

FRANK P. COWARD

Interviewed by: Fred Coffey

Initial interview date: March 11, 1993

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: I am Fred Coffey interviewing Frank Coward at the home of his son in Alexandria, Virginia. Today is March 11, 1993. Frank, first off will you provide us a bio sketch of where you came from, your education, professional background and how you became directed to USIA?

Biosketch: Education; Teaching; Entry Into USIA.

COWARD: I was born in Buffalo, New York. Graduated in 1942 from Union College in Schenectady and went directly into the Air Force. After being told that I would have made a good commercial pilot but wasn't crazy enough to be a fighter pilot, I went into the Air Prisoner of War Interrogation Unit and went to England and to Germany for three and a half years. After an interpreting stint in both German and French I came back and went to graduate school taking a Masters in education at SUNY Buffalo and began teaching seniors in high school.

After teaching for some ten years, I felt that it was incumbent, if I was to give my children a wider sphere of education, that we needed to go abroad. So I had two Fulbrights, one year in Germany, and a second year in Vienna. We went as a family and after I ascertained that everybody was having a good time, including my wife who had to field housekeeping, schools and that sort of thing, we decided to go for broke and I applied to the Agency in 1962.

Assignment To India, 1963, As Education Officer, Madras

In November, 1962, the Agency, forgetting that November 11 was a national holiday, gave me an extra day of freedom as the orientation began on the 12th instead of the designated 11th.

In February, 1963, we were assigned to India. I had not anticipated going to India. It was interesting to me as a critique of American education, although I had been entirely privately educated, there was absolutely nothing in my education that prepared me for India.

Q: So in no way did you indicate to the Agency that you would like to go to South Asia or India. You had no preferences?

COWARD: That is interesting because I wasn't even asked whether I had a preference and I had joined having spent a reasonable amount of time in Europe, not only with the Army but also doing graduate work at the University of Lausanne. I assumed we were going to go happily off to Europe. We were two thirds of the way through the orientation and I had heard nothing about an assignment. I asked and somebody thought it was strange that I didn't already know. I didn't. So we were assigned to India, where we went in February, 1963, and stayed for 4 ½ wonderful, learning years.

Q: When you went off to India, Frank, you were already established in how many languages?

COWARD: In two, French and German.

Q: Where were you assigned in India and what was your position?

COWARD: I was assigned to Madras as Education Officer. In India the big push at that time was in education and I would think few countries anywhere pay as much attention to and spend as much money on education as India. This is probably prevalent throughout Asia, but in India it is absolutely noticeable, the amount of money and preoccupation of families with the education of young people.

Q: So the Agency in fact drew upon your professional background as a teacher as an assignment.

COWARD: Absolutely, because we were then reaching out for university students. We selected certain major universities in each of the consular districts and the Madras consular district would have been the size of France and the Benelux countries. Each one of the districts, Calcutta, New Delhi, Bombay, Madras had an education officer. The purpose was to work entirely with university officials, reaching students. In that area I traveled probably two and a half weeks out of every month operating what we called university programs.

The University Program.

Q: What is a university program?

COWARD: Well, a university program was first of all contacting the vice chancellor of the university to find out if he was interested in having a group of American university professors come down and...typically we spent a week, an academic week on the campus. I would have anywhere from three to six American university professors who would be sent out. Of course this had been planned out in our budget request. They would come for a fixed schedule of dates arranged with the university in whatever subject matters, whether history, science, literature, etc., that the faculties requested and the American professors took over the class periods.

We also had entertainment programs for the evenings where one of the big things that we did...We were fortunate in India that it was the time when the musical "My Fair Lady" was coming. That was a natural because it was Bernard Shaw and, of course, all of the Indian universities were British oriented. So this enabled us to have a sure fire...you could sell Bernard Shaw, whereas you couldn't sell all American literary giants. So we would do that sort of thing in the evenings.

The professors would also have bull sessions, or we would bring in people from our own posts to involve students in informal discussions. We took exhibits and a mobile unit. So we had films and exhibits, in connection with the visiting American professors.

Q: Considering the competition for student and faculty attention at universities can you describe what competition you did have? Were the Soviets pretty active in your area? Or other groups that really weren't encouraging American penetration into the universities?

COWARD: Well, there was no serious competition at that time. My memory is that the Russians never did much cultural activities. What they pursued was science and I have no recollection of them bringing in groups as we did. The nearest would have been perhaps the German Max Mueller Bavan and, of course, the British Council. But there were enough universities and enough students and the territory was sufficiently large that I would not say we were ever competitive in that sense. In any event, particularly with the British Council we were very cooperative in our programs. We had very friendly relations with them.

Q: Did you feel that this was a worthwhile program for the US Government to be involved in?

COWARD: Oh, absolutely. It was good both ways in that it brought American professionals out, gave them a variety of experiences and the universities were most hospitable and the students lapped it up. It was a very happy association in those days. That was during the end of Galbraith and during Ambassador Bowles tenure. It was very buddy, buddy. Those were good years.

Q: Did you have other activities other than the university programming?

COWARD: No, those university programs...that was an office in USIS, an adjunct, of course, of the cultural activities, but it was a separate entity. Due to the size of the consular district, the territory to be covered... Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil-Nadu and Kerala, our entire area...and, of course, the Madras universities as well. So there wouldn't have been time for any other activities.

Q: What interest did you find other than just the discussion brought by the professors in the United States amongst the university students?

COWARD: The Indian university students, of course, were fascinated...the two cultures were so different. The Indian culture with the family unit being so strong, a paternalistic society, except in Kerala which is a matriarchal society. They were very structured. We used to say that no Indian boy becomes a man until his father dies because the family structure is so strong. They were very much interested in the freedom of choice that Americans had. Particularly in southern India, an area where the arranged marriages and other cultural ties were still very, very strong. Northern India, in the sense of Delhi and Bombay, were more liberal because that is where the big impact of both the British and American cultural activities, social contacts, commercial interests came together. South India had never been a battleground in the sense that northern India had due to the capital and major commercial interests being there. Therefore the most conservative ties in Indian society were in the south.

Tendency Of American Professors To "Preach" Rather Than To Exchange Ideas Often Embarrassing.

It made it very worthwhile. The difficulty was that most American professors have a rather missionary approach to life. It was very difficult to get them to listen. In general, they only wanted to preach. I always felt it was a good thing when Jimmy Carter came out and reminded us that this was a two-way road and that we should listen and learn. Of course, that was nice rhetoric but it never really worked because as Americans our tendency is not to listen but to preach and Asian societies are very much aware of our tendency to do just that.

Q: Did you feel that all of our programs in your area were in fact one way, preaching?

COWARD: By and large I am afraid that is what happened. I remember AID was down there. We had some interesting experiences. When Abe Sirkin, for whom I had a very high regard, was PAO, he was very much concerned that we be of service to these people and that we fit ourselves to their specified needs and not take whole cloth Washington's set goals, bring them out and put them on.

I can remember my experience at Carnatic University, an agriculture university, going over and speaking to the vice chancellor because it was felt we should be pursuing agricultural activities and helping them to become self-sustaining. I asked the vice chancellor about a program. I remember him saying, "Now, if all you are going to do is bring out a group of professors to tell us how to operate when two-thirds of my faculty are American trained, I am not interested." "But," he said, "If you will bring out some people who will tell me why when two-thirds of my professors have been American trained and it still isn't working, you have a program." So we organized ourselves on that basis and the Agency sent in a professor from Japan. I can still see Abe Sirkin's face when this professor, with no Indian experience, began to tell the Indian students and professors at the university how things worked in Japan. It was a dreadful moment because it was absolutely what the vice chancellor had not wanted. The man knew nothing about India and instead of cutting the program, which we wanted to do, we were aware that every American professor has a congressman who is a friend and that meant that it wasn't always as easy as it might have been. You didn't have your druthers.

Q: You were in Madras for how many years?

COWARD: For four and a half.

Trust Established By Coward Among Universities Permitted Innovative (For India) Programs. Establishment Of Close Personal Relationships Essential.

Q: During that period you must have established some very interesting, if not strong, relationships with the universities after they had seen your programs, approach and adaptability.

COWARD: We had very interesting times. One unusual thing we did in working with students...certainly the first time anywhere in the south...we took male and female students from two different colleges up to the Laurence School at Wellington, which is in the Ooty Hills by Coimbatore for a weekend of just plain student activities...getting together, sharing ideas. The principal at the women's college from Madras had said, "If it were anybody else I never would have allowed the girls to go." This was quite an extraordinary breakthrough. They went from two separate campuses. One reason why it worked was that at a Hindu college, and I can't remember which, there was an American nun, Sister Ann Xavier, who was vice principal. The principal was a good Hindu lady. Sister Ann was just the most remarkable person. She went along as an escort for the girls. It was a wonderful weekend and a good experience because we were all trusted. I think all the way around it turned out to be a rewarding experience. Sister Ann Xavier (was her name) was from Maine.

Q: Was this towards the latter part of your assignment?

COWARD: Oh yes, that would have been towards the latter part, after I had established credentials and was known. Most Asians in my experience operate on vibes. They are perfectly aware that you probably have all the credentials, you are assigned to an embassy, you have an official title and all that, but what they want to know is: Can you be trusted? Are you really being honest? Are you being a human being? When they have established these vibes at the warmth level it works. But if the vibes are bad, you are not going to get to first base because while Asians never say no, that does not mean they are saying yes.

Q: Frank, are you emphasizing the importance of the last ten feet of contact, person to person? How important is the individual versus the material you had in hand?

COWARD: My experience is that the individual makes the difference. I came out of teaching, therefore, I suppose I had a makeup which led me to feel that I was supposed to be of service to somebody. So I guess I tended to personalize most of my relationships, but for me personally in the assignments that worked. While it takes all different kinds, I think that kind must be included, although my experience with the Agency suggests that personalization of relationships is not by any measure a priority approach. But where I have seen that happen the happiest relationships, the nearest contacts, the most appreciation, it seems to me there was a quality of personalization that underlay the activity, that underlay the success of some particular program or contact or relationship.

Q: That is an interesting viewpoint. May I ask you then what are the qualities of an Agency officer in your experience in India or elsewhere which will provide the quality of relationships that is so important in exchange of information.

COWARD: Well, that is a little difficult perhaps to define. I can remember when I had my Fulbright in Vienna there was an American girl from New Jersey in our group who was majoring in music as a singer. She made the comment that the differences in singing...if you were to bring out the emotion that was intended in an opera, and I use her New Jersey accent, "Yeah gotta be a Mensch." Everything was in the word "Mensch" and what it means. It has to do with being a human being and understanding that you are addressing a human being and expressing the emotion of a human being. It has nothing to do with your personal prejudice, politics, it is one human being to another. I think that is vital because in the final analysis of cross-culture, that is what you are doing.

Q: Are there any particular incidents, activities, programs within your sphere in South Asia that you would like to mention at this point?

The Time Of Indian Language Riots In South India: 1967.

COWARD: I had an interesting experience during the Indian language riots when I had a program including 5 visiting Americans going on at Sri Venkateswara University and I was there as the personal house guest of the vice chancellor, a very impressive person. I was staying at his residence while the program was going on. The campus was under guard because all of south India, particularly university students, was going up in smoke at the arbitrary imposition of Hindi as the national language.

Q: What year are we talking about?

COWARD: This would have been 1967, I believe. People said it was worse in south India than during the separation of India. We had people tied to trees, burned, and, of course, they always attacked school buses and government property.

Anyway, a group of demonstrators came towards the vice chancellor's residence and officials called and said they had ordered the gates closed. Any group in India always picked up all kinds of bystanders. No matter the original question, everyone else has some grievance so they just get into the act, they look for the spark.

Anyway, the vice chancellor said, "Well, what do you want to do make it worse? Open the gates and let them in and I will talk with them." So they came down the drive and Dr. Vaman Rau, that was his name, he had been a minister of education in Hyderabad, listened to them. They said that they did not want Hindi pushed on them because the best English was spoken and taught in south India. I remember he patted the head of a little boy and asked him what he was there for. The boy's reply was, "No speak English, sir."

We did "My Fair Lady" outdoors in a pavilion with troops with guns lined up across the front of the stage in case there was a demonstration. My big concern was getting the American speakers back to Madras. We were probably 70 or 80 miles away. The speakers, each one when he had finished his assignment, would go back in a car. I had one lady from Connecticut University whom I had asked, when she was through doing her lecturing, whether she would meet with the students out on the lawn for a bull session. Her reply was, "I do my job, I don't socialize." Well, she socialized at every road block all the way back to Madras, was very distraught, rushed into the office saying they were all going to be murdered on the way coming back into town.

Well, I had to pick my time carefully so I figured the demonstrators would have lots of enthusiasm in the morning but after mid-noon lunch they all liked a little nap, so with one Indian professor of psychology from Madras, who had an American degree and had gone up with us, I figured we would start back at 12:30 hoping everybody was having a little nap. There were about eight roadblocks and we made it through six. When we came to the seventh we were stopped. We were in a government rented car and I felt I had to do something. My Indian psychologist got down on the floor of the car when I got out to talk to the people who were prepared to paint and break windows. They had buckets of white wash to mess up the car. I am talking to the chap who seemed to be the head of this small group...by no means unmanageable because the rest were having a nap. So finally he said, "Say, 'Down with Hindi, up with English.'" I said, "Well, all right, I will say that provided you will say with me, 'Up with the United States' when we are finished." So we did. It was almost a joke because I shouted, "Up with English, down with Hindi" with them and then they all bellowed, "Up with the United States." Then we shook hands and I got in the car and drove away.

Another time at Sri Venkateswara University, when we had a group of American professors and visitors there for a program, we were to have a luncheon outside afterwards. There were a lot of monkeys around and I noticed that the servants were beginning to put out some of the food for the reception that would be three or four hours later. I mentioned to the vice chancellor when I saw him at his office later that I thought it was a little early to put these things out because there were all these monkeys around and they were going to go right after the fruit. His reply was, "Don't worry, we have other monkeys to take care of those monkeys."

Acclimatization To India Took Time.

Q: How many years were you there before you felt comfortable in this milieu?

COWARD: Oh, I suppose I was there a good year because it was all brand new. As I said I had no preparation for India. Everything was brand new. That was the challenge. That was the sheer delight of it all because you could do what you could do but you didn't know what you could do until you tried it. The Indians were very hospitable. Those were the good years. There was no suspicion of any kind.

Q: What about your children and family situation ...schooling, housing...how did that work out for you?

COWARD: That was interesting because fortunately my wife was very well adapted to this. Her father had been a Woolworth executive as she was growing up and they were regularly moved around. She had attended 8 different schools. So it was natural for her to be moved around, to cope with change. For schooling, in those days only certain officers, and the university affairs officer was not one, could have a car brought in, you had to buy one on the local market and it was very expensive. So we sent the children, because we wanted them to get into the local culture...as I said one reason we did this was to educate our two young children...we sent them to the Theosophical Society School in Adyar, which was just behind us; our house backed up to the Adyar River and facing us on the other side of the river was the Theosophical Society. They went in a rickshaw each morning to the Theosophical Society. They were there for a year. After that we sent our daughter to a local convent school. Our son went from there to a school in Germany for a year. When he came back he went to a Catholic boys school in Madras. Finally both of them went up into the Khodi Hills to the Khodi Kanal School. So for them it was a very wide experience and at their ages...our daughter when we went out was nine and our son turned eleven shortly after we arrived...there were very unforgettable and valuable experiences that opened their minds. It taught them what it was to be a member of a minority. I remember discussing it with them, explaining that we would be a minority as long as we were in India. When they went to the Theosophical Society they were the only white children and our daughter was the only blond. One reason why we moved her into the convent school was that a blond, blue eyed, white child was such a novelty that people liked to pinch her cheeks and pat her head. Neither one did she particularly appreciate, so we kept her there for only one year. I would do it again if I took children of that age because the academics are not nearly as important as the cultural exchange experience.

Indian Reaction To Kennedy Assassination.

Q: You were obviously there during the time of the Kennedy assassination. I know the assassination news rebounded throughout the world and all of us were shocked. How was it in your activity?

COWARD: I had a university program at that time at Annamalai University, south of Madras. The vice chancellor there was Sir C.P. Ramaswami Ayer, a major figure in south Indian history. He had been the Dewan of the State of Kerala and made every effort to prevent it from joining the Union, a monumental individual. We received the news about 7:00 in the morning on a Saturday. It was the last day of the program and my chief Indian local came in and said somebody had told him that they had heard on the early news of the assassination of President Kennedy. Well, I could hardly believe it, but I said that this was something we had to check out right away. So he did his checking and discovered that it was true. I immediately canceled the remainder of the program.

Now this all happened between 7:00 and 7:30. I then received by 9:00 a note from Sir C.P., as he was called, saying that he had convened a memorial service in Convocation Hall for 11:00 that same morning and he supposed that I would like to say a few words after him. It was the first memorial service throughout Asia, a fact that demonstrated Sir C.P.'s caliber. However, I was not at all sure that I wanted to say a few words after Sir C.P. given his qualifications and importance. And in any event as an American citizen this was a tremendous shock, something that I could scarcely believe could have happened in my life time.

I was staying in the college guest house and was suddenly aware of shuffling feet outside. There wasn't a sound to be heard except feet, so I went out on the balcony and one couple who were still there with me was one Dr. Cumming, a close friend and former professor of Dean Rusk's at Davidson College in North Carolina and his wife. We went out on the balcony and all the students were marching silently from the four compass points of the campus to the guest house where we, the three Americans, were staying. There wasn't a sound except those feet. When they arrived they stood in complete silence for probably five minutes and then dispersed.

When we went to the Convocation Hall at 11:00, it was an unbelievable sight. The cavernous building was filled to overflowing. They were standing in the windows, hanging in the balconies, out on the lawn, and coming down the aisle, was a portrait of President Kennedy draped in black. The portrait was probably 3 feet tall by 2 feet wide. Where had it come from? Then we had the ceremony. Sir C.P. spoke and then I did very briefly...about three minutes. And that was the end. It was a very moving ceremony. Throughout south India in the smallest, rural villages, they knew John Kennedy. People who would not have known anything about New Delhi or where it was knew that name and felt somehow involved in this cataclysmic event.

Q: It was a cataclysmic event and a wonderful tribute. Frank, after your experience of four and a half years in India, you moved on to where?

1968: Assignment To Bangkok As Student Affairs Officer, But Circumstances Resulted In Wider Cultural Officer Activities Including Cultural Exchange.

COWARD: Bangkok.

Q: And how did you prepare for Bangkok?

COWARD: I didn't actually prepare for Bangkok. I came back to Washington in August or September 1967 for a year of language study and then went out to Bangkok in August 1968. So the orientation was here in the Foreign Service Institute for language and cultural orientation. But, of course, there is a great similarity between the basic, certainly the religious, culture. A great deal of Buddhism in Thailand stems from the considerably older Indian culture.

Q: Had you asked to go to Thailand?

COWARD: No, that was the assignment. My general attitude was that it was a big wide world and I only knew a small amount of it and tended to accept what the assignment was because I didn't know it anyway. I don't recall that I was asked.

Q: What was your assignment in Thailand?

COWARD: The assignment in Thailand was interesting. It started out as being again student activities. At that time, of course, in Bangkok there were 13 sub-posts. We were in the midst of the height of Vietnam experience. The handwriting was on the wall, however. But Bangkok posts really had no great interest in a student activities officer so it was not the warmest of welcomes. The Agency had an interest of having this body in place, although the post had very little interest, which I must say I felt on arrival. It made it difficult because they had their remarkable AUA in operation.

Q: What is the AUA?

COWARD: That is the American University Association, which was a big part and an essential part of the Agency presence not only in Bangkok but throughout Thailand.

Q: Was this a type of binational center?

COWARD: It was a binational center. An English language teaching center which eventually incorporated to great advantage the American library, which previously had been a separate entity. It had been on Patpong Road and perhaps for some Americans the removal from Patpong Road was a negative, but I am sure from an official point of view the amalgamation of the American library-we built a splendid new library-with the AUA was a big plus. But AUA had a young American unrelated to the Agency, a private contract, who handled their student activities, which made it very awkward because he felt that I was infringing on his territory. So he was less than agreeable. I was perfectly aware that as an official presence if I was to do my assignment, I had to infringe on his territory. It was not very pleasant.

In due course, I guess I was asked, I had my office removed from AUA where it was a regular conflict, into the USIS office where I then began being an assistant cultural affairs officer. I was primarily occupied with the exchange of persons and again promoting programs on university campuses.

Q: Well, then in Thailand when you started off, did you start visiting universities?

COWARD: Yes, but local universities. The Thais are extroverted, had been for such a long period of time, that all young people, university students or not, just exported themselves to the States. The butcher, the baker the candlestick maker, it made no difference, you had to go to the States. And professors did the same thing. When Thais went...my experience there when working with exchange of persons...when a Thai family sent a student abroad there was none of the superficiality of the junior year abroad that we talk about in the States. Thais sent their children out intending that they be prepared to do a full four years and get an American degree. If they could afford it they would have them go right on and get a Masters and probably a Ph.D. They wanted a full American education. They would even send children for two years in a prep school to get the grounding so that they could enter better universities. So it was a little difficult. You were sort of bringing coals to Newcastle when you brought American experts to a top university because the Thai universities had so many of their own professors who are in effect American experts because of these full degrees and language fluency. So it was somewhat different.

But then we could bring American cultural people out, performers, which we did. We had Andrię½ Watts, the magnificent young pianist. The Agency sponsored him under the cultural program. We did produce, also...of course they had the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, all of these groups so there was more competition for USIS programs in Bangkok than we had ever experienced in India. They were more concentrated in Bangkok, Thailand being much smaller than the Indian experience had been.

Q: In this situation did you find that the Thais were appreciative of the American arts, especially, you mentioned Andrię½ Watts, and other programs?

COWARD: They were appreciative, but the Thai audience by virtue of exporting themselves, and this began with the royal family...One had to remember that the present king was American born. His daughter is married to an American citizen and lives in California. She is also a nuclear physicist from MIT. The Thais were much more sophisticated and selective so you had to be sure you were bringing the best. The people who directed their own cultural activities, whether in music or fine arts were highly experienced and sophisticated people.

Q: Did our Agency, at that time part of the State Department, the CU element, provide the top of the line in the arts or not?

COWARD: Yes. I recall that CU, which at that time was still located in the State Department, had some very superior, responsive people who tended themselves to be highly selective...Having worked closely with CU when it was in the Department, I would have only praise for the experience, service and standards that those people in CU set. Jean Moretti, for example, to name but one.

Q: Were the people in CU State Department people or USIA people assigned to the State Department?

COWARD: They would have been CU people, State people, and some of them, when the amalgamation took place, chose to retire rather than make the change because they were not comfortable when CU moved into the Agency. It was rather a loss to the program because as I say they were people of such skill and level of performance that they were very easy to work with and hard to replace.

Q: How long were you in Thailand on this assignment?

COWARD: We were in Bangkok for a full five years.

Growing Repressiveness Of Ruling Thai Military Caused Resentment Of Well Educated University Authorities Resulting In 1973 Uprising And Fall Of Government.

Q: What was the political flavor of things during your period there?

COWARD: Probably again as a result of what I have already said, this exporting of oneself to the States being so prevalent among the young professors who had come back after 4, 5, 6 years in the States, they were chafing at the bit under the strict rule, lack of any democratic participation in the Kittikachorn government. So the steam was already rising, if the pot was not boiling it was on the way. General Phrapak was already viewed as being a thoroughly negative personality as well as being otherwise unattractive, which he never took pains to hide because he felt too secure.

So while we had no problem on the university campuses, it was obvious that among the young professors, they were the young Turks and by Asian tradition university students are the spearhead of unrest, things were moving toward what finally exploded in 1973. We left in May 1973 and then we came back through in August, after the government had collapsed, en route to our next assignment which happened to be Rangoon. The campuses were uneasy and outspoken, the young professors were having their knuckles rapped...but there were too many of them. There were too many returned and well educated abroad...and the Thais educated themselves anywhere. Some went to Germany, some to England, others to the United States and France. They went and stayed to obtain doctoral degrees.

That was one thing I noted when they were writing a new constitution. It was interesting because if they wanted to copy anybody they did not have to have an interpreter. They could get right within their own legal system judges who were bilingual in French, others in German and nearly all fluent in English. They had this big pool of information which they utilized.

Further Comments On March Toward Democratization And Heavy Hand Of Military Control-Special Role Of Foreign Trained Thai Judiciary.

Q: Are you saying that the USIS programs there were contributing to this unrest, towards this movement towards more democratic institutions or opening up the system?

COWARD: I would think they did in just the experience of association because, of course, you were invited in to talk on subject matter. But when you were having your one-to-one conversations with professors and students or when you had them as guests in your home, the conversation automatically became one of this empathetic feeling for participation and they were fully prepared to participate. Of course, my own experience was that the Thais had had a love affair with democratic action for years, but it was always offset by a military preponderant that was the other foot. So no matter how difficult or obtrusive or obnoxious the army might be, the opposite reaction was the continuing and growing push towards a much more democratic system, which has been their path ever since toward greater personal freedom.

They are thoroughly prepared, in my judgment, to undertake it if they can just get the military to one side. But the military is so involved in the economics and control factors, business, in the country as a result of all their years of control, that until that aspect, which is kind of self supporting for the military, can be offset by civilian control the struggle will go on. Of course, they do now have their parliament which functions one way or another and the presence of a very remarkable monarch. I hesitate to think what could take place when King Bhumiphal is no longer on the scene because it would appear that no one, certainly not his only son, is as intelligent or qualified. There is a second daughter who may well be, but then this immediately offers opportunities for a pro-son versus a pro-daughter political gambit and the son has had a military education. That could be a difficult period.

Q: A minute ago you mentioned the qualifications of judges and lawyers in writing a new constitution, that they could call upon their own for language translations, etc. Did you find that the judicial system was oriented towards the West? What was your experience with the judicial system?

COWARD: A unique experience began when Earl Warren came out. Almost immediately after our arrival the World Judges Conference was held in Bangkok. Earl Warren came out for it, among other distinguished people. USIS had a private showing of a film that we had done on Judge Warren that he was very much interested in seeing. I met Justice and Mrs. Warren at that time as I was asked to honcho him. He was not sponsored by USIS, we were merely facilitating. Through that association and contacts that I made at that time I happened to meet other Thai jurists, the most important one for the contacts I later made was the Under Secretary for Law. A splendid chap. Then through him over a period of time my own contacts among the legal people expanded. The Thai legal system is based primarily on the French. They do not have trial by jury. They have trial by three judges. This was very interesting because I attended a couple of trials at the high court where the three judges, obviously thoroughly trained, hear the case and make the decision. Legalities in Thailand, perhaps this is Asian, are rather like the Japanese, there is a preference for settling arguments privately, outside. You take things to court when people are unreasonable enough to have a confrontation, but it is not Thai to have a confrontation.

I noted this particularly at meetings of SEATO where I was asked to go twice by the Embassy. When the Thai delegation arrived they already had their point of view, they did not enter into arguments. Whereas the Americans and Australians would have great lengthy arguments going on, the Thais would just sit there quietly and, when appropriate, express an opinion. I remember particularly asking a Thai delegate afterwards, why, when there was an argument over the English wording of a protocol which was to come out of the meeting, they did not state their preference for it. His reply was: "It wouldn't make any difference because when we translate it into Thai it won't say that anyhow." I thought this was a pretty good way to handle it. Nobody was upset and they let the others have all the arguments and fun.

Q: With the judicial system then as you saw it, what programs or activities did you get involved with or organize?

COWARD: We didn't do direct programs with the judiciary. What we personally did, meaning by that my wife and myself, was to entertain because of our good fortune in meeting these people and other lawyers so that we had access and they were a very rewarding group. Whenever there was trouble in Thailand, when things got out of hand for the government, they went immediately into their high court to put people into responsible, emergency positions. They would ask the chief justice, in Thailand, called the President of the Dika Court, to take another assignment. They would ask a judge to head a university. When there was a great deal of unrest at Thammasat University, they immediately appointed a judge vice-chancellor with the responsibility to get things under control. The President of the Dika Court was immediately appointed interim prime minister because things had gotten out of hand there. His Majesty made the appointments.

My feeling was that this remarkably well-trained group of people, graduates of various countries, were the balance wheel that provided the stability when the forces of the military versus the forces for greater democratic participation had a confrontation. The judiciary was what poured oil on troubled waters and smoothed things out. In fact, one of the heads of the Dika Court, whom I knew well, Dr. Prakorb Htrasing, had studied in Germany through the Hitler period. Very remarkable because there he was studying law in Germany at the time of the rise of Naziism and Hitler's early years as Chancellor of Germany.

Q: I sort of intrude in this point because I was working in Thailand at the same time. I do remember that you had monthly meetings with the judicial group which you and your wife formed. You even brought in various people from the Embassy including the Deputy Chief of Mission.

COWARD: Well, we used to give, without anybody knowing it, on the 15th of March every year a big dinner party. That happens to be our wedding anniversary, so we chose that time to get all of that group together. We did that annually. In fact, even when we had gone next door into Burma, we would come back regularly to give the famous 15th of March dinner. We always intermingled the Embassy officials with the judges and the lawyers. Of course one of the commitments of a cultural officer is to provide contacts and access, which we did, to, I gather, everyone's satisfaction.

Q: What about your family situation at this time? Did the children accompany you?

COWARD: Our daughter did. She did all of her high school there and was a graduate of the Bangkok International School. Our son could have stayed on but after his Indian experience and because he had gone to German schools and Austrian schools as well, he said that he knew everybody's history but his own and thought that if he was to get into an American university he should stay in the US. So he spent all of our Bangkok years as a boarding student at St. Albans here in Washington, from which he was graduated.

Q: Did you consider this family separation a hardship?

COWARD: Well, I think it was a hardship. But I guess it is a problem that confronts a good many Foreign Service families, maybe most Foreign Service families. But it followed along in our commitment. I had started this to educate the children so I felt this was part of it. His St. Albans experience was a wonderful one. He has now been a Washington resident for 25 years; what we lost he gained. And, of course, he visited us. He would come out regularly. We would bring him out at Christmas time and he would come out in the summer. It was a regret of mine that the American Foreign Service was never quite as understanding as the British Foreign Service. They would send children back to Britain for education and bring them back every summer so that families were not really separated. In our Foreign Service at that time you had one round-trip during the tour that your family was there. We were five years in Bangkok which meant that our son would have had one round-trip had we not brought him out ourselves at interim times. I think that is something which, if it hasn't been, should be corrected because there is no doubt that somebody has to suffer. You suffer from the separation, if he is getting a superior education, and his education suffers if you keep him at some international school which may not provide the same caliber of education or opportunity for entrance into the university of his preference here in the States.

Q: But earlier Frank you mentioned you studied Thai before you took the assignment in Bangkok. How useful was this language to you? Why couldn't you work in English?

COWARD: In effect you could have worked in English. I was not the greatest Thai language student. There is no doubt that for people who became fluent in Thai it would have been a more meaningful experience because generally if you maintain only professional contacts you can go on in English, but if you are going to enter a culture you have to be able to speak to non-professional people and Thais, like the Burmese, are very unlikely to talk English between themselves. It is their preference, their cultural prerogative that they prefer to speak their own language. They are always aware that foreign language is a foreign language. You need to hear all kinds of things in the native language that you are just not going to hear if you don't know the language. In India that was not true, but in the rest of Asia it would be true. Asians speak Asian languages unless they are talking to you.

Additional Observations On Five-Year Thai Experience.

Q: Having been with you in Thailand much of this period, it is my impression you were one of the most effective officers in the old USIS spectrum. And we had a lot of people at that time. Before we move on to your next career step, do you have any passing comments about your experience in Thailand?

COWARD: Well, flattery will get you everywhere. Again it was a very rewarding experience. I think every country is unique. Any officer's experience in that country is unique even though cultures may be related as the three that we were fortunate enough to have experienced...India, Thailand, Burma...but still every country is a unique experience in its own way. At the same time, for the foreign individual, the USIS officer is a window on America. So for me it was a thoroughly rewarding experience.

I was particularly appreciative in my years in Thailand that I had the experience of working with Jack Hedges when he was PAO because in my experience he was an outstanding American citizen, USIS officer and individual. He combined all three of these elements in what in my experience would be the proper proportions, the proper outlook and a very effective colleague and Foreign Service officer.

Q: Before we leave Thailand was there any event that stands out in your mind that portrayed perhaps some kind of in depth US-Thai relationship or on a personal basis a USIS relationship?

COWARD: Yes. I feel one of the most meaningful experiences at USIS during my time was when we had the Thai patriarch visit and the ceremony on the front lawn at USIS. The patriarch had returned from his American visit. We had made a film of it. He had seen the film and appreciated it. It had been suggested that the patriarch and a group of his attendant monks come and have a blessing of the USIS compound. I believe you were Acting at that time. You approved it and they came. It was a moving experience.

It was not universally accepted as being a thing that USIS ought to do because here was this Asian religion ensconced in a specially constructed pavilion chanting on the front lawn. To me it was exactly what USIS and its cross-cultural purpose is all about. It indicated to the local society that we not only appreciated but valued their cultural context and I am sure that in the eyes of those people in Bangkok who were our primary target group it was an outstanding event representing a cultural exchange of the highest order.

Q: And Frank, I don't know if you will agree with me, but I interpreted it as a great honor that this supreme patriarch would come to our compound and bless it and preside over a ceremony which was meaningful to all our Buddhist colleagues, our staff and the hundreds of people who stopped on the streets.

COWARD: It probably represents the association that USIS has in a good many communities where we have offices and it is particularly due to the influence of those unsung heroes, our local employees. Those top local employees represent an elite who make a contribution to the success of American foreign policy that cannot be over emphasized, but is very often under valued. Selfless, timeless, the things that they can and do do, their dedication. I cannot believe in this particular instance that if the influence and acceptability of those local employees, particularly in Thailand, who tend to be very highly placed in the social structure which operates on the idea that self promotion is an inexcusable activity, if this had not been felt in Thai religious circles, I don't believe the supreme patriarch would ever have agreed to come and go through this particular ceremony.

Q: I found it a very rewarding activity. Frank, let's move on to your next phase, if we may. You left Bangkok after five years in 1973. Where did you go?

1973: Transfer To Burma As Cultural Affairs Officer After False Starts For Vietnam And Haiti. Then, Stopover In Bangkok As Kittikachorn Government Was Falling In Thailand.

COWARD: It was across the border, fifty minutes in time in flight and a 150 years in cultural experience from Bangkok to Rangoon. A completely different, from a thoroughly extroverted, sophisticated society to a highly introverted and tightly socialistic political situation that ultimately I wouldn't have missed for anything. We happened, incidentally, to make our transition in August, 1973 when the Kittikachorn government had collapsed. The student demonstrations had taken over in Bangkok. On our return from home leave we were scheduled to fly from Hong Kong to Bangkok, but we had to spend the next night in Hong Kong because the Bangkok airport was closed and we couldn't get in. The following morning we were all told that there was one flight that was leaving Hong Kong and to get up and get on the plane. We did and arrived in Bangkok. There were no taxis, there was nothing. The Boy Scouts were handling traffic. So what to do, how to get into town to get to USIS? We sat quite some time in the airport when suddenly I heard a person going through saying that the bus from the Narai Hotel waiting for a French tour group was ready to leave and would they please hurry along. Immediately, speaking French, we joined that group and my wife and I went to the Narai Hotel, where we spent the night and made the transfer the next day. USIS picked us up, took us back to the airport and we were off to Rangoon.

Q: This was going to Burma without any special training?

COWARD: Yes. There was no special training. We had our three months at home. The transition to Burma was very interesting because when we left Bangkok we were scheduled to go to Vietnam, to Saigon. In fact we had gone there and spent three days. I was to be assigned to take over the binational center. We visited the house, approved everything, thought it would be very interesting and went back to Bangkok and then on home leave. Our effects in the meantime went to Saigon. I had an interview with the then PAO, Marshall Brement, a thoroughly obnoxious State person, and I knew it would be difficult working with him because his attitude was "I am God and thou shalt have no other Gods before me."

During my home leave he apparently had someone whom he preferred, who was already there, take the assignment. He was fluent in Vietnamese, so that perhaps was a very definite advantage. Anyway, while he had accepted me and everything was fine from what I knew, he petitioned the Agency and the Agency approved and I was told we were not going to Saigon.

So I waited and the next assignment that came through was Haiti. I had never been to Haiti. My idea again, big world. So we read up on Haiti and were all set to go when the telegram came in that I was too senior for Haiti so scrap and where would I like to go. Well, I said, "You tell me. There is a lot of the world I don't know and I am tired getting all these assignments that are then scratched, so you tell me where I am to go and we will go." So the assignment came through for either Vientiane or Rangoon. I opted for Vientiane because it was French speaking and I had French and wanted to use it. So, of course, the answer when the assignment came was Rangoon. So off we went to Rangoon.

That was all right. Had we gone to Saigon we would have been there for the collapse; had we gone to Vientiane we would have been there for another collapse. Whereas we were happy in Rangoon and had the unique experience of an ideological socialist government, which was a unique learning experience.

Q: And you went there in what position, Frank?

COWARD: I went there as CAO at that time. Arnie Hanson was PAO and I was CAO.

Q: How long were you in Burma?

COWARD: We were there a full five years.

Q: Five years. At each one of your posts you had a considerable number of years.

COWARD: Yes.

USIS Operated Under Great Restrictions Under Dictatorial Socialist Oriented Government In Burma, But With Careful Cultivation Of Key Government Officers, COWARD Able To Revive Educational And Other Cultural Exchange Programs.

Q: Instead of the frequent two and out tours. In Burma how did you approach your job? Did you have the freedom of operation you had in India or even in Thailand?

COWARD: No, you had no freedom of action in Burma. In Burma it was very true you could do what you could do, but every time you approached any ministry you went hat in hand. No matter what happened on Monday, that was no guarantee that it would happen that way on Tuesday. The vibes were absolutely essential. You had to establish your personal credentials and you had to realize that any official with whom you were in contact put his neck on the line when you entered his office. In fact, you never made an appointment. You would get the PA on the phone and he would say, "What is it about?" You couldn't merely ask to see someone. This all had to be filtered and you had to respect it. The people with whom you could speak were probably designated, the people who came to your home when you entertained were certainly designated. We always assumed that some of our household servants were on the MIA payroll. After all in Rangoon the salary level was such that for \$10 a month the MIA (Military Intelligence Agency), could buy all the servants of all the diplomats in the city.

Q: With these kinds of fences built around your programs, what could you do?

COWARD: Burma was the original Fulbright program. It was the only Fulbright agreement that did not carry a proviso for what to do with the funds in the event that the program ceased to function. All subsequent agreements apparently said that if the program somehow was held in abeyance or dropped, the funds automatically reverted to American control. In Burma that did not happen. It was simply silent on the subject; these were joint funds. The Fulbright program had been stopped in 1962 when General Ne Win took over. There were no exchanges.

Q: Given the odds, the post had quite a number of successes, if you would call them that. What information tools did you use and do you figure you did have some successes?

COWARD: I think we were actually quite successful. The Fulbright program had been canceled, as I said, and the political officer at the Embassy had in his annual reports invariably ended the question of exchanges and the potential for USIS programming saying that they should wait until the government fell. This struck me as being a little ridiculous because the government hadn't fallen. It was 12 years later and there hadn't been any exchanges. I felt first of all that we had been more or less told, Arnie Hanson and myself, that our job was to get a program going or let's take USIS out of Rangoon. So we felt it was make or break.

When I began to make my soundings my point of view was not what the political officer's was...his view was that there were Embassy terms on which Burma could have exchange of persons. When I began going to the Ministry of Education my question was simply "Would you like, is there a basis for exchange? What are your requirements, terms for exchange of persons? Will I be able to meet them?" So what we actually did, which was certainly no magic, was to begin a program, which they permitted, actually desired, but on their terms.

My experience in Burma was that one must realize the Burmese know whose country it is and they feel quite competent, have every intention of running it in their own way. They anticipate that foreign governments will accept this. I had no objection to that. My assignment was to start a program and to do that I had to know what their terms were. The net result was that Fulbright exchange began again, cultural programming and exchange began again.

Q: What do you mean cultural exchange in addition to the Fulbright program?

COWARD: We had, for instance, the Charlie Bird Trio come out. The Martha Graham Dancers came and spent a week because of the restricted flight pattern out of Burma. You could only get out twice a week. They were en route to Japan but had to spend a week in Burma. They were sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, the first American group ever sponsored by the Burmese government. Then we had the McLean Family Band. We did all this in one year. They were tremendous successes. Of course I think anything foreign, and certainly American, could have been a success because for so long there had been nothing. They hadn't had anything. Nevertheless, they came and the whole year was a big success.

Q: Did this happen the first year you were there? You were there for five years.

Lessons On Doing Business In Burma.

COWARD: Those three groups came during my second year. The big deal after that was to convince them that it was in their interest to send a Burmese dance group on an American tour. Beate Gordon, the monumental director of cultural programs at the Asia Society in New York, wanted a group of Burmese dancers. The GUB had never sent a classical dance troupe out of the country before and it took us two years to convince them but they finally allowed them to go. They were a big success here. An interesting coincidence out occurred over potential publicity. The Smithsonian Magazine wanted to do a feature article on the dancers and proposed sending the eminent Life photographer, Carl Mydans and his wife to Burma to do the necessary. Well there was no question of getting anyone like that into Burma.

Q: You mean they could not get into Burma?

COWARD: The GUB permitted no one registered as a photographer or journalist into Burma. Absolutely not. And this is a good example of how things were done in Burma. I went to the Minister of Culture and said, "You know Carl Mydans is perhaps our number one photographer. 'Life' magazine. This is wonderful for your dancers, for Burma. They are going to be featured in this prominent magazine." He was terribly sorry but the rules and regulations permitted no deviation. The Asia Society wanted the publicity and I could see we were going to lose a great opportunity, when the minister said in a comment over coffee, "Of course, a USIS photographer could do anything he wants." So I replied, "In other words, if OUR photographer were to take these pictures that would be perfectly acceptable?" "Yes." So Carl Mydans and his lovely wife, Shelley, came in as a USIS photographer. They spent a week staying in our house covering the dancers. The publicity was wonderful and the Burmese were most appreciative. But I had to pick up on that comment. He was telling me how it could be worked. If I hadn't caught that we would not have had the article and photography in the Smithsonian Magazine, which, of course, was an excellent thing for both countries. That was doing business in Burma.

Q: So you had to be keenly attuned to the nuances that were floating out to you. Either you understood them and interpreted them correctly...

COWARD: You had to listen all the time. I learned that early on in one of my first program efforts when I stumbled. There was a building down the street from the Embassy in Rangoon that we rented from the Burma Bible Society which hadn't been used for those 12 years for anything but storage. But that was the office of the Burmese chap who controlled the Fulbright funds. The Embassy didn't even know him when I brought up his name, because of these 12 years. It was an unheard of experience that this impeccably honest man accounted for every dime, over a million and a half dollars worth of kyat, for 12 years during which he carefully forwarded reports. Speak of under valued local employees!

Anyway we had this building so I thought why not try a cultural center with exhibits in the lobby and cultural activities and film shows upstairs. The Embassy rented the building so we could do whatever we wanted to do with it. But to get an audience you always had to write a formal letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Embassy of the United States of America, etc. I did all that and as we received non reply in three weeks I assumed a green light and went ahead with program plans. I waited about three weeks for a reply and no reply came. Then I received a call from the office of Dr. Nyi Nyi, the Minister of Education, an obnoxious person who had studied in the United States and, for some reason, harbored an intense grudge against the United States and its citizens. He called me into his office and Arnie and I went. I needed Arnie for companionship at that moment. Dr. Nyi Nyi said very quietly, "Did you have permission for this program?" I said that I thought I had followed all of the directions. I showed a copy of the letter we had submitted. He said, "Did you have a reply"? I said, "No, we did not have a reply, but since the time elapsed I assumed that if the reply were negative we would have heard it." He said, "Well, in the future, I think it would be better to wait until you have received an official response. Of course, at the American center you can do anything you want to do, but remember that we control the audience."

That was all, but he taught me a lesson. We went away and learned from that experience. We always waited for our replies which could be five or six weeks in coming. This wasn't easy, but they became a little easier as we went along. But that was doing business in Burma.

Q: Well, did you have that first program? Did anybody show up?

COWARD: We did because he called me in before the program date took place. It would have been the first and last non-program had that meeting not taken place. But it did suggest to us that it was possible to do things as long as we carefully minded our manners and moved according to the parameters set by the Burmese government. The American Center was a popular success and young foreign service trainees were part of our regular audience.

Q: I am curious how you managed to get permission to operate a cultural center even though you financed it through these Fulbright funds. There must have been some give on the Burmese government to allow you to do this.

COWARD: Well, the Burmese are a very interesting people. If they say no, they mean absolutely no, there is no questioning, no nothing, that is it. On the other hand, if they say yes, they will do everything, absolutely everything. Cooperation is 100 percent. When they agreed to sponsor the Martha Graham Dancers, that government that has practically no money to do anything, even gave those 27 dancers spending money. To be sure it wasn't a lot, but they felt it was their obligation to give these people...and they would allow us to do nothing, even when I asked the cultural chap who was assigned a couple of questions if it wouldn't make it easier for him, with a great big smile he would say, "No, no problem. We will take care of it." When they say yes, they go 103 percent of the way. The easiest people in the world if they have agreed.

Q: You mentioned the military rule under which you worked. Didn't you find that rather infringing, very restricting on your movement around the country and the types of programs?

COWARD: Oh yes.

Q: Could you bring in a professor to discuss the development of democracy?

COWARD: No, you could not, and here the Agency was very good. There was a chap, Len Robock, who went down the line for us. The way to do exchanges in Burma was to do what you could do. There were certain things it wouldn't have done any good to ask. Just what you have said. The Burmese were very sport minded. Our interest was to get exchanges going. We could bring in sports people. So we brought in tennis instructors. We brought in a swimming instructor. And then the Burmese would entertain them and give them access to the young people. We finally had to establish two Fulbright houses to house the people whom we brought in.

You could bring in literature. That was fine. But it was what they wanted. Doctors, the Burmese were very high on medical people. We could bring in doctors. We could use types the Agency with its political orientation did not particularly favor because they wanted to accent political development. Our problem was that if that was all we could get there wouldn't be any program. If we wanted to get this road paved, we had to do it on their terms. And Len Robock was so understanding, was so good and fought for us here that we were able to work the program. One could say it was often as difficult to work with Washington as it was in Rangoon.

About the center, again the Burmese were very interesting. The same thing happened with the Fulbright funds. They did not question. We rented that building and we could do anything in it that we wished except get Burmese people in. For that you had to have another dimension. In all those 12 years they did not question ownership or mention that fund but State would not let us tap it. Anything we wanted to do with Fulbright had to be with a dollar budget. In the meantime, sitting in Rangoon, I had a million and a half dollars worth of kyat, inviolate, which I couldn't use while Washington was saying save dollars, and I had all those kyat. Every time the kyat was devalued, the USG lost a pocket full of dollars, but the protocol said there had to be a binational decision on the use of those monies and State was adamant. Without Ambassador David Osborn's support, a splendid chap, I couldn't have worked this. I had to go to Washington and plead with the lawyers in the State Department. Finally I had to ask them flat out, "In other words I have to tell a lie in order to save government money." And the answer was, "Yes, I think you do." I had to have a committee of Burmese people. I had to get from the Ministry of Education authority to name three Burmese officials with three Americans, because that was what the protocol said, to approve the use of these funds. The Burmese had no intention of participating in anything that had to do with Fulbright. As far as they were concerned it was a dead letter. Exchange was possible but not under the Fulbright name because that had been canceled. Our problem was in Washington.

I came back and explained to my counterpart, whom I much appreciated, who didn't understand it. He said, "This is your money isn't it?" "Yes." "Have we ever questioned the use of it?" "No." "And we are never going to. Why can't you just use it?" "Well," I said, "I am caught just like you are caught under your government." Together we worked out a fabrication and finally after about 13 years, we were able to get the use of these kyat funds to pay salaries, to operate the center, to rent two houses, to whittle down the dollar equivalent. But that was doing business in Washington. We had the green light in Burma, the red light was here in Washington.

Q: That showed great imagination, Frank, in working within the system and still moving toward your goals. Are there any other activities that come to mind in Burma that you felt were outstanding? Or any incidents? Did you travel? Did you have any branch activities?

COWARD: We couldn't go by car more than 50 miles outside Rangoon without again the official letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. You could fly to Mandalay because we had had an office up there, but the Embassy consular officer occupies what had been the USIS residence. We didn't any longer have cultural activities up there, but you could take one person, if you had him, up there to the university. You were always dealing with acute sensitivity. So as far as the programming was concerned that really was confined to Rangoon.

One interesting experience, however, when we were readying the Burmese dancers to leave for the States, Beate Gordon from the Asia Society was there in town and Ambassador Osborn gave a dinner party for her and the Minister of Culture. Beate Gordon's Austrian father, who was a musician, had lived in Tokyo for years where he was first violinist in the Imperial orchestra. Beate grew up in Tokyo and was fluent in Japanese. The Minister of Culture had done flight training in Japan. He was part of the Burmese group in the Freedom from Britain movement. Ambassador Osborn had come from a Japanese assignment. So we are at the residence and they begin singing songs in Japanese. Beate Gordon knew these songs, and the Minister of Culture knew them. Whether David Osborn knew the songs I am not sure, but he was fluent in Japanese. It was a very friendly musical evening with much singing. After we left and were driving home Beate laughed and said, "You know the songs we were singing? They were all the old Horst Wessel songs in Japanese."

The Education Minister's Farewell Message Of Explanation And Indirect Complement.

Q: Frank, to accomplish what you did under the circumstances, you must have developed a rather warm relationship with the Minister of Culture. Any particular anecdotes or events that you would like to recall at this point?

COWARD: Well, not so much with the Minister of Culture as with the Minister of Education. One of my first experiences with him, which brought us into a pleasant relationship occurred at his office. I had an appointment with him and his PA told me that 20 minutes was the time that Dr. Khin Maung Win had allocated. So when I was ushered into the office, with my local assistant and we were chatting, I was timing my 20 minutes on a clock on the wall opposite me but behind the Minister. In due course I began to feel a little uneasy about time. You know you run out of things to say and find yourself manufacturing things. Finally I looked at my watch which I hadn't wanted to do before for fear of appearing a little rude while facing him across the coffee table, and I realized I had been there an hour and five minutes. His clock was not functioning properly. I promptly got up, and apologizing pointed out to him that I had been using his clock and the clock wasn't working.

Well, the next time I went to see him he pointed out right away that that clock was missing. That sealed a relationship which right up until the end he remembered and laughed about. The clock, never appeared again on his wall during my tenure. When we were scheduled to leave he gave a luncheon at the university for my wife and myself at which he presented me with a painting of the temples at Pagan which we have in the house. At parting he said, "You understand that under normal circumstances, you should have been a frequent guest at my house and I should have been a frequent guest in your house, but you understand that under our situation that could not be." I did understand. Our two compounds, his official residence and the then residence of the Cultural Affairs Officer, were very near one another in Golden Valley. That was all he said but it was a lot at the end of five years. That again is doing business in Burma and he wanted me to know. And I was happy to know because he was also telling me that we had minded our manners, that we had made USIS perfectly acceptable on their terms.

Final Observations On A USIA Career.

Q: Well, Frank, to conclude our interview today, do you have any final comments on your experience with USIA? Any lasting bit of philosophy that we can pass down through the ages here for you?

COWARD: I would say that I think USIS is a very valuable, essential part of the conduct of American foreign policy. I think every officer should remember that he is an American citizen as well as a Foreign Service Officer. If he puts politics first and they are essential to the job, Washington oriented policy, he is likely to forget the fact that he is also an American citizen. He represents American citizens as well as the presidency of the moment. I think this goes back to the thought that "Yeah gotta be a Mensch." I think that dimension is very important.

Maybe the final word is, if your wife doesn't like it, quit the game. I was very fortunate. My wife was particularly adaptable and enjoyed every bit of it. She started a servants registry when we were in Bangkok which was a very valuable asset. She participated in the International Women's group in Rangoon, where all of the wives from all of the countries, the Eastern Bloc countries as well as the West, had an excellent cultural exchange on the basis that probably only congenial wives can have. I think that is an essential part of the play. A single man, I do not think can adequately represent our culture because by and large cultures are family oriented. This is particularly true in the Asian context, a family is an asset.

I don't know whether those are words of wisdom, but they are words of experience from someone who enjoyed every bit of it.

Q: You had how many years of Agency career?

COWARD: Seventeen.

Q: And they sound like very, very full and eventful years, Frank. Thank you very much for this opportunity to put some of your ideas and experiences on the record.

End of interview