on that particular occasion. But, nobody perceived that a slight alteration in the formulaic public press comment would trigger such a reaction. The Hong Kong dollar went from something like 6.2 to 1 US dollar to 9.6 to 1 by the end of the day. Prior to this, the Hong Kong Government had been adamant it would not peg the Hong Kong dollar to a fixed exchange rate. But over that weekend, the Governor and his chief financial advisors changed their minds and fixed the Hong Kong dollar at 7.87 Hong Kong dollars to one U.S. dollar and it has pretty much stayed at that rate ever since.

Q: Were we offering assurances to our people there that we would take care of them?

HARTER: Yes, in a very informal way we were doing that. We made it clear to the people who had been with the Consulate all those many years that the service visa option would be available in Hong Kong. Admin staff members had discussions with the FSNs through the employee association and individually they had their situations reviewed in their various sections. Procedures were clarified and employees understood their opportunities would not disappear so there was no need for a sudden rush to leave Hong Kong. So, yes I think the ConGen made a conscious effort to reassure folks. The Hong Kong government was of course trying to do the same thing and trying to avoid the hemorrhaging of its experienced personnel. The people who had the biggest concern of course were the people in the police and those who had been in the correctional institutions who felt they would suffer at the hands of the locals once they were no longer part of the official government system.

The British had been very reluctant from the beginning of the talks to share anything with us. That included sharing at our Embassies in London and Beijing and their Embassy in Washington. But, a couple of the Hong Kong British officials, the Political Advisor and his Deputy, both of whom were British Foreign Service officers assigned to the Hong Kong government were accessible. And, within certain guidelines, they did let us have a pretty good idea of where things stood. They were not allowed to go too deeply into details, but in Hong Kong we were able to learn much more about what was going on in the talks than anywhere else. The Consul General, his Deputy and I maintained that particular dialogue with the Political Advisor's Office.

Q: When you arrived there, how would you describe the British role in Hong Kong? I've heard it said that they were caught a little bit by surprise. They'd been running it more as a sort of old style colonial place.

HARTER: Yes, that's true. There was very little "interference" from the local population or from people on the outside. If the UK Government wanted to take a particular action in Hong Kong, they simply did it. I was chatting yesterday with a friend of mine who recounted a story about how he had been invited by the Hong Kong Political Advisor to go out and visit the so-called "Walled City." The Walled City was a small piece of territory inside the Kowloon/New Territories portion of Hong Kong that somehow got omitted from the maps that were drawn up when the British leased these territories from the Qing Dynasty in the 19th Century. So, this was a little section of Hong Kong that was a lawless no-man's land. It had no government, it had no police, it had no authority outside the local gangs who controlled illicit activities in the area. It was a place of squalor and slums where drug dealers and pimps operated freely. Some entrepreneur had built an apartment building in the area. If you remember anything about Hong Kong before the late 1990s when they moved their airport to another island away from the major populations centers, Hong Kong used to have its airport in Kowloon in a very heavily populated part of the city and right along the edge of the inner Hong Kong harbor and you would fly in along the overland flight path and you'd be down the last leg of the route and you'd look in apartment windows as you descended onto the runway.

Q: Yes, scary.

HARTER: Well, anyway the Hong Kong Government had regulations about how high buildings could be so they wouldn't interfere with the flights. This entrepreneur had gone in and built something that would have been a couple of stories into the flight path. And, I guess he either didn't know about the regulation or he figured the Hong Kong Government couldn't touch him. So, the purpose of this particular trip, the one my friend was recounting, was to have the Political Advisor enter "no-man's land" and tell the entrepreneur he had to remove the top few floors of this building. He was given a deadline to complete the project or else the Political Advisor promised he faced having the entire building razed to the ground. So, even here, where it was the "Walled City" and the British actually had no legitimate jurisdiction, they felt they still had the right to operate there if the situation required it. My friend recounted the story also to demonstrate that it was indeed a special circumstance, however, that permitted the British to go in to take action. Occasionally, in hot pursuit of a criminal, Hong Kong authorities would cross the boundary into the Walled City, but that was not a common occurrence and it required a pretty serious offense for the British to consider "crossing the line" there either in hot pursuit or as part of a raid to locate someone reputedly hiding in these few blocks of tenements.

Q: Was there much of a local Chinese, Hong Kong representation?

HARTER: Well, they certainly had advisory groups, and some institutions that represented the well-to-do Chinese in the business community of Hong Kong. The Executive Council and the Legislative Council created a facade of "Chineseness" to the overall administration. British civil servants were scattered throughout the government administration and only a handful of Chinese had anything approaching "executive" authority, and often only several layers down in the administration. The court system was exclusively British. The administration of all of the government services was British. There were some Brits scattered in the lower levels of the colonial administration, but overwhelmingly the majority of the personnel in the offices were local Hong Kong Chinese. It's just they never got beyond a certain cap and couldn't become real administrators of Departments. During the '80s, and particularly once the negotiations began with the PRC, the British introduced transitional changes that retired more of the colonial officials and more of the local Chinese came in to take increasingly more senior positions. There was also a greater enfranchisement of the local population and a broader range of offices that could be elected at the local levels.

Q: Did we play any role in - had we been talking to the Brits about this? I mean, wasn't it a way of our business, but -

HARTER: We had, I think, been as surprised as anybody else by Margaret Thatcher's proposals to start negotiations with Beijing on Hong Kong's return to the mainland. I don't think anybody was focused on it as a significant issue because the lease expiration was still 15 years out. While I'm sure she'd discussed this with the Foreign Office, one had the impression the initiative was her own. And, unlike a lot of other issues where our special relationship with the UK meant we had very intimate exchanges of information, I don't think she or the UK Government ever told us beforehand that she would open the dialogue in 1982. Once that issue was out in the public eye, I am certain we had any number of dialogues with the British urging that they try to negotiate some quasi-separation for Hong Kong from the mainland. But that wasn't anything special because the UK had as its own chief objective the maintenance of some kind of continued British administrative presence in Hong Kong after 1997.

Quite apart from what the British were doing, the USG was also involved in looking at our own status in Hong Kong after 1997. Would we merge the Hong Kong Consulate with the Consulate in Guangzhou and cover all of south China from there? Would the Chinese permit Consulates to operate in Hong Kong at all? If the Consulate remained, would we be able to maintain defense attachï¿½ officers and ship visitation rights once the PRC assumed sovereignty? We had to determine what to do with the FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) operation in Hong Kong and all of its sundry monitoring of broadcast and news information inside China. We did develop certain contingencies including reducing the size of our staff in Hong Kong and scaling back on our operations. So, there were a lot of those kinds of issues that had to be thought about as it related to the future positioning of a Consulate General in Hong Kong.

That was certainly part of our internal focus back in 1982, 1983, 1984, the time period that I was there. None of these issues was fully resolved before I left in 1984, but later that year the Basic Agreement was in fact concluded and it became clear we would be able to maintain our facilities in Hong Kong after 1997. And much of what we were able to do before 1997 continued to be possible afterwards. In addition to making clear that there would be no residual British role in Hong Kong after 1997, the key to Hong Kong's future began to evolve as part of a five-year transition immediately before the 1997 turnover.

Q: How was this worked out? Was this something that we - up in Beijing, we're talking at that time and saying, hey fellows, while you're doing this. talking to the Chinese, how about us?

HARTER: There may have been some informal talks of that nature in Beijing I don't believe, however, there were any decisions made by the Chinese about what else would happen in Hong Kong as it applied to other institutions until it was quite a bit clearer what the final agreement would look like. So, I would say much of that discussion took place in the intervening years up to 1997, working out the overall relationship for the consulate and the staffing and ship visits, etc. There were lots of those sorts of issues involving the practical operation of Hong Kong that were taken care of later. Part of the problem in this particular time period is, we had very little idea what, if anything the U.S. government was doing with the reporting we were sending back. We knew a little bit of what the Brits and the Chinese were doing in the talks and how they might play off some things we had discussed in Hong Kong. But whether there was anybody in Washington who was really paying a significant amount of attention to this, we really didn't know. We virtually never got feedback. I mean, people might say about our bringing the various groups in Hong Kong together around the dinner table, "Oh, great idea, good that you're doing this sort of thing." But, Washington never shared any of its thinking on the formulation of U.S. policy on this issue. I found it frustrating. Knowing the materials we were providing and the way in which we were putting different ideas into the collective mix for those involved in the negotiations, but we had no idea what anybody in Washington thought or whether they really cared about where the negotiations were going. All we got were a few "attaboys."

Q: What was the - you were there first place from when to when?

HARTER: I arrived in the summer of 1982 and stayed there until the summer of 1984. I left very, very quickly to go to Indonesia, because that particular assignment was up in the air until the last moment because of some personnel assignment issues in Washington.

Q: By 1984 had the preliminary final agreement been reached?

HARTER: Yes, it was finalized in 1984, but not until after I left.

Q: What was your prognosis, yours and your colleagues about what was going to happen?

HARTER: Well, because we had seen the uneasiness among the local population and the large numbers of people already trying to get out in the 1982-84 period, we projected a much larger outflow of people over those coming years than in fact actually happened. Something none of us foresaw, many of the people who went abroad in the 1982-84 period in fact, returned to Hong Kong in subsequent years.

The people who left Hong Kong in this time period got themselves documented in Canada, in Australia, the U.S., Europe, etc and then they came back to Hong Kong to live and work. With their futures secured by foreign citizenship or residency rights, they much preferred living in Hong Kong than they did in Vancouver or New York, or Houston, or Los Angeles or any of the other places they obtained residency. This was a time too when a variety of places sprung up as instant citizenship meccas where you could for fifty thousand dollars contribution to the government of the Maldives or a seventy-five thousand dollar contribution to the government of Tonga, become a citizen of those wonderful places. Actually, in most cases it was a lot more than fifty thousand dollars, but the idea was to attract financial investment to some of these mini-states in return for citizenship. In some cases you had to wait a period of time after depositing your money, but in other places you could get a new passport virtually immediately after making that basic financial commitment. A lot of the more wealthy people had done this years earlier and at this time it was the middle class people who went out and established rights of abode in other countries. My impression is that most of those who came back have in fact remained in Hong Kong after 1997 because the financial opportunities outweighed the PRC political "control" imposed after the British left. I don't know whether this current problem that exists - the British democratization process was moving incrementally along in Hong Kong in the 1990s but it's been more or less stood on its head by Beijing. Whether that's going to create a new exodus or not, I just don't know.

Q: It's in the evolving process as we speak in 2004. What were you getting from your contacts with the New China News Agency and all? Being the de facto representatives of Beijing. I mean, were they taking a pretty hard line or -

HARTER: In general, yes, especially at the beginning of the talks. Margaret Thatcher and Li Peng did not get along in their initial meetings in Beijing, because she thought there ought to be a residual British role and Beijing made it quite clear there would not be any role for the British after 1997. They were taking quite a hard line. The situation, in fact became very difficult, particularly in Hong Kong, because the British had been used to having their own way on political and economic matters and they were not used to having to consult with other authorities. Moreover, NCNA was still staffed by individuals who were really quite minor-level bureaucrats. There was no one of stature to deal with the Hong Kong Governor.

But, quite unexpectedly, Beijing sent a cadre with stature, Xu Jiatun, to head NCNA. He was a former Party First Secretary in Jiangsu Province, the province surrounding Shanghai, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Xu was an effective representative for Beijing, who had clear prominence, was an established party official, and yet he was quickly able to move in the various political circles of Hong Kong. When he arrived in Hong Kong circumstances came together in an unusual way and I was the first person from the U.S. Consulate General to meet him.

Back in the Nixon era, ping pong had been the big sport that put the US and China together but, in this case it was volleyball, woman's volleyball. China and Japan had two of the top teams in the world and the United States was an up and comer, featuring a couple of stars who actually played in competitive leagues in Japan. As it happened, one of the leftist run sports associations hosted a three team woman's volleyball match in the colony which included these three nations. So, as usual in those sorts of public occasions the organizers send out complimentary invitations, and quite logically one was sent to the U.S. Consul General. Burt Levin said, "I don't want to go to this," and his Deputy, Dick Williams said, "I don't want to go to this. Harter you go." So, for the three nation competition, I was in the box of honor representing the United States, and I was seated between the Japanese Consul General and the Chinese representative, the new head of the New China News Agency, Xu Jiatun. So, we chatted back and forth in Chinese for a little bit before and during the matches. I went back to the office the next day and said, "You'll never guess who I met" and Burt and Dick were a bit surprised because nobody had known Xu would show up for this event. And, they were a bit concerned they might have created the wrong impression by not having made the effort to attend the competition. But, as I said, nobody had any idea Xu would show up at this event.

But, what was interesting is that Xu had a different mission in Hong Kong than any of his predecessors. His role was to project Beijing's "smiling diplomacy" toward Hong Kong. He went everywhere and talked with everyone, all with the purpose of reassuring the people of Hong Kong that Beijing had the people's interests at heart. Xu was out in the local village communities in the rural areas; he was in the schools and universities; he visited factories, business enterprises and town meetings talking to the people in the government administrations. It was a totally different focus for China's top representative in Hong Kong. He was very effective and very highly thought of in most circles. Xu remained as head of NCNA until 1990 when he fled Hong Kong for the United States, some say largely because of his apparent sympathy for the student democracy movement, many of whose leaders were able to safely avoid Chinese patrols along the Guangzhou-Hong Kong border and reach Hong Kong. Others say, however, that he had become a U.S. asset and he was spirited out of Hong Kong by the CIA because he was under investigation that would likely have led to his recall to Beijing. Whatever his motivation, Xu ended up in the United States.

Q: Were you finding that - were they sort of saying what they were up to? I mean, in general terms?

HARTER: Well, after Xu arrived, the articulation of PRC policies softened a bit and Chinese pronouncements on Hong Kong's future featured more assurances to the people of Hong Kong. The presentations were all more sugar-coated. It was all much smoother than in the earlier period where Beijing seemed satisfied just to say "we will be in charge." I'm not sure there was any overall change in Beijing's intentions. Beijing now willingly acknowledged there would be a local administration, some sort of operation which reflected the special nature of Hong Kong and protected the economic system which had sparked China's most recent economic growth. But, ultimately, there was no way Hong Kong was going to be allowed to be "independent" and the Hong Kong administration would be a facade that masked Beijing's ultimate decision-making authority across the political and economic spectrum. The PRC had to be very careful about how it played all of these public pronouncements and maneuvers, because Hong Kong was only part of China's territory that needed to be rejoined to the mainland. Taiwan was the principle prize and everything that was being played out for Hong Kong was being watched in Taiwan to evaluate how the Chinese would handle this transition.

And, of course there was a little issue to be dealt with in Macau, the Portuguese colony which had a 1999 lease expiration date, but which everyone knew would follow just behind Hong Kong once that arrangement was completed. Many years earlier after a big change in politics in Lisbon, Portuguese officials had gone to the Chinese and offered to return Macau. This would have been in the '60s and '70s. But the Chinese said the timing was not appropriate and Beijing would let Lisbon know when the time was ripe. So, while a lot of the new Beijing diplomacy was articulated in terms of Hong Kong's future, it was really being pitched for the audience in Taiwan. I think that's one of the reasons why they sent Xu to Hong Kong. He was a much more polished person than the bureaucrats who had staffed NCNA before this and who would have no flexibility to react to local circumstances. Xu had a flare and a public persona that was approachable. He was relaxed, didn't stand on ceremony, and the most negative thing the press could say about him after several weeks on the job was his penchant for wearing dark glasses all the time. Nonetheless, based on his background, he was certainly more than just a concerned observer and I'm sure if he was required to be a negotiator, he would be hard as nails.

Q: What were you picking up during this period? What was happening in China? Was there any - were we picking up things in Hong Kong?

HARTER: Yes, we were able to find a China reporting role for Hong Kong despite all of our focus on Hong Kong. It was certainly secondary to what we had to do on Hong Kong during this particular period, but, there definitely was a role. There were government officials, journalists and business people who, after traveling through China, would have their first contact with any US official in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was a convenient exit point for China and a comfortable place for people to decompress for a couple of days before heading back to their home bases. So, we had opportunities to meet with those people and talk to them and get a better perspective of China developments well before anybody in the Embassy or Consulates who tended to see people more as they started their China activities. The ConGen also had long-standing connections and contacts with the press. After 1979 and normalization of relations, the New York Times, the Washington Post and a many others left their Hong Kong offices and based their reporters in Beijing. But, Hong Kong was still the place to come to get away from Beijing or to do additional research on China stories. Even though China was a lot more developed than it had been a decade earlier as we were starting the Liaison Office operations, Hong Kong provided a real break from the mainland routine and we were able to take advantage of our reputation on China issues to talk to many of these journalists who also wanted to pick our brains on China or for that matter on the new big story about Hong Kong's future. Those reporters, mostly with periodicals - Time, Newsweek, the Economist, etc. - who were still assigned to Hong Kong tended to have a regional responsibility and Hong Kong served as their base to cover the rest of Southeast Asia. These would be people who had to periodically drop everything and run off to the Philippines or Malaysia or Singapore or somewhere else in the region because of local stories there. We still had the periodic luncheon meetings of China watchers but over time that too shifted to focus on Hong Kong's future.

Q: How were your relationships with the Consulate in Guangzhou?

HARTER: They were OK. We didn't have any jurisdictional problems or anything related to border control issues. ConGen officers still had limited opportunities to go in and out of China. I mean we didn't go in and out as frequently as we would have liked to, but we did try to work out arrangements where we would send officers to Guangzhou to help cover gaps. This was largely something that benefited the Consular side of the house. When we had our planning sessions for consular operations in China, it was decided that all immigrant visa (IV) operations for China would be centered in Hong Kong. That was primarily because the Consular district was the primary homeland for those Chinese who had settled in the United States. More than 95 percent of all the Chinese in the US came from Southern China - primarily Guangdong and secondarily Fujian. So, it just didn't make sense to replicate all of the normal IV processing in Shanghai and Beijing. People who lived outside the Guangzhou Consular District and could not readily get to the Consulate could do all their initial IV paperwork by mail and then come in for the final interview. If the familial linkage in the case was clear and all of the documents had been properly presented, the applicant traveled but once to Guangzhou and got the visa issued on the same trip. Obviously, they still could return home to settle their affairs and they didn't just go from the ConGen directly to the airport to depart. So, while Consular Sections in Beijing and Shanghai had three to five people who focused on non-immigrant visas, the Consulate General in Guangzhou had ten or twelve consular officers focused primarily on immigration cases. Some Hong Kong ConGen specialized agencies had worked out access for personnel who were based in Hong Kong to cover mainland China issues. INS Hong Kong was always sending people in to deal with emigration issues and the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) representative was also welcomed by the Chinese from time to time for visits. Customs personnel usually went in to investigate illegal textile shipments so I 'm not sure there visits were all that welcome.

Q: I think it's probably a good place to stop here. I've got a question I'd like to ask before we move you on and you can cover it next time - relations with the British. Were the old colonial types having problems coming to grips with their diminished role?

HARTER: You'd hear about some stories like that or read about families who'd been in Hong Kong for generations and were now leaving. I guess this was mostly among the middle-level bureaucrats and smaller business operators. The top UK businessmen either moved out like Jardine Matheson, which re-headquartered in Bermuda but kept its Hong Kong investments, or planned to stay on as independents. The top Hong Kong Chinese businessmen had all been investing in China over the previous decade and their links to the mainland were already well-established. When I had dealings with the top Hong Kong businessmen like Li Ka-shing and Gordon Wu, it was largely to get their views on the evolution of Hong Kong's political scene or their understanding of PRC plans for the colony's future. They also gave me their insights into the economic development opportunities in China and they, for the most part, were optimistic about Hong Kong's survivability under the PRC. But, when it came to dealing with the British, aside from some journalists, the people we dealt with were the people involved in the negotiations, fellow foreign affairs professionals. I think from a political perspective, Consul General Burt Levin and the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Edward Youde, probably had more of those kinds of discussions about the impact the turnover would have on local British expats. But, even Youde was a foreign affairs professional, a diplomat and a China specialist. He probably had more conversations with Burt about those kinds of issues, reflecting expat concerns and reflecting colonial attitudes within the overall government administration. Press stories, as I said, often reflected a colonial mentality and depicted concerns about Hong Kong's administrative integrity. But, I can't say I ever really had a one-on-one conversation that reflected this bias.

Q: In 1984 where did you go?

HARTER: John Holdridge, who I'd worked for in the EA Front Office, was in Jakarta as Ambassador and he asked me to bid on the job there as the Political Section Chief. Although I was already head of the Political Section in Hong Kong, this job was a Counselor Level Embassy job. It was a Senior Foreign Service job and I was still an FS-01 so it became a more complicated issue for Personnel to adjudicate. Technically, an Ambassador usually only has his choice of a Deputy Chief of Mission, his DCM, but Ambassadors often found it possible to hand pick their Counselor level subordinates as well. But in this case, so long as there was a qualified Senior Foreign Service candidate for the job, PER in the Department would not consider a stretch assignment for an 01 like myself. One Senior Foreign Service officer who remained unassigned had bid on Jakarta along with two other senior level jobs. The Senior Foreign Service representative in the Personnel Office said to the EA Bureau, "Until you place him, we're not going to release any of these positions for possible stretch assignments." John Holdridge had already turned him down for the Political Counselor position and EA then was able to place him in Chengdu, China as the Consul General. All of this took up a good deal of time during the annual assignments season and when the job in Jakarta was finally released and I was paneled to the position, I had basically three weeks to move from Hong Kong to Jakarta.

Q? Were you married by this or re-married?

HARTER: Yes. Yes, I had remarried. We were married on Christmas Eve in 1982 at the Ambassador's residence in Manila and had the reception there. We started our honeymoon in a tower suite at the old Manila Hotel, MacArthur's old headquarters during the war. Afterward, we drove up to Camp John Hay in Baguio and stayed in one of the Embassy houses on the military base. My in-laws joined us in Baguio as did my two sons and we enjoyed the cooler temperatures and the good food and activities around the camp. The Ambassador had a residence up their on the base and there were a couple of other houses which more or less were used by Embassy personnel on leave. The Ambassador's residence had been the site of the surrender of the Japanese military in the Philippines at the end of World War II.

After we married, my wife was not able to leave her job with Ambassador Armacost right away. She had to wait until Personnel got a replacement for her. She didn't leave Manila until the summer of 1983, but there was no Foreign Service vacancy for her to fill in Hong Kong so she had to take leave from the Foreign Service. But INS had need of an American Secretary and picked her up for the final year we were in Hong Kong. When I bid on the job in Jakarta and other places for the 1984 assignment, she was handicapped for her bids because it was unclear whether I would be able to get the stretch assignment in Jakarta. Moreover, Jakarta had no immediate secretarial vacancies for someone at her level. When the assignment to Jakarta was finalized, she again went on leave for several months before the DCM's secretary departed and she was able to move directly into that position. Because this was a direct transfer for me, I did not get any language training before going to Jakarta and that was a bit of a problem as I tried to get around in Indonesia.

Q: OK. Well, we'll talk about Indonesia then.

Q: Today is the 13th of April, 2004. Dennis, you were in Indonesia from when to when? Could you provide a brief description of the Embassy's organization, main officers upon your arrival?)

HARTER: Summer of 1984 until the summer of 1987. John Holdridge was the Ambassador and Richard Howland was his Deputy. Dick had been in Jakarta as a Junior Officer and knew Indonesia well. He had been there during the overthrow of Sukarno and the start of the Suharto era, which of course was still in full swing at the time I was assigned. William Fuller was the AID (Agency for International Development) Director for a very large program that had personnel working throughout the islands. Our Consul in Surabaya was Barbara Harvey, also a very well-grounded Indonesia expert who later became DCM in Jakarta and an old friend from CORDS Vietnam days, Tom Robinson, was the Consul in Medan on the island of Sumatra. The Economic Counselor when I arrived was Joe Winder but he was soon replaced by Richard Wilson and Sue Woods was our Consul General at the Embassy. Peter Tomaino was our DEA representative and we also had a Foreign Agriculture Service office and a large military presence which included both military attachï¿½s and a military assistance advisory team which worked exclusively on training with the Indonesian military and was involved in the procurement of military assistance materiel. The Political Section included several officers in addition to myself, most notably Mike Owens who had been the Vietnam desk officer when I was Deputy Director of VLC, and Pamela Slutz who had spent time in Indonesia before her Foreign Service career and who currently is the U.S. Ambassador in Mongolia. We later served together in China but in different Consulates General.

Q: What was the situation first, the internal situation of Indonesia when you got there in '84 and then we'll talk about American relations.

HARTER: Overall, I would say Indonesia was pretty quiet. There was no major unrest or opposition to the government like there was in the Philippines. The Suharto regime was very much on top of things and there were still reasonable growth rates. Jakarta was just completing a new international airport which was very modern and it utilized some very advanced construction techniques because it was being built on marshy ground that needed to take the considerable weight of runways and heavily laden aircraft. There were concerns about corruption and the concentration of wealth in the hands of Chinese businessmen and members of the Suharto family, particularly Mrs. Suharto and the children. Politically and socially, the country was not subject to the same kinds of radical Islamic pressures that were prevalent in the Middle East but there was a growing concern on the part of the government that radical Islam could get a foothold in the traditional schools - pesantran - which dominated Indonesia's education system. There were periodical clashes with Islamic groups over Suharto's plan to make all organizations, including religious ones, adopt Pancasila, as their basic guideline. Pancasila was a set of five principles on which the Indonesian state was based and Suharto's goal was to use this secular tool as a way to ensure all organizations, and particularly the religious ones acknowledged the primacy of the state. While Islamic groups were most vocal about the problems of putting Pancasila seemingly ahead of the Koran as the guiding principle of the religious organizations, the Catholic church was also very opposed to accepting this decree. But this was largely a question of politics and social control. Suharto was a practicing Muslim - although he was also known to be very superstitious and consulted a variety of mystics - and he did not intend for Pancasila to supplant the Koran. What he wanted was the Muslim groups to acknowledge the supremacy of the state in political life and not to put religion or religious groups into conflict with the state. Nonetheless, the proposal did produce controversy and on at least one occasion in the fall of 1984 it resulted in a major confrontation in Jakarta. Demonstrators at the Tanjung Priok port, the main port area for Jakarta, were confronted by the military and after a time, the military opened fire. Because everything was covered up by the military, it was never very clear how many had been killed but organizers claimed the number of deaths was in the hundreds. This event prompted a series of trials as the government went after the demonstration organizers and also targeted a group of former regime supporters who had grown disaffected over the years, claiming they had been behind-the-scenes instigators of the rioters. This group, called the Petition of 50 - the number of its original members - after 1980 challenged the direction Suharto was leading the country, but they were an intellectual opposition, they did not mount an opposition that had any chance of derailing Suharto's domination of the election machinery that produced majorities for his supporters each election for decades.

Jakarta proper, however, was subject to a series of arson fires in 1984, including some directed against the Chinese business interests, and one of the major downtown department stores was torched along with a major shopping district. This too was a form of political and social protest because the fires were set at times when there would be no people around and there were thus very few injuries or casualties as a result of the fires. The so-called "mysterious killings" campaign was underway and almost daily the press would report bullet ridden bodies of criminals being found along the roadsides, mostly in Java but occasionally in the outer islands. This campaign was run by the military and had support at the highest levels but it was done in such a way that no one was ever directly blamed and nobody ever was punished for carrying out the murders. But for the most part these events did not disrupt the daily flow of life in the country and they certainly were not a challenge to the stability of the Suharto regime. One incident targeted the US Embassy. In 1986, someone fired a home-made rocket at the Embassy. It hit an electrical or communications wire over the main building and split apart as it fell to the ground, with the charge detached from the propellant. It never went off but it certainly caused quite a stir for a week or so.

There was an unsettled situation in East Timor where periodically you had some Fretilin rebel instigated incidents or military crackdowns against the local groups looking to gain independence for the territory. The conflict arose when the Portuguese colonial government pulled out and the Indonesian military took over the half of the island of Timor that had been a Portuguese colony. The western half of the island was already part of Indonesia - West Timor. Realistically speaking the eastern part of the island could not sustain itself on its own, but some groups were agitating for independence based on their expectation the Portuguese would turn the area over to local rule when they left as had been done in other Portuguese colonies. Heavy-handed Indonesian military actions brought more support for the rebels but by and large there was very little fighting and relatively few casualties. The situation garnered international attention and human rights organizations were constantly criticizing the Indonesian Government and military for repressive tactics. US military assistance and training for the Indonesian military was periodically suspended by Congressional resolution, creating considerable problems for the Embassy and its staff in trying to deal constructively with the Indonesian Government an military. There also was a Free Papua movement in Irian Jaya, the Indonesian half of the island of New Guinea, but that was even smaller and of much less consequence, though it did occasionally get international attention.

Another area where there were occasional separatist problems was in Sumatra in the area around Aceh on the northern tip of the island where fundamentalist Muslims who were ethnically different from the Javanese wanted their own state. As many will have noted in history books about Indonesia, the islands are composed of a multitude of ethnic groups and, while Indonesia is the largest Muslim state, by population, in the world, there are islands which are predominantly Catholic or where Hindu and Protestant influences are quite considerable. The majority of the population is on Java and the Javanese represent at least two-thirds of the total population of the country. When the Dutch were defeated in their attempt to reimpose colonial rule in the islands, the leaders who created the country did not try to impose Javanese standards on the rest of the islands. While they did place the capital on Java they adopted a language which represented a small population group on the island of Sumatra as the national language. That language is very similar to modern Malaysian. So, even the Javanese had to learn the new national language. The country was first led by a very leftist leaning nationalist named Sukarno who had been one of the leaders against the Dutch colonial government. He later promoted Indonesia's international standing as one of the founders of the non-aligned movement along with Nehru and with backing from Zhou Enlai in China -

Q: Tito and Nasser and Nkrumah. They were sort of the -

HARTER: Yes, they were part of it too, but I was speaking of the Asians who were in that mix. And they, of course had their first major international gathering at Bandung on the island of Java in 1955. The five principles of peaceful co-existence came out of that conference. That was part of the earlier tradition of government in Indonesia. In collaboration with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and others, Sukarno was taking the country in a more socialist direction. A poorly organized military coup involving members of the Air Force who had been influenced by Sukarno and the PKI attempted to wipe out the top Army leaders in 1965 and succeeded in killing six of them, but they missed both the head of the Army, General Nasution, and more importantly a General named Suharto. Led by Suharto, the military took over control of the country and declared the PKI were the organizers of the coup. This led to a massive bloodletting, mostly of Chinese accused of being PKI members, and ended with Sukarno under house arrest. Nasution stepped into the background and Suharto became the new President of Indonesia in 1967, a position he held until 1998.

During the period I was there, Suharto also came under some pressure to step down because there was a once every five-year presidential election coming up. His health had occasionally been in question but Suharto was largely playing coy and was non-committal about running for another term. Several members of the Political Section, myself included, and a couple of others who had much more knowledge of Indonesia than I did, felt that Suharto might indeed step down. We were obviously quite wrong and he continued on for two more terms after that election. But, at the time, his statements and behavior led to some thoughts Indonesia might have a genuine election and a succession determined by national elections. And, this issue of a national succession plagued Indonesia throughout the period thereafter until Suharto resigned under pressure. Under Suharto, there was a Vice President who would take over constitutionally but the existence of this mechanism did not create a sense of public confidence about changing leadership.

In that sense, Indonesia and China had quite similar leadership succession arrangements - they were largely non-existent. Mao had a chosen successor on a couple of occasions but they all fell into disfavor and were removed, or in the case of Lin Piao, died in a mysterious plane crash. Mao's final choice turned out to be nothing more than a figurehead who at least had the sense not to stand in the way of more capable and determined leaders. As soon as those like Deng who had been purged earlier were brought back to help solidify the central government they just simply moved him out of the way and he disappeared from any active role in either the government or the party. In a sense the Indonesian succession, so to speak, went the same way. The Vice President, the senior leadership personnel at least during that period, were non-entities who did not have individual public support or standing.

Q: Dennis, where in 1984 when you were out there, what was the situation in the Philippines? Was Marcos out or was Marcos still there?

HARTER: Marcos was still there, though the Aquino assassination had raised serious questions about the roles he and his supporters had in that event at the Manila airport.

Q: So, were you all looking at the Philippines as being perhaps an indicator of what might happen in Indonesia?

HARTER: There was some talk about the corruption issue as a parallel with the Philippines but the economic situation in the Philippines was a lot worse than it was in Indonesia. Indonesia did not have the massive unemployment you found in the Philippines. There was certainly some unemployment in Indonesia and the rural areas were not as well off as the cities, but by and large the economy was still going along at a pretty good clip. There was a lot of economic growth, a lot of new building and construction, which intensified still further after I left. My younger son went back to Indonesia to finish high school after we left in 1987. After finishing college, he went back to Indonesia to teach and went to a brand new high school that had been built to cope with the sudden influx of foreigners and their families coming in to work on Indonesia's expanding economy. They were coming in for engineering and construction projects and many of them were Korean. My son told me that his first math class was an eighth grade math class and the students were all Korean. That school had been created simply because the existing international school could not accommodate the influx of new students. That was in the early 1990s.

Q: When you got there what was the situation with the indigenous Chinese?

HARTER: Well, the indigenous Chinese had been the target of the anti-communist purges in the '60s and tens of thousands were killed. Many Chinese also returned to China. The question of how many was killed is a subject of some debate. The DCM when I was there, Richard Howland, had been there during this period of the killings in the aftermath of the coup and he said for sure hundreds of thousands of Chinese were killed. He didn't believe the death toll reached a million, but he said definitely hundreds of thousands. He described going out of Jakarta into the countryside and seeing along stream beds and alongside bridges stacks of bodies of people who had been killed in the previous day or two.

Not all of the Chinese fled or were killed and, after the killings, many Chinese families continued to dominate business activity and became very wealthy. These families had close ties to the top Indonesian leaders. They were the sort of financial backers for the Indonesian military leaders and the Indonesian politicians. As I recall, they were called cukong, or bosses. This group was extremely wealthy. For their support of the Indonesian leadership, they got special privileges, and they got special opportunities to control new businesses that were opening up. Quite often they partnered with the Suharto children to open up new enterprises, which often became monopolies. If their businesses had problems, they could get government loans or new privileges that would give them an opportunity to become more profitable. The Salim family and the Riady family were two of the most well-known, most influential families. They had come from China during the Dutch colonial, pre-independence days. As they prospered, they adopted Indonesian names and customs. The head of the Salim family was known as Liem Sioe Liong and he was particularly close to Suharto.

Q: Did they marry into the Indonesian?

HARTER: Not that often, no.

Q: I understand in Thailand there was much more inter-marriage.

HARTER: Yes, that's true. Many of Thailand's top families have Chinese ancestry mixed in over the generations. There was much less of that in Indonesia, although it certainly wasn't prohibited. But, the Indonesian Chinese for the most part did take Indonesian names to associate themselves with the majority. In the aftermath of the coup, the government banned the use of the Chinese language. There were no Chinese language signs on Chinese businesses and Chinese language newspapers were all closed down. Occasionally, if you traveled outside Jakarta you might come across some old Chinese signs in the countryside or small towns. I noticed, for example, when I went to East Timor there were still a lot of Chinese signs. Part of the reason for that was the signs had been there through the Portuguese period that didn't end until 1975-1976. So when the Indonesians took control a decade after all the anti-Chinese phobia, I guess they didn't really care about that issue anymore, so they didn't force all the signs to be removed.But that permissive attitude did not extend to permitting new Chinese business signs or Chinese language newspapers to publish either there or elsewhere in Indonesia.

Q: What was the particular interest, did we see with our opposition party, I mean what was the political section doing?

HARTER: Well, we were looking at a number of issues. First of all we were watching the 1988 elections and the issue of whether Suharto would run or step down before the elections. There was also a bit of controversy over the selection of his Vice Presidential running mate and the military was unhappy when Suharto selected Sudharmono, who had been primarily a desk man, both during his military career, and thereafter when he ran a number of high government and GOLKAR Party positions. When Suharto opted to run in 1987, a lot of people believed he might step down before the end of this five-year term and therefore the Vice President, who would succeed the President if he stepped down, was considered to be particularly important. Moreover, if Suharto stayed until the end of the term and then decided not to run in 1992, the Vice President would be in a key position to run for the top spot.

We were looking at the refugee situation, because we were still assisting Vietnamese refugees who were encamped on an Indonesian island off the coast of Singapore. In order to get to visit those refugees on Galang Island, it was easier to get there through travel to Singapore and then a boat trip to the island than it was to try and get there by traveling within Indonesia. There were some NGO-associated Americans on Galang and the Refugee Coordinator for the program was based in Singapore. But we were responsible for dealing with the Indonesian military who ran the camp and who were in charge of all of the procedures to bring people in and out of the island. We had Consulates in both Medan, on the north part of Sumatra, and Surabaya in the southern part of Java.

During the period I was there, we had a number of VIP visits, headed by a visit from President Reagan in the spring of 1986. He came to Bali for three nights enroute to the economic summit in Tokyo. He arrived late one afternoon and rested that evening and the next day, except for some staff meetings. While Reagan rested at one hotel on the Nusa Dua side of the island, the ASEAN leaders met at a hotel on the Kuta Beach side with President Suharto. The following day, President Reagan had a group meeting with all of the senior ASEAN leaders and then joined them for a big dinner banquet. DCM Howland was the overall coordinator for the visit from the Embassy side and I was the control officer for Secretary of State Shultz. On the day the President was resting, Secretary Shultz had meetings with all of his counterparts and then he joined the President for his meeting with the ASEAN leaders. To prepare for the visit, I made several trips to Bali with the Presidential Advance Team and was there for a full ten days immediately before the President arrived. Everything largely went according to plan, though the Air Force attachï¿½ stepped in a ditch while he was working the airport arrival on the tarmac and broke his leg. When President Reagan met with several of us at the end of the trip to thank us for supporting the trip, we were all surprised to see him sign the Air Force Officer's cast.

I was also involved in a somewhat amusing episode involving Secretary Shultz's early morning tennis match. A junior officer in the political section, Tom Niblock, implored me to let him be the Secretary's partner in his early morning double's match before he started his meetings with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers. I agreed because he was a pretty good player. But the pressure of the day must have been to much for my younger colleague, for on one of his early serves in the match he plunked the Secretary square in the back. The Secretary was not injured and was certainly not upset, but Mr. Niblock never lived down his tennis miscue while he was in Jakarta.

Several months before the President's arrival there was another important meeting in Bali where U.S. and Indonesian academics and scholars who did research on Indonesia met to discuss Indonesia and regional issues. I was also very much involved in putting this meeting together and worked with the host Indonesian and US organizations - the Center for Strategic International Studies for Indonesia and the Asia Society for the US. Another issue of concern for the Political Section was the situation on the island of New Guinea. Half of the island was the nation of Papua New Guinea while the other half was the Indonesian Province of Irian Jaya. There was a Free Papua movement in Irian Jaya and there was some tribal unrest which occasionally resulted in groups moving back and forth across the international border. There were a number of U.S. missionaries in Irian Jaya and they occasionally worked in areas where the Free Papua groups were active. The Political Section would team with a Consular Officer, who twice a year went to the province to provide passport services to the missionaries, in order to get a chance to look at the local scene in Irian Jaya. In addition to visiting the missionary outposts, the consular officers also visited the Freeport mining area where there were US engineers and school teachers. I took advantage of one of these consular service visits to go to Irian Jaya.

Let me digress a bit here to talk about the unusual nature of the Freeport mine. Freeport is on a mountain top not too far from the equator. It's actually south of the equator, but on a nearby mountain top, there is a permanent ice cap. We actually flew past that mountain enroute to the airport at the mine site. It was a really unusual site with tropical foliage covered mountainsides adjacent to a snow and ice cap. The Freeport mine is an absolutely unbelievable engineering achievement. It's a copper and gold mine and one of the largest mines in the world. It's dug out of the side of a mountain, but not at the base of the mountain. The entrance to the mine is fairly far up the side of the mountain. When you go into the mine you descend fairly deep into the mountain. No matter how warm it was on the outside, it was really cold inside, in the mine and we had to borrow heavy woolen jackets, boots and gloves in order to go inside. The construction for the base of operations as I said was up very high on this mountainside. Roads had to be constructed from the ocean all the way up to the mine site to bring in supplies and equipment. This was a very lightly populated area and there were very few indigenous supplies so everything was imported. There are big ore crushing facilities at the site and to transport the processed ore from the mine, the company built a multi-pipe slurry which took the pulverized rock directly from the mountain top to the port on the coast. I'm guessing here but it could be as long as 75 miles from the mine to the port. Anyway, I've never seen such a spectacular engineering feat.

There, of course was a settlement of foreigners up there on this mountainside, people associated with the mining operation and an actual international school for the children of the mine family expatriates. These are the people our consular officer would visit and provide consular services. A couple of years later a few of the people associated with the school were involved in an ambush on the main road from the mine and a couple of the teachers were killed or wounded.

The Political Section also focused on the corruption issues, the role of the military in the political system and the difficulties involved with transmigrasi, the Indonesian policy of moving people from densely populated areas like Java and some of the bigger cities on other islands to areas that had fewer people. This program was supported by USAID and also by a variety of international organizations. Not unexpectedly, the program had lots of problems with poor preparation of some of the transmigration sites, poor administration on site, and inadequate transportation to help the new migrants to get their products to market. Corruption was also involved as there was lots of money involved that passed through a number of different government agencies.

Earlier, I mentioned GOLKAR, the big official Indonesian political grouping, but there were a couple of other smaller groups which had links back to Indonesia's early independence days. The most important was the Muslim Party, the PPP, whose leader, John Naro, played a role in the parliament and at one point was even considered as a possible Vice Presidential candidate for Suharto. The PPP was often at odds with another quasi-political Muslim organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama, which had opted out of the PPP a few years earlier. This organization was primarily concerned with education through the local Muslim-run schools, called pesantran, and in interpreting Muslim teachings for the faithful. Its leader at the time I was there was Abdurrahman Wahid and, after Suharto was deposed, he became Indonesia's first elected President. The schools were very important because they were usually the only schools outside the cities and thus the NU had very wide membership and influence. Wahid was known as a reformer and a strong advocate of human rights. The NU was conservative and traditionalist in its general outlook but it certainly wasn't what today we would call a "fundamentalist" Muslim organization. Wahid and others were concerned about the more radical "fundamentalist" movements in the Middle East and constantly were trying to ensure that these influences did not have a wide audience in Indonesia. One of the officer's in the Political Section, Gene Christy, had known Wahid during his first tour in Indonesia, and he introduced me to Wahid. Because he was now the head of the NU, I became his chief contact at the Embassy, and we used to meet every couple of months to discuss political and social issues. I also met with a number of the Indonesian academics, most notably Juwono Sudarsono, who was then a professor of international relations at the University of Indonesia and Lee Tek Cheng who was a professor of Chinese Contemporary History and Politics. Juwono later became Minister of Defense under both Presidents Wahid and Yudhoyono.

One of our most important contacts was with an organization known as The Center for Strategic International Studies. It was not related to the organization with the same name founded at Georgetown University. CSIS in Jakarta was both a research and policy institute. It had very close ties with General Moerdani, Suharto's Minister of Defense and the Army Commander while I was there. As I mentioned earlier, they were the Indonesian co-host with the Asia Society for the academic conference we held to discuss Indonesia-U.S. relations. They were also very influential within ASEAN and other business related groups in the region. They had academic links with European and American research institutions. The founder of the organization was an Indonesian named Hadi Soesastro, but the most prominent leader was a Chinese-Indonesian named Jusuf Wanandi. He and his brother Sofian were among the most active of the academics in the Institute, though Sofian was also a businessman. In Indonesia, Wanandi for the most part used his Indonesian name. But abroad, he was more regularly known by his Chinese name Lim Bian Kie. The brothers had been active among Catholic students who helped the Muslim students who supported Suharto against Sukarno and the PKI and this cemented their ties with the Indonesian Government and with the Catholic General Moerdani. Jusuf Wanandi was the head of this Center for Strategic International Studies and a couple of other Indonesian Chinese, Harry Tjan and Clara Joewono also had key roles. We were regularly inter-acting with Jusuf and the others on domestic and international issues.

Q: Well, particularly with your Chinese background were you getting, was there an Indonesian perspective from the institutions and all of current events in China?

HARTER: The Indonesians by and large did not travel to China, with the exception of Li Tek Cheng. Li would go to China periodically. Lim Bian Kee (Jusuf Wanandi) would meet PRC officials in Hong Kong or Southeast Asia and would travel to Taiwan but not the mainland at this time. But these two and the CSIS group in general saw China's modernization and economic changes as the basis for a new opportunity to resume ties. But they were also very critical of the Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and they tended to see Vietnam as more likely to be a useful barrier to Chinese expansionism rather than as a threat to the non-communist nations of Southeast Asia. General Moerdani also shared this view and he and Foreign Minister Mochtar, an advocate of the general ASEAN line toward Vietnam were frequently at odds over their respective Vietnam policies. To the extent these academics and think-tank members had access to top leaders, which they generally did, they were advocates for a gradual resumption of ties with the PRC. But Bian Kie had to be careful in his presentations, because there was still a great deal of resentment toward the PRC among the top Indonesian leaders over what had happened in the '60s. During this period, there were a number of business and commercial contacts which seemed to hold promise for a resumption of economic ties. This did not take place while I was there, but I believe some trade opportunities developed before the end of the decade and relations were officially resumed in the early 1990s.

Q: When was it cut off? When Suharto took over?

HARTER: Yes. Diplomatic relations were broken during the period when Sukarno was eased out of power and the Chinese were being killed or were fleeing from Indonesia.

Q: Were we concerned about the corruption factor moving into the United States and both companies dealing with it, but also eventually it ended up in the political process in the United States didn't it?

HARTER: Yes, the corruption issue was very important. Laws were already on the books limiting US companies from paying bribes or commissions to do business abroad. But it was very difficult to avoid this and still do business in Asia and many other parts of the world. In Indonesia, the US was very heavily invested in the oil sector. Many of the top US companies in that field were invested in Indonesia. Their status and reputation in the international industry gave them the cachet to keep their involvement without having to rely on payoffs to get business contracts. During the years I was there, the US oil companies were increasingly displeased with Indonesia's oil policies. There was still a good deal of oil business on the extraction side and the export levels were still good. But oil company executives already projected these yields would soon start to decline. They wanted to expand existing fields or to do more exploration but the Indonesians were not letting that happen. The oil company representatives tried to argue that the long lead time between exploration and actual production would not permit the Indonesians to put off exploration if they wanted to avoid seeing their output diminish before new production could be put on line.

Q: Was the lack of exploration all due to the corruption factor in a way or the problem during this?

HARTER: I'm not sure. I think there may have been some international corruption issues but the domestic oil conglomerate, Pertamina, was one of Indonesia's most corrupt enterprises. This company had a very bad image and was heavily involved in funneling funds to Suharto and other politicians, as well as enriching those who managed the company. But there was also a functional rationale for the Indonesian lack of enthusiasm for more new exploration. Suharto and others in the administration wanted more opportunities for indigenous companies to operate in the energy sector. Some thought this restriction of exploration was part of Indonesia's desire to have more control over the entire industry. And, since the Indonesians lacked the skills and the equipment to do the exploration in the more difficult areas, they just stopped new foreign exploration, hoping they could develop the skills before the existing wells could no longer produce.

Q: Were we taking any stand with Suharto on this problem of corruption or was this just his problem?

HARTER: We talked about corruption when we had high-level visitors there to see the President, and both Ambassador Holdridge and Ambassador Wolfowitz who succeeded him, would raise the issue in their bilateral meetings. But outside of the high-level visits, the Ambassadors did not see President Suharto that often, maybe only a couple of times during the year. So the corruption issue was more frequently raised with the economic ministries or with Foreign Minister Mochtar. Ambassadors Holdridge and Wolfowitz would see one of the economic ministers every other week or so and the Economic Counselors, Joe Winder and Rich Wilson would be there at the ministries a couple of times each week.

Q: With the ministries, particularly the more technical ones dealing with mining and all that, were people running these by this time, basically American educated and all?

HARTER: Oh yes, quite a large number of Indonesia's educated elite had graduated from American institutions. In fact, Suharto's top economic advisors inside and outside the Cabinet were collectively known as the Berkeley Mafia, because they were all southern California Ph.Ds. What was interesting about the Indonesians and quite different from the students who went abroad to study from other parts of Asia, the Indonesians overwhelmingly went home. Ninety plus percent of the Indonesians who came to the United States and got regular degrees or advanced degrees all went back to Indonesia. This was definitely not true of the people from Hong Kong or any of the other countries in Southeast Asia. When only the cadre kids from the PRC were coming to the U.S. to study, they invariably went home as they were already part of the privileged elite. Later on when the Mainland Chinese coming to the US were from all sectors of the country, the Chinese overwhelmingly stayed in the US to work for a number of years before even considering going back to China. The Indians and others from the sub-continent stayed in the United States for years and years. Part of it was because of economic opportunity. Indonesia was growing faster than all of these other economies and a well-educated student had pretty good opportunities once he or she returned to Indonesia. But it was also a cultural issue, and the Indonesians simply felt more comfortable being back in Indonesia and they often went into academic positions which didn't provide a lot of income compared to what they might have earned if they remained in the US.

Q: I was wondering whether, you know, weren't you exposed to sort of the American culture and the absence of huge corruption and all this; this can be very frustrating isn't it? I would think on the part of American educated people coming back to a place where corruption was so pronounced.

HARTER: Well, again many of the individuals educated abroad were very critical of the system. But those who ended up directing the economic system and Indonesia's New Order modernization policies were probably willing to tolerate a certain amount of this corruption, at least in the initial period, to enable Indonesia to move forward and grow dynamically.

Q: Did you have any particular group in mind who might lead any - you know, change of regime movement or something?

HARTER: At that time, the issue of imported fundamentalism was not big, but there was a local Muslim education-focused group call Muhammadiyah which we were watching because it seemed like a candidate for creating a base for fundamentalism. Like NU, Muhhammadiyah ran schools and newspapers and social welfare programs for Muslims. But, they were much less tolerant of other religious groups; they were more opposed to the idea of Indonesia being a secular state and wanted more reliance on Islamic religious laws and regulations throughout the society. Muhammadiyah was the group we thought was potentially the most dangerous, again because it was based in Java which was the largest population mass and the greatest concentration of poor and underprivileged people living alongside the greatest concentration of wealth and power. The other groups that could potentially cause problems tended to be ones that were localized. The separatist group in Aceh, for example, had no following outside of that small part of the island. It had no operations throughout the rest of Sumatra, everything was focused around Aceh.

Q: That had been boiling for years hadn't it?

HARTER: Yes, right. But, it had not taken on an oppositionist role outside of its own immediate area.

Q: There's no where to go.

HARTER: The free Papua movement which was in Irian Jaya and associated with the Papua New Guinea people who were in an independent country across the border was again a totally localized movement. It did not have as an objective transformation of all of Indonesia. The East Timorese issue was even more localized, because that island has a relatively small population on a rather small island. I personally believe East Timor is one of those places that should have found a way, found an accommodation to be a part of Indonesia. It's unfortunate, there is just no way that place is going to ever survive as an independent stand-alone nation. It is too small; it is too poor. Unless they find huge mineral resources, the island cannot support itself. The Portuguese did virtually nothing there during their centuries of administration. There were no roads, no bridges, no schools, nothing that existed outside of a number of churches built by the Portuguese in the population centers. But, they didn't even connect the towns with real roads. They were mostly just dirt trails into the villages and some additional roads built by the Indonesians around the capital at Dili. The poverty I saw there was depressing. In the dry season most of the island is a barren wasteland. It is only during the rainy season when there is a real opportunity to farm. And, education was at the very basic level.

Q: Were we concerned with, was East Timor a blip on our radar at that time?

HARTER: Yes, we were paying attention to East Timor. We made demarches to the Indonesians about repressive military policies and raised concerns about human rights. Timor regularly came up at the UN and we had many Congressional critics to deal with. Many members of Congress objected to US cooperation with the Indonesian military when they were reportedly the source of most of the human rights concerns on the island. There was indeed sporadic fighting of a hit and run guerrilla nature. The occasional bloodied Indonesian nose from one of these guerrilla actions usually prompted some form of military reaction or reprisal and that usually meant some civilians were killed, arrested, or detained. There were periodic reports of bad treatment and torture of prisoners. I only visited the island once, but people in my section went there every six or seven months just to get a feel for what was going on. Actually, while I was there the Indonesians seemed to be doing a better job of dealing with popular concerns on the island. The governor was a native Timorese, the Catholic Church leader was a cooperative native Timorese who was more intent on trying to help his fellow Timorese than in trying to make political points in Lisbon or the Vatican. And, the fighting had become much more sporadic. Unfortunately, the Indonesians did not sustain a congenial cooperative policy and the East Timorese did not remain docile so the situation continued to fester into the 90's before East Timor voted for independence in a plebiscite.

Q: How about West Timor? Anything going on?

HARTER: West Timor was pretty much an ordinary little Indonesian-run enclave. It had its own Javanese group and locals who ran the government and operated the businesses there. West Timor was pretty much the same as any of the other smaller islands in Indonesia. They were not well-developed economically but they were certainly better off than the people of East Timor. When the east was fighting for its independence, there were some cross border clashes with people on the western side and there were cross border family fighting connections as well as family reunification issues that had to be brokered by the Indonesians. But West Timor was not particularly interested in joining the East Timorese struggle for independence. They had grown up under the Dutch and then the Indonesians and had very little in common - outside of those extended family ties - with the former Portuguese dominated peoples on the eastern part of the island.

Q: Did you find yourselves under attack 'cause you weren't, you know, from human rights groups or something in the United States or elsewhere? You weren't doing enough?

HARTER: Yes, the Embassy and the State Department were criticized very heavily by the U.S. and international human rights groups. We were accused at best of being too passive in dealing with the Indonesian government and at worst as collaborating with the military to oppress the independence objectives of the Timorese people.

Q: From what you were saying, your judgment, yours and I take it your collective judgment was this East Timor really wasn't, I mean they really had to do adjust to; they just weren't going to be viable as a state.

HARTER: Yes, even those people at the Embassy who were sympathetic to the Timorese desire for independence certainly did not feel that the Fretilin group leading the fight for independence was anything more than a fly buzzing around the head of an elephant. I mean Fretilin did not generate a lot of positive feelings because it did not seem to have any real political or economic program and its military activity was barely at the nuisance level. Certainly no one at that time believed Fretilin had the ability to defeat the Indonesian Government.

Q: What about on that and other things, did you find that the Australians were playing a fairly large role in sort of Western relations with Indonesia?

HARTER: Yes and no. The Australians certainly were very significantly interested in what was happening in Indonesia. There had been periods of time when the Indonesian-Australian relationship was close to the brink of war. The Australians were concerned about refugee arrivals from Indonesia - mostly the possibility of people from Timor or Irian Jaya fleeing to Australia to escape fighting; they were concerned about the possibility of future military conflict over boundary disputes of one sort or another. There were occasional actual problems when the Indonesians periodically would push off Vietnamese boat people who would then end up in Australia. And there were Indonesian concerns about the lack of Australian investment in Indonesia and a surplus of human rights criticisms, particularly about East Timor.

I remember being told there is a point in Indonesia where apparently at low tide you can walk from Indonesia to Australia; I had never heard that before. Interestingly, there was not a huge amount of refugee flow or economic migrants leaving Indonesia for Australia. No matter how bad the economic situation might have been, the Indonesians didn't pack up and get on a boat and go somewhere else. They just sort of stayed there and toughed it out. They may have moved within the islands and they may have moved into a city out of the rural areas looking for work, but they didn't just simply try to get to Australia or any other country in the region. But going back to your original question, aside from paying a great deal of attention to what was going on in Indonesia, the Australians did not have a great deal of influence in Indonesia

Q: How was the Indonesian government, I mean did you compare notes with the Australians?

HARTER: All the time, yes. When I first got to Jakarta I started up a regular luncheon gathering for representatives of those Embassies that were the most active "Indonesia Watchers" just as I had done in Hong Kong. The group consisted of the Political Counselors of the US, Australian, Dutch and Japanese Embassies and we usually met once a month. We would take turns hosting lunches at home to stay out of public view and better focus on what was going on in Indonesia. The group got along very well and we had an excellent interchange, so much so that the original Japanese Political Counselor member refused to relinquish his spot in the group when he was promoted to DCM. His replacement as Political Counselor had to wait until the DCM left Jakarta before he could join our group. There was a bigger group of DCMs who had been having this sort of luncheon gathering, but like any really large group they got to be very much a social gathering. We deliberately kept our group small and private so that we would have a better opportunity to talk about what was going on. All three of these other governments were very interested in Indonesia and all of the luncheon members - myself excepted - had some earlier Indonesia background before their Political Counselor assignments. The Japanese member, Shigenobu Nagai, had even written a book about Japan's relations with Indonesia. The other three original members of the Political Counselor's group later became Ambassadors at top posts for their respective governments.

Although there were certainly some people in the US Embassy who had previous Indonesian experience before their assignments in these middle years of the 1980s, we did not have the depth of background and experience these other three Embassies had. This was not unusual because Indonesia was a much more important country in their bilateral relationships than Indonesia was for the United States. Our chief relationships in Asia were with Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and the emerging relationship with the PRC. I didn't mention Australia and New Zealand here because the former was more like a distant Canadian brother and the latter under the Labor Government had become an estranged relative thanks to its ship visitation policy.

Q: Was there any with this group, would you say, was there a disquiet about the direction of the Suharto government at this time?

HARTER: Yes, very much so. The focus was clearly that the government needed to do something serious about corruption and they needed to do something about broadening the political base. Aside from a few small groups of inter-related families at the top, there were very few people involved in the government. At the provincial government level and below, there was hereditary successions that were either familial or a series of military commanders from locally assigned units. It was similar to a traditionalist village chief system where the chiefs would run a village generation after generation.

Q: There was a movement of Indonesian's, Indonesian government was trying to get people out of jobs and sending them up to -

HARTER: Yes, it was called Transmigrasi - the transmigration program. Actually, it was a very interesting program. Its objective was to open for settlement remote areas on the outer islands of Indonesia which had very limited populations and to develop them with the surplus population of the main island, Java, and other locales that were overcrowded. The government was responsible for providing the infrastructure to set up the settlement areas, from clearing the land and building roads to providing farming implements, seed, subsistence foodstuffs, and building materials for housing, and transporting the migrants to their new settlement areas. Indonesian funds were supplemented by funds from the World Bank, USAID, and other bilateral donors, all of whom had to put their two cents into trying to manage the program. The program had both successes and failures, though by the end, I'd guess the overall rating would have been somewhere in the middle. Government implementation was spotty and corruption often short-changed the settlers' allotments of needed supplies. A number of places where they tried to create settlements were just too inhospitable; the settlers just couldn't make a go of it. Cutting farmland out of rain forest type jungles usually meant you had poor soils for growing agricultural crops and in many places, even with roads, there were no reasonable market places for people to sell their products. People gradually drifted away and resettled nearer to the cities on those other islands. Other places turned out to be quite acceptable. These tended to be in locations that enabled business and trade to flourish a little bit better and in other locations over time the settlers were able to get some crops planted that were less demanding of good quality soil to grow. Some of the transmigrasi sites in Sumatra and in Sulawesi did survive pretty well but the ones in Kalimantan or Irian Jaya or some of the smaller islands did not have a good survival ratio. Nonetheless, it was a challenging experiment which was designed to relieve the population pressures on Java.

Q: As a political officer watching a country that's about, 3,000 miles long, could you get out, say the Celebes or Sulawesi? I mean all of these -?

HARTER: Well, if you go from the western most part of Acheh on the northern tip of Sumatra to the far southeastern end of the island chain in Irian Jaya it's about 3400 miles or more than the distance from Seattle to southern Florida.

Yes, we certainly were allowed to travel by the Indonesians and we did have a section travel budget. I have always been a big believer in travel inside one's assigned country and I always tried to travel as much as I could myself. I also made sure everybody else who worked in the section was constantly traveling. I think we probably had somebody on the road at least every couple of weeks. When I started working in Hong Kong the first time in the mid-70s, the Political Section divided coverage of China's provinces among two officers and we were expected to become "experts" on developments in those areas. When I became head of the section, I modified this a bit and assigned functional as well as geographic responsibilities for the provincial areas. When I got to Indonesia, I resurrected this system and applied it to Indonesia. I expected the political section officers to become experts on their assigned islands. They were expected to travel regularly to these locales, develop contacts among the members of the Parliament from those areas, and otherwise work across the board on any and all issues that affected those particular locales. In addition, we also had functional assignments - someone covering pol-mil issues, human rights issues, etc. At the end of a year, we would revisit the island assignments so people could broaden their experiences and give us differing perspectives on island issues. I found this system to work very well and it later became a major element in how I covered the provincial areas in southeast China when I was Consul General in Guangzhou.

Q: How about some of the universities or university? This always can be a place where there is turmoil around.

HARTER: The students were certainly becoming more active during this period. There were a couple of large demonstrations outside the Embassy but I don't recall the specifics of the issues involved. University of Indonesia students had been radicalized during the Sukarno era and many of them were in league with the PKI at the time Sukarno fell. Thereafter, the University had been locked down by the military and the students had become less active politically. Over the years, however, this began to change, particularly as you had more and more faculty who had been trained abroad. As I mentioned earlier, there were quite a number of Indonesian PhDs who came back and taught in Indonesia. We talked to a number of these people quite regularly, and, after Suharto was replaced, a number of the academics took on leadership positions in the government.

Q: How about the military? I mean I assume the Military Attachï¿½s would more or less cover that, but...

HARTER: They did cover the military and those of us in the political section didn't see the military on too regular a basis. When I first got there, the head of the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry was a military officer and the man who was in charge of the refugee operations on Galang Island was another military officer we would deal with. But, as you say, the Defense Attachï¿½s had most of the military contacts. The other big exception was General Moerdani, the Defense Minister and Commander in Chief of the Army. Many at the time thought Moerdani was likely to be Suharto's successor even though he was a Catholic. Because the DCM knew Moerdani from his earlier tour in Jakarta, he would see him from time to time. And, the Ambassador or high-ranking visitors often went to see Moerdani and then I got to go to these meetings as the notetaker.

Moerdani was directly connected and influenced by the academics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies that I mentioned earlier. Moerdani adopted much of the CSIS regional and global view of Indonesia's foreign policy role, most particularly its Southeast Asia focus and the importance of Indonesia's integration into the rest of Southeast Asia. The Indonesians for the most part were the glue that held ASEAN together. There were a lot of feuds between the Thais and Malaysians and the Singaporeans which the Indonesians managed to smooth together in a way that kept ASEAN going. And there was a great deal of inter-action designed to maintain a collective face on ASEAN's policy toward Vietnam and its invasion/occupation of Cambodia.

Q: I assume that this is something that we certainly, a development that we would appreciate? Because, I mean some in the U.S. saw ASEAN, in a way, as a counter weight to China?

HARTER: Yes. The old collective military alliance, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) had long since disappeared and ASEAN was a political, economic grouping without any military component. But the coordination of policy actions and the military assistance which we provided to ASEAN members during the time of their confrontation with the Vietnamese over Cambodia made it seem as though there was still very much an "alliance" relationship between us. We were still allied to the Thais and the Filipinos and we did military exercises with the Singaporeans and the Malaysians, who also did military exercises with our other regional allies, the Australians. Nonetheless, the coordination of policies and the establishment of a jointly supported non-communist resistance in Cambodia became a rallying point for the ASEANs and was an important focus of our own political activity in the region.

Q: How about Vietnam and its role at that time in this mix?

HARTER: At the beginning, immediately after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, there was an ASEAN consensus to support the Thais who were identified as the "frontline" state facing the Vietnamese military forces in Cambodia. Opposition to the invasion, our collaborative policy at the UN to block the seating of the Vietnamese-sponsored regime in the General Assembly and maintaining that seat for the Khmer Rouge representatives were the foundations of the policy. This was supplemented by a collective decision to support a non-communist resistance against the Vietnamese occupation and its puppet regime as a way to begin to distance the ASEANs from being so closely linked to the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate government of Cambodia. This created the first signs of dissension within the ASEAN ranks as the Thai - influenced by their PRC connections - strongly felt the non-communist resistance was more trouble than it was worth and that the only real fighting force was the Khmer Rouge. This development gave rise to the efforts of Foreign Minister Mochtar to broker an ASEAN-Vietnamese dialogue that would try to bring all of the Khmer groups together to talk. Within the Indonesian position, there was also a divergence as Moerdani was willing to lessen Indonesia's commitment to the ASEAN strategy on Cambodia. He wanted to use Vietnam to help contain China, the nation he and Suharto saw as the major threat to the region. So Vietnam at this point was trying to manipulate both the Mochtar and the Moerdani lines to lessen ASEAN's opposition to Vietnam's Cambodian puppet regime.

Q: I was wondering whether the influence of Southeast Asian studies at Cornell had any particular influence as one of the premier U.S. academic institutions which early on specialized in Southeast Asia?

HARTER: Some of the Embassy's Indonesia specialists had been trained at Cornell and they were well known to academics at Cornell. Some of the top Indonesian academics also had Cornell associations. Cornell people participated in the Bali conference I mentioned that was focused on the Indonesia-U.S. political relationship and Indonesia's role in Southeast Asia. But overall, I would not say Indonesia was particularly influenced by the Cornell group as much as it may have been 10 or 15 years earlier.

I should mention a name here, two names actually. One individual is still in the Foreign Service and is currently serving as our Ambassador in Mongolia, Pamela Slutz [2003-2006]. She was in the Political Section with me and on her second Indonesia tour. Pam subsequently went back again. The other person is retired from the Foreign Service and lives in northern Virginia. Her name is Barbara Harvey. Barbara was our most knowledgeable officer about Indonesia. She had done graduate studies on Indonesia and taught Indonesian history and politics in Australian schools. Before here assignment in Surabaya as Consul she'd had at least one other Foreign Service assignment in Indonesia, perhaps even two. She was later our DCM in Jakarta. If you want to get some good background on U.S.-Indonesia policy, you should consider contacting her for this program -

Q: How about Congress? Going to my time when I served in Korea, we had some, the South Koreans had almost tamed Congressmen, you know, who came and visited and were lavishly treated and all. What was the level of congressional interest in Indonesia?

HARTER: Virtually, nobody. Virtually nobody came; they didn't seem interested. It wasn't part of the main route for Congressional travel in Asia. The big spots to visit were in the northeast - China, Japan, Korea. The main route for travelers in Southeast Asia went through Hong Kong, Bangkok and Manila. Singapore, had some occasional visitors; but Jakarta just didn't have much attention. Steve Solarz, on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was truly interested in foreign policy issues, and he would occasionally come to Indonesia. But, as far as I can recall, it was only Steve Solarz who came to visit, it wasn't anybody else. I don't recall anybody else in Congress making an effort to get there, at least during the three years I was there.

Q: Did you have the feeling that this is also reflected back in the State Department that nobody was particularly, you know, coming back and saying, "Oh my God, you have to do something about Suharto or about East Timor, anything like that?

HARTER: We had pressures from other bureaus, especially the human rights bureau. They were getting heat from Congress and the US and international human rights groups, largely on East Timor issues but occasionally also on Irian Jaya cross border activities. But, by and large, Indonesia was quiet, it didn't generate a lot of attention. You're quite right, Indonesia was not considered a big problem, and most of what we did with Indonesia bilaterally was focused on ASEAN and support for ASEAN's Vietnam policies.

Q: It boiled up in the mid '60s when Sukarno.

HARTER: Right. And, after that it stayed quiet until the late 1990s when Suharto fell.

Q: How about relations with the Philippines for example? I would think there would be quite a bit of either conflict or cooperation or something.

HARTER: Well, Marcos and Suharto didn't get along. So, Suharto was likely very happy when Marcos fell from power. They had had a run-in earlier on and I can't remember the very nature of what it was. I'm sure Barbara Harvey could tell you instantly what set Suharto off about Marcos. But, the two of them never got along. I think it was because Suharto felt that Marcos was too arrogant and too much of a prima donna. Suharto was a very laid back, a very soft spoken individual. He did not come on with a big charismatic style, running around the country to demonstrate his great leadership. The two basically acknowledged the other was there but neither would have gone out of his way to do something for the other.

Q: He and his wife did not sing duets?

HARTER: No, they did not. They did not get into that sort of activity. Mrs. Suharto (Ibu Tien) had some charities she worked with, but that too was less than Mrs. Marcos public persona. Ibu Tien was also very active in business enterprises as was Mrs. Marcos. But the two Presidents' styles were completely different. The Suhartos were homebodies while the Marcos' were media headliners.

Q: How about the Malaysia business? I mean they had Konfrontasi over Borneo.

HARTER: Yes, that's true but that was during the Sukarno period and it was over shortly after Suharto took over. Moreover, the collective ties and collective relationships of the ASEAN group supplanted the bilateral concerns. I think that much of the Konfrontasi issue was a product of the colonial periods. It was a revival of an old British-Dutch division of spoils in Borneo, which was territory overwhelmingly controlled by Indonesia. But, ultimately, despite some cross border battles, it eventually just petered out and Malaya did become Malaysia with the incorporation of two of the former British colonial territories on the island.

Q: By this time we had had decent relations with China. Were we playing any role in between the Chinese and the Indonesians of trying to bring them together? Was this at all in our -

HARTER: No. It was something that came up on occasion with discussions in the Foreign Ministry or discussions when we saw the President and we would ask about the China relationship and they would talk about an occasional meeting here and there but we were not advocating any quick move to normalize relations. We felt that the Indonesians would get around to it when they were ready and it was quite clear that it would be a staged move in which economic ties would likely be the starting point. Within ASEAN, it was understood Indonesia would establish relations with China once Singapore did.

Q: Was anybody trying, the Japanese or Thais?

HARTER: No, neither of them, and I didn't have the impression anybody was pushing the issue. I think everybody felt the Indonesians and the Chinese had enough contact and they were getting to the point where it wasn't going to take too much longer for them to get together. But nobody had any particular reason to try to push the issue any faster than its assumed natural evolution.

Q: Was there concern at that time, we're talking '84 to '87, about if the Chinese get back in they may be, push their weight around or have too much influence or was this no longer part of the thinking?

HARTER: I don't recall that ever being an issue at the time. I think the US felt the Chinese had significantly over-played their hand in the '60s - even if much of the PKI activity was locally generated - and it was not likely they would have a very powerful influence in Indonesia once relations were restored. On the other hand, General Moerdani was a strong believer in China as the future destabilizer of Asia and he sought a better understanding with Vietnam as a way to block Chinese expansionism.

Q: I was just trying to think, what sort of role was Japan playing there?

HARTER: Japan was very involved economically and paid a lot of attention to Indonesian policies and politics. The Japanese believed Indonesia was the key player in ASEAN and they correspondingly tried to develop a better understanding and a better relationship there. Indonesia was certainly the wealthiest and most populous of the Southeast Asian countries and it played a very balanced internationalist role within ASEAN. I thought the Japanese were much more active tin Indonesia and much more involved in trying to understand what was going on than they were in Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore.

Q: Did the Japanese, wrong term is not consult, but get together with you on whether Indonesia and all or were they, I mean in fact on both of you, were you both playing your own games or were you both looking at the same thing the same way?

HARTER: I think we very often saw things the same way in Indonesia. The Japanese were more active and more widely involved in economic activities in Indonesia. I mean there were a lot more Japanese connected business activities than there were Americans. American investments were concentrated in the oil industry and then a scattering here and there of much smaller business activities. I think we saw the situation in Indonesia quite similarly. I think this was true of the Dutch and the Australians as well. They were all part of this discussion group I put together. I found we often had different sources of information, but basically saw Indonesia and saw the concerns about Indonesia in very much the same way. So, I think in that sense we were not significantly different from these other countries.

Q: How about the Soviets? Were they, this was a time when they were undergoing, I guess Gorbachev was getting, the Soviets at one time of course had been a big player. Were they, what was their role?

HARTER: I'm trying to remember. I don't even have a direct recollection of what the Russians, I should say the Soviets were doing at that particular time. I'm having a difficult time remembering where they even were located in the city.

Q: Well, I mean I think that probably indicates what the situation was. One time Khrushchev came.

HARTER: I know there were a number of Eastern Europeans represented in Jakarta and I did see some of the Eastern Europeans from time to time. One of the officers in the section did focus on the Soviets and the Eastern Europeans, but I can't really remember having any personal association with the Soviets.

Q: Well, correct me if I'm wrong, at the time we weren't concerned particularly about communist meddling in the country particularly?

HARTER: No, we were not, because Indonesia's 1960s experience with the communists was so negative we did not consider "communist meddling", as you termed it, had much currency for the country.

Q: And terrorism of the fundamentalists islamatic nature was not -

HARTER: At that time it didn't really exist as a movement in Indonesia. I mean aside from this little group in Aceh which had a fundamentalist focus, the Fretilin group in East Timor and the Free Papua movement in Irian Jaya had nothing to do with this philosophy.

Q: Was there a concern, I'm coming from my background which is serving for five years or nine years actually in the Balkans of a split up of a country like Yugoslavia which happened and here's Indonesia and I mean it has potential for lots of break-ups.

HARTER: Yes, the potential was certainly there, given all the separate islands and ethnic groups. But, as I said when we first started to discuss Indonesia, the nation's early leaders didn't try to build everything around Java and the Javanese people. The Indonesian language was not Javanese, the system of government and administration gave recognition to the localities, and the colonial experience and the resistance to it helped pull them all together. The Fretilin group in East Timor and the Free Papua group in New Guinea were the exceptions but then they also had different colonial experiences and they had been forcibly annexed to Indonesia after the earlier independence struggle against the Dutch.

Q: So, we were never concerned about a break-up there?

HARTER: No, I don't think so. The US was very much involved in helping Indonesia gain its independence from the Dutch after World War II and I don't recall even then there being concerns expressed by the involved American diplomats that Indonesia might break up. Even today after all the disruptions of the 1990s and the changes in the administrations after Suharto, you haven't seen a movement for an independent Sumatra, for example. I mean Sumatra is a huge island. It's got a very substantial population; it's got a great deal of wealth and no real reason to be dependent on Java. But, aside from the group in Aceh on the tip of northern Sumatra, the rest of the people on the island are perfectly happy being part of Indonesia.

Q: Were there any little areas of dispute of islets or something like that, you know with different, got a lot of the neighbors?

HARTER: Nothing that really involved the Indonesians after Konfrontasi over the Borneo territories. But there is a regional confrontation of sorts over ownership of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. These islands are mostly small coral reefs, barely above the surface of the ocean but they are in the midst of a rich fishing area and an area which many believe has potential oil riches. The area is claimed by everybody and his uncle in Southeast Asia. There are Malaysian occupied islands, Taiwan occupied islands, PRC occupied islands, Vietnamese occupied islands, and Philippines occupied islands. All of these little dots on the map are part of a territorial dispute that is ultimately irreconcilable. I mean it's not one of these issues where you can create a claim based on historical occupation or control. They've found Han and Tang Dynasty pottery and coins and other remain on some of these islands, but that doesn't make them Chinese, even though the Chinese would like to make you think so. Lots of traders, fishermen and other travelers of any sort of nationality other than Chinese would have had these Chinese manufactured pottery items because they were plentiful and widely traded. Territorially, they are insignificant except as a means to project baseline territorial claims over the adjacent seas. They are certainly in good fishing areas and there is supposedly a potential for oil. The only way you're ever going to do anything reasonable is by creating a shared economic utilization of the resources of the area.

There's already been some conflict in the area between the claimants but no real all-out effort for one nation to push out the other claimants and their occupying forces. There was an exception elsewhere in the South China Sea in territory closer to China and Vietnam with real fighting over the Paracel Islands. When the Thieu Government was in decline in South Vietnam, the PRC sent troops to occupy the Paracel Islands and they drove out the South Vietnamese forces. When Hanoi liberated the south, they thanked the Chinese for their assistance in liberating the islands but the Chinese did not turn them over. It's been a bone of contention between the two ever since. Because these islands are actually closer to Vietnam and to China's Hainan Province, there have been disputes over leasing rights for oil exploration. Some US companies have been involved as they sought concessions from both the Vietnamese and the Chinese to conduct exploration. This could be even more complicated in the Spratly group because there are so many more claimants and so little basis for any of them to actively enforce their claims.

Q: Did India play any role at this time? I mean, India, you know has a sizeable fleet and they got the -

HARTER: No, there wasn't any Indian involvement in this disputed ocean area. There may have been an Indian ship visit at the port in Jakarta called Tanjung Priok, if that's what you mean by involvement in the area. The Indians were not active in Indonesia either.

Q: When you were there, just when you speak about ship visits, did the Indonesians still have operational this cruiser that Khrushchev gave Sukarno. I think it was a stern most class cruiser?

HARTER: I know they had a Russian submarine, but I don't remember the cruiser. Maybe they did.

Q: Maybe it sunk too. It could very well have. Well, you had two Ambassadors. How did Holdridge, what was his operating style?

HARTER: Well, Holdridge was old school, distinguished looking, upright posture, a bit formal but not very activist. He wasn't a charismatic figure or out trying to influence Indonesian politics and policies by dint of a lot of public posturing. He was basically content to manage the embassy and the relationship with the Indonesians through the occasional demarche on instructions from Washington. But you didn't have the sense he was trying to lead the Washington policy in a particular direction. It was like a caretaker diplomatic relationship, keep things on an even keel and avoid controversies.

Wolfowitz was a bit more activist, but he wasn't flamboyant. He'd be out and about more than Holdridge and probably made more policy suggestions back to Washington. Both Holdridge and Wolfowitz had come to Indonesia after being East Asia Bureau Assistant Secretaries in the Department. Holdridge would probably have preferred to be in China, but his political connections to Vice President Bush were not sufficient to get him there. So Indonesia kind of fit his style, a big important country but without a lot of business to be handled. In that sense, it was less of a fit for Wolfowitz who was much younger and politically a lot more ambitious to move up in the system. He was a political appointee and not a career officer like Holdridge so you would have thought he'd be angling for a higher profile ambassadorship where there were more issues to sink one's teeth. Interestingly, Wolfowitz's wife was a student of Javanese culture and had an academic background on Javanese dance and arts, so perhaps he was drawn to Indonesia by his wife's interests. On the other hand, he came to Indonesia when it was still unclear whether Suharto would run for another term as President and perhaps Wolfowitz thought there might be big changes coming up in Indonesia that would have given him a greater exposure there than elsewhere. The operating styles were in some sense I guess, also driven by the DCM who was an Indonesia hand, Dick Howland. Dick was sort of a crusty kind of guy. Sometimes very hard to deal with and other times very easy going and relaxed.

Q: I have a hard time trying to, I've been a doing a series of interviews with him and he's sometimes wonderful and other times very interruptive.

HARTER: Well, my wife, who was working for him as the DCM's Secretary, on occasion had terrible times with him. My own worst experience with him came about during an unusual incident. The Ambassador was out of country or out of town. Dick was Chargï¿½ and had been traveling out to one of the other islands on a special trip arranged by President Suharto. He had just come back into town. I had been next in line in Dick's absence and had been keeping track of things during that day, or for that particular weekend, whatever it was. I knew Dick had returned to town, but that was all, we had not had any contact with one another. It was around 8 or 9 pm when all of a sudden the skies just outside of the center of Jakarta lit up. Nobody knew what was going on. I was on the phone with any number of people who lived outside the downtown area who said mortar rounds were going off in their yards and what they thought were bullets were flying all over the place. How it happened, nobody was ever very certain, but an Indonesian armory outside of town which was stocked with old munitions blew up and the shells and the shrapnel went all over the place.

Key officers in the mission had radios that connected with one another and the embassy, but for whatever reason, I could not reach the embassy which was only about a mile away and I had no connection with anyone out in the general blast area. So I was basically communicating with people in the affected areas and with the Embassy Marines over the telephone. I told several families that were out in the affected area to pack a few things and move into a hotel in the city until we could determine what was happening and to keep them out of the area where all the shells were landing. I guess it must have been after 10:00 pm and maybe even a little later when things quieted down a bit and I was not constantly alternating between affected families and the Marines at the Embassy. I decided I'd better call Dick Howland and let him know what was happening. I got him on the phone and said there were a series of big explosions affecting some of our staff and he screamed, "I'm tired, I'm going back to bed, don't call me again" and hung up

Holdridge came back into the embassy on the next business day and there was the usual morning staff meeting to brief the Ambassador on things that had happened while he was away. I don't know what may have transpired before the meeting but Holdridge started the meeting by complimenting Dick on having handled this emergency so effectively. Dick just basically took the praise and let it go at that. Everybody else in the mission who knew he hadn't been involved was flabbergasted. Suharto had gone out for a tour in the provinces and took a number of the chiefs of mission along. I could understand that after a long day of slogging around doing this and that and flying back and forth to Jakarta, he was tired. But, when you've got American Embassy personnel who are potentially in harm's way, you don't just say, "I'm going back to bed, I'm going back to sleep, I'm tired. Don't call me again."

Q: Well, anyway. Is there anything else we should cover do you think?

HARTER: There was one event I can recall, though it didn't directly involve me. One of the years, I think maybe 1986, two American tourists went missing at sea and the Consular section people were very involved in trying to mount a search effort. The two young women had chartered a small boat on Java in order to go out to visit Ujung Kulon which is a big nature reserve on the coast of Java and it includes some island areas near Krakatoa, the island which had the big volcanic explosion back in the 1880s. Anyway, after several days at sea, they were discovered and rescued. They said the boat motor had broken down after a couple of hours and they just drifted thereafter. The two girls and the boat boy had managed to survive on tooth paste, rainwater, and some small amounts of food they had with them when they departed. Other than that, nothing else on Indonesia comes to mind right now. But, then like some of the other tours I'll think of something later on when we're discussing some other locale and I'll just insert it into whatever we're talking about at that time.

Q: What about the local media though? I mean the media is a source that political sections feed off of, often. Was that true in -

HARTER: The Indonesian media was pretty mediocre and not willing to challenge the regime. It was pretty well censored and controlled by the government. The U.S. media wasn't really that involved and interested. You would get Time and Newsweek correspondents coming for a visit once in awhile, but they would be there doing regional stories more than they would be doing something on Indonesia. With the situation up in the air in the Philippines, there was much more press attention there.

Q: Well then, 1987, whither?

HARTER: Well, by the end of 1987 I had been overseas for awhile and wanted to go back to the Department. The issue was to try and get into something with more management responsibility so I would be a better candidate for promotion into the Senior Foreign Service. I found a job that looked like it had that potential in the Public Affairs Bureau, which is where I served on my first tour. You'll probably recall that on your personnel profile sheet they had people listed with primary and secondary skill codes. Because of that first assignment, I had a secondary skill code in public affairs. The job I sought was Director of the State Department Press Office which coordinated the Department's public inter-action with the press in Washington and across the country. And, it was also involved in developing the State Department's public affairs positions. So, I made that job my first preference and I was chosen for it and served from 1987 to 1989. This assignment again coincided with a transition between administrations, though in this case both Presidents were Republicans and the changes were not as dramatic from a policy perspective. I worked first under the Public Affairs Bureau Assistant Secretary and Press Spokesman, Chuck Redman, during the last year of the Reagan administration and then with his successor, Margaret Tutwiler, during the first year of the first Bush administration. She's just recently been reappointed Head of the Public Affairs Bureau.

Q: OK. Well,, I think this probably is a good place to stop now. So, we'll pick this up in 1987 when you're going to the Press Office, because I think it's important to give considerable attention to what, how the relations and all that worked.

Q: Today is the 18th of May, 2004. Dennis, what was sort of the atmosphere of the Press Office when you got there? It was called Public Affairs wasn't it? What other responsibilities/offices were there in addition to press relations?)

HARTER: The Public Affairs Bureau had an important role in the Department and the Spokesperson had regular access to the Secretary, a relationship that was particularly notable during Secretary of State Jim Baker's tenure. Chuck Redman and Margaret Tutwiler traveled everywhere with the Secretary of State and orchestrated the Secretary's public inter-action on all his trips. They coordinated the press sessions with the traveling press during the Secretary's travels and provided a liaison point for the foreign press and for officials handling other country's public activities involving the Secretary of State. The Spokesperson's role centered on the daily press briefing, the only such briefing by a US Cabinet Office conducted every weekday. It was backed by a twenty-four hour news response institution, the State Department Press Office, which took on that public role after hours and on weekends.

The Public Affairs Bureau had a number of different offices focused on public information. The old office I had worked in, Public Correspondence, was still operating and providing written responses to public inquiries directed to the Department, Congress and the White House on foreign affairs issues. The speaker's bureau office, where I earlier had taken on public requests for speakers on Vietnam War policies, was also still around and it also coordinated the Secretary and other top Department officials for the weekend television talk shows. This was not just an administrative or logistic function but there was also an important policy role which involved selecting themes and target audiences through which to articulate U.S. foreign policy objectives. The Bureau also was responsible for the Foreign Relations Series of publications which released bound volumes of declassified Department documents and did special topical volumes on important international conferences. When Chuck Redman was the Assistant Secretary/Press Spokesman, his Deputy in both positions was Phyllis Oakley, the wife of Robert Oakley, the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asia Bureau with whom I had worked during my tour as Deputy Director of the Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia office.

My office was the State Department Press Office, and it was part of the Public Affairs Bureau. Our chief job was to arrange the daily noon briefing in the Department for journalists accredited to the Department. It was a very large office, around ten people. We usually had a staff of four or five Press Officers, plus myself, as well as a number of staff personnel who handled specialized events including photo ops for the Secretary and other Department "principals" (the Deputy Secretary, the Under Secretaries, and the Assistant Secretaries) when they were meeting with foreign government officials or more elaborate photo shoots which were part of an action sequence involving the Secretary and other dignitaries. The Press Office was in charge of managing all of the Secretary's press events, we set up the daily briefing and the credentialing of reporters for the Department, and we made all the press arrangements when the press accompanied the Secretary on his foreign travels.

We were also the number one liaison contact for the press outside of the press briefing format. So, when the noon press briefing was over, we were the ones who interfaced with the press on a regular basis until the next day's briefing. The only exception would be when another of the Department principals was doing a public event in between the briefings and then they were usually only speaking on a very specific topic or issue. Anything else ended up being directed to the Press Office and our overnight duty officers.

Any of the daily activities of the Department, any of the daily foreign policy events that came up which involved the U.S. or U.S. citizens resulted in the preparation of press guidance. The Press Office helped create the daily press guidance topics, worked the topics and their policy responses through a clearance and a processing system in the building and with other Executive Branch offices when necessary and then we ran the daily briefing operationally for the Department Spokesman. Once the Press Briefing was concluded, the Office became the official purveyor of the guidance to any and all who sought information through the Department. So, when you would read in the newspaper or hear on the news names of junior people in the State Department quoted as a press spokesman, those were all people out of the State Department Press Office responding to information requests outside the Press Briefing hour. When I came into the office it was a 24 hour job, seven days a week. The Press Office had a duty roster schedule with an officer on duty from close of business to opening of business the following day and a rotating shift system to switch duty coverage weekly. The duty officer got phone calls from the press, referred through the OpsCenter (Operations Center), on everything that happened in the world and quite often from people all around the world. Then, perhaps after being up all night with one issue or another, these officers were expected to put in a regular eight-hour day in the office. During a bad week in which there were lots of after hours calls, the officer involved often could barely stay awake.

I worked with this system for several months but did not believe it was very useful to have people on call 24 hours a day. But, that system had been in effect for quite some time and I wanted to make sure I had a better proposal to make before I suggested changing it. For the most part when we got calls in the middle of the night, it was about stories breaking elsewhere in the world for which we very likely had no particular press guidance to provide to the reporters. And so, all we were saying was, "We'll get back to you, we'll have to let you know tomorrow, we'll have to look into this." Now these were not generally major diplomatic crises which would be the focus of the Operations Center and a particular geographic or functional bureau, these were press interest issues.

Q: They were usually on fast breaking events?

HARTER: Precisely. I mean we'd get phone calls about airplane crashes somewhere across the ocean with the questioner always trying to determine if there were any Americans involved. No way in the world as a press officer you could know that at two or three in the morning. There was no way you could know an incident had occurred or someone had been involved in some kind of a difficulty overseas and gotten arrested. And so, I worked out a new system within the Public Affairs Bureau, which was cleared all the way up to the Secretary - since ultimately we were responding on behalf of the Secretary and the Department in all these cases. Under the new arrangement, the duty officer would be available to take calls through the Operations Center until 11 pm. Any calls that came in after eleven were taken by the watch officer in the Operations Center who would take down the details and refer the issues to us the following morning when our office opened around six o'clock. At that point, we'd research the issue and get back to the original caller with a Department-approved response.

One of our officers, Sondra McCarty, had a flex schedule so she came in at 4:30 am. If I recall correctly, she left home in Gainesville at 3:30 am to get into the Department by that hour, and then she usually left the office between 2:30 and 3:00 in the afternoon to return home. She started the day's press operations by culling the major newspapers: Washington Post, New York Times, Washington Times, Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, she looked at the AP, UPI and Reuters wire service tickers, in order to get a handle on the issues which might prompt questions at the noon Press Briefing. I came in at 6:30 am, double checked some of the papers and talked through the topics with Sondra until 7:30 am. At that point, we had a conference call with the Press Spokespersons, initially Chuck Redman and Phyllis Oakley. The four of us would review all of the issues and decide on what topics were the most important to prepare for. Promptly at eight, even if we were not finished, the conversation ended because the Spokesperson went in to brief the Secretary, and they reviewed the major events and issues and got personal guidance from the Secretary.

After the conference phone call had reached consensus on the topics and the questions that were likely to come up, the Press Office contacted the relevant Bureaus and tasked them for the guidance. For the most part, the Press Office didn't create any responses on our own. We went out to the Bureau Public Affairs Officers, mostly to the geographic Bureaus, but also to the functional Bureaus, and gave them the topics and likely questions. For the most part these Bureau officers had also been scanning the incoming cable traffic as well as the ticker items for hot issues and they sometimes helped us sharpen the topics and questions for guidance. The Bureau Public Affairs Officers then took the issues for drafting and to obtain whatever clearances were necessary, including ones outside the Department, like at Defense or Treasury. The cleared materials were due in the Press Office no later than 10:30 am where the Press Office staff would make sure the Q and A (question and answer) papers and any background material were all properly formatted for the briefing. Then by 11:00 am I would take this material to Chuck Redman's office where he, Phyllis, and I reviewed the responses, occasionally going back to senior officials in the Bureaus to confirm whether we had the right take on a particular issue. Sometimes Bureau Press Officers wouldn't get their materials to me in time and their first review came at the meeting with Chuck and Phyllis. This review occasionally involved redrafting and phone clearances for new language that Chuck had decided would serve better. These meetings were in Chuck's office and occasionally someone from the Secretariat staff would attend and occasionally one of the Department principals might be there if there was an issue of particular concern to them that was coming up. Bureau Press Officers would also sometimes stay outside Chuck's office as we reviewed the guidance in order to provide additional background or details on complicated or new issues. If a White House clearance was deemed necessary, then Chuck would call the White House and review the language. By 11:30, or 11:45 at the latest, Chuck and Phyllis went into the Secretary's office to go through anything that might be particularly sensitive and to review how they intended to talk about the issues of the day.

Redman and Oakley were very, very good about getting the briefings started at noon. It was supposed to be a noon briefing and they wanted to be punctual. Timing was an important issue too for the press, because timely completion of our briefing enabled the press to set up for the evening TV news, to get wire service stories out to make other city deadlines and to prepare things for the print media. The State Department was the only daily US Government briefing during the work week. The White House did briefings infrequently; the Defense Department did briefings only occasionally, and we would of course coordinate if there were issues they felt needed to be raised first in their briefing sessions. Treasury rarely did briefings but we did occasionally have to clear economic and financial issues with them.

The office also had a couple of trained court stenographers, you know the people who use those little machines to create court records, who were responsible for taking down the daily press briefing. Afterward, they produced a transcript which we posted for the press and sent off to others who requested copies of it. And of course it was archived as part of the Department's permanent records. The briefings started at noon and ran for at least a half hour but more often they lasted forty-five minutes to an hour. We rarely went beyond 1:00 pm. The court stenographers were supposed to finish the transcript so it could be posted by 3:00 pm and I think we missed that deadline only once or twice during the two years I was there. Once the transcript was up, our office often received follow-on questions from the press on which we had to get answers or we would get questions which had not come up in the briefing but for which we already had guidance and then we'd answer those questions using the already approved guidance. That's how you would often see names in the paper other than Chuck Redman or Phyllis Oakley identified as a State Department press spokesman. Once the Department started to close down, we'd transfer over to the duty officer system and then one officer would cover all the issues from home until the next day or until 11:00 pm on the schedule I later instituted.

The Press Office also handled the press functions for the Secretary's annual UN General Assembly program. We'd send a couple of people, usually from our Civil Service personnel because they had more experience handling the New York operations. While I was there that would have been Civil Service officer, Nancy Bates, and Civil Service staffer, Gladys Boggs, who would stay in New York for however long the Secretary spent at the General Assembly. Because almost all of the Secretary's time was involved in meetings with foreign counterparts, Gladys was very busy because she was our specialist in arranging photo ops. Chuck Redman would be there in New York too with the Secretary and for that period Phyllis would do all of the daily briefings.

I just mentioned Gladys Boggs and photo ops. This was an important part of our press operation in Washington. When an important visitor came to the Department, we would have photographers and network cameras pre-positioned for the arrival greetings and farewells at the C Street Entrance. Or, we'd have a big group set up in the C Street Lobby to catch the Secretary and the foreign visitor at the end of their meetings when they had agreed to stop or when we hoped they would agree to stop and respond to a question or two from regular reporters. On occasion, the Secretary and his guest would agree to take a series of questions right after their meeting in the Secretary's Office on the Seventh Floor. Then we'd have to get the press set up in the Treaty Room outside the Secretary's Office so we could arrange good camera coverage and space for a small group of journalists. The confined spaces in the treaty room and at the C Street entrance meant we had to work up pool arrangements so that print journalists had an official notetaker on any statements, a still photographer had to be in place for all of the print media - including the wire services, and there had to be at least one network camera crew - one person for camera and one person for sound - to do the very basic coverage package. On occasion, a very small press group would be assembled in the Treaty Room before the meeting started and they would follow the Secretary and his visitor from their entrance on the Seventh Floor right into the Secretary's office where they'd be allowed to photograph the initial words of greeting between the two principals. Then we'd have to get the press moving quickly out of the office and back to wherever the next press opportunity might be set - sometimes with that same group included or sometimes with an entirely different group.

Obviously, we tried to make the events broader to permit more press exposure but the space issues determined everything. And, of course, the security people were anxious to minimize the people involved so we often had to negotiate with them as well. Fortunately in the case of Secretary Schultz he was very approachable and we'd have Chuck Redman make a pitch for a few more people to be around for the various events. Gladys was the real specialist for this work and the press just loved her because she was always looking out for them. My Deputy, Anita Stockman, was another one of the Civil Service officers on the staff and she was one of the people who kept track of credentialing and scheduling the press for the Secretary's travels.

We also had to do the arrangements for the networks so they could set up the TV camera shoot locations. For example, when you see currently, let's say Andrea Mitchell do her shot with the wall of flags back drop from the C Street inner entrance hall, we were responsible for all of the electrical camera and lighting connections and the scheduling of who was going to be doing those TV shots at what time. So, there were a lot of technical things going on and there was a lot of scheduling, since ideally all of the networks wanted to go "live" with that balcony background shot for their six o'clock evening news whenever there were big international stories to be reported. Keeping them from interfering with one another with lighting or sound overages meant we had to try to move them through their presentations promptly so someone else could use the same space. When the issues were not as important, the spot could be pre-recorded and then we usually had a few hours in which to work up a schedule for the TV correspondents to do their individual reports.

The office was also in charge of the Press briefing room which was down the corridor from where our offices were located on the second floor off the 23rd Street Entrance. We actually did two upgrades or refurbishments of the Press Briefing Room while I was there. The first one included some new microphones and equipment at the press desks and a repainting of the backdrop behind the spokesperson and it all looked quite good. But within six months of the new administration coming in the new Public Affairs front office people had a different idea about what the background ought to be and the color combinations that ought to be used and so it was all redone again.

We also were responsible for keeping the press group happy in their two office bull pens one corridor away from us on the second floor. Aside from a couple of individual office rooms, which usually were assigned to network correspondents, along one wall of the big open space, most of the press worked from small carrels inside this open room. Their little cubicles were usually strewn with papers and different types of equipment. They were all pack rats and you wondered how they ever found anything. During this 1987-1989 time period we were operating without all the locked doors and card readers required for access into the press area or to move from within that area into other parts of the building. So the press, once they were in the building with their Department press passes actually could move about quite freely. This privilege was rarely abused and we didn't get more than one or two complaints a year about press people showing up unannounced in other Bureau offices outside the second floor. But during that period, the new restrictions were beginning to be implemented with the first being a locked door outside the elevator block on the second floor where the press would enter their offices. This created a certain amount of grumbling on the part of the press and unhappiness that they were being restricted more than they had been. Some of the press people who had been assigned to the Department for a long period of time knew their way around and they would occasionally drop in on an office on one of the other floors to try to get a bit more background on a particular issue. These people knew their business and didn't get in the way. It was the newcomers who occasionally tried this ploy who had the problems. There were several press people who had been at the State Department for ten, 15, 20 years, so they were very knowledgeable people and by and large were a good crew to work with. Many of the people at the Department shifted among a little circle of positions at the White House, Defense, and State for their respective papers or networks. Occasionally, one of the network people would switch networks, but the print media generally stayed with one organization. We had TV, we had radio, we had print - wire services, newspapers, magazines, all the various press groups jumbled together in two largish rooms. We had a few foreign correspondents who came to the daily press briefing, but most of the international press corps stayed at their offices at the Foreign Press Center which was at the National Press Center building. It was run by USIA and it got a live feed of our daily briefing.

Q: How did this work? You watch these press briefings, the new impressed briefings and almost always there are American reporters asking questions. How did the foreign reporters fit in?

HARTER: We had a few that would come attend the briefings but for the most part they didn't ask that many questions. The largest reason for that I think was they didn't have strong English language speaking skills and thus they were hesitant to ask questions. Moreover, there was only a limited space in the Press Briefing room to accommodate reporters. The USIA operation on the other hand was in a larger facility which got the live video feed directly from us everyday at the same time and different national reporter groups could share their understanding of the briefing together. USIA would also schedule regular briefings for the foreign press by the Secretary and other top Administration officials. From State, the Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and their Deputies would quite frequently be doing special briefings for the foreign press. Sometimes it seemed they did more there than we could get them to do for the US press. At the Department's press briefing, we would only regularly see a few Japanese and Latin American wire service correspondents and they would indeed ask questions if there was a major Japan story in the headlines while the Latin correspondents usually had questions on the situation in El Salvador. There were also a couple of independent correspondents who produced their own copy or their own radio broadcasts of international news that appeared on small town networks or in small town papers.

Q: What about - you mentioned the press briefing, is this I guess, the tip of the iceberg isn't it in your relations with the press? Talk a little about what would go on before and after a press briefing.

HARTER: Well, for the press, after the briefing was concluded, they would go back and start filing their stories if they were wire service or newspaper reporters. Magazine people would likely be doing more research because they had different deadlines. Unless there was a breaking story that they needed to feed for CNN or for mid-afternoon news programs, the TV people would be preparing a story for the six o'clock news and finding out from their directors how much if any time they'd be allotted for a presentation. Radio people worked on their own schedules because for most of them there was always a program to insert their new clip. Sometimes the press would come back and forth to us in the Press Office with additional questions or they'd request clarifications if their notes were not clear. Sometimes we'd have to go back to the transcripts to double check exactly what was said. A number of them, of course also recorded the briefing for themselves. They had their own little tape recorders and then they could go back and recheck things independently.

In the Press Office, we'd be taking calls from people who didn't attend the briefing but who wanted to check up on a particular issue. We'd be monitoring the progress of the court reporters and we'd then review their transcript before we posted it for the press. We also posted cleared guidance which had not been used during the press briefing on a bulletin board so the press could check and see if we had guidance on a particular issue without asking us directly. Sometimes, however, they'd make a point of asking one of us just so they could put a name with the response. When I arrived at the Press Office, I also used my old organizational method and assigned each of the officers a geographic region and a functional issue to keep track of. While everyone had to be able to respond with guidance on all of the various issues that were in the briefing book, I tried to get each of the FS and GS press officers to develop more depth and specialization. That way if a call came in on an Africa issue, it would be directed each time to one specific officer - as long as that officer was available - and the person could then have enough background on Africa questions to provide more than just the day's cleared guidance. I think it worked reasonably well. Whether they use that system now or not I just don't know.

The other parts outside of the actual press briefing, as I said earlier, involved a lot of these specialized activities and somebody had to be sure there weren't conflicts and overlaps. You couldn't have for example, three or four of the networks doing their standup routines at the same time and all be using the flag back drop. You had to make sure that there were enough positions set up on the 23rd Street balcony or in the lobby area so that the stand-up correspondent could get the sound and camera connections in a convenient place. We had a couple of lobby positions with appropriate power connections and I believe there were three separate spaces on the balcony crosswalk, one in the middle and one on each end. A lot of the physical equipment for the cameras and the sound were upgraded during the time that I was there. The lobby locations and at least one of the balcony locations were new and they all had better equipment with new control panels for each of the balcony end units. Security, as I said, was increasing during this time. And it became more complicated to work a number of these different events because security approvals were needed to do certain things which previously we could have authorized on our own.

The only other major press activity during my tenure was for a Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in Washington. A lot of that was handled at the building which used to be the Post Office down off Pennsylvania Avenue and they had then transformed into a big conference center. Gladys and Nancy worked directly at the site and did the liaison work with the White House press staff who staged the Reagan events there. They made sure the Department press had reasonable access to the press events and they controlled the press arrangements for the events where Secretary Shultz was the principal American personage. And, of course, before the event took place, we had to take all the applications for press credentials for the event from the Department press corps and others who were seeking entrance to the press events from around the country. The foreign press accreditations were screened by the USIA people at the Foreign Press Center.

Q: Since you straddled two administrations, could you - from the perspective of the Press Office - tell how Secretary Shultz and Secretary Baker operated? Was there a difference?

HARTER: Yeah, I think there was a significance difference, certainly in terms of the liaison between the political appointees and the career State Department people and the inter-relationship of the people around the two secretaries. I had worked in Indonesia with Secretary Shultz and his staff during President Reagan's Bali stop enroute to the economic summit in Tokyo. His staff was a very relaxed, very informal group and they were largely career officers. In my personal opinion of the Secretaries I worked with, Secretary Shultz was the most knowledgeable on foreign policy issues and the most involved in the daily activities of the building. Baker, on the other hand had no interest whatsoever in the building; he had no interest in the Foreign Service; his only interest was managing foreign policy issues for the White House. His entourage was an external entourage. It was all people from the outside, and mostly people who had been with him at Treasury. They came in and sat on top of the other levels in the Department. There were some other political appointees in the Department who were personally outspoken, like Elliott Abrams who was the Assistant Secretary for ARA (Bureau of Inter-American Affairs), but it seemed to me in the time I was there under this new team that everyone deferred to them.

When Chuck Redman and Phyllis Oakley handled the press briefing preparations, I was a part of the meeting group and participated in the discussions up until that last minute review with the Secretary on special issues. Under Margaret Tutwiler, we'd meet with all of the senior Baker Seventh Floor leaders. There was Bob Kimmet, who at that point was Under Secretary for Political Affairs. The Counselor of the Department, Bob Zoelleck, who is now head of USTR, was there. There was one senior career State Department person in the meeting, the head of the Executive Secretariat, Ray Seitz. Then we had the lady in charge of Congressional Relations, Janet Owens, if I remember correctly and a couple of others, including Margaret's Public Affairs Bureau Deputy Assistant Secretary, a young woman who had worked with her previously. I can't remember her name at all, but she was quite young and had no foreign affairs background whatsoever. This group would go over the guidance, sometimes for about an hour, trying to spin the guidance to reflect Secretary Baker's views on things. Ray Seitz and I were there but the meeting more or less went on around us and even he rarely said anything.

The meeting under Margaret Tutwiler was held in a small conference room adjacent to the Secretary's office as opposed to being held in the Assistant Secretary's Office as Chuck Redman had done. Sometimes as the guidance was discussed no one was quite sure how Baker thought about that particular issue and whether he would say things along the lines of the proposed guidance. At that point, Margaret Tutwiler would simply get up from the table and walk directly into Baker's office to ask his views. This was a unique arrangement and it was very useful from the perspective of the press. Don't get me wrong, Chuck Redman had a great relationship with Secretary Shultz, but they didn't have that degree of inter-action. The difference in background between Redman and Tutwiler also comes into play her. Chuck Redman was a career Foreign Service officer, and knew the issues, knew the administration, knew the responses, and had the kind of background that enabled him to field the questions from the press on his own. On the other hand, when Margaret Tutwiler would stand up in front of the press corps at the daily briefing she would simply read the prepared guidance and it largely stopped there. But what made her presentations successful was the ability to respond when certain questions were raised by saying, "Well, I just asked Secretary Baker about that a few minutes ago and Secretary Baker told me. . ." With that kind of an answer, the press got a totally different perspective to put before their readers and viewers. Chuck Redman was a true professional who really knew the issues and was very accessible. Because of that he was very popular with the press. Margaret Tutwiler was much less popular. The press didn't think she was very knowledgeable, she didn't have the background to analyze an issue or to talk beyond the very limited guidance that we were working with and she wasn't all that accessible, at least not during the time I was there. But, Margaret had unlimited and instantaneous access to Secretary Baker. Margaret could just come in to the briefing room and say, "Jim Baker thinks. . ." And, you knew she had talked to Jim Baker about the issue and that was very important for the press. With Redman you had good discussion of the issues which reflected the Department's views. With Tutwiler, you had a view from Secretary Baker. It gave the press a better lead into running their stories.

Q: I've interviewed Margaret Tutwiler and I've never talked to such a focused person in my life. She really was extremely well organized and well focused. Now as you say, not really a, you know, somebody that you want to sit down and talk about world affairs with, but somebody how to get things done. She was there.

HARTER: Yes, you're quite right. She was very, very good that way. I also had the impression she recognized right away she was in a job where she did not have the issues at her command and she was smart enough to use her access to Baker to compensate for that in a way that would make her better able to do the job. Because she was an outsider, she didn't have much of an understanding of the Department and so, certainly at the beginning, I think she was susceptible to being influenced by others. With the change of administrations, Margaret needed to have someone who filled the Phyllis Oakley, Deputy Spokesman position. I bid on that job. Chuck Redman, who had previously served in the PM (Political Military Affairs) Bureau recommended someone who had worked in that Bureau with him, Richard Boucher. Richard Boucher became the Deputy Press Spokesman. He later became the Spokesman for Secretary Eagleburger and for Secretary Christopher before becoming Ambassador to Cyprus. He even later on came back to head the Public Affairs Bureau and be the Department Spokesman for another few years. I'm not suggesting his selection was all pre-ordained because of Chuck Redman's recommendation, because I did get a chance to have an interview with Margaret and her deputy. But in the end, I think the recommendation certainly helped make his case, particularly since he did not have any Public Affairs background. So, not getting that job likely kept me from a considerable amount of exposure to the people who were running the Department and it gave me the opportunity to move back to my Asia-focused career.

Q: Well tell me, with a group around Secretary Baker, I mean when you look at the final outcome he was really the Bush-Baker combination, it's the Bush one of course. It was surprisingly effective with some major, major things. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War, Gulf one. But, one does get the feeling that in the State Department there was this very tight group around the Secretary. Did you find yourself sort of sitting in on some of these meetings and all? Was there a sense of distance or what was the feeling? I'm talking about the principal, the under Secretary, the Assistant Secretaries and others. Did they feel kind of offer, were they using different ways or unhappy or what?

HARTER: Well, the group was composed of political appointees who had their own connections and access and relationships with Baker and they tended to worked with one another. I think the career people by and large were very frustrated. Ray Seitz is a consummate professional, but Ray did not say much in these guidance review meetings. I can only think of one occasion where I made a point to get involved in the discussions. The Hungarian President, Janos Kadar had died and Margaret or one of the others thought we ought to express some sort of condolences. At that point, I said in1956, this is the guy who was brought to power by the Soviets over the dead bodies of all sorts of Hungarians and that group overthrew the popular government of Imre Nagy. The last thing you want to do is eulogize Kadar. Nobody from that group seemed to have the slightest clue of what had happened in 1956. But, hearing what I said they recognized it was a good idea not to eulogize Kadar at the State Department press briefing and we didn't. I would make comments from time to time on how we phrased some of the guidance statements, but this was the only time I can remember actually making a policy argument in the meetings.

Q: Yeah, this is first of all, some problem when you get people how are focused on the present. I mean this is where you might say the State Department is supposed to give perspective on these things. Did you get involved with the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in Washington of the Federal Post Office Building at all?

HARTER: No, we didn't really have that much to do at the actual events; outside of the ones which Nancy and Gladys did involving the Secretary. The Press Office did all of the preliminary credentialing to make sure all the people who showed up for particular briefings were appropriate members of accredited news organizations. That was also, of course one of the other perennial things we did for the Secretary's travels abroad. When the Secretary traveled he would take a small group of press with him on the plane. On those occasions we had to post an itinerary and a general visit schedule to enable those members of the Department's press corps to sign up for the trip. After that, it was sort of like a lottery. We could only take a certain number of press people and we had to try and balance it out among the different media groups. We couldn't have all TV people. We had to have wire services and we had to have some print people, so it was an interesting little mix that we had to create. You also had to balance the opportunities by seeing who went the last time and who was cut out for lack of space. As I think I mentioned before, that was one of the areas where my Deputy, Anita Stockman, had the main role for the office.

Q: Did you ever get into one of these things where to go back to the Nixon term where somebody would make a statement and then say that statement is no longer operative. In other words, mix ups happens, guidance is wrong and all that. Did you run across some of these things?

HARTER: Yeah, there were certainly occasions when that happened. I can't think of a specific incident or cite occasions where we re-posted guidance. But I do recall us using a brief bit of guidance during the briefing and then later posting a more detailed set of responses after the briefing for the press to use. And, I'm pretty certain there were times when the thrust of the new version of the guidance differed a good bit from what we had said the first time around.

Before I joined the Press Office, the Office Director was one of the official briefers for the daily press briefing. The Office Director would fill in whenever both the Spokesman and the Deputy Spokesman were unavailable. And, because there was a third person in that briefing loop, this apparently did occur from time to time. That was one of the responsibilities that attracted me to the job, because I thought I'd get more exposure and thereby some push for other career opportunities later on. But just before I arrived, Chuck Redman changed that policy, and the Office Director was dropped from the list of official briefers. Thereafter, it was expected that if Chuck was not available, Phyllis had to be. Still, on one occasion, both of them were unavailable and they did not want to simply cancel the briefing - a pretty rare occurrence. I think there were a few things the Department wanted to put out as statements that day and so I was allowed to do the briefing. It was probably one of the shortest press briefings on record. The briefing included a Department statement, maybe two or three questions and it was over. Chuck's decision to have only two briefers was adopted by the new administration and so it was either Margaret Tutwiler or Richard Boucher who did the briefings. If they were not available there was no briefing. So, one of the reasons I had signed up for the Press Office job never materialized and I didn't get the exposure in the job that I had hoped for.

Q: Did you develop, I'm not turning this in to like a witch hunt, but sort of a dislike list, I won't call it a, using a diplomatic term, a dislike list or something, people who are either getting, I'm talking about press people, getting it wrong or always putting, or almost changing what was said and all that.

HARTER: There were some people like that and there were some people who basically always asked dumb questions and didn't seem to be following the responses that were given. But, the press generally took care of those people and just sort of talked them down and got them off the issue and others were recognized to continue the briefing. Sometimes you would find correspondents who had an angle they were pitching for a story and no matter what response they got, they would just try to take the story in the direction they had envisioned. For the most part, that was a temporary short focus phenomenon and you just lived with it until the issue died of its own accord and the particular correspondent dropped back into the pack. But, for certain issues for certain time periods, yeah there were certainly people who were difficult and trying to push things in a direction that reflected their own biases.

Q: One thinks about there's so many leaks, particularly dealing with Israel. How about the Israeli connection? Does that show us particularly?

HARTER: Yeah, there was some of that. There were a couple of reporters for major publications and wire services who did focus very heavily on those issues and clearly were, I guess what you would call the Israeli lobby among the press corps. They were constantly pushing the Israeli's view of Middle East issues. Briefers like Chuck Redman or Margaret Tutwiler recognized that; it was there and they dealt with it. But the administration at that time and clearly the administration before it was definitely pro-Israel and supportive of a lot of the things the Israelis were doing. So, these journalists weren't necessarily out of synch with where the White House or where the State Department was at that particular time. I mean I think, Secretary Shultz was certainly more balanced on Middle East issues as an individual and as a Secretary of State, but he could only go so far on his own.

Q: Did you leave Public Affairs before the great events of the fall of 1989?

HARTER: Yes. I left at that point to go back into East Asia and to become Consul General in Southern China in Guangzhou. I had a relatively easy time being selected - I had served in Hong Kong twice; I had Chinese language; and was a Senior Foreign Service Officer so this wasn't considered a stretch bid. I was selected for the Senior Foreign Service just at the time I returned to Washington from Jakarta. I was actually a member of the Senior Foreign Service pretty much all the time I was working in the Press Office and didn't have to worry about "public exposure" giving me a better shot at making the senior levels.

Q: Well while you were in the Press Office, in career development terms, did you have a concern that you might be losing your East Asian credentials or something?

HARTER: Not so much the credentials, but I was certainly losing the language skills. The Press Office was also a very demanding job in terms of time. I refused to consider leaving the night duty to all the other officers. Even at the beginning, when we were doing the 24 hour duty, I took my turn in that rotation as well. I didn't think it made sense that I didn't participate and share that same burden. Given the number of officers we had, only one person had to do two 24-hour duty days in the same week. I stayed with that commitment afterward when we cut off the press calls at 11:00 pm. So, it was really quite a long day. I started my day in the office at 6:30 and I tried to leave at 6:00 to drive home. Its actually the same place that I'm living in now. I would have to be on the road at 5:30 in the morning in order to get on the express lanes before they were restricted to only HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) at 6:00 am.

Q: Two or more people.

HARTER: For interstate 95, it's three people. If I left at 6:00 pm when the HOV restrictions were dropped in the evening then I could again ride solo back to my home. Either way the commute was a minimum of an hour each way.

Q: You lived where?

HARTER: I live 11 miles past Potomac Mills in Prince William County. The house location is part of the city of Manassas, but it's just beyond Dale City, nowhere near the civil war battlefield. So, I would be up in the morning maybe 10 minutes till five; out the door at 5:30 and back home between 7:00 and 7:15 pm assuming there were no big traffic pileups. Then, some of those nights I was on phone duty until 11:00. So, I would say that they were long days.

Q: How did the family take this?

HARTER: Well, it worked out OK. When I first returned to the Department, we were living in a townhouse in Annandale. Only my younger son was living with us and he was going to Thomas Jefferson School of Science and Technology in Annandale in what would have been its first graduating class. He really missed his friends and activities in Indonesia so I let him go back to Jakarta to finish his final semester and he graduated from the Jakarta International School in the summer of 1988. He then went off to college at William and Mary. My older son was still trying to determine what he wanted to do, but he was not living with us at that time. My wife had returned to working in the Department and she was again working with Mike Armacost who was then serving as the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. She was completing her education and was at George Mason for a good part of this tour. So, for part of the time we had totally different schedules.

Q: So the next assignment was the Consulate General at Guangzhou? From when to when?

HARTER: I got there in the early fall of 1989 and stayed there until January of 1993.

Q: What was the situation - well you arrived just after Tiananmen Square didn't you?

HARTER: Yes. The Tiananmen demonstrations lasted from April to June in 1989.

Q: What were you getting from your colleagues and all, just before you went out, about Tiananmen?

HARTER: We had a very confrontational relationship with the Chinese, because of the Tiananmen events. During the weeks of the student protests, we were strong supporters of the students. We were urging the Government to meet some of the protestors' demands. The U.S. was an outspoken critic of the Chinese crackdown in June, and for the next year our relationship was complicated by the fact a prominent Chinese dissident scientist and his wife were living in the US embassy. Fang Lizhi and his wife were finally permitted to leave in June 1990 and they went to the US under our protection where they were given asylum. At about the same time, the former head of the New China News Agency in Hong Kong, Xu Jiatun, escaped from China and also "defected" to the United States. Xu had been deposed as head of the NCNA in January of 1990 because he was seen as too close to the students and too much an advocate for Hong Kong interests during the early stages of the Sino-British negotiations. So, yes, I would say it was a very negative relationship at that point. We had a new Ambassador, Jim Lilley, who just recently published an autobiography on his China experiences [China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia], who had replaced Winston Lord.

Winston Lord [Ed: served as Ambassador from November 1985 to April 1989] was very upset, because the Tiananmen demonstrations arose just as he was getting ready to leave and I don't believe he anticipated them becoming so dramatic an issue. He had been working to promote a more open relationship with the Chinese and both the demonstrations and the eventual crackdown surprised him and everyone else at the Embassy. Talking with Winston, I think, in a sense, he saw these events as reflecting on his handling of the China relationship. Jim Lilley [Ed: served from May 1989 to May 1991] came in after the first few weeks of the demonstrations in the midst of public U.S. criticism of the Chinese handling of the demonstrations. The demonstrations intensified and the relationship only got worse with the crackdown in June. The continuing asylum situation with Fang Lizhi at the Embassy added to the negatives. We had limited communication with the government and there were large numbers of Chinese troops outside the Embassy.

The Tiananmen demonstrations were of course, not strictly confined to Beijing. There were student demonstrations and some outbreaks of violence in all of the major cities throughout China. In Guangzhou, the demonstrations were among the least confrontational simply because the southern Chinese didn't let politics get in the way of managing the issues. The provincial government and party leadership had a more collegial interaction with the public (the masses in communist terms) and the students. The party apparatus organized a couple of big demonstrations cooperatively with the students, ensuring roads were kept open for the marches and transportation was provided, etc. And, of course, after the crackdown by the PLA forces in Tiananmen, many medium and high-level officials in southern China helped the leading dissidents from the North escape to Hong Kong or to Macao. From there, they subsequently went to the United States, sometimes to Europe, but mostly to the United States. The southern leaders were a much more receptive audience for the students' issues, particularly as they applied to a lessening of central control and authority. The people in Guangdong Province were quite happy to have Beijing otherwise occupied and not restricting local efforts to expand their economic market activities.

Q: Was this sort of almost the traditional cultural dividing line at the Yangtze River, I mean the Cantonese-Mandarin, I mean the whole business of China being split.

HARTER: Yes. The Cantonese were much more progressive politically and economically than those in the north in Beijing. When Deng Xiaoping set up the Special Economic Zones with public infrastructure money to experiment with market run economic programs built on private investment, the Cantonese took the ball and ran with it. From the ordinary people to the top Party leaders in that region, they pretty much all bought into the program. Party ideology took a backseat to economic prosperity and development. During the time I was in Guangzhou, I liked to argue that the Communists could run open elections in Guangdong where anyone could run for office against the existing government and party leaders and that the Communists would have won the elections, because they basically were all popular figures. Everybody generally liked the people running the government and party there, because they had a much more open attitude toward the economy, self improvement and education and all the rest of these so-called "basics" that were of concern to the ordinary people.

Q: Well, I imagine you were looking at this. How did this come about? Was there almost the equivalent within the party of almost the elective process or was there just something in the spirit or what?

HARTER: Well, when Mao took power there was a fair amount of mobility in the political system. High level cadre would quite often be sent to their home areas to work but there were quite a few who were sent from one geographic region of the country to another. Over time, local cadre rose through the system and stayed in the system locally. They weren't moved around. During the political campaigns - the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution - there was a bit more mobility at the top, particularly when the PLA was sent in to take over party and government positions after the major disruptions of the Cultural Revolution. But, in fact over the years the local administrations tended to remain localized.

In the south, the local party and government leaders thought the same way as the people who wanted to do business like their cousins across the border in Hong Kong and Macau. The whole focus in Southern China was to be as much like Hong Kong as you could be. This feeling was obviously centered in Guangdong Province - home of the Cantonese who populated Hong Kong and Macau. But it was also true in Fujian Province, the home province of most of the ï¿½migrï¿½s in Taiwan and Singapore, and second only to Guangdong among all overseas Chinese communities. Guangxi Province was a province dominated by minority peoples and so it didn't have the same widespread entrepreneurial drive. Hainan, the island which made up the fourth province of the Guangzhou consular district took capitalism and stretched it to the extreme. Where Guangdong and Fujian had small special economic zones with a few square miles of land in which to experiment, the entire island of Hainan was declared a special economic zone. And, with that incentive, the Hainan leaders opened up the biggest land and commercial speculation China had seen since the Kuomintang ruled in China. The Hainan authorities in their haste to show progress in the modernization of the island managed to get on the wrong side of just about everything. What I'm referring to is largely speculative activity, using government funds, for example, to procure and import luxury goods through tax and tariff free Hainan which were then resold to other parts of China at high mark-ups. Top level provincial party, government and military cadre were all involved. Bribes and payoffs were the foundation for wild business deals and land development schemes. Many properties were bought and flipped for a profit without anything ever being developed or produced because everyone wanted to get in on the prospective riches. Prostitution and gambling were open activities in Hainan's two cities. The Governor was personally involved in a luxury car import scheme that brought duty free luxury cars to Hainan and then arranged their re-export at a big profit to the local military and political figures in other parts of China. The Hainan fiasco almost scuttled Deng's entire SEZ policy experiment. Only some very careful critique of the Hainan Governor's "excess zeal" to earn profits for the State managed to keep his actions from spilling over into the zones in Guangdong and Fujian.

Q: Were these stolen cars?

HARTER: The stolen cars were part of the wide open speculative and corrupt practices that were going on at that time, but the Hainan Governor's activities were a separate activity. What you are referring to is the contract stolen car operations that were conducted between southern China and Hong Kong and Macau. Occasionally the thieves went as far as the United States and Europe to get their merchandise. With the sudden rise of approved wealth accumulation in China there was a lot of pent up demand for the kinds of luxuries one found in the west. But China was not permitting the expenditure of money to open up those sorts of markets in China. So southern Chinese criminal elements opened up their own supply system. Specific cars could be ordered and they would then be stolen in Hong Kong or Macau and brought across the border through a number of different smuggling routes. Hong Kong has probably more luxury cars per capita than any other city in the world. I know for certain they have more Rolls Royce and Bentley automobiles per capita than any other country in the world. But, the thieves were also picking up big Mercedes sedans as well as Ferrari, Jaguar and even Lamborghini sports cars. You would see these autos being driven on the highways and local city streets in southern China with provincial Chinese license plates - including official government plates - and you just knew where they came from. The Customs Office people and the military, particularly those along the border areas were all taking money to allow this to happen. Periodically there would be a crackdown or somebody would get lucky and intercept the smuggling boats before they reached Chinese territorial waters, but these were exceptions to the rule. The smuggling techniques became increasingly sophisticated. A stolen car in Hong Kong would be stowed inside a large rubber bladder and then towed behind a fishing boat to a coastal spot in China where it would be unloaded. Kept under water, and unlikely to sink because of this big rubber bladder, the car was undetectable. Only the slow movement of the towing vessel tended to give away that it was transporting a heavy load. Sometimes the smugglers would just bring them in on an ordinary car carrier vessel, mixed in with other cars that had been legitimately acquired.

I said this was a period of considerable confrontation between the US and China. When I got there the interaction between myself and the Consulate, with Guangdong government and party officials had already started to improve. The nadir of our interaction with the Chinese officials had never reached the depressed levels it had in Beijing and in Shanghai. And we were also the first to restore our level of activity to pre-Tiananmen days. The provincial authorities were also making a lot of money out of the fees they collected to support emigrating Chinese who pretty much all lived in the Guangzhou Consular District. I mentioned earlier, since 90 plus percent of U.S. citizen Chinese traced their origin to the Guangzhou Consular District it was decided to place all immigrant visa processing there. While the Chinese officials in Guangzhou originally objected to this arrangement, the local authorities eventually saw this operation as a way to obtain lucrative earnings. I believe this gave us some additional influence with the local authorities and influenced these officials to keep the relationship with the United States more open in Guangdong and not as restrictive as it was in Beijing. For example, when I first arrived in Beijing to start this tour the atmosphere outside the embassy was as bad as it was at the time of the incident I described to you in 1975 with all the guards around the U.S. mission buildings. In fact, it was probably a bit more rigorous in 1989. You had to go through three or four check points before you got to the actual gate to get into the US compound. There were guards at each end of the street who would check documents of any Chinese proceeding down the block toward the US mission. There were patrols walking in front of the buildings and then there were stationary guards in front of the buildings. At the Consulate General in Guangzhou, there were no street-side guards and usually only one or two guards near the entrance to our part of the hotel where the Consulate was located. Once we moved to our new location, we went for several months before there was any local guard set up outside our facility even though we had constructed a small guard post for them to occupy.

When I came to Guangzhou in 1989 the U.S. Consulate was still in its original 1979 location, a Chinese government-owned hotel. Its placement there is an interesting story. After the normalization of relations and the opening of Embassies in the two countries, the US and the PRC both wanted to open Consulates. We were looking to open in Shanghai and Guangzhou, two big economic centers along the east coast. (The Chinese wanted Houston and San Francisco.) And, as we've noted before, Guangzhou is the capital of the province where most Chinese-Americans come from. Vice President Mondale was about to travel to China and everyone wanted him to have a "deliverable", something he could do that would have a tangible result. The answer turned out to be "opening the Consulate General in Guangzhou." New hotels were being built and lots of business activity suggested there would be some choices if the USG had decided to wait. But there were no other identifiable "deliverables" and so the US decided to open the Consulate General in a Chinese Government-owned hotel which had been in business in Guangzhou since the 1950s. Although it has been expanded and modernized several times in the intervening years, in 1979 it was still very primitive compared to western style hotels. We took a large space in one wing of the building on the first floor for our consular section and then converted a number of hotel rooms on the upper floors to establish the rest of our offices, including our communications center. It was clearly insecure. We had an open elevator shaft - which we did not control - running right up through the office space and adjacent to the communications shell. The offices were of course, all converted hotel rooms and the living quarters for the Consulate staff were also converted hotel rooms. Because each new "apartment" - a combination of a several hotel rooms - had more bathrooms than anyone could use, wooden planks were installed on top of the tubs to create shelves and storage space. I had stayed in this hotel during my 1975 travel to China and I can't say it had changed significantly by the time I arrived there as the Consul General in 1989. There were certainly more modern parts of the hotel, but we were not in those parts. The hotel did, however, have one big advantage, it was located directly opposite the fairgrounds where the semi-annual Canton Trade Fair was held. So, the hotel still had a great deal of business that kept it going. It was very convenient for us to provide services to all of the Americans who came to China each spring and fall to attend the fair and do business. The consular section was in the worst area because on the first floor they were subject to rat infestations and there were cats in the ceiling who urinated and defecated up there creating odors, health concerns, and occasional leaks through the ceiling and into the consular work areas.

Guangdong province was the heart of China's post-1979 modernization. Excluding the island of Hainan, which had originally been part of Guangdong province, three of China's four special economic zones were in Guangdong. The economic experimentation, which had originally been confined to the zones, was quickly expanded throughout the Pearl River Delta which extended from Guangzhou southward to Hong Kong and Macau. Farm land was quickly being developed into new factories, new zones, and new transportation links tied these areas to Hong Kong. New hotels controlled by outside foreign interests in partnership with Chinese entities were being created to provide services to the entrepreneurs who were coming in from abroad to do business. At one point Guangzhou had four, five-star hotels while there was only one in Beijing and one in Shanghai. The money and the investment and the visitors were clearly all down in the south. Foreign involvement in business and commerce was all centered in Guangdong. After the central authorities created the special economic zones to open up the economy there had been some additional decrees from Beijing which created broader areas for development in the country along the major river networks. But in Guangdong, the province began to make its own decisions to expand the zones. The special economic zones had the most liberal regulations to promote investment, but the Pearl River Delta towns just gradually sucked those special conditions closer and closer to Canton. In effect, you had swath of land and towns several miles wide that ran northward from Shenzhen to Guangzhou for about 150 miles. It was this area that established China's basic light industrial and textile exports to the rest of the world. Of course, Americans were very interested in getting involved in such business opportunities. After Tiananmen had stalled activities in the north, American businessmen saw the more relaxed attitude in Guangdong as a real opportunity to expand their involvement in China. In fact, Guangdong business activity never really closed down during the Tiananmen disturbances or the crackdowns. Some Americans in Guangzhou diminished their day-to-day activities in the immediate aftermath of the crackdown, but very few Americans actually left Guangdong for an extended period of time after Tiananmen. By contrast, all the business people evacuated Beijing and Shanghai after Tiananmen and they did not return for extended periods.

Q: I was going to ask, had there been the equivalent to, I mean was this - they left because of the atmosphere or they leave because of pressure in the United States, don't do business with these people.

HARTER: It was a combination of those two. The crackdown in Beijing made people feel it was unsafe to be there - largely the military action and presence around the capital, plus the hostile attitude that persisted toward Americans after the Tiananmen events. That hostility was due to Chinese Government propaganda targeting the US for interfering in China's internal affairs - human rights criticism, sanctuary for the Chinese scientist in the US Embassy, and asylum for student dissidents able to flee the country. To a certain extent that hostility toward Americans also carried over into Shanghai and some of the other big population centers and Americans and other business people took that occasion to leave the country. Once they were out, they were then more subject to the pressures in their home countries where people saw the Chinese totalitarian regime as oppressing its citizens. Businesses based in the U.S. and in Europe that were active in the China market were under pressure not to do business with these "bad" people.

Q: When you arrived there, when in 1989? I assume you made your normal calls, was there a Governor of the Province and then the Mayor and this sort of thing?

HARTER: I arrived about November, more than six months after Tiananmen started and a few months after it ended. Yes, I started my official calls right off. The Governor was the son of one of China's top Generals and a long-time power in the province.

Q: Were the people you were talking to saying OK, we've had a rough patch let's get on with it down here. Were you able to discuss the situation and all that?

HARTER: Yes. They were very pleased with the way things had progressed in the south after 1979 and they were very anxious to continue domestic growth and foreign investment. Provincial authorities in Guangdong had reached an accommodation with the students and there were no real social disruptions. The leadership did not agree with the crackdown - I should note that Premier Zhao Ziyang who had supported the students and who had been dumped after he criticized the leadership policies had been the Governor of Guangdong many years before and had close ties to the leadership there. You had a feeling Guangdong Governor Ye Xuanping and the top leaders of the party and the government there knew lower level officials were helping dissident students to escape and the provincial leaders let it continue because they too believed it was the proper thing to do. Guangdong was at the forefront of this effort to support the escape of the students but people in Guangxi and Fujian were also involved.

Q: Were you getting remarks about those jokers up North?

HARTER: Yes, you would get a certain amount of that - certainly from middle level and lower level officials. Some of them would make those negative references toward northern officials in very informal conversations. And, that was again one of the advantages of being in the South, everything was a much more informal and relaxed when it came to interactions between the foreign community and the local government institutions. Sure we had some formalistic encounters and some difficulty from time to time getting meetings or getting cooperation to do things. But, overall, you had a much better opportunity to talk with these people and meet with them than you did in either Beijing or Shanghai. Now, the highest ranking people in the province were certainly less accessible than others at lower levels. In that sense, I would say my access to the Governor was probably the same as the CG in Shanghai had access to the Mayor there. I was not able to see the Governor very often, but I could see one of the three or four Vice Governors several times per year. Guangdong had two Governors during the three plus years I was there and I probably met with them on only three occasions.

Q: I mean, how did the Shanghai and compares politically? I mean how did they look at each other for and sort of from the Consulate's perspective?

HARTER: Well, the two cities are real competitors. In the 1930s and 1940s, Shanghai had been the center of China's expatriate business activity and after 1949 under the communists it was one of the major investment centers for the PRC. Shanghai's state-owned enterprises were major tax contributors to Beijing but they were also the primary focus for state investment. Guangzhou was more backward and a lot less developed from that time up to the start of the reform and opening policy in 1979. In the 19th century, the situation had been reversed, because initially the only open ports for trade with the foreigners were in Guangdong. Then, the only foreign factories were on Shamian Island which was also the site of the foreign legations after the 1840 Opium War. My predecessor, Consul General Mark Pratt, had negotiated a lease with the five-star White Swan Hotel to take over its former staff building on Shamian as the new Consulate General site. Actually the White Swan had never used the building for its staff because Esso had leased it for its headquarters and residence soon after it was constructed. In 1986, Esso had decided to relocate to Zhuhai in order to be closer to its drilling sites in the South China Sea and so the building became available. So it was as though we were coming back to where the first American consuls had operated.

By the 20th century Shanghai had clearly surpassed Guangzhou and the other coastal cities as a commercial center with the pre-World War II era being its golden age. Shanghai was also very important after the Communist takeover in 1949, because many of the top leaders around Chairmen Mao, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, came from Shanghai. But, Shanghai got a bloody nose with the death of Chairman Mao and the purge of those people around his wife - known at the Gang of Four - all of whom had come out of Shanghai. Under the communists, Shanghai was the most ideological city in all of China, especially during the Cultural Revolution. I always sort of felt that Shanghai's communist intellectuals were the most ideological, because they felt guilty about how bourgeois and capitalist the city was. To compensate for this capitalist excess, these intellectuals articulated an excess of leftist, radical communism ideas.

Q: Well, Shanghai was actually a fairly new city wasn't it? I thought it was established almost as one of the port cities back in the early 19th century or so.

HARTER: It was not as developed as the southern ports, but I believe it did have a business center in the latter part of the 19th Century. You are correct though that the really big expansion was in the 20th century, especially in the decades between the First and Second World War. It was probably in that time period that Shanghai became a much bigger and more important commercial center than it ever had been before and the foreign section of Shanghai was virtually autonomous from the rest of the city where the Chinese lived.

I think there was a rivalry relationship between the two regions. Beijing was pleased with the effectiveness of the new reform policies and the growth of Guangdong cities and the revenues they produced for the central government. But conversely, they were also concerned that the significant investments which the central authorities had put into Shanghai were not producing the same positive results. After the reform movement in 1979, Beijing was getting huge tax returns from Guangdong and the southern Chinese. But, they were also losing a lot of control over economic developments and that gradually was also restricting Beijing's ability to dictate policy to the local authorities. Part of the reason was simply because Guangdong would provide extra money through loans to the central authorities. This money was beyond what the province would normally provide in revenue share and taxes. Guangdong would periodically provide an extra couple hundred million dollars worth of loans to the Central government. During these years, Shanghai was still a cash draw. It's economy still was dominated by all of those state-owned enterprises that weren't doing anything.

In this time period, in the early 1990s and particularly through the rest of the decade, the Central government made a conscious decision to re-make Shanghai as its most important commercial city. And, they decided to do it in a way that preserved Beijing's control and oversight. They didn't directly downgrade Guangdong and the SEZ areas but they made Shanghai the center for re-directing national investment, particularly in infrastructure, as a way to encourage greater foreign investment to the Shanghai area. Shanghai's "privileges" under the state-run investment program rivaled the investment incentives offered in the zones but they came with greater clout in Beijing. It didn't hurt that Shanghai cadres were once again manning top positions in the Central Government and Party structure. With the combination of foreign investment and government infrastructure development funds, Shanghai took off. Shanghai, I just saw in the paper yesterday, now has a train that goes from their new airport to the outskirts of the city at 287 miles an hour. They say it's the fastest train in the world. The Germans built it. So, a lot of the modernization effort put in Shanghai I believe is a direct result of Beijing seeking to undercut a growing economic independence in Southern China that Beijing feared could potentially have political repercussions. Guangdong's link to Hong Kong, that territory's new special region status after 1997, and its preservation of a capitalist economic structure would only strengthen perceptions that Southern China was a separate entity. Moreover, as Beijing sought to entice Taiwan to a closer association with the mainland it was conceding political and economic independence for Taiwan within that association. In combination, Taiwan and Southern China and their powerful economic muscle could pose quite a challenge to Beijing's control over the country's economic system. Ultimately, Beijing could not risk this economic power becoming a destabilizing element, and thus, the leaders created Shanghai as the regime's counterweight to the free enterprise, foreign investment dominated southern areas.

Q: What was your staff like there? What were you doing?

Harter: First of all, there was no deputy position in Guangzhou and so traditionally, that function was assumed by the head of the Political/Economic Section, a three person unit. The head of the unit was John Tkacik, a career Consular officer who had been in the Hong Kong Consular Section part of the time I served there and who technically was the head of the Economic Section. When I started in Guangzhou, the head of the Consular Section, our largest unit, was Tony Leggio, and he was later replaced by Bernadette Allen, a consular cone officer whom I pushed for a stretch assignment to the section chief's job. She did an outstanding job overseeing the large staff at a time when our immigrant visa load was expanding rapidly, particularly with the growth of a very busy adoption program. Brent Miller was the head of our Admin operations and that was a major job because of our move from the old Dong Fang Hotel facilities into the new building next to the White Swan Hotel on Shamian Island. He was constantly working with FBO on the plans for the conversion of office space and the refurbishment of apartments in the building as well as with the Seabees who did the installation work for our communications operations. We experienced a less successful stretch assignment with Brent's successor. His short foreign service tenure and limited experience - only GSO work - did not give him enough background to be the ADMIN officer as well as the RSO and Personnel Officer for the Consulate and I had to spend more time on these issues myself than I had when they were under Brent's direction.

We had an outstanding young FAS (Foreign Agricultural Service) officer, Phil Shull, an experienced USIA officer who was very active, Rich Stites, and two FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) section heads, Todd Thurwachter and Denny Barnes, who consecutively ran that two-man shop. Prior to my arrival there, these three agencies had been permitted to operate in their own independent facilities without any agency commitment to re-assemble the units once we got better facilities. This produced a lot of coordination problems in agencies that traditionally liked to do their own thing anyway. Of the three, however, it was only FCS that proved particularly stubborn in coordinating its activities with the rest of the ConGen staff. USIA also had a couple of interns who came through as fill-ins while the USIS officer was on leave and they turned out to be very creative and dynamic additions to the team.

As I mentioned, because the Consular Section handled all the immigrant visa work in China, we had a very large Consular section - I would say roughly a dozen officers. Beijing had only five and the other Consulates had one or two officers to handle non-immigrant visas and American Citizens Services. We had a local staff supporting the Consular Section of probably 35 or 40 Chinese. We had one political officer and two economic officers. In addition to the three agencies I mentioned earlier, INS and Customs personnel would come in to Guangzhou to assist us or occasionally to conduct special investigations. They worked with us as much or perhaps even more than they worked with the Embassy in Beijing. This was due to our large immigrant and adoption work as well as South China's production of export goods for the US market. I guess, all totaled up, we had a staff of around the low 30s. We didn't have any Defense Department attachï¿½s and no Marine Guards in the Consulates.

Q: Could you get around easily?

HARTER: Yes. Access and travel opportunities were pretty good throughout the Consular District. The district covered four southern coastal provinces, the four Provinces had, I don't know, maybe 140, 150 million people.

Q: What were the Provinces?

HARTER: Guangdong Province was the biggest and the consulate offices were in its capital in Guangzhou. Guangxi Province is adjacent to Guangdong in the southwest and it was the province home of the Zhuang minority which dominated the administration there. Fujian Province is north of Guangdong along the coast and sits opposite Taiwan. Hainan Province, is a large island, south of Guangdong that had originally been part of Guangdong Province but was made a separate Province and a special economic zone in its own right.

Q: So your consular district covered the Provinces that bordered Vietnam?

HARTER: Guangxi Province shared part of the border with Vietnam but the rest of the border on the China side is in Yunnan Province. Yunnan is part of the Chengdu Consular District along with Sichuan Province and Tibet. Sichuan Province, with Chengdu as its capital, is the largest Province in China. A single Province with well over a hundred million people at that time. Chengdu probably is the largest city in the province, or it may be behind Chongqing. Chengdu probably had five million people. So, it was definitely not "the sticks" in that sense.

When we started out in 1979 with our Consulate General, there was no way to have a separate stand-alone building. The only existing buildings that were developed enough to give you facilities and to give you something reasonable to work with was in the hotels. As I said earlier, we had a hotel-based Consulate and our staff all lived right in the building. My three immediate predecessors spent a lot of their time looking for a piece of property on which to build our own independent facility. The first properties they were offered by the Chinese government were all inside the city but in areas that were a bit out of the way of the ordinary flow of the city. Subsequent options proposed by the Chinese appeared to be too far outside the city - at least at the time they were offered and we also turned them down. While there was a feeling among the ConGen staff that we needed something a lot better than we were working in, there was little likelihood we would be funded for such a project until the Embassy in Beijing had been replaced, because they too were shoe-horned into facilities in the capital. So there wasn't as much pressure to make a decision and find a piece of property as their might otherwise have been if we were the only truly disadvantaged facility in China. Later on in my tour there, I did spend some time looking at property sites and I did find one that was eventually approved by the Department's Property Negotiator, Ambassador Nicholas Salgo. But I don't think anything has yet been done to begin construction, even though we do have lease title to the land we want to build on.

After I had been in Guangzhou for some months, we moved out of the hotel and into a high rise where the lower three floors were reconfigured as office space and the upper nine floors were the residences. The building became available when ESSO, the old Rockefeller oil company, decided to join other oil companies in the Shekou Section of the Shenzhen SEZ which was where all of the oil exploration activities were centered in South China. Mark Pratt, the Consul General at this time, convinced the Department to take over the lease. It was a great decision and has provided us with a facility we use even today. I spent the remainder of my three plus years in Guangzhou dealing with the rebuilding and reconstruction of that particular facility. It was a terrible experience.

Working with FBO (Foreign Buildings Operations) is probably one of the most trying things I've ever had to do in the Foreign Service. When I had been in Hong Kong on my second tour, I was asked by the Consul General to head a group to evaluate a building that had recently been built for occupancy by the Consulate staff. It had been one of the properties in Hong Kong that had been constructed when FBO traded a number of US-owned sites to a local developer in return for some additional buildings being constructed for our use. This new apartment building I went to look at was one of the oddest buildings I'd ever seen. None of the rooms in the apartments had only four corners. Each room had some extra angles which created very difficult space in which to fit furnishings. Moreover, the rooms were all so small and there was so little closet space in the bedrooms that we had to downgrade each apartment by one bedroom so that people would have a place to store things.

In addition, the designer who had been selected by FBO to plan the building had no experience with tropical weather or typhoon type storms which hit Hong Kong most every year. The building had small mosaic tiles placed all along the outside of the building. Unfortunately they leaked when it rained and it took several additional months of reworking the exterior of the building before it could be occupied. That building was bad enough, but FBO also made another big mistake in agreeing to lease a 79-unit apartment building that was supposedly going to be turned over to the USG after twenty years of rental payments. This building, however, had no setback from the street, was totally surrounded by bigger buildings and thus was totally incapable of being protected from potential terrorist activities. Congressional oversight committees roundly criticized this transaction as well. The Consulate was fortunate to be able to get out of the lease, though we had certainly lost almost all of our USG owned properties.

Q: I was thinking it was FBO and Chinese bureaucracy?

HARTER: FBO was absolutely terrible, unable to make decisions, inadequate planning, equipment and materials improperly ordered, no concept of a "schedule." Then, to make it worse, I had the same experience once again when I was in Hanoi. Twice in my career I ended up working in a construction site. What made Guangzhou worse than Hanoi is that we were living in the same building in which all the construction was taking place. At least in Hanoi Embassy people had a chance to leave the work zone and retreat to a proper residence. Of course, a lot of the heavy reconfiguration of office space in Guangzhou was completed before we moved in and began operations, but there was still a lot to be done and continuing issues with communications and classified equipment that had to be installed after we moved in. To make things more personally disagreeable, we also had to move out of our apartment in the building so FBO and the Department's interior designers could come in and redo the CG's (Consul General's) residence as an "official residence." Some of the items they came up with and the patterns and fabrics they selected were unbelievable. It was not an enjoyable experience.

Q: How about your contacts with the government people? What sort of things would you work with them on?

HARTER: A lot of things we dealt with involved investment. We occasionally had discussions of a political nature, talking about Chinese domestic policies and their implementation, but almost all of the political issues were handled in Beijing along with Sino-US bilateral relations and foreign policy issues. Our political officer and I would try to analyze political dynamics within the Consular District and report on them but we were not "involved" in political activities per se. Sometimes when the Embassy was directed by Washington to make a particular demarche to the Chinese on a bilateral issue, the Embassy in Beijing would direct me and the Consul General in Shanghai to go in and talk about the same issue, but that was pretty rare and I can't say that I can recall any specific issue I might have had to raise that way. But, because of the business-oriented focus of the region, by and large I probably did more commercial support work than anything else. I certainly got involved in some of the Consular issues, particularly as we tried to sort out policies to handle adoptions and a rapid growth in immigrant visa issuances. I was also involved in trying to cut into the surge of illegal immigrants coming out of the district and into the U.S. But, I tried to stay out of the day-to-day consular issues and avoided making referrals and recommendations for others to get visas. As I mentioned before, the head of the Economic unit was a long time consular officer and on a number of occasions I had to get him out of the Consular Section operations. He was constantly getting involved in trying to adjudicate cases or making sure people he referred were getting their visas. And, of course, my main task was to make sure all of our people got the support they needed to do their jobs effectively.

A lot of what I had to do was also ceremonial - U.S. businesses opening up an exhibit; U.S. businesses opening a factory, all that required my "presence." I helped to dedicate or break ground for all kinds of different buildings and facilities. Pabst Blue Ribbon, which used to be a popular beer in the United States, brought in a U.S. factory and set up their own brewery in China while I was there. I think at one point it was the only actual Pabst Blue Ribbon factory still in independent production with all of the U.S. produced beer under that label being made in other companies' breweries. They were the first American beer to come into China and they were very popular across the Consular District and then across much of China because they had that "American" cachet. Several young entrepreneurs got their start by buying Pabst in Guangdong and taking it off by train or plane to other parts of China to sell at a higher price than they paid in Guangdong. The Pabst people did terrific things within their locale to support their local partners and their community and they were a great help for our representation activities and Fourth of July events and everything else where we needed support from the American business community.

Following a process begun by one of my predecessors as Consul General, we also helped introduce McDonalds to Southern China. When I arrived, McDonalds was just being permitted to open in the Shenzhen SEZ. But, every year on the Fourth of July or occasionally for some other special events, we got local government permission to allow McDonalds to bring food up on the train from Hong Kong. Hong Kong McDonalds sent some of their staff and we set up locations for them to prepare and assemble the food and we'd have a Fourth of July with McDonalds hamburgers, french fries and apple pies. We also got Kentucky Fried Chicken introduced the same way and we were able to rely on support from the Pepsi and Coke factories that had also opened in Guangdong to provide us beverages and snacks - Frito Lay is part of Pepsi - so all of this made for a big draw for our July 4th events. Fortunately, these companies were all anxious for the exposure and so our limited representational budget did not take a hit when we had several hundred people come in for the Independence Day activities.

While I was in Guangzhou, the city hosted the first ever women's World Cup Soccer Championship. The American team was one of the favorites and ended up winning the tournament. In fact, they have remained a top contender in each of the following quadrennial contests.

Q: The Chinese had a team?

HARTER: The Chinese had an excellent team, yes. But, interestingly the other perennial top competitors have always included Norway and Sweden. How those two countries with their relatively small population base would be out there competing with the United States and with China and their much larger populations seems incongruous. Moreover, they're probably got to deal with snow and frozen turf for close to half of the year which limits their outdoor play experience. I think it's quite phenomenal. Anyway, the Consulate General did a special McDonalds event for all the members of the team and their parents. Unfortunately, McDonalds hamburgers and fries were not part of the approved diet for the athletes so they couldn't partake of the food. Another locally based US food manufacturer was an official sponsor of the competition and M&Ms chocolate candies from the Mars Company were also part of our celebratory events.

Q: These are candies?

HARTER: Yes, the candy manufacturer. So, we had good opportunities to highlight American products and to use them for special events. M&Ms made special promotional items, including hand-held fans and signs with team cheers and the M&Ms logo for the soccer event. I recall taking all of the parents and the coaches out to dinner at one of my favorite street-side Sichuan restaurants near the Consulate and for a group of fifteen people I think I spent all of about $25 of my representation fund to entertain them with local beer and spicy Sichuan food. Unfortunately that was again something the team members had to miss.

But, we did a number of those kinds of promotion events to give U.S. businesses and artists opportunities to interact with the Chinese community. One of the things I did in Southern China that pleased me the most was to get Agriculture, Commerce and USIA to work together to do joint programs under the auspices of the Consulate General that were directed toward their own target audiences. We actually did a number of promotional events, involving all three of those agencies, which turned out very well. We had a commercial food products show opening in one of the Chinese department stores organized by either our Agriculture or our Commerce unit. I got the other one to participate with representative US products and then convinced USIA to spend some of its funds to bring in a U.S. rock band that was performing in Hong Kong to appear at the grand opening. We set the band up in the parking lot of the department store with all of its sound equipment and we had the parking lot filled to capacity and the construction site next door to the location was filled with workers and others who climbed up onto the building to get a better view. When the concert was over, the crowd piled into the store and many of the US products were sold out very quickly.

On another occasion, the Agriculture Officer was doing a New Orleans style food presentation for our landlord, the White Swan Hotel, with a chef from New Orleans preparing traditional foods for both lunch and dinner menus. One of the Commerce Officers was from New Orleans and I got him to contact some of his friends to see if we could find New Orleans musicians who might be willing to come to China for a couple of weeks. Once he found them, I got the USIA office to get this Zydeco band invited under USIS auspices. I got Commerce to work with United Airlines to get the musicians free transportation to China in return for United publicity material being placed at the White Swan Hotel. United was agreeable because they were trying to get rights to fly to China and in the meantime were still taking a lot of U.S. bound passengers from China through their operations in neighboring Hong Kong. We worked with the White Swan Hotel to give the musicians free rooms and meals in return for their performances at the hotel dining room events. And, during the daytime we were able to get the musicians over to the local university music department to offer classroom instruction on Zydeco and other traditional New Orleans music. It ended up being a multi-dimensional, multi-agency operation that was very, very successful and each of the three agencies contributed to making it work for themselves and for the others as well. And, the Consulate General was the big winner because all of the Chinese entities involved were satisfied with what they got out of it. So often overseas these agencies operate in their own little worlds and never, never try to do anything with one another. In the worst cases, they are each trying to outdo one another as though it was some sort of competition.

Q: When an American business person would come to talk to you, what would you tell them in setting up? What were the good things and the bad things at that particular time?

HARTER: Well, of course the pressures for payoffs and under-the-table payments and things of that sort were very heavy in southern China. And, Americans of course had to be very careful of both the US laws and regulations on corrupt practices as well as local laws. Relationships with local partners also took a lot of cultivating and many a company foundered because it didn't do due diligence in selecting its partner. Much of what I talked about with American businesses related to these issues. I also spent a lot of time explaining how the signing of the first MOU was in fact, just the beginning of the negotiation with a Chinese entity.

A Memorandum of Understanding, a cooperation agreement, is an agreement to cooperate between a Chinese entity and a U.S. business firm which set out the basic target of a business. It was difficult to get the businessmen to understand the Chinese hadn't really started to bargain or work on a partnership at all until after that MOU was signed. MOUs really meant nothing. They were just a significant showing of interest and willingness to proceed with a lot of other, often very difficult negotiations.

I can remember one Massachusetts company's multi-month conversations with a local municipality that would have provided modern equipment and technical management expertise for the city's power plants. I had briefed the U.S. businessmen each time they came to China and gave them my thoughts on how to proceed with their discussions. On a trip back to the U.S. on consultations which also included some public speaking engagements, I stopped at their headquarters and again talked about how their deal was progressing. Finally, everything seemed about to be finalized. Even though the U.S. company team had been there for more than a week and had already engaged in a number of different sessions with the local officials, the municipality authorities balked on some last minute arrangements and postponed a couple of "final" discussions that were to take place before the actual agreement was signed. Now I should point out, all of this was taking place toward the end of December. It was either 1990 or 1991 and the Americans were all anxious to get home for the holidays with their families. "Reluctantly" the Chinese agreed to one more meeting, scheduled at 6:00 pm just before a small banquet dinner which was now scheduled for Christmas Eve, ensuring the Americans would all miss out on their holiday at home.

I agreed to sit in with the businessmen to demonstrate USG interest in seeing the two sides reach agreement and to provide any last minute suggestions to help the Americans. The Chinese officials knew what they were doing, they knew exactly what they were doing. They knew the American team wanted to get out of there and wanted to go home for the holidays, but they had strung them down to the wire. The senior US businessman made the last little concession the local officials felt was needed to make the municipal government satisfied and we concluded the agreement somewhere around 8:00 pm and adjourned for dinner and a few well earned maotai toasts. The U.S. businessmen didn't get out of town until Christmas Day and by the time they were back in Massachusetts they only had the New Year's Holiday left to enjoy with family and friends. But, that was the way the Chinese would work and do business to exploit their leverage.

And, it didn't make any difference whether it was Americans or other nationalities coming in. They played the same tricks with Overseas Chinese who would come in to negotiate business deals. Because I had worked in Hong Kong previously, I knew a number of these Hong Kong entrepreneurs - Li Ka Shing, Gordon Wu, Henry Fok - who came to arrange major investments, primarily in the Guangzhou consular district provinces. The Chinese Merchant Steamship Navigation Company, for example, developed the entire Shekou District of Shenzhen. Gordon Wu had brokered and then built a major power plant to supply the electrical needs of all of the towns and factories in the Pearl River Delta. Then he came to the local authorities to pitch the construction of a super-highway from the Hong Kong border and the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) all the way to Guangzhou. Once that leg was completed, he then planned to build a parallel route that would go down the other side of the delta to the Zhuhai SEZ opposite Macau. When I first heard the idea during my early 1980s tour in Hong Kong I thought this was a ridiculous idea, because there just wasn't enough traffic to justify that kind of expenditure. I used to tease Gordon that he just wanted to get on a big road away from all the traffic in Hong Kong so he could open up the speed on his big Mercedes sedan or on one of his family sports cars. And I suggested the only money he would make would be by ensuring his friends and their high powered Lamborghinis could get out on the road and have a good time. But he was truly prescient. The road concept proved to be a phenomenal success and a big money earner. Gordon negotiated, as part of his concession, the right to collect the tolls for a period of time, as well as the right to develop land at the interchanges and so he then became the new developer for a slew of satellite towns and factories along the edges of this new highway.

Q: Sounds like the Union Pacific in Southern, going across the continent.

HARTER: The plan was a fantastic achievement. Gordon was a Princeton educated architect engineer. He was a pioneer in Asia's development of build/operate/transfer power plants. He would sign a contract to build a large power plant and for his investment would receive the right to sell the electricity for a period of time until the contract called for the plant to be turned over to the local authorities. His success on the big plant in Guangdong gave him entree to do similar projects in Thailand and the Philippines. And, his timing for the project coincided with the big burst of growth in the Pearl River Delta with its export-oriented factories and its SEZ investment areas.

Q: Any more stories, did Hong Kong capture southern China or vice versa?

HARTER: Li Ka Shing's investments were in land development, industry and hotels. His Hong Kong holding company, Cheung Kong Holdings, was the largest Chinese enterprise in the colony and it dominated land development, warehousing, and hotels. The Hong Kong Hilton down the street from the ConGen was a Li Ka Shing enterprise that the Hong Kong ConGen used all the time to put up visitors. Li rebuilt and modernized the hotel while I was there and then eventually took it down to put up an even larger commercial building because of its prime location adjacent to the Bank of China and the Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank which was the old British standby. Li had come to Hong Kong as a refugee and made his first fortune producing plastic flowers in a small factory in Kowloon. As a refugee from the Communist takeover of China, he might have seemed an odd businessman for the China operations, but Li was above all a businessman and he knew where money could be made.

Henry Fok, on the other hand, had been a long-time supporter of the communists and he had made a good deal of money smuggling items into China during the Korean War. He was on the U.S. blacklist during the war and for some time afterward. I met him while I was in Hong Kong and had numerous subsequent meetings with his son. All of the top Chinese businessmen ran their enterprises as family businesses with the children expected to follow in the father's footsteps. (At that time, Gordon was the exception because his children were still not even teenagers.) Henry Fok was the investor who built the White Swan Hotel and who did a lot of investment in Fujian Province, his original home in China. Because he also spent time in Guangzhou, he built a whole new wing on the municipal hospital with a cardiac center equipped with all of the latest equipment and foreign-trained Chinese doctors who could take care of all the geriatric Chinese businessmen and investors who were constantly in and out of Guangzhou. The local doctors there were contacts of ours at the Consulate and they were very helpful when we had American tourists with medical problems - the kind you suggested in an early session that became known as "death by duck." On one occasion I had to take my wife there in the middle of the night because she had developed a terrible case of hives. We wandered around a number of wards in the old section of the hospital before we could find anybody to get us into the more modern cardiac section and it was a real lesson in contrasts. Thereafter, we made sure we had regular contact information for the duty doctors in that part of the hospital.

Q: American Business comes in and sets up operation there. I'm talking about during your time. And, they finally after a lot of very difficult negotiation set up things. Was that just the beginning of trouble or had the Chinese learned that you don't keep trying to; you know I'm talking about bribes. You don't get labor, you don't, I mean all sorts of things can happen.

HARTER: Well, for the most part, one of the key elements of my in-briefing for the new businessmen was, be sure of what your partner can do; make sure your partner has some capabilities, not just connections, but capabilities. But, if you decide you're going to have a partner who has no intrinsic-to-the-business capabilities and you only intend to use him for his connections to get things approved, then make sure your agreement restricts his ability to get involved in the management of your enterprise. Finally, make sure the percentages of shared responsibility and profits reflect the work to be done, that you can repatriate profits in hard currency, and that you have an acceptable means of settling disputes. If the partner was a facilitator rather than a participant in the business, it was best to limit his involvement to his collection of a percentage of profits and appropriate fees for his facilitation work. I also warned the businessmen who were taking on partners with existing factories that they had to be firm about hiring workers. The first thing a Chinese partner wanted you to do was to absorb all of its workers. That was a recipe for disaster because most of the workers had very limited skills and didn't do much of anything on the factory floor. Chinese factory workers were way in excess of the needs for any given factory's operational requirements and the amount of redundancy could be as high as 50 or 60 percent. The American businessman had to make sure he had a say in hiring and to emphasize he wanted a new batch of people to train for the new work styles involved in modern manufacturing.

Proctor and Gamble did one of the best investment development programs I've ever seen and I used their experiences as a model and lesson plan for a lot of others. P&G had gotten started before I arrived, though they had not yet started production of the P&G shampoo product that was to start their overall line. They initially partnered with a local soap company and upgraded the local company's facilities so they could begin producing for the local market, getting their brands more well known, and developing an understanding of how the local market operated. At the same time they were starting to build a factory that would enable them to then produce their own products under better conditions - like a more open plant floor with mechanized conveyor belts moving the product through the production and bottling and packing phases of operations. They had a really good working relationship with this particular partner. The partner got his products upgraded as part of the deal and he helped P&G get permission for local sales of the P&G products. This was a very tricky issue with the Chinese Government because it was always trying to insist on the foreign investors agreeing to export their products in order for China to earn foreign exchange. The Chinese were often also very restrictive on the repatriation of profits. At the beginning this was not a big issue for many of the investors as they were trying to expand their businesses and using up their local currency to do that expansion and pay for factory construction meant corporate money wasn't being spent. But eventually, they all wanted to bring home the bacon and the Chinese made that difficult. I can recall learning of stories of companies buying Chinese products with their excess local currency and then trying to market those products abroad. One big seller during that period was Chinese carpets and I think even P and G at one time or another purchased Chinese carpets as a way of getting profits out of China.

I tried to get other investors as they came in to look at how P and G had set up its investment and to look at how the partnership agreements were worked out. And, Proctor and Gamble was generally pretty good about that. They were willing to let other people know how they had actually gone about doing business. So, they were a big help for people like Avon and Amway when they came in and tried to start their own manufacturing operations. I was there when P and G's first products came off the line in the partner's factory and I was the U.S. official who participated in the new factory dedication with P and G's CEO and other top American officials from the company. I later watched them roll off new product lines including bar soaps and Pampers at the Huangpu factory site. I also spent a lot of time with delegations from GE that were evaluating a variety of investment opportunities for different operating divisions from small appliances and light bulbs to bigger sales promotions for turbines, engines and other such items. When GE finally inked its first deal, Jack Welch came to town with the Italian GE Vice President who succeeded him and we spent some time together discussing business operations in China. I also had the chance to work with a small business investment group that included former Cabinet Secretary Elliott Richardson among its members and I had several sessions and trips to factory sites with him and his partners during this tour.

Q: Avon is cosmetics?

HARTER: Right, right. This was another real tremendous breakthrough, because Avon was allowed to do what it has done traditionally in the United States, door-to-door, sales and marketing where individuals basically ran their own operations. Although the original sales operation was to be restricted, initially Guangzhou and a couple of adjacent areas in Guangdong, it spread very quickly through individual initiative. What was most important, it provided a tremendous opportunity for women, and all of a sudden there was a great deal of upward mobility for women in south China.

Q: As you say this, I can think of a horror of allowing Chinese women who are not known for being passive really when they get going in business things to turn that loose on their fellow ladies.

HARTER: It was absolutely unreal in terms of how fast they grew. When Avon started out the company brought into Guangzhou what it thought would be a six months supply of products. At the beginning, Avon could only produce a few of the products so they had to bring in supplies from outside to get started. The "six month supply" was gone in a week and a half. The company had to bring in huge quantities of products from other factories outside the country - I think it was mostly from the Philippines - in order just to be able to meet the explosive demand as they tried to get their own production capabilities expanded and producing at a full capacity right from the start. This was very expensive for Avon because it had to pay all the duties on the imported products, exactly what it had hoped to avoid by setting up its own production facilities in Guangdong. But they just couldn't keep up with demand, particularly after the Chinese ladies decided they could determine the sales zones on their own.

Q: Well, you're talking about something that has been a dream of entrepreneurs from outside.

HARTER: Right. Sell an aspirin or a bottle of coke to every Chinese and you've made a million dollars.

Q: It use to be oil for the lamps of China and all this stuff.

HARTER: What you had initially for the Avon ladies was a group that was recruited, interviewed and hired by Avon representatives who came out from the states. But, thereafter, the ladies who went out to sell from this first tranche were picking their own sub-dealers and other intermediaries. They had sales staff networks where some ladies at the top of the chain were making as much as three and four thousand U.S. dollars a month from their commissions and sales. These ladies usually did some sales of their own but for the most part they were running a series of other people down below them. I'm not sure this ever would have passed muster with Mao Zedong and Marx and Lenin were surely already rolling in their graves.

Avon, as I said, was originally designed to focus on the Guangzhou area and the Pearl River delta regions down to the Shenzhen and Zhuhai SEZs (special economic zone). So the sales area was originally confined to only a part of Guangdong Province. But, once they were in business, these Chinese ladies went out and bought an airplane ticket and got on a plane with their samples boxes and order forms and all of a sudden they were in all of the big cities of China. Avon products were turning up in Western China among the Muslim tribal areas. Avon products were available in Shanghai almost over night. Avon products were in Beijing, simply because these ladies said, "Why do I have to stay in Guangdong? There's already a whole bunch of ladies down here selling these products, I'm going up to Beijing where there's nobody else selling it." Before long, Avon, was one of the biggest enterprises in all of China. They became so successful that a few years later the Chinese decided this arrangement was getting out of hand as a kind of pyramid program and they forced Avon to sell out, though I believe Avon was able to return and resume operations without the direct sales approach. Basically, I think the pyramid scheme argument was a mask for a Chinese Party decision that there was too much "independence" and lack of control in a direct marketing program.

Others came to China and started this same kind of pyramid door-to-door sales program. The two college classmates who created Amway and the combination of detergent and cleaning products as well as personal care products also came in and set up a factory to produce their product lines and then recruited a sales force to market door-to-door. They had less of an appeal than Avon, because there was a real lack of local competition for the Avon products. For Amway and its detergents and cleaning products, they ran head on into Proctor and Gamble and the big British Unilever group.

Q: Did you run across problems, I'm not sure where they started, but you know, I think of the triads and the criminal type things wanting to edge in and all that.

HARTER: Yes, that was a very significant problem but in a different way. You didn't have them trying to get into the business world or trying to extort money for protection. The big item was smuggling luxury goods into China. And then, during the time I was in Guangzhou we had the real start on a large scale of Chinese being smuggled into the United States. There were all sorts of routes and systems involved. Some groups went through Europe or Latin America, with the latter coming up and across the Mexican border. There were groups who came to Canada on transit visas, left the airport and were walked or driven across the Canadian-U.S. border. There were groups brought across the Pacific in cargo containers and then smuggled out of west coast ports. This also meant a big upsurge in false documents, passports, visas, stamps and seals and photos. Government officials connived in the process and for a fee they produced documentation that prospective students would use to submit to U.S. universities in order to gain admission. Faked papers from U.S. universities would also be submitted and the volume of applicants at the windows was such that people got a very short screening. Over time, the consular section interviewers' presumption was that most of the documents they were looking at were fraudulent and the basic interview starting point "prove to me you are not an intending immigrant" had an even more negative take in Guangzhou.

For those who were going to go to the U.S. on a more direct route, this was the way to go. You had to get documents good enough to make it on the plane. Once on board, you simply destroyed the documents or passed them on to a handler who would then recycle them for future use. Then the document-less Chinese would stand in front of the immigration desk and ask for political asylum, just as they had been coached to say when they were preparing to come to America. On the United States end, the enforcement system was, and largely still is, farcical. Someone would be stopped as an undocumented alien, an illegal immigrant. Once they claimed political asylum, they were under the protection of the U.S. courts and they had to be given a hearing. Detention facilities for the illegal aliens were over-crowded and couldn't handle the influx so the illegal alien would be told to return for an interview and hearing in three or four months. At that point, they were gone. They didn't return for the interview and INS didn't have the personnel to go out and look for them.

Since all of this had been arranged for a very healthy fee, most of these individuals became sweat shop slaves, working to pay off their transportation and facilitation debt. Because they were also being charged for their room and board, their debt tended to increase rather than decrease. Young attractive women were recruited or forced into prostitution and drug running. Strong, aggressive males were recruited for drug running and as enforcers to help control the large numbers of people in the system.

I spent a lot of time talking to people in INS and State and other agencies and for the longest time everybody said, "You can't do anything with this. There's no way we can stop it; we can't turn people around; and we'll just have to do something different." I said, "That's unacceptable. We cannot allow trafficking in human lives. We cannot accept this as a norm. You need to try and take out the criminal element that is making money on this process." And, I actually made enough noise and objections that INS and the Department convened a regional meeting in Hong Kong for the very first time sometime in 1992 to try to determine how to slow if not stop the process. I personally could never understand why the US Government automatically extended the protection of the U.S. Constitution to an intending immigrant who had no documentation just because he or she had managed to reach a US airport. To me, the fact they arrived without documentation indicated they had already committed a crime and therefore should have been immediately subject to deportation. We could have created some system that would have permitted the human rights victim to be screened out of this direct deportation arrangement. But even then that screening system might not have been used very frequently because the human rights activists had usually been successfully interviewed abroad at a US embassy or consulate.

I decided it was simply a question of having to go back to the source of the smuggling efforts and in southern China, the source was generally Fujian Province, the northernmost province in our district. The smugglers were working with relatives from Taiwan, across the Taiwan Straits, because most of the people in Taiwan were of Fujian ancestry. There were Chinese in Indonesia and Malaysia and Singapore who were also originally from Fujian and they were part of the intermediary points that moved the Chinese in stages to the U.S. I took it on myself to start putting pressure on the government authorities in Fujian Province. We started by having the Consular section question the people the Fujian government was sending down to us with recommendations for visa issuance. We scrutinized local Fujian government documents and found many of them were fraudulent. We started putting pressure on them to do a better job of screening the people before they were sent to Guangzhou. The Fujian Government operation was probably the most corrupt of any that I have ever had to deal with. Government officials were getting kickbacks from individuals who wanted to get to the U.S. and they were also working with the people smugglers because many of those being smuggled were Fujian residents. Fujian Province officials invited us to come to the province to work with them and I took the Consular Section chief and sometimes others from that section to Fujian to talk about the issues. Over the course of long meetings, long banquet dinners with myriad liquor toasts, they tried to get us to simplify our scrutiny and to accept their recommendations and referrals but I would not budge and we regularly rejected visa applicants who had been recommended by the provincial authorities.

Actually this reminds me of some local color stories associated with our trips. On one of the early trips I had brought the Consular Section Chief, Bernadette Allen, and the newly arrived Economic Section Chief, Steve Spangler, to Fujian with me to meet with the provincial officials but also to go out into the countryside and see some of the local areas where there were issues of interest to both of those sections. For both Bernadette and Steve, this was their first foray into the Chinese provincial banquet circuit. On this particular occasion, as I noted just a moment ago, the provincial authorities kept us at the toasts and drinking Chinese liquor for some time. When all the courses had been completed, they took us off to the hotel's karaoke lounge and a private room where we could continue to drink and, of course, sing. Then as the evening wound down, the Chinese officials proposed that I go off with them to write up an agreement on visa issuance procedures. Needless to say we did not reach or even work on such an agreement that evening or at any time during the visit. Aside from the copious amounts of liquor, our hosts had provided us with a rather standard set of dishes for our banquet meal. That was not the case however when we left Fuzhou and went out into the mountainous region to the west of the city. There we were entertained with snake bile liquor, snake soup and a variety of other unmentionable or unrecognizable animal ingredients. Both Steve and Bernadette managed to "hang in there" and upheld the honor of the U.S. side but they remained amazed that this was what I usually encountered on my provincial travels and that I still continued to make the trips.

Q: In a way there are two different things. One is the fake papers which Hong Kong had been dealing with for, all of a sudden now you are able to get to the villages where these people say they're from. Was the INS able to get in there and your people get in there to the villages. Use to have these books on where was the well of such and such a village and all that.

HARTER: We actually did get some of our people in there. Sometimes it wasn't quite so easy for the Americans to go and we had to send some of our local employees into more remote areas where the appearance of a foreigner would be a lot more suspicious. We ended up having to do the exact same thing when I was in Vietnam later on, because we found the same smuggling enterprise developing in Vietnam that we'd had a decade earlier in China. The INS people who were in Vietnam in the late '90s and their local employees ended up having to do a lot of those investigations.

One of the issues that we got involved in in Guangzhou, and one that was later to be paralleled in Vietnam, was the start of agency promoted adoptions of Chinese babies. This was another one of those situations where fraud and mismanagement and corruption crept in. There were agencies and individuals in the United States who were unscrupulous. There were government officials and local hospitals and both Chinese and American adoption facilitators who were "buying" and "selling" babies and some were passing on babies that had illnesses to unsuspecting American parents. One of the worst things you can imagine dealing with is someone who has just started to bond with a baby and then is told the baby can't go to the United States because of bad documents or procedures.

Q: Oh that's terrible!

HARTER: We had a couple of those cases while I was there. Some of them got nasty and involved lawsuits and Congressional interventions. We also had situations where adopting parents had bonded with the baby, and the baby died in their arms after only a couple of days while they were in the midst of processing the paperwork.

Q: Where were the babies coming from?

HARTER: Mostly from the rural parts of Hunan, an inland province, next to Guangdong, but also from Guangdong and Fujian provinces. Sometimes people would get babies from the North, but most of them were coming out of the South.

Q: Almost all of them girls weren't they?

HARTER: They were occasionally some boys, but most all of them were girls, that's right.

Q: I was in Seoul in the 1970s, Consular General there and we were processing about 5,000 adopted babies a year. However, it worked. I mean, we had anti-fraud procedures in place which seemed to be pretty good checks. The kids were healthy kids for the most part.

HARTER: Well, you had a different operating environment in Korea. You're able to get around a lot more; you're able to deal a lot more openly in Korea as an American government official than you are in China. So, it was a lot harder to do some of those checks and to verify the paperwork and procedures in the adoption facilities or the hospitals. And, we just simply didn't have the manpower to be able to go out and cover a country as vast as China.

Q: What about doctors for visas, particularly for the children, but for the others too? Were you able to have a fairly good medical screening system?

HARTER: Yes, we did. We did pretty good medical screening. We used the provincial facilities in Guangzhou and even did some of our work through the doctors in the special cardiac center I mentioned earlier. They had all the latest equipment and a number of western trained doctors.

Q: Were you seeing any reflection of all the Chinese who went to the United States to get educated? Were a significant number coming back?

HARTER: No, not at that time. No, significant numbers were not coming back. The original tranche of students were the so-called "cadre kids," children of the leadership in the government apparatus and the Communist Party. Many of them came back because they were being groomed for Party and Government positions based on their parents' status. After that group of students and as the numbers grew significantly most of the student did not return. I'm not sure that the students intended to stay permanently, but I do believe they intended to spend a significant amount of time in the US after their university studies were completed. At this particular time, there was still not a lot of opportunity for the well-educated Chinese student to succeed in China and so staying abroad meant greater options and the ability to send money back to the family. It was only later, probably around the turn of the century, when the Chinese economy began to generate its own momentum that these Chinese began to return home and the recent graduates of that era didn't stay as long in the US after graduation.

Q: How about the Taiwan connection in your area?

HARTER: The Taiwan connection was very big. We had a lot of Taiwan businessmen who came in to work both in Fujian and in Guangdong. They were investors in a variety of seafood enterprises in particular, because they had markets that they had developed in Taiwan to supply Japan. They came in and they set up eel farms, and fish farms, and shrimp farms to raise and process these foodstuffs for Japan. We had a number of Taiwan business people who worked with Americans to help develop projects. That was also a good cooperation, because the Chinese had certain access on one hand, but then could use the Americans as the intermediary for dealing with the government in a way that, you know, use the influence and the power of the United States. So, it was a good combination between the two. This was particularly evident in the shoe industry, the athletic shoe industry with all the top U.S. brands at one point moving out of Taiwan and South Korea and almost entirely into southern China.

I can recall a particular visit to the Shantou SEZ which is in the northern part of Guangdong just south of the border with Fujian. This was another area that was the home for a significant number of Overseas Chinese and thus a natural area for China to set up as a Special Economic Zone to attract Overseas Chinese investors. On this visit, I was meeting with a Communist Party official who had been in the area for a long time. He was explaining to me that the local farmers outside Shantou were no longer producing rice and they were importing the rice from across the border to meet their needs. I questioned him about this because I knew that farmers liked to produce rice at least for their own consumption because they often thought that the "local variety" of rice was just a bit better than what was produced elsewhere. He agreed, but said it was more important to make money out of the land. He then sketched for me the evolution of the recent year's investments in different land utilization practices. He said that vegetable production had been the first stage of the farmer's evolution into entrepreneur status. Those farmers living closest to Shantou or closest to the main highway were the first to make the change. But then when lots of people got into the vegetable business, some of the more prosperous farmers decided to invest in orange trees and other forms of fruit trees. This was good because it brought both a higher return in the local sales market, but it also opened up opportunities for international sales, to Hong Kong and Japan. He didn't make the obvious mention of Taiwan sales but we both knew that Taiwan was also a buyer of the local fruit. Then, once these farmers were in the international market, they drew the attention of Taiwan and Japan investors who came in and convinced them to convert their fruit tree groves to eel and fish farms, particularly eel farms. This was totally for export and almost exclusively for Japan. While I was there I visited a number of the eel farms and saw how the live eels were shipped in plastic bags of water and air on the flights out of Shantou airport for Japan. There were also a couple of farms which set up their own factory production facilities so that they killed, cleaned, and roasted the eels in a special soy sauce and then shipped them in hermetically sealed pouches direct to the supermarkets of Japan. This was even more profitable that just shipping the live eels to Japan. But I digress, the main story I wanted to tell was how surprising it was to hear this long-time Communist party member talking about ordinary farmers giving up their rice paddy fields for entrepreneurial activity to make more and more money. He never once indicated that this was somehow out of step with communist economic theory. He was just proud of how the people in his district were prospering

Q: Were relations with Taiwan and Japan, they seem to go up and down. I was wondering whether that was reflected in the business or did that sort of have a life of its own?

HARTER: During this time period the relationship, I think was pretty stable. There were no big incidents, there were no major defections of pilots and aircraft along the coast, there was no test shelling of a rocket here or there. All of that came much later. Taiwan was only slowly easing out of its Kuomintang domination period into a more pluralistic political system. The mainlanders were still in control and so Beijing was not so worried about a political system that looked like Taiwanese running Taiwan for the Taiwanese and looking to have an "independent" status for the island. I don't believe there was any incident or difficulties during that time involving the Japanese. The big disputes about textbooks and the Japanese Prime Minister visiting the shrine to the war dead came at different times.

Q: What about us on the Consular side, Americans getting into trouble. Was that much of a problem?

HARTER: We had some, minor issues with Americans in jail or under investigation - usually regarding a business complaint - but nothing significant. Nothing, nothing of major consequence that I can recall, not even anything like the Lisa Wichser case I was working when I was on the China desk.

Q: What about, say an American gets into conflict with his Chinese partners or something?

HARTER: That was definitely complicated. There were certain circumstances where Chinese businessmen absconded with certain funds or factory equipment just disappeared. They were also similar cases where the American wasn't exactly above board. I got complaints from Chinese officials and Chinese business people about a particular American who had promised something and collected the funds for it and never delivered it. We had a few issues like that. But, these were issues where the Consulate and even the US Government had no control and we had to just simply tell the Chinese that it's a question of caveat emptor, the buyer's got to be aware of what he's making an agreement to buy and with whom he is dealing.

Q: What about, I mean were any Americans in jail?

HARTER: A couple of times, I can recall where we had an American in jail. I can't remember anybody being in jail for anything terribly significant. We didn't have any murders; we didn't have any rape cases or things of that sort. It was usually drunk and disorderly I guess or bad documents, or expired documents, things of that sort. So, we did have some cases where Americans in jail and our American Citizen Service officer had to visit them periodically.

Q: Was there much in the way of American men, usually older men arriving to find a bride and that sort of things?

HARTER: This wasn't a big industry like it is in some other areas in Asia or Eastern Europe. It was more often elderly Chinese from the U.S. looking for younger Chinese women. But, it was not the same sort of thing you'd have in Thailand or as it would later be in Vietnam. There you had both Overseas Vietnamese from the U.S. seeking a younger, less Westernized woman as well as older Caucasians seeking young brides.

Q: And some of these were very fake. I mean these were guys that arrived, fall in love at the airport with a young lady and come in the next day to the embassy in order to get married.

HARTER: Oh yes, to be sure. There were a number of the "love at first sight" occurrences. There were certain cases of people who showed up in ACS (American Citizens Services) which looked like they were just part of the people smuggling process. Somebody came in and arranged a wedding in order to bring the person to the states, simply for the purpose of immigration. We did certainly have some of that, yes. And, I can recall INS had to look at a couple of those arranged marriages.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover about this time you were there?

HARTER: It was again, a very wide open, very entrepreneurial time period for Southern China. They were really getting their teeth into development and growth and very quick to dispense with communist ideology when it came to economics and business. They were averaging during that time period, 18, 20 percent or more growth each year.

I recall Ambassador Jim Lilley coming down to visit a couple of times with the express intent of going out into the provinces to see what the south's economic development was all about. He too was amazed to see what was going on. I recall he was also very proud of his staff in China and he noted how when we went off to meet with provincial and local government officials we all conducted our meetings in Chinese even though the Chinese often had interpreters set up for the meetings. He commented to me that none of his other colleagues in Beijing had similar capabilities among their staffs either in Beijing or in their Consulates.

I guess I should also mention the other Consulates that were in Guangzhou at that time. Once again I organized a monthly luncheon group among the various CG's in town. The group included the Poles, the Japanese, the Australians, the French, and the Thai. The Poles had been there the longest because they had been one of the first to recognize the PRC and because they needed someone in southern China to look out for Polish seamen on the Polish and Eastern European ships that delivered trade goods to and from the PRC.

There was a North Korean office in Guangzhou as well but nobody ever associated with the North Koreans. Even the Chinese officials were a bit stand-offish when it came to the North Koreans. I can recall the head of the Guangdong Provincial Foreign Affairs Office telling me that the North Koreans were into smuggling and all sorts of unsavory activities and that they virtually never came to any official events. I can't recall ever seeing them at any provincial events which involved the consular corps though I did see their dark colored sedan occasionally on the streets of Guangzhou. The Vietnamese also had consulates in Guangzhou and in Guangxi province but these had been closed during the 1979 border war. Toward the end of 1992, the Vietnamese and Chinese resumed the staffing of their respective consular missions and a Vietnamese Consul General appeared. I was the Dean of the Consular Corps at that time and it was my duty to welcome him to Guangzhou and he participated in the last few luncheon gatherings which I attended before leaving China in January of 1993.

The luncheons served as a chance to review general events in the consular district and occasionally to talk about the larger events in China. We also reviewed consular issues and our relations with the Guangdong Government and I recall we made joint demarches to the government on a number of occasions about local policies or to seek better access to government officials. As a result we got an annual group meeting with the Governor of Guangdong and we successfully resisted the Foreign Affairs Office effort to have us make all of our appointments to see provincial officials through the FAO.

As a result of our "activism", the Foreign Affairs Office also tried to be more open and provide more opportunities for us to participate in provincial events. One of the most enjoyable was attendance at the annual lychee festival in one or another of the Pearl River Delta municipalities or counties. We'd travel by tour bus to the locale and after the usual ceremonial greetings we'd go out into the orchards where the lychees were being picked. Fresh lychee just picked off the tree is especially sweet and we'd all be covered in sticky juice. After the required farewell banquet, we'd all be presented with big baskets full of lychees to take home.

I guess I should also note that I again assigned the three political and economic officers to cover each of the outlying provinces in our consular district, leaving Guangdong to be covered by everyone. Political and economic officers were to be responsible for all activities in their respective provinces and not just issues in their own cones. This developed a better understanding of the issues and personalities in the provinces. The three officers also were tasked to mentor junior officers who were interested in doing reporting work. Because we had such a large consular section, most of them were first tour officers and not all of them belonged to the consular cone. So, I encouraged them to try to get out of the Consulate and to take some in-country travel. If they traveled in the consular district - and there were some worthwhile things to see and do in the consular district - I told them I would not charge them annual leave if they proposed and I approved an investigative reporting topic that they could complete as a result of their travels. Then, I'd have one of the political or economic officers review and develop their reports for transmission to Washington. Although I guess relations between consulates and the embassy are often a good bit more structured and constrained, we did not have any such limitations while I was in China. We reported directly to Washington without clearing our materials with Beijing. Occasionally, Beijing would ask us to submit some information to assist the Embassy to complete a tasking from Washington, but it was more usual for us to be tasked and to respond directly to Washington.

Q: Was there concern about, on our part about the environment?

HARTER: We certainly did have concerns about the environment. We tried to make sure that American manufacturers that went to China paid some attention to that too. We advocated they not just simply export a lot of old systems and old technologies that would create environmental problems. While I was there, there were a number of scandals involving fires in over-crowded dormitories where the companies hadn't taken the proper safety precautions and hundreds of people died in the fires. Fortunately these did not involve U.S. companies, but people who were working in these factories were often producing directly for the US markets. We tried to encourage American businesses to develop good business operations and practices as though they were in the U.S. and to try to encourage better local conditions for the workers in these factories. It was easier to do with companies that were actually producing products in their own or joint venture factories than it was for those that only involved buying up production or factory output that was owned by another investor. The garment and toy industry largely fell into this latter category. Southern China export industry factories often had sweat shop conditions with poor ventilation, inadequate lighting and safety equipment. These factories often ran all day long and the successive shift workers shared dormitory beds with those on other shifts.

When I was talking about before about the U.S.-Taiwan partnership, Nike had basically partnered with a lot of Taiwan shoe manufacturers who came in and set up the facilities to manufacture Nike shoes. Some Korean factories also were moved and this occasionally meant there were Korean managers running the factories. Some of these factories were first rate, with good ventilation in the toxic smelling gluing areas and featured well-lit assembly lines with good equipment that protected the workers along the line. Workers wore masks so they weren't inhaling the fumes or the residue of the fabric that floated in the air. But others were 180 degrees opposite and it all depended on the Taiwan or Korean manager/owner. Human rights organizations in the U.S. occasionally would target NIKE or some other manufacturers because of poor conditions for the workers.

A lot of Nike's bad publicity in the late 1990s in Vietnam came about as a result of this sort of situation. The local Nike representative there wasn't paying much attention to the factories in Vietnam and didn't recognize their link to NIKE's image. The Korean and Taiwan-run factories there just got out of hand and I can remember there were charges a Korean manager was involved in beating workers. NIKE didn't have a very good public relations staff at the time and they added to the problem with some inept press releases. NIKE had an overall responsibility to set some basic standards for production and for treating workers but it was certainly difficult to do when they had no control of day-to-day operations on the factory floor. Once again, this was an area where P&G had an excellent reputation and its quality control procedures and its overall worker-owner relationship was outstanding.

Q: In Summary how would you differentiate the workload at Guangzhou from other China posts?

HARTER: The obvious difference between Guangzhou and the other China posts was first and foremost our immigrant visa work for all of China and the much higher volume of adoptions we were handling as China adoptions became popular in the U.S. Beyond that, the Consulate General's major operational focus was support for U.S. businesses seeking to get into the China market. As CG, I spent a lot of time advising businessmen and working with them in their dealings with local officials and government-owned factories. Showing the flag, was clearly a commercial endeavor, much like it was when the US first appeared in China in the 18th Century and when we established a presence on Shamian Island in the 19th Century. It was too bad I didn't have a big sailing vessel since the Consulate building backed directly on the Pearl River.

Q: Well, this probably is a good place to stop and if you think of anything next time, we can fill in, but otherwise we'll pick you up in '93 and whether?

Before we move on, let me add a personal story involving my father-in-law who had been born in a small village in southern Guangdong province. My wife's parents came to visit us while we were in Guangzhou and her father wanted to visit his old home town and see if the house where he was born was still standing. We talked to the local officials and they agreed to do some checking for us before her parents arrived. When her parents arrived, we were able to confirm the house was still standing and we arranged an opportunity to visit and meet a couple of people from the village who said they knew "relatives" from the era when my father-in-law had been a little boy. I guess I should say that his father had come to the U.S. On his own and then sent for his son afterward. My father-in-law spent part of his boyhood in China and part of it in the U.S. He joined the U.S. Army during World War II and had been assigned to the China-Burma-India Theatre where he utilized his electrical engineering background to set up communication lines. He met his future wife in Yunnan Province during the war and they married at the end of the war before he was sent back to the U.S. On a troop ship.

When we arrived in the small village, all of the local officials were there and they toured us around the area and finally to the houses where my father and his other relatives in the town had lived. The village officials told him they were prepared to arrange to have the house title transferred to his name since they were now sure his family was the original owner and they told him they'd be happy to help him arrange to get it all fixed up and made more modern and livable. That was a good bit more than anyone in my wife's family had intended and that particular offer was politely declined. Thereafter, however, we had occasional contacts with the local officials there wondering when my in-laws were coming back to visit and to see if they had changed their minds about taking over the old family home.

HARTER: I left China in 1993. When I departed in late January, I didn't have an onward assignment. This was because my departure was off-cycle and there wasn't anything on the open assignments list at that time for a Senior Foreign Service Officer. So I was assigned "over complement" to EAP (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs). I worked on a number of special projects in EAP before being assigned to work on the November APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting in Seattle which was to become the major EAP-focused event of 1993. APEC includes the U.S. and all the Pacific Rim and Southeast Asian countries in a single economic and trade-focused unit. Its primary goal was to promote and prod WTO (World Trade Organization) trade liberalization. In July, 1993 I was sent on a one-year assignment as the State Department liaison with the Washington Council on International Trade WCIT), a non-profit based in Seattle. WCIT organized the local government and public support to promote Seattle as the site for the US hosting of APEC in 1993. When Seattle was selected as the host city, WCIT became the coordinator for the state and city to handle the conference preparations.

Before I get too deeply into APEC, by way of background, when I came back as "over complement" to the East Asia Bureau, at that particular time, Winston Lord was the Assistant Secretary [Ed: served from April 1993 to February 1997] and again, the new Clinton administration was starting up. The EAP Front Office was in the process of being assembled and as he was putting together his team, Ambassador Lord directed me to look at a couple of specific issues for the Bureau.

Q: This is the new administration getting ready to see what problem or what issues they should focus on?

HARTER: Right. My first task was to take a look at the organization of EAP's Economic Affairs and its Regional Affairs Offices and see how these functional units could be made more effective. I began by reviewing the work of the Political Military Affairs and Economic Affairs Bureaus in the Department - PM and EB - and then I reviewed how the geographical bureaus like European Affairs and Latin American Affairs organized their functional operations. After a several days of meetings and note taking, I proposed a number of changes for the EAP offices. Ambassador Lord liked the proposals and worked them into EAP operations.

Q: I was wondering when you were doing that, did you find any Bureau that was doing exceptionally well, or did you base -

HARTER: My recollection is that the European Affairs Bureau was the one that seemed to be the best organized and the best structured for handling functional issues. AF, the Africa Bureau, and ARA, the Latin America Bureau,...I don't recall there be anything particularly striking in either of those bureaus.

Q: In many ways, of course, AF and ARA are unlike Asia and Europe, which are economic giants. At least in American terms, it is not surprising AF and ARA aren't organized to handle major economic issues.

HARTER: Right, that's very true, but I was also looking at the Regional Affairs Office operations and here too European Affairs had a better functional integration of responsibilities that did not overlap with the country desks. Part of Winston's goal was to try and minimize the duplication that existed between the functional offices and the country desks where quite a few country desks had their own economic affairs officers. In fact, for example on the China Desk, there were two or three people doing nothing but Chinese economics. Some of the desk activities had a distinctly bilateral Sino-U.S. economic affairs focus, but some of what they did was more regional. And certainly anything that begin to look like APEC-related activities needed to be moved back under the wing of the functional Economic Affairs Office in the Bureau and out of the hands of the individual country desks. There was even duplication with some APEC work being handled within the Regional Affairs Office of the Bureau. I'm not sure if any of this reorganization effort which I proposed 11 or 12 years ago has continued or whether it ended when Winston Lord was replaced as Assistant Secretary. I do know, however, that the Economic Affairs Office in the Bureau has remained the action office for all of EAP's APEC activities, especially for the Bureau's involvement with APEC to business and educational entities and for the staffing of APEC meetings. This was all part of the new Clinton focus on support for American business globally - to create a new position in the EAP Front Office focused exclusively on supporting US business activities in the EAP region. The person selected for the job was a political appointee woman who took some time getting cleared into the Department and so I created the template for the job and actually filled the job until she was cleared.

The second issue I was tasked to work on was actually more important. When the Clinton Administration came in and Warren Christopher took over as Secretary of State, Clinton directed the Department to be more involved in supporting U.S. business and commercial interests abroad. Many years before, back in the late 1970's, U.S. businessmen felt the State Department was not an effective advocate for their interests and, after several years of complaining about State's lack of support, the commercial function was taken from the State Department and moved to the Department of Commerce and its then newly created Foreign Commercial Service (FCS). Many State Department Commercial Officers left the Department for Commerce which then sent its own officers abroad to work in U.S. Embassies and Consulates. My own experience in working with U.S. firms in Guangzhou was definitely an exception for that time period. Nobody had actually directed me to get so involved, but I took it upon myself to do so after the business people sought me out to provide them with background on local developments. It was natural for the U.S. business people to want to talk to the top U.S. official in town and not just the head of the FCS office so I just became pro-active in the process. Setting aside my office management responsibilities in Guangzhou, I probably spent sixty percent of my other time in Guangzhou working on business and commercial issues. Although I hadn't mentioned this earlier when we were talking about my time in southern China, when Stapleton Roy was the Ambassador in Beijing, the Department announced a new award - I think it was called the Cobb award - which was to be presented to the FSO who had done the most to promote American business activities abroad. Ambassador Roy nominated me for that first year's award, based on a number of specific business deals that I helped push through, most notably a big GE investment and the sale of a number of BOEING aircraft to the local South China Airlines which had seemed to be safely in the hands of Airbus. Unfortunately, the nomination was never considered because the message got lost in the Department and never made it to the review process.

But let me get back to the task I was asked to work on in EAP in 1993. In the intervening years after FCS was created, unless an Ambassador made a particular point of emphasizing support for U.S. business, nobody at the Embassy outside of the FCS officers regularly got involved in helping US commercial interests abroad. Clinton and Christopher wanted to change that. Winston was the first Assistant Secretary to pick up on this idea and to establish a position in the EAP Front Office specifically focused on business outreach. So, that's the job he asked me to set up and initially to run until the political appointee woman he had selected for the post could be cleared. Christopher also wanted to have someone doing this in every Bureau and to have someone working in the office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs who would coordinate all of the Bureau activities and try to give some structure to the efforts for the Department. Because I set up the EAP office before any of the other Bureaus, I got a chance to return the help the other Bureaus gave me in reorganizing EAP's functional offices. I was also coordinating the EAP operations with a number of different people on the seventh floor who were trying to establish the seventh floor office to deal with business support.

Now that the position was established, Ambassador Lord expected me to present commercial issues for the Bureau to review. The goal was to review the issues and hopefully come up with policy decisions and recommendations which would support the US business objective. Because I spent a lot of time in China talking to American businessmen interested in nuclear power plant development in China, I was aware of the great difficulties any American business had in getting involved with nuclear power issues there. Congress had made it a virtual impossibility for anyone to work with the Chinese on nuclear power. But a nuclear power plant was a lot more than a nuclear reactor and there was a great deal of ancillary business that could be done if you could separate these non-nuclear elements from under the restrictions associated with the nuclear reactor. The business community had a specialized term for this ancillary business and they called it the "balance of plant and equipment" - meaning everything except the nuclear reactor.

Back in the days of the Cold War and our antagonism toward Communist China, we had prevented American companies from competing for nuclear power plant projects there. China's existing plant in Guangdong was all based on US technology that had been laundered through France and the plant was a big success for the French company, Framatome. China was clearly going to build more power plants and mindful of the prohibition against working on the reactors, I felt U.S. business should have a shot at bidding for work on the "balance of plant and equipment."

Back in 1992, while I was still in Guangzhou, I had taken up this issue with Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia. Senator Nunn had come to Hong Kong for a private visit and once there, a Hong Kong businessman who was his host, arranged to bring him to Guangdong Province to see the Special Economics Zone in Shenzhen. When I found out he was coming, I arranged to meet him in Shenzhen to brief him on U.S. activities in the region. Because I was included in all of his day's activities there, I spent a lot of time talking to him about the difficulties American business had dealing with the Congressional regulations on nuclear power plants and how the regulations froze the U.S. out of competition for "balance of plant and equipment" items. He understood, as many of his colleagues did not, that talking to the Chinese about nuclear power was not a proliferation issue because China was already a nuclear weapons state. But I recognized, and he acknowledged it would take a great deal of effort to get Congress to step back and permit US nuclear technology to be shared with the Chinese, even if it was only for peaceful nuclear power plant reactors. So I proposed to Senator Nunn that we get Congress to separate the nuclear reactors from all of the other power plant elements - the turbines, the boilers, all of the other instrumentation and control systems which had no nuclear connection at all. I explained how China was in the process of putting together bids for another half dozen nuclear power plants. And, American businessmen estimated we were talking about billions of dollars for U.S. firms who were the technological leaders in most all of these fields. Senator Nunn was a very receptive audience as I was to find out a bit later on.

Q: China, of course being without significant oil resources and I don't know about coal, but I mean they have -

HARTER: They have lots of coal in the north, but it all had to be shipped by train to supply the industrial centers in other parts of the country. China's South China Sea oil resources, which were considered developable, were disappointing by most American standards. China's explorations in the western parts of China had not yet produced much good news and the oil fields in the northeast were being depleted at a rapid rate.

Senator Nunn took this on board and thought it made an awful lot of sense. So, when Ambassador Lord expected me to arrange a presentation on a business issue, I thought this issue was a natural one to start with. I knew many of the US business leaders who were interested in this issue because I'd talked to a lot of them when they came into China. So, for this first business issue discussion I brought in top power plant officials from General Electric and Westinghouse, representatives of engineering firms that did plant design and construction oversight, instrumentation firms like Babcock and Wilcox that designed and built the controls and the gauges used in the control rooms. They made their presentations to Assistant Secretary Lord and his DASs (Deputy Assistant Secretaries) as well as the lady who was supposed to be doing this job for the Bureau once she got cleared. The head of EAP's Economic Affairs Office was there along with a representative from the office of the Under Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs.

The meeting went better than I had expected. The presentations were very good and clearly laid out the opportunities which the firms felt they could compete for. Winston Lord was impressed and convinced by their presentations and decided this effort made sense. But, "political realities" soon put a damper on his support. Others advised him that the issue was still controversial on the Hill. That was certainly true, because nobody seemed to be willing to be associated with cooperating with China on nuclear energy issues. In addition, the State Department had not yet geared up its business and commercial support program, and there was still some resistance in the Department to our getting too involved in commercial issues. Finally, from a practical perspective within EAP, Winston Lord did not want to risk taking this subject forward to the Hill as one of his early initiatives, if it was likely to provoke controversy and opposition.

You were in the Foreign Service back in the days when Commerce didn't have a Foreign Commercial Service and when all the commercial support was handled by the State Department. And you probably remember the reputation the Department had for handling business promotion was pretty poor.

That's why support for American business got moved out by Congress to the Commerce Department. But, over the years, Department officers still ended up getting involved in business promotion and commercial activities on their own and not just at the behest of the folks in FCS. The main reason U.S. business people came to me in Southern China, for example, was because I had more access and stature with Chinese officials than the FCS officers did; I knew more about what was going on overall in southern China than my FCS colleagues. The FCS people basically were fine, but they were very specialized in what they knew and in what they could do. FCS had become a sort of business in itself and a good part of the FCS officer's job was to promote the sale of Commerce Department trade services, trade support packages so that the US businessman would come in and pay Commerce to provide services. Well, I always thought this was a kind of waste of time and money for the businessmen, particularly in China because you can get lots of Chinese firms that specialized in this sort of work and would do an even better job promoting those opportunities than FCS could.

So getting back to the issue of "balance of plant and equipment" sales, as I said Assistant Secretary Lord decided not to move forward with a presentation on the Hill. But, because Senator Nunn had taken a serious interest in the issue, he initiated the effort on his own. In the next year and a half, Senator Nunn pushed through the legislation that delinked the "balance of plant and equipment" items from the nuclear reactor and made it possible for U.S. businessmen to compete in China for those sales for the very first time. So while I had hoped to use the new Executive Branch interest in promoting business to effect this change, in the end it was the presentation I had made directly to the Senator which had a more salutary effect. Although I was not working in this field when Senator Nunn introduced the new legislation, I believe he did it without any major Executive Branch involvement. So, while I didn't get the State Department behind this particular initiative, I was pleased that my initiative to talk to Senator Nunn got him interested in the inequities of the legislation and resulted in new opportunities for American commercial activity in China.

As I was setting up the position and working on its responsibilities, I also helped coach the lady who was to take the job on how the Department worked. I introduced her to people with whom she was most likely to be working. I just can't recall her name and I don't know anything about her background or role in the Democratic Party. While I was doing this job and she was waiting for her clearances, EAP was increasingly involved in discussions related to the U.S.-hosted APEC meeting in November, 1993. Moreover, big corporations were becoming interested in APEC and wanted to be involved in the multi-nation discussions so they could offer input to policies on trade that would effect their opportunities in the region and ultimately worldwide. Existing U.S. business organizations - the Chamber of Commerce, the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council, etc. - saw APEC as a vehicle for influencing economic and trade policies that would ease manufacturing, trade and investment opportunities throughout the region. They were seeking a presence at the Seattle meetings and an opportunity to make presentations to the leaders. Business people were still trying to determine the ideal way to work with APEC, ranging from those who wanted a direct business involvement within the APEC delegations to those who felt it would be better to create a parallel or side organization to advise APEC delegations. Many of us thought it made sense for businesses to be involved and we were actively seeking individual corporations and business institutions to participate in APEC discussions. We also saw business involvement as a way to stimulate broader interest within the U.S. for APEC issues. In the end, U.S. business groups operated around the margins of the APEC meetings in Seattle. They were able to provide some input to the U.S. delegation but no formal adjunct business organization was created during the Seattle sessions. That would come a few years later with the creation of the APEC Business Advisory Council.

As the APEC focus intensified, I got more and more involved in the Bureau's planning work for APEC. Several months earlier, the U.S. was reviewing applications from a number of U.S. cities that sought the opportunity to host the APEC meeting. The Washington Council on International Trade (WCIT) in Seattle was a business-membership non-profit organization newly headed by Robert Kapp that put together Seattle's presentation. He assembled an organization of Washington State-based business people and lobbyists and he successfully lobbied the State and Commerce Departments to get Seattle chosen as the site for this meeting.

Under the APEC meeting structure, delegates from the key trade and foreign affairs ministries of the member states held a series of preparatory meetings (the so-called pre-ministerial meetings) throughout the year culminating in a ministerial meeting where the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of all the member states would meet to make finalize policy recommendations for the region and also to provide the region's proposals for trade liberalization to the World Trade Organization (WTO). For the US, the Commerce Department, the U.S. Trade Representatives Office and the East Asia & Pacific Affairs Bureau in State provided the so-called "senior leaders" who helped shape the annual policy recommendations for the APEC Ministerial Meeting. Again, as I mentioned in the prelude to this discussion, APEC had its own internal focus, designed to open up trading links within the members around the Pacific Rim. But, its goal also was to drive the reform policies of the World Trade Organization and to get the World Trade Organization to open up more quickly. So, it had both and Asian or regional focus, as well as a global focus on trade issues. When the meetings were held, they tried to work local Asia-focused agendas and they tried to work global agendas. On the U.S. side, the State Department, Commerce, USTR (U.S. Trade Representatives Office) senior officials were Deputy Assistant Secretary or equivalent level people. The State Department support staff usually came from the East Asia Bureau Economic Affairs Office. From its inception in 1989 up through the 1992 meeting, the APEC Ministerial Meeting in late October or November had been the culmination of the year's work. President Clinton had already started to get government institutions to do more to promote U.S. business abroad and, in the late spring of 1993, he announced his interest in inviting all of the heads of state of the APEC members to come to Seattle to participate in a leaders meeting. This announcement was not yet an official invitation or a commitment to hold a leaders meeting but it precipitated a general tasking to U.S. Embassies in the region to see whether there was sufficient interest on the part of the APEC leaders and, most particularly, would they likely come if invited.

Q: Prior to that never been done?

HARTER: Never been done, no it had never been done. Previous meetings had all stopped at the minister level. The "minister" on the U.S. side was the U.S. Trade Representative, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Commerce. Those three U.S. principals shared the responsibilities for APEC and they all usually participated in the annual meetings.

Even before President Clinton indicated he was interested in a leader's meeting, EAP had decided it was essential to send somebody from the State Department out to Seattle to be a liaison with this non-profit organization, WCIT, and municipal and state government leaders. I was aware of these discussions because I was attending many of the front office planning meetings. Knowing the job I had been doing in Washington for the past several months was just a dead end, already tabbed for a political appointee, I said I would like to go to Seattle. I was unaware at the time, however, of the operational discussions that were underway within the management offices on how this assignment would be delineated. The job was to begin almost immediately in June, but even with an extensive wrap-up period after the November meeting was concluded, the job would surely be wound-up by the end of the year. If it was to be only a six-month assignment, EAP would have had to fund the entire cost of my assignment, something it was reluctant to do. Moreover, it would mean they would also still be responsible for me, or whoever was chosen to go out there, until a new assignment was arranged and that was much more likely to happen during the regular summer assignment cycle. So, EAP proposed to Personnel that the assignment be set up for a full year - a Department rather than a Bureau expense - and said the person assigned to the job would continue to work with WCIT and the State of Washington somewhat like a "business-focused" equivalent to a diplomat-in-residence at a university. PER must have had enough money that year because it did not balk at the idea and I was selected to go to Seattle on a one-year secondment to WCIT.

The basic bottom line was that once APEC was over EAP didn't have the slightest idea what else I would do out in Seattle. EAP only knew it did not want to pick up the check for my assignment there. But even without an established plan, I figured out a lot of things to do once APEC was concluded that were both interesting and challenging.

But back to setting up the APEC activities. My first task, was to quickly get to Seattle to participate in one of the pre-ministerial or preliminary meetings which was scheduled for the latter part of June. This was a four or five day meeting of the working-level people - those DAS's and their support staffs I mentioned earlier. They did the preparation work on the agenda, the issues to be decided/approved by the ministers. In fact, through that session and through another preliminary session held for two days before the APEC Ministerial Meeting, these officials crafted everything for the ministers to approve. Aside from presenting reports and their own individual remarks to the meeting, all the Ministers would have to do was raise their hands to approve the policy decisions already worked out in advance. So, the June meeting and its following session in November was very busy and a lot of work had to be done on the agenda issues so they could be presented to and approved in advance by the Ministers.

The Washington Council on International Trade (WCIT) had a suite of six to eight offices and conference rooms which it shared with the Washington State China Relations Council. Bob Kapp had been the head of that office prior to taking on the job as head of WCIT and he was still chairing the China Relations Council when I arrived. He was a China specialist and spoke Chinese. They put me in an office which had previously been for the Director of the China Relations Council. The China Office had a graduate student doing most all of the work for the office and an Office Manager/Secretary. WCIT had an Office Manager/Secretary and an Operations Manager and the Director. So to start with we were at most an office of only six people once I joined the staff. Although the Seattle and Washington State Governments were major supporters for the project, they did not get involved in deciding what was to happen within the confines of the conference. Of the two, the Seattle City officials had the most to do since they had to be responsible for traffic issues, police protection issues, coordination with municipal support organizations and things like that. After that, except for the contents of the APEC meetings, everything else was in WCIT's hands. WCIT's Executive Board would meet periodically to provide support and guidance and of course they were the major fund raisers who contributed money to cover all of the expenses for the conference. I don't know what the overall cost was, but I know it involved millions of dollars. A Boeing executive was the Chairman of the Board that year, and his representative for most of our day-to-day issues, Ray Waldman, had once served as an Assistant Secretary in the Commerce Department.

While Seattle was officially the host for the meeting, it was WCIT which was the functional host and hospitality director. It had to do all of the organizational work lining up hotels, limousine services, security arrangements, arrange the publicity and press guidance materials, convince private and business facilities to contribute money as well as space in which events could be held and get complementary items which could be provided to the delegates to boost Seattle and Washington State. Clearly, a six-person organization was going to have a lot of difficulty doing that and WCIT quickly added a public relations/press relations specialist to the staff as well as a couple of interns. Seattle's Mayor, Norm (Norman) Rice recognized this was going to be a very high profile event, particularly if all of the APEC heads of state came. Rice created a support committee and turned to Boeing to chair the committee. WCIT in turn then became the action element of this committee. With Boeing heading the planning committee, raising funds was much easier and WCIT oversaw the budgeting and payments for all the work that was done. My State Department-directed responsibility was to keep the Department advised of what was happening and to keep the Washington State-end apprised of what was being decided in DC regarding the meetings. I also vetted with the Department a number of the planned promotional events which the city hoped to develop for the attendees. But, after that, I was just one of the WCIT workers trying to make successful arrangements for the APEC visitors.

Subsequent to my assignment to Seattle, the State Department also assigned an admin specialist, Chris Runckle, to handle the Department's logistical needs in the city and to advise the Seattle Government about the on-the-ground needs for the meetings. I believe Chris was working in the Office of International Conferences at that time. I'd worked with Chris before when he was a Junior Officer, a first-tour GSO (General Services Officer) in Hong Kong during my first assignment there. He'd also worked in Beijing and in Bangkok but our paths had not crossed for about fifteen years. Chris had a great reputation as an organizer. And, although he was not in Seattle full-time until perhaps a month before the Ministerial and Leaders Meetings, Chris was closely engaged in all of the logistics and management coordination for APEC.

WCIT and the local organizations involved in the events were all trying to showcase the region's best images, so they wanted to have special meeting sites and special hospitality that would reflect well on Seattle, Washington State, and the Pacific Northwest. All of these ideas, also could not be created in a vacuum and they all had to be vetted and sold to the USG. And I became the middle-man as advocate and conveyor of the local proposals and the State Department responses. The U.S. government ultimately had the final decision as to whether any of these ideas was going to fly - funny unconscious choice of words when so much of the program centered around Boeing. One of the places we selected as a special venue was Boeing's Museum outside the city as the site for the ministerial dinner. The Boeing Aircraft Museum is like the DC Smithsonian Air and Space Museum with aircraft suspended from the ceilings and on the floors and we had a dinner amongst and under these historical aircraft. This venue got DC approval, even though it created a motorcade issue where we had to bring all of the ministers about ten miles outside the city along one of the major commuter routes for the city. Fortunately our dinner timing was sufficiently past the major commuting traffic to avoid tying up the interstate. Nonetheless, there were still a lot of motorcade activities within the city that did affect city traffic during the days of the meetings. We also set up a reception in the city's Asian Art Museum which, at the time, was actually closed for renovations. We got it reopened as a reception site for a one-night event.

One of my specific local responsibilities was to seek out contributions from local businesses to provide hospitality packages for all of the delegates. Putting on my Protocol hat, I devised a series of promotional presentations to match the rank of the recipients. We had a basic welcome package for all of the delegates, a more exclusive package for the Ministers, and then the most exclusive for the Head of State or Head of Government. We had wines from Hogue Cellars in eastern Washington, chocolate covered cherries, smoked salmon in sealed aluminum packages, a local product which I think is now just coming to the east coast called "Oh Boy! Oberto" a dried beef jerky, and, of course, coffee from Seattle's Best a big competitor to Starbucks. We also had made a number of items with APEC logos, including a folding umbrella, a fitting symbol for Seattle's famous drizzly weather. Once I got agreements from people to contribute, I had to get it collected or delivered to WCIT and then packaged in baskets. It then had to be appropriately tagged with delegate and VIP names and eventually delivered to their individual rooms after review by security personnel. To promote the event and to serve as welcome symbols for the delegates, we also helped design flags and banners that were hung on street lamps throughout the city for this event.

In the midst of all these activities, I was working with the officials of APEC member Consulates who were represented in Seattle, because their home offices were asking for details on local arrangements. The Governor was former Congressman Mike Lowery, and Norm Rice, as I said earlier was then Mayor of Seattle. He actually succeeded Lowery as Governor four years later. As you would expect, we had to do a lot of last minute coordination because the White House coordinators and the Secret Service didn't actually get directly involved until maybe the last four or five weeks of this process. Fortunately, Chris Runckle was able to keep that side of the arrangements under good control.

Q: Well, as you were doing this was there any concern on your part or anybody's part about Seattle where my daughter and her husband and her son live. I mean, it's been the haven for the liberal left, did domestic politics interfere with the APEC project?

HARTER: There was a little concern about it, but we had created a very positive Seattle focus on the meetings and we didn't have any kind of difficulty with demonstrations. Later on, when Seattle was again chosen to handle a major trade and finance-related gathering all hell broke loose and those riots became as famous as the ones at the Democratic Convention in Chicago during the Vietnam War.

Q: Yeah. Was it the World Trade Organization?

HARTER: Yeah. The funny thing is our 1993 event probably woke up this anti-open trade group in the US to the fact that Seattle could be a big venue for this kind of global focused meeting and it helped coalesce their issues for them. Our 1993 meetings were ahead of that negative force. We didn't have any problems with the local population though there were lots of pre-meeting "letters to the editor" wondering about what would happen to Seattle's traffic patterns. We did some outreach work with the local Asian community to make sure there was not going to be any problem with the Chinese participation - by having members from the China Relations Council and other business groups meet with local Chinese organizations. The Council members appealed to "community" interests to welcome all Chinese representatives. And, of course, China and Taiwan both participated and in fact, so did Hong Kong. Hong Kong was still a stand-alone member of APEC, because this was before Hong Kong's 1997 integration into China. After 1997, Hong Kong was listed as Hong Kong, China.

One of our local objectives was to make the Heads of State visit a bit different so that it was just not seen as a higher level ministerial meeting. WCIT came up with a number of "special" places that could be utilized as a separate venue for the leaders meetings. You may recall there was a very popular TV series called "Twin Peaks" that was filmed in the Seattle area. Much of the action was supposedly taking place in a big rustic lodge that was pictured in its mountain top setting at the beginning and end of the program. Located over top of a waterfall, the Snoqualmie Lodge was indeed a popular resort with good facilities for a conference. WCIT's proposal was to house all of the leaders there and conduct the leaders meetings in that venue. All of the earlier APEC sessions and the rooms for the delegates and ministers were already scheduled for the downtown Seattle hotels. So this clearly would have set the leaders sessions as distinct meetings. During the summer pre-ministerial meeting, we had some events out at Snoqualmie to see how it would work and we thought it would be a successful venue. The White House team looking at the conference options didn't like the connection to the TV show - you may recall the show was definitely off-beat and some would say "weird." Some also were concerned that it was a good distance out of town and it would be logistically a lot more complicated.

One of our other proposals made the grade and the Leaders Meeting was held on Blake Island in the Seattle harbor. The island had been developed as a promotional site for the Northwest Indians and there was a museum and restaurant/entertainment facility that fit our objectives of creating a separate and distinctive venue for the leaders. Despite some Secret Service reservations about getting everybody on boats to and from the island, they liked the exclusivity of an island which could be sealed off from other people. Unfortunately, the island location was not part of the scheduling for the late 1990s conference where the demonstrators got the biggest attention and notoriety for their downtown clashes which disrupted the hotel-based meetings. As is common for the late fall in Seattle, we had some concern about how the weather would treat us. November can be very nasty - cold and damp and windy, particularly in the harbor area. But we were lucky and had decent weather. It was cool and a bit chilly, so everyone got a chance to wear the special commemorative heavy windbreaker jackets President Clinton presented to all of the leaders. This tradition of a special shirt or jacket reflecting the host country was an ASEAN Ministerial Meeting tradition. The windbreakers were arranged by the White House, not by WCIT or the local organizers. The jacket turned out to be a smashing success and all of the leaders were really pleased with it. Some of them even wore the windbreakers when they boarded their aircraft to head home.

Q: Keeping volcano watch on Mt. Rainier? No volcano erupted while you were there?

HARTER: Oh yes, there was certainly concern about the possibility of that happening too. Most people don't realize that the Cascade Mountains include active volcanoes, though the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens a decade earlier was certainly known to everyone in the Pacific Northwest. But nothing of that sort happened.

When the APEC Conference concluded, WCIT totaled up and paid all the final bills for the events and promotions, and we found we still had half of the money collected from businesses and "sponsors." At this point, I am not absolutely certain exactly how much we had left, but I believe it was in excess of $500,000. While Seattle and Washington State were the focus of our fund-raising for a lot of the events, WCIT also offered "sponsor" status to business contributors who provided - if I remember correctly - $10,000. APEC business "sponsors" came from all over the country and we had companies like GE and other U.S multi-nationals ponying up big contributions. What WCIT was selling at this point was access. Those who contributed a certain amount of money got to be part of the business forum that WCIT ran parallel to the APEC Ministerial Meeting. Those contributors also got invitations to participate in a couple of the receptions or in some of the lesser dinner events that were part of this overall gathering. At these functions, the business leaders had the opportunity to talk to foreign government representatives from countries where many of them had significant business interests and investments.

So, the question was what to do with all the left-over money. Sitting down with the local APEC Committee Chairman from Boeing and a couple of the other members, Bob Kapp and I argued we should try to maintain a Seattle connection to APEC and keep APEC focused on Seattle as the U.S.'s APEC city. We further recommended that we create a non-profit, somewhat like WCIT, that would have APEC as its focus. After the committee members agreed, we sold the proposal to the city and state government officials and I convinced the State Department this would be a good adjunct to the official APEC work. Because Bob Kapp still had to run both WCIT and the local China Relations Council, I was tasked to write up the organizational proposals for the new entity which we decided to call the National Center for APEC. The new organization's chief objectives were to promote better understanding in the US of APEC goals and activities, to encourage business involvement in APEC's decisions and operations, and to create an educational link through universities and publications that would encourage APEC objectives for an open regional trade system. So that's what I had to do to set up the structure and organization of the new non-profit.

As this work was on-going, Bob Kapp got a new job. He was recruited to be the head of the Washington, D.C-based U.S.-China Business Council and within a matter of four or five weeks he had packed and moved to DC. So, the organization members had to find a new head for the Washington Council on International Trade and had to find a new head for the China Relations Council. In the interim, I was asked to take over management of both of them. For the Washington Council on International Trade, there was a very well-structured leadership committee composed of executives from the member organizations. So, I did not have a lot of things to "manage" and the experienced local WCIT staff members were able to keep operations going quite easily. On the China Council side, there was basically only a secretary/office manager and a graduate student. So, I spent a lot more time focused on the China Relations Council while the business members of that organization began to recruit potential successors.

To set up the National Center for APEC, we started our educational links through the University of Washington, but we also sent out proposals for collaboration to a lot of other universities throughout the country. I went back to the same groups who had been "sponsors" for the APEC meeting in Seattle and solicited their membership in the new APEC Center. While it was going to be a Seattle-based organization, the objective was to focus on all kinds of organizations that could support the promotion of trade and business opportunities for US firms and institutions. The woman who had been Bob's WCIT Deputy, Monica Whaley, was very interested in the new Center and she willingly took on the job of contacting potential members, similar to work she had done while in WCIT. She subsequently shifted over entirely to the APEC side of the office. Washington, at this point still didn't -

Q: Which Washington are you talking about?

HARTER: State Department Washington on this occasion. The State Department expected me to write an after-action report on the APEC events and issues that had developed in Seattle, but they provided no other guidance on what they expected me to do for the remainder of my one year assignment. I should also note that the original commitment from EAP when the job was created was to supply a senior Foreign Service Officer to work out of WCIT for one year. There was no plan to send anybody to follow me in this position. Because I had been working with a lot of business people, I discovered that many of them didn't really have a very good idea of what the government could do to support their businesses to operate internationally. Commerce had an office in Seattle and there was a USAID procurement office based in California that had regional responsibility for Washington and Oregon. There were a couple of small business focused organizations in the Seattle Municipal Government and in the State Capital in Olympia that also had interest in promoting local business. I got them to agree to put together a traveling road show to visit cities in the state to promote awareness of government programs to support business. We'd contact a local Chamber of Commerce or the Lions Club or Rotary International to set up a one-day session with a working lunch with any local business that was interested. Each of the government organizations would make a presentation on the services they could provide in the morning session. We'd sit down separately at tables in the meeting room for lunch with people who wanted to discuss particular issues and then in the afternoon we'd each conduct one-on-one sessions with any attendee who wanted more in-depth time to review specific business opportunities or government services. I'd spend most of my initial presentation on our overseas Embassy and Consulate support work but would also talk about bringing specially skilled personnel to the United States through business visas. After APEC concluded, I set up three or four of these sessions over the remaining months I was in Seattle and they all seemed to work out very well. That initiative was one of the projects I participated in once the APEC meetings were concluded.

Governor Lowery decided to travel to Asia to visit Washington State's sister state and sister city counterparts. His trip was to include Japan, Korea and China. Because I had worked closely with his foreign affairs staff and he knew of my China experience, he invited me to join the delegation for the China portion of the trip. Since Washington State picked up my expenses for the trip, the State Department readily agreed and so I spent several days in China with the Governor and his party.

That spring, EAP and the Department began to see the assignment of an FSO to Seattle in a different light. They were interested in the new National Center for APEC and saw that as a good place to put an FSO from the Bureau. The Department sent a message to the city of Seattle and proposed to send someone to liaise with the new non-profit. Seattle, which some years earlier had someone from the State Department working in the city government on foreign affairs issues, quickly agreed. The Boeing people who had worked most closely with WCIT on APEC were informed as was the Governor and the WCIT Executive Board. This group had a different idea about the State Department proposal. They caucused and came to me and said they didn't want the State Department to send another officer out to Seattle, they wanted me to stay for another year. At that point, Governor Lowery, on behalf of the State Government, the Seattle City Government, and the local business community wrote to Winston Lord requesting I be assigned to the National Center and stay in Seattle for a second year. The letter also made a special proposal to the Department. Governor Lowery said if the Department agreed to keep me in Seattle for another year, I would be named the Chairman of the National Center for APEC. But, if the Department decided to send someone else, that person would be only a member of the staff at the Center. Well, I certainly was flattered by the offer and was sorely tempted by the opportunity that was being offered. Privately, some of the business people said they would make sure I got the Chairman's job if I opted to leave the State Department. Winston Lord did not agree to assign me to Seattle for a second year because he had a different idea in mind for me in Washington, DC. He responded to Governor Lowery by saying they would send another officer to Seattle and in fact ended up sending two officers, one to work at WCIT and one at the National Center for APEC. I think the Department assigned an FS-01 Officer and an FS-02 Officer to Seattle in my place. I know that arrangement continued for a few years, with a regular FSO rotation to those offices in Seattle. Whether they kept two persons out there during all that time, I don't know, because after about 1995 or 1996 I didn't really have that much contact with the National Center and only limited involvement with APEC.

While I had been in Seattle, EAP had created another position under the Assistant Secretary focused on APEC. This was a senior level position staffed by the fellow you asked me about a week or so ago, Desaix Anderson. Desaix was made the Bureau's Coordinator for APEC and he worked in the EAP Front Office under Winston Lord. He handled the direct liaison with APEC member countries and guided the APEC support work done by EAP's Economic Affairs Office. He also went to the senior officials meetings along with the DAS-level people at USTR and Commerce. The two people who were later assigned to the Washington Council on International Trade and to the National Center for APEC to replace me were also under Desaix's direction when it came to APEC issues.

Back in Washington, the EAP issue Winston Lord wanted me to work on was totally unrelated to APEC. What Winston Lord and his Deputy for Southeast Asia, Peter Tomsen, had in mind was for me to coordinate normalization of relations with Vietnam. Prior to my return to Washington, there had been some preliminary discussions with the Vietnamese and the normalization effort was formally begun by both sides. The Clinton Administration decision to normalize relations was not its top foreign policy issue. But, once I was involved in the effort, it seemed to me this was a more firm decision than the one that had been made back in 1978. It also seemed the Administration was committed to concluding the process and not negotiating just to see if it might be possible to achieve normalization.

Q: Before we leave this Seattle time, one of the things I note, could you talk a bit about how other nations, particularly some of the ones responded to this. And I note that with China and of course, Japan, which you being a Chinese specialist. But, there is another country out there called Japan. Was it going through, was this a period of the credit crisis and all?

HARTER: There certainly had been problems with Japanese bank loans and this was the initial stage of what was to become a decade-long economic malaise. Nonetheless, Japan was still considered by a number of academics as a model for economic growth and development. A number of the academics and business-focused organizations who saw the Japan model as a positive one were themselves also involved in APEC and so they were certainly in Seattle during the November meeting. But, as you suggested, the press was already reporting a slowing of economic growth and there were bank scandals as well. On the other hand, the Japanese were very anxious to see APEC go forward. The Japanese thought APEC would give them some cover in their economic dealings within the region, because there was still residual resentment about how the Japanese had behaved in Southeast Asia during the Second World War. By getting under this bigger, broader APEC umbrella - blessed by the United States and involving China and the other nations in the region - Japan could benefit from the more open market access of APEC membership without it appearing to be a direct bilateral Japanese pressure to negotiate better trade opportunities on its own.

Q: Did you get involved in the protocol issues which arise when you bring all the world, a significant number of the world's leaders together and how they, who sat where, and how the delegations fit and all that?

HARTER: We did do some of that in Seattle, but that was largely the kind of issue that Desaix Anderson focused on. He got to do that last part of the protocol process, along with the people out of the White House staff who were assigned to work in Seattle at the time of the APEC meeting. Desaix and the White House people came out to Seattle a few days before the meetings began to handle these arrangements. For APEC's logistical arrangements, Chris Runckle and people out of the State Department's Office of International Conferences did most all of that work, in cooperation with the local authorities. This State Department office handles the logistics and a management side of all conference activities involving the US Government. They're very, very good at those kind of arrangements, and they were the ones who ended up focusing on those details. And, Chris Runckle was their point person.

Q: So you came back, so when did you start the Vietnam focus?

HARTER: This was the summer of 1994.

Q: So what happened then?

HARTER: Well, as I said, we had had a number of discussions with the Vietnamese earlier in the year. Those meetings were the so-called talks about talks, mutually agreeing on the goal of establishing diplomatic relations, setting up steps to reach the objective or staging of the process to get to normalization. On the U.S. side, we had already decided we could not simply go out and normalize diplomatic relations all in one jump and we had to just sort of nibble our way, step by step, to complete the process. This process was dictated by a number of domestic hurdles, which had been holding us back from normalization over the previous decades since the end of the war. The biggest hurdle was the issue of the MIAs, the servicemen missing in action from the Vietnam War. In addition, there was the large Vietnamese refugee community in the United States, the overwhelming number of whom were staunchly anti-communist. Many of these individuals and groups continued to fly the former South Vietnamese flag in front of their businesses and home and community organizations. This group included many who would happily have participated in the overthrow of the Hanoi authorities. Only a very few might have been willing stand up for normalization of relations. And, there was the international issue of Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia and our policy decision to forestall any move to talk about normalization of relations until Vietnam made clear its intent to withdraw its troops from Cambodia. Vietnam's withdrawal decision and actions in 1992-1993 made it possible for the US to consider normalization, but the domestic hurdles meant we were going to have to proceed gingerly to make sure we didn't create new political problems for the Clinton Administration. And so, it was felt that we had proceed incrementally - even when we agreed to establish diplomatic relations with the Vietnamese, we did not immediately open embassies but proceeded via the China precedent of first opening Liaison Offices in the two capitals.

My responsibility in this process was to do everything necessary to make it possible to normalize relations. I had to do the planning work within the U.S. Government; to do the liaison work with the Vietnamese - and we were again working with the Vietnamese UN staff; to find and work with domestic organizations and institutions that would support normalization; to find ways to minimize the impact of the critics; and ultimately to keep the process just moving forward in a steady step by step process. While the President, Secretary of State Christopher, Winston Lord and Peter Tomsen were all supporters of this process, none of them saw normalization as a real priority for their daily attention. So, as a result I found myself with only generalized guidance about what needed to be done and how to go about getting it accomplished. Moreover, because they were all focused on lots of other priorities, it was very difficult to get others in the Bureau or the Department to be directly involved until at some point I said, "I need somebody at your level to do this."

As I looked for support groups, I discovered there were key people in the Senate who wanted normalization to happen. There was also a group of U.S. corporations who were interested in doing business in Vietnam and who were part of an organization called the U.S.-Vietnam Trade Council. This was a group that had been founded by former Ambassador William Sullivan, Bill Sullivan. He had been our Ambassador in Iran and in Laos during the war and had been involved in coordinating the U.S. bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. He had been talking to and working with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach, to find ways to open up the possibility of relations. His Executive Director, Virginia Foote, became one of the people I relied on to develop a support base to push the normalization objective. The most important people on the Hill were in the Senate and included Arizona Senator John McCain, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, Senator Chuck Hagel, and Senator Bob Kerrey, the latter two both from Nebraska. All were veterans and McCain of course had been a POW for a long time. There were a few supporters on the House side, most notably Florida Representative Pete Peterson, who had also been a POW. But it was the Senate group that was the most influential. There were a few others. Senator Murkowski of Alaska was somewhat involved, but these other men were the main ones.

Q: One had a Congressional Medal of Honor and the other had a Silver Star. I mean, these were not light weights.

HARTER: Yes, and the fact these people were supportive ultimately made the difference in getting the normalization effort concluded. The work they and their staff members did to build support on the Hill and the lobbying work there by the U.S.-Vietnam Trade Council created enough momentum to convince the administration it would work and it could go ahead with normalization without creating a vocal domestic opposition. McCain and John Kerry were the most influential in the process and their respective staff people, Mark Salter and Nancy Stetson, were my regular contacts in this process. Salter was McCain's Chief Legislative Assistant and Stetson was Kerry's Foreign Policy advisor. Virginia Foote, the Executive Director of the US-Vietnam Trade Council mobilized the business lobbying efforts that paralleled our "political" efforts because of all her contacts on the Hill.

Q: Did you find yourself up those in the Republican Congress who were, in a way, still fighting the Vietnamese war and using the image of the missing in action or prisoners of war, as a way of focusing their opposition?

HARTER: Well, there certainly were similar individuals in Congress who were not in favor of normalization, like Senator Dole and Congressman Sonny Montgomery, or who actively opposed it, like Congressman Randy Cunningham. Their problem was they were not organized; they did not have a dialogue among themselves to create an opposition strategy; they didn't present any kind of united opposition. Part of that was also because the Administration and our pro-normalization Hill group was not conducting a big public normalization campaign. The biggest coordinated opposition was from Ann Mills Griffith's League of Families POW/MIA organization and the American Legion. Those two organizations really tried to build a coalition against the normalization process.

Q: I mean, was opposition to normalization ideological do you think?

HARTER: I believe it was ideological more than anything else, because the logic of what you just said made normalization a reasonable goal for all who wanted to achieve the fullest possible accounting for the MIAs.

Q: Because practically it makes more sense to have more people on the ground.

HARTER: Absolutely. Over the previous several years, we had been getting more and more cooperation from the Vietnamese on the issue. Under the Reagan Administration, we were able to convince the Vietnamese to be more cooperative and there were a number of MIA investigations and remains recoveries that led to some service personnel being identified from these remains. But the big push came after 1992 when we began to have members of our military POW/MIA office stationed in Hanoi working daily with the Vietnamese to prepare for periodic joint excavations. This structured effort had already produced results and the cumulative effect of MIA remains' identifications helped neutralize opposition to normalization and that made it possible for this whole process to go forward. We were able to argue, ultimately successfully, just exactly what you said. The more people we have on the ground through normalized relations, the more opportunity we will have to resolve the MIA issue through accounting. That argument made normalization seem reasonable for most people.

Establishing US military men on the ground in Hanoi, was the culmination of a USG MIA accounting effort that went back to those days in the 1970s when we talked to the Vietnamese about normalization. Under the Carter Administration, the POW/MIA issue was defined as a humanitarian issue separate from normalization and we urged the Vietnamese to provide us with information and remains. The Vietnamese accepted that division and committed to providing information as it became available. At that time, we believed the Vietnamese should have been able to account for and even produce remains of a few hundred additional names beyond the returned prisoners and the limited human remains we had received up to that point in time. Then, on top of that number, there were more than two thousand individuals who were still listed as missing and largely presumed dead.

When President Ronald Reagan took office, the new Administration linked the two issues and argued there could be no possibility of normalization until POW/MIA issues were resolved - though how much had to be resolved before one could begin the process was not very clear. This was the period of time when the League of Families and Ann Mills Griffiths established themselves as the key public players on the MIA issue. Ms. Griffiths was working very closely with the Defense Department and Richard "Dick" Childress. I can't remember exactly what his title was at the time, but he was later on the National Security Council staff. After the Reagan Administration, Childress and Ann Mills Griffiths continued to be focal points for the vocal opposition to normalization.

After Vietnam invaded Cambodia, the U.S. supported ASEAN's efforts to block international acceptance of the puppet government in Phnom Penh, isolated Vietnam economically and declared we would not consider talking to the Vietnamese about normalized relations until Vietnam military left Cambodia. Vietnam committed to that withdrawal in 1992 and its forces left Cambodia. From a global perspective then, we committed ourselves to dumping the trade embargo and all the blocks to Vietnam's economic engagement with the region and the world. On the bilateral front, it meant moving forward with MIA cooperation and starting talks on normalization of relations. Before I got involved on this normalization effort, we expanded our POW/MIA work to include stationing a US team in Hanoi and, based on US-provided information and Vietnamese ground searches, we set the stage for joint investigation and excavation work that produced remains for review in the identification laboratory in Hawaii. The State Department was involved in this process but it was primarily worked by the military. Some of the U.S. veterans organizations were supportive of this effort but Ann Mills Griffiths, Dick Childress, and the American Legion, tended to be much more critical of the process and the results. They also accused the U.S. of bending to Vietnamese rules and regulations and not pressing hard enough on issues they thought were most important. Nonetheless, what we were doing was unprecedented. Never before had one country permitted another to come in and dig up the landscape in areas where a war had occurred. When the U.S. did this in Germany after World War II, we did so as one of the occupying powers. But, this was the enemy's territory and the enemy's villages and 20 some years later we were on the ground trying to find the remains of individuals with the cooperation of the national authorities in Hanoi.

In the years after the war, the U.S. Defense Department's MIA Office (DPMO) had been exhaustive in its efforts to collect information and to review each and every one of the individual MIA case files to make sure it contained the best information possible. This included following up on what were known as "live-sightings" or following up on people who were last know alive but who had not appeared on Hanoi's accounting lists. It took care of accumulating all sorts of information resulting from post-1975 live-sightings where people who apparently weren't Vietnamese were seen in various locations. People claimed to have seen chained individuals in a work gang who they thought were Caucasian. All sorts of information like this was collected and systematically analyzed. There were reports of people being kept in caves in Laos along the Chinese border. And of course, all of this was done without access, without an opportunity to be there on the ground and see things directly. This made it impossible to prove things conclusively, particularly when there were so many people in the U.S. who believed the U.S. was part of the effort to cover-up POW/MIA losses. So, it was very important to get people on the ground and to work on procedures to get investigations and excavations that could lead to recovery of remains and then, hopefully identification. These procedures were conducted on the ground by Defense Department personnel and the Vietnamese. Both sides created organizations that could meet together and agree on investigation efforts. Vietnamese personnel from the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Public Security were part of the Hanoi group who worked with the US military teams.

The U.S. government sent military personnel, initially non-specialists, to do the liaison work and prepare for the specialists who would come to do the excavations. The specialists came from the Central Identification Laboratory in Honolulu, Hawaii - abbreviated as CIL-HI and pronounced Sill-HI and they conducted the excavations. These were archeological excavations with sites set out on grids, with ropes and strings subdividing the areas to be excavated. Each section was individually excavated by hired local workers who sifted the dirt under American supervision. It was an intensive, and exhaustive survey. The teams would be in Vietnam for three or four weeks and sometimes they came back to the same site several times in order to complete it and ensure they had covered every possible opportunity for recoveries.

Q: Also, we've just reached the point were DNA was really coming into its own.

HARTER: It took a while for the Defense Department to fully accept and agree to utilize DNA. In fact, even when I was working in Hanoi in the late 1990s, this particular process was still only to be used as a final verification step. It was not approved then to be used as the sole means of verification. In other words, you had to have a whole lot of other evidence that said these are the remains of Mr. X, before you could get to the DNA testing stage to say yes, the DNA test confirms the identification of Mr. X. The key U.S. objective was to bring back identifiable remains so the military could say with certitude this is Mr. X and that information and the remains would be released to Mr. X's family for proper interment. But before we began the process of systematic research and site investigation and excavation, the Vietnamese authorities turned over many different collections of remains. In these cases, there was very little to go on and what the military called "a chain of custody" rarely existed. That is, few of these remains came attached to a story of where they came from, under what circumstances they were found, or what sort of incident might have led to the loss of life. It was almost impossible to do anything with these remains, although we were able to screen out remains that were non-American and return some of them to Vietnam. When I left Vietnam in 2001 we still had several hundred remains sets in this category. And when I say sets, I'm not talking about complete skeletons, I'm talking about fragments that came from a particular location that were supposedly associated with one case. And, in some of those instances, such as say a helicopter or large aircraft crash site, you would have multiple losses with all of the remains co-mingled. The success rate of MIA recoveries and a steady flow of identifications out of the CIL-HI Lab was sufficient to convince the leadership of the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) this was a meaningful "cooperative" effort and they ought to support the USG proposal to normalize relations with Vietnam. So, we actually did have one major ally among the Veteran's organizations that supported normalization.

Q: Did you get any feel for what the problem was with the American Legion? Was it the people at the top? It's always been known as a very conservative organization.

HARTER: The American Legion's International Affairs advisor shaped the organization's policy on the MIA issue and he was a disciple of Ann Mills Griffith. Although the League of Families was the chief critic of our normalization proposal and a critic of the way the USG was handling the dialogue on MIAs with the Vietnamese, Ann Mills Griffith had been involved directly in secret negotiations with the Vietnamese under the Reagan Administration to return a large number of remains which the Vietnamese had promised to provide. Ann and Dick Childress had gone to Vietnam and negotiated with the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry and they claimed a financial package had been put together to trade for the remains. All of this was very mysterious and convoluted, but nothing ever came of it. I think that failure to bring back the promised remains was part of their bitterness and antagonism to the US Government effort. I think, to some extent they felt they had been played by the Vietnamese who didn't deliver on their commitments. Moreover, they had created a public expectation of success which, when it didn't materialize, reflected poorly on them as well as on the Vietnamese. And so, I think that fueled a certain part of their antagonism toward the Vietnamese and their unwillingness to back fully the new government effort.

Now, to be fair, I should say quite clearly the League had done a great deal of good in its efforts to lobby for the families of those with missing servicemen. After the war, the Defense Department had been absolutely abysmal in its liaison work with the families. The offices that initially dealt with individual service losses were just bureaucracies with no "human" touch about them. The service offices were "reactive," responding only when prodded and all they did was create enmity among the families who felt they were getting a runaround. Now, admittedly for a number of years there wasn't much news that could be provided because we had no access and no dialogue with the Vietnamese. Once we had the new unified structure and a more focused approach to MIA recovery efforts the Pentagon became pro-active and sought to contact the families to provide the latest information on their loss cases. This office was the Defense Department's Office of MIA Affairs and it was set up in Rosslyn under a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, focused exclusively on the POW/MIA issue for all the services. His responsibilities included dealing with the Vietnamese on MIA issues - though this was done in conjunction with State - and liaising with Congress, the families and the various veterans and MIA organizations.

Q: I still see the missing in action flag flying over churches.

HARTER: Public buildings and a variety of towns across the United States, continue to fly that flag as a result of resolutions that were passed locally 15, 20 years ago.

Q: Did you find that within the families of the missing, was there a feeling one, that in a way they don't want to have it resolved, because there's always hope, and you know, this is a finality or was there, would it made sense because, to keep it going, because in a way they were still receiving pensions and some of that?

HARTER: No. There was no real financial reason for keeping it going. I think that theory was a bit of a myth. The Pentagon had long ago closed out all the cases that would have kept individuals in the category of "missing, fate unknown." The MIAs from the Vietnam war had already all been put in the category of "missing, presumed deceased." In that sense, the pensions or financial payments had all been regularized based on the presumption of death. For some families who personally wanted to insist the missing serviceman was still alive it was because of a strong anti-communist feeling - you can't trust the communists to tell you the truth about the missing servicemen, or an anti-government feeling - the USG is covering up because it ended the war dishonorably without bringing back all of the POWs.

For the overwhelming majority of families, what they wanted was closure and a chance to place their loved one in a cemetery where he could be honored. It was only a few dozens individuals who were the nay-sayers. The problem was the nay-sayers were vocal; the people who were looking for closure were trying to do things quietly and out of the spotlight. They didn't want that media attention. They weren't trying to make an issue out of it. So, it was a lot more difficult to get them to help you in this process of publicizing the success of the MIA recovery and accounting effort. The US military had conducted a very rigorous forensic study on each set of remains and the military never went ahead with an identification that did not have absolute certainty. Nonetheless, there were still some families who refused to accept the remains as that of their loved one. These folks distrusted the Vietnamese and U.S. Governments, though I also believe some rejected the remains identification because there was just so little left on which to base an identification. For the most part, however, the Government got gratitude and a lot more people achieved closure to their losses.

Over the years, there had also been a number of families who tried to go to Vietnam and find the loss sites on their own. Of course, in the early years, they did not tell the Vietnamese beforehand what they intended to do. Naturally, this activity did not meet with the approval of the Vietnamese Government. There were more structured efforts once we had our POW/MIA Office set up in Hanoi and the Vietnamese were willing to let family members in so-long as they confined their MIA work to dealing with the official US and Vietnamese offices.

Q: Were you having problems with the bone peddlers?

HARTER: Yes.

Q: You might explain what I mean by this.

HARTER: After the war, there were thousands who remained unaccounted for and the absence of contacts with the Vietnamese left open all sorts of speculation about POWs still alive in captivity or hiding in remote parts of the country. Charlatans began to create a variety of stories about "live sightings" to get money from the grieving families. Or, they would be proposing raids into Vietnam or Laos to retrieve these men for an even greater set of fees to cover their expenses. At the same time, people in Vietnam were manufacturing dog tags purportedly from some missing American. Others claimed to have some remains or whole skeletons buried in places only they could access. These were the so-called "bone peddlers," While the claims continued even after we normalized relations and had MIA teams on the ground in Vietnam, the high point of this heinous practice came with the large refugee outflow from Vietnam in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Here people thought they'd be guaranteed admission to the U.S. if they could produce MIA information. The U.S. contributed to this process by sending military teams to all the camps to interview the refugees and the U.S. published circulars asking the refugee arrivals to provide any information they could on MIAs.

In the early stages, there groups of adventurers in the United States, as well as in Southeast Asia who would try to deal directly with the families to get money. In the late 1970s, there were actually a couple border crossings on-the-ground into Laos and Vietnam to rescue POWs.

Q: This is Ross Perot?

HARTER: Right and people like Bo Gritz. There were cases where Thai and other Southeast Asian nationals were picked up by the Lao or the Vietnamese during one of these rescue missions. But, most of it was just a scam, simply a means of collecting money without any rescue effort taking place. Some U.S. Congressmen believed in and supported these scam artists and promoted their stories in Congress but they too were later all discredited and their Congressional careers fell apart. This included Congressman John LeBoutillier and Congressman Billy Hendon. While a lot of the POW/MIA information was spurious, there were other arguments that were harder to dismiss. Visitors to Vietnam would report visiting Vietnamese war museums where they spotted information on display which related to specific MIA cases. Official Vietnamese records and archive films showed individuals who were not otherwise accounted for. So, some of the questions about MIAs were not just made out of whole cloth and the Vietnamese did have to do some more serious accounting than they had done in 1972. Once the agreement was reached to allow US personnel to have access, US MIA teams visited these museums and went to work examining official records for more information on the MIAs and we did obtain some leads and ultimately some concrete results through these investigations.

Q: Did the Vietnamese, I mean by the time you got involved, did they understand both the desire and the political consequences of this do you think?

HARTER: Absolutely. The Vietnamese realized this was the only way to bring about an end to their global isolation and it was the only way normalization of relations could be achieved. They had to be cooperative; they had to make this thing work. There were a lot of things they didn't like and they sometimes took a long time in agreeing to U.S. requests for information or access. Yet, on the other hand, everything we did involved a financial cost which we paid to the Vietnamese Government. Some of those costs were pretty extravagant. Money paid to village workers, for example, was much higher than ordinary wages. The Vietnamese workers got only what they normally would have received and the extra money stayed with Government officials, mostly in Hanoi, but also some in the villages. We brought in fleets of vehicles for the Vietnamese to use in their investigative work. Whole fleets of vehicles were brought in from the Middle East after the first Gulf War and were handed over to Vietnamese government officials throughout the country to assist in the MIA search process. We not only provided them with the vehicles, but we also maintained them. The vehicles were Mitsubishi Pajeros, not exactly SUV size but a little jeep type vehicle. The Vietnamese were using them for a lot of activities that had nothing to do with POW/MIA issues. But what would you expect, Vietnamese Government offices didn't have a lot of money or vehicles to run their operations so the US funding and the vehicles simply got used where they were needed in regular government work.

The important thing was we were producing results - finding remains and obtaining identifications. Both of these processes were very slow and time consuming. A lot of work went on in the U.S. before we gave case files to the Vietnamese. Periodically a team from Washington would bring new cases to their attention. At those meetings, we'd discuss how the Vietnamese were progressing with their investigations and the U.S. or the Vietnamese would propose site investigations or excavations based on previous join site exploration work. The Vietnamese would take the cases and go off into the countryside to try to locate information about a particular case or try to locate potential excavation sites based on the U.S. files. They would also be putting out announcements in the provinces and districts seeking people with information on wartime U.S. losses.One of the reasons it was such a difficult effort on the ground in Vietnam is because most of the cases we were investigating were aircraft losses. So, you're talking about a high impact, a high speed crash with explosive ordinance and explosive fuel scattering aircraft and human remains a great distance. On top of that, you had to add 20 years of a climate that was constantly reducing the human remains through heat and humidity and rain. Moreover, Vietnam's soil is highly acidic and that further sped the process of deterioration. In contrast, right now we are going back to North Korea to seek remains of losses from the 1950s war and we are locating remains there. That effort, of course, was a result of the U.S. having successfully conducted the searches in Vietnam. Korea's climate with frozen ground for several months each year helped preserve remains and the site areas were not heavily treed and foliated which made sites easier to explore. And we were mostly looking for the remains of ground troops whose remains were more likely to be intact. So, climate, the type of loss, the acidic soil all made our search two decades later a much harder task. But, in fact we were making progress. Pieces of aircraft led to excavations and bone fragments or other personal effects that pinpointed the loss and helped identify the individual(s) involved. Ultimately, we could use the DNA tests to achieve verification. Again, I'd like to stress, the Defense Department mantra was conclusive proof before you announced an identification. If you had pieces of a type of aircraft, and even aircraft numbers and parts numbers and if you had a helmet with a name on it, and if you had small change or personal items from the man's pockets, perhaps even including personal identification items, DOD did not permit you to say you had closed the case and called it resolved. This would all just simply be more verification of the assessment that the individual was dead but it was not enough to take the person off the MIA list. Even if you had bone fragments at that crash site which indicated that an individual had indeed perished at the site. If you could not identify the individual based on those fragments you could still not close the case and take the name off the MIA list. DOD's policy requirement was to be able to stand up in a court of law and defend the actual identification. No matter the circumstantial evidence, but if any remains actually belong to a particular individual you could not close the case and it remained "unresolved." These very rigorous standards also created somewhat of a credibility problem. I do not know at the present time how many cases are on the list of unresolved. It's probably somewhere around 1,800 I would guess, probably 1,900 at this time. But, if we removed all of the cases where our circumstantial evidence was like what I just described and we removed those cases where the nature of the loss precludes us ever finding remains - an aircraft crash at sea well of the coast, an infantryman seen to have been hit directly by an enemy mortar round or artillery shell and his body disintegrated in the explosion - we've probably got less than 200 MIA cases left to complete. But, simply because we are not permitted to remove the names without that court-of-law-level of certitude on a "remains identification" we're still carrying the 1,800 or 1,900 names. And for some critics of the U.S. policy this means we haven't achieved our objectives and the Vietnamese are not cooperating the way they could or should.

So taking this back to our main objective, the Vietnamese cooperation to allow the U.S. investigative teams to come in and conduct excavations, the U.S. repatriation of remains and the research at the Central Identification Laboratory in Honolulu to identify the remains and return them to the families for burial was the process that made normalization possible. This progress created enough positive momentum the Clinton Administration felt it could go forward. But the Administration was ever cautious and it was unwilling to announce the establishment of diplomatic relations and open embassies without an intermediate step. I personally argued there was no reason not to take the step all at once because I had seen no evidence there was any opposition group that could have successfully argued against full normalization. I can recall on one occasion I was part of a meeting in one of the Secretary's offices which I believe had been called by Peter Tarnoff, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, Wendy Sherman, was making a presentation about the potential for opposition to normalization on the Hill. She and her office had been too busy dealing with other Department issues on the Hill to even ask what I had been doing and they had not been involved in any of the work I had done on the Hill to build the support system for normalization. What she was saying made absolutely no sense in that context and after listening for some time, I spoke up and disagreed with her. After giving me a few minutes to make my arguments, Peter Tarnoff made it clear to me that I was to shut up. The senior attendees from EAP did not speak up to support my position and Tarnoff accepted the Congressional Affairs cautions about Hill opposition and advised the Secretary not to push to open embassies. So, the first stage was the establishment of a Liaison Office.

Q: Well, did we already have an office in Saigon, now known as Ho Chi-Minh for orderly departure or anything like that?

HARTER: Oh yes, that we did have. We did have an office focused on orderly departure but those individuals were contract employees of a voluntary organization. It was not a formal diplomatic establishment. Our consular and INS officials came in to Ho Chi Minh City from time to time to process the applicants and they were not resident in Vietnam except for a couple of days each month or so. As we discussed earlier, orderly departure grew out of the refugee crisis of the late 1970s when huge numbers of Vietnamese fled into Southeast Asia. The United States and a number of other countries that had offered asylum to those who fled Vietnam in 1975 wanted to minimize the risks of people fleeing Vietnam and to provide an opportunity for relatives of those already resettled abroad to join their families. Discussions with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) and the Vietnamese Government produced an agreement where both receiving countries and the Vietnamese produced lists of people who respectively would be accepted or who would be permitted to leave and then the orderly departure offices processed these individuals for admission to the U.S. and other countries. This ultimately meant we accepted lots of individuals who had been in re-education camps because of their roles with the U.S. or the South Vietnamese authorities during the war. We also arranged to take Amerasians, children with American fathers and Vietnamese mothers and their families. We also tried to focus on individuals who were part of families that had already been settled in the U.S. In addition to that group of contract employees and TDY officials, we had our military MIA team in Hanoi by that time. Then, in 1994 we also put a few State Department officers in with the MIA unit to deal with administrative issues related to our normalization dialogue visits and to work on operational needs for the future opening of relations. This small group became the core to open the Liaison Office.

Q: Did you find by the time you came in 1993 that the Vietnamese, basically the government people and the Americans were use to working together? Was this sort of a stand-offish thing or how did you find this?

HARTER: No. I got there in the summer of 1994 and it was still kind of stand-offish. There were still a lot of first-time-around issues we had to go through to make things work and so starting a dialogue was important. One of the first things I did was to go up and talk to the Vietnamese Ambassador to the United Nations. He was the senior Vietnamese official of the only Vietnamese government group working regularly in the United States. I talked with him and I talked with members of his staff as part of this process of at least establishing communications on a regular basis to keep the normalization process going. In 1994, we didn't have anybody senior in Hanoi to talk to the Vietnamese and Hanoi's government didn't have anybody in Washington to talk to us. So, periodically I would go to New York and meet with the Ambassador there. Of course, we talked about normalizing relations and the MIA visits and excavations and we reviewed a lot of the mechanical things we needed to do to open our missions. I certainly did not begin our dialogue by telling the Ambassador and his staff about how we were going to normalize relations in stages. I think it might have been unsettling to start that way. But, over time I had to get him to understand better the domestic issues which were driving the Administration views. I personally still believe we could have gone to the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of embassies in one single step, but there was never any high-level interest in that option. The Clinton Administration leadership was convinced there would be too great a domestic backlash. Nonetheless, the way the Administration handled the issue was successful and so all we're really talking about is having spread the full normalization process out for a number of months.

When I had started in the Vietnam office I was taking over from Jim Hall. Jim had also worked on China, having served in Guangzhou and as Consul General in Shenyang when we opened that post in northeast China. He had spent time in Vietnam during the war. He and Winston Lord's Deputy Assistant Secretary who covered Southeast Asia, Peter Tomsen, had worked together in China and Peter had brought him in as the VLC Director for the tour before mine.

Once it was decided we were going to open our relationship with a Liaison Office, EAP decided that Jim would be sent out to head the office, which would include a few other new people and the small State team we had set up in the MIA Office. Our initial plan was to try to get this set up by the fall of '1994. But, nothing ever works on schedule and so it really wasn't until early the following year that we were really able to get things set to officially open the Liaison Office. Because the Administration considered the MIA issue to be the critical issue that could make or break normalization, we devised a formula whereby each time we planned to take a step forward in the normalization process we first sent a DPMO team to Hanoi to discuss MIA issues. Then, once the team returned and presented its report about Vietnamese "cooperation" and "progress" in remains' recoveries and accounting we announced our next "political" step toward the normalization/embassy opening objective. Once I was told we had to normalize relations in stages, we put together this sort of step-by-step process to move the timetable forward - DPMO visit to Vietnam to assess progress on MIAs, report of progress on MIAs, announcement of next step on normalization check list.

The procedures were all presented in a very public process designed to demonstrate bilateral MIA cooperation was producing results that warranted further political steps toward normalized relations. Our public argument was straightforward - the Vietnamese had made progress in identifying sites and helping in recoveries; the U.S. accounting effort is making progress because we are recovering remains and then identifying them. Since we are making such progress, it behooves us to go the next step in the political process which will encourage the Vietnamese to cooperate even more and the MIA accounting will get even better.

When we sent the DPMO teams to Hanoi to talk to the Vietnamese on the MIA issue, we also were including Ann Mills Griffiths from the League of Families as well as the international affairs directors for the American Legion and the VFW. By doing so, it strengthened the Administration's openness to the concerns of the veterans and families. And, even though the League and the Legion remained critical of many parts of the program, they could not dismiss the progress that was being made. They were left in the position of saying "it could still be better" or arguing that the U.S. was not pushing for progress at a fast enough pace. On the other hand the combined State Department and DPMO Defense Department report on progress had sufficient positive statistics to make the case successfully for further diplomatic steps.

Though I'm still critical of the step-by-step progression because I don't think it was necessary, I cannot fault the scripting process that we used to achieve the objectives. Each step was inexorably followed with another step that led us closer to normalization of relations and the opening of embassies. Over time, I think the Vietnamese probably divined what we were doing and they fell in line and didn't balk when we moved forward in increments because they saw we were going to complete the process even though it took a bit longer. We geared our MIA trip reports to the Congress so that everyone there could put things in a positive light for their constituents. Those Senators I mentioned earlier, Kerry, Kerrey, McCain, Hagel, Murkowski, and their staffs were our liaisons into the rest of the members and staff. The one person on the House side that was particularly important was Florida Congressman, Pete Peterson. Like McCain, also a former POW who was shot down over Vietnam, Peterson had been in a number of different prisons over the six and a half years he was a POW and spent some time in the same prison with Senator McCain before they were released in 1972. After he returned to the United States, he stayed in the military for awhile, then successfully ran a business and was elected to Congress from Florida's panhandle as a Democrat.

As I said, he was from northern Florida, and I think the town was called Marietta. He was apparently popular among his fellow Congressmen and they respected his views on the MIA and normalization issues because he had been a POW. He was helpful on the Hill, though not with the same clout as McCain and Kerry and their staff people. His greatest utility in this process was in his regular communication with President Clinton and the Clinton White House staff, more or less holding their feet to the fire to keep them committed to normalization. Once again, as it had been in 1978, the White House had lots of other fish to fry so the President and his staff never were actually engaged in pushing the normalization process. Their only concern was to be sure the normalization effort didn't coalesce an opposition force that would weaken the President. So long as that wasn't happening, the White House left the mechanics to the State Department. The State Department was in charge of making this happen and if wasn't able to make it work well then, from the White House perspective, it was just not the right time to do it and they could afford to wait a bit longer. Thus, any time Peterson could keep the White House on focus toward the normalization process, it meant we didn't have to worry about losing our backing to keep the ball moving forward.

Also, very importantly, the Asian affairs advisor on the NSC, Sandy Kristoff, had previously been the Economic Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary under Winston Lord. She was a political appointee who I believed came to State from the Trade Representative's Office (USTR). We had worked closely on APEC issues when I was in Seattle and we had a very good relationship. I could always count on her to keep the White House focused positively on Vietnam normalization. My general impression was that the NSC Advisor, Tony Lake, didn't want to invest a lot of effort into the process, and it was not something he would have fought for if there had been some big obstacles that had to be overcome on the way to normalization.

Tony Lake had a long personal connection to Vietnam. He'd been in Vietnam at the Embassy in the early years of the U.S. military build-up along with Dick Holbrooke. When the Nixon-Kissinger initiated bombing campaign in Cambodia turned into an invasion, he resigned from the Foreign Service. I went over to the NSC on a couple of occasions during the period when we were developing the normalization strategy to brief him and others, and you could see he was ambivalent about the whole issue. But, because there was a commitment from the top, from Clinton, the NSC each time we met allowed us to keep working at the process. This time we didn't have a China relations issue looming ahead of us as an obstacle.

Q: This is the 21st of July, 2004. Dennis, where were you? Still in Washington?

HARTER: Yes. I'm still head of the Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs. At this point, beginning actually with the fall of 1995, after an EAP Bureau reorganization, Burma and Thailand desks were added to the office, but in the early part of 1995, we were Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (VLC). Normalization with Vietnam is on the table.

The Administration had decided to normalize relations with Vietnam but to do so in incremental steps rather than all at once. So as to minimize any potential opposition to this process, the strategy was to precede each step with a demonstration of improved cooperation on POW/MIA issues by the Vietnamese. The first formal step in this process was the establishment of Liaison Offices in Hanoi and Washington. Some months before opening the Liaison Office in Hanoi, we assigned some young Foreign Service officers to work in the U.S. MIA Office so they would assist us in getting the whole office opening process concluded more rapidly. But on one occasion, I think the folks in EAP went overboard in trying to keep things moving incrementally. When we established the Liaison Office in January 1995, I went to Hanoi to represent the Department for the opening of our new office facility. But then Jim Hall told me he had instructions from Peter Tomsen in EAP not to hoist the U.S. flag once we had completed our exchange with the Vietnamese. I called Peter and argued that this made no sense but he said "people" (not named) were concerned about the press coverage of the flag raising. I said the press who were there to cover the Liaison Office opening would be even more puzzled and were likely to write speculative stories if we did not raise the flag. I couldn't convince him and so we had our exchange with the Vietnamese and just entered the building. Shortly thereafter, I went to the airport and returned to Washington. The day after I left, Jim Hall went ahead and raised the flag and there was no apparent press concern about the event or the delay.

After the Liaison Office was opened, we assembled another DPMO team to talk to the Vietnamese on the MIA issue. This one was headed by Deputy Secretary for Veterans Affairs Hershel Gober who had also been actively working with us on the MIA issue and had helped build support within the various veterans' organizations. The delegation included key members of the VFW, the American Legion, and the League of Families. I accompanied the delegation for this trip and was expected to write the trip report. This trip report was to be the formal presentation of the Administration's argument to normalize relations with Vietnam. Once again, the chief audience was the Congress, but we also intended this report to be used with the veterans organizations and the public. The report concluded that we continued to make progress on accounting as the result of enhanced Vietnamese cooperation and that it was therefore appropriate to move forward to normalize relations. When we opened the Liaison Office, we wanted to demonstrate to the Vietnamese that we were indeed moving the process forward toward normalizing relations and my predecessor in the Office of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Affairs, Jim Hall, was sent over to open up the Liaison Office in Hanoi in January 1995 and to manage operational activities until we could normalize relations. We augmented the small team of young Foreign Service officers with some administrative people who were sent to try to locate appropriate office facilities. Chris Runckle, the administrative coordinator for the APEC meeting in Seattle, had been lobbying for this position and he was assigned there. Chris located a recently constructed office building outside the old center of town which appeared to be the only reasonably modern facility that would meet our needs as a start-up facility.

As we were presenting our report on MIA progress to the Hill, the Administration was reviewing the next phase of the normalization process. The debate was over how we would open our embassy. The White House remained cautious and the Department was told to put together a memorandum proposing the establishment of diplomatic relations with the naming of a Chargï¿½ d'Affaires to head the Embassy. The White House believed that if we made it clear we were going to open the mission with a Chargï¿½ then the Vietnamese would do the same, not wanting to have sent a higher level official to the U.S. than we had sent there. This, they figured, would permit the U.S. to take an additional incremental step - and simultaneously show more MIA progress - and then move ahead to naming an Ambassador. So, even though we had now reached our objective of normalizing relations, the Administration wanted one more reassurance and our process continued to move forward at a snail's pace.

After the President approved the memo to establish diplomatic relations, he invited a large number of dignitaries to the White House for the formal announcement of the establishment of diplomatic relations on July 11, 1995. I was very pleased to be there to see the process finally concluded and to be part of what was clearly an historic change from our period of hostility with the Vietnamese during the war. All of the key players who had been involved in the process from the Congress, the Veterans Affairs Department, the Defense Department, the veterans and families organizations were invited and everyone was very positive about the announcement. Days passed and the newspaper commentary was also favorable and the public reaction was blase - no big deal, no big protests - it was all simply another step in a process that the USG had dragged out for more than a year.

The State Department had already selected a candidate for Chargï¿½, a career Foreign Service Officer, Desaix Anderson. Desaix had previously been the head of the VLC Office and was working in the EAP Front Office as the APEC Coordinator. The White House, after looking at the proposal did not raise any objections. Uncharacteristically, the White House had already been looking beyond the Chargï¿½ period to determine who would be named Ambassador later in the year, although they still had not revealed anything to the Department. So, for the interim, Desaix was named to go to Hanoi to be our first Chargï¿½ in the middle of 1995.

And so, once again we did at least demonstrate to the Vietnamese that establishment of diplomatic relations meant something more than our previous step of opening a Liaison Office. We didn't just continue business as usual with the person who had been there as Liaison Office Chief being given a new title. We sent out a more senior officer to go with the higher ranking title and responsibility. The Vietnamese, for their point sent their Ambassador from the UN Mission down to open up the Embassy in Washington. And, as expected, they gave him the title of Chargï¿½ D'Affaires and not Ambassador, matching our own designation in Hanoi. Now, there were a couple of really interesting little sidelights at this stage which deserve mention.

The first interesting issue was the Vietnamese declaration on the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States. You look at the text of the statement from Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet and there's nothing in it that says the Vietnamese have established diplomatic relations by recognizing the Government of the United States. Absolutely nowhere is there any mention of it! Prime Minister Kiet mentions the fact that the U.S. recognizes Vietnam, but there is no corresponding concrete statement that says Vietnam had recognized the U.S. So, after I had read the statement a couple of times, I called up the Legal Advisor's Office (L) and talked to Jim Hergen who had been our liaison in L throughout this period. I asked him if he had looked at the text of the Vietnamese statement. He said, "No." I said, "Look at it and see what you can tell me." After a few minutes, he called back and said "They didn't say anything. They didn't establish diplomatic relations." I said, "That's exactly what I thought when I read it. But, everything is all set. The statements are out and everybody has just assumed that it's happened and we've both established relations. There's no way we walk this back without a lot of problems." I said, "What are we going to do?" and he didn't have any response. I then proposed I call the Vietnamese Ambassador and talk him through the Vietnamese statement as it came out from the Prime Minister's Office and get him to say that this means they've established diplomatic relations. And then I said, "will that suffice?" Jim thought for a moment and he said, "Yeah, but you'll have to write it up." I said, "OK, I'll write it up as soon as we finish the conversation." A few minutes later, without letting anyone else in EAP know what was happening, I called the Vietnamese Ambassador and we talked through the Prime Minister's statement. At the end of the discussion, I asked him, "Is this then what you consider as your formal establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States?" And when he said, "Yes," I thanked him and hung up without indicating anything further about why I had called. I then wrote up the telephone conversation and with Jim Hergen'e assistance made sure it was appended to the State Department's collection of legal documents associated with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Vietnam which of course included both President Clinton's statement and Prime Minister Kiet's statement. Those papers are all part of the formal diplomatic record. And that's basically how we made the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam "legal." Outside of Jim Hergen and I, I don't think anybody else ever knew at the time what we had to do to "complete" the normalization process.

Q: Did you ever get a feel for why this wording? Was this just a legal problem?

HARTER: No. I have no idea, I have no idea what the Vietnamese intended. No one on the Vietnamese side ever came back to me and said, "Oh, we forgot to mention establishing relations," or "no, that's the way we always do it." There was just no exchange back and forth. I figured we were better off once it was done to leave it alone. The last thing I wanted to do was get a contrary explanation or get an explanation to cast doubt on what I had already put on paper and sent to the files. What I found most intriguing is that nobody in the press ever asked about it. You know how the press usually goes over everything with a fine tooth comb. But, in this case, they just completely overlooked it.

Q: Well, this could have thrown it back to Congress.

HARTER: Absolutely, absolutely. There was just no point in trying to go any further with it. I thought that was really a rather amusing way for the issue of diplomatic relations to end after all the concerns about making sure we did things in such a methodical way.

Q: Less than amusing at the time.

HARTER: Oh yeah. There was a mild sort of panic on my part, because I was afraid it would all come apart. But it was one of these things that come up from time to time in diplomacy and you just have to figure a way to deal with it. And, as long as can pull it off and nobody really complains about it, then it's fine and nobody is ever the wiser.

Q: Did the Vietnamese Ambassador understand your problem and what he was doing?

HARTER: I don't know whether he did or not. I did not try to make it clear to him that I needed him to say this for a particular reason. I just sort of walked him through it as though I was clarifying the text for the record. We knew each other well enough at that point and I probably could have asked him directly. But it was one of these things where I didn't want to get a different answer from the one I was guiding him to say. Therefore, my thought was to keep it as simple as possible. Once I got him to say what I wanted, I just wanted to end the conversation and create the record and let it go. I never really did go back to him and ask him about it afterward. Maybe sometime in the future I will do so.

Q: Where was the problem coming from about putting in an Ambassador? I mean, once both countries recognize each other and exchange Ambassadors, it doesn't strike me that an Ambassador is a big deal.

HARTER: Well, it shouldn't be, but we've had problems doing this before. Burma was a case in point. The Congress got all head strong over Burma. After we nominated an Ambassador in 1990, he got agrï¿½ment and had his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But, the Burmese pulled agrï¿½ment over things he had said in his Senate hearings that were critical of the Burmese Government. After "punishing" the Burmese regime for a while by not naming another Ambassador, the Department tried to nominate another person and the Senate refused to consider an appointment because of Burma's human rights record. We haven't had an Ambassador in Burma since 1990. The whole issue of Tibet was an issue of contention during our recognition of the PRC and whether the United States was recognizing the integration of Tibet within the greater sphere of China.

From Congress' perspective as long as Burma was controlled by a bunch of military thugs who refused to accept the results of a national election in 1990, then the bottom line was we're not going to have anything to do with them. Even when various steps took place a few years later that suggested the military leaders were opening things up, there was no one in Congress willing to bite and allow the State Department to move forward. This policy was all dictated by a Congressional staffer whose wife happened to be from one of the minority tribes in Burma. He was the one who dictated the policy to block the sending of an Ambassador. Opposition to the Burmese military broadened out after that because of the regime's repressive policies, but that's how and where it all started. Obviously we deal diplomatically with a lot of regimes that are repressive and don't represent the way we would like to see things handled, but we still manage to accredit Ambassadors to those countries anyway. Burma is the big exception.

While we're talking about Burma here, I should note a story from the latter part of my time in Washington when the desk added Thailand and Burma to its portfolio. As often happens in the Department, there was an effort to cut down on staffing and EAP had to find some places to cut personnel. I was asked if I thought I could also manage to oversee Thailand and Burma affairs if the two offices were combined and I said yes. The Bureau cut the Office Director position from the Thai-Burma desk and moved the other two three officers there into our Vietnam Laos and Cambodia desk. I decided we needed to come up with a functional abbreviation for the group, like we had used VLC before. I didn't want to put one group ahead of another so I decided to alphabetize the listings and so we became BCLTV - Burma Cambodia Laos Thailand and Vietnam.

While I was Office Director, I had the occasion to travel to the two new countries to meet with government leaders. The Thai visit was pretty straightforward and focused mostly on the state of our cooperative efforts to bring about a new government in Cambodia that represented the people but did not contain much influence from the Khmer Rouge or the Vietnamese. The Burma visit was another matter. As I said, we had not had an Ambassador in Rangoon, or Yangon as they now called it, since 1990. Our relations with the Burmese military were standoffish at best. And our chief focus was support for the 1990 elected government which the military had refused to permit to take office. The head of that group, the National League for Democracy, was Madame Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the founder of Burma. She had been under house arrest for most of the time since the 1990 election and it was not often any Americans had a chance to meet with her. I had specifically requested an opportunity to meet with her but there was no agreement for me to do so before I reached Burma. I had a couple of meetings with senior people in the Foreign Ministry and one of their development focused ministries. Both were former military men who had been seconded to the ministries. After my first day in Rangoon, I was told that I had been given permission to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi at her residence. We talked for a couple of hours and I found her a very impressive and determined woman. I also came away from the meeting feeling that it was going to be very difficult to get any kind of accommodation between her and the ruling military. Her positions were as stubborn and uncompromising as theirs were. She articulated no give or signs of willingness to negotiate differences despite occasional comments to western media which suggested she would be willing to talk to the military about a restoration of democracy in Burma. Because her "image" was so positive in the U.S., I did not feel I would have much of an audience in the Department if I revealed my thoughts that her attitude might also be part of the problem of a "negotiated" or "compromise" solution for Burma's move away from military domination. As a result, I did not put those kinds of comments in my written report on the trip, but I did try to convey my concerns about her uncompromising position in my talks with others in the Department. I don't believe they had any impact, however, and there was never any sign I saw that Department officials were concerned that backing Aung San Suu Kyi likely meant a continuing stand-off between her and the military who ruled the country and little hope to bring about change.

The month after we established diplomatic relations, Secretary of State Warren Christopher went to Hanoi for the first visit of a Secretary of State to Vietnam since the war [August 5-7, 1995]. I accompanied him on the trip and we signed two sets of papers confirming the normalization of relations and announcing the opening of our embassies. At that point, we made clear to the Vietnamese we would be opening with a Chargï¿½ and that an Ambassador would not be named for several more months. By that time I'm sure the Vietnamese expected no different given our long history of small steps and there was no negative reaction from the Vietnamese side.

Anyway, once the whole step of normalization was out of the way, we then went through the mechanics of getting the Vietnamese established in Washington. I think I recounted back when I had been serving as the Deputy Director of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia Affairs in the late 1970s, I had gone into the then vacant Vietnamese Embassy and discovered that it basically was in the same state it had been when the South Vietnamese diplomats walked out and closed the door behind them in 1975. There were a series of problems with the building thereafter with the electricity off, and the heat off, and the water off, and there were holes in the roof. Subsequently, we fixed it all up using frozen Vietnamese Government assets and the Department actually used the building for a period of time. I think the office was used by the refugee affairs people. The Vietnamese officials at the UN came down and they were looking at it and trying to determine how best to utilize the facility. We, of course wanted to be very particular about how we were going to handle the property issue. The Vietnamese had returned to us the property that we had in Hanoi - the old site of the U.S. Consulate, and we did get back the old Embassy property in Saigon and a number of other properties. This was all a very detailed and complicated negotiation process with the Vietnamese. The only property that they owned was the Embassy Chancellery over on R Street, NW, just off Massachusetts Avenue.

Q: Did they have a residence?

HARTER: They did not, no. So, that was the only thing they physically owned. And of course, they had bank accounts and some other assets. We talked about that before and how we resolved the issue of the money that the Vietnamese had. This time, FBO handled all the property discussions and I didn't get directly involved the way I was supposed to have been back in 1979.

Q: What about our embassy and all in Saigon? I know it turned in to the oil ministry or something.

HARTER: Right. There was a period of time after 1975 when the Vietnamese used the building as a government office building dealing with petroleum issues. But, it finally was abandoned by the Vietnamese, because they couldn't repair it. They couldn't repair the air conditioning system and the other US equipment in the building and so it basically sat there derelict for quite some time. When we looked at the various properties we had owned, some were clearly more desirable than others. The Vietnamese were willing to give us back all of the properties except for our Consul General's residence building in Hanoi which they had provided to the Polish Government. So we made a number of trades and exchanges and the Vietnamese owed us money for all the property we gave up. They paid us through the bilateral Claims and Assets settlement for the property we didn't want to keep. The Claims and Assets agreement was one of those other hurdles we overcame enroute to a normalization of relations. Our big advantage over a lot of other such negotiations was that we had more Vietnamese assets under our control than there were claims against those assets. Our negotiators were able to achieve the best ever claims settlement from the Vietnamese - better than 90 cents to the dollar - simply because the Vietnamese knew they were going to come out of the negotiations with money they didn't previously control. In the long run, it was better to agree to settle the American claims and end up with several tens of millions of dollars than to fuss and haggle over the amounts. The property transfers were all part of that process and we deducted the values of the property we didn't wish to keep in Vietnam from their assets before returning the remainder to Hanoi.

Q: Like our Consul General in Da Nang and things like that?

HARTER: Right, although that particular property and most of our consulate properties were leased and not ones we owned. There was also a property in Hue that we couldn't even find because it, along with a lot of nearby buildings, had been destroyed and the buildings had been reconstructed so that it was impossible to determine where our property had been on that street. So, there was no point in trying to do anything with that issue and that property went into the "sale" column. The people at FBO (Foreign Buildings Operations) were absolutely adamant, based on their experiences and dealing with other governments and particularly Communist governments, we had to be very, very firm about what we allowed the Vietnamese to have. We didn't want the Vietnamese to get all the property they needed for an embassy or a residence or whatever they thought they needed until we also felt we had an appropriate piece of property or a building we could use for the long term.

The Vietnamese looked at their old building in Washington and decided it wasn't adequate for a modern office facility. They thought it was too small and too cramped. They considered using it as an Ambassador's residence, but thought they might only use it occasionally, perhaps as a facility for guests or for entertainment programs. What they wanted was office space. So, FBO agreed to let them lease office space just as we had done some months earlier with the office building in Hanoi, though we actually bought the building as part of the property settlement. The Vietnamese accepted that arrangement and agreed to find us a site in Hanoi for a permanent embassy compound within two years. Well, believe me, the two years came and went in a heartbeat and nothing was ever agreed to. We looked at a number of locations, but we could never make up our minds. Thus, a prime downtown location disappeared into another investment project. When I got there a couple years later, I was able to locate a number of places for consideration. Ambassador Peterson also located a very large empty space. Up until the time I left Hanoi in 2002, we could not get FBO to agree that any of the places we found were acceptable and the Hanoi embassy was just not high enough on the Department's priority construction list to require a decision be made within a certain period of time.

Q: What was it that they just didn't get around to it or did they have -

HARTER: They had too many other things on their plate, number one. Number two, they are probably the least decisive group in the State Department I've ever worked with. Finally, they basically don't like anybody else getting involved in the property business. When it comes to property, they want to do everything. And, if you have some ideas, it's the devil to try and get them to listen to you, let alone ever to agree to anything you think makes sense.

Q: I remember back in 1960, they put up some staff housing in Dhahran. And, despite the fact we pointed out the porches of these things were pointed in the direction of the prevailing sand storms. They said, we know better. Of course, there was a big sand pile in front of everybody's door.

HARTER: Yeah. I've already recounted my experience as Consul General in Guangzhou, China where we lived and worked in a construction site. And, going to Hanoi I went through the exact same thing in the office tower we had acquired. There we had no other facilities to use and so we did work in the building while it was being remodeled and adapted to diplomatic use. Moreover, the house we selected as a DCM's residence was a combination of two houses that had to be reconnected. We did most of that work through the owner and FBO didn't get involved in the construction effort there. But there were a lot of construction problems that emerged after we moved in so that we still experienced more construction work around our living space. FBO did not have the DCM property on its radar screen at that time, but it was heavily involved in redoing the Ambassador's residence, one of the building we had acquired from the Vietnamese. It was an historic building that had once housed the Governor of Tonkin, the northernmost of France's three Vietnamese territories. I'm obviously not a big fan of FBO. If there's a way to avoid dealing with FBO during your Foreign Service career, it ought to be avoided. I'd recommend anyone think twice about taking an assignment where you're going to end up having to spend a lot of time working with FBO.

Anyway, the property issue was a critical one and we did not, either during the time I was in the office of Vietnam, Laos Cambodia Affairs or the time that I was in Hanoi, ever come to a satisfactory resolution of the issue. The one property the Ambassador found was really an ideal property, but the Vietnamese were reluctant to agree to this site. It was 25 hectares and much bigger than they had permitted any other countries to have for their missions. Moreover, the Vietnamese by that time were pushing governments interested in opening new facilities to move into a diplomatic enclave they planned to construct outside of town on the road to the airport. We had no interest in that option, nor did anyone else while I was in Hanoi. The property Ambassador Peterson found would have been large enough where we could have built recreation facilities along with the embassy building as well as some buildings for apartments to house the embassy staff. Otherwise, we would remain at the mercy of a very expensive housing market and most of the property was in the hands of members of the Government and Party elite.

When I was in Hanoi, for example, my residence was running five or six thousand dollars a month. It was a very big residence, ideal for entertaining, and really very nice in that sense. But, it was out of the question to be paying that kind of rent. When my successor, a bachelor, arrived, they dropped my residence. He went into an apartment, a very nice and expansive apartment over-looking West Lake; his apartment was still in the forty-five hundred, five thousand dollar a month rental range.

The property the Ambassador found was a difficult issue for the Vietnamese and FBO wasn't all that crazy about it either. I don't recall their objections, but we all suspected it was because people at the Embassy found the property instead of it being located as the result of an FBO survey. The Ambassador really wanted to get FBO to make a commitment and the senior staff at the Embassy had been kicking him from one end of the post to the other about the problems we were having in the office building we were using. But FBO basically sat on their hands and didn't do much about the issue. That was one of the bilateral negotiating issues that continued to plague people during my time in Hanoi. And, I suspect, although I'm not absolutely certain, it's probably still an unresolved issue today, knowing how long it takes to get things done with FBO.

The assignment then of a Chargï¿½ went forward and Desaix Anderson went out and the process then of looking for a new Ambassador was moved up to the forefront. The Department wanted to elevated Desaix, but that was not in the cards. By the fall of 1995, it was very clear that Pete Peterson was the Administration's choice for Ambassador. He was a loyal Democrat, member of Congress from Florida; he'd been a POW for six and a half years; he had a good relationship with other Vietnam veterans like Senator Kerry and Senator McCain and he had good relations with some of the more conservative members who were opponents, like Randy Cunningham. Peterson got along with all of them. He also worked reasonably well with Ann Mills Griffiths and the others among the veterans who were not supportive of normalization. But, he clearly supported normalization and was active on the Hill in tamping down criticism and misconceptions on the part of some of his fellow lawmakers. Peterson's choice was popular with most everyone. Once people met him and had a chance to talk to him they thought he was a good candidate for the job. From a Department perspective, if we were going to get a political appointee, this guy was OK. From the State Department's perspective we would have liked to see a career person like Desaix go there, because there were still a lot of tricky issues to handle. But, Peterson was a sensible, pragmatic fellow and the EAP folks, myself included decided he'd likely do OK. Well, as we talked through the process and the timing, the goal was to get Peterson to Hanoi as early as possible in 1996 and certainly no later than the spring, or early summer of 1996. Then, our idea was to follow his arrival by announcing the opening of the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City toward the latter part of 1996, from September or October to the end of the year.

I went over this timing sequence with Peterson and he agreed the timing made sense. For some time, I had been meeting with him as we proceeded with the final steps for normalization and afterward we would provide him with material to prepare for his nomination hearings or we'd talk about plans for mission activities. I guess he felt comfortable with my background and work style and he asked me to be his DCM. I told him I would like that. However, based on the assignments schedule, I knew it would be possible for Jim Hall to stay in Hanoi until the early part of 1997. I was scheduled to finish in VLC during the summer of 1996 so I told Peterson I wanted to go to open the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City first. My thought was that Jim could help bridge the transition in Hanoi while I set up the new Consulate General and put that in operation. Then, when Jim departed in January or February of 1997, I would go up to Hanoi as Peterson's DCM. Peterson thought that made sense assuming the State Department agreed it could be done. I got EAP/EX on board and they convinced PER that it made sense based on the timing sequence we had worked out for Peterson's nomination/confirmation and the opening of the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City.

The next step was to get Peterson's nomination on the docket. As his name got floated for nomination on the Hill, somebody with an interest in the Constitution raised a question about whether Peterson as a seated member of Congress could be nominated to be an Ambassador when we've just established relations with the country? The question was posed in connection with Article 1, Section 6 and Article 2, Section 2 of the Constitution. In simple terms, the former says no member of Congress can be appointed to a position he had helped to create while the latter refers to the President's authority to appoint Ambassadors and other high officials. A legal opinion was requested of the Justice Department. I assumed this would be a brief formality and expected no problems. However, after a brief review, the Justice Department concluded the President could not appoint Peterson because he was still a member of Congress and he can't be seen as being appointed to a position that he helped to create." I immediately turned to our Legal Office and Jim Hergen and queried how the Justice Department could reach such a conclusion. What exactly did Justice think was Peterson's role in creating this position?

Q: He was at the Senate.

HARTER: No, he was in the House. Secondly, I argued, this isn't a new position; we've had Ambassadors in Vietnam before. Who did they think Ambassador Bunker was working with except the Vietnamese? I argued further there was never a one Vietnam or a two Vietnam issue involved here. Just because Bunker dealt with South Vietnamese, he was still the Ambassador to the Vietnam we recognized. I brought up the 1954 Geneva Accords, where one Vietnam was temporarily divided in half with subsequent elections to be held to reunify the country. When the elections didn't happen, countries around the world generally recognized one or the other of the Governments that were established in Saigon and Hanoi. But, they all were dealing with Vietnam. I said, "This is a crazy argument it makes no sense." But, Jim Hergen couldn't get the Legal Office to budge because it was unwilling to challenge the Justice Department ruling. I was still upset and took the issue to other offices in the Department, but I struck out with all of them. EAP, Congressional Relations, and the Secretary's office all concluded that we had achieved our objective by normalizing relations and if it took another year before Pete Peterson could become an Ambassador and go to Vietnam so be it. Even though it made no legal sense in terms of our history of Vietnam relations, nobody would challenge the Justice Department. But that decision turned the whole schedule of our next steps upside down and it prevented Congressman Peterson from being named as Ambassador to Vietnam until after his Congressional term ended in January 1997. That was the second of the unusual circumstances which arose with our normalization of relations with Vietnam.

Q: Well now does the White House, I would have thought the White House would have been interested?

HARTER: They didn't care either. They didn't care because we had normalized relations, and that was the objective. For the White House, the issue was over, it was done with, the rest of the arrangements were just paperwork. The White House didn't care. I said earlier, Tony Lake was ambivalent about the whole idea and for Clinton the goal had been achieved. So that ended it.

From the desk's perspective, however, the whole timetable was now off schedule. We couldn't propose opening the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City without having an Ambassador in place. So, the whole process just drifted. We continued to send people to staff up the office in Hanoi. Since this had been an operation that had been planned for some time, we also had people in the pipeline scheduled to go to Ho Chi Minh City. They were learning Vietnamese or they were in consular training or some other training at FSI. Because we had no office in Ho Chi Minh City, we added them to the staff in Hanoi. Some we lost to other assignments. Those who went to Hanoi didn't have regular assignments or work there so they helped out where they could.

Ambassador Peterson had his hearings and there were no problems on the Hill and he went to Hanoi in the spring of 1997. But, I was also off schedule. I'd finished my two-year assignment as Office Director in the summer of 1996 and Jim Hall was still in Hanoi. So, I was put in Vietnamese language refresher training. Peterson was also there to learn some basic Vietnamese and so we continued to see each other regularly. In the spring of 1997 before he left for Hanoi, Ambassador Peterson told me he didn't think it made any sense for me to go to Ho Chi Minh City. Even if we could open Ho Chi Minh City immediately in the summer, it meant he would be without a DCM for several months and he did not want to do that. He concluded we were going to have to recruit somebody else for that position and that I should plan to go directly to Hanoi. As you well know, the assignments cycle is usually pretty much finished in the first couple of months of the year with everyone moving during the summer months. So, we had to go to PER and try to find out if anyone was available.

PER came up with an officer who had served in Vietnam in the military during the war. He had completed a military career of 20 odd years and retired as a Major. He then joined the State Department and had done ADMIN work, and had a decent ADMIN record. In his most recent assignment, he'd been a DCM in Africa. The Ambassador interviewed him and concluded his Vietnam service background and his service in Korea at least gave him an Asia connection and there was just nobody else even close to that. And that's how we got Charlie Ray assigned to Ho Chi Minh City. He's currently our Ambassador in Cambodia.

The person who was supposed to be the Deputy CG in Ho Chi Minh City was already in Hanoi so we knew we had a little bit of lead time before we dropped him in Vietnam. Thus we arranged to have Charlie start some Vietnamese language training at FSI in the interim. We figured that once we were able to open the Consulate General we could move the people who were over-complement in Hanoi down there and let the Deputy keep things running on the ground until Charlie had some basic Vietnamese to work with. The Ambassador ended up with a gap at the DCM slot after all, because Jim Hall left earlier than planned and I didn't arrive until late summer. We were still not ready to send people to Ho Chi Minh City and the Ambassador made it clear he still expected me to oversee and manage the set up of the new office. I should point out that opening up the office in Ho Chi Minh City was another of these low-budget/no-budget operations because we really didn't have a functional building to put all these people in. Under the Orderly Departure Program, we had been doing resettlement/immigration interviews for the previous few years in a small building complex that had been part of our pre-1975 property in Ho Chi Minh City. I think it may have been USIA property at one time, but I'm not absolutely sure. This became the hub for our new Consulate General operation and we slowly shoe-horned several more people into an already crowded space while we again went back to FBO -

Q: Did they have the old embassy or not?

HARTER: Oh, yes, the old embassy and its property had been returned to us as part of the property settlement. But, as I said earlier, the old building was in terrible condition and we had long ago decided it was bad symbol to plan on refurbishing it. It would have cost more to try and rebuild it than it would be to tear it all down and start all over again. So, that decision, strangely enough didn't create a great deal of patriotic fervor. Still, whenever we had visitors to Hanoi who intended to stop in Ho Chi Minh City they would invariably ask about the old embassy in the south. The official visitors would come to the Embassy in Hanoi and during their briefings they'd always ask to see the old embassy when they went south.

This was one time when we had some priority attention in the Department for our building needs and EAP was able to get FBO committed to the construction of a new building. But at this time, there was a new wrinkle, FBO claimed they couldn't provide us with all the money needed to set up a classified facility and they proposed we start with an unclassified mission. This had come up some time before, while I was still in Washington, and I argued we should not get into that two-step process. I had already seen how poorly it worked in China in some of the Consulates we opened and I didn't want to see that replicated in Vietnam. Just from a security standpoint, it meant we would be compromising a great deal and I knew as a reporting officer people were going to try to bend the rules. They'd be anxious to get some information reported and they'd say the subject was unclassified just so they could send it directly without having to wait and take a flight to Hanoi and prepare the message there in proper facilities several days later. Moreover, the Department had stopped using the "limited official use" message category so you either said something was unclassified or at a minimum confidential. I thought I had won the argument against the unclassified operation while I was still on the desk, but whatever I thought had been agreed was revisited once we got closer to the actual planning. The Ambassador was talked into the whole idea by our EAP Executive Office and FBO. They guaranteed the new building would be constructed in such a way that we could add a classified floor on top of the new building once there were adequate funds and more people available to be sent to Ho Chi Minh City. So, in addition to having to work in the Hanoi office while remodeling operations were underway, I soon found it necessary to visit the construction site in Ho Chi Minh City from time to time to ensure everything there was on track.

As we were getting the Embassy running, Ambassador Peterson and I discussed how we were likely to be getting a steady stream of visitors seeking to reconnect with the war-time experience and that there was a lot of potential for changing the American mindset about Vietnam. We knew there would be a lot of veterans coming back, official visitors wanting to see what we had just done with normalization of relations, and that over time we would be getting Vietnamese Americans returning to do business, visit relatives, seek connections to what they had lost two decades earlier. These latter groups could end up becoming problems if they could not cope or deal appropriately with the changed circumstances. We decided the best way to handle this was to have a completely open door for dialogue with anyone coming to Hanoi who wanted to stop by and talk to us. Our goal was to bridge that two decade gap with a solid dose of practical discussions about what we and the new relationship were all about. Having a former POW as the Ambassador made just the right image for that sort of dialogue and outreach. Anybody who wanted to talk to us, we'd talk to them. Anybody who wrote and requested a meeting or a briefing, we'd set it up for them. He would meet them or I would meet them and sometimes we'd do it together. We established a country team briefing package that was available to official visitors, providing presentations by all the mission elements. We also decided to be pro-active and go back to the U.S. on a more or less regular schedule a couple of times each year to meet with groups there and discuss our new Vietnam operations. During the two years I was on the desk dealing with normalization, I had started going out and talking to groups in the DC area and around the country about why normalization made sense and how we were continuing to make progress on POW/MIA issues. Before he went out to Vietnam, Ambassador Peterson had also gone around and spoken to a number of different veterans groups and to Vietnamese-American communities. So, we took turns going back to the U.S. to make these presentations in different locales.

When we wrote up our budget EAP was very generous in providing funds for this travel. They gave us enough budget that the Ambassador and I could come back to the United States annually. He sometimes went back more often, because he had to go back to lobby on the Hill when we had other issues to talk about that had Congressional interest. Congress was always interested in having him come back and testify. We periodically then would go back to the United States and travel to a variety of different places, speaking at academic institutions and at conferences. We also specifically targeted concentrations of Vietnamese-American around the country. I used some of the contacts I had from my previous work at VLC and also the contacts that I had from APEC. There was a large Vietnamese community in the Seattle area, in addition to the more well-known ones in California and Houston, Texas. Members of Congress who traveled to Vietnam told me about other groups and so I added trips to the Chicago and New Orleans areas to our more standard stops. On the east coast, in addition to the northern Virginia group, I added Boston and Philadelphia sessions.

Q: What sort of reception were you getting from these groups?

HARTER: It was always mixed. You'd get a lot of people, particularly older people who were still immersed in the war issues and they didn't see any value in dealing with the Communists whatsoever. Many of them thought we were naive and very ill-informed about the Communists' intentions. They exaggerated all of the stories of human rights violations, talking up poor treatment of prisoners and especially prisoners of conscience, mistreatment of ordinary people who opposed the government. They pointed to Vietnamese Government censorship, the lack of religious freedom, persecution of religious leaders who were trying to advocate greater openness in society. On the other hand, there was another generation of younger people who had come over as infants or ones who had been born and raised entirely in the United States. Most of them were much more open and they were much more interested in learning about their origins and the country that they had come from instead of just listening to the things their parents said. Now that's not to say that there were not also some younger folks who just took on hook, line and sinker the whole story that their parents had said about how terrible the Communists were. This group spouted the same line their parents had and they weren't willing to listen much to what we had to say. But for the most part, the generational difference meant a difference in outlook toward Vietnam.

I remember there was a young Vietnamese woman staffer for Congressman Tom Davis of Virginia and she fell into the group who got her beliefs from the older generation. Ambassador Peterson had convinced Davis to come to Hanoi for a visit since his district included the northern Virginia Vietnamese community centered around the Eden Center which has traditionally been very conservative. Congressman Davis agreed to come and promised to have an open mind about what he was going to see in Vietnam. He brought the staffer with him and she spent the entire time she was there trying to dig up negative stories to report to Davis' constituents in the Arlington area. And Davis, despite his promises to keep an open mind, got back to the States and denounced Hanoi's Government and society in his usual way. Congressman Randy Cunningham from California who was another of Peterson's Congressional friends who had served in the military in Vietnam also promised to come to Vietnam with an open mind and he did go away a lot more positive about things than Davis did. Cunningham was still not a full believer that we were seeing significant changes in Vietnam's behavior and in our ability to work with the Vietnamese but he didn't go all out to criticize them either. He probably didn't feel his re-election depended upon securing a lot of Vietnamese votes the way Davis did.

There were also quite a number of Vietnamese who grown up in Vietnam during the conflict and who later fled to the U.S. who had decided it was better to work constructively with the Vietnamese Government to achieve other objectives. Some of the people who worked the refugee issues or the family reunification issues decided it was better to be friendly and open and to develop a relationship with the Vietnamese government simply to make it easier to gain their refugee and family reunification objectives than it was to keep putting your thumb in the eye of the Vietnamese leaders. So, there were a number of well-respected community leaders, people in their late forties and early fifties who had this particular view and served as a bit of a contrast to the majority of the older generation. On the other hand, the leader of Boat People SOS was in that same age group and he was as rabid and active anti-Communist militant as any of the older generation who had been senior military or civilian leaders in South Vietnam.

On a couple of occasions, at the places I went to speak there were demonstrators and occasionally there were police outside the place I was speaking keeping the demonstrators at the required distance. On one of his first speaking tours, the Ambassador had run into a very vocal group in Orange County, California. The group was so vocal, so bitter and so nasty in their remarks in the auditorium that he could not deliver his remarks at all and he had to walk out. And of course for the negative audience that was a big victory. They had silenced "Hanoi's mouth-piece." On many occasions, both of us were referred to as spokesmen for the Hanoi government or "the Communist regime." Orange County probably was the most rabid anti-Communist, anti-Hanoi, and anti-normalization center in the U.S. Yet while I was in Hanoi, the elder of the two Sanchez sisters, Loretta, who represent that area in Congress visited Hanoi and she was far less doctrinaire about things than Tom Davis was. She didn't go off half-cocked in Vietnam, but she didn't pull any punches against Hanoi when she spoke to her constituents in the Vietnamese community in California who kept her in office.

While we were in Hanoi, a youngish Vietnamese businessman hung up a picture of Ho Chi Minh in the window of his video shop in Orange County. That action created a huge furor in the community and demonstrations were held. The young businessman was spat upon and pushed around as he left his store; his car was vandalized, and after hours his store was trashed. He got a certain amount of sympathy and attention from the ACLU and a number of other rights organizations, but then it turned out he was pirating videos in the store and was mass producing video copies of Vietnamese and Western titles that got him on the wrong side of the law. He compounded that by getting arrested on a wife beating charge, so it just turned into a total circus. But, it was one of those stories which demonstrated how very hostile some of these Vietnamese communities were about anything that had to do with Hanoi-run Vietnam.

Q: Well, we live right here within a mile of the Eden Center where I go eat from time to time. They fly the old flag. In many ways, the South Vietnamese flag is still the sort of symbol of Vietnam. It seems from my observance you can't fly what I call the North Vietnam, I mean the regular Vietnamese flag.

HARTER: Yeah. It's very difficult to do that, yes.: Well, it's one of these things that I'm sure everybody on the Vietnam desk groans over, because every time it happens, the Vietnamese government sends the U.S. Embassy a protest and the Vietnamese Embassy calls up the Vietnam Desk at State and says, "What are you going to do about this or what are you going to do about that?" And, it's usually just impossible to do anything about it, because the flag is flying on private property, it's most often not an issue the State Department can affect. We've had this same problem with China and the Taiwan flag over the years. When I was on the China Desk, I had to deal with local officials in Los Angeles and San Francisco a couple of times over promotions which the authorities had agreed to that featured Taiwan's flag. And, I had to deal with the old South Vietnamese flag issue when I was the Director on the VLC desk. In fact, on one occasion, the Vietnamese community in Houston had petitioned sub-city authorities for approval to construct a monument which would have included a statue of Vietnamese and American soldiers surmounted by South Vietnamese and American flags and bearing a plaque dedicated to the Vietnamese and American veterans who had "fought together, suffered and died at the hands of the Communist invaders". This was not just a proposal for an out-of-the-way location, it was designed to be placed on a highly visible thoroughfare on public land and, by the time I learned of it from Vietnamese Embassy officials, the request had already received the sub-city administration's approval. The Vietnamese Embassy naturally came to me to get this project stopped. I explained to the Embassy officials that all I could do was to point out to the local authorities how this didn't correspond to our current policy of recognizing and dealing with the Hanoi Government as the Government of Vietnam. I made clear to the Embassy that it was still a local decision and not one the federal government could direct. But, I did make a trip to Houston, and I did sit down with people in the City Planning Office and I talked to other people in the Mayor's Office. I explained to them all the problems that might occur that would have negative consequences for the city if the memorial was built as planned on public land. As a result the Houston officials got the sub-city officials to change their minds and the proposal for a memorial on public land was abandoned. There was a movement to relocate it on private property but I don't believe that ended up raising much money.

Q: What were the problems if it had occurred?

HARTER: Well, for example, it could affect the Vietnamese willingness to cooperate and deal with business companies based in Houston. Vietnam was an up and coming oil exporting and exploitation site. Houston is a huge oil business center. The Port of Houston could have had problems getting its products or ships into Vietnamese ports. The Vietnamese certainly would not look favorably on Houston as a site for a Consulate. And, as you probably know, there is a little bit of a competition among cities in the United States to get foreign consulates established in their jurisdictions. It is seen as prestigious and more foreign consulates often means greater business connections. But the main argument I made was to get Houston to keep the project off public land. If local people wanted to put up a memorial on private property, the Houston authoritiee - and the State Department - would be off the hook. Ultimately, that was enough to convince them. The Houston City Government officials decided there had been some irregularities in the original vote to approve this project. The city authorities noted there were other competing community requests to use the public land for youth recreation. These plans would not work well with the installation of a monument and its associated walkways and seating. So, they were able to wiggle their way out of the whole issue. But, ultimately there's virtually nothing you can do to stop people from setting up their monuments, memorials and flags on private property. I shouldn't be so categorical. There's always the possibility you could make an argument about these memorials creating a public nuisance or a disturbance in a residential setting, but that's going to require more lawyers and more court actions to block those activities.

Q: Well, I may have this wrong, but we were talking about the Eden Center which is a big place. They had a ceremony there some years ago and I think some Vietnamese and Vietnamese veterans were there. A Vietnamese guy got quite drunk and urinated on a Vietnamese flag and he was killed. And, they never found out who did it. I mean, it was sort of a wild action.

HARTER: Yes, I remember that incident too. There are a number of Vietnamese-run organizations in this area that work with the disabled or with Indochinese refugees who counted on the Vietnamese community for their support. These organizations traditionally would also petition the U.S. government for funding and support. The groups would hold periodic social meetings and fund-raiser events out at the Eden Center or at some other big restaurant in the area. These events would all feature the South Vietnamese flag up on the wall. The program would start with the participants singing the old South Vietnamese anthem. Many of the attendees would wear their Vietnamese military uniforms and all their decorations and there would be patriotic speeches extolling the virtues of South Vietnam and attacking the communists. And, because the State Department and AID and other U.S. government agencies were all involved in these projects, we would also be invited. When EAP, or Refugee Bureau or AID officials attended these functions we were often asked to deliver remarks on refugee and aid policies for the Vietnamese community.

Once we normalized diplomatic relations I went to several of these northern Virginia organizations and told their leaders nobody in the U.S. government would be attending any of the fund-raising functions or anniversary celebrations unless the visible links to South Vietnam were dispensed with. There was to be no more South Vietnamese flag on the wall, no more South Vietnamese anthem being played or sung, and no more anti-Hanoi speeches if they expected a U.S. Government representative to participate in the programs. I told them as representatives of the U.S. Government we couldn't attend a program and make a presentation with all of this contradictory material in the background. Nonetheless, I also made clear that whatever their decision about how they dealt with my requirements, I told them we'd continue to provide funds for their organizations because they met our objectives to channel money and programs into resettlement efforts for needy refugees or to help the disabled still in Vietnam. I also didn't try to alter how they conducted their regular business meetings. My concern was the community-wide promotional efforts where they wanted an "official" U.S. presence. For the most part, the organizations in northern Virginia complied and they kept the old regime paraphernalia out of their public events. The flags and uniforms and anthems probably continued as part of the regular meetings and more private gatherings but that wasn't my concern. I just didn't want more arguments with the Vietnamese Embassy about U.S. officials taking part in events that glorified the old regime. I had some objections from a few of the American officials about this policy, but once I discussed it with them they too realized it was no longer appropriate, even if they didn't like the arrangements and had their own hearts tied to the former regime in Saigon.

Now, from time to time when I went out and spoke at meetings of Vietnamese associations around the country I'd get to a place and there'd be the South Vietnamese flag up on the wall, often right behind where I'd stand to speak so it would appear in any photos taken during my remarks. I didn't have any choice about that. I used to advise groups where I was scheduled to speak about not putting up the old flags, but it was difficult to control from long distance. And, of course, many of these organizations needed financial contributions from their local Vietnamese communities to continue to provide social services so it was difficult for them to cut off their base of support. But, I didn't walk out or refuse to speak until the flag was removed. I told people when I got up and spoke that I knew the flag and what it symbolized, and that I too had served under the U.S. flag and alongside that Vietnamese flag during the war. But I also made a point of emphasizing it was not the flag of the Government of Vietnam that we recognized today and I left it at that.

Q: And you were in Vietnam from when to when?

HARTER: Summer of '97 until the summer of 2001.

Q: You initially were working in Ho Chi Minh City?

HARTER: No. I did not go to Ho Chi Minh City at all. Because of the long delay for Peterson's appointment and subsequent arrival in Hanoi, we were too far behind schedule with the opening of the Consulate General for me to go there first. I was in Hanoi throughout my assignment. But, the Ambassador still put me in charge of getting the mission opened down there and asked me to handle all of the supervision and coordination activities until we actually got a Consul General on the ground. The Foreign Service Officer I had chosen to be the head of the Consular Section in Ho Chi Minh City was also to serve as the number two at the ConGen and she had already been in Hanoi for a few months. She went to Ho Chi Minh City with some of the consular and admin personnel to set up shop in the old interview compound and she held the reins in the interim until the Consul General actually arrived. She was not a member of the Senior Foreign Service, but certainly had a strong consular background and that was clearly going to be the main work for the operations in the south. As we had done with the Consulate General in Guangzhou in China, we centered all of our immigrant visa work in Ho Chi Minh City since all of our likely applicants were based in the southern part of the country. Once the office was open, I generally went down every six weeks or so to see how things were going operationally as well as to keep tabs on any problems that might have developed. During the early phase of operations, the cramped work space and lack of communications created a number of misunderstandings among the people assigned there that required a tempering hand from outside.

The majority of all the people that you're going to deal with for immigrant visas will be in the southern half of the country. But you still needed a Consular Section to cover the north. In Hanoi, the consular officers would provide services for Americans, handle official and diplomatic visas for Vietnamese Government personnel and provide visitors visas, the latter mostly for people who wanted to do business with the United States, and some student visas. But, the senior consular people, the ones with the most experience were assigned to work as unit heads for the Consulate General in the south.

Q: Could you give us a background in the organization of the Mission in Hanoi, main officers, and what you though were the first problems to approach upon your arrival?

HARTER: When we opened in Hanoi, we committed to bringing in a standard mix of State Department functional elements - consular, political, economic, and administrative officers - and we had United States Information Agency, Foreign Commercial Service, and Defense Attachï¿½ personnel from other elements of the Government. The POW/MIA Office continued as a separate Embassy unit apart from the Defense Attachï¿½ Office. We also established a Marine Security Guard detachment at the beginning. After a few months, we added a medical doctor from the Center for Diseases Control in Atlanta to coordinate our medical assistance work in Vietnam. AID did not open an office during the initial phase of our set-up and it was only toward the end of my time in Hanoi that we had AID personnel coming into the country on a regular basis preparing to set up a permanent presence. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) personnel went to Ho Chi Minh City once the new building was completed and we were fully operational. The Drug Enforcement Agency did not have an office in Hanoi until later on. I am not absolutely certain, but I don't believe the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) established a presence in Hanoi when the Embassy first opened, but they were there well before I left. After the main Embassy building had been in operation for some time, FCS and FAS leased office space in a separate office facility near the Embassy building. When we took over that space, we also acquired another floor in the building to handle our consular operations. Despite our thoughts we'd need only a limited staff in the north, the volume of student and business visas quickly surpassed our estimates and the Consular Section daily business activities outgrew the limited Embassy office space. USIA maintained its own separate facility in a more central part of the city.

Operationally, the first priorities for Embassy personnel were focused on making the office building into a functional Embassy. This meant upgrading most of the infrastructure, installing greater support beams to handle additional weight on the various floors. It meant reconfiguring space for public access for the consular unit until we were able to find a bigger facility for them to use. It meant installing all the basic security features needed to meet USG standards. As an office building on a main street, however, we had no setback, no gated entrance, no side or rear perimeter walls above six feet, and only about two or three feet between the perimeter walls and the building on the sides. We built a larger wall with a steel gate in front of the building, but the gate was probably only ten feet from the entrance door. At one point, one of our neighbors built a temporary structure up against our wall and also against our building. FBO and DS ignored our requests to install security barriers against this intrusion and the local authorities were deaf to our requests to have the structure removed.

Another early task required Ambassador Peterson and I to develop working relationships with many members of the Hanoi official community who were less open about the new relationship between our two countries than those we had previously been dealing with in the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Trade. But, by and large our efforts to get into contact with the national government officials went well. It was also very important to keep up momentum on the POW/MIA front. After Ambassador Peterson participated in the first few regular bilateral meetings between the POW/MIA Accounting Office and their Vietnamese counterparts, I regularly attended the scheduled sessions where the planning of future investigations and excavations was worked out. Ambassador Peterson and I also would go out to the excavation sites when the CIL-HI teams were working there and we both were always at the airport repatriation ceremonies when we boarded recovered remains on a U.S. military aircraft to take them back to Hawaii for identification. Our direct involvement in the POW/MIA dialogue often helped to smooth over disagreements and I believe it convinced the Vietnamese that the issue remained a serious one for the U.S. side even though we had achieved normalization of relations.

The biggest bilateral issue we had to deal with was to move from normalization of diplomatic relations to normalization of trade and economic relations. Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam had made this the centerpiece of his own bilateral dialogue with the U.S. When he came to the U.S. for the UN General Assembly session and met with American officials in the mid-1990s up through his dialogues with Warren Christopher in Hanoi after normalization and his first official trip to the U.S. in 1998, on each occasion he pressed for the normalization of economic relations. As a communist country, Vietnam was prohibited from receiving most favored nation treatment without a regular annual waiver of the Jackson-Vanik provisions of the Congressional Trade Act - I think it was from the mid-1970s. These provisions required certification by the President that the country in question permitted freedom of emigration and President Clinton did make that certification for the first time in 1998. Now one would think with the operation of the orderly departure program to facilitate emigration this would not have been a problem. But this again was Vietnam, a war-time enemy, and so nothing was ever very straight-forward and easy to achieve.

But even with the annual waiver, this still didn't get Vietnam Most Favored Nation (MFN) treatment. The trade agreement negotiations were especially difficult because there were very few sophisticated economists in Hanoi who could explain to the old-fashioned communist leadership all of the ins and outs of modern economic principles or trade requirements. Most of these communist leaders saw the capitalist trade system as anathema and so we spent probably two years getting through the basics. We even had an agreement in hand in the summer of 1999 only to have the Vietnamese leadership sit on the agreement for over a year because there was no will to follow through and because we had not pushed the issue effectively. When we finally did reach agreement we still had to get the agreement through the U.S. Congress. Moreover the President's certification of Vietnam's freedom of emigration policies was also subject to Congressional review and so that too had created a few skipped heartbeats each time it came before the Congress. Nonetheless, we did reach an agreement on trade and the U.S. Congress and the Vietnamese National Assembly ratified the agreement and it went into effect at the end of 2001, shortly after I left Vietnam. At least I was there when we signed all the agreements in Hanoi so I was pretty sure everything would be finalized when I did leave the country.

Q: When you got to Hanoi how did you find, first place, how did you find the Vietnamese government, the officials you were dealing with?

HARTER: Well, the people that I was dealing with when I was in VLC and when I first got there were initially all Foreign Ministry cadres. The Foreign Ministry people I was dealing with were all people who had been working on U.S. affairs for a long period of time. Le Van Bang, for example, who moved from their UN Mission down to Washington, DC as Chargï¿½ and then became the Ambassador, had been working on U.S. affairs for 20 some years. The head of the America's Department, Nguyen Manh Phong, had been educated in Cuba, had served in Cuba, but aside from one tour in South America, I believe he had spent all the rest of his time in the Foreign Ministry working on the U.S. A number of people who had leadership roles in the America's Department were fluent in English. Some others were not so fluent, but the majority of the folks we dealt with were all people who had been trained in English with the expectation they would move into diplomatic posts in the U.S. once normalization occurred. And of course, as I've mentioned before, we had talked about normalization as early as the late 1970s. And so there was already this momentum within the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry focused on eventual normalization of relations with the U.S. and the Vietnamese maintained it over the intervening decades. Then when it looked like there was going to be a possibility to complete the process in the 1990s as Vietnam gradually wound down its Cambodia adventure they added new people to the mix to build up their cadre base with some younger officers.

But, like the Ambassador, I went around to meet people in a lot of different ministries and government offices. A lot of the people in those offices were very narrowly focused and many had a very limited education. A lot of the "educated" cadres who had Eastern European and Soviet academic backgrounds in what we would consider the social sciences did not have a lot of depth. Their understanding of "western" ways was very limited. The people who had had technical or engineering training, even from Soviet bloc universities, tended to be more open and much more interested in rapidly building up a relationship with the United States. A lot of the people who were more narrowly focused, as well as a lot of the people who had leadership responsibilities in party organizations were very narrow. There were also different cliques within the leadership. There were groups that were China-leaning; there were groups that were Moscow- leaning; there were groups that didn't want to have much to do with either China or Russia. But even those who were less ideologically-inclined remained very leery of us and very leery of what might come of a relationship with the U.S. Anything we did or proposed to do with the Vietnamese was always viewed with suspicion by traditionalist Party leaders. That group was also suspicious of any Ministers who were more open to western ideas and that's why we had so much difficulty with the Trade agreement. Nonetheless, even the old fashioned cadre shared the view the U.S. relationship was the key to modernizing the Vietnamese economy.

Once we had normalized relations, I believed it was important to keep up the semblance of momentum in the relationship. I was concerned once we normalized relations, most people in the Clinton Administration would have been just as happy to focus on entirely different issues and it would have taken us forever to get things done with Vietnam. So, right after normalization, I took advantage of the planned Asia travel of Secretary of State Christopher to attend the annual ASEAN dialogue meetings as an excuse to get him to Hanoi. Working with the Vietnamese Chargï¿½, we worked out a "document" for Secretary Christopher and Foreign Minister Cam to sign which "formalized" the establishment of diplomatic relations. It wasn't necessary to do this but it was one of those things that we used to call a "deliverable", something you did which made the trip worthwhile because it created a symbol of activity and accomplishment. You'll recall I said the opening of the Consulate General in Guangzhou, China was a "deliverable" for Vice President Mondale. Nobody was quite sure how the relationship was going to evolve and on the U.S. side the only thing certain was everything was going to continue to move incrementally - find a building, send a chargï¿½, find an Ambassador, wait to get him nominated and approved, etc, etc. So on the occasion of Christopher's visit, the head of the America's Department and I stood behind the two Foreign Ministers and passed the books for them to sign on the establishment of diplomatic relations and we had a very nice photo opportunity and a document to add to the normalization files in the Department. I don't think the photo got a lot of play in the U.S., but the signing shot was part of the Vietnamese History Museum's display of activities in the normalization of relations with the U.S. and it remained in a prominent display area in the Museum for a number of years.

I got off on this digression because I was talking about the trade issue and how it was important to the Vietnamese. During Christopher's visit, Foreign Minister Cam made the trade relationship issue the focal point of his discussions with the Secretary. And the trade dialogue became one of the momentum issues we were able to use to keep up a semblance of forward movement during the period when we only had Chargï¿½s in the two capitals.

Q: What were you observing there? You're saying that many of the ministers and people from the cadre looking with great suspicion on diplomatic or no diplomatic relations and the process of Americanization. You know, the jeans, the Coke, the clothing...

HARTER: When I got there, Baskin-Robbins (ice cream franchise) was already there - it had three locations inside Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Kentucky Fried Chicken was there. Baskin Robbins closed in Hanoi after only a short time, but I think KFC was still in HCMC when I left. McDonald's hadn't yet entered the market because they couldn't work out a steady domestic supply chain of acceptable beef and potatoes.

Q: Young people, well attuned to everything? Had the pirated movies and -

HARTER: Yeah, the movies were there, but they all came from China. The Vietnamese had not yet fully subscribed to what the Chinese called "reform and opening" of the economy. They were still far more conservative than the Chinese. In the early 1990s, the Vietnamese made a few steps toward opening up but they quickly retreated. After normalization with the U.S., they again took some tentative steps but they again pulled back. Vietnam had another handicap, and that was in limited computer literacy and computer use. During the normalization era, say 1995 through 1997 or 1998, there still wasn't much evidence of computers in the government or even in businesses and schools. It was 1999 and 2000 before you started to see more widespread use of computers, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City.

The country was also security conscious. We regularly had problems with the Public Security Ministry. The Ministry wanted to be involved in the decision-making process about how we operated in the country. Our Embassy people were being watched and followed and there was occasional harassment. Embassy local hire personnel were employed by the Vietnamese Government Services Bureau and they had to attend meetings and report on what U.S. personnel did in the Embassy. Some of us, I suspect, probably were monitored all the time. There were probably monitoring devices directed at our building from outside and we could see someone sitting in a building across the street from us watching our building. He sat in the shadows of a doorway on the second floor of that building and just watched.

One of the big issues for the Embassy in Hanoi, much as it is elsewhere in the world, was to get our officers out into the country to talk to people and find out what was going on. In Hanoi, it was a little bit different because we were coming in cold or out of the cold after a long hiatus with no exposure to the Vietnamese people or the country. And while to a certain extent we were a "novelty", we were also potentially a "hazard" because somebody was likely to follow up on wherever we went and whomever we talked to to see what we had asked about.

The Ambassador led the charge to get out and to be seen around the country. He set a goal of visiting all of Vietnam's 63 provinces and provincial level cities. He may have missed four or five before he departed. Because he did so much travel, I didn't get out to the provinces very often, except when I traveled to MIA excavation sites. I'd occasionally go to one of the resort or tourist areas, so I did get to Nha Trang, Hue, and Da Nang in the south, and Haiphong, Sapa and Ha Long Bay in the north. I spent most of my time out of Hanoi working with the staff in Ho Chi Minh City. I made sure we had a good travel budget from EAP so that our political and economic officers could get out and travel. Most of these people were language officers and some of them were fluent in Vietnamese. A few were older officers who had been in Vietnam during the war and had Vietnamese spouses. Some of the younger officers had been doing refugee interviews in Ho Chi Minh City during the early days of orderly departure and they knew the language of the streets. Virtually everybody had some level of FSI Vietnamese training before coming to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Overall the officers assigned there were top notch.

Q: Did some from the street scene, which was seen in society in Hanoi and what you would see in Ho Chi Minh City, was there distinct contrast or not?

HARTER: Oh yes, there was definitely a contrast. In Hanoi, you still had a much more rigid, less open society. You had the start up of small businesses, street-side stalls and houses where the ground floor had been converted into shops with the owners engaged in some commercial enterprise. This was part of the Vietnamese economic modernization effort which permitted individual "capitalist" enterprise activity. In the South, you had private factories; you had large scale trading businesses; you had real entrepreneurial creativity and not just the basic, start-up street-stall or shop-house. You had a much more freewheeling and open society and people who sought out restaurants and places for entertainment and recreation. There was more money from business activity. And, very importantly, there were large amounts of remittances from Vietnamese relatives overseas. These remittances created a cash and investment flow that sped up that economic activity in the south. The south was also more prosperous agriculturally than the north. The north had some raw materials and a mining, extraction industry component which the south lacked until there was some development of the oil industry. But basic food supply for the population was a problem in the north and it was virtually never a problem in the south. Even if you had terrible floods and damage from typhoons, the southern provinces could still maintain self-sufficiency in foodstuffs. Subject to similar natural phenomena, the north was in crisis and even in the best of harvest years it had to count on the southern provinces for food staples. In the south, there was a more open appreciation and response to the presence of foreigners, not just Americans, but everybody. You had the opportunity to be more socially engaged with people. People were much more willing to initiate a conversation or to respond to questions about general issues and problems. There were occasionally people in the north who would do the same, but that was not very common.

One of the things that I tried to do while working in the Embassy was to identify a few people in responsible positions and different parts of the Vietnamese Government I could go to and talk to in an "off-the-record" manner to try to prep them on issues or to get a feel from them how certain actions might be perceived. I'd go in to a couple of these people and say "Look, we've got a potential problem coming up in our relationship. I need you to make sure that people on your side understand the U.S. approach and where we're going with this proposal or what's going to happen, or I need to get a feel for how you think the Vietnamese authorities will react to such and such." There was a person I could talk to like this in the Office of the Government who proved to be especially important in this regard. The Office of the Government was an Executive Secretary type of office for the Prime Minister with a combined NSC and domestic policy focus. It provided policy advice and recommendations for the Prime Minister based on its own research work and on its tasking of various ministries for information. The Prime Minister in Vietnam held a much more important power position than the President. So, I used this contact to go back and forth on issues of importance.

I also dealt with a person in the Foreign Ministry in the same way. He looked at overall foreign policy issues, and another person in the America's Department of the Foreign Ministry who I could meet with and give him a heads-up on an important bilateral issue that was about to break just to see how we could make sure it didn't disrupt our relations and mutual understanding. I tired very hard to establish the same kind of contact with a military man in the Public Security Ministry but he was much more elusive and very hard to pin down. I probably met with him alone on only two or three occasions during my entire tour. I suspect he had to be more cautious because of the Ministry he worked in. And, I occasionally met with another individual who was primarily a contact for other people in the mission, but he was still someone I could go to in that same vein and say, "You have a different set of contacts and different set of people that you work with, how is this going to play, or we've got a real problem coming up, what do you think?"

I found that using this informal system of contacts and pre-emptive discussion of potential problem issues did help to lessen misunderstandings and limit Vietnamese over-reaction to some of our activities. This was particularly important when we were dealing with the visit of President Clinton to Vietnam. I knew from previous experience there were certain things the White House staff would cram down our throats in terms of how they wanted things done and how they expected the Vietnamese to handle certain requirements. I was able to use this informal contact arrangement and go to a couple of key Vietnamese officials and say, "Look, you don't like this plan, I don't like it either, and a lot of us think this is a silly arrangement, but this is the only way "they" will let it happen - we just have to do it this way, because "they" (they being the White House staff) will not take no for an answer." I mean that's one of the reasons I guess the Clintons' visit was as successful as it was. By going through this back channel, I was able to make the Vietnamese understand that ultimately they didn't have a choice on how certain scenarios would play out if they wanted the visit to take place. Obviously, there were other issues where the Vietnamese wanted certain things to be done a certain way that we were able to compromise on. These were issues considered unimportant by the White House and by agreeing to those conditions when they were proposed by the Vietnamese it made it seem as though there was a bit of a balance.

Q: We're talking about Secret Service stuff aren't we?

HARTER: Well, no. Some of the issues involved the Secret Service, and their security requirements, but some of it is just - it's the whole play of events and how they would be organized and how White House staff wanted to manage just about every phase of every activity. For example, one of President Clinton's events was a public address to the Vietnamese people, just like he had done in China on his first visit there. Embassy Hanoi sold this idea to the White House and the Washington bureaucracy. So, it was in the Embassy's interest to make sure it would work, even though the Vietnamese were really very, very hesitant about agreeing to his making the speech. But, after a lot of negotiating on how and where it would happen, the proposal worked. The President addressed a group of students at a prominent university and the speech was broadcast throughout the country - unlike in China where it did not go beyond the immediate auditorium audience. We worked through all the problems and the speech came off well and the Vietnamese in the end were not unhappy with it.

But in spite of all our efforts to create this opportunity to communicate with ordinary people, there was still a major screw-up as the speech was delivered in a language that most Vietnamese didn't understand. Language Services in the Department assigned a stateside interpreter to go along with the President, rather than rely on the Vietnamese-American interpreter we had in Hanoi. The interpreter in Hanoi was a State Department Language Services employee assigned to work with the Ambassador, just the way we had an interpreter working with our Ambassador in China. The man Language Services assigned to interpret for the President had virtually no experience dealing with the language then being used in Vietnam. His terminology was all wrong and he used old language styles common to the wartime era in the south. He didn't know the current northern terminology and he spoke in the southern dialect. This created a negative reaction among a lot of people when they heard the President's speech. The university audience and the majority of the Vietnamese, all born since the end of the war, did not understand a lot of the words he used and older people were unhappy that he was using the old terminology.

Vietnamese officials were originally upset by this but because we had worked on this issue for so long in advance of the visit, we had permission to distribute a printed version of the speech - something which again the PRC officials had not permitted for Clinton's China speech - and we made sure the printed version of the speech was translated by our interpreter at the Embassy. The Vietnamese Government left this arrangement entirely to us and there was no effort to censor or alter the speech. Once the text of the speech was out in print, the initial negative public reaction faded and the overall impression of the Clinton remarks was highly favorable.

Now, in fairness to Language Services, part of the problem was because the White House made the final call. The Ambassador's interpreter had been pulled into an earlier one of the President's bilateral meetings with no forewarning and somebody on the White House staff didn't like the way the translation activity worked out at that meeting. So, White House staff said, "we're going with our guy (the Washington interpreter) for the President's speech." The Ambassador never had a chance to tell the President or the staff why that was not a good idea. So, even with your best organized plans, with your best intentions, things can sometimes get messed up. In the end Language Services agreed with us, they should have been more attentive to the language differences and they instituted a plan to train their Vietnamese-language interpreters to better handle the current language. Fortunately too, as I said, the initial audience negative reaction quickly became a positive one once the speech text was widely circulated.

Q: Well, as long as it's terrible, I mean it's something we have all run into and that is after you have an expatriate community the language changes and people start picking, I mean it just doesn't sound right.

HARTER: No. To start with there is a distinct Northern and a distinct Southern pronunciation of the language. There's a whole different vocabulary set for a communist political and economic system. The U.S.-based interpreter had missed out on a 25-year evolution of his native language and he simply didn't know the current patois. Our interpreter in Hanoi experienced this same situation when he arrived to work for the Ambassador. He started out using the wrong words and some people were offended. Some of the people in the Foreign Ministry explained to him what was wrong and he adapted. He studied the new terminology and listened to the way the people in Hanoi spoke. When Clinton arrived, he'd already had a couple of years experience under his belt, but the fellow assigned from Washington to go on the trip came in cold and was at a terrible disadvantage which he didn't seem to recognize.

Q: Did you while you were there, I would think that this, you're talking about the rather rigid orthodox, nomenclature or whatever you want to call it of the governing party you brought up and strictly sort of Marxist principles and all. But changes have swept through Russia, Eastern Europe, China, I mean Marxism was no longer even an issue. And, here is Vietnam with a very clever; I mean these are not passive people as we all know. What was happening there? Were they questioning and asking you or anybody?

HARTER: When we were there, the top leaders were still the war-time generation leaders. The people who were in Hanoi and the party, in the government, in the military, those top people were all first generation war-time leaders. They were Ho Chi Minh's lieutenants; they were Ho Chi Minh's comrades-in-arms. The Prime Minister, Vo Van Kiet, had been the head of the underground political movement in the South. The most well-know Hanoi military leader, General Vo Nguyen Giap, who defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu and then developed the strategy to oust the Saigon regime was still alive, but he was actually becoming an outspoken critic of Party orthodoxy. He was generally kept out of sight. But, the military who had been commanders of the brigades and divisions that had launched the invasion of the South were the current military leaders. Party General Secretary Do Muoi, Presidents Le Duc Anh and Tran Duc Luong, and Prime Ministers Vo Van Kiet and Phan Van Khai all represented the war-time era.

The first change in office from this war-time leadership was the election of a man who turned out to be an absolute disaster as the Party General Secretary. Le Kha Phieu was from the security apparatus of the Vietnamese military. He was from the commissar or party side of the military. He started out trying to cultivate an image of openness for the Party and after his selection he went out to meet people around the country. He asked questions about issues of interest to the people in the cities and the countryside and he tried to appear sympathetic and understanding. But in no time, you could see he was totally insecure and uncertain about himself and he became more and more isolated within the leadership. Neither the Party nor the Government seemed capable of making a decision on policy issues with him in charge.

The Party and Government decision-making process had been in the hands of a collective leadership, but one in which the top leaders were expected to carry more weight than others. Le Kha Phieu carried no weight at all. He was clearly a last-minute fill-in as General Secretary because the collective leadership could not come to a decision on how to balance the two competing power blocs in the leadership, which one traditionally categorized as the modernizers and the ideologues. While the ideologues had kept the modernization process moving ahead at a very slow pace during the leadership of Do Muoi, under Le Kha Phieu things seemed to stagnate. The Vietnamese could not make concrete decisions to do much of anything. The foreign business community was totally frustrated. The U.S. and European governments who were trying to deal with the Vietnamese government on development assistance and the World Bank which was committing large amounts of money to assist the Vietnamese in developing modern economic institutions and some development projects were just running their heads into brick walls.

The international financial institutions (IFIs) had a major effort underway in Vietnam to assist in modernizing the economic operations and organizations in the country. The man who represented the group at large was the Vietnam Country Director of the World Bank. He believed the Vietnamese would not respond to criticism, so all he did was say how wonderful the Vietnamese were working at reforming the economic system and then suggesting a few tweaks here and there that might make it better. The donor community, the nations who put up the money that was provided for the Bank and other IFI groups, was increasingly frustrated, and both the Ambassador and I were very outspoken in these donor gatherings about how things were not just fine and that the Vietnamese were not getting anywhere on instituting reform measures. The Vietnamese happily basked in his praise but nothing was getting done. Money that had been allotted for projects years before was still unspent because the Vietnamese couldn't make decisions on finalizing the projects. Projects that were being identified as clear targets for infrastructure development and for which there was money, didn't get started on time. No decisions were made. I talked to a friend of mine a month ago about what he's been doing recently in Vietnam. He is a consultant to a big U.S. engineering firm. He said he's still working to try and get a portion of a World Bank funded hydro-electric power grid in the northern part of Vietnam for his company. That project should have been underway in 2000. It was postponed time after time, perhaps half-a- dozen different times between 2000 and 2001, while I was still in Vietnam. The Vietnamese leaders decided the first plan created a dam that was too big. They said they wanted something smaller. Then the next design was judged to be too small - it ought to be something in between the two previous designs. First it was an issue of the large dam creating too big of a flooded area behind the dam so that too many people would be displaced and too many hectares of land would be swallowed up by the man-made lake. Then there was a concern that the smaller version wouldn't produce enough electricity, even though all of this was being created against an estimated "potential demand" inside Vietnam and a good part of the project was initially being designed to provide electricity that would be sold in neighboring Laos. There was always a reason, there was always an excuse not to do anything and to put off making the decision. And, now here we are in 2004, and my friend is still working on getting a share of a project that should have been decided on and launched four years ago and now should already be producing electricity. This exemplified how the Vietnamese weren't, and in some cases still haven't been, making decisions.

Q: What was happening in the universities? One, did we have much contact with them and was sort of, the dead hand of Marxism dominating?

HARTER: The "dead hand" was there in the universities, but it really wasn't that pervasive. The schools and the universities were really teaching in a much more open way. The focus was on technology and economics without the Marxist interpretations. A lot of U.S. institutions, European institutions had come in and established relationships with various universities in Vietnam. They sent teachers and professors and they even sent students to the Vietnamese institutions. U.S. and European universities accepted Vietnamese students for extended periods of time. The schools in the south were also much more open than those in the north. The academics and students from abroad said they had the feeling they were involved in a more technological, more modern society than you would otherwise expect from what you saw day to day on the streets. Yes, they still taught the old ideology, Marxism and Communism classes and they talked about the role of the state in directing the economic operations of the nation. But, in fact the rest of what they did in the classrooms was pretty open. There wasn't much of a focus on Western literature or Western social sciences, but you still had a lot of programs focused in the technical areas, and on modern business practices and economic theory, and these elements opened up still more opportunity to learn about the Western world. That was very, very prevalent in schools. I mean, we had a lot of kids at the Embassy, and I say kids, because these were people who came to work at the Embassy and at the Consulate General who were in their 20s. Most were high school graduates and some were college graduates who were very much more flexible and more open in the way they reacted to everything. They were curious, inquisitive about the kinds of things that were going on in the rest of the world. They saw working at the Embassy as an opportunity to learn more and to get a better understanding of what had been happening outside Vietnam. They didn't have any experience or direct impressions of the war and they were very certainly not looking backwards, they wanted to move ahead.

Q: The computer and the internet has become so prevalent almost everywhere.

HARTER: Yeah, and that was to be the case in Vietnam, certainly much more so after 2000-2001.

Q: I mean, this is almost the last barrier. I mean once it gets fully integrated into a system, it's very difficult to -

HARTER: But, see the Vietnamese had controls, even more effective and stringent than the ones used by the Chinese. They had official nets that filtered and screened all of the material that was available and restricted what was accessible before it got to the audience at the computer terminal. There were a very limited number of opportunities to go beyond the controlled net. Now, I know people at the embassy who said with a little bit of expertise you can get around anything. And, with a little bit of, you know, fooling around you can get around the firewalls and into the restricted sites. But, a lot of people didn't have their own computers. People went to cyber cafes or small shops to access store computers. The few times I went into cyber cafes or went into shop houses, I saw more people playing games and sending e-mails than actually studying and using the computers as a vehicle for learning. So, while yes internet use and access was growing and there was more opportunity to use it, the internet was still not the big revolution in Vietnam that it was in other parts of the world until the time I was about to leave Vietnam in 2001.

Q: How about employment?

HARTER: Employment was still largely government-controlled, but more and more people were able to go out and seek work on their own. Employment was an issue that the Embassy had to deal with right from the beginning. As in most communist societies, the government wanted us to hire people through them and their labor exchange, the Services Bureau. Initially the first few people we took, we did hire that way, because we didn't have time to go out and interview. But, as soon as that first batch was in and we got our first American staff organized, we started recruiting directly. We went out and we negotiated contracts with the individuals. We did not negotiate contracts with the State labor office. After I arrived in Hanoi, I spent a lot of time arguing with the Vietnamese security folks and those who ran the Services Bureau. Our Admin team dealt day-to-day with the official labor office and their security people, but every time it came down to the issue of signing the labor contract, I was the heavy. I would go to the meeting with the Vietnamese officials and tell them we were not going to hire exclusively through them. We agreed we would interview the applicants they recommended but we would not commit to hire any of them in advance. In addition, we couldn't stop the Vietnamese Government from requiring the people we hired to join their official labor unit, the Services Bureau, but we categorically refused to be forced to hire people from that labor unit to start with. Most of the employees at the Embassy and the Consulate General were individuals who applied directly to work for us when we advertised openings in the local media.

I also began a process to turn our Vietnamese local hire employees in a different direction. I began by organizing the Vietnamese employees of the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and later those at the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City into an employees association. Our first group of employees in Hanoi had put together a sort of a welfare association to provide mutual assistance to one another when individuals had financial problems. I expanded their focus so they could meet with me to deal with their interests as Embassy employees. They could talk about job mobility, wages and salaries, supervisory relationships. Then I took it a step further and started discussing their relationship with the Labor Department and the Services Bureau. I explained how we would deal with those offices for them and how we would protect them if they had problems with those units. Chris Runckle had started the first local employees selling Liaison Office Hanoi T-shirts as a way of earning money for their welfare association. I got them to expand this to coffee mugs and other Embassy Hanoi labeled items which were always a big seller with delegations and visitors to the Embassy.

I took that same idea from Hanoi and went down to Ho Chi Minh City where we had five times as many local employees and created the exact same type of organization. Strangely enough, in more liberal and open Ho Chi Minh City it took more time down there to convince people to create the association because they were actually concerned about how the Government would react to this sort of an organization. They hadn't created their own internal welfare organization and so I had to convince them to start that as the first stage. Once I convinced them it made sense to have a way to deal with employee emergency situations, the rest of the idea gradually coalesced and they too formed a more broadly focused organization. By the time I left, the two associations were working together. In addition, I got the more activist Hanoi employees to go out and liaise with their counterparts in other embassies in Hanoi. I urged them to organize among themselves for mutual support whenever there were different disputes or contentious issues with the Services Bureau. I then met with a number of other DCM-equivalent officials in the bigger embassies to create a dialogue on labor issues that affected all of us. The dialogue group included the Australians, the Canadians and Brits, the French, and the Dutch, and I talked with them about creating a new labor hiring operation that was independent of the government. Once they got into the idea of the association and its potential as an advocacy group for better employment conditions under the Vietnamese Labor Bureau, the Ho Chi Minh City employees became even more aggressive than the employees in Hanoi. Our Ho Chi Minh City employees went out and made the connections with the other locally hired Consulate staff and they started a similar dialogue there to the one I had begun in Hanoi.

Q: Well, I would have thought that the Vietnamese government would have stepped right in and squashed it.

HARTER: They didn't, or at least they didn't do it effectively. They tried to intimidate people, but they did so with old fashioned methods that people weren't going to put up with anymore. Society had changed enough so that their intimidation effort wasn't effective and it only built resentment against the government. The local employees were not afraid to step up and say no when the government pushed in a direction they did not want to move. This didn't happen immediately. It took time. I told the people in Ho Chi Minh City about the Hanoi T-shirt operation and pushed them to do the coffee cup design, pointing out how there would quickly be far more American visitors in the Ho Chi Minh City area than there would be in Hanoi. And, they did it and soon they were making a good deal of money for their employees' welfare association. Once they saw the benefit they could derive from working together, the Ho Chi Minh City employees really got into the whole idea of developing their own employee related initiatives.

Q: What was your relation with the other major embassies? I'm thinking of the French. I would have thought the French would have wanted to jump in with both feet. They'd been there the whole time.

HARTER: The French were a little bit of a problem in the diplomatic corps, but they had great Bastille Day affairs. The first French Ambassador Peterson and I dealt with was "old school". He was an older fellow, with white hair, and very dignified. His successor was younger, but more pompous than his predecessor, and very full of himself. His goal was to demonstrate that France was still an important player in Vietnam and a first-rate world power. While we were there, he organized a Francophone summit meeting in Hanoi. It was hilarious the way things worked out. All of the various Francophone countries sent their top leaders for several days and it demonstrated to the Vietnamese just how bad a big state visit could be. There were 30 or 40 different heads of government at this meeting. And, of course, it was de rigueur they had to do everything in French. But, the Vietnamese hadn't been doing much of anything in French since the 1950s. At the famous Metropole Hotel, an old-fashioned French owned and managed hotel in Hanoi, the story was the only person the French speakers could converse with was the General Manger because he was the only one who spoke French. Of course, he was the only one there who was French. So, the Embassy and the Metropole instituted a crash language program to train all of the employees to be able to say a few basic phrases in French. Every time a foreigner came into the hotel, someone tried to practice their French but few people understood them. As soon as the summit ended, all of the French phrases and greetings disappeared at the Metropole and people went back to speaking English and Vietnamese.

To give you a better idea of how little the language was in use, a Vietnamese newspaper in Ho Chi Minh City published an article about the number of students studying French. According to the paper, there were 140 junior high school students in Ho Chi Minh City studying French, all of whose French studies were paid for by the French Government. By contrast, as the paper pointed out, there were several tens of thousands of students studying English, most of whom were paying to study English in special language institutes. The U.S. didn't run any special language program in Ho Chi Minh City or in Hanoi except occasionally to provide some teaching materials. Our USIA team would also work with the various educational institutions to assist them in setting up their programs by providing advice and directing them to US academic institutions for other support and exchanges.

But, the French were really very adamant about creating the image of a strong bilateral relationship between France and Vietnam. The most useful Francophone Summit contribution to the city came from the French Canadians who contributed a lot of signage that went up around Hanoi. It was really very helpful, because it was in French and English and Vietnamese. And, it basically enabled a visitor to find any of the major places you might want to get to in the city. But, overall the Francophone Summit was a laugh, except for the monstrous traffic jams it produced. There were 30 to 40 heads-of-government motorcades running from one part of the city to the other with everybody flying their national flags and all trying to move from a handful of big hotels to a central conference point and back during the day. The French Government brought in a fleet of Peugeot automobiles to help the Vietnamese handle all the VIPs. Before the summit got started, the French and the Vietnamese authorities ran practices moving the motorcades in the city and, sure enough, the first day they were practicing, they had a huge traffic accident and three or four of the Peugeots were totaled in downtown Hanoi. The French left most of the Peugeots behind as a gift, so the Vietnamese Government did get some benefit. But, I'm convinced the biggest "learning experience" was in giving the Vietnamese a little bit of a feel for the kind of circus you have when the U.S. President comes to town for a visit.

Actually, I was quite fortunate in my relationship with the French. The DCM, Paul Jean-Ortiz, had been my counterpart as French Consul General in Guangzhou. We had consulted each other frequently in Guangzhou and we worked very well together in Hanoi as well.

Q: What about while you were in there was there a significant number of Vietnamese who had left Vietnam coming back to visit families and all that?

HARTER: Yes, there were a lot of them coming back, but not as many, of course, coming back to the north. Most of the U.S.-linked overseas Vietnamese had their family ties in the south.

Q: What was the impact of that?

HARTER: There were some problems. But, by and large everybody seemed to get along pretty easily. Even while I was still in Washington, there were always older Vietnamese-Americans saying, "Oh, the only way you can get into Vietnam is to put a twenty-dollar bill in your passport when you get up to the immigration window and then everything's OK. You'll get your entry stamp and they'll let you go about your business." Well, that was nonsense, but quite a few Vietnamese actually did it. Like every country, the Vietnamese had their hit lists and they closely scrutinized people who came back to the country, particularly those people who didn't just gravitate to Ho Chi Minh City or one of the other big cities like Da Nang, Nha Trang or Hue. People who were going into the Highland areas of the south were given closer scrutiny. Occasionally when someone returned from abroad the Vietnamese trotted out "crimes" that had occurred in the past and the people were detained. We had one such situation in one of the Mekong delta cities where an individual Vietnamese-American was detained by the military. I can't remember exactly how we learned about this detention, but it was certainly via the typical backhand way you find out about these situations. In spite of our consular agreement requirements for prompt notification in the event of a national's arrest, the Vietnamese by and large didn't notify us. So, you find out about an arrest or detention through a family friend or a friend of a friend who comes in or writes to the Embassy and informs you someone's been arrested. Or, some relative in the United States says so-and-so went somewhere in Vietnam and hasn't been heard from - though they usually add they believe the person is being detained in some specific location. So, you go through this whole process of investigation with the Vietnamese authorities trying to locate a missing American. And, 99 times out of a hundred, yes the friend's story or the relative in the U.S.'s information turns out to be accurate. In this particular case, the man had been detained directly by a military unit and the civilian side of the government didn't know anything about it. After the Consular Section got nowhere with the Consular Department of the Foreign Ministry and I got nowhere on a follow-up visit, I went to the Americas Department. But they backed up the Consular Department and said they had no information on the case. I then turned to my contact in the Defense Ministry, and, after some time, he arranged for me to meet with a more senior Defense official. Initially, the meeting produced another denial. The senior military man said "We don't know anything about this and you shouldn't be talking to us in the first place. You should talk to the Foreign Ministry, we don't have anything to do with this." Well, it turned out in fact they did have something to do with it. Several days later, I was called back to the Defense Ministry and the official told me the missing Vietnamese had been detained by a local unit and they supposedly had not informed other local or national government authorities. This supposedly explained the lack of information about the case in the Foreign Ministry or elsewhere in Hanoi. According to the Defense Ministry official, the local unit claimed this young man, his brother and father had killed people when they stole a boat to escape from Vietnam. The unit, part of the Vietnamese Navy, claimed this Vietnamese man was going to go on trial for robbery and murder. The Defense official concluded this was a heinous crime and I should not get involved in the issue because this individual deserved to be punished by the Vietnamese courts.

Nonetheless, I went back to the Foreign Ministry with the story and complained about notification and access and they promised to work on the case, though they too by then had learned enough to suggest this individual was going to be tried and likely sentenced to a considerable time in jail. Perhaps only a week later the Vietnamese-American in question showed up at the Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City. He said he was getting ready to go home and that the whole issue in the delta with the military had been "no problem." As he explained it, it was only a question of getting some money to the right people and the whole case was dropped. He further explained that the local military authorities demanded something like $150,000 or some such astronomical amount of money. The Vietnamese man said he kept talking the issue over with the authorities and he gradually go the local authorities to keep lowering the figure in question - I think it finally was six or seven thousand or eight thousand dollars, something like that. The man was allowed to contact his family and friends in the U.S. and he got the money into the country and paid it to the local naval unit. Good to their end of the bargain, the Vietnamese Navy unit released him and canceled the prospective trial. The man seemed to think nothing of his experience and told our Consulate officers "I'm going to come back next year with my brother and my father." I told the Consular officers to tell him he was out of his mind to do so and that he shouldn't even think about doing that because the Vietnamese unit could decide to arrest the other family members for the same reasons just as they had arrested him. But, whether he or they returned or not I don't know, I never heard anything further about this particular story. One thing I'm more certain of is our "interference" in the process probably cost the local navy unit some of its US dollar payment. Once the higher authorities were made aware of the issue, I'm sure they also collected a share of the funds the Vietnamese American deposited with the local officials.

This was a particular Vietnam war-connected issue. But, by and large, the problems we had with Vietnamese-Americans or non-Vietnamese Americans were the kinds of problems you'd have in any American Citizens Services case file abroad. A couple goes abroad and they fight the same way they do at home and maybe there's an injury or a death involved. People get drunk and disorderly. People get into fights or get beat up on the street and robbed. These situations happen anywhere abroad. There was one situation involving American males in the south that was worrisome. We thought there might have been a gang operating in Saigon, giving people lethal injections after they robbed them. We had two or three people between their 30s and 50s who wandered out of a bar area in the city and were later found dead quite far away, suggesting they had been deliberately taken elsewhere. I don't recall the Vietnamese authorities solving this case, so I can't tell you whether anyone ever determined what happened or who was responsible.

In general, I think the Vietnamese-Americans tended to be pretty cautious. The younger ones who knew about Vietnam from their parents and elders started out being very circumspect because they'd grown up hearing how bad the communists were. The older Vietnamese arrived with that fear of being detained and they tried to make sure they didn't attract any unwanted attention. With all of the anti-communist rhetoric in the Vietnamese communities abroad, surprisingly you didn't have people coming back and trying to pass out anti-communist propaganda materials. Sure, sometimes people were detained because they were found with anti-communist literature when their baggage was screened but rarely did you have to visit somebody in jail who had been actively spreading the anti-communist message. There was one notable exception to this generalization. One Vietnamese-American who had flown over Cuba a few years earlier dropping anti-communist material turned up in Vietnam during President Clinton's visit. And, he did the same thing he'd done in Cuba. He hired a plane in Cambodia and flew over Ho Chi Minh City to drop his material. Well, the Vietnamese got him and put him in jail awaiting trial and more than a few Vietnamese considered this something that we actually intended. Embassy and Consulate officials spent a lot of effort over the next several months trying to convince the Vietnamese to let him go so we wouldn't have him as a long-term prison case. Eventually, we were successful in getting him out of the country.

Q: How did you work that out?

HARTER: We convinced the Vietnamese his actions were in no way connected to the Clinton visit and that he was really not all there - he was not mentally sound. The Vietnamese did some investigating and they questioned him extensively, but they didn't go ahead with any prison sentence. They held a trial and he was convicted and sentenced but he was then expelled. His only punishment was the amount of time he spent in prison from the time of his arrest to the time he was released.

Q: How about missionaries?

HARTER: Foreign missionaries were generally not permitted to operate in Vietnam. But, we had a lot of folks who tried to do some proselytizing on the side, just like we did in China.

Missionaries who were active in Vietnam during the war were predominantly Protestants and they generally worked in the highland areas. The minority tribes in these areas were predominantly anti-communist and had worked closely with American military forces. After the unification of the country, they continued to resist Hanoi's intrusion into their lives and territories and they were targeted for special attention by the communist authorities. Former missionaries wanted to go back and work in those areas and this made the whole process seem more sensitive to Hanoi. You may have noticed in the newspaper just last week, there was a Washington Post story which alternately said, five thousand and then fifteen thousand Hmong were coming out of the refugee camps in Laos and Thailand to resettle in Minnesota. Well, this was one of those highland groups who had been connected to the U.S. military.

The highlands were considered sensitive areas, in part because the highland regions were close to the borders - the Laos-Vietnam border, the Cambodia-Vietnam border, the China-Vietnam border. And, even before Vietnam invaded Cambodia and the Chinese got involved in support of the Cambodians by attacking the Vietnamese border regions in the north, Hanoi had to deal with Montagnard rebel groups, anti-communist Lao fighters, and a few South Vietnamese holdouts, all of whom were active close to the international frontiers. While most communist states try to suppress religious activity, there was still a good deal of Buddhist and Catholic religious activity in Vietnam. Neither of these religious groups were favorably inclined to Protestant missionaries, so this too helped to solidify Hanoi's stance against any resumption of religious activity in the highlands.

Catholic Church activity was quite interesting. Catholicism was still actively practiced in Hanoi. When the two separate regimes were established in the north and the south after the French defeat, most of the people who fled from the north to the south were Catholics. Nonetheless, there were Catholic churches in Hanoi that remained open during the war and other churches in the north had reopened in the 1990s. Traveling in the countryside in the north, you would see a lot of shuttered churches in the villages, and most of these were the ones that had shut down when whole villages fled Ho Chi Minh and the communists in 1955. The Ambassador and others in the diplomatic community would regularly attend services with the local Catholics in Hanoi, and he was married in the Catholic Cathedral in Hanoi. I don't remember whether we actually discussed that wedding before. It was interesting to see how the Vietnamese Government played this situation.

When he arrived in Vietnam, Ambassador Peterson was a widower. His wife had died of cancer some years ago. Shortly after he arrived, he attended a summertime dinner party at the Israeli Ambassador's residence, and he found himself seated next to a Vietnamese-Australian who was then the Australian Embassy's trade officer. She had gone to Vietnam a few years earlier as the representative of an Australian bank but had been recruited by the Embassy to promote Australian trade opportunities. The Ambassador and the Trade Officer soon were "the couple" of Hanoi. Vietnamese officials were very pleased because the American Ambassador was going to marry a Vietnamese woman and the whole idea of a big diplomatic wedding was thought to be quite wonderful. There was also a fair amount of public knowledge in Hanoi about the two of them being together. But, this public awareness also seemed to cause the Party and Government officials some concern. I think these officials thought it would suggest too close a relationship between the US and Vietnam if the authorities gave too much attention to the wedding.

When it came to the actual day of the wedding, there was absolutely no mention of it in any newspaper in Hanoi - no photographs, nothing at all. And there certainly was no mention in the TV news coverage for the day. A very, very small number of Vietnamese from the immediate area near the cathedral, attracted by all the vehicles arriving there, did gather around the church. The cathedral is right in the middle of a residential and shopping area of Hanoi so it would have been very difficult for the activities there not to be noticed. But, the government certainly kept people from outside the immediate area of the cathedral from coming into the square. So, only a few local people were outside the church at the time of the wedding. And, for the most part, Vietnamese officials did not come to the wedding or the reception. One of the receptions held by the Ambassador and his wife did include a smattering of Vietnamese friends and a few medium-ranked "token" officials who were assigned to go. The vast majority of Vietnamese invitees were simply told they couldn't attend.

While the Vietnamese did appear to have deliberately downplayed the wedding, the concept of "token" representation was a standard policy for foreign functions in Vietnam. When you had a reception, a national day function or some special visitor in town to introduce to Vietnam, Vietnamese officials had to get permission from their work units to attend the function. For most ministries or departments, people were designated to attend the function, even though they might not be the individuals who had the closest working contacts. When it came to a national day reception, it was usually the official who was in charge of the "friendship association" between Vietnam and the foreign country who attended as the "official" representative to present Hanoi's toast to the foreign Ambassador. The other Vietnamese official attendees would be designated ministry representatives. At Vietnamese Government hosted functions, the ministry and department representation was much larger, but it was still based on the attendees being assigned to represent their offices.

Q: You mean even at a Fourth of July?

HARTER: Yes, or any other National Day or any big visit reception you had. Vietnamese attendees were authorized to go or told to stay home. You would have an event where, for example, we would invite all of our major contacts for the Fourth of July to the reception. We would deliberately hold the event in a hotel ballroom so nobody would be concerned about having to go to the Embassy or the U.S. Ambassador's residence. It was always at a venue the largest number of people could go to. We would invite all of our working-level contacts in the Government, some people who were primarily Party cadre, as well as key ministers and other Ministry people you frequently worked with. If you got two ministers beyond the person who was officially designated by the Vietnamese to handle the toasting requirements, then you had really been blessed. Otherwise, you got only a handful of the invited contacts; interestingly though, you'd get more of the military contacts than the civilian ones. There was an established military attachï¿½ corps which interacted with a set group of Vietnamese military officials. And, that set group of Vietnamese military went everywhere, to all of the national day receptions. But, on the civilian side, on the party side, on the government side, it was not like that.

Q: I would imagine that attendance, then, became a political barometer of, who was doing what to whom, or even that they were loosening up? Do you know what I mean?

HARTER: Well, a lot of the problem was trying to figure out the relationships and the alliances and how the various leaders dealt with one another to get things done. It was very much the same as when I'd been a China watcher in Hong Kong and later in China - looking at the national and local government leaders trying to figure out how decisions were being made and who was lined up behind whom. When this fellow, Le Kha Phieu came into office, he had clearly been a last minute choice for the leadership -

Q: This is the assertive-type guy?

HARTER: He's the Commissar, Political Commissar from the military who came in when Do Muoi stepped down as Party General Secretary. He'd clearly been a compromise candidate, he was not really known to very many people at all. He started out, as I said earlier, trying to make a public relations push for the Party, trying to establish himself as a man of the people. He talked about changing this and modernizing that and then went back into the Party headquarters and gradually retreated into a shell where he just didn't do anything. The Party and the Government started to open up things a bit more and the new leaders all began to talk about more changes. But, in fact, the decision-making process didn't get any better. The three elders - the Communist Party General Secretary, the Prime Minister, and the President (a top military leader) - during the previous period had agreed to step down simultaneously because none of them trusted the others or wanted them to have stronger roles in naming their successors. So this trio, more or less decided who would take over those three positions. And, although they all stepped down at the same time, they didn't remove themselves from decision-making. They sat behind the scenes and got involved in all of the decisions. And so, the new Party General Secretary and the new Prime Minister weren't the chief arbiters of policy. You got people elevated into positions of prominence but these younger, up and coming leaders got titles before they got power. The current Party Chairman is not even an ethnic Vietnamese, he is from one of the northern minority peoples. He had been a leader in the National Assembly and was a very impressive, very savvy fellow. But, I don't know that he has been given the freedom to reset things in a more open fashion, even though he is certainly so inclined. Foreign business people and those involved in the international aid programs were very frustrated by their inability to get the Vietnamese to make decisions.

Q: Were you seeing sons and daughters of the Cadre moving up?

HARTER: Yes. That's the norm, just as it was in China. The so-called "cadre kids" got opportunities the ordinary Vietnamese never had, entrance to the best schools, overseas study opportunities, options to start businesses which immediately had "contracts" to provide services to the Government or Party. And yes, you heard stories of corruption and cadre kids getting away with, in some cases, murder. An ordinary Vietnamese would have never been able to avoid prison or execution. On the other hand, there would be periodic crackdowns and some lesser lights and some junior cadre would get slapped on the wrist or, if the corruption issue was particularly egregious, they sometimes were severely punished.

Q: What about American business people who came in there? I mean, one thing they want to know is what are the rules and are the rules abided by? Was this happening?

HARTER: The rules weren't followed. But, even worse, the rules were constantly being revised and rewritten so it was hard to know what regulations you had to comply with. The Vietnamese never had a legal system which clearly established one law superseded another. So, the old law remained on the books along with the new one, even though they might be mutually contradictory. And, with those kinds of contradictory laws on the books you had to depend on somebody's interpretation of the law to decide, in each particular situation, which of the contradictory laws might be applied. American and many other foreign businessmen found this situation unacceptable.

Q: Well, one of the big reasons that we push for recognition was that all of our Western competitors and Japanese had gone in there and we wanted to get in there. But, when we got in there I take it, it wasn't that great a place to -

HARTER: Not at all, it wasn't a good place to do business at all.

Q: I mean, this would be true for our competitors too?

HARTER: Absolutely, absolutely. Deals did get done by a lot of these other businesses which did not have to operate under the terms of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. They were able to open some factories and produce products for the local market as well as for export and some of them made money. But, most of them didn't make a lot of money. What they did get was what the business world calls "market share" and "brand identification". For many of the Japanese firms, that was what they wanted. They tended to take a longer-term view of market opportunities than a lot of the U.S. people did.

We had huge problems with some of the companies that came in. I had worked with the Proctor and Gamble folks in Southern China when they opened up there and they had gone through a very exhaustive process of looking for a partner to work with. They had done a very good job of putting their business model together and they had been exceptionally successful in China. They came into Vietnam in the same way and with the same due diligence. They had to find a partner and they were given a number of suggestions on which company to choose by Vietnamese officials. P&G started relying on one consultant, a person who was related to a high-level official, and who provided them with a lot of "inside" information about how the company could get things done. This is the kind of thing a lot of the cadre kids got involved in, brokering deals for foreigners with Vietnamese partners. This particular consultant made the local P&G team feel they were on the right track. So, Proctor and Gamble got themselves set up with a partner. Once the partnership was concluded, P&G discovered that this partner was also the local partner of their chief international competitor and their chief foreign competitor in Vietnam, Unilever, maker of the original Lever Brothers products. P&G soon discovered their local partner was passing on all of the P&G plans to the local Uni Lever officials. Because the Unilever people weren't under the same Foreign Corrupt Practices Act restrictions, they were making under the table payments to the local partner for this information and, as a result, they were able to undercut virtually everything that Proctor and Gamble wanted to do.

P&G came to the Embassy for help and we had to assist them to arrange a divorce from their local partner. P&G wanted at that point to be a hundred percent foreign-invested company. This was not to the Vietnamese liking, because they had not wanted to have any fully owned foreign ventures. They always wanted partnerships, because in this way they would have an opportunity to help elevate local businesses, and to have an opportunity to pirate the information and technology that the foreign companies had. For the Vietnamese, it wasn't just a question of the foreign company coming in and paying some taxes for the benefit of the Government, but they would get the knowledge and the technology to help them modernize their own industry. For P&G, it was a costly procedure but they were finally able to operate independently, though I'm not sure it would have been possible without the interventions of the Embassy. Smaller companies without the financial clout or global reputation of P&G had a much harder time making things work so that they could stay in business and earn some return. They were constantly being pressured by one organization or another to do things that were not exactly legal. Some of them I guess did what they were asked to do, others didn't.

Q: Well now, the company was getting pressure, particularly a smaller company, in a way it couldn't take care of itself. Would they come to you and tell you about you it?

HARTER: Sometimes they would, yes.

Q: Could you do anything?

HARTER: We could basically counsel them, as we did in China, about the problems of staying within the lines of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Without fail we would suggest they take a hard look at who they're using for advisors and consultants and to try to ensure they had more reputable people to work with. This was about the most we could do.

But, for the big companies that were trying to develop natural resources or to get involved in government projects, it was the decision-making process I told you about earlier that was probably more frustrating. During the time I was there, many of the U.S. oil companies that had hoped to resume their pre-1975 explorations finally give up and just left. They decided there was no possibility of getting anywhere. In spite of the total collapse of the Soviet Union and the fact there was no Comecon Bloc supporting them, the Russians were still very influential and dominated the exploitation of the Vietnamese oil resources. The U.S. firms and the Embassy kept telling the Vietnamese, "you've had declining production for years in these existing oil fields because neither you nor the Russians have adequate technology to exploit the fields properly. We have technology that will enable you to extract more oil from these fields. We know what's down there and you know what's down there and we can bring in the needed technology to exploit those resources." But, the Russians blocked it every single time. When it came to letting out new exploration blocks and encouraging the search for new fields, the only place the Vietnamese were willing to let American firms go was in the ocean areas between China and Vietnam. Sometimes, the Vietnamese would approve an exploration arrangement where a few lesser US firms had only a very small minority interest in a package primarily being handled by South Koreans and Vietnamese and other international partners. So, it was a very difficult for the big oil players and they finally gave up and closed their Vietnam offices. And, just as they had been once before in China, the oil companies had been the biggest U.S. investors in Vietnam; so when these companies left, the U.S. share of the Vietnamese investment market plunged dramatically.

Q: Today is the 14th of October, 2004. Dennis, let's talk about the Trade Agreement. Once again, you were in Hanoi from when to when?

HARTER: I got there in the summer of 1997 and I stayed there until the summer of 2001. I was Deputy to Pete Peterson and then for about the last four months I was chargï¿½, awaiting the arrival of the new DCM and the new Ambassador.

Q: OK. Well now, let's talk, we've covered everything, I mean you said a long time convoluted trade things. Start from, how did this trade get in the works and how did it develop?

HARTER: When we first started talking about normalization of relations with the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese wanted political normalization, but what they wanted more than anything else was trade relations and most favored nation status. They wanted us to end the embargo and other restrictions which had been imposed as the result of their invasion of Cambodia. And, as we began the process of normalization, once we did make certain basic progress on their withdrawal from Cambodia and on MIA case resolution, President Clinton ended the embargo and we continued on with the normalization discussions. Once we had completed normalization the Foreign Minister said, "Now we have to go on to normalize trade relations and get most favored nation status." We set up a series of meetings and discussions for USTR representatives to meet with the Vietnamese so we could learn more about their economic system. As part of this process, I went on one trip to Hanoi with an officer from EB (Economic Bureau) in State to talk to the Vietnamese about their economic system and the rules and regulations they had in place regarding trade, investment, and business operations. And, that was ultimately the crunch test, we had to evaluate what changes were necessary in the Vietnamese economic structure that would make their system compatible with the rest of the world. The U.S. tried to create a set of standards that Vietnam would have to meet in order to make it possible for them to be a part of the international trading community. As we advertised it to the Vietnamese, everything you're going to do with us in a bilateral agreement to open up your trade and investment system will ultimately assist you in getting into the WTO, the World Trade Organization. Vietnam, of course, was not a member of the WTO and they knew they needed to take that step too to get into the global trading community. The Vietnamese acknowledged what we said and recognized that getting trade relations established with us would help to ease the problem of meeting WTO standards.

We had many discussions with the Foreign Minister and with the Trade Minister. Trade Minister Triet came to the United States soon after the normalization of diplomatic relations and had a series of meetings at the State Department, at Treasury, and at USTR and Commerce to review the basic issues. There was a considerable degree of difficulty in comprehension. The Vietnamese just simply did not seem to understand how much was going to be involved in getting their economic system into the mainstream of international trade. While part of this may have been a problem of translation, it was clear to me and a few others on our side that many of the Trade Ministry people, including the Trade Minister, didn't understand the concepts. Fortunately, a couple of more savvy people from the Foreign Ministry and from the Office of the Government in Hanoi had been included in the delegation. They had a much broader level of international experience and better understood the economic issues.

Q: What was his background, did you know?

HARTER: I don't know that much about his background. He was certainly a senior member of both the government and the party. He was only Trade Minister for about a year to a year and a half after normalization and he retired. But the new Trade Minister, Trade Minister Tuyen, who succeeded him was an absolute disaster. He was a political choice who clearly knew absolutely zero about trade and moreover, was basically dense. No one except a few sycophants in his own Ministry had any respect for him whatsoever.

But now I'm getting ahead of the story. After the first round of meetings for Minister Triet, it became clear to myself and a couple of others that the Trade Minister and his Ministry colleagues just did not comprehend the basic issues. This convinced me we had to try to set up another more private session for Triet to see if the issues could be simplified and presented more directly. Some of these earlier meetings had large numbers of people involved on both sides. And yes, the Trade Minister was the key person and was the head of the delegation, but there were so many other people involved in the initial meetings that it was very difficult to really focus the discussions. So, I went to the people we worked with in the Economic Bureau to ask Alan Larson to chair a smaller session with Triet and a few other Vietnamese delegation members. Larson at that time was the Under Secretary for Economic, Energy and Business Affairs at State [Ed: served from November 1999 to February 2005]. Larson had chaired the first State Department meeting with the large group from Vietnam and he too thought a smaller meeting made sense. I also went to one of the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry people and one from the Office of Government on the delegation who I believed really knew the issues and understood the western concepts better than anybody else on the Vietnamese side. Both of these people had been educated in the United States for extended periods with graduate degree level courses. They understood English and they understood western economics, and they had enough stature in the Vietnamese delegation that if they said something different from what the translator had said, they would be respected for both the translation and the substance of what they were explaining. And, once we got Minister Triet in that smaller meeting, you could almost see the little light bulb go off over his head. Larson did an outstanding job of simplifying complicated issues and you could tell by the different type of questions Triet asked he understood the concepts. You could see he was focused now on really what the key problems were going to be for the Vietnamese Government. He was beginning to conceptualize how the Vietnamese had to break down the State-managed system and open things up to competition and what this would mean, if in fact U.S. businesses were allowed to come in and set up joint ventures or fully-owned ventures in the country. At that session, the U.S. side gave Triet a draft outline of a prospective trade agreement.

The next meeting which was to take place in Hanoi did not occur as quickly as we had originally projected because Triet had such a big job to do to explain the depth of change and breadth of change that was going to be required in the Vietnamese economic system. The Vietnamese at this time were also transitioning in a new party and government leadership which meant not everyone could be fully devoted to the trade agreement issues.

As I've already related, the three top Vietnamese leaders had agreed to step down together and a new group of leaders would assume their positions. The three who were stepping down were key leaders from the Ho Chi Minh-era who had earned their status and stature through the war and their relationship to Ho. Anybody else who was coming up after them would have been minor or mid-level party, government or military men during the war-time era. They did not have any real stature, except perhaps locally or within a small bureaucracy. They could not directly assume a leadership mantle based on association with Ho Chi Minh or from their leadership roles in war-time service. Those of us who were watching the political situation expected there to be a period of relatively uncertain leadership and one that would be very cautious. That new decision-making apparatus turned out to be even more cautious, because the person who was made the head of the Party and hence primus inter pares, had no real understanding of international politics, let alone, how to get the country's economy going domestically. As a political commissar, his background was ideological, and, based on his public remarks you did not have the impression he was a person with a breadth of understanding of modern society, economics, or politics. So, a lot of getting him to understand the trade agreement issues was going to involve a basic education - it was probably more primitive than Economics 101.

When we started out the next round of meetings, we again had the large delegations involved. But, starting with our follow-on visit to Hanoi, these were large delegations focused on working-level people. We didn't bring ministers along for any of these discussions - no Secretary of State, or Secretary of Commerce. We had a USTR (U.S. Trade Representatives Office) negotiator as the head of delegation. Behind him we had people from Commerce and State and Agriculture and a number of other groups within the State Department bureaucracy, the Economic Affairs Bureau, people like that, who were part of this overall discussion. And they didn't all just meet together at the same time. They spread out and had smaller sessions on their own, exploring, from the U.S. perspective different economic operations so we too had a better understanding of the Vietnamese system.

Q: As you put this together, even the first set of meetings, but the second meetings, was the attitude, you know, this is really a two part or one. This is to get the Untied States and Vietnam going, but this really is to get Vietnam into the World Trade Organization. Was there a difference? Was there a discrepancy between these two goals?

HARTER: There was only in the sense that we, the U.S., didn't care about the second issue whatsoever. We weren't worried about that. That was something the Vietnamese were going to have to deal with and they were going to have to conduct their own negotiations with the WTO in Geneva. They were going to have to respond to questions from the WTO members about their economy. We simply explained to them that there wasn't anything that we were going to do bilaterally that was going to hinder that WTO entrance process and in fact, it would facilitate whatever they had to do to meet those requirements. So, we pretty much stayed out of that issue. We told the Vietnamese if they wanted help we'd be willing to provide it, but in fact they ended up going for help with their WTO membership to other organizations. They got help from the World Bank, they got help from the IMF, they got help from Europeans to facilitate their dealings with the WTO. Unless things have changed in the last year, Vietnam is still not a full member of the WTO. Their negotiations with the WTO were, as they often were with us, hard to comprehend. The Vietnamese would come in and lay out responses to WTO questions and they'd present a plan on how to meet WTO obligations and both we and the Europeans would sit there and say, "But this doesn't answer the question." At times, you had the feeling Vietnam was like a ship passing its destination in the night without any clear signal of where it thought it was going.

Q: What about China? I mean, China had, I realize the Chinese and Vietnamese aren't exactly on the best terms. Was there a Chinese, I mean China at this time was going through some of the same?

HARTER: Correct. They're still doing the same -

Q: Could there be any crossover?

HARTER: There may have been. I just am not aware of anybody saying the Chinese and the Vietnamese were ever really talking about this among themselves. Clearly the Chinese were getting a lot more help from us on the WTO and a lot more support from a lot of countries, because of its size and economic clout. Vietnam was basically one of the also-rans in the whole process. Internationally there was a feeling it would be nice to have Vietnam in the WTO to keep up the idea of universality. But if they weren't in not a lot of people would care much about it. At the time, in terms of its economic clout, the Vietnamese economy would barely match one of the major provinces of China. On the other hand, everyone wanted China to sign on to the WTO in order to better ensure that it operated more according to the international trading rules - though I'm not sure anybody has yet gotten China to play by rules other than its own. The Chinese and the Vietnamese may have exchanged some information about what they were hearing from the WTO just to make sure that we weren't fiddling them about what they had to do to meet international standards. But, beyond that I'm just not certain there was any real cooperation.

Q: Well then, you were talking about sort of the working level? What were some of the issues particularly as you got into the nitty gritty?

HARTER: The first basic issue was just simply a discussion of the Vietnamese system, finding out exactly how it operated, how trade worked, how companies were set up to do business, and how subsidies occurred, and how the government supported various industries. We actually still haven't sorted all of that stuff out. We're still objecting to the volume of Vietnamese exports to the United States on the grounds of them being from a non-market economy. Since they are not a market economy, we end up creating artificial models of how the economy operates to then measure how they are subsidizing their exports to the United States. Using these formulations, we have recently pretty much clobbered the Vietnamese on two basic seafood exports to the United States. One is shrimp, but the biggest one is catfish exports. The Vietnamese had managed a fairly substantial increase in their sales of both products to the United States, but they were still only a small portion of the overall U.S. market. Based on the U.S. analysis of their non-market economy model, we calculated such a high degree of government subsidy of these industries that we were able to impose stiff tariffs which severely cut into the Vietnamese export effort.But, I'm off the track again. During the discussion round in Hanoi, the range of issues was quite considerable. Our delegation would split up and we would have some small agriculture-to-agriculture, commerce-to-trade ministry talks. And then, you'd have the plenary sessions where all of the visitors would follow the USTR and Trade Ministry representatives outline of issues as they tried to find common ground for an agreement. After three or four of these meetings, where we seemed to be reviewing an awful lot of very basic things, it seemed we were having to repeat discussions that had been held months before. There were still concerns about comprehension problems on the Vietnamese side. Some of us began to try to define the problems on the Vietnamese side and it all seemed to come back to the new leadership. We weren't sure the trade discussions were actually getting reported back into the hierarchy in a way that they could understand. There was also a possibility some of the trade people who were reporting back to the leadership were reluctant to talk about how big the gaps were between the two systems, fearing they might be told not to pursue the trade dialogue because it was so antithetical to the communist system.

Look at it from the perspective of this new leadership in Hanoi. They are inherently more conservative and cautious about breaking new ground. They're not very knowledgeable about the international system. Told about the changes that have to be made to meet the US expectations, they could just throw up their hands and say the Americans are trying to screw us again. It would not be illogical for them to simply walk away from the talks and to try to soldier on the way they had in the past. In fact, once we had completed the negotiation of the agreement, that's exactly where we ended up, with the Vietnamese not following through with the signing. But, again that's going a little bit ahead of the progression of the talks.

After one of my trips to Hanoi, I went over to see Joe Damond who was the Trade Representative Office designee to conduct the negotiations with Vietnam. I said to him, "We've already got a trade agreement process worked out with the Cambodians and we've been at this with the Vietnamese for a certain amount of time, but nobody has talked about doing anything with Laos. Why don't we take a look at Laos and see what's going on there?" He said, "Well, I suppose we could. It would be a nice package to get it all done and take care of the old Indochina or Vietnam War era countries, but nobody knows what the hell is going on in Laos in terms of the economy or anything else." I said, "Well look, I have enough flexibility in my travel time here and I have the State desk responsibility for Laos; I'll take somebody else along who's more knowledgeable on economic issues and we'll talk trade issues with the Lao and see what might be possible."And so, along with an EB officer, Bill Heidt, I went to Laos and started talking with some Lao Ministry officials. We explained about how we'd negotiated a trade agreement with Cambodia and they knew we were talking with the Vietnamese. When we asked if the Lao Government was interested in a bilateral trade agreement they agreed, at the working level, it would be a good idea. Up the line, more senior Lao officials decided they should have a trade agreement with the U.S. since the two countries had never broken relations and they should have an agreement if the Khmer and the Vietnamese had them. So, as we started reviewing the basic issues and were getting answers to our questions about the Lao economic system, we learned that none of the obstacles that had to be overcome in the system in Hanoi existed in Laos. They didn't have any of the rules or regulations or any of the communist control systems. The Lao economy was just "functioning" without a lot of rules or regulations. There weren't any problems in the sense that everything had to be done a certain way that was inconsistent with the international trade regime. And, the Lao Government and Party regulations didn't set up a lot of absolutes which fixed how the economy was to be managed. So, I went back to Joe Damond at USTR and told him that Laos appeared to be wide open in terms of their economic system. They were interested in having a trade agreement, they would like to have us help them get into the WTO, and all it needed was for him to convince USTR to expand his authority so he could talk to the Lao. And, sure enough USTR did authorize him to talk to the Lao and I think it was less than nine months, maybe even less than six months of talks and exchanges and we had negotiated a trade agreement with the Lao. Everything was really going along quite smoothly.

Once it was all pulled together, there were questions in the Administration about the timing of when the agreement was going to be sent up to Congress for ratification. Unfortunately, we ran into a problem with Congress which made it very difficult to get anyone there willing to consider it. Some Lao-American highlanders disappeared in Laos while on a visit. The Lao Government claimed to have no understanding or knowledge of what was going on. But, it was believed this group was working with the resistance movement in the highlands against the Lao Government. The U.S. Government, human rights advocates, and certainly the U.S. Lao-American Montagnard groups believed the Lao Government killed them. So, as soon as there was some thought of sending this trade agreement forward for Congressional review and approval, the issue of the missing Lao-Americans was raised and the agreement was side-lined. As far as I know, the US-Lao Trade Agreement has still not been submitted to Congress on the grounds the Lao Government has still not answered "our requests for information and details on the disappearance of these individuals." It's unfortunate, because as I said, the Lao agreement was a snap. It was an absolute slam-dunk. The Lao wanted it, we wanted it, and there were basically no obstacles to negotiating it. Whether it would be an effective trade agreement was still to be determined. As I said, the Lao Government didn't have a lot of sophistication and it wasn't the most effective governing body. So whether they could have enforced the terms they had agreed to was still an open question. But, at the time, we certainly could have had a completed trade agreement with the Lao and wrapped up another of the wartime problems from the 1970s.

Going back to Vietnam, the Vietnamese kept saying to us, "Give us a draft, give us a draft." And we kept saying, "You're not ready for a draft. You still haven't indicated a comprehension of the basic issues enough to be in a position to start altering your own rules and regulations - in fact, so far you haven't even indicated you're ready to alter them." And the Vietnamese kept saying that, "If we don't have a draft, we can't get the ministers or the Party to focus on it. They're not going to talk about changing this or changing that until they can absolutely see what is involved and how it stacks up against other things that we've done." So, that was a bit of a problem for our side. It wasn't easy to get USTR to give the Vietnamese a draft. Other agencies had some input, but USTR was the primary drafter and creator of this document. And, I believe Joe Damond actually did virtually all of the writing himself. With both the Vietnamese and the State Department working on USTR, we eventually did get them to submit a draft.

Q: Well, isn't there a basic standard that we can take off the shelf? I mean are these things that have to be handcrafted?

HARTER: I think there is a basic draft, but the agreements have to be hand-crafted and tailored to the individual country, because in fact they require countries to take away certain rules and regulations that are country-specific. And, as part of the negotiating process we try to determine from U.S. business and industry what the subjects are of greatest interest to them in that particular country and focus some of our requests for changes and modifications to meet their areas of greatest interest.

The trade agreements are in a sense standard. But the agreements have to be tailored so that you can alter the specific laws and regulations in a particular country, so they will meet global standards. In addition, the USTR and Commerce folks like to have a dialogue with U.S. business interests to determine areas these businesses find most appealing for investment or trade and, thereafter, tailor the agreement to reflect those interests. For example, one of the chief U.S. interests in Vietnam was the telecommunications sector. So, in negotiating the trade agreement we wanted to include a specific schedule of opening up of the telecommunications sector in Vietnam to foreign investment and foreign competition. We wanted some very specific things done with regard to the banking, finance, and insurance industries. These were all industries American companies were interested in and where we wanted to try and get some leg-up for American business to operate in Vietnam. Now, of course, while the trade agreement is designed to provide some boost for American business, in fact the new trade regime you create is not entirely U.S. specific. It is actually a global agreement. Because the global trading system is so inter-connected, when you open up the insurance sector in Vietnam for American business, Japanese and European and other nation's firms are also able to go in at the same time and under the same terms, because, for the most part, all nations have what is known as most-favored-nation trading/investment status with Vietnam in their own bilateral agreements.

Q: Well tell me now, how far, I mean in our analysis, how far had France, Japan, England, UK and others, how much progress had they made in agreements or were we kind of the point person?

HARTER: We were definitely on the point for trying to develop a full-fledged comprehensive trade agreement. But, a number of other countries had very basic agreements established well before ours. The basic agreements were enough to give them the MFN (Most Favored Nation) status that thereby applied to their trade relations whatever we specifically negotiated. It was very clear once we broke open, under very specific terms, various sectors of the Vietnamese market we were in fact opening it up all the way to the rest of the world. And, of course, this was one of the things we kept selling to the Vietnamese. Getting the U.S. trade agreement concluded would enable them to extend the same treatment to other countries and all of that in turn would enhance their WTO membership opportunities. One of our chief objectives was "leveling the playing field" for American businesses and American investors, because in some cases certain foreign trade partners with Vietnam had obtained special advantages which we could not tap into because we did not have MFN status there. But all of this "leveling" of opportunities for foreign business worried the Vietnamese. Throughout our discussions, the Vietnamese were very concerned about how the onslaught of international competition would swamp some of their basic industries, many of which were getting into a global market for the very first time. The trade embargo and the isolation imposed on Vietnam as a result of its invasion of Cambodia in 1979 had really shut down Vietnam's access to the international market system until the early 1990s. There just was no real understanding within the Vietnamese banking and finance and commercial systems about much of the international trade regime or international finance and banking. As a result, during the various negotiating rounds, the Vietnamese were trying to negotiate phased, and I should say long-term phased, opening of virtually every sector of their economy - the industries, the financial and commercial institutions - to global competition.

After a series of marathon negotiations, we concluded an agreement in the summer of 1999. A senior USTR representative, Ambassador Richard Fisher and the Vietnamese Trade Minister, Minister Tuyen, signed an "agreement in principle" in July. All of the elements were in place and the terms were as clear as they could be made. Once we had initialed the agreement, the Vietnamese, and we had a great celebration and everyone was feeling very positive. On the US side we said everything is all set and we can just proceed to a formal signing ceremony. And the Vietnamese officials initially all said, "Yes, that would be very, very good." But the Vietnamese couldn't follow through. Trade Minister Tuyen couldn't really comprehend a lot of what was in the agreement and the agreement basically languished in the ether for several weeks. Nothing moved, and the Vietnamese trade officials were not responsive in follow-up discussions. The more we talked about it with the people on the ground, the more we talked about it with sources that we had inside the Vietnamese government who themselves were anxious to see the agreement move forward, the more we were convinced the Trade Minster just really wasn't conveying the material in a realistic way to the leadership. He was mischaracterizing some of the elements of the agreement and, because many of the top Party leaders didn't really understand what the international trade regime was all about, they were reluctant to move forward.From the U.S. perspective, we believed we had talked through all of the elements and that moving forward should be straightforward. As a result, the US negotiators proposed putting the whole package together for signature as we approached the end of the Clinton presidency. On the U.S. side, we thought it would be fitting if we could wrap up the agreement by the time the President visited Vietnam in November 2000. But the Vietnamese still weren't moving. We finally decided that we needed to make another direct push. The Ambassador, myself and a few others went to the Vietnamese Ministry officials and to other Party and Government leaders and said, "We need to get this trade agreement process back on track. President Clinton is interested in visiting Vietnam. The President's visit and Vietnam's re-entry into the international community could be a great symbol for out two countries to finally mark the conclusion of the entire war era antagonism. We ought to re-energize this negotiation process." We convinced enough people in the Foreign Ministry and other Ministries and also some in the senior leadership of the government that this was the way to go. We resumed talks and there were some changes made in the originally concluded agreement, even though both sides had been satisfied with it a year earlier. After concluding the agreement once again, however, the Vietnamese still felt uncomfortable with some of the terms, and we conceded on a few additional issues they were interested in. None of the changes had much substance, but at least they made the Vietnamese a bit more comfortable. At this point, we made a tactical mistake; but we didn't recognize it as a tactical mistake until it was too late to salvage the agreement for that year.

The tactical mistake was in pushing the Vietnamese to finalize the agreement quickly. There was to be an APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting in Wellington, New Zealand and both President Clinton and the Vietnamese Prime Minister would be there for the leaders meeting. We said, "This is the way to do it. We'll get the President involved; you can get your top leadership involved; the two leaders will meet and we'll sign this agreement. It will bring the relationship into a completely new era. It will be a great symbol, etc etc. And, of course, you realize this is only X number of days away, so we've really got to get going and get this arrangement confirmed."

That approach and pressure set off all the alarm bells within the Vietnamese system that you can imagine. All they could think of was, there's something in the agreement that's a problem and the Americans are trying to slip it past us and push this thing through. Our leaders still don't really understand what this is all about, and when they discover the problem, we'll get blamed. So, even the Foreign Ministry and the Trade Ministry became hesitant about getting involved. In more or less typical American fashion, we didn't slow down and try to work things out in a diplomatic fashion: "Well, tell us where you think there's a problem or is there somebody we can work with in the leadership to help deal with these concerns. How can we help you make this approval process work? Is there some way that we can facilitate whatever it is you need to get approval to do this?" Instead of all those, expressions of concern to facilitate their process, we just kept saying, "It's X number of days away, we really ought to get this thing signed and we ought to really commit. The President wants to do this." The Vietnamese just sat on their hands; they just would not do it. After the APEC meeting, the White House was a little ticked off at the Vietnamese, and probably also at the Embassy and USTR because we'd been so certain we could get the Vietnamese to agree to highlight the APEC meetings with our own bilateral event. White House organizers were particularly upset because they were looking for "deliverable" events and ways to emphasize the President's global responsibilities and his involvement with Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation nations. There were a couple of other APEC-related deliverables, but none that had quite the same kick as the US-Vietnamese Trade Agreement would have provided. But, as I said, it just didn't work out and the agreement remained in limbo.Fortunately, over the next few months, while the Vietnamese were still sitting on their hands, there was a decision to change some of the Vietnamese Government officials and change some of the leadership within the Communist Party. The man who had been at the top of the Party, and the man who had been appointed by him to be the Minister of Trade, both departed the scene. Finally, we had someone who was knowledgeable on trade and economics and global relationships running the Ministry. The new Minister of Trade, was previously a Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. He knew the global diplomatic system; he knew about international negotiations; he knew trade issues. The Party hack who had been managing the Ministry before was shunted back to the local provincial administration where he had previously served and he was no longer in the national leadership councils. The new Party leader came from within the National Assembly leadership and thus he too had a better understanding of the economic issues facing the country - and certainly he knew national and international issues far better than his predecessor who only had a military commissar background.

Once again, the Vietnamese suggested it might be useful to have a few other changes to the agreement to ease their leaders' concerns and also to make it more reasonable for us to move forward after this second delay. We fiddled with a few of the terms - though I don't recall the specifics. The changes made it possible for the Vietnamese to suggest they had toughened their stance and had convinced the Americans to alter some terms of the agreement to Vietnam's advantage. That was enough to tip the balance. Nonetheless, even then, there was still a debate among the elderly "advisors" who had previously been running the country directly about whether this was the right way to proceed. The former Party leader, Do Muoi, who had become an advisor, did not really understand the economics of the agreement and he was also the most conservative of the old leaders. The former President, Le Duc Anh, was also in this conservative group and it took the new Prime Minister, Phan Van Khai, the advisor/former Prime Minister, Vo Van Kiet, the new Party leader, Nong Duc Manh, and the new President, Tran Duc Luong to pull it all together and push the decision through. Prime Minister Khai and his predecessor, Prime Minister Kiet, were themselves both forward looking individuals from the southern part of Vietnam. They had a better understanding of where things were going economically and a better understanding of international issues in general. They were the ones who helped bring the agreement to a successful conclusion.

Stepping back from the negotiations, the trade agreement was not in itself anything particularly remarkable, and it did not immediately make things significantly easier for American businesses to operate in Vietnam. But, I think the process convinced the Vietnamese that we were sincere in our efforts to assist them to modernize and rejoin the world trading community. It probably also convinced the Vietnamese that they could continue to hang tough on issues and the US and other western nations would eventually meet their negotiating demands. When it came to signing the trade agreement, there was again some toing and froing about how high a level of leader might be involved or if we could tie the signing to some particular bilateral event. But none of that worked out and I believe the way it ended up we signed the agreement simultaneously in both capitals.

The Vietnamese, of course still had unrealistic expectations about what this agreement was going to mean in the short-term. They saw it as giving them a leg up on getting into the WTO. With the U.S. trade agreement in hand, the Vietnamese assumed WTO entrance would be a formality. So, even though they were conducting many dialogues with the WTO headquarters in Geneva during the period of our bilateral trade agreement negotiations, they thought all the WTO problems would disappear once they signed the U.S. trade agreement. The WTO, however, was not prepared to roll over because the Vietnamese signed an agreement with the United States. In fact, the WTO felt the Vietnamese had largely been unresponsive on most of the WTO standards they felt the Vietnamese had to meet.

The Vietnamese also seemed to feel they would immediately be shipping huge quantities of Vietnamese products to the United States as the result of this new trade agreement. But they found that, too, was not so easy. Throughout the negotiations, we had advised the Vietnamese there were many issues they had to understand in order to get into the U.S. market successfully. We talked about the lack of quality control in Vietnamese factories and farms, Vietnam's limited understanding of the U.S. market, and its inability, at that time, to design items for the U.S. market on their own. We tried to explain that even though they were selling product X in Japan or product Y in Europe, Vietnam couldn't just simply ship the same product to be sold in the United States. We tried to explain how there were different interests in product design, or there were issues of safety standards that differed in the various markets. For example, the Vietnamese were exporting all kinds of baby clothes to Japan. They expected to sell the same items in the American market, but they didn't meet fashion standards, design standards, safety standards.

All those issues were new to them. So, none of those immediate expectations were gratified. And, you soon got a lot of grumbling among the Vietnamese manufacturers who wanted to know what good the trade agreement was. In the initial phase of operation, the Vietnamese manufacturers weren't having any success at all. The ones who were successful were the Japanese and Korean firms that invested in Vietnam and immediately produced items to meet American standards.

On the other side of the spectrum, the people who were in the agricultural business as opposed to manufacturing had a sudden opportunity to supply products to the big Asian grocery markets in the U.S. and, soon thereafter to other U.S. markets where seafood and other products had a more universal appeal. Soon the Vietnamese fish industry got linked to the distributors who worked for the major seafood chains in the United States. Red Lobster, Chesapeake Bay Seafood, Long John Silver and other seafood chains were getting large supplies of fish from Vietnam. How it was labeled as a fish, other than that it was from Vietnam, varied from one chain to another once it got in to the United States. Within a couple of years, however, most of the focus was on catfish. Catfish had been specifically discussed and negotiated during the trade agreement. With the agreement of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the term "catfish" was extended to a Vietnamese variety of fish that looked in fact, like a U.S. catfish, a bottom dweller fish with "whiskers" and the sort of flattened head characteristic of the U.S. species. In actuality, it's not exactly the same genus of fish and our Agriculture Department thought perhaps it could be distinguished by calling it basa catfish. The Vietnamese thought that term was OK. This was an U.S. Agriculture Department suggestion and it was worked out during the trade agreement talks. Once the Vietnamese fish were marketed in the US, you could find it in the Asian markets and then in the U.S. supermarkets as well. I first saw it in the U.S., I guess it was 2000 or 2001, in live fish tanks in Houston, Texas in an Asian community grocery store complex. Houston has a series of Asian supermarkets that dwarf the Asian supermarkets in this region. They are almost the size of a Walmart and carry all kinds of Asian food products and cooking implements - bowls, dishes, chopsticks, woks, charcoal burners, etc.

But let's get back to the catfish issue. Over the past few years, the U.S. Catfish Association spent a lot of time and promotional efforts developing the domestic U.S. market. Catfish became a really popular food item in the United States. The Association became very concerned about the Vietnamese catfish being marketed in the U.S. So, they put a request in to the Commerce Department - not the Agriculture Department - about the Vietnamese exports, charging that the Vietnamese were subsidizing these exports and they were undermining the local U.S. catfish market. The U.S. Commerce Department then was required to conduct an investigation. The case rapidly became politicized and it all went against the Vietnamese.

If it had been agreed Vietnam operated a market economy, Commerce could have conducted a direct investigation on the ground and determined if there were subsidies or not. But Commerce decided Vietnam was still a non-market economy, meaning the Government exercised a lot of control over and direction to economic activity. Because it was a non-market economy you couldn't just simply determine there were no subsidies involved in this particular industry. Commerce was required to compare the costs of raising the fish in Vietnam to other economies where fish are being raised for export. Commerce created some model of India or Bangladesh as a fish raising country and it looked at the costs there as compared with the costs in Vietnam. Commerce concluded Vietnam was subsidizing the export of catfish because the costs for raising the fish in this other "model" were higher than they were in Vietnam. The Commerce decision completely contradicted the survey done by our own USDA representative in Hanoi. He had gone out to the fish farm areas and prepared a very detailed analysis and report on the catfish industry, basically concluding there were no subsidies. Moreover, the USDA report concluded most of the farms that were exporting to the US were local, private entrepreneurs or groups of private entrepreneurs who had banded together to cut costs and export abroad. These farms were not being run by government-directed companies and they weren't getting any special incentives for exporting. Vietnam couldn't believe the Commerce conclusions. I think the catfish struggle began to sour the Vietnamese a bit on the whole value of the trade agreement and to bring some realism to their expectations of how they could exploit the international market. The end result was Vietnam could no longer brand it as catfish or basa catfish, and it had to market the fish under a different name. You'll still find the fish in U.S. Supermarkets, but it is branded as swai. And the U.S. catfish industry has been "saved."

Under the trade agreement, U.S. businesses going into Vietnam couldn't all just pour into Vietnam pell-mell. Each of the various sectors of the economy were opened up under a timetable and investments and individual business operations had to be approved by the Vietnamese Government. Moreover, the Vietnamese still were concerned that situations not tilt overwhelmingly in favor of an international presence and business activity within the country. The Vietnamese felt it was better to balance with some Europeans, some Asians, and some American participants in each of these various sectors. A prime example of this balancing effort in the early phase was the insurance industry. The Vietnamese approved the participation of a European company, a Japanese company, a Taiwan company and an American company to begin to do insurance business in Vietnam. And, each of the companies was permitted to operate in only one segment of the insurance industry. The Vietnamese then did the same thing in banking. Banking licenses were limited, some French, some German, some English, some American, some Japanese banks were permitted to open but the terms of their operations were all different. Some could be in Hanoi, but not in Ho Chi Minh City. Some could be in both. Some could do all types of banking business in Hanoi and more limited business in Ho Chi Minh City. Some were permitted to do all varieties of banking business in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Thus, even though there was a timetable when the various sectors of the economy would open to foreign investment and operations, in actuality it became a question of balance and staging by the Vietnamese Government. Just as the Vietnamese were disappointed by their inability to move quickly into the U.S. market, U.S. companies were disappointed to find business operations were a good bit more restrictive than they had imagined, even once they accepted the idea they would have to wait for various sectors of the economy to be opened over time. The U.S. had insisted on our companies having the option under the trade agreement of opening wholly owned businesses because of the problems U.S. companies had initially with their local partners - like the ones I described earlier concerning the Proctor and Gamble partnership. However, the Vietnamese are still not fully comfortable with the idea of foreign companies being completely independent as solely owned firms. And, as a result, they have delayed a number of such applications for such a long time that a number of firms either went away or agreed to operate in conjunction with a local partner.

Q: Did you find that at a certain point, you might say the entrepreneurial chromosomes started to kick in, I mean the Orient is a bit like also the Levant?

HARTER: Yes, very much so and particularly in the southern part of the country where there already was a capitalist and market-oriented tradition from the pre-1975 era. Manufacturing for the international market place was focused there as well. Provincial authorities in those areas picked up on the old Taiwan and Chinese models of export zones and special processing zones. They weren't anywhere near as successful in their efforts as either the Chinese or Taiwanese had been but the zones that worked the best were all in the south. The southern efforts were aided by a larger pool of labor, better ports around Saigon and good agricultural products to use in food processing industries. Once local authorities saw this was a useful model for development, every province and region tried to have its own export development or processing zone, whether it made sense to do so or not. The central authorities did not try to create any planned approach, at least not while I was there. As a result, there was no real sensible pattern of development in these zones. The PRC went through a similar phase after they had opened up the first three or four test zones in southern China. Once the Chinese authorities decided to transfer that model to other parts of China, there were lots of regions that wanted to set up the zones. But, the Chinese had a better system of control and didn't allow it to get out of control as the Vietnamese did. I think at one point, the Vietnamese had development zone projects in every province and in some provinces in the south there were more than one. As a result, most of them were doing very little business. Even the zones that were established in primary marketing and export locations, like Haiphong on the coast outside Hanoi, couldn't get off the ground. The zones created in the north often appeared to be the least well planned. They had very large spaces set aside for factories to be constructed, and they put in some basic infrastructure, but even in Haiphong only two or three companies were actually operating after several years of trying to attract investors.

Q: How about the overseas Vietnamese in the United States, particularly of France, but also Australia. Were they beginning to come in and bringing their skills they had learned, in France, United States, or Australia?

HARTER: There was a certain amount of that, particularly among younger Vietnamese. The older Vietnamese, particularly the older generation in the United States and Australia, New Zealand, Canada, - those who were adults when they left Vietnam - were much more negative about doing anything with the Communist regime. This was less of a problem for the Vietnamese in France who had left the country in 1954-1955. They had an additional generation away from the Communist regime and 35 and 40-year old Franco-Vietnamese had less of a direct connection to the Communist past.

Those among the older generation of Vietnamese-Americans who did return tended to focus on social welfare issues rather than trying to engage in commercial activities. Most of them were treated respectfully by the local authorities, but the Vietnamese Government tended to be suspicious of this group and watched them closely. Over time, however, many of them were given more freedom to operate and these Vietnamese-Americans gradually established a basis of trust among the local authorities. Certainly younger people did indeed come back to reconnect with their roots and to see if there was an opportunity to use their "overseas" expertise to make a good living. Some of the youngsters also got involved in social work and tried to focus on education opportunities to help the Vietnamese society to better deal with the outside world. I don't think any of the ones who came to Vietnam looking to make a lot of money actually did, but some of them certainly got some small business operations off to promising starts. Actually, I don't think anybody in the international business community was making lots of money in Vietnam.

Over time however, the Vietnamese successfully adapted to the needs of a market driven export industry and were able to get into the textile and other such basic industry markets in the U.S. They adjusted to U.S. and other global marketing requirements for style, safety, and produced different products for different markets. You can see today even major woman's clothes labels, like Jones of New York and Ann Taylor market products made in Vietnam. In the lower-end apparel lines, items that sell in T J Max or in Kohls or Walmart there is a much wider range of products made in Vietnam. You see a lot of handicrafts or household use items from Vietnam in stores like Pier One or Tuesday Morning. At this time, you don't see much in the way of Vietnamese made electronics or small appliances. Those products with the now well-known Japanese or Korean brand names are generally still made in the Chinese factories. That sort of manufacturing has not moved into Vietnam to any significant degree. Instead, you are seeing Chinese brand names competing with the Korean and Japanese brands, but the products are still largely made in the PRC.

The most specialized of the apparel manufacturers who came to Vietnam were the athletic shoe manufacturers, like NIKE or REEBOK, for example. Over the previous decades, these shoe manufacturers linked up with shoe factories in Asia - initially in Taiwan and Hong Kong, then in Korea, and finally in China - and gave them the designs and the production requirements and let these factories and foreign entrepreneurs make the NIKE or REEBOK shoe. NIKE, for example, generally did not have a direct involvement in the ownership or management of the factory in these overseas locations. Their big contribution to the production process was quality control and ensuring the factory product would meet their international standards. NIKE said, "Here's the shoe we want, the quality standard we want and we want X number of dozen pairs a month to ship abroad." As the costs began to rise in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the big firms went to Korea. Then Taiwan and Korean entrepreneurs moved factories to China and set up new factory operations there with lower cost Chinese labor. While I was in Vietnam, some of the Korean, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong entrepreneurs started setting up these factories in Vietnam to produce for NIKE among others.

The NIKE operation in Vietnam created a big problem for the company's corporate image and the Embassy ended up very involved in the process of trying to smooth over the difficulties the company had with the Vietnamese Government. Some of the Korean and Taiwan Chinese factory managers were pretty rough with their local Vietnamese employees and it got attention from the local and international media. You'll recall this was the era when there was a lot of international media attention to clothing chains that had factories in Central America that resembled old fashioned sweat shops - poor working conditions, poor health conditions, abusive treatment of employees, underage workers, etc. Some major "name brands" and "celebrity owners" had to get a lot more involved in overseeing what was happening in the locales where they were doing their manufacturing.

NIKE wasn't so smart when the issue first got some public attention in Vietnam. NIKE's comments seemed like they were stonewalling any criticism of the Vietnam operations. As they got more criticism over what was happening in a couple of the factories, NIKE seemed to be more defensive and even less responsive. I must say, I have never seen a more ineptly handled public relations effort than the one NIKE tried in Vietnam. They just simply inflamed the overall issue in Vietnam for better than a year, making the situation progressively worse, rather than better. NIKE eventually "got the message" and took more responsibility for what was happening in factories that produced for the brand. But, the company had to commit additional personnel, tighter US supervision and oversight and finally had to revise corporate requirements for a number of its partners who were operating in Vietnam. The Embassy reported on the issues during several factory visits and helped NIKE deal with the Vietnamese authorities and provided advice on how best to overcome their negative image.

Q: What a major cartoonist, Gary Trudeau really hit them hard on this. It became, I mean it was very much in the forefront, because you had these big athletic stars of basketball and all and they were being castigated for being associated with sweat shops.

HARTER: I visited a number of these shoe manufacturing facilities, both in Vietnam as well as earlier when I was in China, and you could readily see where problems could occur. I'm not referring here to NIKE or any particular brand's operations, but as you walked through a shoe manufacturing line each separate production stage had its own hazards and problems. In the area where they heated up the glues that held the different pieces of the shoe together the odor was really difficult to deal with. Lots of workers on the line just weren't wearing protective masks and nobody was insisting they had to do so. In the places where machines did the sewing, or the assembly of various elements of the shoe, the production line was so crowded and the people so close together you wondered how people managed to stretch without banging into somebody else and upsetting the rhythm of the production. Lighting in some of the factories was often terrible and there were many areas with inadequate ventilation so that in the cutting areas there were clouds of dust and fabric particles in the air. Floors were often littered with all sorts of production remnants which were hazardous for safe movement.

Nonetheless, in Vietnam as well as in China, there were a number of factories that were much better and were a lot closer to proper conditions for worker safety and the operations were conducted in a healthy environment. There were fewer factories in Vietnam that had large worker dormitories as they had in China. When I was in China, much of the labor in the Guangdong processing factories came from outside the province. The workers, in many cases young women, were put in these big dormitories that were attached to the factories. A factory shift ran from 8 to 12 hours and the workers would move from production line to bunks which had just been occupied by the young women who were now starting the next production line shift. They did this all year long, with the exception of the two or three week break they got at the Lunar New Year holidays when the trains filled up with all of the workers taking home their gifts and money for the families they left behind in the rural provinces of the Central and Southwest regions of China.

China had big production-line cafeterias in their factories which provided meals on a regular basis all day long. The Vietnamese factories also had cafeterias because the workers needed a meal during their regular work shifts, but there were not many places that operated all day long with different shifts of workers. Over time, the factories began to install health and infirmary rooms with some trained personnel to treat illnesses or take care of minor worker injuries. These improvements were largely introduced by the international firms and Vietnamese firms soon found they had to copy these "benefits" in order to attract good workers. So even though there were some problems here and there, the opening up of the Vietnamese market did provide some real benefits to the general labor situation as well as providing opportunities for Vietnam to absorb new techniques and technologies.

Q: Well, sort to sum up Dennis, did you see this whole trade thing must have put tremendous strains on the Vietnamese government. It was an old style Communist government where it had all the controls and all this. You have to be competitive and almost to survive in the modern world, you pretty well got to accept these things. But, this is not to just say, OK fine, we'll have these rules, it means all sorts of things, including sort of bringing real managers into some of the party apparatus. Were you watching this?

HARTER: Yes, and the Vietnamese answer to that threat to their control was simply, in large part, to delay the whole evolutionary process. The Vietnamese government and the Communist Party still had to make the ultimate decision about what project or corporate operation was going to be approved. If project X was to build a large dam for hydroelectric power that would lead to opening new agricultural areas and new factory construction and development of a particular isolated area, the Government and the Party were involved in all of the individual decisions that had to be made about the project - the financing package, the size and scope of the project, the composition of the international participants, etc. If the Vietnamese found it difficult to make these decisions, they simply postponed them or set up short-term obstacles that had to be overcome before anything else would be permitted to move forward. In some cases, major infrastructure projects that had adequate international financing to develop power plants or to utilize off-shore gas resources were just postponed year after year as the Vietnamese debated how to proceed. There are projects being looked at today that were originally on the books to be done in the 1990s. While I've been out of Vietnam now for a couple of years, my impression is this situation has not changed significantly and Vietnam's modernization and growth to date could have been a lot bigger and a lot faster if the Vietnamese leadership had really committed itself to moving forward.

Q: Was there a feeling that you got to wait for the war fighting leadership to almost die out? I mean, was there a feeling that the new people coming on board or maybe another generation or so that sort of the Gorbachevs of Vietnam had begin to come in or was it still, was the party still a pretty rigid and sort of narrow-minded organization?

HARTER: I think for the most part the Party leadership still was rigid and narrow-minded when I was there. I also think it was not so much a product of the war-time hardships as much a product of the ideology itself. The Vietnamese political and Communist Party leaders were remarkably tolerant of Americans. They showed very little hostility to us at all. There were occasions when you could see some hostility among the military men that likely was a holdover from the war. But, beyond those few occasions, the general population in the northern part of the country did not express resentment towards the US and Ambassador Peterson and his marriage to a Vietnamese clearly gave the US a positive image in Hanoi. But, you are correct, they needed to have a few more Gorbachevs to come in and shake up the ideology, to break the stereotypes and molds of communism. You needed people in positions of influence who had a broader range of education and an understanding of the way the rest of the world operated before things were going to significantly change. These people were ready to see change.

The people who were most anxious for and most understanding of the need for change were the people who'd had this international exposure. Many of them were technocrats, engineers, people who had had training in Eastern Europe or in the Scandinavian countries that had remained open to Vietnam during the embargo era. They were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Trade Ministry people who had been abroad and who had spent time in Western countries, not just within the socialist bloc. They had a better understanding of where things were going on the outside and what needed to be done for Vietnam to be a part of that process. Presently, there are people moving into middle levels of the government and business firms, people who obtained advanced degrees and technical training in Western countries, including the United States. These people are going to make the difference and give impetus to change. I think within this next decade, even the first years of the decade, those people will begin to influence the changes and the speed of development will pick up more rapidly. I think the changes will take place and I think Vietnam will soon be one of the Southeast Asian tigers.

Q: Now, here in Northern Virginia, where there's a significant Vietnamese population, it seems every other high school valedictorian is of Vietnamese origin. Were you seeing, was this manifesting itself in the home population?

HARTER: Yes, you were seeing some of that. The overall education levels of the Vietnamese were expanding, but the basic education for most Vietnamese, particularly in the rural areas, didn't provide for very much school time and didn't provide much real world knowledge. The domestic education system really stopped short of junior high school and you got narrower and narrower percentages of people going on to high school and to college within Vietnam. There is now greater investment in education but the brighter people are all trying to get out and go abroad to study. More foreign funding, more cooperative programs between Vietnamese institutions and foreign institutions are helping to improve the domestic education system, and that will show results in another several years.

Q: Well, you left Vietnam in 2001?

HARTER: Summer of 2001.

Q: What happened? Did you retire at that point?

HARTER: No, I didn't retire at post. I came back to Washington looking for a job and had the most frustrating experience I've ever had with the Foreign Service. When I came back, I was nearing retirement for "time in grade" as a Minister Counselor. The question of course was to what other things I would do. While I was Chargï¿½ after Ambassador Peterson left, Secretary of State Powell visited Vietnam [July 24-27, 2001] and I talked with him about possible ambassadorial assignments. I also talked with Jim Kelly, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs during that same visit. He suggested I consider being Ambassador to the Marshall Islands or the Mariana Islands in the Pacific. I turned down that suggestion and told him I wasn't interested in just having the title of Ambassador. I wanted to have something to do and sitting out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on a group of small sandy islands didn't exactly seem like something meaningful to do. I reviewed with AS Kelly the qualifications I had for other Southeast Asian positions, but nothing further was proposed. I came back to Washington and talked to my advisor in Personnel in the Department when I finished my home leave. It was October, 2001, the September 11 events had already turned things upside down but there seemed to be very little available. The Counselor said "we don't have anything for you right now, but we'll see what we can ring up."

For the next several months I was offered two or three "opportunities." The first proposal was to work in the Inspector's Office. So, I called to schedule an interview and gave them some details about my background. The person I spoke with said, "Well, you can come over and talk with us, but I'll tell you right now we can't afford you. As a Minister Counselor, you are too expensive for us. We'll do better taking a WAE in from the retiree ranks for a short period. That person can work the specific inspection project and then the employment stops. We don't have to pay any benefit items and the salaries are much lower than taking someone who is still in the Senior Foreign Service." That really was a non-job offer as nobody in the Inspector's Office was planning to hire a Senior Foreign Service officer.

Q: A WAE means "when actually employed." In other words, a temporarily employed retiree.

HARTER: Yes, that's right, a temporary worker from the retiree ranks. To bring him or her in to do the work, the office only had to budget for the specific period of time of the inspection and there was no requirement to absorb "benefits" payments because the retirees did not get any. By contrast, I was at the top of the regular Senior Foreign Service pay scale as a Minister Counselor.

After a few weeks, my advisor then suggested I interview for the position of Political Advisor at NSA. [Ed: National Security Agency at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland]. I didn't think that made much sense since the house I had just moved back to was 35 miles south of the State Department and NSA is about 30 to 35 miles further north of the Department. I would have a 65 to 70 mile commute each way, during rush hour. Several weeks later the advisor asked me to consider being the Political Advisor to the Central Command. This office was based in Florida. I told him having just moved back to Washington, I was reluctant to get uprooted to go to Florida for a short-term assignment. I explained how I'd already done a short tour in Seattle during the APEC summit and I thought it made more sense to do something in Washington DC, if there was no opportunity to go back overseas.

At the time, the Department had several different task forces in session, including one dealing with 9/11, and one dealing with Iraq. Never once did anybody suggest I work on one of the task force groups. Never once did anyone suggest there was some other thing I could do in the Department or even at FSI and I spent most of my time in the Foreign Service Lounge or the Library areas. After the New Year, I finally decided it just wasn't worth hanging around anymore. I waited until the May retirement class was scheduled and I signed up.

Q: The retirement class. What was it like, who was with you?

HARTER: I'll pass on describing the seminar and job search classes other than to say they were well-organized and well-presented. I was not really looking to any immediate employment opportunity and thus did not pursue some of the proposals I had described as targets for future work. I don't recall much about the other class members.

On balance, I believe my 36-year Foreign Service career was one of the longer ones among my entering A-100 class. A couple of my A-100 colleagues, Jerry Bremer and Alan Flanigan became Ambassadors, but I'm not sure any of the others in my class reached that level. As I recall, a very large number of my entering class were no longer in the Foreign Service within a decade of our entry.

So, I took the retirement seminar and after a handshake ceremony for retirees with Secretary of State Powell that was it.

Q: What have you been doing since?

HARTER: I've talked to a number of different people who were interested in doing business in Vietnam. This was all very informal, there was no salary involved. I also met with some Vietnamese who wanted to get involved in business here, but that also never materialized into any real business activity or real work after the Foreign Service. Primarily, I've been working on my house to make it more livable and to make space for my collection of Asian antiques. I've resumed membership in the Washington Oriental Ceramics Society, a group of ceramics aficionados who are themselves mostly collectors and I've participated in many of their activities. In June, I was signed up by the State Department to do declassification reviews on State Department documents under the Freedom of Information Act. I am now officially one of those W(hen) A(ctually) E(mployed) individuals. A friend of mine who was working in the FOIA office got me introduced into the program.

Originally I was told the office that did East Asia and Pacific (EAP) Affairs materials was very anxious to get me on board. But, it took another two months before I was assigned to their orientation program and, since then, I've not received any work assignment. The EAP office now says they don't have any space for me to work in and the amount of EAP work is limited right now. So, I remain connected, albeit very tenuously, to the State Department.

Q: Great. How about with the Vietnamese community here in Washington? Do you have anything?

HARTER: No. I haven't done anything with the Vietnamese community. When a couple of the business people came here from Hanoi looking for opportunities, I got reconnected with some of the Vietnamese Embassy officers. But, other than that, I've not really resumed any of those earlier connections. I don't think I'm on their mailing list for the annual Lunar New Year celebration or anything else like that anymore.

Q: What's Pete Peterson doing when he came back?

HARTER: He originally returned with the idea he would get back into politics. He was a candidate in the most recent primary for Governor in the State of Florida. That was his home area when he was a Congressman. Before the primary was held, he stepped aside to support former Attorney General Janet Reno. She did not win the election. After that, he went back into business promotion and business consulting. I'm told he is based now in Bangkok where he and his wife do business consulting work primarily focused on Vietnam. She is a former banker; I shouldn't say former because perhaps she's back doing banking work again. She went to Vietnam as a banker on behalf of an Australian bank, ABN I believe. Actually, I think the letters are reversed, it's NAB, I think that's an Australian bank. She had been in Vietnam for a few years establishing their office before she was recruited by the Australian Trade Office to head their trade operations at the Australian Embassy. She was head of the Trade Office when the two of them met and then subsequently married. So, I suspect she's probably doing banking related work.

Q: OK. Well, Dennis, I think this is probably a good place to stop.

HARTER: I agree.

Q: I want to thank you very much.

HARTER: It's been my pleasure.

End of interview