

AMBASSADOR JACK R. BINNS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Please tell us a little about your background.

BINNS: I am a West Coast person. I was born in Oregon, raised largely in Spokane, Washington. I came east in 1952 when I accepted an appointment to the US Naval Academy. I graduated from that distinguished institution in 1956 and began a career in the Navy. I served in the Navy until 1962, when I entered the Foreign Service. While serving in the Navy, I was assigned to "foreign shore duty" in Yokohama, Japan.

I had become interested in the Foreign Service through a friend, who retired 10-15 years ago and became a professor at Michigan University. I took the Foreign Service entrance examination in San Francisco, before leaving for Yokohama. While there, since I had received notice that I passed the examination, I went to see the Consul General to introduce myself. The people there were quite interested in me and were very helpful. I met a number of people there, two of whom are still close friends-one just retired and the other will be retiring shortly.

When I entered the Foreign Service in 1962, my class was reasonably large. It had between thirty-five and forty people. For much of our work, we were divided into two sections. A number of my colleagues have been quite successful in the Foreign Service; some left the Service and became successful in other endeavors. At age 29, I was one of the two or three oldest people in the class. Most of the class had had relatively little work experience; many were just entering from graduate school. The class was predominantly male-one woman; no blacks or Hispanics. In the sense that it was male and white, it was much like its predecessor classes. But it was not predominantly Ivy League. There had been a clear effort made to reach out to get geographical and academic representation-it went beyond the Ivy League, Stanford and Berkeley.

Q: What was your first assignment?

BINNS: My first post was Guatemala from 1963 to 1965. In those days, when you entered the Foreign Service, your first two year tour was a "rotational" assignment and you spent, in theory, at least, six months in the main sections of an Embassy-political, economic, consular and administrative. That was my first assignment.

Q: What were our interests in Guatemala in the early 1960s?

BINNS: Our interests were largely economic and security. This was after Castro's coup and there was a perception, indeed a reality, that he was fermenting revolution in the Central America region. The US had major investments in Guatemala, at least relative to other Central American countries. We had a major economic assistance program-The Alliance for Progress. We saw the development of Guatemala as an inoculation against communism and it was therefore a priority.

Socially, Guatemala at that time was a panorama of extremes. There was a substantial wealthy community which controlled the economy, controlled to a large extent the political scene although it by no means had a monopoly on it. Then there was 90% of the population living at or below the poverty level. The majority of this group was ethnic Indians, many of whom did not speak Spanish. It was clearly a polarized society.

Q: How well did you and your Embassy colleagues feel that the Alliance was working?

BINNS: We felt it was a very positive effort and thought we were having quite a bit of success. That was certainly true from the microeconomic perspective and from the social development point of view. We built over two thousands schools over a relatively short period. I remember that we would always try to send someone from the AID Mission or the Embassy to dedicate these schools as they were completed. We had two or three people on weekends cutting ribbons.

Q: Did these buildings remain school buildings?

BINNS: I am sure they are still being used as schools. We build two thousands of them, mostly small ones with four to five classrooms largely in remote rural areas. They were built for primary education. The question was that beyond that level there was not much of an infrastructure, not much government investment nor much economic interest in pursuing more than just rudimentary education. The poor rural families, once a son reached the age of ten, put him to work because the child could contribute more to the family by working in the fields than by staying in school.

Q: While you were in Guatemala, how important did you consider American business interests?

BINNS: Except for the United Fruit Company, American business was not particularly influential. Even the United Fruit Company's star was waning at this time. Because of American anti-trust legislation, the Company had been forced out of the railroad business-at one time it had owned the only railroad in Guatemala. It was forced to sell it because of American law. The same law broke the Company's monopoly on sea-borne transport in Guatemala. Until the early 50s, United Fruit owned the only deep water port in Guatemala. There was no road linking the port to Guatemala City and other major population centers of the country. There was only the railroad. So United Fruit controlled the port, the railroads as well as large banana plantations which was the basis for one of the principal export products of the country. It had a lot of power.

Q: Your Ambassador was Jack Bell, I believe.

BINNS: That's right. I was most impressed by him. I thought he was extremely intelligent man; one who did a superb job as Ambassador from my point of view as a newcomer to the Service. His major interest is economic development. I remember most vividly that during my second year, while I was probably working in the administrative section, I was pulled out of the section to study what progress the Alliance for Progress had made. So an AID junior officer and myself were given the task of designing indices which would allow us to objectively measure the progress that was being made in meeting then specific goals of the Alliance. The Treat of Punta Del Este set up ten specific goals for the Alliance. One for example, which was easy to measure, was a sustained growth rate of two and half percent per annum above the population growth. There were others which for the most part did not lend themselves to quantitative measurement. So we had to device other indices. For example, for the eradication of literacy, it could only be done through a thorough census, which was beyond the capacity of Guatemala to conduct. We used instead the number of schools built, the number of children attending, the number of people attending adult education, the amount of investment the country was making in education from its own resources, the number of teachers being trained and so forth. There were a long series of measurements which while not addressing the issue directly, could provide a feel for where the program had been, where it was currently and how far it might have to go to meet the objectives. We spend several months doing this. It became clear that we were making more progress in some areas than others, but there was a general feeling that progress was being made across the board. In no case, to the best of my recollection, were there any objectives that were achievable in a ten year period.

Q: The Castro appeal was very strong at this time. Did we do anything to counter it?

BINNS: We were providing military assistance to the Guatemalan Armed Forces. We had a "Public Safety Program" through the AID mission which was intended to train the police. We were, as I mentioned, trying to inoculate the country against Castro's siren song by improving the lives of the Guatemalan citizens, especially for those at the lower end of the income scale. These were all activities to counter Castro. Not all were of course being conducted solely for that threat, but they served that purpose as well.

If you know Guatemala, its history is strewn with government over-throw attempts, usually by the military. Shortly after my arrival, the existing democratic-ostensibly democratic-government under President, was over-thrown by the military. It stayed in power throughout my tour, but shortly after my departure, conducted elections which were free and open in which the opposition party won. The new President was allowed to take office and served his full term.

Q: Your next assignment was Bolivia in 1965. What were your responsibilities there?

BINNS: I went as Executive Assistant to the Ambassador. It was a newly created position in the Embassy, in response to the Administration's desire to have closer linkages between program activities and budgetary requirements. During this period, programming budget in the Department took the form of CCPS (Comprehensive Country Programming System). I was sent there along with some twenty-five other relatively junior officers around the world, to run the CCPS and to serve as a staff aid to the Ambassador. The CCPS required the identification to a considerable degree of precision the policy objectives that were to be achieved in the country by the US elements. In that sense, it was a very useful exercise. We had to disaggregate these policy objectives into discrete lines of actions or strategies designed to attain those objectives. Then we had to relate somehow the priorities assigned to these objectives to budgetary allocations. The idea of identifying your objectives more precisely and the idea of disaggregating those objectives and the idea of designing your strategies and course of actions quite carefully to meet the objectives, seemed to me and everyone else a great improvement on previous practices. The system however broke down on the assumption that there was a linkage between the objectives and the resources devoted to attaining them. I drew the conclusion that sometimes the most important objectives might be political-for example, sustaining a democratic government in the face of hostile military or subversive threat-which might be sustained the best by just having the Ambassador talking to two or three key people and stopping the undermining. The resources involved would be nil. On the other hand, your fifth most important objective might be the development in Bolivia of the Chapare unsettled Region which might be a very resource intensive goal-building roads and other infrastructure, moving people into the area. So there is no correlation between how important an objective might be and the resource allocations. The assumption behind CCPS that there was such a correlation was just wrong.

Q: There are a lot of things that can't be quantified. But in the sense that it forced people to look at what they were trying to achieve, it was a very valid exercise.

BINNS: Another aspect of CCPS was that, at least in theory, you would be able to identify the presence of individuals and agencies of the US Government in the country that were not really contributing to our foreign policy objectives. Those positions could be eliminated and the people returned to the United States. Indeed, as recently as 1977 or 1978, in London the State Department inspectors discovered 17 or 18 people in the British Defense Department who were completely unknown to the Embassy. It could have been that 20 years earlier or whenever the program started, the Embassy may have been aware of their presence, but over a period of time, lost track of the program while these US government employees continued to go along merrily doing whatever it was they were doing.

Q: What was the situation in Bolivia in 1965-67 when you were there?

BINNS: As always in Bolivia, the situation was extremely poor. The country depended largely on its earnings from its tin mines. The political situation was that the Bolivian revolution, which began in 1952 and was a real revolution-changed land tenure patterns, changed land ownership, gave rights to the rural campesinos, who had been essentially disenfranchised and treated as serfs-was ended by a military intervention in 1964, when the military threw out President Victor Paz Estenssoro. The military closed his political party and took over. It was initially at least a stressful period because they overthrow of a democratic government was seen as a set-back for the Alliance for Progress. Over the near term, the Bolivian military agreed to return to democratic rule, had elections which brought, not surprisingly, a military officer, to the office of President.

Our Ambassador at the time was Doug Henderson, who was very good. He was a first class human being. That is also true of Jack Bell; both were extremely able and admirable people. We had an enormous AID mission in Bolivia in the mid 60s. We were putting in big bucks in development funding for direct budget support of the Bolivian government. There were two types of budget support: one was direct allocation of US appropriated dollars that were given to the Bolivian government for mutually agreed upon uses to permit them to carry out their functions and the other was called "extraordinary government budget support" which was entirely funded from local currencies accumulated by the US government from the sale of PL 480 food sales and distributions. We basically fed the country of Bolivia for a long, long time and generated enormous amounts of local currency. We used that currency for developmental ends; much, but not all, went to the Bolivian government to fund programs that both they and we considered essential. At one time, the AID Director, Irving Tragen, said to me that we controlled over 60% of the Bolivian currency. Here was the United States controlling 60% of another country's currency.

Q: Of course, that kind of situation also has great dangers. What was the view of the Embassy in having all this power?

BINNS: The view of the upper levels of the Embassy and the AID mission, which I got to know pretty well through my CCPS assignment (all resource related questions used to come to my desk before going to the Ambassador, at least in theory, which gave me as a junior officer an unusual broad overview of the Country Team and US inter-agency operations) had a concern about our deep involvement. When I arrived, we were in the process of phasing out the direct budgetary support and the local currency support. The direct dollar support was being phased out at approximately 20% per year under what was known as the "Sullivan" plan. It was totally phased out in 1967. With it, there was a major restructuring of the Bolivian government.

The local currency support was a little trickier because we still owned the money. We could either burn it or spend it. The question was how we were spending it. It was hard to find developmental ways to spend local currencies other than directly supporting government programs-wages, etc. So the phase out of that program took a little bit longer until the local currency was exhausted.

There was a concern at the Embassy that its role was too big and clearly Irv Tragen, who was in my time in the Foreign Service during which I associated with a lot of AID programs, was by far the best mission director I ever encountered, both conceptually and in dealing with governments and people.

Q: Tells us about the Bolivian miners.

BINNS: They would occasionally be unhappy with the central government, usually as result of their wages not being increased as rapidly as the inflation or that the government had taken some action to close down the less productive tin mines. That would bring as many as 50,000 miners to La Paz where they would march down the streets with their mining gear and sticks of dynamite tucked into their belts. It was quite a dramatic scene. In La Paz, at least, they rarely set off the dynamite, but tales of their dynamite activities at the mines are legion.

Q: Were we during your tour in Bolivia very much involved in the drug issue?

BINNS: It was not a significant matter. Later, during the 1972-74 period, I was the Bolivian desk officer when the drug issue was a major one, calling for White House interest. There were special task forces to deal with the narcotic issue. Needless to say, most of those efforts were fruitless and the situation continued to deteriorate simply because the market for the products grew and grew.

Q: After nine months of international labor training, you went to El Salvador and were there from 1967 to 1971. What was the situation in San Salvador when you arrived?

BINNS: Politically, the military, essentially reform minded, under Julio Rivera, who had just left the Presidency when I arrived, had assumed power. Power had flowed from the traditional oligarchy to the military, which pursued development and other strategies which the oligarchy did not like very much. It tried to dull the cutting edge of the military's reform process, usually with some success. Nevertheless, there was still a feeling of reform progress. The first several legislative elections under President Rivera were by all accounts free and open. The Presidential elections for his succession which brought Fidel Sanchez, another military officer, to the office was probably the most open Presidential election ever held in El Salvador up to that time. The Christian Democratic Party, which was a new party in existence only three or four years, claimed it had won that election, but I am not sure that even it believed it. It was nothing like 1972 when there was blatant and open fraud which everybody could see. So essentially while I was there, it was a very hopeful period.

Q: What were our interests in El Salvador at this time?

BINNS: Economic development was our overriding interest. We didn't have a great deal of investment; it was not a large market, but we felt that El Salvador needed help, needed the inoculation against Castro's subversion. El Salvador was also a country that was marked by sharp economic differences between a small elite and a mass of people at or below the poverty line. You had cautious movement toward reform, but at the same time, it was a repressive society-less repressive than five years earlier and much less repressive than it had been thirty years previously, but still a repressive society.

Q: One of the accusations against the Foreign Service and the Department that has been with us for a long time is that we tend to deal with the elite group at the top, ignoring the large masses below. How did the Embassy work in a situation such as El Salvador?

BINNS: When I went there, our Ambassador was Raul Castro, a political appointee. He later became our Ambassador to Bolivia and then Governor of Arizona and later became our Ambassador to Argentina. He did quite a good job in El Salvador, less good jobs in Bolivia and Argentina. I felt that in El Salvador we were too close to the ruling party; not too close to the oligarchy because for the most part we didn't have much to do with it. To the extent that the accusation you mentioned might be applied to El Salvador, it is incorrect. But we were close to the ruling political party, which was in some respect influenced by the oligarchy, but only as one of several factors. My job was that of Labor Attaché, which required me to establish contacts with trade unions. I supervised a labor development program which was conducted by the American Institute for Free Labor Development and financed by AID. So I worked for the Embassy in a political position and for AID as a program director. I persuaded the Ambassador that we needed to improve our contacts with the Christian Democrats; I persuaded the Ambassador that we needed to reach out beyond just the trade unions that were affiliated with the regional democratic labor movement and reach out to the Christian Democratic labor movement with which we had no contacts. We had to establish at least lines of communications with a communist affiliated trade union center. So I was out a lot talking to people who had had no previous contact with the Embassy and to whom the Embassy had previously not paid much attention.

The Ambassador did not have the Christian Democrats or the labor leaders over for dinner, but he would certainly include them in larger functions.

Q: Why couldn't the Christian Democrats be invited for dinner?

BINNS: I didn't say they couldn't be invited; I just said that the Ambassador didn't. The two principal leaders of the C.D. Party-Napoleon Duarte and Abraham Rodriguez-were distinguished leaders. But the Ambassador was basically a conservative, even though a Democrat. He felt more comfortable with the upper middle class which was predominantly affiliated with the ruling National Conciliation Party.

Q: Did you have any problems with any parts of the US Government in your role as Labor Officer?

BINNS: In our goals and aims, there was consistency among all agencies-to the extent that I was ever aware of what others were trying to do. On the other hand, there was a real egregious case in which the CIA attempted to enlist a leading labor leader with whom I had worked with very closely. They put him on their payroll; it caused him lots of problems and didn't help us. Prior to that time, he had been very willing to work with us. We gained nothing from the Agency's efforts except to gain some unvarnished intelligence about what was going on or what his views of the labor movement were. It was a dopey action for which we and the labor leader paid a price. But basically, all agencies were pursuing the same goals.

Q: I think that just points out that putting foreigners on US payrolls does not give you information that you couldn't get in overt manner.

BINNS: There was another probably even more egregious case. CIA Had a very good penetration of the Christian Democratic Party. They were paying a senior member of the Party, who I am pretty sure I know who it was. After some time, I was able to build up very good relationships with Duarte, Rodriguez and other senior party leaders, including Fidel Chavez, now the Presidential candidate, but who at that time was a young man who was a good friend. We were getting more information than we needed about what the CD Party thought about issues, their aims and strategies. At one point, Duarte said to me that if we wanted to give them money, it would be welcomed. He said they would take money from anywhere. It was not a plea for recruitment, but just his reflection on the US activities. Senior members of the Party knew that one of their members had been become a CIA agent because he had told them so. They used that channel as a way to get their message to the Embassy. From their point of view, it was a perfectly legitimate approach under the circumstances.

Q: How did the Embassy view the "Great Soccer War"?

BINNS: There were some very interesting side aspects. Basically, the demographic pressure in El Salvador was so great that over a period of approximately twenty years, large numbers of Salvadoran had migrated illegally to Honduras, which had a lot of land, almost free for the taking. It had employment opportunities; it had banana plantations which paid much better than any employment in El Salvador. There were probably between 100,000-200,000 illegal Salvadoran in Honduras. The Hondurans viewed the Salvadoran as taking the best jobs because the Salvadoran have a deserved reputation as being extremely hard workers.

In 1969, for reasons that I still don't clearly understand—partially due to domestic politics, partially conscious effort to divert popular attention from domestic problems toward the presence of the Salvadoran immigrants, partially because of the football (soccer) rivalry in the World Cup preliminaries—tension between Honduras and El Salvador rose after a game in El Salvador which hosted the Hondurans. The Salvadoran stayed up all night screaming in front of the hotel where the Honduras team was playing so that no one could sleep. It was trivia, but shortly after that, riots broke out in Honduras where Salvadorans were dragged out of their homes, beaten, driven off jobs, brutalized. Obviously, the Honduran government sanctioned those mob actions. Literally thousands of Salvadorans immigrated back to El Salvador, including some who had lived in Honduras for as long as twenty years. Many were in bad physical condition because they had been beaten or because they had to walk fifty or hundred miles to the border. It was a very, very bad situation. Tensions were rising dramatically. Both military groups were making noises about the each other's barbarity. Finally, in July 1969, the Salvadoran armed forces launched a military attack on Honduras, driving twenty to thirty kilometers into the country. They repelled the Honduran army's counter-attacks. Then they literally ran out of gas and couldn't move forward. Within 100 hours, the OAS had intervened and a truce was established. Ultimately, the Salvadorans withdrew. Interestingly enough, in the days preceding the outbreak of the war, we were extremely concerned about the possibility of a Salvadoran incursion into Honduras. There were a lot of reasons why we didn't want that to happen, but suffice it to say, our efforts to avoid the war were unsuccessful.

Our Ambassador at the time in El Salvador was Bill Bowdler, who at every Country Team meeting and in between was asking for the best intelligence available on what the Salvadoran army was doing. He encouraged the members of the MilGroup to circulate among the military, particularly in the outlying areas to see whether there were any signs of mobilization. He wanted daily meetings to bring all the intelligence together. The same injunction was placed on the Defense Attaché and the Political section. The key was the military. During the prewar period of several weeks, our MilGroup people would return and report that they saw no sign of any movement whatsoever or any signs of mobilization. They reported that the Salvadoran army was not doing any of the things that one might expect from a military force preparing for action. On the other hand, we had political leaders saying to us that war was likely and that El Salvador would attack Honduras. Our military officers could not corroborate this prediction. CIA could not get any corroboration, because their key liaison contact was a senior military officer who was involved in the mobilization plans. But he was a liaison man; CIA had not penetrated the military.

The most interesting aspect, which we discovered only later, was that the commander of our MilGroup and the chief of our Army MilGroup section, were meeting daily for long periods with the general staff of the Salvadoran armed forces, planning their mobilization and their attack on Honduras. It blew our minds, but it absolutely true. As far as we know, these American military officers were on their own and not under Washington instructions, as far as we were able to ascertain. They were involved in Salvadoran activities without knowledge of the other members of the MilGroup and certainly without the knowledge of the Embassy. One could argue that the other members of the MilGroup might have suspected something or were pretty stupid.

The way we discovered this atrocious negligence of duty was even more extraordinary than the fact itself. When the Salvadoran attacked Honduras, they immediately violated the Security Assistance agreement by using the equipment and munitions that we had provided for something other than self-defense and against a non-Soviet or communist power. We were required by law and by reason to suspend our military assistance program which meant withdrawing all our advisors from all Salvadoran units and breaking all relationships with the Salvadoran military. That was very politically heart-felt in Washington because the whole incursion came as a great surprise. The Embassy, except perhaps some of the MilGroup, recognized that the suspension of assistance was the only right and proper response that could be made. So we stopped all supplies. That mean for example that all Salvadoran planes were immediately grounded for lack of spare parts.

This greatly upset the Salvadoran. They called the Ambassador in and told him that they were very upset. He told them that his hands were tied; they had violated an agreement and our law was quite clear. We didn't have any choice. The Salvadoran President said that to show his government's displeasure he would declare persona-non-grata the MilGroup commander. The chief of the army section and the chief of the air force section. We considered unfortunate, but weren't overly upset since there was not to be a military assistance program for a while anyway. The Salvadoran gave our military officers a week to pack up and go home. Soon after the President's action, the MilGroup commander came to the Ambassador and said: "Mr. Ambassador, it is very unfair that I being declared p.n.g. It is not fair. Nevertheless, I would like to pay farewell calls on the chiefs of staff of the armed forces, the Minister of Defense and others. But since I can't have anything to do with them, would you grant me an exception?". The Ambassador agreed that it was decent thing to do.

It turned out that the MilGroup commander, who was a colonel and a graduate of West Point, didn't speak a word of Spanish. So he took with him a Puerto Rican officer, a major, as a translator and note-taker. When they returned from the farewell calls, the colonel instructed the major to prepare memoranda of conversation. The major sent the drafts to the colonel, who cut them to bits so that nothing that had transpired was left in memoranda. In fact, the MilGroup commander put in a lot of stuff that had not transpired. The major, who was not too smart, went to his superior, who was the number two in the army section. That officer read the originals and the corrected versions. In the original there was comment made by the colonel to the effect that the problem between the US and El Salvador was the American Ambassador and his failure to perceive and support legitimate Salvadoran aspirations. Furthermore, the Ambassador's unilateral decision to suspend assistance was unwarranted. The colonel was blaming the Ambassador for everything that the US government had done to punish the Salvadoran. All that was in the originals of the memcons. The colonel had of course scratched all of that out and had put in other stuff. The number two in the army section was also a West Pointer couldn't believe what had happened; he took the two documents home, slept on them and at 7:30 the next morning went to the Ambassador's residence with the papers. He said that his commanding officer had done this; that it was unconscionable and that he couldn't support it and thought that the Ambassador should be aware of what had transpired. The colonel was then given twenty-fours to leave. Subsequently, the chief of staff of the Salvadoran armed forces, at a party, approached the Ambassador and said: "One thing about that war with Honduras that always confused us was your strong reaction when in fact you helped us plan the mobilization". He then proceeded to describe the activities of the American military officers, still puzzled why the Americans had helped to plan the invasion and then had cut off military assistance when it happened.

The whole story was unbelievable. Bowdler actually laughed. He had an opportunity when the versions of the memoranda of conversations were brought to him and the subsequent immediate despatch of the MilGroup commander, there had been a lot of cable traffic with Southern Command, whose commanding general wanted to court-martial the colonel. SouthCom took the matter very seriously, but Bowdler, being more decent than I would have been under those circumstances, decided against that on the grounds that a court martial would raise an unnecessary uproar. He recommended that the colonel just be put out to pasture and be permitted to retire in a year or so.

Washington was appalled by the whole incident. It was the most egregious thing I have ever seen. At that time, out bilateral military assistance agreements for the most part required the host country to pay for all the expenses related of the American military-rental allowances, some contributions to the US government for salaries and other expenses. The officers were provided cars by the host government. So many of the MilGroup officers came to view themselves as much, if not more, agents of the host government's military because that was who supported them-financially and in other ways. They had allegiance to the Embassy, SouthCom and the host government's military establishment. I have seen similar attitudinal problems in Bolivia where a MilGroup commander was removed by Ambassador Doug Henderson, basically for articulating his views on his relationships; he felt that he was responsible to the Ambassador for certain things and to the Bolivians for others. He said that he always had to chose between the two. Henderson said that he admired his frankness, but that under the circumstances, it was best for the officer to leave the country.

Q: Tell us a little about Bill Bowdler, who was a very important figure in our Central America policy development.

BINNS: Bowdler was a lot different from Raul Castro. He did have Christian Democrats, labor people and others to his house for dinner. He was more informal and thoughtful. He was profound. He did act decisively after the MilGroup incident, but he was much less forceful than Douglas Henderson. He was more of an intellectual. He had trouble with US military elsewhere as well. He had an Air Attaché^{1/2} in South Africa who acted contrary to existing US government and Embassy policy and got us into a big flab with the South African government by flying the Embassy airplane over the South African nuclear site, took photographs and then left the camera in the plane, where it was confiscated by the authorities. There was no intelligence that he could have collected that wasn't already available to us. The South Africans knew where he was because they watched him and he violated existing inter-agency procedures on how you get approval for intelligence missions of that sort. It was a royal screw up.

Q: You left El Salvador in 1971 and were assigned to ARA. What were your responsibilities?

BINNS: I started out on the Inter-Departmental Group (IG) staff. That staff is now know as the Regional Policy Office in ARA. One of our functions is to coordinate our policy in the region and oversee its conduct. In the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, a lot of power was given to these inter-departmental groups, which were chaired by the State Department's Assistant Secretary. The IGs made resource allocations and other policy decisions. The inter-departmental process reached its zenith during Henry Kissinger's term as National Security Advisor. The process eroded somewhat after he moved to the State Department because he didn't need that elaborate system there to influence what was going on. In the Reagan period, you had anarchy-there was no process, certainly as far as Central America was concerned.

I was dealing with all of Latin American when I was on the IG staff. Ever since the beginning of my tour in El Salvador, I had the feeling that the region was being neglected by the top policy makers. For example, in the Johnson Administration, you could observe the steady decline of economic and security assistance levels and other resources allocated to that region.

Q: What were our major interests in Latin America in the early 70s?

BINNS: I would say that the major interest of the IG staff was to get Henry Kissinger's attention to a policy review paper on Latin America-called a National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) at the time. Shortly after taking office, Kissinger sent out a NSSM directing ARA to conduct an inter-agency study of our policy toward Latin America. He wanted to know where we should be going. The study process was underway when I got to the IG staff. It was still going on twelve months later when I left the IG staff. It would be scheduled for an NSC review and then something else would arise to take it off the agenda. Three months later we would get a new NSSM telling us to redo the study, which we would do. Then we send it back to the NSC, but it never got on the agenda. Kissinger had a bipolar world view.

Q: As you looked at Latin America, how did Mexico fit in?

BINNS: Mexico has a unique role because of our inter-dependence and the many faceted relationship that we have with that country stemming from its proximity. It doesn't therefor fit very neatly with the rest of the Hemisphere.

Q: In 1972, you moved to be the Bolivian desk officer.

BINNS: Yes. By the time I arrived, Che Guevara had already been done away with. Development and the restitution of democracy were the big issues. President Renhad been killed in a helicopter accident. He was succeeded by his Vice-President, who was extremely weak with no political base. He was hand chosen and seemed to be the kind of Vice President selected by a number of political leaders around the world. But he couldn't hold on and the military took power. We objected and tried to push the Bolivians toward democracy. There were more coups. We just tried to get our relationships with the Bolivians straightened out. Narcotics had become an issue, but it was not yet anywhere near the top of the agenda-maybe it was third or fourth.

Q: What was your impression of ARA after your tours in the field?

BINNS: Whenever we thought that we weren't getting the proper amount of top level attention, we would look at the Bureau of African Affairs and felt better. Clearly, we weren't the Bureau of European Affairs, which was the glamor bureau and the Bureau of Near East and South Asia Affairs, because of the region's volatility probably get the lion's share of resources. The Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs had a war. The Reagan administration changed all that.

Q: Then you had a major change of pace. How did that happen?

BINNS: Thanks to Henry Kissinger and his GLOP theory. He reputedly, after a hemispheric OAS Foreign Ministers meeting in Mexico, where he met with all our Ambassadors in Latin America, was appalled by their alleged lack of understanding and appreciation for the great bipolar issues of the day and felt that they were very parochial; he felt that this was a problem in the Foreign Service and in his usual insightful, but in the short term probably stupid, was decreed that 60% of all assignments made in the next period would be made to areas outside an individual's area of specialization. Hence, if one were a Chinese language officer and an East Asian expert, he could expect to be assigned perhaps to Africa or the Middle East or Latin America. A Europeanist could go anywhere, but 60% of all officers were not to go to their areas of special knowledge and experience.

I had been scheduled to go to Guatemala as chief of the Political Section. That was never consummated because of GLOP and the Office of Personnel proposed that I go to Madrid as Labor Attaché, which would have been a natural. As it turned out, there were problems with my acceptability to the AFL-CIO for that assignment. Because in the delay in getting that clearance, Personnel, assigned me to London in the Political Section, where a vacancy had unexpectedly developed.

Q: Let me pursue your comment about the AFL-CIO. Was that procedural problem or a policy problem?

BINNS: I am not sure what kind of problem it was. Labor Attaché assignments are referred to the Department of labor for approval. It checks with the AFL-CIO. If the latter has an objection, for whatever reason, it will make it known to the Department of Labor, which in turn will then not concur in the State Department's proposed assignment. The Director general has the authority to make the assignment anyway. In this particular case, we had a pusillanimous Director General and Personnel staff which didn't want to do that. Part of the problem was not so much that they disliked me, but they had someone they liked better. The Labor Department blamed it on the AFL-CIO; my few contacts there said it was not the AFL-CIO which had vetoed the assignment. My own guess is that the jerk in Labor Department, who was former Foreign Service officer whom I didn't like, made little effort to do anything. It turned out that the Madrid assignment was made in Solomonic fashion with neither of the contenders getting there in the end by extending the officer then in Madrid for another year. In any case, I did very well by the snafu.

Q: You served in London from 1974 to 1979-five years. What was your assignment?

BINNS: I started out working on the Labor Party, the Northern Ireland issue, the Scottish and Welsh national issues and I was the resident expert on Latin America.

Q: Lets' start with Northern Ireland. What were we doing on this subject?

BINNS: Kingman Brewster, who was my Ambassador at the end of my tour in London, put it best. He said: "In law, you have to distinguish between a problem and a fact. The problem you can resolve; the fact you have to accept. Northern Ireland clearly appears to be a fact". That sums it up precisely. What we in the Embassy tried to do, not always with success, was to try to keep the United States out of it. We had no business in it; we wished both sides-the Irish, the British, the Ulstermen Protestants and the Catholics-well. But it was not our problem or our fact. There was and still may be, although less so, a tendency particularly in the Irish-American community, to try to get the United States involved in the resolution of what they perceive to see as the "Northern Island problem" as opposed to the "Northern Ireland fact".

Q: Were there any pressures from people like Senator Kennedy and Speaker Tip O'Neill, both of whom represented large Irish-American communities, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Catholics?

BINNS: In 1974, when I went to London, Ted Kennedy had made some statements that upset the British. They were outraged by his involvement which they felt was based on ignorance of the situation in Northern Ireland. They thought that his statements were unhelpful. In case of O'Neill, during my five years there, I don't remember anything that he did that drew British outrage or even concern. In that same period, Kennedy's activities became less obnoxious to the British; he may have gained a better appreciation of the situation in Northern Ireland and what the two governments were doing. In my last year in London, I became the Political Counselor-chief of the Political Section. I had four different Ambassadors while I was in London-Walter Annenberg, Elliot Richardson, Ann Armstrong and Kingston Brewster.

Q: In the Northern Ireland case, we were not trying to play the "honest broker"?

BINNS: That was certainly the institutional preference. The State Department didn't want to touch it because it was and still is a "tar baby" and something over which we really have no influence and no ability to affect.

There was one compelling issue which to some extent is still an issue-or a collection of issues. I refer to the fund raising by the IRA in the US, illegal arm shipments from the US to Northern Ireland in support of the IRA, extradition of people that the British want and who live in the US Those issues are always with us.

Q: During this period, how were we dealing with these IRA problems and how did the British Government perceive our efforts?

BINNS: We condemned the IRA as government. Certainly there were members of Congress-and not all were Irish-American. There were some Italian-Americans who were very vocal-pro IRA. We supported the efforts of the Irish and British governments to resolve the problem. We supported direct rule and power sharing. There was a power sharing government for the first time in 1973-74 that ultimately collapsed in the face of popular opposition. Power sharing called for Catholic and Protestant politicians who formed a single government for the Northern province. But it lacked popular support and was brought down by a labor strike by Protestant workers. They closed the economy of the province and the government collapsed and direct rule from Westminster followed-no local Parliament, no local government.

Q: What was the status of the Welsh and Scottish nationalities issues at the time?

BINNS: There was a major interest concerning Scotland. The national problem of Wales is basically non-existent. There was an opportunity in 1979 for the Welsh and Scots to vote on what the British called "devolution"-essentially the return of powers from the central government to regional governments, which at the time didn't exist. The regional governments would have to be established. In Wales, about 70% of the people voted against devolution. In Scotland, of the people who bothered to vote, about 60% voted in favor, but the referendum was so drafted that in order to be approved, it required the support of 60% of registered voters. In Scotland, the vote fell short of it. So there was no devolution there either. However in Scotland, nationalism is alive although not well. In Wales, it is a dead issue.

Q: As a political officer and subsequently Counselor, what were your main concerns?

BINNS: It was a matter of avoiding problems. We tried to have the British government to continue to support our strategic interests in NATO and other parts of the world. The British, through the Commonwealth, an historical association with and influence over areas of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia that allow them to do things that we can't do. They can gain information which we couldn't collect on our own. So they are very helpful to us. The preservation of that collaboration, the preservation of their commitment to NATO, the preservation of their position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union were the main interests.

Q: Were there any major point of conflict with which you had to deal?

BINNS: There a number of them, none of them earth-shaking. One thing that was of concern was the leftward drift of the Labor Party, which, if it had continued, might have threatened the British commitment to the alliance, threatened their participation in European affairs and our collaboration in other areas of the world. Michael Foote was identified with this left-wing strain in the Labor party as was Neil Kinnock, the current Party leader. In fact he has brought the party toward the right. What concerned us most was what we called "entryism" which because of the Labor Party's structure, permitted extreme left wing groups-usually Trotskyites-to enter a constituency party organization and with twenty or thirty people who were willing to dedicate time to the effort, could take over that organization. A Labor Party constituent party in Dorking, England is no threat to the United States, but what they did, when they took over the party, was to determine who the party's candidate for Parliament might be from that constituency. Theoretically at least, if they were able to make this "entryism" program stick, they could control and dominate the Parliamentary party, which is, of course, when Labor wins an election, is what runs the government.

I arrived just after Ted Heath had lost the February elections. So Labor was in power when I arrived and when I left in July 1979, Margaret Thatcher had just come into office. So I served my London tour entirely with a Labor government. Harold Wilson was the Prime Minister initially and he was followed by Jim Callaghan.

Q: There was a book written about Wilson's overthrow. What was that all about?

BINNS: According to the person who advanced this theory, MI-5, which is the domestic intelligence organization comparable in some, but not many, respects to our FBI, felt that Wilson, for a long, convoluted and not very persuasive series of reasons, was an agent of influence for the Soviet Union. Some people say that helped contribute to his resignation and in turning the plot over to Callaghan. The plot was that the MI-5 people and their cohorts were going to make this public and that threat caused Wilson to step down. I don't believe a word of it.

Q: Were we comfortable with a Labor government?

BINNS: Quite. They were extremely supportive not only in NATO but also vis-a-vis the European Community, etc. We might have a discrete problem here and there-e.g., shipping arms to Chile-but no major issues. There were extensive consultations on all issues, global as well as local. Our level of foreign policy cooperation and consultation was closer with the British than any other foreign country. Not because the British were better allies than for example the Germans, but because the British through the Commonwealth and their historical connections, had a greater reach than others.

Q: Were you able to contact anyone in the British government?

BINNS: It was a unique experience for me that a foreign government was so open. People were extremely open with us. It was almost like working in Washington, maybe even better.

Q: Did you find it a problem to keep on top of all the relationships between the Embassy and the government? Or of telephonic conversations between Washington and the British government?

BINNS: I think that was true in the U.K. and some other posts. A lot of it has to do with who the Ambassador is. Clearly during the Annenberg period, the British, while many liked him personally, did not consider him to be a "serious" representative. As a consequence, the British began to conduct more business through their Embassy in Washington than through us in London. I think that changed with the advent of Elliot Richardson, who was probably at that time, at his peak of fame. He was regarded as a "serious" person and politician and was extremely connected in the US; Annenberg's departure coincided almost with a change in the U.S. government. I think then the Labor government was more comfortable dealing with us than with unknown persons in the State Department and other agencies in Washington. Later, they solved that perception by changing their ambassador in Washington. But clearly the change of our ambassadors in London shifted the burden of dialogue from the British Embassy in Washington to the American Embassy in London.

Q: How was Anne Armstrong regarded?

BINNS: She was extremely well liked and earned everyone's respect-British as well as Embassy staff-because of her intelligence and her ability to pick up very quickly on an issue. While her appointment initially was not greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm, she won the respect of all through her intelligence, diligence and the seriousness of her approach to her job. Both Richardson and Armstrong had rather brief periods in London-a year plus. That of course increased the burdens on the Embassy's professional staff. We were blessed during this period with Ron Spiers as the DCM-an extremely able officer who had had a distinguished career. He was followed by Ed Streater, who was also a very able and distinguished officer.

Q: Brewster had a much longer tour. He had been President of Yale. How did he perform?

BINNS: He was an outstanding Ambassador. He was the best that I served, partly because he had a longer tenure, but also because of his relationship with Cy Vance, the Secretary of State. They were close personally and Brewster could reach Vance at any time and essentially get anything he wanted out of the State Department. Unless you have witnessed such a relationship, you don't realize how helpful it can be, whether you are talking about resources, policy issues or anything else. Brewster could make things happen.

Q: That is an interesting point. It is often assumed that a political appointee has automatic access to people in power. This is not always the case. But it is certainly helpful an Ambassador who has direct access to the Secretary of State instead of some White House staffer.

BINNS: That is certainly true. There are many issues that are resolved by the White House, either through the NSC or through a staffer to the President. Rarely, although I am sure it happens, the issue is resolved by a direct call to the President.

Q: How did Carter relate to the British?

BINNS: Callaghan had a very strong and close relationship with Henry Kissinger. They were two different types, but they struck it off very well. They were personally close. For example, when Callaghan was named a "free man" of Cardiff, Wales, which was quite an honor, Henry Kissinger came from the United States to participate in the ceremonies at Callaghan's invitation. That was a personal gesture; it was not a policy matter; the two just liked each other considerably. That did not happen in the Carter period, in part because Vance was not the same type as Kissinger. Callaghan had become Prime Minister; David Owen was the Foreign Secretary and the same chemistry that existed between Kissinger and Callaghan did not flow between Vance and Owens. On the other hand, the Labor party liked Jimmy Carter a lot and particularly were pleased with his emphasis on human rights. The decision on the neutron bomb, for example, blind sided the British, who felt that it was handled very amateurishly.

In NATO, we had mooted the possibility of deploying an advance nuclear weapon that had the advantage of destroying targets by radiation-it killed the men inside a tank, but not the tank. It could be dropped on an occupied village for example and not destroy it, although the occupying army would be killed. Unfortunately, it would also kill any civilians in the village as well. There would be no long term radiation effect. It was believed that it was a partial answer to the West German and other continental European concerns about the possible destructiveness of nuclear war in Europe. We labored long and hard to persuade our allies that this was the weapon of the future and necessary for the defense of Western Europe. They were not easily convinced; in fact, the Germans were never convinced at all. Others went along with varying degrees of reluctance and agreed with the decision. At the last minute, without previous consultation-which was the key-, the Administration decided not to deploy the neutron weapon. Because a lot of people had their arms twisted and had been forced to agree to decision to deploy-a decision with which they were somewhat uncomfortable and which was unpopular in their countries-they felt they had been left out on a limb and that Carter then sawed off the limb. If he had consulted with them, they could have scrambled back to safety.

Q: How did the US view Thatcher's election at the time it happened?

BINNS: As George Brown once said, after he had lost his Parliamentary seat: "Democracy is democ". We are democrats and we think democracy is a great thing, so we were happy to deal with her. Personally, I never liked her. I found her very hard edged, opinionated, not open to reason and argument in my limited contacts with her at dinner parties and social events. For the Embassy, it was business as usual.

Q: Your next assignment came in 1979 as Deputy chief of Mission in San Jose, Costa Rica. You were there for a little more than a year. How did you feel about that assignment?

BINNS: It was a great assignment. I lobbied hard to get it and I got it. After I got there, the Ambassador stayed for a couple of months and then went on leave, returned briefly and went on to another post. So I was Chargé $\frac{1}{2}$ for nine of the thirteen months I was there.

Costa Rica was a dramatic change from my previous assignments in Central America. Costa Rica is absolutely atypical for Central America. It is a social democracy; there is relative economic equity; the wealth of the nation is spread relatively evenly. The literacy rate was somewhere in the 90 percentile. There was no abject poverty. It was a very delightful place.

Q: Were there any particular problems?

BINNS: I got to Costa Rica about a week after the Sandinistas had taken power in Nicaragua. So most of our efforts were related in one form or another to Nicaragua and to Cuba, as well. The Costa Ricans had agreed to allow Cuba to use their country as the resupply point for the Sandinistas during the last year before they took power. They had gained considerable ground in Costa Rica and had unusual relationship with the President and his family. They paid substantial amounts of money to the President's son in order to get the supply base rights.

Q: What was the US role in Costa Rica while the Sandinistas were using the country as a base?

BINNS: We certainly voiced objections. We felt that it was an unwise thing for the Costa Ricans to do. I was not in Costa Rican during this period. But I know that we thought it was improper according to international law; we thought it was a short-sighted Costa Rican policy-probably senseless; we thought that rather than supporting the Sandinistas, they would have been wiser to support our efforts and those of the OAS to force Somoza out and replace him with a transitional government. They didn't agree and being a sovereign state, they conducted themselves accordingly.

Q: When you arrived in Costa Rica, the Sandinistas were establishing themselves in Nicaragua. How did that impact US-Costa Rican relationships?

BINNS: After the fact-and perhaps even before-, the Costa Ricans realized that there was a risk with the Sandinistas-being Marxists-Leninists- might not be democratic reformers. They certainly liked to think that the Sandinistas were the latter; there were some reasons to believe that. There were some people in the Sandinista movement who were legitimate democrats. When I got to Costa Rica, we were in a pragmatic mode. The Costa Ricans had approached us and told us that they could have some influence with the Sandinistas; that the Sandinistas owed them a lot and that the Costa Ricans would try to use that influence to get a viable democracy established in Nicaragua. We told them we would be most pleased to cooperate to achieve that end. We started to put joint programs together, discussing ideas on what might be done to keep the Sandinistas "honest" and force them to hold open and free elections for Somoza's successor. They were unsuccessful.

Q: How did you see the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan situation?

BINNS: I viewed the situation with considerable concern, but not alarm. I tended to feel, based on my experiences in the region and in London where we exchanged a lot of views with the British, including the Labor Party and the socialist International-both supported the Sandinistas-, about the Sandinistas. There was considerable hope that the Sandinistas could serve as a basis for democratic regime as opposed to a totalitarian leftist government. That was ultimately proven incorrect in part because it was self-fulfilling prophecy. There were people who said there was no choice, that they would become totalitarian and therefore we should treat them as such from the onset. If you would talk to Larry Pezzulo, who was in the best position to know because he dealt with the Sandinista government for a couple of years as our Ambassador, he would tell you that had we adopted a different policy, events might have turned out differently. There was some role for American influence; to be sure, less than we would have hoped for, but there was some.

For example, shortly after the Sandinistas took power, they asked the Costa Ricans to help them with their educational system. They wanted to replicate the Costa Rican experience; they wanted to educate their people. They asked the Costa Ricans for any surplus teachers-e.g. retired-who would be willing to go to Nicaragua to put a program together. Both countries became interested in the project, but neither had the money for it. So we were asked to fund it. We told the Costa Ricans we would review it. It was not a project that US could fund, so we went to the World Bank, which was willing to fund something like 400 teachers on a grant basis. It never happened because it turned out that this was not what the Sandinistas wanted. The same situation arose with the Peace Corps. We offered them a Peace Corps program; they voiced an initial interest, but never made the decisions or took the steps necessary to start the process of developing a Peace Corps project. We did provide Nicaragua economic assistance. The Costa Ricans, along with the Panamanians, offered assistance in customs and immigration procedures. Those were initially accepted and twenty or thirty Costa Rican and Panamanians went to Nicaragua and started to work with what was left of the Somoza custom and immigration services. Within four months, they were all expelled and replaced by Cubans. Same with the teachers program; it became a Cuban project.

Before leaving my Costa Rican experience, I should mention the "Maria" boat crisis. These were Cubans who wanted to flee Cuba and Castro was willing to let them go. They could take small boats and anything else that would float were allowed into Cuba to pick up those who wanted to leave and some who Castro wanted to expel-whom we did not want in the United States. There was also an airlift and many people were seeking asylum in various Latin American Embassies in Havana-all who ultimately were permitted to leave Cuba. But the US didn't want them and we were looking around for other havens. The Costa Ricans offered temporary asylum for up to 10,000 escapees. We put together a so called international conference on the issue; we got lot of inter-American participation; not much European. The conference was held in San Jose which didn't do a lot, but it was an issue with which we were dealing with and the Costa Ricans were being very helpful. The Costa Rican offer was largely self-generated; we were canvassing all the Latin American nations to see the level of interest-Peru, for example, was very helpful. Once we had made the request to Costa Rica, without any arm twisting, Carazo, the C.R. President, agreed almost immediately.

Q: Your next assignment was as Ambassador to Honduras. How did that come about?

BINNS: I am not exactly sure. Bill Bowdler came to Costa Rica and said to me: "Jack, you know you haven't been here very long, but I have a proposition to make. I don't know whether you'll find it acceptable; I don't know if I were in your shoes that I would accept it". That piqued my interest. He said that the Department had been watching what we were doing in Costa Rica and some of my messages had reached the Seventh Floor. They thought I had done a real good job and besides the Seventh Floor remembered me from London days. So Bowdler had asked Harry Barnes, then Director General, if I could be considered for Ambassador to Honduras, even though I was still in a relatively low rank. Bowdler said if I accepted the offer, my name would be forwarded to the White House for approval. I really didn't want to leave Costa Rica because it first of all a very nice place and I was enjoying it immensely and secondly, I had a daughter who was senior in high school, who would have to move for a third time during her high school years, which would not have been a good thing for her. She was very happy in Costa Rica and as it turned out, was very unhappy in Honduras for a number of reasons. But after a family confab, we agreed that the Ambassadorship was an opportunity that couldn't be passed. So I accepted.

Q: Did you have problem being confirmed?

BINNS: There were attempts to block the appointment from two quarters: a) the right and B) and some non-Congressional Democratic opposition. The right considered me too liberal-I was caught in one of the usual contests between Senator Helms and the Department of State concerning Frank Ortiz, for whom Helms wanted an Ambassadorial assignment which State didn't want to give (there were some twelve Ambassadorial appointments that Helms was holding up at the time). Ultimately, the Department did something for Ortiz and my appointment was approved. The other problem stemmed from a Presidential Commission that Carter appointed while I was in Costa Rica. It was supposed to study agriculture in the Hemisphere to see what we could do to advance it so that Latin Americans could feed themselves. It was headed by the former President of Florida University and was composed of a distinguished group of farm experts, academics and some people interested in economic development-one former AID Mission director, for example. That Commission came to Costa Rica first for some reason and we scheduled to talk to Costa Ricans knowledgeable in agricultural matters. It became clear after the first couple of days that the Commissioners were almost unanimously opposed and made no secret about it to land reform as was being proposed in El Salvador at the time. Without exception, including the President, the Costa Ricans favored land reform. When the Carter Commission left, I sent a NODIS (very limited distribution to high ranking officials in the Department only). I made a mistake of including other US Embassies in Central American for distribution because the Commission was supposed to go to those posts. I sent the cable because this was an American Presidential Commission ostensibly on a fact finding mission that appeared to have predisposition against one of our principal policies; i.e. the support of land reform in El Salvador. I thought the Department and the White House should be made aware of this as well as my colleagues in the posts that the Commission would visit. It happened that the Commission went from San Jose to Guatemala where our Ambassador showed them the cable. I am told that they hit the roof when they found out that I was reporting their prejudices before the report was written. One of the members of that Commission subsequently tried to stop my appointment. He stalled it, but didn't stop it.

Q: You were in Honduras from 1980 to 1981. What was the situation?

BINNS: There had been a military rule in Honduras almost uninterruptedly since 1963. Briefly, there had been a popularly elected government in the early 70s that served about eighteen months before the military replaced it. In light of the events in Central America, especially Nicaragua and El Salvador, the Honduran military had gotten religion and decided to get the problem of governing off their hands and to return to democracy. We of course had been twisting their arms and trying to force them in this direction for almost fifteen years.

The Honduran military had announced that it would hold elections and turn governmental power to a democratically elected government. Basically, therefore, my instructions were to do everything I could to make sure that those elections took place and that there would be a peaceful transition to a constitutionally, democratically elected government. It turned out that way. The election in November 1981 was very close. There was an almost-coup in September of that year, but it didn't occur.

Q: What tools of influence did we have?

BINNS: The principal tool we had was the Honduran people, especially after the military had announced that they wanted an election and a transition. The political parties geared up. Popular sentiment supported the transition to democratic government. We used every means at our disposal to underscore our support of elections. Every speech I made-I made a lot of them-, every interview I gave and in almost every meeting I had with Honduran officials or members of the private sector, I underscored the importance we gave to the elections. I also pointed out the potential consequences of not following their commitment by pointing to El Salvador and Nicaragua. We were able to make to push the door further open.

Q: How would you judge the ARA Bureau? What policies was it pursuing?

BINNS: It was trying to inoculate Honduras from the same disease that had infected Nicaragua and El Salvador and potentially Guatemala; i.e. civil war. We didn't need another communist-backed insurgency in the region and the best way to do that was to make our best efforts to allow the people of Honduras to determine their own future through a democratic process.

During my period in Honduras, the Sandinistas were not much of a problem. Their activities to spread the romance of revolution were couched more in evangelical terms than in actual subversion. They were using Honduras as a base to provide material-weapons and ammunition-to the insurgents in El Salvador. But they did not actively try to subvert Honduras.

Q: Did you receive instructions to try to stop the Sandinistas from using Honduras as a transfer point?

BINNS: Yes. I was trying to gain Honduran cooperation to make arms interdiction more effective. We spent a lot of time on this issue and the Hondurans made one seizure. The problem was that the Salvadoran insurgents and the Nicaraguans had a pretty good apparatus. None of the seizures and very little of our successes were based on any intelligence that shipments were coming. The evidence tended to be circumstantial. The big shipment that was stopped came as the result of a low level policeman seeing a warehouse that seemed to hold very suspicious material. He went into one day when no one else was around and found a semi-trailer, without the truck, with its top pulled back. That struck him as very curious; he reported it and the police came and investigated the warehouse and found a concealed basement that was filled with arms-several hundred US combat weapons and munitions. When they looked at the trailer, it had once upon a time been a refrigerated van. The cooling coils had been stripped out and the space was used to store munitions and bring them to the warehouse. From there, the shipment would be broken down into smaller quantities and smuggled to El Salvador. This was not an intelligence coup, but the result of good police work. One interesting aspect was that after the police had made the discovery, they cleaned the place up and staked it out. One day, a pick-up truck driven by a Salvadoran, pulled up and the police grabbed him. Within twenty-four hours, throughout the US, Mexico and El Salvador, there were screams about the Hondurans arresting one of the principal insurgent leaders. Our intelligence people went to the Hondurans to check the story and were told that the Hondurans had never heard of him. They wanted to know who he was. After a couple of days, it became clear that the Salvadoran driver was the leader in question. He had been traveling with two passports, both of which were fakes. The truck he was driving had been constructed so that rifles and ammunition could be hidden in it. So a Salvadoran insurgency leader was captured by sheer accident. That was typical of the kind of success we had.

Q: What was the human rights situation in Honduras in the late 70s?

BINNS: We of course were involved in that issue, but there weren't many problems in Honduras on that score. One of the interesting thing about the Honduran military rule and Honduran society in general did not condone repression and therefore there wasn't much. There was some, but not much. The military had never been violent against their own people, One did see the kind of repression in Honduras that you saw in Guatemala, El Salvador or Nicaragua.

Q: That suggests that these countries are much more different than is usually thought.

BINNS: That is right. If you have been there and have spent any time in more than one, the differences are clearly greater than their similarities. In the macro sense, their similarities are strong, but at the micro level, dissimilarities prevail.

I might just mention the Contra issue as it manifested itself toward the end of the Carter administration. When Somoza fell, much of the National Guard left Nicaragua, especially the leadership. They went to Costa Rica and Honduras. Initially, in the latter country, there were about three thousand former Guardsmen in holding camps. The Honduras left it pretty much to international organizations to support these refugees. Some went to the US; some filtered into the Honduran society and became legal immigrants. Eventually, all the people in the camps dispersed and they were closed. So we had about one to two thousand former National Guardsmen in Honduras. Many settled in the Choluteca area which is the south corner of Honduras. Some of them staged raids across the Nicaraguan border, which according to our information, were not so much military actions than they were just harassment. For example, they would rustle cattle to bring them back into Honduras. These incursions were not significant or effective either militarily or politically. In Tegucigalpa, there were a number of former Guardsmen or Somoza supporters who were running around telling everybody that they were the leaders of one Contra group or another which was fighting in Nicaragua. Most of that was illusory; most of these individuals were pretty seedy.

I thought I was on the same wave-length with the CIA, although near the end of my term, there were some events that caused me to raise my eye-brows. It was not entirely clear what was going on. I only put the whole picture together later when more information was revealed. Indeed the CIA was preparing for a Contra movement, but during my time in Honduras, I think there was a consensus in the Administration that these guys were little better than criminals. In many cases, the organizations they claimed to represent were penetrated by the Sandinistas; that is to say that some of the people in leadership position of these organizations were suspected to be either Sandinista agents or at least sympathizers. That came from CIA intelligence as well as from the Hondurans. So we did not take these organizations seriously. On the other hand, these groups were constantly trying to push the Embassy in one direction or another. I think they were trying, by being seen with us, show that they US support. At one point, I issued a policy that the Embassy staff have nothing to do with these people-they were not to be invited to our parties, we were not to accept their invitations. If they came into the office on legitimate business, such as consular, the policy was to deal with them in a business-like fashion, but to avoid any public contact with them. I had a couple of Embassy officers who were a problem in this matter; that is the reason I issued that policy directive. In one case, the officer had served in Nicaragua and was sympathetic to the Contra cause on a personal basis and was opposed to the Sandinistas.

But the Contra movement at that stage was not a serious matter. I advised the Department of my policy and never received any disagreement. My view was supported by our Embassy in Managua because both of us felt that we should not appear to be favoring the anti-Sandinistas.

In the Summer of 1981, there was a growth in lawlessness in Honduras which became a concern. Bank robberies increased dramatically, super market and payroll robberies increased; there had not been much of this before. Then there was a kidnaping of the child of a wealthy Nicaraguan Somoza supporter who was living in Honduras. We suspected that the bank and payroll robberies were being conducted, in part at least, by former National Guardsmen and so reported to Washington. The kidnaping, as it turned out, was conducted by former National Guards elements-Contras. They were holding the child for ransom to finance their movement. We reported this event since the information reached us through liaison channels. Ultimately, the child was released and the Contras were warned by the Honduran authorities that "enough is enough" and that either the crime would cease or that they would be expelled to Nicaragua. That stabilized the situation in a hurry. It was clear that certain Contra elements were engaged in criminal activity. We reported all this in both State and CIA telecommunication channels. The Agency instructed the Station Chief to stop that kind of reporting, or so he told me. That was a straw in the wind. He also received similar cautions about reports of human rights violations by the Hondurans.

When I arrived in Honduras, we knew that there was a group of between 10-12 Argentine military officers working with the Honduran G-2 (Intelligence). We didn't know why or what they actually did. They kept to themselves and neither our MilGroup or defense Attaché's were able to get any information on their activities. You will recall that at this time Argentina was under a forceful and repressive dictatorship. It turned out that these officers were training the Contras with the knowledge of the Honduran military, if not the whole government. Subsequently, in the Reagan Administration, we approached the Argentines, got them to increase their staff in Honduras and used them to train the Contras, before we had authority to get involved on a large scale ourselves.

Q: How did US politics influence your activities? At this time, the US was close to the election which brought Ronald Reagan to the White House.

BINNS: It played in a number of ways. We have already talked about the Contra issue, although that didn't flower completely until after my departure. Another aspect was in Honduras itself. There were two parties contending for the Honduran Presidency: the Liberal and the Nationalist. The former was marginally to the left of the latter, but not as far left as, for example, the Christian Democrats. The Liberals were pretty much a centrist party that had won the two previous electoral outings, although their governments never completed their terms. Their presidential candidate was. The Nationalist Party was led by Zuniga, who had been a major player in Honduran politics since 1963 when he was Minister of Interior and a key advisor to General Lopez, who took power in 1963. Zuniga had been in and out of powerful positions since that time and had always been a power behind the throne. He was widely discredited; believed to be very pernicious, influenced by many people, many of whom were unsavory. He was a man who had attempted on various occasions to manipulate and indeed remove American Ambassadors for real or perceived interventions. John Jova was entrapped by Zuniga; he purchased some antiques, which had been stolen, unbeknownst to John of course. Jova had been set up by the Ministry of Interior. Fortunately, John had already been named to another position, but Zuniga took credit for having the American Ambassador removed. He had running feuds with a series of Ambassadors; he felt that I was a leftist and mounted a campaign even before I got there trying to discredit me and thereby weaken my influence. He did develop close relationships with the extreme right-the nutty-wing of US politics. Among his contacts was Senator Jesse Helms and members of his staff. That staff was perfectly capable of being disruptive even in a country like Honduras. Immediately after the US election, rumors were floated that I would be relieved immediately. Fortunately, I stayed on for another eleven months so that the rumor proved unfounded. But Zuniga was constantly stirring up the waters and I became an issue in the American campaign. Once Reagan had been elected, Zuniga was able to play more cards. There were at least two people from Helms' staff who would come now and then to Tegucigalpa. One of them is now the Under Secretary of State for Economic affairs-Dick McCormack and the other was Chris Manion, who I think is still a member of the Helms staff. McCormack was a loose cannon and a fool. He was convinced the Liberal Party candidate was a cat's paw for the Sandinistas and that he and his Party had received financial support from the Sandinistas. McCormack was sure that if he were elected, he would tilt dramatically toward the Sandinistas. In fact, the reverse occurred. He allowed us to run the Contra support operation from his country and was very helpful to our pro-Contra policy. McCormack, on a couple of occasions, has said to me that I had been absolutely dead right in my judgement and that he had been wrong. In any case McCormack and Manion were in Honduras trying to undercut what I was trying to do. Zuniga was involved in trying to prevent the elections because he felt that he would lose, which indeed is what happened.

Q: When Reagan was elected, was there a feeling that there would be a major change in our policy in Latin America?

BINNS: There was that perception immediately among the right wingers in Honduras and the Contras. These people had been in touch with their American friends and allies throughout the election period. They had been told that as soon as Carter was out, so was the concern of human rights and that real politik was in. The Honduran Democrats would be back in and the bad guys would be thrown out. The change in Administration was used by Zuniga particularly in Honduras in support of his efforts to frustrate the electoral process. He kept pointing out that the new American administration was different from the last one and that therefore I no longer represented the Administration and that no attention should be paid to the Honduran election-this was all said privately, not publicly. Publicly, Zuniga was campaigning for President.

Q: The inference I have gotten from other interviews that the change in ARA leadership was more of a "hostile take-over" than just a change. Did you have that impression in Tegucigalpa?

BINNS: Indeed. Bowdler was tossed out unceremoniously to say the least. It was one of the worst examples of personnel management in the Department that I have ever witnessed. Bowdler has served several administrations loyally. He was literally given until noon of January 20th. to clear his desk and get out of his office. Unheard of!

Q: How did that impact on you and your Embassy staff?

BINNS: Well, we still worked for the Department. There was still some one in charge of ARA-John Bushnell as acting Assistant Secretary. He was "acting" for quite a while. I also had friends on the Seventh Floor who were feeding me information. They knew that I was on the so-called "hit" list that the transition team had prepared. I was also told that Haig had thrown that list away and that I was not in immediate jeopardy. Then I was told that I would be replaced; Enders, the Assistant Secretary-designee, called me and told me that I would be replaced. Then he called and said a problem had arisen with my successor and that I would have to stay for a while. Indeed, during my last week at post, he called and asked me to stay for another two weeks, but that was after all my farewell activities and I said: "No way!".

Q: Was your effectiveness damaged by the rumors and what was going on in Washington?

BINNS: There were a number of agendas being carried out by different people; there was a State Department agenda-at this time it had not yet taken the decisions to support the Contras, but was certainly considering it-was to hold the Nicaraguan government's feet to the fire to insure that there would be an election. Vernon Walters made two trips to Honduras to talk to President Paz and senior military officers about holding those elections. We did not want the Hondurans to think that if they didn't hold the elections, business would continue as usual. In terms of my principal over-riding objective, there were no differences between the Embassy and the Department. We had the largest economic assistance program in Latin America, which in fact grew after my departure. As far as military assistance was concerned, the new Administration wanted to provide more money than I thought could be reasonably absorbed. Despite that, the Hondurans got more; what we were trying to do in the military sphere doubled, much of it ill-advised. For example, in mid-February 1981, my MilGroup commander came to me to tell me that he had just received notice from SouthCom that it had been tasked to develop a plan to interdict the arms flow from Nicaragua to el Salvador. SouthCom was putting together some recommendations which including the assignment of over 200 American troops to Honduras to assist the Hondurans in this interdiction effort. These Americans would lead small combat teams to cut all the trails through the mountains, etc. which might be used as infiltration routes. I have never seen anything about this plan, but I got this information. I sent another NODIS cable to John Bushnell in Washington, asking what was going on. I said that I had not been consulted and that it was nonsensical idea. I pointed out that we were working on the issue with the Agency through different means and this involvement was the silliest thing I had ever heard; it was counter-productive at best. Little did I know that the decision to task SouthCom for those recommendations had been taken by a very small group; there were allegedly only four people in the Department who knew anything about this. So I was blowing the news all over the Department, even though I had sent the cable NODIS. Bushnell was incensed that I sent the cable. I told him that I had not known anything about it and that I had received this information which I thought should be passed on to the Department. I repeated that I thought it was a stupid idea. It never reached fruition, but they found other ways to accomplish their aims.

Q: When you returned, did you see the new emphasis on the Nicaragua and el Salvador threats as over-blown?

BINNS: In regards to Nicaragua, it was mindless. The notion that a rag-tag bunch of individuals-the Contras-, who were mostly former Guardsmen and hated by the Nicaraguans, could enter their country and overthrow the regime, even a totalitarian one, which was supported by at least 75% of the population, was sheer non-sense. The idea of doing it covertly was even crazier. I happen to think that there are occasions when covert operations are appropriate, but one has to be extremely careful and select the situations very carefully which will permit a country to have "plausible deniability". You can't be totally inconsistent with international law and practice. Most importantly of all, you have to have a political support base in the United States. None of these conditions had met when the operation started against the Nicaraguan regime. We should have continued to try to co-opt the Sandinistas, even if the chances in the short run were not very good. That was what Pezzulo was trying to do and I supported his efforts wholeheartedly.

Q: When you returned to Washington, how were you viewed by the new leadership?

BINNS: There was no way they would let me back into ARA. That is not unusual; you become a non-person. You don't have a job. I was sent for a year as a Senior Fellow to the University of California at Berkeley (The Institute for International Studies). I was there five or six months when I got a call from EUR asking me to come back as Director of the Northern European Affairs Office. I accepted with alacrity.

Q: Did EUR undergo any great trauma under the new administration?

BINNS: No, no great trauma. There were some differences and ironies as well. One of the policies I was resisting when I was in Tegucigalpa was the militarization of the central America problem. One of the leading instruments of that policy in the Department was the Director of the Politico-Military Affairs Bureau, Rick Burt. I had served with his two principal deputies in London-Bob Blackwill and Jim Dobbins. He had become the Assistant Secretary for EUR. So I was I back working for my old nemesis. The other irony was that two years later, Tom Enders, who had been the Assistant Secretary in ARA and who had sacked me before he was sacked himself, asked me to be his DCM in Madrid.

Q: What was your principal concerns in the Northern European Office in the 1982-84 period?

BINNS: The state of our relationships with Great Britain and nine other countries. The greatest stresses were due to our decision to proceed with a major anti-trust prosecution of a number of British airlines for restraint of trade in setting Atlantic airfares. Among the alleged culprits was British Airways which Mrs. Thatcher was determined to privatize. She felt that our action in addition to a potential suit by Freddie Laker for putting his airline out of business-which might have triple damages-might endanger the financial health of British Airways. Ultimately, the prosecution was killed by a Thatcher to Reagan phone call. That was the major tension during my term.

Q: You then went to Madrid as Deputy Chief of Mission to Ambassador Enders, starting in 1984 and stayed there until 1986. Was the offer to be his deputy come as a surprise?

BINNS: You could have knocked me out of the chair with a dust feather. Enders was a good guy to work for because he was open to reasonable arguments; you could talk to him; you had to make a pretty persuasive case if he had other views. There is a theory that I would subscribe to that Enders is very good to work for-he encourages the people who work for him, he reinforces their efforts, he rewards psychically at least, he is bright and exciting-but does not work well for others. His problems, as illustrated by experiences in ARA, were with other people-the White House (which really didn't know what it wanted to do), the Seventh Floor, etc.

Q: What was the situation in Spain and what were you particularly involved in?

BINNS: Spain had a socialist government. A couple years before an attempted coup d'etat by some elements of the military was defeated, probably through the intervention of King Juan Carlos. The whole military did not support the attempt and therefore democracy was saved.

This socialist government had been in power for about a year and half when I arrived. We wanted to get Spain into NATO. The Spanish popular opinion did not support Spanish membership. We also had the problem of renewal of base agreements. We also had to deal with Spanish entrance into the European Community.

We certainly felt quite strongly that Spain remain a part of NATO. They had started the joining process under a previous government and we wanted them to continue. We encouraged the Germans particularly and the British and the French to use whatever persuasive efforts they had to convince Spain in its membership drive. In some sense, we may have been pushing on an open door. Early on, Felipe Gonzalez had decided that Spain was going to be come part of Europe. This drive towards "Europeanization" included membership in NATO. He viewed the presence of US bases in Spain as somewhat of an anachronism which he didn't particularly like. On the other hand, he recognized that there were some valid strategic interests for those bases-especially the Rota Naval Base near Gibraltar. So he decided early on, as any good politician would, that he would try to serve as many ends as possible with the same initiative. He felt that by keeping Spain in NATO he would strengthen Spain's European credentials, please his European allies and his colleagues in the European Community so that they would accede to Spain's membership and would get rid of at least part of his "bone in the throat" over the bases. He saw staying in NATO as a means of reducing our military presence in Spain which he didn't like.

Q: Were the bases a major problem for the Embassy during this period?

BINNS: They were not a major bone of contention. It was a problem largely of our making in that we tend to approach negotiations on those issues is to make everything high priority and do not ourselves engage in a determination of importance of each of the issues. The Defense Department's position in any base negotiations is to get everything and, if possible, get a little more. That is not a very realistic way to approach negotiations, but in a highly charged, ideological administration, to suggest otherwise would have undermined one's own credibility and standing. Felipe Gonzalez told Tom Enders early on that he would do everything he could to stay in NATO; he thought he could bring it off, but the price would be that we would have to close the Torrejon Air Force base, just outside of Madrid. That was the home of the 401st Tactical Fighter wing, which in a crisis situation is moved to a forward base in Turkey on NATO's southern flank. That is how the Spanish Prime Minister viewed the situation evolving. He had to turn popular opinion around in Spain-which reflected a 70% opposition to NATO. He also had to swing his own party around which had a long standing position of opposing Spanish membership in NATO. So he saw the base closing and Spain's membership in NATO, and therefore Spain's integration into Europe, as trade-offs.

Enders understood that position. We had to be very cautious, as I suggested earlier, how the issue was framed to a very highly ideological administration. It didn't want the facts; it just wanted to accomplish what it wanted. It was hard to address because Enders was fearful that if the issue was addressed frontally and openly, the Defense Department would tag Enders as a "liberal whose loyalty to the administration has been in question and whose judgement has always been dubious". Such a DoD attitude would have killed any chances of finding a solution before the bargaining had even begun. On the other hand, the European Command understood what the situation was and was willing to try to find a compromise and to address the issue in a rational way. But they never prevailed on the civilian side of DoD-the Richard Perles of this world-who wanted everything we had and a little more.

While I was there, Spain held a referendum which Gonzalez played like a fine violinist plays a Stradivarius-with loving care with a good melody. The Spaniards reversed themselves and voted in favor of Spanish membership in NATO, with certain qualifications, such as that military forces would not be integrated into the NATO command structure. We tried not get involved in the internal debate. The US position was quite clear and we didn't have to announce it repeatedly. It became somewhat screwy because the Conservative Party in Spain, which had traditionally supported NATO, now urged voting against Spanish membership in the referendum because they viewed a favorable vote as a vote of confidence for Gonzalez.

Q: Does Spain's membership make much of a difference?

BINNS: Does Luxembourg matter? Germany contributes the land upon which the battle will be fought and a substantial army. Spain has a good air force; it has a small, but respectable navy; the army isn't much but in view of Spain's geographical location, it is hard to see why a large army could be maintained. Strategically, if you look at armed combat on in Europe, Spain would serve like the U.K. in Northern Europe-a reserve depot logistic support base. That made sense strategically and militarily as well as politically because the way you helped preserve democracy in Spain is to link Spain ever closer to Western Europe. You institutionalize that democracy. Belonging to NATO is another element binding Spain to Europe.

Q: You left Spain and retired in 1986. You were still young. Did you feel that you had served in Central America and had incurred the enmity of Jesse Helms and others that you had a limited future in the Foreign Service?

BINNS: There were two decisive factors. One was the one you just mentioned. The other one was that I had thirty-five years of governmental service and had nothing to gain from staying on from a retirement point of view. The more decisive reason was that the Foreign Service was no longer fun for me. I had served in it for nearly twenty-five years and enjoyed really virtually every minute of it. I never served with an Ambassador I couldn't respect and in most cases, respect enormously. I have seen a lot of situations-in one case, it happened to me-where an officer had an immediate supervisor that he or she didn't respect. I know a lot of colleagues that served with impossible people and in intolerable situations. I never experienced that. I was very lucky. I always had good jobs and I enjoyed tremendously what I was doing. In Spain, for a variety of reasons, including the political one that you alluded to, it was no longer fun. One of the more decisive elements was the way the Administration was treating Enders.

That is a long and involved story, but it may be illustrative. I got a call in about July 1984-soon after I had arrived in Madrid-from a friend on the Seventh Floor who was very close to Secretary George Shultz. He called me from a phone in a city other than Washington and his remarks were very indirect. The thrust was that President Reagan had told Shultz that he had been getting comments from sources accusing Enders of being disloyal to him personally and politically. Reagan thought that Enders should be replaced. The person who called me said that he had told the Secretary that he had a source in Madrid who would give him the straight and unvarnished truth on this allegation. Since I was that source, I told my friend that whatever had been told Reagan was a lie; I thought Enders was more loyal than the Administration deserved after the way it had treated him in Honduras. I said that Enders was basically a believer in what the Administration was trying to accomplish and he had never, never done anything except to support the Administration in every respect. My Seventh Floor friend said he would take my comments to the Secretary. He also told me that I was not to mention this conversation to Enders unless he called me back within a week's time to tell me that the issue was dead. Then I was permitted to tell Enders. My friend of course didn't want Enders to stir up the waters any further. After the week went by without a word, I called my friend and reminded him that I was supposed to get some information. I was told that the rumor had been killed and the Secretary had managed to allay the President's concerns. So I proceeded to tell Enders about the events. He was astounded. He couldn't figure out the source that had tried to knife him. Then in September or October, I received another call from the same person on the Seventh Floor, informing me that the same issue had arisen again. He asked me to inform Enders, but asked that Tom not do anything because the Secretary believed that he had it under control. My friend thought however that Tom and I should be aware of the situation. In December, Enders returns to Washington-he was taking a Christmas holiday-for one day. While there, he discovers that someone else has been nominated by the Department to the White House to replace him. Of course, no one had told him about it. The reason given to him was this pernicious allegation of disloyalty. So Tom went to talk to the Secretary and was told that the charges of disloyalty had been raised twice. He didn't know the source, but the pressure was coming from Mrs. Reagan. That was the reason why, when the Secretary thought he had matters under control, the rumor and the pressure kept recurring. Shultz told Enders that he didn't believe one word of what was being rumored and that he had his full support, but that the situation was reaching the point where he couldn't continue to defend him without ruining his own credibility. Shultz said he would look for another assignment for Enders. He also told Enders that he wanted to go to the White House to straighten this issue out, he was most welcomed to do so.

So Enders went to the White House and had an interview with Michael Deaver, Reagan's special assistant and very close to both the President and Mrs. Reagan. Deaver said that he would examine the issue and would conduct "loyalty" hearings. Unbelievable. Enders called me from Washington to explain all this to me. He wanted to collect all his speeches and press conferences and other media coverage because he had to return to Washington in two weeks with all this material for the hearing. I told him that I thought he was crazy and he shouldn't have to put up with all this nonsense. If I were in his shoes, if they didn't believe in my loyalty, I would tell them to go to hell. He obviously didn't take my advice-it may not have been good advice, but it felt good. Enders went back to Washington in January for the "loyalty" hearings. Deaver said that he was convinced that the rumors were all specious and he didn't know where it came from, but that he would give Enders his full support and he thought that the rumor could be killed. But it didn't die; Deaver was in Madrid in March or April, advancing a Presidential visit scheduled for May. He told Enders he had tried to kill the rumor, but it was still floating around. He said that during the visit, he would set a private meeting between Enders and the President during which Enders could reassure him that there were no foundation for the accusation of disloyalty. The matter dragged on and on even though the President accepted Enders' statements. It was still alive six months later, when Enders was being considered for the post of Ambassador to Australia primarily to get him out of Spain and out of the President's eye-sight. That was for me an enormously souring experience even though it hadn't happened to me personally. I finally told Tom that I didn't know how long he would stay in Madrid, but that I was getting out. It was no longer fun, particularly the way he had been treated. There was nothing left in the Reagan period that I could aspire to and therefore I was going to retire.

I stayed until January, 1986. Enders was going to be replaced in July and began to look around for a second career. He is now with Solomon Brothers and I understand that he has not regretted for a moment his decision to retire and I haven't regretted either.

Q: Did you ever find out the background of all this?

BINNS: One thing that came out at the "loyalty" hearing was an indication from Deaver that the sources who were talking to Mrs. Reagan were Mr. Rosebush, her private secretary and some friends in the New York social set, particularly the publisher of Women's Wear Daily"- a fellow by the name of Zipkin. Their contacts in Madrid were feeding this disinformation to the White House-Mr. Rosebush-who was relaying to Mrs. Reagan who then passed it on to the "old man". We found out that among the things that were used to buttress the specious argument of disloyalty were little squibs planted in gossip columns in the Madrid press. For example, one column suggested that Enders was very close to the Socialists. The Madrid gossip press, not unlike that of many countries, was quite corrupt and you could get almost anything printed if you were willing to pay for it. It was a campaign originated by the right wing in Spain for unknown reasons except perhaps to discomfort the Ambassador. Obviously, they were successful. It subsequently became clear when in mid- or late-1985, I got another phone call from a friend in the NSC who asked me if I knew the Countess of Romanones. I said that I knew her. She was an American married to a Spanish nobleman. They were very right wing-openly and avidly Francoists. They were on the outside since Franco's demise. They were excluded from the royal court-they were unacceptable to King Juan Carlos. My friend then asked why the NSC would get a request from the East Wing of the White House for the Countess to have an appointment with Bud McFarlane-then the NSC Advisor. I said that I couldn't imagine any reason for such a request and I advised the McFarlane should not meet with her. I asked that I be kept posted. I then went to Enders to tell him of the call. He told me that before he had arrived in Madrid I had been advised by Wells Stabler, the former Ambassador, to stay away from the Romanones because they would try to take American Ambassadors as social hostages. Enders further said that when he arrived in Madrid-it was on a Wednesday-his social secretary, without asking him or my wife-had accepted a dinner invitation extended by the Countess for Thursday evening. He then told my secretary that she would have to call up and get him out of it; he was just not prepared on the first night in Madrid to accept such an invitation. After that, the Countess was out to get him. In any case, eventually my NSC friend called back and said that upon his recommendation, Bud had decided not to see her. A second request was made by the East Wing; McFarlane then agreed to see her and was then asked by the Countess to appoint her as the US Ambassador to Spain to replace Enders. And that's how the campaign to discredit Enders got started. Unbelievable! The Countess has a residence in New York and travels in those social circles and through them, she sabotaged Enders. She paid for the articles to be published in the Madrid gossip columns; they would then be clipped and sent to Zipkin who then sent them to Rosebush. That was bizarre!

Q: What did you do when you left the Foreign Service?

BINNS: I came home with the idea of getting into the antique importing business. I started that and I also had a consulting business. Shortly after I retired, while in Spain on an antique buying trip and other commercial work, I got a call from the Department's Bureau for Diplomatic Security which wanted to know if I would be interested in becoming a consultant on crisis management exercises. This is the way the Department practices its emergency plans and trains Embassy personnel in crisis management. I did for about four years. I have been doing other consulting work as well. One of the companies that I consulted for has asked me to join them on a permanent basis in Tucson, Arizona.

Q: Thank you very much for this interview.

End of interview