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

WILLIAM LENDERKING

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is March 5. This is an interview with William Lenderking. L-E-N-D-E-R-K-I-N-G?

LENDERKING: Correct.

Q: And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

And you go by Bill?

LENDERKING: Yes.

Q: Okay. Bill, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

LENDERKING: I was born in Great Neck, New York, on Long Island, March 26, 1934.

Q: Okay. Year of the dog.

LENDERKING: Well, I guess. I never thought of it that way.

Q: Well, my wife was born in 1934.

Okay, well tell me something about, say on your father's side. Where did the Lenderkings come from?

LENDERKING: The Lenderking family - and as far as I know, if there are any Lenderkings in America we are all related - is a very small family. They originally came from Germany, as I understand it, and went to England because the oldest ancestor was working in the court of one of the kings- whoever was king at the time. This would be around the 16th Century. And family records on that side of the family are not strong, because so many of the records of German families have been destroyed in the many wars that ranged over Europe down through the centuries.

My mother's side of the family also goes back to England, but many of them came to America. At least one of my ancestors was on the Mayflower. His name was John Howland and he survived miraculously when he was tossed overboard in a storm but managed to grasp a bit of line and hang on tenaciously until he could be hauled back aboard. He was an indentured servant to the Plymouth colony's leader, not one of the group's leaders or religious zealots. So he was not really one of the real Puritans, who we now know were not only brave and resolute in defense of their religious beliefs, but also rigid, intolerant, cruel (against the Indians and non-believers) and not very nice folks in many ways. Anyway, John Howland eventually worked his way out of servitude, had a family and prospered. So our family in America may be small but we have been around for a long while.

My great-great-grandmother lived in England with her husband and three young sons. He took the family to the West Indies, either as a senior military man to help administer the colony of Jamaica, or to earn his fortune as a businessman. It was a time trade between the West Indies and America was growing tremendously. Unfortunately he became ill and died, leaving her a widow with three young sons to raise. She probably got on one of the ships plying between the West Indies and America, and settled in Brooklyn, New York. One of her sons was one of the first summer residents of Shelter Island, at the end of Long Island, where my family had a summer cottage for three generations.

I still have relatives in England and Germany I have never met. In a novel twist, my great-great uncle was an Anglican clergyman who went to Australia around 1900 to help in Aborigine communities, and eventually became Dean of the Anglican Cathedral in Perth, where my wife came from. When my great-great uncle's wife died, he remarried a young Englishwoman, and they had several children, when he was in his 70s, I believe. His great-great granddaughter, my second cousin, is now a supermodel in New York, and she's been written up in the New York Times, made the cover of the Spanish edition of Vogue and was in the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue one year. We're not sure, but we think the descendents of my American relative who emigrated to Australia must have known my wife's family in Perth, because they were around there at the same time. Of no importance, but it really is a small world.

One other family tidbit. I am a first cousin, about seven times removed, of Ralph Waldo Emerson, on my mother's side. My father used to say having a famous ancestor and a nickel would buy you a cup of coffee (this was a generation before Starbucks!), and I don't remember his name coming up much in family conversations, but his ideas permeated my family's ways of thinking. I only discovered this recently when I started re-reading some of his essays and the family genealogist, an English cousin on my mother's side, clarified the relationship for us.

Q: Well let's take up your father's side; when did they come to the States and what were they up to?

LENDERKING: They came, as far as I know, around 1850. And they were here, I must assume, for economic betterment. They settled in Baltimore and one or two of them became prominent in the German-American community. It is interesting, to me anyway, that they were described in the newspapers as "so-and-so Lenderking, prominent member of the German-American community." They were not considered quite American yet. And some of them stayed and seemed to have prospered in business, and apparently some of them did not and went back. And we don't have the particulars on why they went back. I think a lot of immigrants went back to their home countries. Not all of them stayed and lived out the American Dream.

Q: Well, starting with your paternal grandfather, what did he do for a living?

LENDERKING: He was a railroad executive for the Chesapeake and- or the Baltimore and Ohio, the B&O. Remember from the game of Monopoly the B&O Railroad was one of the four railroads - and I don't know what his exact position was. He died before I was born, I think.

Q: And your father?

LENDERKING: He went to Baltimore City College, which Russell Banker described vividly in his marvelous memoir, "Growing Up," because Baker went there too, many years after my father of course, but it seems there were still many similarities. It was not really a college; it was more like an advanced high school/junior college. And after my father graduated he taught there for awhile and then he was an entrepreneur in the development of paper vessels; that is, paper cups, paper drinking cups, paper containers of all kinds. And he formed his own company, heading it at the age of 28. This was on the edge of the Depression, where millions of American men lost their jobs and their savings and couldn't find employment. My mother's two brothers were hard hit; they couldn't find work, lost their savings, had to sell their homes and never fully recovered. In contrast, my father was a leader in a new industry on the rise. He prospered and in the mid-30s or so bought my uncle's summer home on Shelter Island on Long Island, which had been in their family almost from the time it was built in the late 19th Century. Instead of being grateful that his purchase kept the house, technically at least, still in the family, I think they resented my father's success.

Anyway, my father's company eventually became a NY Stock Exchange Corporatiothe Lily Tulip Cup Corporation - and then was bought out by Owens-Illinois in the 1950s or so, and maybe it has been bought out again. I think Lily cups are still a distinctive brand within the genre.

Q: Well, what do you recall while you were a young lad about your father's paper cup business?

LENDERKING: His company was bought out and he became the vice president in charge of sales for Lily, which was a principle rival of Dixie Cups, if you remember way back then, and they had a big plant at College Point, New York, right across from LaGuardia Airport, where I worked one summer. So he was one of the senior executives at that company. Their corporate headquarters were in New York City, in the Chanin Building, right across from Grand Central Station. At that time it was the third tallest building in New York, after the Empire State and Chrysler buildings.

Q: On your mother's side; you mentioned that they were an old England family, right?

LENDERKING: I think those who came settled around New York, Brooklyn, White Plains, Long Island, and thereabouts. There were some clergymen in the family, there was an English professor, at least one that we knew of, but I'm vague on relatives I didn't know personally.

Q: What about your mother's parents? What were they up to?

LENDERKING: I didn't know my grandfather or grandmother. They died before I was born or when I was a baby. My grandfather was in business, I think. My mother was the youngest of four children. None of them made a lot of money, but I think they had a lot of fun. My mother's oldest brother was an early pilot in WWI. He enjoyed playing pranks and one time he commandeered a wheelchair and persuaded a friend to wheel him, in full uniform, into a New York City ballroom during a gala dinner dance and everyone stood up and applauded. My mother's old scrapbook has lots of photos of sailboat outings, clambakes, family get-togethers, that sort of thing. Several of them were keen sailors and sailboats were part of my summers growing up on Shelter Island. I think the Depression tore all that apart. They were all quite literary but not many of them went to university.

Q: Did your mother go to university or no?

LENDERKING: No, she didn't.

Q: Well of course, this is the pattern of, I would say, most of the people I am interviewing now. My parents did not go; my father had one semester. But they read a lot, and did a lot more self educating than happens today.

Anyway, how did your mother and father meet?

LENDERKING: You know, I'm not sure how they met and I should know that. By the time I came along my mother and father didn't talk much about their earlier lives, except for some well-worn family anecdotes.

Q: Well, you were born in Baltimore but-

LENDERKING: I was born in Great Neck.

Q: I mean Great Neck. Did you grow up in Great Neck?

LENDERKING: I did. Until I went to college.

Q: Okay. What was Great Neck like?

LENDERKING: Great Neck is a really interesting community because it is 16 miles from Manhattan and in the '30s it was a small agricultural community but also increasingly a place of residence for Hollywood stars; Paulette Goddard lived there for awhile, Eddie Cantor lived there for awhile; and literati, Scott Fitzgerald wrote-

Q: I was going to say, was this not where Great Gatsby was written?

LENDERKING: Exactly. I know the house and it is less than a mile from the house where I was born and grew up.

Q: Did you see the green light blinking there?

LENDERKING: No, no. Unfortunately where he wrote it is not on the water but it is part of Great Neck, though. I should perhaps explaiin The Great Gatsby, West Egg was the fictional name for Great Neck. Jay Gatsby looked longingly across the water from Kings Point, which is the wealthiest part of Great Neck, to Daisy's place in East Egg, the fictional name for Sands Point. Sands Point was, and is, even wealthier and more fashionable than Kings Point in Great Neck. It's part of the famous Long Island Gold Coast, whereas Great Neck is not. This is only important because Fitzgerald was a keen observer of social class and distinctions, and those distinctions were significant in his day. Now, I doubt if they mean anything at all except perhaps to the wealthy people who live in those communities. But Fitzgerald's observations on this subject and the portrayals of his characters were of course central to the novel. When I was an English major in college, "Gatsby" was considered an important novel but not quite up there with the best of Steinbeck, Hemingway and Faulkner. Now many people consider it the greatest American novel of the 20th Century, maybe the best ever. First editions with complete dust jacket go for hundreds of thousands of dollars when one comes on the market, which is rare.

But when I was growing up there was a great influx of Jewish businessmen and intellectuals to Great Neck from New York City, many of whom became deeply involved in the civil rights movement later on. Our high schooand this is one of the blessings of having grown up in a place like Great Neck - was always considered one of the best in the country. And on a Jewish holiday it was almost empty because the school was about 80 percent Jewish kids. I don't think the population of the community as a whole was 80 percent Jewish, but there was a large Jewish population and Jews are certainly the largest religious or ethnic group today. After I graduated from high school in 1951, the nature of the Jewish community changed, I am told. It became much more conservative or orthodox, and many of the Jewish families who were active in academics, civil rights, and show business moved away. I'm not suggesting this as cause and effect, only mentioning it as a phenomenon. In any case, the Jewish kids I went to school with were smart, iconoclastic and funny. They also prized education, and it was a tremendous blessing to grow up with these kids as friends and fellow students, although I didn't fully realize it at the time.

Q: Let's talk a bit about very early life. Did you have brothers, sisters?

LENDERKING: I had two older sisters and later on when my parents divorced a younger half-brother.

Q: What was life like for a kid growing up there? Did you get out and around?

LENDERKING: Oh, it was blissful. At our 50th high school reunion a few years ago we all said, all the people who came back, that this was a nurturing community and we all benefited so much. As I said, the education level was very high; the teachers were great. It was a pleasant community to live in. There was a lot of stimulation; it was close to New York so it was not a typical suburban community. It had the arts and culture and all of that involvement in the shadow of New York yet there was a rural atmosphere. You could play in open fields; now they are all filled in with houses; the woods are gone and the streams dried up. It was a small town environment with the stimulation of a nearby great city; it was extremely healthy.

Q: How about at home? Was there much sort of interaction in the family, you know, sitting around the dinner table at night and talking about things?

LENDERKING: Oh sure. Lots of politics. My parents were both staunch but moderate Republicans. In those days the strongest wing of the Party was moderate, and the militant conservatives who dominate the Party today were not in evidence. My father commuted to New York every day and we would go down and meet him at the train station. He was always in the seventh car on the same train every night. He often complained about having to work too hard, but I guess that didn't include overtime, because he left the office right in time to catch that train when it left Penn Station on 34th Street. He never worked on the weekendthat was family time and for doing work around the house, socializing with friends, and so on. Sunday was time for a big family dinner in mid-afternoon. Pearl Harbor happened when I was seven and then we had rationing and certain foods like butter and choice meats were very scarce, and commodities like gas were rationed so our lifestyle changed somewhat. We were not wealthy but we were very comfortable. By today's standards it was probably luxurious. Our house was a not large, but we had four bedrooms on the second floor, two cars, and a live-in cook and live-in driver with small separate bedrooms off the kitchen. Growing up, I thought our house was enormous, but I went back to see it some years ago and it looked pretty tiny.

Q: Where did your family fall politically?

LENDERKING: They were conservative, especially my father. He was a conservative businessman; he felt business values were the bedrock values of the country. He railed against big government and taxes. My mother was a moderate Republican.

Q: What about religion?

LENDERKING: We were Episcopalians and I was made to go to Sunday School. I say "made" because it was not something I was dragged to, but my mother and father did not go except on Christmas and Easter and special occasions. I think they felt Christian teaching and ethics should be an important part of everyone's life but they never, to my recollection, indoctrinated me in Christian theology. My mother was a non-practicing Christian Scientist, although that didn't extend to keeping medicine away from us or preventing us from being treated by doctors when we were sick. She just felt that if you lived a good life, somehow God would provide, although deep down I'm sure she wasn't at all confident that there even was a God.

Q: How was elementary school?

LENDERKING: Elementary school was very pleasant. We had a good mixture of kids; there were some foreign children. About that time the UN was getting going after World War II and their first temporary headquarters were in Lake Success, which is part of Great Neck, so we had some UN kids and there were other foreigners there. So there was, as I say, a good mix of Jews, Catholics and Protestants. There were only a few blacks and a smattering of other kids from foreign countries.

Q: Was there much of a Catholic community there?

LENDERKING: There was indeed and there were a couple of big Catholic churches that were very well attended. The Catholic kids tended to be Irish Catholic, although there were a few Polish, and I'd say the Irish were the dominant strain among the Catholics and economically they were probably mostly lower middle class. And so they were generally not among the economic leaders of Great Neck. As I recall, the leadership of Great Neck followed a clear dividpolitical and business leaders, bankers, real estate people and so on tended to be Wasps. The Jews were leaders in the arts, culture, and intellectual life. That may not be totally accurate, but that's how I remember it.

Q: Well then, how did you find the schooling? Were you much of a reader?

LENDERKING: I loved reading. My mother read to us all a lot and I was drawn to reading and even wrote a little short story in the third grade. My favorites were the Thornton W. Burgess animal books, Peter Rabbit, Reddy Fox, Old Mr. Possum, and so on, and after I learned to read in the first grade I kept on reading them myself until I had read them all. Whatever academic talents I had were strongly on the verbal and literary side rather than in science and math.

Q: You said the high school was very lively, so how did you find it?

LENDERKING: Well, almost all of us were taking a college preparatory course and the teachers were so good. There were about 20 to 25 students in a class but we had driver training, typing, home economics, very good facilities, such as workshops, auditorium and theatre, two full-sized gymnasiums, soccer, baseball, and football fields, and so on. Today, there is another big high school of equal size there, so the community has grown a lot, but it still has the aura of a prosperous community where kids can grow up in a healthy environment and have a pleasant place to live.

Q: Did you get involved in sports much?

LENDERKING: I played a lot of sports. I was one of those kids who was pretty good at everything but excelled at nothing. Before I made a couple of the teams in high school (I played football, basketball and track on the high school teams), the kids I hung out with were tireless in playing pickup sports, e. g. playground basketball, stickball (an import from New York City), school intramurals, you name it. We organized our own baseball league with three teams, each from a different neighborhood. No adult supervision, not even coaching, was involved. On our neighborhood team we were all pals anyway, but we held tryouts, chose our leaders, arranged games, and had a grand time. We also talked about sports incessantly and went to major league football and baseball games in New York, either with our parents, or later when we were in high school, by ourselves. This was even after we also started chasing girls.

Q: How about other extracurricular activities? Singing, plays, clubs...

LENDERKING: Yes, I was the lead in a sixth grade play and again in a larger production in the ninth grade. The drama teacher said we want to see you out here, you know, for tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade productions. I wanted to do it, I liked it, but I was also involved in sports and I chose the sports so I never followed up on that. I was also the chairman of our junior prom, and wrote sports and other articles for the school newspaper.

Q: In reading, did you find any particular books either in elementary or high school level that particularly impressed you or whatnot?

LENDERKING: Well certainly I loved Sherlock Holmes and that would be about eighth grade. I read all of them, including the four full-length novels one Christmas vacation. A Tale of Two Cities I think was the first great novel I read, probably in the ninth grade. I loved Ivanhoe, The Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Christo, Victor Hugo's Les Miserables and Toilers of the Sea, Anthony Hope's Prisoner of Zenda and Rupert of Hentzau, the Captain Blood series by Sabatini, and The Beau Geste tetralogy by P.C. Wren. Of course earlier on I had read the boys' adventure bookDave Dawson - oh gosh, what were they?

Q: Tom Sawyer?

LENDERKING: Yes, but I never read Tom Sawyeonly an excerpt of the fence painting episode. Similarly, I never read Huckleberry Finn until I was an adult, but the ones I mentioned are the ones I can remember best offhand.

Q: Well then, in high school, and for social occasions, did the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant kids mix?

LENDERKING: We mixed pretty well. It was not a total melting pot but we started being social in the seventh grade, going to dances and that sort of thing. Some of us had to go to dancing school. At parties there would be dancing or sometimes spin the bottle and what were called "kissing games," and the people in the crowd that I was part were Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and I suppose non-believers. As we got older, divisions along religious and economic grounds became more apparent as I suppose we began to mirror the social behavior of our parents. But I had close Jewish friends I'd pal around with - riding bikes, hanging out at the swimming pool, going to mixed parties, visiting at their summer home, that sort of thing. At school functions from the ninth grade oproms and so fortany kid who wanted to go was welcome, but we all paired off with our friends. I had close Jewish friends as well as Catholics and Protestants, but there were social fraternities and sororities starting in the tenth grade and it is shameful to think back about it but Jewish kids were excluded from my fraternity, according to the national charter, because it had chapters all over the country. In my senior year some of my classmates led a movement to invite some of our Jewish friends to join, and we all voted in favor. So we integrated our fraternity on our own, and maybe the other ones did too. We had to change our name and resign our national affiliation. The Jewish kids also had their own fraternity and it was very lively. The year after I graduated, the principal of the high school simply abolished fraternities and sororities and that was that. I always wondered how he had the power to do that, because they had nothing to do with the high school, but in those days you could do that sort of thing and get away with it. I can only guess that social life somehow survived.

As for economic class lines, there were very few poor kids but those less well ofsay lower middle classtood out and were generally not class leaders unless they were athletes. There were three black kids in our class, all three outstanding athletes and well liked, but they were not part of our social group. I'm sure everybody said, "Well, they like to stick to their own," and maybe they did, but the simple truth was that they were not invited.

Q: Did you get involved in summer jobs or anything like that?

LENDERKING: Well yes, later. We were fortunate to have a summer cottage at Shelter Island that I mentioned earlier, where we went until I was 11, when World War II ended. My parents divorced and they sold the house. They sold it for $8,000 and today it's worth about $3 million. And I didn't work summers, but one time tried to be a caddy at the golf club with a friend and the local kids ran us off because they didn't want any competition. There was bad feeling between some of the year-rounders and the summer residents. So my summers seem idyllic in retrospect, even through the war years. My earliest appreciation of the war was when one of the older kids who had gone into the army was wounded and came home. He was sunbathing at the beach club and had a big shrapnel scar on his stomach and we all looked up to him because he had gone off to fight. But later on, in high school, I worked in the summer as a camp counselor and swimming instructor for two summers and then I worked in the cup factory in College Point, across from LaGuardia Airport, that belonged to the company my father worked for.

Q: Did World War II have much of an impact on you?

LENDERKING: Well, I remember the air raid drills in my neighborhood that my father volunteered for as a warden. He and the other dads would go around the neighborhood checking to see if all the houses had turned their lights off, and blowing their whistles. We used to tease him about that, but he took it seriously. But beyond rationinwe had two cars so we had to be careful about using both of them - I can't say the war had an impact on me, really. We were safe.

Q: Did you follow it very much or were you too young?

LENDERKING: I started reading The New York Times and The New Yorker at an early age, and followed the fighting in Europe every day in the Times. In the New Yorker, I started out reading the cartoons and then some of the articles. So those early habits have been with me all of my life. I remember running into the kitchen with The Times in my hand around 1943 and saying to my mother, "good news, good news!" and reading her the headline, "Sevastopol is ours, Berlin says." I obviously had misunderstood the headline and that became kind of a family joke.

Q: Well you graduated from high school when?

LENDERKING: I graduated in 1951.

Q: Had your older sisters gone away to college?

LENDERKING: Yes, my oldest sister was eight years older than I and she was quite bright and popular and went to Smith College when she was 16 years old. People did that in those days. Later on she said it was a big mistake. While she was academically able to keep up she was socially unprepared for the transition from high school to college.

Q: When did she graduate, do you remember?

LENDERKING: This would have been around 1947. And then my second sister went to Northwestern and really enjoyed that.

Q: So were you pointed towards any place?

LENDERKING: Not really. I had always wanted to go to Yale. We used to go up to see some of the football games in New Haven or Princeton and it was always a really enjoyable family outing. In high school we had a very strong contingent of people who went to Dartmouth. Our high school seemed to send a lot of boys there. The principal was a Dartmouth graduate and so were some of the teachers. And there was a very strong Dartmouth alumni group in Great Neck, so some of the alumni talked to me and some of my friends about going to Dartmouth and I got interested and applied there.

Q: So you went to Dartmouth? You were there from when to when?

LENDERKING: I graduated in 1955; I was there from 1951 to 1955.

Q: What was Dartmouth like when you went there?

LENDERKING: It was a serious academic school; I think that was the best thing about it, although it also had a reputation as a party school with a lot of drinking. It was all male then; it didn't go co-ed until the '80s, I think. The academic side was marvelous, the sports and other activities were great. The hard partying was fun, although in retrospect it was sometimes excessive. Hanover and northern New England were great for anything outdoors, and there was a great outdoor program.

Q: Academically, what were you concentrating on?

LENDERKING: Oh, I was early on very strongly drawn to English literature and that is what I majored in; English literature, comparative literature.

Q: At Dartmouth and also in high school, did foreign affairs intrude much on radar?

LENDERKING: Not a lot except that I had a real urge to travel, to see as much of the world as I could. And because of the war not many people in Great Neck were able to travel very much outside of the U.S. even if they had the means. But my oldest sister took her junior year at Smith in Mexico and we visited her there in the summer of 1945. Later on I had a trip to Montreal. Those two trips really piqued my interest and I wanted to see more and more.

Q: Were you taking a language?

LENDERKING: I took French in high school and I took a year of French in college and that was it. Mostly I was not drawn to that, although I enjoyed it, but once I had satisfied the language requirement I didn't take any more languages.

Q: How about outdoor sports? What sort of things were you involved in?

LENDERKING: At Dartmouth, I was briefly on the track team. After that it was intramural sports; there was a very strong program and all students were encouraged to play on a dorm or fraternity team. Of course there were pickup games all the time. I played intramural touch football and basketball; did a little skiing although I was an inept skier, and some track when my body filled out and I was no longer competitive as a high jumper for the varsity. The kids in Hanover learned to ski just about the same time they learned to walk, and it was not unusual to see a pre-Kinder kid schussing down the slopes.

Q: What were the dating habits at that time? Where did one go?

LENDERKING: Unless you were skillful in avoiding 8:00 a.m. classes you got up pretty early and went to class and somehow got some food in you before noon. The academic requirements were rigorous and the teachers and courses were extremely stimulating so you wanted to study; there was an intellectual ferment despite all the rah-rah stuff that Dartmouth is associated with. And maybe in the afternoon you would study, play a sport or have an activity like the newspaper or radio station or one of the many organizations. In the evening more studying, sometimes evening lectures, occasionally a flick or hanging out in the dorms after studying was done. There were few women there so the social life was pretty much on the weekends when people headed for the women's colleges or invited them to Dartmouth, although Hanover was a long way from everything. So big weekends at Dartmouth were limited, but when they occurred, they were raucous. Smith, Skidmore, Colby Junior, Radcliffe, and Mount Holyoke were the favorites among the women's colleges. Q: Where did you go?

LENDERKING: Smith mostly, and I ended up marrying a Smithie. But I got around to most of the colleges at one time or another. It was really time-consuming because I didn't have a car and you'd have to find someone who had a car and hitch a ride, chipping in for gas. Freshmen weren't allowed to have cars, so until we'd learned how to find rides I and a couple of friends spent several very raw winter weekends hitch-hiking around New England in frigid weather in search of some social life. Maybe it was character building.

Q: Oh yes. Somewhat earlier when I was in the class of '50 at Williams I had the same problem. I headed to Smith, too...By the time you graduated were you pointed towards anything or? You were getting out in '55?

LENDERKING: Yes. In high school I wrote a lot for the school paper, including what I thought were humorous articles, in addition to straight coverage of sports and school events. I didn't do much of that in college but my interest in journalism was very strong. In college I just wanted to sample a lot of things before making any commitments and not just be single-minded about journalism. After college I went into the Navy for two years, having received a commission from taking ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) courses in Hanover. I graduated just six months after the end of the Korean War, so I missed that but did get to East Asia very quickly after graduation and that introduced me to a fascinating new world and changed my life.

Q: Let's talk about where you took your officer's training.

LENDERKING: After Dartmouth, I was assigned to amphibious training in Coronado, California, part of greater San Diego. After two months' training, off we went to Japan.

Q: What sort of a ship were you on?

LENDERKING: I was on an attack transport, all of which have long since been mothballed, but it was a large ship whose mission was to transport about 1,000 Marines across oceanic distances if necessary, and put them ashore in landing boats. So we carried about 28 landing boats.

Q: And you spent most of your time in the Pacific then?

LENDERKING: That's right.

Q: How was Japan? I guess you went to Korea too?

LENDERKING: Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Philippines; up and down the coast.

Q: Well did that kindle anything in your outlook?

LENDERKING: Yes, absolutely. I thought wow, this is really something. I remember vividly the day we went into Hong Kong for the first time, that gorgeous harbor, never mind that the water is a little bit polluted, but it is an absolutely gorgeous harbor. Steaming in there and standing way up on the bridge doing one thing or another as this big, vibrant, exotic city hove into view, and I thought here I am a young ensign, only 21 years old, on this great big ship and I'm coming into this marvelous, storied place. What could be more exciting?

Q: Did the Foreign Service cross your bow at all?

LENDERKING: Not at that point. I only had a two year active duty requirement, because I wasn't at Dartmouth on an NROTC scholarship, which shortened the active duty requirement from three to two years, and I thought that maybe when that was done I would go to New York and try to be a journalist. And that's what I did.

Q: So you got out of the Navy in 1957, and then what?

LENDERKING: By then I was married; my wife was from New Haven and we both wanted to try our luck in New York. Both of us were determined to travel and see as much of the world as possible, but we were confirmed Easterners and wanted that area to be our home base. So I got a job as a copyboy at The New York Times.

Q: How did you find that?

LENDERKING: I called them up and I said are you hiring? And they said, not for the regular reporting staff but a way to get there is to come on as a copyboy. Come on in and take a test and we'll see. So I did, and about a week later I was working as a copyboy. No methodical job search for ml went to the number one newspaper in the country, took the first job I was offered, felt I had arrived. The whole process was surprisingly casual for an organization as august as the New York Times. After taking a short and easy aptitude test and undergoing a brief interview, the interviewer said, "You're hired." I couldn't believe it, so I went back to New Haven elated. My wife's parents were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary that very day with a big cocktail reception under a tent on their lawn, and when I arrived back home, flushed with excitement and told everyone I'd been hired by the Times after my very first interview, they all were very happy for us. My father in law liked me but as a conservative businessman was a bit apprehensive that I was taking his lovely daughter off to New York City without an established job and no experience outside of my stint as a young naval officer. Anyway, I felt my new bride and in-laws were proud of me. What I only dimly realized, of course, was that copy boys at the Times were rather a special breeperhaps having some distant promise, but totally untested, and worthy only of doing the most genial tasks, like delivering office mail, taking newspaper copy to the composing room, running errands, and maybe absorbing enough to submit a few feature stories which might actually get printed, against long odds. That was the only way one could make it to the reporting stafjust being a good copy boy wouldn't do it. So the competition was very keen among us.

Q: What does a copyboy do?

LENDERKING: I guess they still have copyboys, but I'm sure modern technology has changed whatever they do. At the Times the guys I was with in the cavernous newsroom thought they were going to write the great American novel or they were going to win a Pulitzer Prize sooner rather than later. We were all very ambitious and highly competitive, and some of us had talent, so it was a good company of people to be in but basically we were gophers for the reporters and the editors. Here's an incident I remember - delivering a whole suckling pig wrapped in newspaper to the managing editor's sumptuous apartment on Park Avenue. The managing editor at the time was Turner Catledge, who exercised almost godlike authority over the newsroom and I had only seen him at a distance and never spoken to him. Because I had a gray flannel suit on, still in my Ivy League attire, I asked my supervisor to authorize taxi money so I could take the pig over to his apartment without soiling my suit, and he said no, you have to go on the subway. So here I was in the crowded subway carrying this suckling pig wrapped in newspaper over my shoulder, and I took it over to Park Avenue and gave it to the doorman at Mr. Catledge's building. Please tell Mr. Catledge that his pig has arrived, was exactly what I said.

Q: Did you have a chance to get around the City, doing at least preliminary work on stories?

LENDERKING: Oh, sure. They don't do this anymore but a lot of the guys I was competing against had already received their Masters degree from Columbia Journalism School or some place similar, and they worked police beats as a way of making it to the reporting staff. For those without graduate journalism school degrees, such as myself, the only way to get ahead was to submit short feature articles on our own initiative, hoping they would be good enough to get in the paper somewhere. The chance of getting published was very small but we all got articles in the paper from time to time, usually features and short pieces. But the Times also had a religious page or two on Saturday and Sunday and two religious editors, so on Saturdays I would cover some of the leading synagogues in New York and on Sundays I would cover some of the leading churches. Some of the leading clergymen in the country were in those lovely and dignified churches and synagogues and sometimes they were discussing church policy matters in their sermons, or making news because of the importance of their views. For example, getting assigned to St. Patrick's Cathedral was always a plum, because that was the seat of the New York Catholic diocese and Sunday sermons were sometimes of considerable news importance. So I had some nice stories. I never made the front page but I got on page two a couple of times. And I never had a byline but I had quite a few stories published. I also wrote some essays for the editorial page (usually on topics like the Christmas appeal for the "100 Neediest Cases"), and a column that appeared regularly that was written by free lancers, other staffers, and copy boys called "Topics of the Times," and things like that.

Q: How long did this last?

LENDERKING: Two years. In early 1959 I looked around and figured it would take about eight years, if I was very lucky and very good, and neither of those factors had been established, for me to work up to where I could get an assignment as a foreign correspondent. After two years, I had gone from copyboy on the editorial floor to copyboy in the newsroom, to newsbite writer for WQXR (the radio station), to news assistant on the foreign and city desks. My starting salary was $35 a week, and I had risen to about $60 a week, plus about $25 extra if one of my sermon stories or editorials got published. It was hardly enough to live on, but my wife was making about $60 a week as a program assistant at the Ford Foundation, and somehow we survived, had a lot of fun, managed to see lots of plays and go to concerts, always on the cheap. New York in the late 1950s was a rollicking place and it seemed that every young person with ambition wanted to be there. But I thought I wasn't getting ahead fast enough and smaking a long story short - I took the Foreign Service exam and passed.

Q: Well now, did you know anything about the Foreign Service?

LENDERKING: By then I did. Certainly my time in the Navy was an education and that excited me about foreign policy and foreign affairs and how other countries worked and what their interests were. And although as a copy boy I was a complete flunkey I was exposed to current events and the world of action and ideas all the time. All of us read the Times cover to cover every day, critiqued the stories among ourselves, and occasionally talked to reporters and editors, so it was a terrific learning experience. I especially liked being the news clerk on the foreign desthe first guy to handle the stories as they came in from correspondents around the world, and tracked them as they were edited and then by late afternoon sent to the composing room to be put into print for the next day's paper. You are handling copy all the time, helping the editor, checking facts, taking phone calls and queries, that sort of thing. I guess it's all computerized now so some of the immediacy is gone forever. All of this was a really great breeding ground for anyone with a nascent interest in foreign policy. And my wife was also very interested in foreign affairs, excited by the prospect of travel and seeing the world.

Q: Well a little about your wife; what was her background?

LENDERKING: She grew up in New Haven. Her father was an executive in the utility company there, United Illuminating, which I believe is still the largest utility company in that region. She was one of five children, four girls and a boy, and as I mentioned I met her at Smith on a blind date. She was tall, blonde and gorgeous; I was floored, and she led me a merry chase.

Q: The New York Times is a preeminent paper; what was it like for young people like yourself? Did you feel like you were part of a team or were you peasants or what?

LENDERKING: We were peasants, but we thought we were pretty gifted and wouldn't be peasants for long. But you know, the reporters would say "boy," like that, to summon us, and you would hustle over and do whatever they asked, whether it was substantive, or more likely, "go get me a coffee and sandwich." But a lot of the reporters were pretty good guythey were on deadlines, of course, so they didn't have time to chat with us or mentor us. You were just supposed to work hard and absorb whatever you could, by osmosis. We were really at the bottom of the hierarchy and there was not much nurturing. You were supposed to figure out a way to show what you could do by getting good stories into the paper on your own initiative, off the cloc(stories were never assigned to copy boys or news clerks) and if you could not compete then you were not ever going to make it, and you would realize it sooner or later.

Q: And so you took the FS exam and passed it the first time?

LENDERKING: I did. But I have to explain that in those days USIA (United States Information Agency) was not fully integrated into the State Department's Foreign Service, and did not have a regular Foreign Service exam. I had applied the year before to take the State Department exam, which was my main interest, not USIA, and it had been oversubscribed so they didn't give it that year, 1958. So 1959, next time it came up, a friend of my father's or someone said, look, why don't you apply for USIA? It is a neat little agency and given your interest in journalism and public affairs it might be a good match for you. And maybe if you are still interested in the State Department you could switch over later on. Well, I thought that was a pretty good idea so I took the USIA exam, which consisted of a short written exam followed by about an hour oral exam with a three man panel. I also took a language test in French, but my French was pretty awful and the tester must have decided that I had more aptitude than proficiency because it didn't hurt my chances. And the written exam was not rigorous; it was not like the regular written Foreign Service exam that we're all familiar with. Where I came through was on the oral was so up on things because of being at the Times I took on foreign policy, literature, international economics, and a lot of other topics the examiners threw at me, and I think I was totally confident and gave good answers. The system then was that they would tell you on the spot whether you passed or failed, so after about a half hour of nail biting in an outer office I was told I had passed. I was elated, of course, and when our junior officer class showed up in Washington in March of 1959 - there were only nine of us in the class - I was impressed with my colleagues and thought I had made a great choice. I liked them all right away and they struck me as very intelligent and savvy.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that you were asked on the oral part of the exam?

LENDERKING: Well, I think what they did was look at my background and saw that I had been in East Asia so one of the first questions was about China. And, knowing that I had majored in English literature they asked me what books I had read recently and what I thought of them. It was not just what have you read, but what was the thesis of the book or novel, and what is your opinion of it. They were always trying to draw you out, and I thought the panelists were tough but fair and it was a good exam.

Q: Yes. I gave my oral exam in the '70s, we used to do that. Well then, where did you take your A-100 basic training in the USIA area?

LENDERKING: We put all our possessions in our old Nash Rambler and drove to Washington. And we had ten weeks of training and I learned about halfway through that my first assignment would be Havana. And that was my first post.

Q: How did you find the training?

LENDERKING: It was mixed, but pretty good overall. I think the most memorable part was that we had a regular session every Friday afternoon with Chuck Vetter, who would put you up on a stool in front of your colleagues and he would play the role of informed critic of the U.S. He could imitate all kinds of accents and was very well informed, so there was an entertainment aspect to it as well as the grilling, and he would put you up there and would go at you about American foreign policy and what's wrong with American culture and all those things, and you were supposed to show how you could deal with that. It was a lot of fun, but we were always nervous when it was our turn. But it was very good training, and encapsulated what must have been thousands of similar conversations I had later on in my various overseas assignments.

Q: Oh, excellent training. Well, you went to Havana when?

LENDERKING: In March of 1959.

Q: What was the situation then?

LENDERKING: Fidel Castro had just come to power two months earlier and Havana was euphoric. In the early days Fidel and his circle were regarded as folk heroes, even worshipped by some Cubans, and I had to admit when I saw them in public they cut a fine figure, especially Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, who was later supposedly removed by Castro when he had doubts about the revolution. Everyone seemed to think that this was a new era, that a bad government had been ousted and that we could get along with Castro and he would certainly want to get along with us because of our power and influence. And so it was a period of real optimism there.

Q: What was your job?

LENDERKING: I was not just the youngest and most junior officer on the USIS staff - we had about six or seven officers there - I was the youngest and most junior officer in the whole embassy. In fact, I was still in trainee status, and did not have an official position, which meant I was supposed to get experience in all the sections or at least the two USIA sections, information and culture, and as it turned out that was only a one year assignment. That is the way USIA did it in those days. And in that one year the whole situation in Cuba turned 180 degrees. The feeling of euphoria dissipated quickly, at least among those who were not committed revolutionaries, and changed to one of deep dismay and opposition. There were constant crises between the U.S. and Cuba; Castro was denouncing us all the time, there were demonstrations, intrigue, high emotions. It was very exciting. My wife and I thought wow; this is a great place to be, and I had chosen the right career. Shortly after our arrival, my first child was born, and I couldn't have been happier.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

LENDERKING: The ambassador was Philip Bonsal, an eminent career ambassador, very much of a gentleman, a diplomat of the old school. His wife was a lovely lady and was cordial to the junior wives from her rather lofty perch. Remember, this was in the time of the last years of the old Foreign Service. Arriving spouses paid calls on senior wives, left calling cards, had tea. We were so junior we didn't see much of Ambassador Bonsal; we weren't invited to the residence all that much. But whenever we did see him he was very cordial and gentlemanly, and when we left he included us in a small farewell luncheon at his residence for departing officers. Bonsal was the Eisenhower administration's attempt to initially get along with Castro. His predecessor, Earl E. T. Smith, was a wealthy Republican investment banker who was well connected with the Cuban Old Guard and supportive of Batista, and he was very unpopular. His wife, Florence Pritchett Smith, was a Palm Beach socialite and equally unpopular outside the decadent Cuban country club set. One of the biggest knocks on U.S. foreign policy, especially in Latin America, was that we always supported corrupt, brutal, and unsavory dictators like Batista, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Somoza in Nicaragua, Perez Jimenez in Venezuela, and a host of others. Bonsal was a gentleman, low key and sophisticated, not at all bumptious, spoke excellent Spanish, was familiar with Cuba and Latin American history, and he was popular with the Cubans. He tried very hard to have a good relationship and get us over the bumps of old resentments that were always getting in the way. Certainly in the beginning we hoped there would be a chance to build a new relationship to replace the old one of dependency and exploitation based mostly on sugar. I'm convinced that the Eisenhower administration genuinely wanted this, and the Kennedy administration would have backed any initiatives in that direction with even greater vigor.

But in retrospect I think Ambassador Bonsal was slow to recognize just how far Fidel Castro was prepared to go and that he was not really interested in good relations with us, except totally on his own terms. In short, I think from the beginning Fidel was convinced he could never carry out his revolution unless Cuba's close ties with the U.S. were broken. He later said he'd always been a communist and forged a close relationship with the Soviets, replacing Cuba's dependency on the U.S. with one on the Soviet Union. But in his radical student days and in the early period of his rule, Castro was never a committed Marxist-Leninist and merely used the rhetoric and the socialist model as guideposts for his very personalist policies.

Q: What were you doing while all this was going on?

LENDERKING: I was assigned to various information tasks, such as writing articles in English, which we would have translated, and try and get placed in newspapers about one thing or another. The idea was to emphasize the practical benefits of democracy and a free press, and the hazards of following authoritarian models, which was clearly the direction Castro was taking Cuba in a big hurry. We hit hard on the idea that you could have thorough reform without confiscating all private property and driving away entrepreneurs and people you needed to make the economy productive. I would write under a pseudonym, and this was a way of criticizing the way things were going without confronting the regime directly.

For example, I wrote a pamphlet on agrarian reform, which was the heart of the revolutionary program, and we didn't like the way the government was just taking peoples' land and throwing the owners off without any compensation. Some of the landowners were Americans who had made genuine and honest contributions, and they were driven out with no compensation. My pamphlet was on how land reform had succeeded in our state of Georgia. Unfortunately, when it came out under a title everyone thought I was talking about Georgia in the Soviet Union so I am not sure the pamphlet had much of an impact. Especially since Castro was taking control of the newspapers one by one and the daily drumbeat of really vicious attacks and false charges was much greater than anything we could respond to. But we tried. There were lots of projects going on and I spent most of the time in the press section and we had a lot of contacts with Cuban journalists. There were tons of visiting American journalists and I met a lot of them and learned a lot from them.

I was the youngest guy in the embassy and in the beginning I didn't speak Spanish, but it isn't the most difficult language and I had an hour a day in an early morning class at the Embassy with a great teacher and I was picking it up quickly. And because everyone was so busy - we didn't have a very large embassy - very few people were able to get away from the work load in Havana. And everyone was wondering what was really happening throughout the country, which way Castro was moving and what he would do next, and what would happen to Cuban-U.S. relations. Since I was the most expendable American officer, still technically in training, I went out and what I saw in the squares and talking to people in some of the interior cities was that there was a massive program of indoctrination going on beyond anything we were aware of in Havana, and it was against the U.S. and it was pro-communist. Castro's officials were taking the books out of the libraries and replacing them with Marxist tracts, supplied massively in Spanish through the cheap paperback programs the Soviet Union had in those days, worldwide. We also had a worldwide book translation program, but it wasn't in the same league in either depth or breadth with what the Soviet Union was offering. They understood the importance of ideas and argumentation much better than we did. And it wasn't just books. The regime was taking over the newspapers and independent magazines, one by one, picking off anything and anyone who offered an independent opinion.

I also witnessed on several occasions kids outfitted something like the Boy Scouts being marched through the squares chanting, "Uno-dos-tres-cuatro, viva Fidel Castro Ruz!" Well, I'd read "Animal Farm," "1984," "Darkness at Noon" "Brave New World," and others in that same general vein and what was happening in Cuba was alarming. It was nothing less than the stifling of all independent voices and the indoctrination of the youth of an entire country, and it seemed to me very ominous. So I went back and wrote all this up, a couple of lengthy reports, and the political section liked it, and they sent it to Washington. I was, of course, elated that something I had witnessed and written about was deemed interesting enough to send on to Washington as a political cable. But the plain fact was that no one else in the entire Embassy had seen what I had, and it was all there in plain sight going on in the squares of the interior cities. Of course there was a Consulate in Santiago de Cuba, and we had consular agents in a couple of other cities, and the CIA must have had reports (which I never saw) coming in from their contacts, but I think the small American staff was overwhelmed in just trying to keep up with the big problems coming their way every day. For example, dealing with the confiscation of American property and the harassment of American citizens, screening people trying to leave the country for visas (and some of these were in great danger), dealing with officials of Castro's government and searching for those who genuinely wanted to work with us instead of blaming the U.S. for all of Cuba's ills since the beginning of time, and many other problemyou can imagine it was a huge workload and our officers simply didn't have the time to take a few days off to take the temperature of the country.

Q: Well, were you able to maintain your personal contacts, was this difficult or were relations with individuals fairly cordial?

LENDERKING: Well, certainly in the beginning they were very friendly. From my experience and the experiences of others, I believed Cubans genuinely liked Americans and vice-versa. But Cubans had a very highly developed sense of grievance toward the United States, which in my view was justified to a large extent by having had Cuba as an American colony, and after Cuba's independence in 1934 continuing to treat it like one. But we tried to meet as many people as we could and in the beginning, as I said, neither my wife nor I spoke very good Spanish but we were picking it up quickly and we tried to develop relations with people our own age who were up and comers in the Castro government, or in the "new Cuba." One person I had an introduction to through my wife's sister, who had met him when he was visiting at Yale, was a senior official in the foreign ministry. He was a Yale graduate, a charming bon vivant, and when I contacted him he said okay, I will take you to lunch. Well, we hit it off instantlhe was suave and very outgoing and we just bounced from one topic to another at this upscale restaurant he took me to, with the din of the Cuban luncheon cocktail hour and Cuban music blasting in our ears. It had to be experienced to be believed. Lunch that day consisted of seven gin and tonics and no food. Finally he looked at me and said, "Well, Bill, there's no time for lunch, I have to get back to the Ministry. We had a good time, and let's keep in touch," and off he went.

So I wobbled back to my office, unfit for any productive labor that afternoon, but I did cultivate my friendship with him and when things really got bad I offered, and he accepted, my help to get him and his wife out of the country. And it's a long story but basically what happened is I was able to get him an expedited visa. I argued with the visa officers who insisted he appear in the Embassy in person. We all knew the Embassy was being watched, and he, as a senior official in the Foreign Ministry would certainly be spotted by the surveillance people, and he was very apprehensive of coming into the Embassy. I arranged for him to come in and leave by a side door and maybe that helped, but it was wrong to make him put his life at risk by coming in to have a quick interview and pick up the visas. The risk was real enough - he could have been arrested, jailed, and even executed as a traitor - it happened to others.

Fortunately, he and his family got oudisguised heaviland he made his way to New Haven where American friends helped him get established and settle in a new home. It's good to remind ourselves that very few people coming to America, even if they aren't running for their lives as he was, are as fortunate as he was, with close American friends, bilingual English, a fungible professional career, and contacts ready to help him.

These incidents were very exciting. Even though we were Embassy people, being in Havana when relations were going downhill fast carried genuine risk. It was jarring to think that Havana was regarded as almost a paradise and a haven for tourists of all kinds only a few months previous to all this.

I'll tell you one more story that I think is interesting. The head Cuban cultural affairs assistant-

Q: At the embassy?

LENDERKING: -at the embassy, in USIS, was very popular and well connected. Everyone loved her. She was just perfect, and had been my older sister's advisor when she was at Smith College. So we naturally had a lot to talk about, and everyone liked her and relied on her. But there was only one problem - she turned out to be a spy for Castro. She was in the Embassy in a glassed in ground floor office, so she saw all the people who came and went, and she was reporting to Castro's intelligence services. I'm sure some people ended up in prison or being roughly interrogated because of her. So that was the kind of atmosphere it was; it went from euphoria in the beginning to very unpleasant.

Q: Well, you were sort of the new boy on the block and so you could observe this, were they going through almost a rejection period, saying this cannot be as bad as it seems and maybe there is a way to deal with Castro or was the embassy divided in saying this guy is a communist and he is evil and others would say oh no, he is a reformer?

LENDERKING: Well, there was certainly debate but I think we were all dismayed about the way the government was going. It was shutting down the newspapers and censoring, seizing land without compensation, mounting scurrilous and vicious public attacks on anyone who dared to criticize what was happening, and none of these were essential to a successful revolution. So we began to see that Castro's agenda did not include a friendly relationship with the U.S. and a willingness to sit down and work out our problems. And we were all operating from the premise that our problems could be negotiated and settled and it was in the interest of both our countries. And I think almost all of us felt very strongly about that and were dismayed. At one point, I can't remember exactly when it was, but it was before I left in May of 1960, so it would have been somewhere around fall of 1959, the embassy, I guess it was the country team, had a straw vote, just the embassy section chiefs, the Ambassador and the DCM, and they voted that there was no way the United States could get along with Castro if he continued on his present course, because things had gone too far. And after that point I think we all prepared for what would be an eventual breaking of relations.

Q: What was your impression of the newspapers there, to begin with?

LENDERKING: They ran the gamut. There were some that were old supporters of the oligarchy and very strongly conservative, pro-Catholic, basically mouthpieces for the Catholic hierarchy, very much on the side of the wealthy Old Guard, and consequently very critical of Castro. The leading paper in this group was Diario de la Marina. Of course, their criticisms made them targets, and Castro got rid of them right away, the old establishment papers that had supported Batista. As one who had little sympathy for the old regime and the corruption and brutality of things under Batista, I was initially not sorry to see Diario criticized. But as the attacks became vicious and the dangers to the paper and its personnel became very real, I admired their bravery and eloquence in standing up to Castro. Of course they were swept away, and I hope that those who wanted to leave were able to.

There were probably about 11 daily newspapers in Havana, and some of them were pretty good, and in the middle of the spectrum there were some very good reporters. There was a popular weekly magazine called "Bohemia," which had excellent cultural and political articles. Their leading cartoonist, Prohias, had a very popular series "Spy vs. Spy" that lampooned Castro's spies as well as the CIA. Eventually, Prohias had to flee for his life. He made it to the U.S. and continued his cartoons in the American press, and they attracted a wide following in the US as well. So the Cuban press overall was quite good, and certainly lively. But even the moderate papers and the ones that had been pro-Castro were forced to follow the party line without deviation and if they wavered in the slightest they would be threatened or censored, with blank spaces in the paper appearing in the paper where their column was supposed to be. So what was happening was really a communist takeover. The Castro regime was turning out to be very rigid and doctrinaire; Castro was going to create a "new Cuban man," and he increasingly turned to the Soviet Union as his model. Castro's supporters on the left in the U.S. refused to see this, and continued to make excuses for what was going on.

Q: Was there any debate whether Castro was a real communist or was he just a homegrown dictator?

LENDERKING: We talked about that all the time and everyone did, whether they were in the embassy or not; that was one of the main topics. I guess where I came out was that Castro was not a communist in the beginning, but he certainly had a blueprint for how he wanted to run the country and what he created was a communist state. I doubt if he was ever a Party member, but he was a radical leader in his student days and must have had a lot of contact with doctrinaire communists as well as student radicals and revolutionaries.

Q: Well then, you left there in, when?

LENDERKING: I left there in June of 1960.

Q: And whither?

LENDERKING: I went to Bolivia. In those days your first two years constituted your first assignment, divided into a ten months training assignment, and then a junior officer position in a different embassy for the remainder of the first two years. So I went to La Paz, Bolivia, as assistant information officer.

Q: You did that from when to when?

LENDERKING: June of '60 to June of '61.

Q: What was the situation in Bolivia when you got there?

LENDERKING: It was pretty bad; some would say it has not changed much but in fact it has. The Bolivian government was leftist/populist, with its main constituency being the powerful labor unions, chief among which were the miners. Many of the oligarchs had been chased out by the leftist but much milder revolution under President Victor Paz Estenssoro, and the tin mines nationalized. I use the term "oligarchs" because that was the general pejorative word used to describe anyone who had been part of the old establishment, you know, the tin barons, wealthy landowners, and the like. La Paz was also undergoing a leftist revolution, not nearly as virulent as in Cuba, but certainly the sympathies were somewhat the same; it was a leftist revolution but not communist.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

LENDERKING: Carl Strom. He'd been ambassador in Cambodia and I think a couple of other places. I remember him saying one day at the morning staff meeting, (to which I was pleased to be admitted, but played my role as the most junior officer in the embassy by rarely saying anything) that he had never seen a country like Bolivia. He said it was almost hopeless, and at least in Cambodia, from which he had come, you figured well, maybe in 25 or 30 years there would be some hope that they might be a little bit better off but in Bolivia I don't have that feeling at all.

Q: What was the USIS operation there?

LENDERKING: We had a small, five man post in La Paz, two on the cultural side, and two on the information side, headed by a public affairs officer. And then we had a branch post in Cochabamba, which is the principle interior city, and in those days there was an American Consulate but the only USIS American in Cochabamba was the binational center director. And then in Santa Cruz, which is in a now prosperous oil producing, jungle part of the country in the east, we also had a reading room but no American staffer.

Q: How would you say Bolivian/American relations were at the time?

LENDERKING: They were rocky; we got along well with the old establishment of course, and they liked us. And the rest of the country did not care for us much. They saw us as aligned with the old traditional interests and there was a lot of suspicion and hostility among the campesinos, the Indian population, which had been downtrodden and never had any cause to expect much of anything from us or their own government. Those who were leaders in that group were highly politicized, often doctrinaire in their campesino socialism, and were not friendly. I remember going around to the radio stations, some of which were in the hands of ethnic Indians and they would allow me to visit and they would sit me down and start asking hostile questions about U.S. foreign policy. It was very good training for me but it wasn't terribly pleasant.

Q: Was there a divide between the people you were in contact with and, say, the miners? Were they a breed apart, pretty much?

LENDERKING: Yes, I think so. I think the people we dealt with were university people, professors, intellectuals, politicians; that was more the political section but in my case I had a lot of contacts among the journalists. We had Bolivian journalists, ex-journalists on our staff who knew the territory, had good contacts, were good writers, and very helpful. The miners and other labor groups were organized in powerful unions; for the most part they were Indian, not well educated, and suspicious of Caucasians for historical reasons, going way back to the time of the Incas.

Q: Was there much travel to the United States by journalists and the wealthier classes?

LENDERKING: Not a lot, although everyone wanted to go. Bolivia was and still is a very poor country and so a lot of the really wealthy, say the mine owners and people of that level had been forced to flee to save themselves and some of them went to America. Also, some of the people whose businesses were not prospering under this new regime probably left. That was the time when jet airplane travel was just starting commercial service, so when that started that gave a boost to regular travel, but in the beginning there wasn't a lot of tourist travel back and forth.

Q: What impact did the 1960 election in the States have? Because this election engaged a lot of Americans and was closely watched overseas.

LENDERKING: Of course, we were concerned in our parochial situation of how the election would impact on Bolivia and our relations. I remember election night, we had a usual election night scenario; of course it was very close, and almost all the Bolivians there strongly wanted Kennedy and they didn't like Nixon. They were cheering Kennedy's certain victory, and our information officer said, hey, this ain't over yet. If you want to see a winner you're going to have to stick around until dawn. When Kennedy finally won, the journalists and most of our contacts were very pleased and had no trouble saying so.

Q: Was it difficult dealing with the Bolivian Government? Because this is a time when no government lasted more than a couple of months, right?

LENDERKING: Well, this government lasted a while. We tried hard to build rapport, and we had a large assistance and development program that was generally welcomed and was engaged in helpful projects. But a lot of people we were trying to reach were suspicious of us, and in the labor unions and especially the miners, there was outright hostility. In fact, two Americans from the embassy were kidnapped shortly after I left, and held hostage by the miners for several weeks. But we did have access, and we could meet with our critics and talk with them.

Q: What about the universities?

LENDERKING: Difficult. There was a lot of hostility. Sometimes you had to be careful on campus because we were not welcome on most of them, especially the national universities that were in the hands of radical leftists and communists. This was generally true throughout Latin America, while the smaller, more elitist private universities welcomed us and were friendly.

Q: Was there anything that you all were trying to do to penetrate the campus?

LENDERKING: Well yes, the usual panoply of USIA kinds of things; visiting speakers, lectures, the Fulbright exchange program, and so on. We had a very good binational center that had a separate location away from the embassy. It was under the direction of a binational board, so it avoided to some extent the taint of being a Yankee institution. We had a lot of university students enrolled and learning English and taking courses, and participating in activities. So we did what we could.

Q: Did you get out much?

LENDERKING: Oh, yes. One thing about Bolivia, it is a spectacular country. Overland travel is difficult; the roads aren't good, it's very mountainous, there are often landslides and dangers from storms or falling rocks, but it's rugged and very scenic. There wasn't much public entertainment, even in La Paz, so we all traveled all the time, officially as much as we could with our small budget. On weekends we'd get a small group of friends together and go somewhere on our own, to some exotic place. It was rugged travel, but great fun.

Q: Was that a different world?

LENDERKING: Yes, indeed. And the people we encountered in the countrysidcampesinowere not especially friendly but they were certainly not hostile. But they lived in poverty and had no amenities. Their lives were hard.

Q: Cochabamba; how was that?

LENDERKING: Cochabamba is at around 8,000 feet in altitude, over a mile high, but it is balmy compared to La Paz, at 13.500 feet the highest capital city in the world. La Paz was warm and sunny during the day but became chilly with a penetrating cold at night. So Cochabamba was nice for a respite, although there wasn't much public entertainment there either. We had to make our own fun. There were also some fascinating areas on the Altiplano, or high plain, sort of a high desert where most of the Indian population lived, and those trips were always adventurous.

Q: Well then, after this experience where did you go?

LENDERKING: My initial idea was that I had never seen much of Latin America so I asked for a Latin American tour and fulfilled that desire by going to Havana and Bolivia. But my heart was in Asia, as a result of my Navy experiences. Deep down I also wanted to see Western Europe but I felt embarrassed to ask for Europe because that's where many people wanted to go for obvious reasons, but I thought the real Foreign Service was in the more exotic countries where we were facing fresh challenges and greater danger. So I applied for Chinese language training, but there were already more Chinese speakers than could be accommodated because we had no relations with the mainland and Chinese speakers would go to Singapore or Hong Kong or some place like that to deal with the Chinese community. These were not exactly mainstream jobs and there seemed to be more satisfying opportunities than to go to these cities, deal with the Chinese community and wait for relations to be established with Communist China. In those days that seemed a long way off, and in fact it didn't occur for another 20 years or so. So USIA said okay, we're going to send you to Japan.

Q: Okay, you took Japanese language training; what was the course, from when to when and where?

LENDERKING: Oh, I should also mention I was first assigned to Kwangju, Korea. I had never heard of Kwangju. By then we had two small children and it just sounded like the back of beyond and I felt that I really didn't want to be in such an isolated place with two small children, especially since I didn't know the language. I wanted to be in a big city, the capital. Someone in personnel finally said I shouldn't be given an assignment in an isolated backwater like Kwangju, but as a young officer I should have a broader experience and the benefit of exposure to senior colleagues. So they came up with Japanese language training, where there were openings, and that fortuitous decision changed my life in a big way.

Q: Where did you start your language training?

LENDERKING: Unlike now, where students have the first year of two years at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and then go to Yokohama, in those days we had a leased house, a lovely private home with a Japanese garden right in the center of Tokyo. It was an oasis of quiet, but very near the bustling area of Shibuya. There were about 12 students and an equal number of Japanese language teachers and an American director. We spent our days learning Japanese and immersing ourselves in Japanese culture and everyday life. The Japanese language is very difficult, and some experts consider it the most difficult language in the world for a native speaker of English.

Q: How did you find it?

LENDERKING: The experts were right, but it was a fascinating experience. It's tough to do something badly for two years. Not good for one's confidence. But at the end, we could speak Japanese pretty well, and my assignment to Sapporo, a vibrant city of over one million where there were few Americans, for the next three years helped enormously. At the end of that five year immersion I was confident of my Japanese in almost any situation or context. I could read a newspaper, at least the political and economic articles, with some ease and confidence, and many days I spoke more Japanese than English.

There is an old story about the early Christian missionaries, who thought Japanese was a language invented by the devil to prevent the Christianization of Japan. Because it is difficult, being at the language school was not totally satisfying. The quality of instruction and the small class size were excellent. But we were isolated in a close-in Japanese suburb, cut off from meaningful work and daily contact with our embassy colleagues who were dealing with Japan, and it was frustrating too. If you're struggling every day with the complex grammar, and nuances, and learning all the Chinese characters, and feel you're doing it badly, you don't have much job satisfaction, which is contrary to the mindset of most FSOs, who are generally a self-confident bunch. And so to deal with that - we had six class hours a day and then homework at night - I took up tennis. I joined the Tokyo Lawn Tennis Club where the Crown Prince (now Emperor) and Princess Michiko played, and a lot of the Japanese elite played there as well. Every day after school we would be on the court at 3:30 and I got a pretty good tennis game out of that. And I eventually learned a lot of Japanese.

Q: Looking back on it, how did you feel the training went?

LENDERKING: I thought it was superb. Of course we all groused about it but it was superb. We also had some special programs. At least twice a year we were given $100 or $200 or something, which was a lot of money in those days, to go off for a week, on our own, unaccompanied by anyone, no translators, family, or anyone like that, and you could go anywhere you wanted and just go out and mingle with the natives, so to speak. And that was very good. The teachers were excellenthey were wise and generally patient, and understood enough English so that they knew why we were having such a hard time putting our thoughts into good Japanese. Some of the teachers ended up marrying the students but that is not why they were good; it was basically one-on-one teaching or maybe one teacher to two or three students or maybe three. A class with three students in it was considered almost unwieldy. You really got face-to-face instruction, intensive teaching and at the end of the day you were tired. But there was a special course where we would have an hour or two hours a week with reading newspapers and so we learned all the newspaper terms with a specialist. There were other special programs that were good. All of the students were keenly interested in learning the language and absorbing Japanese culture and history and there was a strong sense of competition. The FSI texts and special materials were also first rate.

Q: Well, can you think of any of the people who were in the course with you?

LENDERKING: Sure. Bill Clark and I entered about the same time and had about the same learning aptitude, and he later became ambassador to India and had other senior positions. Mark Peattie and Tom Rimer were close USIA colleagues. Both of them had a special interest in Japan and after serving with distinction in Kyoto and Kobe/Osaka, respectively, both resigned from the foreign service and went back to get their PhDs in Japanese studies, Mark in military history and Tom in literature and culture. After that, both had long and distinguished careers as university professors. Most of my fellow students went on to reach senior levels of the Foreign Service, and several became ambassadors.

Q: Bill Clark - he was political counselor in Seoul when I was consul general.

LENDERKING: Really? Bill and I had a lot of class time together. Later he was consul general in Sapporo when I was the center director there. And, Bill Breer was another- he came after me but had already learned a lot of Japanese on his own. He and his wife Peggy spent most of their career in Japan, and Bill ended up as DCM. Dave Hitchcock was another. Tom Shoesmith, who just passed away (2007), later became ambassador to Malaysia. .

Q: Now, this was a two year course. How did the second year go?

LENDERKING: By the second year we had learned a lot and we were also dismayed to see how much we still had to go. By then we had probably learned maybe 1,000 characters and we could read a fair bit of the newspaper and we were in advanced Japanese but we realized how complicated it was. Almost every utterance you can think of is said differently than you would say it in Englisword order, grammar, levels of politeness, and so on. So we were functional but I don't think any of us felt we really had reached the level of educated professional fluency.

Q: After the second yea1963? - what did they do with you?

LENDERKING: I was assigned to Sapporo, which is on Hokkaido in the north, with a population of over one million. It was and is probably the most congenial large city in all of Japan.

Q: Why?

LENDERKING: Because it was settled rather late and with American influence. It was considered Japan's frontier and was less traditional. People were more open, and more inclined to make friends with foreigners. I was there for three years and I had a near-total immersion because there were very few Americans there. There were some missionaries and there was a small army base about 50 miles outside of the city at the airport, but I was speaking Japanese all day, every day, and in the evenings, too. We ran programs, lectures and discussion groups mostly on foreign policy issues, and that was a great way to learn about what Japanese thought and to improve my Japanese. I got so I could get on my feet and give an impromptu greeting, presentation, or short remarks without nervousness and with very few mistakes. So I gradually regained my confidence.

Q: How about your kids? Did they start picking up a lot of Japanese?

LENDERKING: Oh, yes. The kids were marvelous. We sent them to Japanese yochi-ens, nursery schools, and they had some adjustment problems; the kids were not used to the Japanese system. They would get up and walk around and they didn't see why had to sit in a group on the floor like the Japanese children, or couldn't go out and play or do whatever they liked, and the teachers were sometimes vexed by their non-conforming and individualistic ways. It was a classic differencthe Japanese children, obedient and group-oriented; my children, independent and curious. But they picked up Japanese very quickly. Unfortunately, when they left Japan they also forgot it quickly. But like most people around the world, the Japanese are great with kids. My second and third sons had flaming red hair and they were real oddities to the Japanese children. We would go to the zoo or some public place and people would stop looking at the animals and flock around them and touch their hair. They were just little fellows and it got too much at times and I would have to shoo the Japanese kids away, but they didn't mean any harm; they were just curious.

Q: You were running the American Center?

LENDERKING: Yes. We had centers in six main Japanese cities, established in the post World War II period during the U.S. military occupation. They were accepted as important parts of the community and the Japanese flocked to the libraries and our programs. In Sapporo, we also had a small consulate with three American officers, and we worked very well together and became close friends. What was special about that assignment I think - I was then all of 29 years olis that the Japanese were so welcoming and treated us well above our station. By that I mean the Governor, who was a nationally prominent figure and one of the most impressive men I've ever met, would occasionally invite us to play a round of golf with him; we had the President of Hokkaido University and his wife at our house for dinner a number of times, and so on. The Japanese regarded this as a very important assignment, and sometimes asked why it had gone to such a young officer. In their eyes it was unusual, and they interpreted this, incorrectly, as signifying that I had some special talent or abilities. They seemed to think "Why did this young guy get such an important assignment, he's still a kid." My predecessor was in his mid-40s.

Well, after a while, we knew many of the top people in town, in government, the media, the universities, the political parties, cultural life, and even to some extent the pro-Marxist labor unions. All of us spoke Japanese well and we all had good personal friends among the Japanese. My wife learned enough Japanesshe wasn't an official student at the language school, but took advantage of the self-study opportunitieand developed friends and contacts on her own. In a situation like that we all felt we were really representing America in a direct and personal way.

Q: Who was your predecessor?

LENDERKING: John McDonald. He was very popular because he spoke very good Japanese, had a Japanese wife and also was an excellent golfer, the sport of choice for the power elite of any Japanese city. So most of the top people and the ordinary folks of Hokkaido were very friendly and made us feel welcome. Even if we were meeting people who didn't like us, such as some of the labor union folks who organized anti-U.S. demonstrations over Vietnam and things like that, they would be cordial when we met and sat down, and then they would light into us. Our Japanese was good enough so we could often hold our own, although I don't think we convinced anyone of the rightness of our policies. Even some of the Marxist university professors who didn't like the United States at all were personally cordial and we often asked them to participate in our programs, making sure they had a chance to speak. That willingness to listen was an important factor, although I sometimes regretted it because Japanese responses during a discussion tended to became monologues or almost speeches, and so we would sometimes have to impose a time limit.

When I first arrived, I had an informal meeting with a small group of Japanese professors who were experts on American literature. Since I had majored in English and American literature, they asked me on the spot to speak on trends in contemporary American literature. I gulpethey were far more learned than I on the subject, and in recent years I had done more reading on foreign policy than on modern American literature. Since they all spoke excellent English I at least could stumble better in my own language than Japanese, and had the good sense to make my remarks short. .

Q: What was the center's focus?

LENDERKING: Basically, the center was trying to establish a stronger dialogue with opinion leaders of all kinds. More specifically, we were trying to make intellectual and political inroads into the very strongly entrenched Marxist ideology that reigned virtually unchallenged in the universities and in Japanese intellectual and cultural life. It was kind of an established orthodoxy, especially in the history, economics, and political science faculties. Now, for historical reasons and most recently World War II, the Japanese had no particular reason to feel any affinity at all for the Soviet Union, but because the leftists embraced Marxism and rejected capitalism, they naturally gravitated to the Soviet Union. So we would often hear senior Japanese leftist politicians, scholars, and intellectuals speak about the Soviet Union as the "peace force," with the United States of course labeled the "war force." Communism, or radical socialism was the wave of the future; capitalism a remnant of a retrograde past.

The practical impact of all this was that the professors were mostly pro-Soviet and influenced their students in that direction. So we were trying to challenge them enough with facts and scholarship so they would ease away from the rigid ideology that was being transmitted from one generation to the next by the feudalistic university system that still prevailed. The president of the Hokkaido University was sympathetic to this effort but had to be careful because the faculty and labor unions wielded a lot of influence. So that was one thing we worked on.

The President of the Teachers College was personally cordial but a flat-out pro-Soviet Marxist and made no secret of it. The Governor detested him and said if he could have his way, he'd throw him in jail.

We also had a fair number of cultural events. We had a nice library that was used all the time. We had a very active speaker program. We taught English. And there was a lot of scope for me as a young guy bursting with ideas, to try out some of these ideas. And some of the Japanese staff would say hey, you know, you aren't going to change this society overnight, just take it easy. And they would rein me back in. And they were so good, supportive but wise about our American ways and where they might rub Japanese the wrong way. We were blessed to have people like that who wanted to work for us.

Q: I would have thought there would be a lot of resentment over the Soviets hanging on to, what is it, the Ryukyus?

LENDERKING: The Ryukyus are where Okinawa is, to the south. You're probably referring to the Kuriles.

Q: Yes, the islands to the north. I mean, because this has always been the great blessing of our policy with Japan over the last 16 years; the Soviets had hung on to those islands to no great benefit...

LENDERKING: That's true. There was some political resentment of the Soviets on this issue, but it didn't have much popular resonance for some reason. I think the Japanese were still in their post-World War II mode of semi-shock. They hadn't quite regained their feet and their full confidence, although the country was prospering and coming on fast. The 1964 Olympics marked Japan's coming of age as a confident regional power with a world class economy, but until that time they preferred a low profile. Still do, as a matter of fact, so they don't wield the influence on the world stage commensurate with their importance. Anyway, even though the Japanese had legitimate grievances over the Soviets' continued possession of the Kuriles, Marxist ideology among the interi, or intellectuals, was a much bigger issue. As pro-Marxists, they condemned Japan's wartime excesses anyway, so many of them thought Japan had brought its troubles with the Soviets on itself.

Q: The issue has always made it a lot easier for the Japanese to dislike them and like us.

LENDERKING: Well, that's a good point. The business sector was not at all sympathetic to Marxism and the top businessmen were friendly to us. And the business sector really is what controlled Japanese politics, certainly in Hokkaido. The governor was a conservative in the Liberal Democratic Party and a very powerful man.

Q: Did you spend much time trying to show what we were doing in race relations and all, because this is a time of civil rights?

LENDERKING: We did. We had a very fine movie that USIA produced, you've probably seen it, which we showed all over Hokkaido at the universities and elsewhere. It was about Martin Luther King and the March on Washington and it was very moving and quite popular. We must have shown that to hundreds of thousands of people and we did have occasional discussions about that in some of our programs. We had a small program of inviting outstanding students to visit the U.S. for a few weeks and they invariably wanted to visit Harlem or have some insight into race relations. So we did address that problem.

Q: Were we trying to do anything about the gender issue with women? Or was it that this was a Japanese situation and we were not trying to proselytize or anything like that?

LENDERKING: We took that up too. We were very lucky in having an advisor for women's affairs who was recruited outside of the Foreign Service, Dorothy Robins-Mowry. She had been very active in women's affairs in the U.S. and although she didn't speak Japanese she knew her subject and was very empathetic. She sought out non-traditional women with leadership potential who wanted to break out of their traditional roles and restraints, and she established rapport with women community leaders all over Japan. We invited her to Sapporo as a speaker and conference participant several times, and she had some fascinating meetings with Japanese women, activists, who were trying to push against the system. We weren't trying to overthrow the Japanese system but we were trying to just give them some ideas to think about and suggest things they might do to bring about change within their own system, and in accordance with their own social mores and cultural values. This is a problem the Japanese are still struggling with. Japan is a truly impressive country but still this problem is not solved, and young women today as a group are massively dissatisfied.

Q: How was the Japanese economic miracle at that point?

LENDERKING: 1964 was the dividing point. The 1964 Olympics took place in Tokyo and there was a frantic effort to modernize parts of Tokyo. They built the facilities, widened the highways, improved their transportation system, and did all kinds of things. And that was a psychological dividing line because the Olympics were a tremendous success. They really marked the end of the dowdy, post-war era when Japan, it seemed, would never, ever get out of the World War II doldrums and frame of mind, reform their society and energize the sluggish economy. But after that Japan took off, and that's when the Japanese miracle really started. Our ambassador there was Edwin Reischauer, who of course was very familiar with the Japanese situation and was listened to very seriously. He was in some ways a cheerleader for the Japanese, encouraging them to open new ways of thinking and doing, and when he criticized, which he occasionally did, they would really listen to him.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that Japan reformed its society because of a few Americans, even of the stature of Ambassador Reischauer. They did it on their own, but America was a key factor, because the Japanese were watching us all the time, sometimes adapting our innovations and improving of them, sometimes learning from our mistakes, sometimes reinterpreting their own values in the light of the demands of the modern world. The Japanese are constantly innovating, testing, building, and at the same time remain a quite conservative and traditionalist society. The push-pull of these conflicting aspects was always fascinating and we could talk with the Japanese openly about such things. To have lived in Japan without speaking Japanese would have reduced the richness of our experiences by 90 percent.

Q: Was there much travel to the United States at this point?

LENDERKING: More and more. It was growing. There was tremendous prosperity in Japan but generally people were still looking inward but more and more people were traveling to the United States. Young couples would go on their honeymoons to Guam or Honolulu and wealthy businessmen traveled back and forth all the time. Tourism was just starting to take off.

Q: In Sapporo, and the rest of Hokkaido, did you get into the hinterlands much?

LENDERKING: Sure. Yes, Hokkaido has a lot of beautiful scenery, sort of like New England. Not as spectacular as New England but with lovely fall foliage, some accessible mountains to climb and hike in, great skiing places, hot springs all over the place, that sort of thing. Yes, we traveled a fair bit. And Hokkaido is much more rural than the rest of Japan.

Q: Were there any Koreans there?

LENDERKING: Sure. There is a large Korean population, millions of people, not so much in Hokkaido but in the rest of Japan. There were two very large organizations, one was pro-North Korean, one was South Korean, which had a great influence, especially in the labor unions. Oddly enough, the pro-North Korean group was larger and had more influence. The Japanese were very concerned about North Korean influence and in fact still are because the North Korean group is close to the DPRK politically and there is still a very uneasy, hostile relationship between Japan and North Korea, the DPRK. There is a huge Korean minority in Japan, and many mixed marriages. Prejudice against Koreans is still alive, and is one of the few ugly aspects of modern Japan.

Q: Well, it is about the only minority they had, really.

LENDERKING: Yes.

Q: You were there from when to when?

LENDERKING: From 1961 to 1966; five years in a row.

Q: Five years. So Vietnam really did not raise its head.

LENDERKING: At the end, it did. The demonstrations against our actions in Vietnam started, and the criticisms didn't come just from the radicals on the left. Most of the intellectuals and ordinary folks were strongly opposed. And we started to be very active on this issue, because we were getting hammered every day. We were stressing that this was not just a homegrown insurgency in Vietnam, but fomented by outside forces in violation of the treaty that established separate Vietnams, north and south. We brought in outside experts as speakers, and by this time my Japanese was quite good and I really enjoyed going up against someone on the other side who was spouting rigid ideological stuff. Of course, I was doing my duty but I enjoyed it because so many of the critics, especially among the intellectuals, were so arrogant and smug.

Q: You were saying the Marxists were quite rigid...

LENDERKING: Yes. There were not, as I recall, a lot of really thoughtful critics; they were basically ideological critics and it was hard to get through to them. I guess as a personal note I enjoyed the back and forth; it was fun but also I thought I was making good points against some of this rigid thinking. And oddly enough, I am skipping ahead, my next assignment was Vietnam. And when I got to Vietnam I didn't agree with the doctrinaire socialists but I certainly became a very harsh critic of our own policy and actions once I saw it upfront with my own eyes.

Q: Okay. Well, is there anything else - for example, how did the Japanese fare in language learning? Were they able to pick it up? They all seem to have a problem with learning English, as we have had a problem learning Japanese.

LENDERKING: That's right. They had trouble and they still do have trouble learning English and other foreign languages. English used to be mandatory in the schools, and may still be, but the emphasis was on reading, especially technical and scientific texts. So English was not taught properly, as a way to understand a complex foreign culture, but as a means to making someone a better engineer, or something like that. That approach reveals a weakness in Japanese attitudes, what some people call their superiority/inferiority complex. As an island nation, they are very self-centered, like the British in a way, but more so. And we, as a continental country aren't so hot at learning foreign languages and relating to other cultures ourselves. In Japan, students are taught English to read but not to speak properly. I think the Koreans have much better knowledge of spoken English than the Japanese. They learned it when the missionaries came in the late 19th century, and unlike the Japanese they welcomed the missionaries, mainly because they needed outside help to keep their bigger and stronger neighbors - Japan, China, and Russifrom swallowing them up.

I would like to mention one program that I did in cooperation with some others that I thought was particularly good. We got a leading professor of modernization from Princeton, Cyril Black, to come out to Japan for about a month and he spent time in Sapporo, Kobe-Osaka and Kyoto, and I worked hard on this for a long time but we arranged for him to give, for the first time ever at Hokkaido University, which was the leading university in Hokkaido and one of the best in Japan, a formal course with senior students and graduate students. I can't remember whether they allowed a certain amount of credit for it but it was a formal course and we provided the interpreter and Cyril Black was a marvelous professor, a marvelous lecturer, and he taught it just the way he would teach a course at Princeton. And this was a revelation because the methodology was different from anything the Japanese students were used to. After initial reluctance on the part of the students, who were accustomed to listening quietly at a formal lecture and accepting the professor's words as gospel truth, Black got the students to participate and present diverse opinions - it was not just a rote lecture. He gave an exam and graded the papers himself, with the help of an interpreter. Afterwards, he told me the exams were weak and well short of U.S. standards. Most of the responses were just regurgitation and showed little evidence of independent thinking. So Black lightened up on the grading standards. But it was a new experience for the students and something of a revelation. I thought it was very exciting. And the professor who was the head of the political science department at Hokkaido University, whose cooperation was essential for this project, was initially very skeptical but he and Black got along very well and cooperated. So this turned out to be a marvelous example of what could happen when you do something right. That experience reverberated years and years afterwards. The professor became a good contact at the center where before he never had anything to do with us. And Cyril Black, Professor Black, who died a few years ago, had the same experience in Kyoto and Kobe-Osaka. It was really worthwhile.

Q: Okay. After Sapporo we're in 1966, and going twhere?

LENDERKING: I did a year in Vietnamese language training. So I picked up another foreign language.

Q: Okay. We'll talk about Vietnamese language training in '66 and move on to Vietnam. Today is the 12th of March, 2007.

So how did you find- Vietnamese? Of course, it's a tonal language...

LENDERKING: It's not nearly as difficult as Japanese. The only thing that's more difficult are the tones because Japanese, of course, does not have tones, nor does Korean, but both Korean and Japanese are much more difficult grammatically. And there are actually quite a number of loan words between Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese, so that was a help. I'm not saying it was a snap; it wasn't. But after a year at FSI I was able to go out and get along in Vietnamese and I was in a place where I was using it every day.

Q: Okay. You were doing this from more or less the year of '66 or '66-'67?

LENDERKING: More or less the whole year of 1967.

Q: Okay, '67. What were you getting from this training, I mean both in the language teaching but also you are heading for an assignment in Vietnam, you are watching the news and all, and how did things look in Vietnam at the time?

LENDERKING: That was an era, of course you remember, when the protests were growing stronger. I was beginning to have doubts about whether this was the right thing for us to be doing or if we were doing it right. As I said previously, in my last year in Sapporo I was really actively engaged in teach-ins but of course on the side of the U.S. Government. I was defending the U.S. Government position and I particularly enjoyed taking on some of the doctrinaire, leftist pro-Marxists, and my Japanese was good enough so I could do that to a certain extent. Of course, I certainly didn't have the fluency of a Japanese professor, but I could express my thoughts clearly and generally follow the conversation and comments, which of course were critical. But with growing doubts I went into the Vietnamese training course and although our course was almost totally on the language we did have a little bit of time with visiting speakers. And the speakers, if they had been in Vietnam and finished their tours and come back, would always say, "we understand your doubts, wait until you get out there, wait until you meet the 'good' Vietnamese, wait until you see what's going on. You'll get with the program, don't worry about it. And that was their counsel to all of us who were going through this program with growing doubts. In fact, a guy in my class resigned because he didn't want to go to Vietnam, he was against the war and he also didn't want to be separated from his family. He made it very clear that his family came first and he wouldn't accept a separation for a war he profoundly thought was wrong. Most of us had qualms but were not as certain, and we gritted our teeth and went, hoping for the best. What most of us found was worse, but I have to admit my two years in Vietnam were very exciting and instructive. They changed my life, most obviously that my wife and I ended up getting a divorce. I can't blame that entirely on my going to Vietnam, but that certainly didn't help. But the Vietnam experience changed my life and outlook in other ways as well.

Q: Okay. You were in Vietnam from when to when?

LENDERKING: I started Vietnamese training in Washington in early January of '67 and went just about a year. So I got to Vietnam just before the Tet Offensive in '68.

Q: And you were in Vietnam from '68 until when?

LENDERKING: I was there almost exactly two-and-a-quarter years, leaving in mid-winter of 1970.

Q: Let's talk about your initial impression. Before Tet, what were you told you would be doing and where were you going?

LENDERKING: I was in Saigon for a few days just for checking in and learning my assignment. My first impression is that it was lucky I had learned some Vietnamese because all new arrivals were supposed to be met at the airport and assigned to a hotel, because Saigon was very chaotic and they didn't want people wandering around getting lost and blundering into difficulty. In my case, there was a screw-up of some sort and I was neither met nor assigned a hotel; they had no record of my coming and I thought okay, if this is what Vietnam and the American involvement here is like, we're going to be in deep trouble. Guess what? I was right.

Anyway, I could speak Vietnamese so I made my way into town, having found a taxi and giving the driver directions on my own. We were not supposed to do that for security reasons, and I found a place to sleep and the next day I was able to straighten it out. But that was not a good start.

Q: What were you going to be doing?

LENDERKING: My assignment was a reflection of the unreality that people in Saigon had about the way the rest of the country worked. I learned right away I was going to Pleiku in the Central Highlands not far from the Cambodian border. My job was to be Psyops Advisor to the Vietnamese Information Service rep there, and the psyops advisor on the civil-military advisory team in Pleiku. The team was part of CORDS, the bureaucratic acronym for the pacification program. More on that later.

There had been a lot of fierce fighting in and around Pleiku Province, and the U.S. 4th Division was based outside the small city in a huge area. The climate was fairly nice but it was a poor provincial city and I, as a mid-level foreign service officer, definitely not a senior officer, was supposed to deal on equal footing with Major General Ray Peers, who was a legendary figure and a very senior Army general. He was commanding general of the Fourth Division, and there was no way he was going to deal with me as an equal. In fact, although I met and worked with many military men from the rank of captain on up, I never even met General Peers. So I found someone farther down the pecking order who I could deal with. The basic problem was that some of the objectives of the pacification program ("hearts and minds") were at cross purposes with the objectives of a big, tough Army division ("find the enemy and kill them.")

I was assigned to CORDS, which is the Civil Operation for Revolutionary Development Support, otherwise known as the pacification program, headed by Robert Komer at the time. We had an advisory team in which every significant Vietnamese official had an American advisor, a counterpart, who was supposed to get him resources and advise him on how best to pursue the war. On our team, which was more than half military, we had a group of about 45 or so military advisors and the civilian advisors numbered about six or seven, depending on the vicissitudes of the war and assignments. We civilians had our own separate compound, five or six people, and we lived about a mile away from the military advisory team compound. They were commanded by a full colonel and we worked very closely with those guys and they were, for the most part, very good. I got to know some of the younger officers quite well, as well as the colonel who was the head of the team, who was technically my boss and I got to know them all well and liked them a lot.

Q: This is before Tet; what was the situation in the field at that time in Pleiku?

LENDERKING: I stopped in Nha Trang on the way to Pleiku, which was the headquarters for Region Two. Vietnam was divided into four regions for purposes of military organization and I met with the senior psyop people in Region Two, and they said well, you come at a good time because we are expecting trouble. There has been a rising level of Viet Cong activity and we have lots of intelligence that there could be a major offensive and we're glad you're here. And in Nha Trang I had lunch with my predecessor, who was on his home.

Q: Who was that?

LENDERKING: His name was Frank Dean. This was the only time I ever saw him, and he was very, very glad to be leaving. He looked tired and sort of beaten down and he said with obvious relief, "I'm out of here." He then told me life in Pleiku would not be very comfortabll was not going to like it, there are very few creature comforts, there is a lot of fighting and it is a dangerous place, and so on. He said just for his own privacy and wellbeing he rented a small house on the outside of town so he would not be crammed in with the military guys or the civilians. He said he saw them all the time, every day, and just needed a little privacy. Well, basically what he was saying was that he wanted to have a Vietnamese girlfriend in, so having his own house was very convenient for him. When I got to Pleiku I went and looked at this house, which was a small, rather forlorn house on the edge of town, but a bit nicer than living in the civilian compound with a tiny bedroom and a cot. But I said to myself, I'm so new here, I don't know the lay of the land, I'm hearing all these reports that there could be an attack, I don't even know how to get around on the roads and I'm not going to live out in that house until I know it's safe. And that saved my life because that house was overrun a couple of days later and was used as a temporary staging area for Viet Cong who would then go on to attack the town. So I moved in with my civilian colleagues on the advisory team. There were four or five or so of them and that was a good decision to make.

Q: We're talking now about the time just before all hell broke loose - with all this talk of pacifying, what did that mean, exactly? What was your daily workday like?

LENDERKING: There were a number of projects all involving aid of one sort or another for the Vietnamese so the government would be able to show it was working for the people and the people would then be inspired to support the government. This could be building schools; it could be helping with the refugees and internally displaced people; there was a Chieu Hoi advisor who was supposed to work on messages and programs to encourage the Viet Cong people who might be wavering to defect; there were some construction projects and agricultural assistance, things of that sort. Anyone who was in Vietnam at the time, and thousands of Americans worked for CORDS in the provinces at one time or another, could probably talk for hours on these things, and all these programs were flawed because the war, in a place like Pleiku at the time, was overwhelming everything. And the Vietnamese people whose hearts and minds and basic allegiance we were competing for were just trying to survive and there was no program I could see that was reaching them in any way that would reassure them that the government was on their side because the government was in fact corrupt, a lot of the officials were venal, they were not interested in helping the people and they were badly organized and they were not very capable. That is, the Vietnamese military talent level was not very high in Pleiku, and in most places in Vietnam, with some notable exceptions. And civilian officials were even worsmore corrupt, less motivated, poorly trained and unqualified, you name it. To be fair there were outstanding exceptions and I did meet a few of those.

My Vietnamese counterpart was a civilian. He was lazy and corrupt; all he wanted from me was supplies that he could dispose of as he saw fit and to his own advantage. And he wanted me to get him a gun and help him find accommodations for his girlfriend, and things like that. Now, we were all under instruction to build rapport with our counterparts in order to make the advisory concept work, but I saw these things as outside my job description, shall we say. So I was beginning to see early on that there were deep flaws in this program and far from being reassured, as I was told in Washington I would be once I got with the program, my dismay was growing by leaps and bounds. And this was even before the Tet offensive.

Q: How did the American military welcome you and how did they feel the war was going?

LENDERKING: The American military people I met and worked with were, for the most part, exemplary people. I'm talking especially about some of the enlisted men and most of the young officers and the commanding officer of the advisory team, and he was a full Army colonel. And later on, the officers I worked with in JUSPAO in Saigon. These guys were well-trained, dedicated and probably more inclined to be gung ho than the civilians - we were generally more skeptical - but we got along well. There was a dichotomthe guys in the field tended to be realists because they dealt with the muck of the war every day at close quarters. The true believers tended to be more in Saigon, where they could talk about their pacification theories over after work drinks and didn't have to worry much about rockets coming in the window and things like that. Of course, even Saigon had plenty of action from time to time.

Anyway, whatever our misgivings in Pleiku, we were all there to do a job, and we all accepted that. We generally liked one another, we worked and socialized closely (social life in Pleiku consisted of a beer or two before dinner, and maybe a few more after as well). The military guys welcomed me and my civilian colleagues as valued members of the team, they depended on us to get out and see what was going on and we were extra eyes and ears for them. When I arrived, I was issued an old M1 rifle by the CIA, who apparently were authorized to give us these things. But we were non-combatants and I never fired it the whole time I was there, although I'd take it along on overland day trips of any distance outside of Pleiku.

Q: That's not much protection. It's an awkward weapon, and not easy to load.

LENDERKING: In that case I'm glad I never had to depend on it. I also had my own jeep, so I could go where I wanted and I often ventured out of the city alone to visit a village, talk to the people and try to gauge how things were going, what the people needed, and what we could do to further our mission. Doing this by myself probably sounds dangerous, and it was, but I wasn't foolhardy. It's interesting, but very quickly most of us developed a kind of sixth sense of when and where it was safe to go on a dirt road somewhere in a territory that is basically Indian territory. And when it was safe to enter a village, and when it might not be. In those situations, you rely more on your gut instinct than anything else, more than the morning intel briefing from the military guys. And so I developed this feeling quickly; it was maybe a couple of weeks after the Tet Offensive when I began to have this confidence. And you looked for telltale signs; for example, if you went into a village, if there were no people around, that was clearly a bad sign. Or if the little kids didn't come running out to greet you or something like that. If that ever happened I just turned the jeep around and off I went, and I wouldn't even get out of the jeep. But for the most part, everywhere I went I was in my jeep by myself so in that sense I was on my own in hostile territory. But it was not as dangerous as Baghdad is today. (July 2007).

But there was a very large U.S. and Vietnamese military presence in the province. So I traveled all over that province by jeep and to other places by helicopter and other airplanes of all kinds. I calculated once that I'd been in about 30 different kinds of aircraft in Vietnam during my two year tour. After I left Pleiku and was transferred to Saigon I went all over the country, so I saw a lot of it.

In our compound I was the only person who spoke Vietnamese, the only one who had had Vietnamese training, so one of my first duties was to check on the guards, old guys in sandals who always ran off at the first sign of danger, and who could really blame them? They also had a habit of dozing off at all hourtheir jobs were unbelievably borinso I'd say their only value was as a kind of deterrent. Occasionally, I'd see some Vietnamese, perhaps an itinerant food seller, stop and ask them questions, but if anyone wanted to enter the compound they wouldn't have been deterred by our guards.

Daily life in Pleiku was trying at best, but it was especially hard right after Tet. Of course, we were all grateful we'd survived a close call with no casualties at all, so that was important, and we got right back to work after a day or two and we knew that large offensive attacks from the Viet Cong were improbable for a while. But we had a number of housekeeping difficulties, the most important being that the generator for the compound lost power and we had no electricity and therefore no power to operate the water pump at a time when it was beastly hot and extremely dusty. There was a kind of laterite red dust that would seep into everythinour living areas, our clothes, our vehicles, our hair, our eyes, our noses, everything. There was no protection from it, so at the end of the day the thing you wanted first off was a shower. Although we tried to fix it ourselves and had several mechanics in, we could only get it running for short periods. It was a heavy generator housed in an outdoor shed, and it took three or four of us at full strength to turn the crank to turn the wheel to try to get the generator started. It was very hard work, and most of the time it was futile.

Now, we had maids come in every day to clean the floors and wash our clothes because they would get so dirty, and they would use whatever power we had to wash the clothes. And so we could not get the generator fixed and I was designated as the compound person to talk to the maids and to the one guard we had out at night whenever we had a problem. I explained to them as best I could that we had a water problem and to go ahead and clean the houses and wash the clothes but try to conserve water. And every day when we were coming back from our day's adventures, usually about 4 pm, the maids would just be squeezing the last drops of water from the wet clothes and walking off to spend the night with their families, and they'd say to us with a smile, "Hut nuoc roi," which means "water gone already." I can't tell you how those three little words came to have a dispiriting affect on us. Of course, we eventually got the generator fixed, but I think it took about four weeks.

Now, just to finish the housekeeping details, we may have had a small oven in the back of the main house but we hardly ever used it. Instead we jumped into our vehicles and went up to the Advisory Group quarters and joined them for meals, which we paid for. That way we didn't have to cook, or clean up.

Q: OK, now when was the Tet Offensive? Was there any lead up to it where you were, and what happened?

LENDERKING: When I got to Pleiku, people again said there were a lot of indications that something big could be underway. And the second in command of psyops in Region Two in Nha Trang came up with me, and I guess he did this with all new people, to introduce them around to the brass and say to the various military commanders, here is this guy, he can help you get the message out and you've got to work with him, and so on. So I appreciated that. He was very pleasant and helpful, a lieutenant colonel, and the first night we were there he stayed in the civilian compound with us, and there was an extra bed in my room. It must have been about 2:00 in the morning, there was some shelling and it sounded like really close, artillery shelling and machine gun fire, and of course I was very startled, it was my first experience of this. I jumped out of bed and said, "what's going on?" And I hear this voice from the floor, and Ben, the Lt. Col, is down there lying flat, and he says in a slow drawl, "better hit the deck, Bill." And so that was my introduction. So, right from the get go, there was a lot going on.

The Fourth Division had their big division headquarters outside of Pleiku, maybe ten miles, but there was also a big installation at the airport, about three or four miles from our compound, which was close to the tiny downtown of Pleiku. There was a big airfield there and it was used for both civilian and military purposes, and there was a big military installation there that was part of the Fourth Division. They had a military field hospital and I used to go up there all the time. There was a small PX (post exchange) and you could buy provisions and it was clean and you could get a cold beer and slightly different food. I used to go up there in the evening because it was like something out of MASH; they had a field hospital and I started hanging out with some of the nurses; it was just nice to go and have a beer with them after they got off work. But I would pop into the field hospital to see if anyone was interested in a beer and just getting off work. And often they were just mopping up the blood from an operation they'd just finished on a wounded soldier. So it was pretty graphic. And they were a pretty plucky bunch so it was nice just to sit down and talk with them for a little bit because it was kind of a lonely place. I got along well with all my civilian counterparts too; they were great guys and we all bonded. We might not necessarily have been close friends in any other circumstances but we became very close and of course all we did was talk about the war and I learned a great deal from them because I was the new guy.

Q: So what happened during the Tet offensive?

LENDERKING: Our little compound had four very small buildings, maybe 2-3 basic bedrooms in each one, like a cabin, except that the buildings were just cement blocks and had mostly cement floors. So during the main night of Tet, firecrackers were going off all over the place after dark because that is the principal way the Vietnamese have of celebrating that holiday, Chinese New Year, the biggest holiday in Vietnam and China.

The Viet Cong cleverly used all the noise and smoke as cover to disguise their attack, and soon there was a lot of gunfire and it occurred to us that there was something more than firecrackers going off. At first we didn't think anything of it but we were a little bit nervous. Also, for a couple of nights previous, there had been really concentrated attacks on Camp Holloway, which was where the Fourth Division helicopters and small planes, used for reconnaissance and forward air control, were kept, and that was quite near our compound, only about a mile from where we were so we heard all of that, but wouldn't find out until the next morning what was going on.

And not to string this out too long, but we got word by radio from our military guys about a mile up the road that there was an attack going on and the best they could tell was that there was a small platoon of Vietnamese Regular Army Rangers out there, about 12 guys, in a rice paddy and that is where the attack in this part of the town was coming from. So get ready, they told us, the attack is coming right towards you and we don't know where they are planning to attack but there are some of the enemy right there. And this was about a mile away, over nearly open ground.

And so we heard this; we had a bunker inside our building, and it had sandbags and a metal airway runway piece over it and we had some hand grenades and a couple of guys who knew how to use weapons. I would have been hopeless because all I had was my M1 rifle and a grenade with a pin sticking out of it. But we had a Filipino Special Forces guy who was the civilian advisor to the Chieu Hoi program, aimed at persuading the Viet Cong to lay down their arms, and he knew what he was doing. And it was a comfort to have him there along with a couple of other guys who'd had recent military experience. But we wouldn't have been a match for anyone had they come in the door. Of course, our one guard, an old man with a wispy beard, ran off the minute the guns started firing.

So the Viet Cong are coming up the dirt road and I'm thinking, "Oh my God, what am I doing here?" My civilian boss, the head of the civilian team, was nervous and he said, if you're not comfortable staying here, they have room for us to stay overnight with the Advisory Team just a mile up the road. And we all discussed it and decided we were going to stay where we were, where we'd be less of a target and had the flexibility of moving around if we had to. If we're going to be attacked, we're going to stay here together, we decided. And the military team up the road was much better armed and there were active duty guys who knew how to fight. But they were much more likely to be a target for rockets and direct attacks that we couldn't handle, so we guessed that although the Viet Cong knew we were there (we'd received threatening notices before), we were not a very important target to them so took our chances by maintaining the lowest possible profile.

The civilian boss headed up to the military compound for the night, and when he left he was very nervous. The rest of us stayed, and we survived; so did all the military advisors up the road. The Viet Cong came close, but did not enter our compound.

Q: How long did this last?

LENDERKING: All night. At one point it sounded very, very close as though there was fighting just outside the gate. And I firmly believe, but I can't prove it, that it was that small Vietnamese platoon of rangers that saved our lives. They were not defending us, but they were blocking access to the city from a large rice paddy, and they either deflected or turned back the Viet Cong choosing to enter the town that way. Now, we never saw those guys, and we often disparaged the Vietnamese army because it was rife with corruption, incompetence, and lack of discipline. So maybe it's a bit ironic that a platoon of Vietnamese rangers inadvertently saved our lives.

No one came bursting through the door or anything like that. But a couple of guys I knew in other places like Hue were in fact captured and killed in circumstances much like that.

Q: So in Pleiku, was the Tet Offensive sort of a one day thing?

LENDERKING: It was really basically one day. And the next morning, this is my recollection, we went into town and all the buildings had huge artillery and shell holes in them, plus strings of holes where bullets had hit. And there were all the corpses of the Viet Cong and the people were standing there holding their noses because they were decaying and puffing up in the sun and the smell was pretty powerful. There must have been a couple of hundred bodies. The Army put them out to impress the people that they'd whipped the Viet Cong. And by this time the sun was out, and it was quiet, there was no more fighting, and the townspeople were just standing there, clutching a handkerchief or something to their noses, not talking, just standing there looking. In addition to the scene right in the central square of the town, which had just a few buildings, there were outlying hamlets and villages. One in particular, a hamlet with perhaps a hundred two-room shacks arranged on the side of a hill, the Viet Cong entered in force, and for some reason lost to history they made a fatal mistake by allowing themselves to be caught in daylight out in the open without any cover except those tiny houses, from which the occupants had apparently fled. And our pilots, I don't think the Vietnamese Air Force was involved, spotted them and just cut them to pieces and I think there must have been several hundred killed and they were lying all over the place. All the houses had huge holes in them from the firinthey looked like Swiss cheese. One of my colleagues said you know, they are our enemy and they would have killed us but you almost have to feel sorry for those poor devils who got caught in that, because it was carnage.

Q: Was this mainly from an air attack?

LENDERKING: Yes. I think the main body of the Fourth Infantry Division, a huge army division, was out fighting in outlying areas. In that period, there were some legendary battles, the la Drang Valley, other places in Pleiku and Kon Tum provinces, where there were some fierce set piece battles, mostly before Tet.

Q: Were these Viet Cong as opposed to regular North Vietnamese?

LENDERKING: Yes. None of the people I saw had regular uniforms on. They had just peasant gear of some sort but they were all armed and suffered heavy casualties.

Now, right after this we had a post-mortem, and some of the military guys were crowing about what a stunning defeat this was for the Viet Cong. And here we were talking about the whole country, our region, about the Vietnamese who penetrated our embassy in Saigon and were fighting almost hand-to-hand with our people in the embassy. And some of the military guys were insisting it was a huge setback for the enemy and a lot of us didn't see it that way at all. We were surprised at just how enormous an attack they had been able to mount countrywide and how close they had come to actually turning the situation entirely to their favor. Yes, they certainly took heavy casualties but then in the following days the security situation was not any better for us. The attacks, after a day or two, mounted up again. The roads were often not safe to go on; you took a chance when you went out to a village. We all did it. If we could, we would go out in a helicopter because it was safer. But it was always dangerous.

I remember going out on a road in the morning, it was a dirt road going to a village I had to visit, and it was fine. And when I came back several hours later there was a Vietnamese Cit-lo, a little putt-putt kind of thing, lying smoking beside the road. In other words, it had passed over a bomb and detonated it (what was later called in the Iraq insurgency war of 2005-2008 an IEimprovised explosive device) and these kinds of bombs were placed in the roads all the time. I should explain that most of the roads in Pleiku province were unpaved, but the main ones were broad and not rutted, so you could drive around 50-60 mph on them without a lot of discomfort, although you kicked up a lot of dust. Anyway, the Cit-lo detonated the bomb on the exact spot I had passed over earlier. How did I miss it? Or, was it planted after I passed over it, in broad daylight? Either way it was spooky, and it could have been me and my jeep that were detonated. That's the way it was.

Q: What was the population of Pleiku? It was up in the highlands; were these Montagnard or was it a mixed population?

LENDERKING: It was mostly Montagnard, although there was a small overlay of Vietnamese small businessmen in the town. And the Montagnards in Pleiku consisted of several tribes, principally the Rhade and Jarai. They spoke their own languages and they even had different kinds of huts and villages. They had not been very well treated by the Vietnamese and, as it turned out, not very well by us either, although most of the Montagnards were friendly to us and some of them became fierce fighters on our side. The biggest project I was involved in was one to relocate the Montagnards to a safer place and turn the area in which they farmed and lived into a free fire zone. The idea was that they would be safe and we would provide security and anyone moving in the rest of the surrounding area would be fair game. And to make sure the population understood this we dropped leaflets. Well, can you imagine anything more ineffectual than that? And people went around in the villages and said you have got to stay out; this was their land, mind you, this was where they farmed, this was where they roamed freely. I could give you a lot more details about this project, which was huge. It involved building almost a mini-city on what looked mostly like scrub lanperhaps thousands of huts with tin roofs, in a new community called Edap Enang. This large village we built was supposed to accommodate thousands of people but it had no infrastructure to it. It seemed to some of us the real question was, how are these people going to live and how are they going to survive?

To answer your earlier question, I don't recall how large the population was but it was not a heavily populated province. It had a couple of plantations, tea plantations, that had been run by the French, and the French plantation owners wanted to stay. They didn't like us at all because they knew that wherever we were there was going to be fighting. And some of the plantation owners, I think, stayed on but maybe had to leave eventually when the North Vietnamese won the war. I don't know if some managed to stay. But I never got to know them.

Q: Were there Special Forces camps around there?

LENDERKING: Yes. There were a couple, especially over near the Cambodian border because that was an area the Viet Cong used often, for infiltration and safe haven. And so I was over there a lot. We had a Special Forces guy who stayed with us for a while in our compound. We always had an extra bed or two if someone wanted to come in and the guys would come in sometimes and they just wanted a shower and a hot meal. And wow, they looked awful. They had rings in their ears and they were covered with dirt and dust and they really looked like savages. You had to feel sorry for them - they were pretty tough guys to be living out there under those conditionbut they were so grateful just to have a warm shower and a decent meal.

Q: Did you get any feel for efforts of the central government to put teachers in the provinces or anything like that?

LENDERKING: This was a problem. We were filing reports all the time, and we had a weekly province report and all the different section chiefs would write something. The reports were nonsense because it was all based on numbers: this week we opened X number of schools; used X bags of cement and rebar to build houses; spent X number of dollars. These were used to compile progress reports and because the totals were going up, Saigon could report we were making "progress." But none of the real questions were addressed: there were no teachers for the new school buildings, or they were unqualified, or the Viet Cong had killed them or intimidated them and they had run off; the cement and rebar were being pilfered by the Vietnamese, or watered down so that if you walked across the cement floor in a new schoolroom the cement cracked under your feethings like that.

So basically, the idea was not to talk about what was happening, really, but to inform Saigon what problems we had solved. This approach was supposed to be forward looking and we were encouraged to put in these progress reports what we had accomplished during the week or previous weeks so people would say our projects continued to make progress. They all seemed to start out that way. So we had all these empty shells all over the country that we had built and were not being used. And we had education advisors who could not get textbooks and all kinds of essentials. So there were major, major dysfunctions.

Q: Well, was anybody coming from headquarters and from CORDS and asking how are things going? And could you tell them and did they pay any attention?

LENDERKING: All the time they came. And most of them would make sure they did not stay overnight because it made them nervous. And I can understand that. I mean, I got to feel that, after I had been there several weeks, I got used to it and my anxiety level went down because I was dealing with the situation every day. But if you came from Saigon you did not want to stay in a place like Pleiku overnight. But they came all the time and yes, we took them around to the projects, we told them things are not going well here. About this time I formed the conclusion, and I think it is very relevant to the situation in Iraq today, that without security there is nothing; nothing can happen. You can have a corrupt government and a situation where justice is episodic and the government takes advantage of the people and rips them off and so on.

But if the government provides a modicum of security and exerts its authority over territory then you have a situation which is at least viable, and maybe some projects and programs can be initiated. But without security nothing is possible, and that is what we found, in Pleiku and elsewhere. There was no security, there was no place that was secure. And so all these projects, all the money we were expending...I can't remember how much money I had but I would go to the one bank in Pleiku, this tiny little place, and draw down my account and there were wads of piastres, you could put them in a gym bag or something like that. And I paid my Vietnamese assistant, and the culture-drama team we operated in the province. The culture drama teams were one of the few things we did that actually worked, and ironically the idea for them was borrowed from the Viet Cong. They were teams of Vietnamese entertainers that operated in most provinces, singers and storytellers, who would go into the villages dressed in black pajamas and they would get the people involved in stories and they would tell them that the Viet Cong were bad and not to support them. It sounds simplistic, and I was initially skeptical but I developed tremendous admiration for these mostly young people, who were brave, intelligent, and talented. They could sing, dance, tell stories and argue politics in a way that people could understand and respond to. They lived at the grass roots and they were like troubadours. And they were very impressive. My Vietnamese was not great but it was good enough so I could talk to them. They knew that if they got caught they were certainly going to be killed, and the women, who often were young and attractive, would have terrible things happen to them.

Well, CORDS was a huge organization and there were literally hundreds of different programs and some of them were imaginative. But in the end they didn't make much difference because the security was never good enough; the soldiers were generally poorly led although some of the Vietnamese officers were outstanding. But in a situation like that, the Vietnamese never developed enough confidence that they could handle the job, and all our programs couldn't instill that in them. So what you ended up with was a very large army with every individual top to bottom motivated chiefly by the need to save himself and his family rather than fight for his country.

I have to tell you one little anecdote because it was memorable. There was some criticism of the civilian team that I belonged to, and I guess just through attrition, no one was killed but some people left and they were not replaced, so perhaps by default I became deputy province senior advisor, a grandiose-Potemkin-like title. What it meant was that I was no longer just the psyops guy but the senior civilian in the province. We always had a military guy as the senior guy and the top civilian was his deputy. The whole advisory team was about 55 or 60 people, military officers and enlisted and civilians, and I was, for a number of months, in charge of the civilian team of about six or seven guys so there was a real imbalance. But I felt the whole situation there was not going well and that the programs were ineffectual. There was criticism of the team from some of the military guys because while we did not have much security our little compound was a little more comfortable to live in and at the end of the day we could have a couple of beers and put our feet up and play some poker or talk, and it was more congenial. And so there was a little bit of resentment on the military side, that they took all the risks but we lived better. But we did not live very well; I mean, there were rats in our houses and other unwholesome aspects, and it was not all that comfortable. The Filipino Special Forces guy got bitten one night and had to have that very painful series of 13 rabies shots in his stomach.

So I asked to go out on an overnight patrol one night and the colonel said okay, I know you are not a combatant, you are not experienced with weapons. You know there is a big risk and if you want to take it I'm not going to say no but keep your wits about you and so forth. And a couple of civilian guys said, you know, if you have to use a rifle you will shoot yourself in the foot. And they checked me out a little more. Anyway, I did this and I went out on an overnight patrol and it was a memorable experience because it was scary. The purpose was to surround a Vietnamese hamlet in which there were suspected Viet Cong, enter by surprise at daybreak and see if we could capture any suspects. We had to travel through heavily wooded areas; at any point we could have run into an ambush. The senior American was a savvy young captain I respected, and we had a radio man and we had me, and I was not supposed to be there. And there were about 50 or 60 Vietnamese troops, and they were carrying a heavy machine gun and their own individual weapons. And even I, inexperienced as I was, became alarmed at their behavior because we were supposed to be moving silently and they were bunching up and giggling from nervousness; we had to keep telling them not to bunch up and to spread out, because if we were ambushed we would all be killed in one burst. We came to a stream we had to cross, and one of them couldn't swim at all and would have drowned from the heaviness of his pack if we had not grabbed him and pulled him across. I found I was going back and forth helping these poor guys get across the stream and they were scared, they were alarmed and afraid they were going to get ambushed and killed and they were certainly more nervous and alarmed than I was. I realized they were just young Vietnamese soldiers and probably hadn't had much training.

Anyway, the idea was to enter the hamlet at daybreak, surprise some people in there, and maybe capture some weapons and suspects. We reached an open field at the edge of the hamlet while it was still dark and decided to stay there until daybreak. Now, one of the most fearsome and effective weapons we had was what we called spooky, which was a helicopter with a Gatling gun arrangement mounted that could fire something like 600 rounds a minute. And when those things opened up they could cover a field in a matter of seconds and put direct fire into every square foot of that field.

While we were lying in this field waiting for the night to end so we could enter the hamlet, there was a spooky operating perhaps a quarter mile from us, and it was firing at something but it was circling around and getting closer and closer to us. And it dawned on us as it was getting closer to us the crew didn't know we were there. And so we thought well, friendly fire, we could easily be killed. Finally the captain got the radio man and he broke radio silence - we were not supposed to do this, but he got on the radio and he said, using very strong language, there is a Vietnamese platoon down here and an American advisory team and get the hell away from us. So they did and we weren't killed and the next morning we went into the village and people were surprised; we got a couple of suspects. There was no firing; the suspects were rounded up and taken off for questioning and that was the end of it. But we knew that because we were going to turn them over to the Vietnamese they would probably be beaten badly or something like that.

Every day it seemed like something happened that was memorable and indicative of what was happening in the war. Right after the Tet Offensive, almost immediately afterwards, General Westmoreland, who was commander of the American forces in Vietnam, went around the country to see the soldiers and give them encouragement. The Tet offensive had been a major upset, so these visits were both timely and necessary for morale. Now, the field hospital I mentioned was quite a nice, clean, well staffed hospital, and I received a radio message saying there was a North Vietnamese prisoner up there and he's been wounded. He's lying in a hospital bed and he's so grateful for the care he's getting that he's ready to talk, and we can use that for a propaganda message.

So I got my tape recorder and I raced up there and I saw this guy, and there were some other Vietnamese soldiers in there too, and the poor guy was in bad shape, all bandaged up, conscious but grimacing with pain. He'd been getting good treatment. I talked to him, and I could make myself understood to him. I could ask him who he was and how he was feeling, but he was in no shape to talk to anyone. He was hurting and it wasn't because he was hostile or anything like that, but I think he was just glad to be alive, just as any of us would have been. But he was in bad shape. So I realized that messages were getting distorted from the grassroots as they went up the line. This guy was in no condition to talk to anyone, so the idea of getting a useful statement or something was just nonsense. And I went back a couple of times and he was never in any condition to say anything that would help us.

Anyway, in the midst of all this in comes Westmoreland and he's going along and the North Vietnamese soldiers, there were only three or four of them as I remember, were lying right in adjoining beds to the Americans and there was no problem, no one was worried about security or anything like that. The guys were all wounded, some pretty badly, and that was the one thing they shared. And so I said hello to the general and I must say, he was very impressive. He made some major mistakes in Vietnam; mainly we had a strategy that was based on measuring our success by body count and that was not the way to measure success or failure. There were also distortions in how we counted the casualties. But he was a good soldier and I was very impressed with the way he greeted the wounded American soldiers, stopping to talk to each man informally, with no pomp or standoffishness due to his rank, and he put his arm on them and for a minute or two it was just one soldier talking to another. It was quite moving. So that was another indelible experience for me.

Q: As time went on, what were you getting from the village chiefs? Did you feel you were getting true stories from them or were they looking to you to give them supplies and they would say whatever it took to get them?

LENDERKING: I think they would tell us anything they thought we wanted to hear that would help them. The CORDS hierarchy seemed to assume that it was a simple matter to go into a village unannounced, seek out the village chiefs or elders, sit them down, find out what they needed, and then put it all together and chalk up another success. I was among the more fluent Vietnamese speakers of all the provincial CORDS representatives, but the level of communication I had with the village folks was quite primitive, not because I couldn't communicate in Vietnamese, but because the cultural and political divide was enormous and couldn't be bridged by simplistic contact. That was a basic lesson that most Americans just didn't understand about grass roots nation building across cultures.

On paper our CORDS organization looked good. But it didn't account for practical obstacles that we were never able to overcome. In Pleiku, there was a province chief who would be similar to a governor; a province was the same as a state and he was a Montagnard, so that was good. But he wasn't an educated man, he didn't have a lot of experience. He had an unfortunate habit of giggling, and looked out of place in a uniform so there was no inspirational leadership he could provide to his province. But his chief military man was a Vietnamese major and he was very good, brave officer, one of the truly good ones. I wonder what happened to him. But anyway, a lot of the Vietnamese military leadership was not competent.

One day I was out in a village where the province chief was supposed to go and I don't know what happened, but there were all these aircraft around and he was supposed to be transported by helicopter. I went out in my jeeit was a big ceremony or something - because there wasn't any room in the helicopters that were going out. The province chief was going to say something at a ceremony. We would have these things from time to time, where they would round up the villagers and make them stand out there in the sun for a couple of hours and then a dignitary would come in, like a province chief, and he would walk around and say a few words, then get back in his helicopter and off he'd go. You had to wonder, what are we accomplishing with this kind of nonsense?

So anyway, the province chief's helicopter did not come and I got on the radio and tried to straighten things out. I saw all these helicopters going back and forth, and finally it's getting dark and still no helicopter for the province chief, who didn't have any security guards with him and he was getting a little nervous. You didn't want to be out anywhere outside of the town after dark, certainly not on the roads because the night belonged to the Viet Cong. And so they finally said well, there are no helicopters, they're all assigned. And sometimes helicopters would be assigned to some high ranking officer to take his girlfriend around or something, in addition to official missions. Now it was getting dark so I said to the province chief come on, let's go, I'll take you in my jeep. And he climbed in beside me, in my jeep with a canvas top, and I guess we were probably about 30, 40 kilometers from Pleiku. I hit the pedal hard and headed back as fast as I could go on the unpaved road, and I thought well, wouldn't it be nice if the Viet Cong caught us, and the province chief would be a nice catch for them. Anyway, we got back. I guess the moral is that there were always things to be worried about, something was always going wrong, but this was life in a war zone. There was reason to be concerned on this day but nothing happened. So you'd think you were just lucky.

I guess I should say a word or two about danger. These were new experiences for me, and even though I had military experience, I was at sea in the Navy and that didn't include combat. I was certainly apprehensive about a lot of situations I encountered in Vietnam, first in Pleiku which was a hot combat zone, and later in Saigon, when a guy could throw a bomb from a motorcycle into an open cafï¿½ and take out most of the people inside. That happened sometimes, and I experienced one or two such incidents at close range. I can't say I became nonchalant, but life does go on, even in a combat zone. I mentioned that I developed a kind of sixth sense that I learned to depend on, and that gave me confidence. Still, I'm sure at many times I let my guard down and was just lucky that nothing happened. I don't think I was ever specifically a target. Yet, people I knew were killed in some of the same circumstances I was living through every day, so it wasn't like a walk in the park.

Most of us copeit was something you did. But some people, including American military officers, Vietnamese troops, seasoned Foreign Service officers, cracked under the everyday tensions, which weren't palpable but just a fact of life. In any case, an Army major I knew quite well said, "I just can't take it any more." He was worried about his wife, his family, and of course himself. I think he was transferred, and that was probably wise. So, I have nothing really profound to say about facing danger, and don't consider myself brave, but you either do it or you don't, and there's no predicting how a given person will react. Most people I saw, including the Vietnamese people who were generally under much greater duress than we were, took it in stride and did the best they could day by day. A few couldn't deal with it, and I never thought they were cowards or anything like that.

Now, getting back to CORDS, there was a disconnect between policy and what was actually happening. Robert Komer, who was an ex-CIA guy and in overall charge of the huge CORDS operatiohe was nicknamed "the blowtorch" because he knew he was dealing with a cumbersome Vietnamese bureaucracy and a huge American unwieldy bureaucracy and a very, very difficult war - Komer's idea was apparently to pump money and resources into the economy through all these programs, get them going and that is how reconstruction and development would happen. Well, it didn't happen that way at all. I think there were some good ideas but they were tried too late and by the time of the Tet Offensive it was too late. I would say Komer was a very smart man; he was not a good listener and he was not a success. His successor was Bill Colby, who later became head of the CIA, and he came up to Pleiku to talk to us and I was very impressed with him. He was a very smart man and he seemed to be one of those guys who knew what you are going to say before you said it, and then paraphrased it better than you could have. He was clearly well briefed and knew about all the jargon and all the field talk; he never asked, what are you talking about. And he would say, we need you guys to do a better job. One thing we had to do on the psyops side was send in a weekly attitude report, which got to be kind of a joke because how could an American out in some province or in Saigon gauge what the peoples' attitudes were, especially if he didn't speak Vietnamese, and most of us did not. Even if we did speak Vietnamese, and I spoke well enough to talk to people about serious topics, who are you going to talk to? You go into a village and go up to some guy out of the blue and start asking him questions, is what he is telling you just blowing smoke or is he actually telling you something? Well, of course, you can't just happen on a stranger in a foreign country and expect him to tell you anything useful about what's going on in his life.

Anyway, the idea developed, I guess it was on Komer's watch, you had to specify in the report who you had spoken to. So these guys were saying, you know, seven cyclo drivers and four bar girls said they feared the Viet Cong were going to come again, or some such thing, and it was total nonsense. So Colby said look, we need to know better what you are doing and who you're talking to. You've got to find people who are credible interlocutors, talk to them, and report what they say. I know it sounds easy, but it wasn't, and it didn't happen except in some of the larger cities where it was a little bit possible to build some rapport with local leaders, politicians, merchants, soldiers, whatever.

I believe Colby knew the whole CORDS program was in deep trouble, and there are a number of things he did - I can't remember all the details - to tighten things up and just make us stop chasing after mirages and get down to reality. And in fact after some months things started to get better and we had some military successes and the follow up was much more effective in terms of getting resources to the grass roots and establishing an anti-Viet Cong presence in the villages and so forth. So it was a mixed situation say, maybe eight or nine months after the Tet Offensive.

Q: Did you get to Nha Trang or Saigon from time to time?

LENDERKING: As often as I could. My usual feeling, even to go to Nha Trang, a small city on the beautiful Region II east coast, was that I was a country boy allowed a few hours in the big city. After Pleiku it almost seemed that way. There was an excellent French restaurant in Nha Trang and the city is right on the South China Sea; the location is beautiful and the beaches are gorgeous. Now, you had to be careful if you were going to go out and spend any time on the beach; there was no security out there and also the kids, if they could, would rip you off. I lost a nice camera when I was a little careless and it was gone in a flash.

Q: I lost a pair of pants at Vung Tao (a famous Vietnamese beach resort).

LENDERKING: I'm not surprised. The kids would take everything they could grab. But people from Saigon were going out to Vung Tao. I only got there once and it was a very quick visit; I didn't have time to even walk on the beach but it was crowded. Now, here was another aspect of that crazy wayou'd go to Saigon and wild parties were going oguys with money in their pockets and beautiful women availabland it was a totally different atmosphere from the austere countryside, where it was dangerous every minute, there were no amenities, and the most you could look forward to was a couple of beers and some conversation at the end of the day. Of course, Saigon could be dangerous too at times, and it certainly was dangerous during the Tet Offensive, but you could go up to the roof of one of the major downtown hotels such as the Caravelle, or the Continental, with its large open street level veranda where guys used to sit and drink a citron presse or a beer at the end of the day and watch the staggeringly lovely Vietnamese girls float by or putt-putt down the avenue on their scooters. The Majestic was the third big hotel, and it was right on the Saigon River, so it had a great vantage place for watching the war, just across the river, in full technicolor. You often could see up close a firefight in progress, with helicopters firing rockets, machine gun fire rattling into the night, and so on.

Q: I remember seeing the movie "Patton" and watching traces go up in the air and flares going off...it was an odd world. So, did you develop a sort of country boy versus city slicker attitude toward your American counterparts?

LENDERKING: For sure, yes. One thing that is legendary, even to this day, is the daily press briefings that were held at JUSPAO, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, which USIS operated with the military. And those came to be known as the five o'clock follies. At any given time there were 4-500 foreign correspondents there in-country and some of the really top names in journalism were there at one time or another as foreign correspondents. So it was a big deal, and this was how the world was seeing the war, through what these guys wrote.

One experience I had in Pleiku: we were informed that a Viet Cong company had surrendered, and this was a big coup for us because the Chieu Hoi or amnesty program was not really successful. Some people came in but they were low level people and they were just tired of the war and we very rarely got anyone of any consequence. For this reason, the surrender of a large number of the enemy was a big deal. But I was a personal witness to all this, and my colleagues who went out to check and see who those folks really were saw right away they were just bedraggled Montagnard villagers forced out of their homes and just trying to survive. They'd been uprooted from their village by the war and had been wandering about for some time without much water or food, and maybe a couple of them had old rusty guns or something. They weren't Viet Cong, they weren't combatantthey were just part of the war's huge flotsam, but somehow someone thought it would be helpful to call them Viet Cong and report they had come in and laid down their arms. So after hearing from my colleagues in Pleiku what this incident was about, the very day I went to Saigon on other business, and at the end of the day I went to the Five O'clock follies. And guess what they are talking about? The big news of the day, announced to a briefing room full of war correspondents was this: a company or a platoon of 55 hard core Viet Cong have come over to our side. And I took this in from the back of the room, and I said to myself, this is just total bullshit. And this is what happens: an incident of some kind occurs, and immediately it is passed up the line, getting more distorted at each link in the chain. Now, obviously I wasn't going to say anything there but I went afterwards and said you know, I'm from Pleiku and my colleagues saw these people you're calling defectors, and what was said just now was total nonsense. Well, they didn't want to hear that. I was pouring water on their story. They didn't want to hear me out and put out a correction; they wanted me to go away and not come back. I could give you many such examples.

I remember a cocktail party conversation, not really a cocktail party but there were always parties going on in Saigon, some reception or other, and I was talking to a guy from USAID (United States Agency for International Development), a senior guy in Saigon. I told him who I was and we were just talking, and I said it doesn't matter whose side you're on or whether you think this war is justified or not; from my perspective we are losing and we're not going to win it. The war is unwinnable and we're doing all kinds of things wrong. And he got red in the face and said if you feel that way you're disloyal. You should go home; you shouldn't be here. And I said, "I didn't ask to come here but I'm doing my best and all the guys who are here are doing their best but this is what the situation is. And we're out there where we can see what's really happening."

When you came into Saigon there would always be guys from the provinces in there; they're coming in to get some money or coming in to push a project or something like that so I talked to many of them and found I wasn't alone in the way I felt. Almost all of us in the countryside felt that way. Guys in other parts of the country had stories very similar to the ones I've mentioned and they had the same sense of disillusion: we were doing badly, we weren't winning and our side was not capable of winning the war. So I felt okay, it's not just me, it's not just because I am disgruntled; I'm seeing the same things these other guys are seeing. So I think that was a good chance to learn that we were not crazy or disloyal; but we were dismayed and a lot of guys had really good projects going but they had this sense that our side was not capable. And my Vietnamese was getting better and better because I was using it all the time and I would talk to students on the street corners in Saigon or something like that and they were just like guys who hang out on street corners anywhere. They were chasing women and looking after themselves, and I said to one of these groups one day, why don't you join the army and fight for your country? They were university students, and they said "No, we are not soldiers, we are intellectuals; we are students." So I paraphrased Lyndon Johnson's well-worn argument, "do you think it's okay for Americans to be here and fighting this war, when Vietnamese students hang out on street corners, drink coffee, and chase women?" "Oh yes," they replied, totally without guile. "You should fight, it's perfectly all right for you but it's not for us and you go out there and win it and we'll stay here."

That little vignette always stayed with me. As privileged kids in a class-ridden hierarchical society, what they were advocating was perfectly reasonable. They weren't soldiers, they were young intellectuals. It helps to explain why our side could never win.

Q: Well of course, in a way it reflects two things; the Chinese, who put the soldier down at the bottom and all that; and the Mandarin Chinese and also the French.

LENDERKING: Exactly right.

Q: While you were in Pleiku, were there teams of provincial reporting officers from the embassy coming out and talking to you?

LENDERKING: Not so much. I knew some of those guys and we are still in touch to this day and they were more in the Delta and more populated areas where they could get a better gauge on Vietnamese attitudes and what was going on both militarily and politically. And I think because most people disdained the Montagnards as a military force and they really weren't a strong political force for the most part, we didn't see them much in Pleiku but they were there. And I read their reports and they were good, they were usually very solid. The trouble was, our hopes to help build a democracy in this infertile soil were unrealistic. There were political parties and some good people in some of them, but they faced overwhelming odds and of course they ended up being overrun.

And here is another little vignette. I had a good friend who I went through Vietnamese language training with who was a State Department guy assigned to the political section. And I exchanged notes with him, I guess maybe after we had left Vietnam, and he said he agreed with the criticisms of the reporting and acknowledged the process of distortion and how the message got altered along the line to Washington, because of the pressure to produce good news. He said, the best reporting on Vietnam, for all their faults, came from the press and there were good people and bad people but press reporting was the most reliable. And the second was the CIA. And the third I guess were the provincial reporting units, the fourth was the reporting from the embassy, and dead last were the voluminous and so-called objective reports from CORDS and the countryside. He told me supervisors would alter reports people had written, and alter the meaning to reflect good news, which was not borne out by the facts on the ground.

Q: Who was this officer?

LENDERKING: His name is Dick Thompson and he was a very conscientious officer - you probably know him.

Q: Yes. I think I have interviewed Dick.

LENDERKING: He was a smart officer with a lot of integrity, and still iand we got to be good friends.

Q: How were relations between what you were doing and the headquarters of the Fourth Division? Was this not the ivy (IV) division, the famous fighting Fourth?

LENDERKING: Yes. Well, I went out there a couple of times to remonstrate with anyone who would listen to me and basically I just did not count enough. I mean, I never got in to see General Peers but there were a couple of guys, say, lieutenant colonels, majors, I could talk to and their attitude was that an Army division is a massive thing and we have a war to fight and we're not going to worry about the people who get in the way. And that was very unfortunate because some of that has happened in Iraq, too. And they did have a war to fight and they were doing things like using Agent Orange and they were trying the best they could to not contaminate places. The planes were only supposed to fly when the conditions, like wind direction, were a certain way, and there were other rules as well, but in a war zone you fly those planes when you have them, you know. Put your finger in the air and take off.

One time, I had an argument with an Army captain. He said his troops had to destroy what were called "monkey bridges," makeshift bridges made of a narrow plank or two that the people used during the day to cross streams to get to their crops, or whatever. And then at night the military would come and chop them down because the Viet Cong were using that bridge too. And the captain said, look, I am here to protect my men and I'm not going to allow that bridge to be used by the Viet Cong to attack my troops. Of course I could understand his viewpoint; I would have felt the same way in his position. But here was a tiny but fundamental conflict, right at the grassroots, that went to the heart of some of the problems of trying to defeat what was already more than an insurgency. It was an attempt by North Vietnamese to repel what they regarded as an invasion and occupation by a foreign power, and that's what it was. From our viewpoint, we were trying to help a weak and corrupt non-communist regime survive so that communism would not take over another country. If we had understood better that the forces of nationalism and xenophobia were stronger than any pro-communist sentiments, perhaps we wouldn't have made so many mistakes. In any case, we feared that Vietnam would become a satellite of Communist China, and that was never really a possibility. Later, the Vietnamese flared up at the Chinese over a border incident, and the Vietnamese really bloodied some Chinese noses and gave a very good account of themselves before the Chinese numerical superiority dictated an end to hostilities.

Q: Did you stay the whole time in Pleiku?

LENDERKING: No. I was rather disillusioned at this point and I was having some domestic problems - I think the separation was not good for our family, the same effect it had on many families. I felt bad about having to go to Vietnam - we had three young children and I really missed them. I had to leave my wife, Lois, to cope with all of that, moving into a new home and neighborhood in Washington, looking for a job and all the rest of it, and so I went home on leave and I thought hell, this is awful. I'm not accomplishing anything; it's dangerous, if something happens to me what is going to happen to my family, blah, blah, blah. I seriously thought about quitting the Foreign Servicit was my only option to serving out my tour - and in fact at one point I did submit my resignation while I was on my first leave. I was looking around for another job, which I was not able to find because I didn't have enough timmy leave was only for a couple of weeks. But as a result of all this indecision I overstayed my leave. I said to my wife, "I've had it, I'm not going back." And my wife said, "you've got to go back, otherwise people will think you're a quitter and it will dog you the rest of your life." A couple of close friends said the same thing. So after a few days of inner turmoil I decided to go back, and take my chances. A couple of other friends said "you still have a good career, go back, finish up, stay in the Service."

And so I did. I went back, I was basically AWOL (absent without leave) by about, oh I guess almost two weeks, and so the head of JUSPAO wasn't happy when I got back. He called me in and he said, "You don't know this, but I was considering you for an important senior job in Saigon, where you'll be supervising people technically senior to you. It will require dedication and good judgment. But before I consider it any further I have to have your ironclad assurances that you will restrain the impetuous side of your nature and not indulge in any further adolescent capers." Those were his exact words.

Q: Obviously this was seared into your mind.

LENDERKING: Yes. And it was such a classic dressing down that I almost smiled, and said "okay, yes, I'm back, I'll do my best." And so I went up to Pleiku to finish up and work my way out of there, hoping I wouldn't get shot now that my luck had changed for the better, and Komer hears that I'm going to transfer. I don't know where he got this but I saw his message protesting my transfer, and it said, in effect, "why are we transferring good guys out of the field? Here is a dedicated officer who wants to stay in Pleiku and continue his work. I think he should stay." My heart sank. I was dying to get out of Pleiku. I had been there a year, I felt I'd paid my dues, I could see nothing good happening there under any kind of realistic scenario, and I wanted to move on and maybe do something where I could try something different.

Anyway, it took about two months to effect the transfer and I went down to Saigon, and I got the senior job there. I was supervising guys who were senior to me, FSOs and military up to the rank of LTC, and because I had field experience I was often called on to be the vetter- to vet projects that were aimed at communicating better with the Vietnamese. And so I brought that perspective to the job. Now, of course I wanted these things to be as effective as they could be, but I also was as honest as possible without being a total naysayer, saying that some ideas were unrealistic, inappropriate, counter-productive, poorly crafted, and so on. Our military counterparts, the U.S. military, were very weak in that regard; they just did not have any clue about who the Vietnamese were as people, what their values were, anything like that. I at least knew something.

Q: I would think that you would get all sorts of cockamamie ideas from people sitting there who had no idea. You know, let us put our message on bars of soap or what have you.

LENDERKING: Yes, exactly. There was a lot of that. But sometimes there were good ideas. I don't want to be totally negative. They had these little radios that they dropped and could only tune into one frequency that of course was limited to messages from our side, such as surrender messages. But I heard that the Viet Cong figured out a way to rejigger the frequency. Well, who knows? But I believe it. So many of our ideas were well-intentioned but ineffectual, because they didn't reach the core of Vietnamese attitudes. The Vietnamese enemViet Cong and North Vietnameswas clever and inventive. They were defending their own country and were willing to fight as long as it took, while we were there for a year or two and then went on somewhere else, usually disillusioned and dismayed.

We used to have frequent meetings, probably once a week, joint meetings with the military brass, and the military psyop guys were headed by a full colonel, and I guess I was the senior civilian; big conference room, table, all the military trappings out at the military base at Ton Son Nhut near the airport, and this guy said, "Today we are considering putting messages in cereal boxes so that as the Viets open their cereal they will get a message. And I or someone said, you know, that is not the way Vietnamese eat their food; they do not have cereal boxes. Whatever they might be eating, rice, fish, or meat or whatever, they eat it with their fingers or with a fork or spoon or chopsticks. They don't have cereal boxes. Well he said, "OK, we'll put these messages in their Cracker Jack boxes, or whatever the hell these people eat." You see, he just didn't have a clue.

Q: Seems reminiscent of the attitude in Panama years later, where we, trying to get Noriega, blasted the house he was holed up in with loud rock music, hoping to wear him down. Now, how long were you in Saigon?

LENDERKING: I had a year in Saigon. So the way it worked was the tour of duty was two years plus whatever time you had spent on home leave. I think I had two more trips home of about ten days each. And I have to tell you, of course this interview triggers all these memories, the first trip I came home was about three or four months after Tet. I was really anxious to see my family for reasons I just mentioned, and by then I considered myself a hardened veteran because I'd been up in Pleiku through all the tough times and I flew home non-stop and happened to arrive when a huge anti-war demonstration was going on in Washington. So the next morning I went to American University, which was one of the centers of it, and Walt Rostow, who was National Security Advisor, and a lot of other prominent people were speakers. I had only left Saigon the day before and I go and hear Walt Rostow and he's talking about a country that bore no connection or resemblance at all to the place I had just left 24 hours ago. He was saying the Viet Cong have suffered a terrible defeat; the people are happy, they are rallying around us. Well, my goodness. The country was in ruins, the people were afraid, disillusioned with their government, demoralized, and the programs are not working. By that time, it was not just Pleikthe whole country was really in bad shape.

And then all the other groups represented therand there were scores of theeach seemed to have its own agenda at this huge rally. The different groups had separate workshops, so I went to one that was dominated by a group that was probably affiliated with the Black Panthers. I quickly realized they weren't interested in the war at all; they knew almost nothing about it except that they were against it, and wanted to use the protest to get some resources for themselves for their projects in the city. So I was disillusioned by the likes of Walt Rostow, and I was turned off by the various advocacy groups who wallowed in ignorance about Vietnam and were nothing more than political opportunists. So when I got back to Vietnam, I was almost glad to be back, because although there were plenty of people whose views of the war differed from mine, at least all of us had some familiarity about the issues and the problems.

Q: Well how did your family welcome you when you got home? I know my wife was taking courses at University of Maryland at the time and she was picking up an awful lot of their anti-Vietnam stuff. I'm sure it wasn't an easy time to come back.

LENDERKING: It was not. It was tough on my wife. We eventually got divorced, and I can't in all honesty blame Vietnam for that, but it made things more difficult. The situation was tough on her. I was never late with sending the rent money and the support money and those things but she had three young boys to contend with and she was trying to get a job, and when she found one she had to juggle house and job. But as I mentioned, she also didn't want me to resign, because she liked the Foreign Service and our life overseas. So she was ambivalent about Vietnam. Later, when there were some of the huge anti-war protests on the Mall, I took the kids down there as an act of witness, not to demonstrate. My oldest son was about ten at the time.

So I took them down to the Mall and there were thousands and thousands of people, plus some of the anti-war celebrities such as Peter, Paul and Mary, Jane Fonda and others, and someone unfurled a North Vietnamese flag and they started chanting, ho, ho, Ho Chi Minh or something like that. I said to the kids, let's get out of here; we're protesting the war, not glorifying the enemy. So I took them home, again dismayed by the shallowness of my fellow Americans, whose dislike of the war immediately transferred them into supporters of Ho Chi Minh. And that was another indelible experience. I explained to my sons why I took them in the first place and why I then pulled them out of there when I didn't want to be any part of that aspect of the demonstration. There were always those elements in any kind of political demonstration in Washington, and there still are on the Iraq issue. The radicals, and some of them are genuinely dangerous, always try to hijack the demonstration and use it to their ends. So I really got soured on those big demonstrations.

Later, Lois, my wife, was going to take a candle and march in a demonstration and I said look, it's an act of hypocrisy...you've urged me to go back. If you were really against the war you wouldn't have urged me to go back where I was in danger; you would have said stay here and support me. But ironically, it was probably a good idea that I did go back, because I really liked the Foreign Service and I didn't wreck my career, and in the end it was very satisfying. But there were tense times.

Q: JUSPAO was essentially USIA's headquarters in Vietnam...?

LENDERKING: Yes, but it was married with the military.

Q: -How did you deal with your sense that the information that was being disseminated didn't reflect what was happening in the field?

LENDERKING: It may be hard to explain the work atmosphere of JUSPAO. The head of JUSPAO for some yearl came on the scene near the end of his tour - is a legendary figure, Barry Zorthian, who is still around and still very articulate about the war and public diplomacy issues. His successor was my PAO in Tokyo, Ed Nickel, who was nobody's fool, a very savvy bureaucrat. Ed's idea was, we all know how many of you feel about the war, and you may be right. But we have a job to do and we're going to do our very best. That was a reasonable position. So Ed would tolerate people like me to a certain extent, as long as he saw I was trying to do a good job and not out there trying to sabotage the mission. Here's what I mean: some years later, in 1973, when I was back in Washington, USIA formed a large inspection team for Vietnam and I was chosen to be part of it because I think I was the only guy on it who had had a lot of experience in Vietnam. Most of the others were senior to me. And Ed Nickel, and a few others tried to keep me off the team because they knew how I felt and they felt my views would wrongfully influence the team. Now, no one ever stated this in writing or to my face, but I learned about it from colleagues.

Ironically, as it turned out most of the others on the teawe were seven in all - felt even stronger than I did and when we got out to Vietnam the people who were in charge of USIS - the office in Saigon and all the infrastructure we still had in Vietnam - were not particularly cooperative with us and thought that we were probing where we had no business to probe; but that is what inspection teams do.

Q: Before we leave Vietnam, I do want to get some of your impressions of the press corps. I don't know if you dealt with them but there were hundreds of correspondents running around, and some of them were amateurs, or wrote amateurish stories. There was a lot of that as well as solid reporting. And I would like to talk about that next time, plus anything else you would like to raise about Vietnam, because this is important.

LENDERKING: Well, I've self-reflected as the Japanese say, on what we talked about last time and I had a couple of maybe amplifying thoughts and we can do that next time.

Today is the 16th of March, 2007. Bill, amplifying thoughts and the press corps.

LENDERKING: Okay, plunging in: As for amplifying thoughts: I've had these considerations before, but I served in quite a few countries, nine altogether, and in four of them there were major American foreign policy blunders, from serious mistakes to fiascos or disasters, Vietnam probably being the worst. So roughly 50 percent of my career was in assignments that dealt with American blunders that did not need to happen. Books have been written about all those things, Vietnam and the rest of them, but you have to wonder, if you agree that these other places were also disasters, that would be Cuba, Vietnam, Italy and Pakistan, what is there wrong, systemically, that causes such foreign policy failures? We have so many able people to analyze situations and carry out our policies in a forceful and credible way.

Q: Well, let's talk about the press first, and then get to the other topics. What was your impression of the foreign press corps in Vietnam?

LENDERKING: In Vietnam, there were as many as 500 foreign correspondents there at a given time, and they ran the gamut to really top people to adventurers and people who weren't really competent. But I would say, on the whole, as I said last time, the press did a better job of presenting accurately what was really happening than the embassy reporting, the CIA, and others such as USAID. I'd have to rank CORDS reporting way down at the bottom because there was so much pressure to produce good results. Most of the bosses weren't interested in knowing what was really going on. They wanted to know how much money you spent, and they wanted to hear things that would allow them to say the programs were succeeding, when in fact most of them weren't succeeding at all. In fact, I kept a memo, I think I probably still have it, a directive from our regional headquarters in Nha Trang (Region III Headquarters) saying that the amount of money we spent would be an indication of our effectiveness and that we were not spending all the money that we had allotted. Never mind, they didn't know what we had spent it on or what the result wawe were just supposed to push the money out there and then report something positive to Saigon. The result was a jumble of meaningless statistics that they kept track of by computeso many tons of cement used to make so many school houses; so many Viet Cong laid down their arms, although we never were able to differentiate actual fighters from those poor souls who were just fleeing the horrors of war, like those scraggly Montagnards I mentioned earlier.

Anyway, the press was very good but even the best of them had their faults. I happened to be in Japan, towards the end of my tour in Sapporo, when David Halberstam of the New York Times won his Pulitzer Prize for Vietnam reporting. If you went back and looked at his reporting there was some brilliant investigative reporting and it put him on the map as a first rate correspondent, certainly one of the best and brightest among the correspondents. But the night he won the Pulitzer, I happened to be having dinner with the Times's man in Japan, Emerson Chapin, who was a senior editor on the foreign copy desk when I was a copy boy there. He was almost apoplectic about Halberstam's Pulitzer: he said almost every story Halberstam sent in had to be very carefully fact-checked because there were so many factual errors. He said ruefully, at the very least that Pulitzer should have been shared with the foreign copy desk because he and his fellow editors had to do so much heavy lifting to change Halberstam's often brilliant raw copy into a story that would meet the Times's high standards for accuracy, fairness, and depth. And while Halberstam certainly produced a lot of really good hard reporting, he was very loose with the facts and "The Times" was very scrupulous about those things. They had a huge "morgue" a ready reference capability, and a large number of fact checkers. Chapin said everything that Halberstam sent in had to be sent to the morgue to be fact-checked, and if anyone deserved the Pulitzer it was the fact checkers and editors.

Well, that's just one example. I don't mean to denigrate Halberstahe was one of the great ones. But even the best were mistaken at times, or careless. And when Halberstam left Vietnam for a while and came back a couple of years later, I believe, it's interesting that he came back to do kind of a Vietnam update and some fresh reporting, and he of course went back to his old sources. But the situation had moved on and those old sources were no longer the best people he should have been talking to. I'd bet if you dug out his reporting from this later period, it would seem rather undistinguished and a lot of it was probably flat out wrong. I don't have any particular pieces in mind, but that was my impression at the time, when I followed what the media were saying very carefully.

Q: How did you find dealing with what I would call the "amateur press corps"? I mean, they tended to get in trouble from time to time and this consul general- I and one of the other consuls had to go and bail them out or something because they were sort of an undisciplined group, sort of like coming for spring break, and reporting in an scattershot way. Did these types cause you much of a problem?

LENDERKING: They didn't cause me a problem because I didn't have to deal with them, and very few correspondents came to Pleiku. In Saigon and JUSPAO, my job didn't encompass dealing with the media, but rather trying to see that the huge number of products we issuenewspaper stories, films, book translations, photos, you name imet standards of credibility and accuracy. Also, I was one of the principal contacts with military psyops, and I have to say that despite a lot of energy and earnestness, backed up by DOD's limitless supply of resources, the products were generally amateurish and ineffective.

Now, back to Pleiku for a second: if correspondents did go there, they went to the Fourth Division to try and get the story about the larger battlela Drang Valley, and others. And they got the Fourth Division treatment about what the Fourth Division was doing. They didn't cover the pacification program, which was where the real war was being waged, and lost. The only two people I remember, the whole year I was in Pleiku, were Peter Kann and Robert Keatley of The Wall Street Journal. Peter Kann was one of the best of the correspondents who spent considerable time in Vietnam. He eventually went on to become president of Dow Jones and The Wall Street Journal. Robert Keatley spent less time in Vietnam and some years later become the managing editor of the "South China Morning Post" in Hong Kong. Anyway, both of them were very savvy, eminent reporters. I was grateful they chose to spend a whole day with me and the pacification program, so I showed them as much of the province as we could cover in a jeep in a day. We looked at the war from the grassroots, not through the eyes of some briefer at the Fourth Infantry Division. I felt that was the real way to understand what was going on, not just get your information filtered through the Army. The Army was great talking about weapons, orders of battle, set piece battles, estimated casualties. The subtleties of pacification tended not to be worth very much of their time. The Army briefers also, in my experience, put out a lot of misinformation. That is, they didn't intentionally distort, but they reported only one side and they didn't know very much about Vietnam, the people, or their history and culture. Since I attended our own local briefing in Pleiku every morning I knew what the briefers were saying. And I contrasted that with what I saw with my own eyes in driving around and talking to people. And then I could also hear what our briefers were saying in Saigon at the Five O'clock Follies.

Anyway, that is a long winded, roundabout answer, but in Vietnam I didn't have a lot of contact with the press. In later assignments, as the press attachï¿½ or the public affairs officer I was intimately involved with the media every day, especially in Italy, Thailand, Peru, Pakistan, and Washington.

Q: All right. Now, when did you leave Vietnam?

LENDERKING: In late 1969.

Q: And where did you go?

LENDERKING: I went back home and did a quick refresher in Japanese and was assigned as the chief of protocol at the American pavilion at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan. That EXPO, or World's Fair, was the biggest ever, and certainly one of the best. It was a huge success, and the Japanese went to extraordinary lengths to make it so. Also, it was the last Worlds Fair the U.S. participated in where we went all out to have a really first class pavilion, and put our best foot forward. And we did, and we had a huge impact, but unfortunately most of the world thought that Worlds Fairs had become redundant in the age of instant communications and they were probably right. But we had a marvelous pavilion, with huge crowds waiting patiently in the broiling summer sun to get in. Our pavilion was the biggest hit of the EXPO. As for me, I had gone from counterinsurgency in Vietnam to chief of protocol at the biggest Worlds Fair ever in the space of about three months. You can't beat that for variety.

Q: What was the period you were there?

LENDERKING: The EXPO, by international agreement, lasted five months, mid-April to mid-September. So I finished my Japanese refresher and went out to help with the setup and preparation of the pavilion in February and March of '70, and the opening was in April. And in the five months, if memory serves, something like 18 million people visited EXPO, and about 7 million came to our pavilion. We were of course hugely gratified, but we had terrible problems with crowd control and related problems.

Q: Describe what EXPO was about and what was shown and particularly what we were doing.

LENDERKING: As I said, this was maybe the last truly great truly World's Fair, or world exposition, the purpose of which was to present ideas and information to the world's people and governments that would spur innovation and progress. In earlier years, particularly around the late 19th century, these fairs had a tremendous impact because they would showcase innovations in technology, science, and culture and the arts. For EXPO 70, we had a commissioner general, Howard Chernoff, who was very effective in raising money, especially in fashioning a skillful pitch to Congress to fund the basic appropriation, and then visiting major corporate donors to get them to shell out big time. He did, and they did. We also had a very able and experienced professional staff, plus some gifted Japanese staffers. As Chernoff liked to say, "We're going in there with our first team," so we all felt we were part of something special.

Howard Chernoff was a genius at fund raising. At the time, he'd been a special high level advisor to the Director of USIA Leonard Marks, but he came from an extensive media background in the private sector and seemed to know everyone of influence on the face of the earth. So he raised a heap of money from corporate contributors and other people to supplement our congressional appropriation, which as I recall was about $13 million total, and we put on a really first rate pavilion. He'd go to a potential contributor, demand to see the top decision makers in the corporation, promised to take no more than 15 minutes of their time unless they wanted to ask him questions, and tell them what was going to be in the pavilion, how it would be totally first rate and genuine, only genuine artifacts used, and so on, and how their message could be showcased. And he'd also tell them they couldn't plaster commercial messages all over the place, but spell out exactly what we would do for them, which was considerable, while still preserving the integrity of the operation and avoiding crass commercialism.

That was the era of the moon walk, and somehow Howard wangled actual moon rock samples from NASA and most days it seemed like the whole world wanted to get inside to have a look at them. We also had the actual capsules used to transport the astronauts. No models or reproductions were allowed, and even the marks from reentry were clearly visible. Everything in the pavilion was an original. Sometimes the lines were so long, the people waiting to get in would have to stand outside as long as five hours in the hot sun. Many of the people who came to EXPO were Japanese from the country and had never seen anything like that, especially something as exotic as the moon rocks. So they would wait patiently, and never complain. Since we were there to present an image of America, making them wait became a big headache for us. So we built awnings to provide shade, and got the great golfer Billy Casper to come and give shotmaking exhibitions several times a day. We built a small platform for him and he would chip golf balls into the crowd, and they would catch them in their hats, and loved it. Japanese love golf more than any other sport and they all knew who Billy Casper was, so it was a big success. This was Howard Chernoff's idea, and he made it happen through his connections. It was an eye opener for me and my Foreign Service colleagues on the staff. We operated by the book, and the freewheeling way of doing things in the corporate worlyou scratch my back and I'll scratch yourwas rather new to most of us.

Another problem was also caused by our popularity. Of course we had a VIP entrance for special guests, and a range of favors depending on who they were, and I was in charge of all that. A lot of people tried to present themselves as VIPs (very important persons), who really were not. I dealt with arrangements for visitors ranking from emperors to kings, queens, political leaders, congressmen, senators, actors and actresses, corporate leaders, and other celebrities from around the world. They all felt they deserved special treatment and most of them did. I have to say most of them were very gracious and it was fun meeting them.

Q: Okay. Let's take a king or a queen or something; what would you do?

LENDERKING: We had to set up procedures from scratch, but we worked carefully with other pavilions and with the Japanese overseers of EXPO to handle VIP visitors on a reciprocal basis. Our problem was that we were so popular we were usually overwhelmed, every day. We had to learn to say no gracefully, or make alternative VIP arrangements. Sometimes there was a dispute over what kind of treatment we would give them. But if they were a king or a queen or someone of that rank we would treat them well. Most just wanted immediate access to the pavilion and a personable and knowledgeable guide to take them around, and we had some magnificent American university students who spoke Japanese to do that. Sometimes we'd offer them a drink in our lounge, or even a reception or luncheon or dinner in our small VIP restaurant, which was catered by Pan Am, still one of the world's top airlines at the time. Our pavilion was visually exciting and stimulating, and it would take maybe 45 minutes or an hour to go through it. Our lounge and restaurant weren't open to the public, but we had VIPs flowing through there every day. Some were so grateful to just sit down for a few minutes and have a glass of cold water, or a soda, or beer or something. Most weren't demanding at all. We formed a theory about VIPthe more eminent they were, the better they behaved. It was the ones who hadn't made it but who thought they should be in the big time that might be rude or demanding.

As for other corporate donors, Chrysler gave us 13 new cars, including a limousine for the commissioner general, so everything was first-class. We had Chivas Regal scotch and ample supplies of food for our receptions and a nice budget. So we did things right for people who were interested in our pavilion, and for people we wanted to contact. The large Consulate General staffers in Kobe/Osaka used us quite a bit for their purposes, and that was fine. They were also a bit jealous of us because we had a lot of fun, a dynamite pavilion, and excellent resources at our disposal. I think it was the first and only time in my entire Foreign Service career when everything we had at our disposal for representation was first rate, and we had ample supplies. The general Foreign Service experience throughout my career was to scroungmake the most of limited resources, scrounge amenities, pare guest lists (and thereby limit outreach capabilities to people who were important to U.S. interests, and so on. We all had that experience.

Q: How did the Japanese run the EXPO?

LENDERKING: As you might expect they were meticulous in planning and details. They were consummate organizers. The fair itself was designed with flair and imagination; sometimes their idea of what should happen and what we thought should happen would differ but they were usually very accommodating; they provided housing for our staff and for the commissioner general that was very comfortable and it was all new. They put in new metro lines and commuter access facilities and all kinds of infrastructure in suburban Osaka, and it was most impressive. I doubt if any U.S. city could do as well on such a large scale in such a short time, even with help from the federal government. In our federal system, authority is too dispersed, and organizing people on a grand scale is really beyond us except in emergencies like World War II.

Q: This is still the Cold War, still in full bloom. Were we competing with the Soviets?

LENDERKING: Yes. I'm really glad you asked that because it was one of the most interesting aspects of my experience. It was also amusing at times but it was also deadly earnest. For any younger people who read this, the Cold War was serious; the threat from the Soviet Union was serious; and the contest between us raged around the globe for 45 years.

In Osaka, the Soviets put up a huge paviliothey were there to make a statement about the attractiveness of their system, and to engage in competition with us, and they wanted to win. Their pavilion was about twice the size of ours, and dominated the landscape at a different corner of the EXPO than ours. We were clearly in competition. We had two Americanl and a deputy, Pat Wazer, who was very knowledgeable and correct, although underneath it also an iconoclast - in charge of our protocol operation and six really excellent Japanese local hires who were just super young people. We worked fast and furiously for long hours and without our bilingual Japanese staff we couldn't have been successful. The Soviet Pavilion was enormously popular and they had a lot of talent and impressive exhibits, but our pavilion was the one "must see" attraction at EXPO. Among the Soviet professional staff there were quite a few spies, KGB agents, and their thinking was that EXPO was a good place to put their KGB people because they naturally came into contact with all kinds of personages and people and they could pursue their own interests with a perfect cover. My counterpart in the Soviet pavilion, who I met very early on - we sought each other out - was a KGB person. He did not identify himself as such but we were able to find that out, with the help of our agency personnel downtown.

A number of the high ranking people in the pavilion were also KGB agents and their cover was their protocol office. The funny part of it was that they assumed that I was, of course, a high ranking CIA person and they paid a lot of attention to me. In other words, they naturally assumed that we would do things the same way they did. You could conclude that maybe this was a reflection of Soviet provincialism, and one of the flaws of their system. Here is another example: they had a large number of guides, and they all spoke perfect unaccented English. It was really impressive, the more so when I discovered that none of them had ever been outside of the Soviet Union before. In other words, they put these attractive young people through a rigorous and lengthy language training that went far beyond what I had in Japanese, and that was quite rigorous in itself. That is, after two solid years of doing nothing but study Japanese I could get around well, had a good professional vocabulary, could read most sections of a newspaper, and could engage in professional conversation with educated people. But my fluency was not the same as these young guides, who spoke English like American university students, but without the slang. But here's the flaw: Howard Chernoff, our commissioner general, insisted that all our guides would represent a cross section of multi-ethnic America, and they all had to pass a fluency test in Japanese. Very few of the Soviet guides spoke Japanese, so in a sense their command of English was somewhat wasted, although they were able to provide good explanations of their pavilion in English. But Chernoff wisely never let us forget that we were there to reach out to the Japanese, so all of our guides were able to take a Japanese group through the pavilion and communicate with them, or escort Japanese VIPs through the pavilion and give them a fun tour in Japanese. I must have had hundreds of compliments from Japanese VIPs about our American guidethey were so obviously American, yet they all spoke Japanese, having learned it in university, from their parents if they were Japanese-Americans, or through exchange programs.

If the American people and our congressmen ever understood clearly what a tremendous impact at low cost something like this has, we wouldn't have to go begging every year for funds, while the Pentagon gets almost a carte blanche to produce weapons. Of course we need weapons; that's not the point. But we also need to communicate effectively with people and their leaders and we often sadly neglect that aspect of foreign policy.

Anyway, back to the Soviets, who considered me a very important CIA agent. My protestations to the contrary - that I was just exactly who I said I wawere regarded as cleverness. They used to say to me, "Bill, you're very clever, but we really know who you are," and they paid me an awful lot of attention and treated me as a much more important person than I really was. But another advantage we had was that we had CIA people elsewhere, where the Soviets did not.

So we did not need to have agents working in our pavilion. I met with CIA colleagues occasionally, perhaps several times during the course of Expo, on contacts I had and especially who in the Soviet pavilion might be spying, and we were able to identify many who were KGB agents and those who were legitimately working on just protocol. The CIA had pictures of many people they thought were agents and I was able to identify many of them. They had a lot of KGB agents in the pavilion, and in due course they tried to entrap me.

Q: How did that work?

LENDERKING: It was kind of amateurish. I was very friendly with my counterpart, and we got along well, even though I knew he was KGB. The business side of our relationship we both handled quite efficiently, and that was dealing with scores of VIPs high on the other's daily lists. We sent quite a few of our VIP visitors to the Soviet pavilioit was large and imposing and second in popularity only to our own, but Sergei often sent us hundreds of their so-called VIPs at a time, creating logistics problems for us. We had a complicated pavilion in that the roof consisted of a translucent fabric that was held up by air. The effect was magical, because the large building had no posts or beams, and the roof let in lots of sunlight, so the effect was light and airy. But to keep the roof from collapsing two airtight doors were required, and they could only be opened one at a time or the roof would collapse. So it was logistically difficult getting hundreds of VIP visitors into the pavilion at one time. Further, they weren't really VIPs, but ordinary Soviets off the tourist ships, and Sergei promised anyone who came ashore VIP access to the U.S. pavilion. It got so bad, Chernoff, who had a small bantyish physique but was afraid of nobody, marched down to the Soviet pavilion and into the office of the Soviet commissioner general, and said "you're leaning on us and you've got to stop it." I wasn't there but I heard the effect was electric: the astonished Soviet CG, expecting to receive his American counterpart and bestow some affability and hospitality on him, but being instead confronted by an indignant American with some ridiculous complaint on his mind...well, I'm sure it was a shock.

Incidents like those provided some laughs, and weren't serious because they were quickly forgotten in the crush of business. And, we all knew that we were there to create good will so Chernoff and everyone else in our pavilion were hospitable to the Soviets and we got along well, although we kept them at a distance. For example, we didn't invite them to our small intramural parties where the guests would usually be favored Japanese from the EXPO staff, and friends from other pavilions. It was too risky that the Soviets would make some contacts or compromise someone who might have had too much to drink. So we were friendly, but careful.

As for my counterpart, Sergei, he was smart and charming, and spoke good English. It was usually easy to identify KGB agents even without the help of the CIA because they generally were more sophisticated, spoke good English, and had much more freedom to move around EXPattend parties and official receptions, stay out late, and so forth. We enjoyed arguing politics with each other and would run to see each other at receptions. He was very visible and well known, and it was hard not to like him. He also was working hard to further his country's interests. And he beseeched me one time; several times actually, to go with him to a massage parlor in downtown Osaka that he said was popular with the people in the Soviet pavilion and it would be a very nice experience. It was such an obvious setup it was ludicrous. I told him very firmly I had no interest in that proposal, but he asked me several more times, before he finally gave up. I was a bit disappointed that a slick outfit like the KGB would try something so obvious and amateurish, but I guess they nailed quite a few people through that kind of thing during the course of the Cold War, so for them it probably was worth a try. If I had gone they would have taken pictures and tried to blackmail me.

Q: Tell me more about our guides.

LENDERKING: We had 60 guides and they were super; I call them kids, because they all had the freshness of youth, but many of them were in their mid to late twenties and were in graduate school or professional jobs. As a group, they were bright, they knew about Japan, and they were a diverse bunch so they really reflected many aspects of our society.

Q: Were they mostly Nisei, or Sansei (second or third generation), or were some of them what we might call Anglo-Saxons?

LENDERKING: There were a few with obvious Asian heritage, but most were not. And the Japanese were surprised and pleased that people who had no ancestral connection with Japan whatsoever had taken the time to study their country's history and culture and learn their language. To see the impact of that realization was a kind of revelation. Also, I think almost a third of the 60 were Mormons who had been in the Mormon system as overseas missionaries, and we called them the M Squad because they were very aggressive. They did some proselytizing too, in a good natured way, but they were among the most self-disciplined and reliable of the guides. I had a lot of contact with them because they were dealing with the public, and if I wanted a tough job done I almost always would go to one of them and they would get it done. They were superb.

Q: Did you get any movie stars or people that were well known in Japan who visited the pavilion?

LENDERKING: Oh sure. We had a huge number of people from Congress and the Senate. The one I remember best was Hubert Humphrey, who just like his reputation had a marvelous flair for people and was always behind schedule. But he went through the pavilion and just loved every part; he rhapsodized over the various sections and objects, and he was genuinely enjoying the experience. And later on that evening we had a reception for him, a huge reception, in a separate meeting hall, attended by all the VIPs we could round up. And my wife had gone through the receiving line a couple of hours before because I was still working in the pavilion. Altogether about 600 people attended that reception, and I came through the receiving line about an hour after my wife, and when I met him, he said "Oh, Mr. Lenderking, I had the pleasure of meeting your lovely wife a little while ago when she came through." He had an extraordinary memory for people and an ability to connect instantly with them. No wonder he was a successful politicians.

So we had a lot of people. Julie Nixon came out on National Day and represented the United States and she was very gracious. Nixon was of course president at that time. We had a number of movie stars, Dina Merrill and her husband, many others. Dina Merrill was not only beautiful and gracious, but an expert in her own right on art and some of the modern structures we had in our exhibit. Quite a few eminent people came through, celebrities of all kinds, every day.

Q: Who designed the pavilion?

LENDERKING: We'd had a competition to choose the design team and the winner was Ivan Chermayeff, an architect and designer very well known in New York and design circles, and he designed the pavilion. I mentioned the inflatable rooyou could walk on it as long as it was fully pressurized, and it was a very innovative structure. The effect on the inside of the pavilion was almost magical.

The guiding artistic spirit, though, was a USIA career Foreign Service officer named Jack Masey, who in 2007 still worked for the Chermayeff company in New York. He has done a lot of major exhibits, such as the marvelous one on immigration on Ellis Island. He'd also done the U.S. pavilion at Montreal for EXPO 67, which some said was even better than our exhibit at EXPO 70. I think doing these two major exhibits and pavilions were his crowning achievements in USIA. In those days, we had a full time design section: USIA had been put in charge of U.S. participation at all foreign expositions, so our exhibits people designed these but also a series of traveling exhibits, large and small, that we sent around the world. Budget cutting and developments in the way people communicated with foreign countries changed all that, but it was beautiful and impressive while it lasted. And maybe it's true that mounting those huge exhibits was not cost effective when the world moved to instant communication, but they were beautiful, substantive, and said something about America that made an impression on people, and there is nothing we do overseas now outside of the Olympics that has nearly the impact.

Q: What was the Japanese public response? What was your impression?

LENDERKING: Oh, they loved it. And the one thing that everyone wanted to see was the moon rocks. Well, to look at they are just rocks, even if they were mounted in a revolving glass case with special lights shining on them. But the Japanese also responded well to the rest of the exhibit - we had a sports section, a section of space exploration which had three or four space capsules that had actually been in space; a modern art section; and an antique section with genuine old objets, and they were all great crowd pleasers and the Japanese just loved it. We had relevant music piped through each section, and a great collection of contemporary prints, and we were all pleased that the vitality and diversity of America was displayed so creatively, with no bluster or boasting but with a lot of verve and energy.

I mentioned the appearances of Billy Casper to keep the crowds from wilting in the sweltering heat; he was there for two weeks. And we had a crew of professional folk singers who also performed every day. They were the only ones permitted to have beards or facial hair of any kind. In accordance with the custom of the period, I had let my hair grow so it was quite thick and long, over my ears, although I didn't have a beard or mustache. But Chernoff made me cut my hair short; he was very positive about what kind of image he wanted the pavilion in its entirety to project, and he was right. Guides and staff were to look fresh and clean cut; folk singers were folk singers and beards were welcome. We also passed out refreshments to the crowd from time to time, but we had to be careful because there were thousands more people than we could accommodate with those gestures.

Q: Well then, so late 1970 you left Japan?

LENDERKING: Yes. EXPO closed on September 15, I think. I stayed on for a few days to write the necessary reports about the protocol section and what we did, and then I left.

Q: And where did you go next?

LENDERKING: I was offered the job of director of the American Center in Kyoto, which was one of the top centers anywhere because of the cultural and historical importance of Kyoto and its being a university and intellectual center. And that job was very attractive but I'd been away from America for so long I really felt out of touch with my own country, especially because so many changes were happening so quickly. The Vietnam war, women's lib, music, dress, language, and behavior were all changing rapidly. I'd already had five years in a row in Japan before Vietnam, so I was ready to come home. So I became the desk officer for Japan, Korea and Micronesia in USIA.

Q: And you did that from when to when?

LENDERKING: I did that for the rest of 1970 until mid 1972.

Q: So we are talking about probably '71 to '72?

LENDERKING: Yes, that's right. After my desk officer job, which was busy and interesting, I was the head of Policy, Plans and Research in the large policy planning office of USIA.

Q: Well one of the things that I guess took place, a new Japanese word, "shokku." (shock). Can you talk about that? Because you must have gotten involved in that. I'm referring to the opening to China, known in Japan as the "Nixon Shokku." It was in '71 or '72. Anyway, it was during your time there. The announcement that Kissinger had gone to China and we had not told the Japanese until the last minute...

LENDERKING: Yes. There is a marvelous story connected to that. What I recall is that it must have been when Alexis Johnson took over as ambassador from Edwin Reischauer, who was a great ambassador. I think the Japanese ambassador to the U.S. was named Asakai, and he told senior people in our government that he had a recurring nightmare that he hoped we would avoid giving him at all costs, and that was that he would wake up one morning and read in the paper that we had gone ahead and recognized Communist China. It was a grave matter for the Japanese because successive governments had stood up to a tremendous amount of domestic pressure by resisting chances to draw closer to Communist China. They did this because they felt that the American connection was their number one alliance, so they took a lot of flak, but it was painful for them. It was such an important matter for the Japanese that the possibility of our normalizing relations with Communist China without telling the Japanese came to be known as "Asakai's nightmare." We of course repeatedly assured the Japanese we would do nothing of the sort without full consultations with them beforehand and then we went ahead and did it. To find out we had actually made a major overture to China behind their backs would seem to them something like the ultimate betrayal. But that is exactly what happened, and the Nixon shokku was the fulfillment of "Asakai's nightmare."

Q: Well, what were you doing during this period, as Japan desk officer?

LENDERKING: We had a very active USIA program, information and culture, to administer and so I was the backup and the point of contact and expertise in USIA in the East Asian office for everything like that. Our job, simply stated, was to be the post's backup in Washington for anything they needed, whether it was personnel, policy guidance, support for producing new information materials, cultural presentations, everything. And we also relayed Washington's concerns and suggestions to the post. We had a very innovative PAO in Japan, Alan Carter, who was trying to put in all kinds of new ways of communicating -super graphics, faster response on policy topics, more serious and focused intellectual content in all our products, you name it. He wanted to introduce a lot more of the exciting ferment that was going on in American culture at the time, the early 70s. Alan was very imaginative and forceful, but there were a lot of old guard traditionalists in USIA who often regarded new ideas as trendy fads that would quickly run their course. So there were strong disagreements, but it was good for USIA, and Alan's ideas quickly permeated throughout the agency, particularly among the younger officers. Many of them were put into practice and were effective. I don't recall specifics, but I suppose that some of them were discarded along the way. But Alan's watchword for judging these ideas was, "quality, relevance, speed." Those are still viable criteria and I'm convinced that if the Bush administration's practitioners of public diplomacy had applied those simple criteria to some of their ideas (instead of being prisoners of the neo-conservative ideology, which had some interesting aspects but also displayed an appalling ignorance of the rest of the world), our response to 9/11 would have been much more effective.

I'm of course oversimplifying a bit, but this was the essence of it. So, returning to the 70s, I was the post's representative in Washington in selling their ideas to the bureaucracy, to the various support elements in USIA in Washington that were responsible for getting him the resources. And it was a little bit of a struggle and frankly I did a pretty good job but I could have done better. First, I had to resolve my own initial skepticism, but Alan was such an articulate and forceful advocate that he quickly convinced me. The end result, anyway, was that USIA programs improved and the innovations caught the Japanese attention.

As for your original question, I don't recall how the post dealt with the reverberations of "Asakai's nightmare," but Alan's insistence on quality, relevance and speed meant that we responded directly to our critics with authoritative answers to their criticisms.

Q: Did you find that there was a pretty good connection between what was going on in advertising, education and other areas of the civilian world regarding communicating across cultures, influencing people and getting people to do things?

LENDERKING: Yes, Alan was quite interested in communications theory and introduced a note of realism to USIA's way of thinking. He borrowed some concepts from the academic world regarding the process of communication, starting with awareness, to understanding, to agreement, and finally to active support for our viewpoint. He stressed that it was illusory to suggest that any information program, except in unusual circumstances, could ever achieve the final steactive support. But it could and should strive for awareness and understanding among our target audiences, and that was difficult enough. Occasionally, we might persuade people that our viewpoint was correct and win over some of our critics, but that was unlikely. It was good for USIA to come to terms with those concepts, because one of its traditional weaknesses was a tendency to exaggerate its achievements in order to justify its existence. That in fact, was one of the chief defects of reporting by CORDS in Vietnamany CORDS employees in the field confused activities with results. Alan Carter and those who were influenced by him played a big part in educating USIA on realistic assessments of our activities.

USIA then and certainly later on was able to call on really good people, Americans, to travel to posts as speakers and participate in special seminars, conferences and discussion programs and the Japanese were receptive to those. Almost always we were able to get an impressive turnout from leading Japanese intellectuals and other opinion leaders. We had center directors who were for the most part very energetic in getting to know the people in their cities who were important in their various fields and getting them interested so they would be receptive to these initiatives. So, what the Japan program achieved in those days was to have a very high quality exchange of ideas and information on all sorts of subjects with a great cross-section of Japanese opinion leaders. That may sound easy, but it isn't, and it's my opinion that very few posts in the world had that same quality.

Q: What about Korea? Here you were, you studied Japanese, served in Japan, a real Japanese expert, and all of a sudden you have Korea on your plate too. The Japanese and the Koreans don't have the happiest of relationships and the Japanese tend to think themselves quite superior to the Koreans. Did you find yourself infected with some localitis when you first took this on in looking at Korea, and were you perhaps looking at northeast Asia from a Japanese point of view or not?

LENDERKING: Yes, to some extent, unfortunately. But I also was dismayed by some of the Japanese attitudes that were really just raw, naked prejudice. I remember one eminent woman telling me I know exactly how you people in America feel about blacks because we feel the same way about Koreans. If I am in a swimming pool and I see a Korean in a swimming pool I get out of the swimming pool; I will not stay in the swimming pool if there is a Korean there. I tried to correct her and she said no, no, I know what you have to say, you are an American diplomat but I know how you really feel. So nothing I could say had an impact on her.

On another occasion, an eminent Japanese, I think it was the Governor of Hokkaido, who as I said earlier was a man I both respected and admired, told me the Koreans were "difficult" people. When I asked why he thought so, he answered, "When we occupied Taiwan, we got along very well with the people there. There were very few incidents and it was a successful occupation. But in Korea, the Koreans gave us nothing but trouble, even though we had the same colonial policy as we did in Taiwan. They are difficult and stubborn people."

This eminent Japanese was a staunch conservative and anti-communist, and had lived through the periods he was talking about, so he was at least reflecting honestly his views as an old colonialist. But I was flabbergasted by his point of view.

But certainly there was a feeling that Koreans were the sort of people who would come into your house with mud on their shoes and be a bit rough and aggressive. You have to fight those stereotypes. While I was in Japan, my exposure to Korean people and intellectuals was much more limited and I didn't speak the language, but your obligation as a human being and a professional diplomat is to fight prejudice and stereotypes and keep a balanced view. My experience with Koreans was that they tended to be more open and direct; you did not have to wade through a lot of polite verbiage to have a substantive conversation with them. They would get to the point much quicker, and although I was fierce in my enjoyment of Japan and respect for the Japanese people, I found my limited encounters with Koreans interesting and refreshing.

Q: Just to give you the GI point of view, I served as an enlisted man first in Japan and then in Korea. This was the middle of the war, you know, the place was devastated. But I found that the Koreans were kind of like Americans. I mean, if you shove them, they would shove back, you know what I mean? It was very straightforward. Now as far as Japan was concerned, there was too much bowing and all that for an American GI. I later went back as consul general to Seoul 25 years later and I found the Koreans very refreshing. They were awfully hard working, almost embarrassingly so. But you did pick up a prejudice, their prejudice against the Japanese as their former oppressors who had done everything they could to grind them down and there was just no love lost there at all. But having also served in Yugoslavia where I watched the Croatian/Serbian prejudice and how it affected even the American officers serving at post in Croatia and Serbia, I was just curious whether you noticed that your colleagues in Japan had this infection of looking down at Korea.

LENDERKING: Well, it was there, but it wasn't much in evidence. I think it was manifested mostly in a sense that we in Japan were working in one of the most complex, interesting, and important countries in the world, and matters Korean simply took a back seat most of the time. I didn't have the same depth of experience that you had in Korea, but there was a large Korean population in Japan. A lot of those people tried to mask their identity in one way or another because there was prejudice against them, including job prejudice. It was tough for them, no doubt about it. I was very sympathetic to them and I am certainly sympathetic to the Korean community that I see here today in Washington, robust, hard working, all those good qualities that I'm sure you're very familiar with.

Q: Yes, in Japan the Korean community is divided between the North and the South. I was also surprised that there is a strong community sympathetic to North Korea; I would think that North Korea is so horrible, that once they were in Japan their allegiance would shift away from North Korea.

LENDERKING: In fact, the organization representing the North Koreans, Chosen Soren, I think it was called, was much larger and more powerful than the South Korean organization. Because most Japanese perceived North Korea as hostile, this had a certain traction among Koreans who had experienced prejudice in Japan. In other words, the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Q: Do you recall any crises where you had to mobilize any big public affairs campaigns?

LENDERKING: I don't recall any special mobilizations, but we spent an awful lot of time on the nuclear issue and whether our nuclear ships could call at Japanese ports or whether any of our ships that did call were carrying nuclear weapons. And that is controversial to this day. We spent a lot of time crafting what we could say about that.

How did you feel our operations in both Japan and Korea were funded and run?

LENDERKING: I think the talent pool we had at the American embassy was the best of any embassy I served in. Many of my colleagues spoke good Japanese and found service in Japan challenging and stimulating. They took the time to learn about the country and build contacts. Collectively, we had a lot of country expertise, and an ambassador, Edwin Reischauer, who encouraged us to learn more and get out and talk to people. When we had meetings in Tokyo, he encouraged younger officers from the field to speak up and not just sit quietly while the section chiefs in Tokyo imparted wisdom. Owen Zurhellen, head of the political section for a time, used to take his subordinates to lunch and challenge them to read difficult kanji. Later, when I went to the Embassy in Rome, I was surprised to find very few fluent Italian speakers and very few American officers who knew much about Italian history and culture. Many of them were just happy to be in Rome and thought they had really arrived if a wealthy Italian conservative invited them for Sunday lunch at his place in the country. Of course, they absorbed partisan views very quickly and many of them had warped judgments, in my view. There was certainly not the same commitment to serious analysis and country expertise that I'd experienced in Japan. This was surprising and disappointing to me, because Italy was not only a delightful country, it was crucially important to us, and was going through difficult times. Further, Italy is an extremely complex modern country, and Italians, although charming, are far from easygoing and laid back.

Q: What about the Pacific islands? What were we doing there?

LENDERKING: Well, we had minimal presence there except in a couple of places like Fiji and Papua New Guinea, where we had small embassies. In the smaller islands, our USIA activities were pretty much limited to occasional visits and finding good people from the universities there to accept Fulbright grants, or studies at the East West Center in Honolulu. We didn't have much in the way of money or resources, but the challenges were minor compared to the complexity of our relationships with Japan and Korea. I just didn't have enough time and there were too many places to visit to get into that very deeply. The problem is that if you have a national interest even in some out of the way place like most of the Pacific islands, you ignore it at your peril. George Shultz, who I thought was a superior Secretary of State, once said, "Diplomacy is more like gardening than architecture, and you'd better water your garden and nurture your plants every day if you want to be successful."

Q: Well then, about '73 you left that job. Then what?

LENDERKING: I was anxious to get out of East Asia for awhile and an opportunity arose to go to Europe. We used to have one person a year go to the Bologna Center of Johns Hopkins, part of the School of Advanced International Studies, and that was usually a springboard to getting an assignment in Europe. So I applied for that. I don't think many people knew about it, but it was an incredibly plum assignment. So I got it and went to Bologna for a year and quickly came to feel our policy in Italy was off track. Even in Bologna, where we did not have any representation at all but I as a USIA person was supposed to stay in contact with a few minor and mostly pro-American, anti-communist businessmen and give them encouragement and occasionally materials that they could use, the poverty of our imagination was evident to most people except the US Embassy in Rome. It was pathetic.

Q: Well, this is part of the Red Belt, was it not?

LENDERKING: Yes. Bologna was a communist city but a communist city unlike I had ever seen before. It was very prosperous and bourgeois. And I almost lost my job in Italy right off the bat, for recommending that Ambassador Volpe visit Bologna. I had run my idea by a few prominent citizens of Bologna, and they wanted to have a closer relationship and contacts with Americans, but they told me if Volpe came he would absolutely have to call on the Mayor, who was a popular figure and a Communist. Otherwise his visit would be seen as a snub by all Bolognesi, and resented.

At the time, our firm policy in Italy was absolutely no contact with any communist official, university professor or journalist. The idea was that any contacts would "confer legimacy" on the Communists and it was better to circle the wagons and isolate them. If you think that this idea is conceptually bankrupt, counter-productive, or simply ineffective, please consider that we are still clinging to something similar in regard to Iran in the year 2007. Anyway, after doing this informal canvassing, I duly relayed this information to the Embassy in Rome and after a while I was told I'd caused a ruckus and they were considering whether it was safe to have me come to Rome as press attache.

Anyway, I survived and after Bologna I did go to Rome as press attachï¿½ for two years and I did lose my job, eventually.

Q: Who was the head of the Bologna Center when you were there?

LENDERKING: A young scholar by the name of Simon Serfaty, who was there for several years. I was the oldest guy among the student body and all but one or two of the faculty and I was older than Simon. But I was there as a student and I got along with my fellow students, almost all of them recent graduates, and even a few undergraduates. There was a lot of suspicion of me at first, especially among the Europeans. They all thought I was a CIA agent come to spy on them and it took me awhile to just be a student along with them. So it was a very interesting assignment; of course, I'd had no experience in Europe and I plunged right into this kind of total immersion, with all the different nationalities of Europe represented. It was a really great educational experiencmy subject was the international relations of Europe. I got along well with both the students and with the director and on occasion I was useful in an informal way when issues arose between the administration and the student body.

Q: Well what was the Bologna Center doing?

LENDERKING: The Bologna Center of SAIS was set up to train American and European graduate students, plus a few "outsiders," in the social sciences of Europe. So it was basically international politics and the economics of Europe. Johns Hopkins offers a two year Masters, and there was an option to take the first year in Bologna. It was an excellent program, similar to the Fletcher School at Tufts University.

Q: What was the state of the art in teaching political science at the Center? I ask this because political science has changed over the years.

LENDERKING: The best way I can answer that is that we had a very international faculty, mostly Europeans, French, German, Italian, and English, plus a few Americans. They all brought their national and ideological perspectives to how they taught a particular course, whether it was Italian history from independence to the present day, or economies of France and Germany or something; they were regular university courses but you had very different perspectives among the faculty, and ideological leanings from conservative to radical socialist.

Q: Were ideological differences and methodological approaches very pronounced?

LENDERKING: I suppose so. There certainly were people who had sharp political views. There was a German professor who was very popular who said he was not a Marxist but certainly sounded like a Marxist to me. I took one of his courses and found it very interesting but he was clearly presenting a pro-Marxist point of view. And there was another one, an eminent Frenchman, who was quite the opposite, much more conservative. Most of the students, European and American and a smattering of others, were on the left.

Q: Did the Cold War intrude at all while you were there?

LENDERKING: Vietnam was a big issue, and there were frequent discussions, formal and informal, among students and faculty, which is what you'd expect in an academic atmosphere. It was stimulating and I wasn't horrified that most of the students were on the left. In due course, if they continued their studies, extremist views would be leavened out. I was there from September 1973 to June 1974.

Q: Did the ambassador ever get to Bologna or not?

LENDERKING: He did not.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

LENDERKING: It was John Volpe

Q: Yes, I have talked to people who served under Volpe. You served under him for awhile?

LENDERKING: Yes.

Q: Well, we'll talk about that.

LENDERKING: Okay.

Q: In '73, what would you say was the state of politics in Italy? Maybe the same state they were in '48, but how would you describe it?

LENDERKING: The overriding issue certainly for us and it seemed to me for Italians was the situation of the communists, the opening to the left and keeping...

Q: Apertura a sinistra.

LENDERKING: Yes, the Apertura a sinistra, the opening to the left; and whether the communists would be allowed into the government and if this would be the precursor for a takeover and the unraveling of our interests in Europe. So that was the issue. I think U.S. foreign policy was overdue for a change. It had become more than a bit creaky as far as Italy was concerned and did not take into account enormous changes that had occurred in Italian society since 1945. That phenomenon is nothing new in U.S. foreign policy. In 2007, we're still suffering from the same obscured vision in various parts of the world. For example, finally in late 2006 we realized that our keystone alliance with South Korea, which buttressed all our vital interests in Northeast Asia, would come apart if we didn't make some changes. The main irritant was the huge American military presence in metropolitan Seoul, accompanied by the inevitable tragic incidents, in this case when a runaway military truck ran over and killed two Korean schoolgirls. Of course there was an uproar from the Koreans, fueled by many grievances. The Alliance, which remains of vital importance to us, could have been derailed had we not taken action. Finally, by mid-2007, months of negotiations had wrought a transformation, a key portion of which was the relocation of our GIs out of Seoul, at a cost of billions, to be paid by the ROK for some things such as land acquisition and relocation of Koreans, and the U.S. for new housing construction.

Anyway, back to Italy. The U.S. was rigidly holding onto attitudes in the embassy and back in Washington that were not related to the reality of Italian life and the policy was therefore a failure, and had become counterproductive.

Q: Well, talk about the embassy. What was your impression of Ambassador Volpe?

LENDERKING: He was a well meaning man. He had come from one of the poorest sections of Italy, and done well in America. He was self-made, very proud of his Italian heritage and very proud of being a prominent American. He became prosperous in the construction business. He had a lot of things in his rï¿½sumï¿½ that he was proud of and I think he felt it was a culmination of his life and career to go back to Italy and represent his country to Italy, the country of his birth. That is a very commendable feeling and entirely natural but it was also a recipe for disaster. Unfortunately, sophisticated Italians in Rome, of course very conscious of the bella figura, and one's status, regarded John Volpe not as a returning native son they were proud of, but as a bumpkin from a provincial backwater of Italy. To them, Volpe's less than perfect Italian, laced with out of date phraseology from the provinces, was not impressive, and they mocked him in a way that I'm sure was hurtful to him. This does not reflect well on the Italians, but also, Volpe's behavior was also partly responsible. He sometimes tended to look down a bit on his former countrymen for the various things that had plagued Italy for many years. He also was a rigid anti-communist, and in my view failed to achieve a realistic understanding of the profound changes that were underway in Italy.

Q: Yes, perhaps it was a little bit like an Italian ambassador coming here and speaking hillbilly English.

LENDERKING: That's right. So in some ways he was treated maliciously by the Italians, especially the sophisticates of Rome and the big cities but also he did a lot to strengthen that stereotype by insensitive behavior. By this I mean that he was a very proper man and never did anything wrong in that sense but I don't think he had any real feel or understanding for contemporary Italy. Despite conservative institutions like the Church, in many ways Italy is not a conservative country politically and I think he felt that his way of doing things and looking at the world should be a lesson for the Italians to emulate, and they weren't buying that.

Q: Was anyone on the public diplomacy side trying to get to him and say, look, going out and speaking in your poor Italian does more harm than good and that sort of thing? Had anybody tried this?

LENDERKING: He had a special assistant who was a good guy, also quite politically conservative but smart and much more politically aware than the ambassador. He had also gone to Dartmouth; I did not know him then. But he was kind of an interlocutor and he could talk to Volpe but I don't think he had much success because Ambassador Volpe was a very proud man and not a good listener. He was also exceedingly sensitive to any perceived slights, so it was very difficult to even suggest to him in a roundabout way that you shouldn't say that because you will rub people the wrong way. I must admit, I didn't try that much, nor did my USIS bosses, the PAO and Deputy. It was a big embassy; I didn't have that much one-on-one time with him.

Q: Well let me see, you were the press attachï¿½. Tell me what a press attachï¿½ does in a huge embassy like Rome.

LENDERKING: Well, I was the information officer for USIS as well, which meant I was in charge of a large information section that handled the various daily and long term information programs that were directed at giving Italians a more accurate picture of American society, culture and foreign policy and countering the many distortions and inaccuracies that dogged us every day. We had a pretty large section, but my time was almost totally devoted to dealing with the press, and that was also my personal inclination. This was where the action was, in both a policy and a practical sense.

For example, there were 12 or 13 daily newspapers in Rome alone that I had to read, or at least skim, in Italian, plus weekly political magazines, plus the English language press, to see what was going on. The media were pretty aggressive; they were looking out for the slightest indication that our policy might be changing and anything any of us said ran the risk of being inflated or distorted, with resulting big headlines. So I felt I was under the gun from the Italians all the time to answer inaccurate or distorted allegations, and the way I answered them would sometimes be distorted. We were holding the line on an outdated policy that I disagreed with, but I did my best to explain the policy and reasons for it, almost every day, it seemed. After all, even if trying to shun the communists was no longer a productive policy, it hadn't been formulated by idiots and there were genuine concerns about the communists coming to power and opening up the country to much wider Soviet interests.

Q: What was our policy, would you say?

LENDERKING: The policy was that we did not favor any communists in the government and we ourselves would not have any dealings with any communist party official. There was one person in the embassy other than the ambassador who was authorized to talk to communist party officials and he regularly met with some of the top people and he was a very close friend of mine.

Q: Who was that?

LENDERKING: Martin Wenick. He'd had experience in Moscow and was very wary of the communists, and especially the insistence of Italian communists that they were somehow different because they were part of a democratic country. But he was also scornful of the mindless and outdated knee-jerk anti-communism that radiated out from some of the guys in the political section and Washington. To this day, Martin is a very knowledgeable and pragmatic guy. You should get him to come for an interview because his recollections would be most valuable.

Q: Well, you know, you had been observing politics in other countries; what was your impression of Eurocommunism, as it was called at the time, and of Berlinguer, who was the communist party leader. This was supposed to be the new face of communism. What was your impression?

LENDERKING: Well, the communists always presented themselves that way, and it sometimes seemed it held open that promise, but there was still a lot to be skeptical about. Certainly the communists had open relationships with the Soviet Union. They had extensive trade, cultural relations, and close ties through the unions. But I found in Bologna I was not dealing with communist officials - I was not that foolish - but I certainly met in every day life people who supported the communist party for historical and purely Italian reasons. The problem is, the embassy and Washington made no distinction between the two, but the distinction was huge. Historically, the communists had been and still were the principal antagonists of the fascists, and to most Italians Mussolini was far worse than any Italian communist. Incidentally, I never heard any supporter of the PCI (Communist Party of Italy) praise Stalin, and they had more criticisms than praise of the Soviet Union. I always felt those attitudes could be exploited. Anyway, the communists were anti-fascist, they had been front and center in the fight against Mussolini. And in a city like Bologna some of the most eminent people in towyou might meet them at a party after the opera and they would be in their tuxedos and looking very elegant, with beautiful manners and very bourgeois tastes, from the really good families, not radical people at aland they would tell you why they supported the communists. And they were not naï¿½ve at all about communism; it is not that they wanted a Soviet type government in Italy, but they were tired of the same old corruption and politics as usual year after year. And I guess that is why the policy was called, the compromesso storico, the historical compromise of the communist party. So it is hard to convey a sense of how volatile this issue was and it was volatile in the United States too. Most Italo-Americans were far more conservative in their political outlook than mainstream Italians, so there was a disconnect on that level too. And there were people like Jeane Kirkpatrick, who became very eminent and a darling of the right wing, having evolved from her early Cold War position as a democratic socialist, later won her ambassadorship under Reagan at the UN by writing an article called "Dictators and Double Standards" in which she argued that communists were totalitarians and could not change and would not change, whereas other types of dictators, right wing dictators like Somoza or people like that would eventually go their way and they could evolve.

Well, it seems ridiculous at this point in time and in light of the astonishing demise of the Soviet Union, but the whole nub of my disagreement with American foreign policy is that I argued that nothing is inevitable and even communists can and would change and that the way to deal with them is not to ignore them or isolate them (because that is impossible) but challenge them to work within the democratic system. That was the whole thing I was arguing about. And there was a very strong group of democratic socialists, not the conservative kind in the U.S. but people of the socialist party who were quite critical of the United States but also were committed democrats, small "d", and we would not talk to them either because they were critical of us and didn't like our policies. They wanted us to be more supportive of the democratic forces and not just rally our wagons around the conservatives, which was our traditional way of doing things in Italy.

Q: Were you under constraints as far as who you could talk to and who you could not?

LENDERKING: Yes. The farthest I could go was to meet on occasion with an unabashedly pro-communist journalist who spoke good English and had lived in America, so we had some pretty interesting conversations. Of course I didn't agree with him, but I came to understand his point of view, and on some issues, such as gradually expanding contacts, I thought it would do some good, especially since we seemed to be so sure that the communists were wrong and we were right. Emotionally, I felt that if we had so much confidence in our system and way of life, why were we so reluctant to challenge the communists? I also met a lot of other journalists regularly, over lunch, whatever. Most of them were very critical of the U.S. and our foreign policy, even if they were staunch anti-communists. My Italian was pretty good by then so I had no problem in a one-on-one conversation with an Italian journalist or if he wanted a quote over the telephone I could do that. But the pro-communist I mentioned spoke very good English and I used to go to lunch with him as often as I could because he had some interesting ideas and was always trying to get the embassy to welcome the editor of his paper, who was a cultured man of some fame, with an important art collection and so forth. I could not go too far in recommending that kind of testing the waters because I would have cut the ground from under myself. And also there were a number of Italians, respectable, centrist Italians who thought it was very dangerous and naï¿½ve of us to be having any contacts with the communists. And they didn't like our current policies either, but didn't want us to go very far in changing them.

At one disastrous small dinner party, I invited this communist journalist, who was not an official, and his American wife to sit down with a very eminent columnist from Corriere della Sera, which was the leading Italian newspaper, and I thought just getting the three of us together would be a good way of airing views. Well, they did not get along at all and the eminent columnist left as soon as it was polite for him to do so. So that was a disaster, and it was clearly a blunder on my part. There were a lot of cross-currents in Italian society, not just political enmities, and they were beyond the understanding of any American in the embassy. Of course we relied on an excellent Italian staff, but they too had their own special agendas, and one had to be careful not to become a prisoner of our Italian staffers. I'm sure you had the same kinds of experiences along the way.

Q: Were you picking up any emanations from Portugal at the time? Because Portugal was going through something perhaps similar; you had these young officers in '74, I think, ,who had basically taken over the government and they were quasi communist and Kissinger was talking about practically yanking all dealings with them, wiping them out of NATO (North American Treaty Organization) and all that. And Frank Carlucci - and this is one of those great stories of the Foreign Service - was sent there and had enough clout as having been a sub-cabinet member and all, to essentially challenge Kissinger and say let me play this. And he played it masterfully and Portugal continued on its way. And I was wondering, this is where this whole debate about Eurocommunism was going on and was this something we could deal with, or at least the debate? But it sounds like you almost had a firewall about Italy back in Washington and within the embassy of not looking at this or dealing with it.

LENDERKING: The embassy was very rigid, although there were a few scattered silent dissenters like me, and it was under instruction from Washington to hold the line. Volpe, as I said, was not a sophisticated man and the nuances of Italian politics escaped him. He was a hardcore anti-communist and he certainly understood what Washington wanted. And his DCM (deputy chief of mission), who was a career Foreign Service officer-

Q: Who was that?

LENDERKING: Bob Beaudry; one of the few people in the embassy who actually was familiar with modern Italian history and understood something about Italy but he was very conservative, a devout Catholic, and his anti-communism sprang from his devout Catholicism. And many of the other people in the political section at that time, guys who had been around for quite awhile, and had served in Italy maybe ten or fifteen years before, came back in the 1970s and had a shock because they found out that the country had shifted to the left considerably and instead of understanding how that happened and what it was like they went into a kind of a paralysis that colored their views. There were a few exceptions, such as Marty Wenick, who was new to Italy but had a pragmatic experience with the Soviet Union, and who had no illusions about communism and a realistic understanding of contemporary Italy.

Q: Did the Vatican play a role? I realize we had separate diplomatic representation to the Vatican, which is a sovereign state, but the Vatican press and all that, was this something you dealt with?

LENDERKING: Not so much. Not surprisingly, a lot of Embassy officers had good contacts with the conservatives. They fed off each other, so one more rider in that wagon was not needed. I dealt more with the mainstream secular press. I can't remember any really substantive contacts I had with the L'Osservatore Romano, which I think is the name of the Vatican newspaper.

I felt the best thing I could do was try to open some contacts to the democratic left and I did that aggressively. I took some heat for ithe basic attitude was, "why would you want to have contacts with people who criticize us?" - but that was not prohibited. I was also trying to advance the idea within the embassy that the way to confront communism was to challenge them to work within the democratic system. The communists were always talking about how they could and would do that, so okay, make them do it and hold them accountable, instead of treating them as outcasts.

Q: How about the Christian Democrats? They were the party in power; I mean, they were going through frequent changes of government...What did you think of them?

LENDERKING: Well, the Christian Democrats had a huge apparatus with all kinds of aspects to it, and the communists were their counterparts on the left, with almost as large a following in national elections. In some ways they were mirror images of each other, although they were bitter enemies. The Christian Democrats ran the gamut from mainstream, very decent, solid interlocutors, to people who were so conservative that they sympathized with the fascists.

Q: You were up against sort of an Italian mafia within the embassy, to use a generic Italian term. I mean by this people who had been there for a long time, and this is one of the problems. Sometimes, you know, you get people who have become so attached to a country and also have been back so many times that they get rigid.

LENDERKING: Yes. And I think some of them thought that the best thing that could happen to them was to be invited by some rich family out for a day in the country in their villa outside of Rome, and the rest of Italy didn't exist for them.

Q: Did you pick up, I am speaking now as a former consul general in Naples, prejudice about the south?

LENDERKING: Sure; yes.

Q: I noticed I got it from my fellow officers when I went to Rome.LENDERKING: Yes, it's true. And I guess from my viewpoint the justification was that Milano was such an important city in terms of public opinion and media in Italy, and Torino to a lesser extent, I really had much more reason to concentrate on the northern part of Italy than the southern part. So I did that, and Sicily and Naples, where we had consulates, did not get as much attention.

Q: Well the feeling was reciprocated. You know, there would be a change in the government and there would be an excited set of cables about the latest change in this governmental minuet, asking "What is the impression down in the Naples area about this? Well, the impression down there was an absolute shrug.

LENDERKING: Yes. But it is interesting that a lot of the guys in the embassy didn't seem to have much of a serious interest about Italy, which as you know is an extremely complex country. They weren't familiar with Italian history. There were very few fluent Italian speakers. I was a newcomer and my Italian was already better than some of theirs. I was shocked at seeing that, with still vivid memories of our Embassy in Japan, where people worked hard and enthusiastically about learning more about Japan.

Q: What about Italian congressmen? Did you find yourself having to deal with them, and many of them have strong family or parochial interests in Italy. Right now the speaker of the House is of Italian-American descent, Nancy Pelosi, and she seems pretty solid. Did Italo-American congressmen show a lot of interest?

LENDERKING: Actually I didn't meet many. Remember, my portfolio was the Italian and foreign media. Other people in the Embassy, mostly the political section, dealt with visiting congressmen, and there must have been a bundle of them. I think we were more worried about Italian pro-fascists who would go to America and wangle a warm welcome from some American political VIPs, maybe get invited to the White House, and the press would be on us like Dobermans for flirting with Fascists. But among American congressmen, John Rooney came all the time. He'd buy a lot of things and who knows who ultimately paid for it. Certainly not Rooney, I'm reasonably sure. I remember hihe was very powerful.

Q: Oh yes; Brooklyn. Well I got a bellyful of them because we had an earthquake down in Naples when I was there in 1980 and every Italian-American in political office came down...

LENDERKING: I bet.

Q: -because this is where so many Italian-Americans came from, you know, so they were out appearing and showing their support...Now, on the Socialist side, did you get involved with the glitterati of the movie business at all?

LENDERKING: To some extent. I had a legitimate reason to deal with them and of course that was fun; the intellectuals, the culture gurus, and assorted opinion leaders. Of course, we could not socialize on their level, but occasionally an opportunity arose. For example, one time the great director Vicente Minnelli was in town making a picture, and I got the bright idea of asking him to do an informal meeting with us, maybe meet with students, intellectuals, aspiring film makers, whatever. We could pull together a good audience if we had an attractive headliner. So I just picked up the phone and called him at his hotel. He was very gracious and courteous and said, sure he'd be delighted to do it, no charge, provided his schedule permitted. Flushed with success, I promised to get right back to him and immediately went to enlist the aid of our head cultural programmer, plus the PAO and DPAO. I thought I'd landed a coup. Well, you wouldn't believe iinstead of snapping up an opportunity like that, they turned their backs and couldn't be bothered, simply because the idea wasn't theirs. So I had to abandon the project. There was a lot of that kind of territorial pettiness in the Rome Embassy and I found it unattractive.

But I did get to know some of the intellectuals who wrote columns for the leading newspapers. They were a fascinating group of people. As you know, many of the journalists there who are columnists are really considered essayists and they are part of the literary establishment as well because of their fluidity. And I had a number of good contacts among them. I'll give you an example. Do you remember Arrigo Levi of La Stampa, a socialist leaning newspaper in Turin but read nationally that often criticized us strongly? They were also strongly anti-communist and pro-democrat. Of course, many folks in the embassy couldn't make those distinctions.

Anyway, Levi was an elderly Italian Jewish intellectual, and one of the leading newspaper columnists in the country, widely quoted and with a number of well-regarded books published. And he was pretty hard on Volpe and American foreign policy, employing that marvelous facility for insult and vituperation that many Italians seem to have. When I arrived in Rome, I read his columns, and aside from the invective they were well-reasoned and made many good points. He was clearly a learned man. And so I went up to Turin and I said, would you have lunch with me? And he said sure. I think he sort of thought, here is this young naï¿½ve American, (I wasn't so young anymore but I was a lot younger than he), and he's the press attachï¿½ and he's come to see me; okay, why not? So he takes me to lunch at an elegant restaurant that served divine truffles and we have a lovely lunch and are getting along well. So I said, the next time you're in Rome, if you have time drop by the Embassy and I'd love to introduce you to the ambassador. I didn't know what his response would be, but he was clearly pleased, and said "I'd enjoy that so much." You see, no one from our Embassy had ever bothered to talk to the guy, one of the most eminent columnists in Italy. He wanted an American of some importance to say, "We know who you are, we read your columns, we take you seriously even though we don't always agree, and we respect you." You know, just a simple gesture like that.

So he came down to Rome from Turin, and you always worried with Volpe because you didn't know what he would do, but he could be also very gracious and he welcomed Arrigo Levi. I guess he had him to dinner or something and paid some attention to him and Levi was delighted. I don't mean he sold his soul for a bit of flattery and attention from the American ambassador, and he didn't change his basic viewpoint, but his tone moderated and he became accessible. And this is one of the top newspaper people in the country and no one had ever bothered to talk to him. So, there were a lot of examples like that.

Q: Well then, you left there, you say you got kicked out, but what happened?

LENDERKING: I wrote a dissent and I went to Tom Trimarco, who was the ambassador's special assistant, and I gave him a copy, intending to use a special State Department mechanism called the dissent channel. It was set up with some difficulty because AFSA, the American Foreign Service Association, had been trying since the McCarthy era to set up a procedure for Foreign Service officers who disagreed with policies to register their views without fear of reprisal, or being punished, passed over, or whatever. It was a formal process, and anyone who submitted a dissent was guaranteed to receive a formal response from the head of the Department's Policy Planning Staff. It was a great idea, and sorely needed, but most years it didn't work all that well. True dissenters willing to put their views on paper even in a protected channel were rather rarsome years there were only a handful of entries for the annual awards given by AFSA for "creative dissent." You see, this was not supposed to be a channel for malcontents and those with personal grudges, but a serious forum on policy. And what happened to me is perhaps instructive, although I couldn't claim it was typical.

Anyway, my dissent was basically along the lines I have described to you; hardly a revolutionary or radical idea, but it was a way of dealing with the communists and I said the present policy is a disaster and is bound to fail. My suggestion of challenging the communists and pressuring them to work within the democratic system had never been trieit was always considered too risky, or would open the Department to charges of "appeasement." Memories of the McCarthy era were still alive.

So Tom Trimarco, who I considered a friend as well as a colleague, said do not do this, it will end up hurting you. He offered this advice as a friend, but since he was also pragmatic, he could see no good coming of it, and might in fact get people worked up needlessly. I responded that it would be a test of the system. And Tom said, "You will test the system and find it wanting." All of those things came to pass, and my boss in USIS, the PAO in Rome, was no better; a nice guy who passed on about a year ago...

Q: Who was that?

LENDERKING: Bob Amerson. And you know, he just couldn't really cope with it so I didn't have any support in the embassy and I sent it off anyway. Amerson was basically a nice guy, but he was an old school minimalist. That is, press attaches in his eyes were flacks. He even told me one day, as a criticism, "we've never had a press attachï¿½ like you before," meaning I caused waves every now and then. Of course, I took it as a compliment. I was even invited to teach a course at Loyola University in Rome on Italian modern history since 1900, to a small class of American undergraduates, and Amerson nixed it, because he was afraid that I might say something controversial, in a small university classroom, to a group of American undergraduates. I couldn't believe it.

Press attaches, I guess, weren't supposed to think or use whatever brains they had. They were supposed to take what was given to them, a press guidance or whatever, and flack it to the media. That was never my concept for one minute, and the guys in USIA who were successful press officerand there were a lot of thefelt the same way, in my experience. And a lot of them had trouble with the front office, always fearful that they might say too much, wander off the reservation, utter a nuance that might seem critical of our policy makers. Bosses can be unbelievably uptight, especially if we're dealing with a controversial situation and there's a feeling that the world's eyes are on us.

Anyway, I certainly didn't go to a place like Dartmouth, be a defense counsel in a military court-martial, work for the NY Times, and enter the foreign service just to flack press guidances prepared by the public affairs office. If you have a good education in the U.S. you are most of all taught to think for yourself, not just regurgitate received information.

Anyway, back to my dissent cable. Those few people in Washington who read it - someone wrote me and said well, you can be assured that at least four people will read it - said it was good, well-reasoned, and made good sense. The next step was to see what the Department's formal response would be. I must emphasize that dissent papers were never given wide distribution inside the Departmenl don't recall seeing any of them other than my owso it was not like they received any widespread distribution.

But some weeks later it was time for me to go on home leave and Bob Beaudry called me in and says okay, you're going on home leave and you're not going to come back. In those days, and maybe still, an assignment like Rome was normally four years, with a six week home leave break in between. And I said, "Am I being fired?" And he said "no, you're just not being invited back." Well, I had only been there for two years and I had signed up for a four year tour so I was really upset about that but I wasn't surprised. So Tom Trimarco was right and that was the end of that.

Q: So then where did you go?

LENDERKING: Well, the story's not quite finished: My dissent cable went through Department of State channels, and USIA, as a separate agency, was not automatically sent a copy. I didn't raise it with Washington because it was my personal battlI didn't want to implicate USIA in a policy disagreement they might have been uncomfortable with. But when USIA inevitably learned what was going on, the area director said to State, why are you firing our press attachï¿½ out therhe's been doing a good job. And actually, many of the journalists liked me, although of course that's not the standard for effectiveness. But I was up front with them, I knew my job, and I tried to be generally helpful as often as I could, tip toeing around classified information but quietly suggesting to a reporter that he was moving in the wrong direction if I knew he had unreliable sources or was interpreting a sensitive story in a way that was contrary to the facts. Jim Hoagland (Washington Post) wrote a story reprinted in the International Herald Tribune, which was jointly owned by the Post and the New York Times, saying there was a popular press attachï¿½ who was being transferred for criticizing an outdated policy, and much as I liked the article, that didn't help me either. Bob Amerson was cross, and vaguely suspected I had engineered the article, although I hadn't, and hadn't spoken to Jim Hoagland about it. But I did respond on background to a couple of trusted American correspondents who asked me what was going on, and I told them what the issue was.

Anyway, USIA said to State, okay, the ambassador can have anyone he wants on his staff, that's his right, but there mustn't be any punishment. Lenderking's dissent was within the system and according to guidelines for dissent, so if he goes his new assignment has to be of comparable stature. So I didn't get demoteit was more of a sideways scuttland I ended up in Thailand as the press attachï¿½ for the embassy and concurrently information officer for USIS, and it was a very nice assignment.

Q: And you were in Thailand from when, '70-?

LENDERKING: Seventy-six to 1980.

Q: What was the state of things in Thailand when you got there in '76?

LENDERKING: It was quiet, as I recall, but shortly after we arrived there was a bloodless coup by the military, not an unusual occurrence in Thailand. I guess that's why things were quiet - a military dictatorship buttoned things down and put a chomp on any kind of dissent and things went along in their usual Thai way. I mean, the country was bustling with commercial activities but political dissent was carefully squelched. Anyone who strayed out of line, such as critical newspaper editorial writers, overly inquisitive reporters, or politicians clamoring for more democracy, were not treated brutally but they would be squelched.

I had agreed to that assignment because it clearly wasn't a punishment for what happened in Italy and I would get an equivalent assignment. USIS had a huge information establishment - for example, we produced our own films and TV news clips, radio programs, publications, and had a fast reaction press section. My press attachï¿½ job was in the embassy, and the USIS compound was about a mile away through Bangkok's traffic-choked streets. I think many USIS officers would have regarded the responsibility of running that huge information production facility as a real plum, but I came with fresh eyes and so it differently. It was a holdover from the days about ten years ago when Thailand was in the throes of a serious communist insurgency, in the 1960s. There was great concern, and it was legitimate, that Thailand might become a "falling domino" like Vietnam and our staunchest ally in Southeast Asia would be taken over by the communists. So we helped in the fight against the insurgency, and Americans who were involved in that struggle were very proud of that, because they regarded it as the insurgency that won. And there was merit in that view.

Anyway, the large and impressive information program at USIstaffed, I should say, by about 60 extremely able and dedicated Thai employees, Foreign Service nationaljust rolled on out of inertia even though its time had passed. So I said that the size and expense couldn't be justified in terms of our present program needs and the situation in Southeast Asithe plant was really a relic of Cold War days and the insurgency in Thailand. Naturally, the PAO, Jim McGinley, didn't see it that way. He was proud of what we could do and he saw my job as finding things to do to justify that large operation. His attitude essentially represented the same kind of mindset that I ran into in Italy, although the issues were different. But the mindset was the same: you are not here to question policy or challenge the program, but to think up new ways to use our capabilities better. Which meant, your job is to carry out my wishes, not question what you are asked to do, but do it in a productive manner.

By this time, I was no longer a junior officer but one knocking on the door of senior ranks, and to be told that I just had to shut up and follow orders was something that didn't sit well with me. (By the way, I said I was knocking on the door of senior ranks, but at this post, with something like 12 American officers, I was only the fourth ranking. We were a bit top heavy.)

Q: Well, were you beginning to feel now that you were ill suited for a bureaucracy?

LENDERKING: No, despite a certain pattern beginning to emerge, I always thought the foreign affairs bureaucracy was never dull, but was a living, pulsing organism bubbling with ideas, human machinations, policy struggles and all the rest, and fascinating because it's part of the perennial struggle over who gets what, what gets done and what doesn't, and who does it. Now, I've never been a rebel but I have been a little bit of an iconoclast. But these things kept cropping up. I always thought my job was to follow the oath we take to do our best to uphold and support the constitution of the United States. That doesn't man an obligation to put personal loyalty over duty to do what you think is the best way to use the resources we were given; it doesn't mean a slavish devotion to a given policy, because policies change over time; they can be mistaken; individuals can be mistaken and all of this is part of an internal dialogue that we should always have.

Q: I would imagine that the date, 1976, was important because things were changing. For one thing, we were no longer in Vietnam. And the whole name of the game in Southeast Asia had changed. Now, how did we view the Vietnamese and Chinese threat at the time, from the perspective of Thailand?

LENDERKING: As I said, many people were proud of our support for counterinsurgency in Thailand, which was perceived as a place where it actually worked, as opposed to Vietnam, and there is a lot of justification for that view. Resisting the insurgency bought time for Thailand to get its act together and lessen the threat. Of course, the threat was not nearly as great as it was in Vietnam if you define the Ho Chi Minh government as the threat. Maybe there was a time when we could have worked out a non-belligerent relationship with Ho Chi Minh but that time was long past. We were still hip deep in the Cold War, the worldwide threat from the Soviet Union was genuine, Communist China was belligerent, so we perceived the world as a dangerous place.

So when, two years later, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and overthrew Pol Pot there was no rejoicing in the State Department or elsewhere in the U.S. foreign policy establishment because one of the most vicious dictatorships of all time had been overthrown, but concern that an aggressive Vietnam had extended its power all the way across Cambodia to the Thai border. And of course the Thai were very concerned; they feared the Vietnamese. Now, if you had taken a long look you might have said this was a good thing; it's better to have a less repressive dictatorship that might moderate over time, than a rigid and brutal totalitarian dictatorship like the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia.

Q: Well, another factor is that in all of these areas where we saw some overarching generalized threat of communism, there were cracks in the wall - we thought the Vietnamese, that is, the North Vietnamese and the Chinese, were as close as lips and teeth, to quote the old Mao saying. Well, the teeth were biting the lips. The Cambodians and Vietnamese hated each other from time immemorial and will continue to do so. The Chinese and Vietnamese also have a long history of enmity and in fact fought a vicious battle just a while after you arrived in Bangkok. So nationalism and cultural hatreds often trump grand theories of how countries are going to behave.

LENDERKING: I suppose in retrospect you have to be dismayed that for all our involvement in East Asia and Southeast Asia, including the Vietnam War where we supposedly learned lessons that we might have absorbed, we were very surprised when Vietnam and China fought that really violent border war in 1977 or 1978 and the Vietnamese gave a very good account of themselves until they were overwhelmed.

Q: Yes, it's just the same as today, you know, we seem to think Iran is going to take over Iraq if we pull out. Well, the Arabs and the Persians have not gotten along well for some time, we're talking about centuries, and obviously that chemistry will continue to work.

Now, to go back to where we were, why wouldn't it be kind of nice to have a big printing place and have a movie studio and the whole thing, as long as you're there to strengthen Thai-US relationships? Or was this capacity a misuse of funds, or counterproductive or what?

LENDERKING: Well, we had a device called the country plan and although it was much criticized it was developed over years and I had a hand for awhile in refining the annual process but essentially it was a useful planning document that forced PAOs to think about what their public affairs priorities were and how they could achieve them. The way it worked is that once a year posts would set out their objectives in support of specific foreign policy objectives, and would develop a supporting program of activities. The plan had to be approved by Washington, the money allocated to the plan had to be rationally accounted for, and PAOs were supposed to turn down ideas that didn't directly support a country plan objective.

I felt, looking at our country plan, that this huge information plant could not be justified, that we had excess capacity. My main concern was for people, the Thai staff, who were running this thing, the motion picture branch, the radio/TV branch, publications, and press, each one headed by an American officer, all under my supervision. It was ungainly, running on its own momentum, its presence the principal justification for its being. It was a huge operation for USIA but the Thai staff was superb, and you couldn't think about dismantling that thing without thinking of them and their talent. I mean, we would ask them to do something and they would do it and they put out quality work, and I thought that Washington would eventually force us to cut back the program anyway, so we should do it ourselves and retain the option of deciding how we wanted to cut. So I thought well, let's do this rationally and provide for these guys and their retirement and such so they know what's ahead and are not taken by surprise and thrown out on the street and that sort of thing. I cannot remember how many Thai staffers we had but I think it was well over 100 in just the information section; a big, big plant. So basically I wanted rational cuts because they could no longer be justified and in fact that plant was not used full time. I should add I also spent a lot of time working on good projects that would support our objectives but sometimes it was hard going, because just running that bureaucratic machine that we had created years before took most of our energies.

Q: Could you turn this plant into a regional thing so you were printing things for, or supporting information activities in India or Pakistan or Afghanistan or elsewhere?

LENDERKING: In fact we already had an even larger printing center in Manila, which produced regular books and textbooks very professionally, and that was a regional printing center, which eventually was undone by budget necessities too, but there was no need to duplicate that operation. The one we had in Thailand was basically just for Thailand and all the regional stuff went to Manila.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

LENDERKING: The ambassador when I got there was Charles Whitehouse, who was a Republican. He was a career officer, he had been in the CIA; a marvelous guy, a great raconteur. He had served in Vietnam as one of the CORDS (pacification program) directors, in III Corps (Region Three). I didn't know him then but he loved talking about the Vietnam War and the mistakes we had made and the things that we could and should have done. He was accessible to the press and he loved it when a journalist came in with Vietnam experience and he'd start talking about Vietnam. Sometimes he'd get out his maps and get down on his hands and knees, on the floor sometimes, and go over the maps and talk about the strategy and what was happening.

Q: Well was he not known at one point, maybe when he was in the CIA, for his previous service in the Air Force?

LENDERKING: I think so, but I don't know the particulars. I do know he was previously in the CIA and I believe he had a distinguished World War II record, perhaps as a bomber pilot. I can't say for sure.

In any case, Ambassador Whitehouse had a lot of experience in Asia. He was from an aristocratic American family with honorable forebears. He had style, grace and wit, and a fine sense of humor. I was very fond of him.

Q: Well, I would think that Thailand would be a place where we would be very concerned because our effort in Vietnam had just collapsed and we had pulled out ignominiously from there and Thailand; you talk about the dominos and Thailand was sitting on the border of two potential dominoes, Laos and Cambodia, and we would be very concerned that the Thais would take a look and say, the U.S. is a paper tiger and make their peace with Vietnam and China.

LENDERKING: That's right, and I am remiss in not recalling that the concern was very real and seemed valid at the time, and because it didn't happen I guess it has receded in my memory but now that you raise it I think that was a very definite perception at the time. But, remember countries aren't dominoethey're more complex than that. It's not so easy to overthrow a government and occupy a country, as we discovered in Iraq thirty years later. But I'll say this in defense of the domino theorwhat we did, especially in Thailand, bought more time for the government and people of that country to get their act together and defeat a tough and determined insurgency. And, although the conditions were different, the Brits did the same thing in Malaya.

Q: What was your impression of the Thais? You know, you had served in other countries and here you are up against the Thais, who are a very distinct group.

LENDERKING: Yes. I think everyone loves Thailand and loves the Thais. They are so congenial but no pushovers by any means. There is a sort of a clichï¿½ about Thais; you do not want to ever get them angry with you where they feel you have been disrespectful or rude or wronged them or something like that because yes, they do have a temper. But a more gracious, hardworking people when they are on the team, so to speak, you can never find. And people love living in Thailand, loved the life and got along very well with the Thais. A lot of my counterparts spoke very good English, a high percentage of the Thai elite studied in the United States. There is always a strong contingent of the Thai foreign diplomatic service that has graduated from the Fletcher School at Tufts and other leading U.S. institutions, and there are very strong ties that have been built up and nurtured over the years. So it was a real pleasure to be in Thailand. Of course there were people who were critical of the U.S.; of course there were people who would blast us every day in the newspapers. Most of those people were friendly and approachable on a personal level and you could talk to them. Their critiques often had trenchant things to say about American foreign policy and actions. If they sometimes spoke or wrote sharply, it was generally not because they were anti-American, but because they expected big things from us and we often let them down. I always tried to reach out to those people and if they were at all accessible build a dialogue with them. I did that in Italy and I did it in Thailand.

Q: Let's talk about the media there. You know, Italy had its own media configuration; what about Thailand?

LENDERKING: I have to tell you this story. On my way to Thailand I stopped off in Denmark to visit a friend and the ambassador there was John Gunther Dean, a senior career ambassador with a distinguished record. He invited my wife and me to play tennis with him and my friend and afterwards we sat down and had a Coke or something and he said okay, you are going to Thailand. He had just come from there. And he said, "I want you to know that you will have a generally friendly and favorable press when you get to Thailand. I don't want you to think that is because of your efforts or because of your skills; it is because almost all of them are in the pocket of the CIA. So fair warning." And when I got there, I found he was spot on.

Now, the biggest newspaper, Thai Rath, was in Thai, not English, and that was rather consistently critical of us. Because I didn't speak or read Thai and had only elementary Thai courtesy phrases, I didn't have the same level of sophistication or appreciation for some of these political undercurrents that I had in other places like Cuba, Japan, Italy and Vietnam, where I spoke the language and was able to mingle with people who did not speak English. But there was a very vigorous English language press, good journalists and good English newspaperbetter than in most other countries I'm familiar with, such as Italy or Peru. And of course I had a lot of contacts among those people and they were generally friendly although they never gave us a free pass.

Q: Did you have, on your staff, Thai speaking officers?

LENDERKING: Yes. Our press officer, Ross Petzing, spoke a lot better Thai than I did and he was very energetic. The deputy PAO, John Reid, was fluent; he'd been there for a number of years previously in other jobs and he loved Thailand and had a lot of good Thai friends. His Thai was probably the best in the entire Embassy. There were a few others who spoke good Thai but not many.

Q: How about radio and TV? Did we have pretty good relationships in those areas?

LENDERKING: They were tougher to break into. Occasionally something we produceperhaps a news cliwould appear on TV, or we'd get a film from Washington, put a Thai soundtrack on it and show it through our own distribution system; and we produced quite a few news and commentary programs that we were able to place. We had American officers for each of these areas, plus an excellent Thai professional stafradio and TV, film, press and publications, and exhibits.

Q: You were there during the Carter Administration?

LENDERKING: Yes.

Q: The one innovation for the Carter Administration was human rights; how did this play in Thailand?

LENDERKING: It was sensitive and I can remember at a country team meeting Ambassador Whitehouse said okay, the new human rights person in the State Department, Patt Derian, is coming. (She was married to Hodding Carter, an outstanding journalist in the great tradition of Southern journalists and editors, and who became at some point spokesman of the Department). So Ambassador Whitehouse explained to us that Patt Derian, who already had a national reputation as a human rights activist, was coming to Thailand and we now have a new dimension in our foreign policy. Like it or not- I am paraphrasing what he said- like it or not, we are going to be respectful and we are not going to be dismissive of her agenda and we are going to cooperate to the extent possible. And he added that I, as a traditional diplomat, am somewhat skeptical of this new initiative because I think it may get us off course to no good purpose, but this is what we are going to do and I want you all to be mindful of my instructions.

Well, I thought that was pretty good. So she came and we were involved in her human rights concerns because there were human rights problems in Thailand and I think Ambassador Whitehouse and everyone else felt that calling attention to some of the human rights abuses and rubbing the Thais' noses in the dirt so that they lost face and felt that they were being humiliated or held up to criticism or ridicule by their great friend the United States would be harmful and it was better to work quietly behind the scenes whenever we could. These were basically domestic human rights concerns, strictures on the press for example, treatment of prisoners; some of the usual human rights agendas. As far as benevolent dictatorships went Thailand was probably one of the best in the world but there were problems. So that was a concern and we tried to manage it. Patt Derian arrived and she was a very forceful advocate and she wanted us to do more for the Carter human rights agenda and eventually the impetus that she started became an integral part of U.S. foreign policy, as you well know. So she had an impact, worldwide.

Q: Yes. I think I was in South Korea at that time and we were also getting involved in this new initiative because we had Kim Il Sung and 40 tank divisions sitting within 30 miles of us, which tended to make us focus. And we had the Park Chung Hee dictatorship, which was not too bad, you know.

So, as press attachï¿½, how did you treat human rights?

LENDERKING: We didn't focus on a lot of local situations but we put out a lot of information in articles and also in briefings about U.S. policy and how it is not designed to be a threat to countries but to get them to realize that they could observe the universal declaration of human rights without threatening their own regimes and their own survival. And so it was kind of friendly persuasion, I think you could call it.

After the military coup that occurred shortly after I got there, there were strictures on the press and other clampdowns and we tried to work around those to the extent that we could without upsetting the larger relationship with Thailand and to some extent we did. I remember Joan Baez came out and there was concern that Joan Baez, who is outspoken in support of her political beliefs...

Q: She is a folk singer who was quite prominent in the anti-war movement.

LENDERKING: That's right. And a peace activist and I would say a very effective one. She came out a number of times and one concert we arranged for her she came out with Bayard Rustin, who was also one of the most prominent of the African-American peace activists, and they were terrific. Very politically astute. Made their points while giving a great concert, and did it without getting anyone angry. The concert took place in the concert hall of the bi-national center there, which was run by a Thai and American board. And there was a lot of nervousness because the new President and some of the senior coup leaders and government officials were there, and Joan Baez gave him a dazzling smile from the stage, saluted him and then sang a song of protest. But she did it so gracefully that no one's back was raised and the hackles stayed put. Bayard Rustin sang a marvelous old folk song that had a sharp political point and got a huge ovation.

Q: I have to say this while we're on the subject, just for the record. I have the greatest admiration for Joan Baez because, unlike so many of these singer-activists who, as soon as the draft ended, all went on their way. When South Vietnam collapsed Joan Baez took the cause of refugees in South Vietnam under her wing and really did a lot to help, rather than these others who, once they were not involved in being drafted or the girlfriends of guys being drafted, just sort of left the refugee situation and paid no attention to it. She did. I give her great credit for that.

LENDERKING: Those are exactly my sentiments. And we saw her a couple of times in Thailand. She was dedicated, hard working, she was very savvy; she had one or two people with her, helpers who were also savvy and focused and knew how to deal with people and how to push their agenda in an effective way. I totally agree; she was effective and impressive.

Q: I read in an obituary in today's paper that her father died. And he was a PhD in, I think physics or something, a very impressive person. Obviously she came from a genetically well endowed family.

Q: Well, let's talk about refugees. You were there during the time of tremendous pressure from Indochinese refugees. How did you view that and what was your role in dealing with this huge problem?

LENDERKING: My tour in Thailand was 1976- 80. The first two years were under the coup leadership and it was very quiet. And then the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and overthrew Pol Pot and suddenly in Thailand we had several million refugees. And we had by now a new ambassador who came out, Mort Abramowitz, who replaced Ambassador Whitehouse when a Democratic administration came in. I greatly liked and respected Whitehouse and I also think Mort Abramowitz was one of the best ambassadors I've ever seen. They were quite different in their mindset and approach to diplomacy.

Q: Abramowitz is going to be interviewed shortly, not by me but by Tom Stern.

LENDERKING: I think he will have so much to say. He is a marvelous person; I have tremendous respect for him and still see him from time to time. I really admire what he did in Thailand so much. He took the refugee cause under his wing and he was much more interested in it than Ambassador Whitehouse was and saw this as a major challenge for the United States and American foreign policy. And he and his principle guy for refugees, Lionel Rosenblatt, who is also a very close friend, really did heroic work for the refugees, persuading the Thai Government that this was very important to them and to treat the refugees in a humane manner. The Thais were very reluctant to have all these refugees and wanted to push them back across the border, and in some cases did push them back, right into live mine fields. Ambassador Abramowitz and Lionel Rosenblatt and his helpers were involved in all kinds of things to care for the refugees, to get massive assistance from the executive branch, the Congress, the UN, NGOs, and the public at large. It was important to show the Thai that this huge burden would not be the sole responsibility of the Thai Government and therefore make them more amenable to having these small cities of refugees on their borders. So that was very important work.

Q: Well, did you have any role in this? Was the USIA doing anything on this issue?

LENDERKING: By this time I was the full-time press attachï¿½ but I also had responsibilities for the information shop about a mile and a half away but I spent most of my time outside of the ambassador's office and we had a very large group of foreign correspondents who were there because of the refugee crisis and also because Bangkok was a great place from which to cover the rest of Southeast Asia. So a lot of the big outfits had bureaus there, CBS, NBC and ABC, and "The Times" and "The Post" and a lot of other newspapers had full-time correspondents there. I dealt with them all the time and it was the part of my work that I enjoyed the most, and the thrust of what the Embassy was doing was to make the correspondents aware of all the things that were happening, to facilitate their visits up to the border so that they could see for themselves, and they would write about what was going on and that would generate support from back home and from other countries. That was much more important than anything USIA was doing, although the VOA also had a full-time correspondent who was a regular journalist and member of the press corps. His status was a journalist, and a U.S. government official. USIA never seemed to realize the importance of the U.S. press. Because we were supposed to be dealing with a foreign audience the U.S. press could in many ways do our work for us by publicizing an item which would then reverberate around the world and purvey information in a much more effective way than if we had written an article and gotten in placed in a local newspaper.

Q: One of the things that anybody reading this has to look at is that we are talking about 1976 to '80, when there was no CNN or worldwide TV yet, so individual correspondents representing media from all over the world abounded.

LENDERKING: Of course there was AP (Associated Press), Reuters, and the wire services but you are righthis is some 10, 12 years before CNN, I think.

Q: Yes. Was there any problem in getting the press to the refugee camps?

LENDERKING: There was. Initially, the Thais didn't want the refugee story to be publicized, because they didn't want it known that they were sometimes pushing people back. But also they were concerned that if other potential refugees heard about the massive assistance being supplied to the refugees in the camps on the Cambodian border, more and more refugees would arrive and the problem would only get worse. So it was a constant struggle, and Lionel and Mort especially were tremendously effective. Lionel spoke pretty good Thai, Mort did not, but he was a very forceful advocate, knew Washington, had great contacts in the political and media world and made sure he was out front on these initiatives and fully supported by Washington. He arranged for Rosalynn Carter to visit the camps, and we had a succession of important congressmen come visit. My wife worked for Lionel for awhile. Her job was to interview some of the refugees and write case histories of what they had been through. Those stories became an archive that was used effectively to document what being a Vietnamese refugee was like, and were very useful in educating people about the problem.

I have to mention this, because it illustrates the importance of having first hand information. Even I, as the press attachï¿½ in Bangkok and being immersed every day in the details of the refugees and the camps, had a hard time visualizing what their situation was actually like. Even after hearing stories from Susan, my wife, who along with Ann Rosenblatt and a few other volunteers plus the NGOs like Medecins Sans Frontieres, sped to the border during the first huge arrival of many thousands and pitched in to save literally thousands of lives, it was hard to imagine the horror and hardship. But after a few weeks, when the camps began to look like places where help was being dispensed instead of just being holding areas for starving and frightened people sitting out in the open in the mud and rain, I was able to visit the main camp at Aranyaprathet on the Thai-Cambodian border. Up to then, I thought the problem was simply too immense for even the U.S. to handlcertainly we could take a few of the refugees to help alleviate the problem, but there was no way we could assimilate hundreds of thousands. But after a day at Aranyaprathet, seeing the refugees, talking to many of them, I was overwhelmed with the feeling that somehow we would have to find a way to take nearly all of them. And we eventually did. I don't know the exact total, but it was about one million people, and most of them were settled in the U.S. and other receiving countries. In the U.S. the Vietnamese community for the most part has done itself and the U.S. proud, and the task of accepting the refugees, providing camps for them, and then screening, processing, and resettling them is one of the most impressive and effective humanitarian operations in all of history.

Q: You mentioned Lionel Rosenblatt. What was his job?

LENDERKING: He was the refugee coordinator and he had a large and very able staff. Because the problem was so big he had a number of people who were as experienced and as dedicated as he was.

Q: Well Lionel, of course, made quite a name for himself after the collapse of South Vietnam by taking off from Washington and going out on his own with one other FSO, Craig Johnstone, and personally assisted more than a hundred Vietnamese to get away and get to the U.S. It's fair to say that he and Craig saved their lives, because many of them would have been punished by the new regime because of their association with the United States. More power to them.

LENDERKING: That's right. I guess one of the stories that has now become a foreign service legend is that Lionel worked for Henry Kissinger at the time and Kissinger didn't want Lionel to go out; in fact, someone from the Department sent a cable to the Embassy warning that Lionel might come out and to watch out for him because he would no doubt cause trouble, demanding that refugees be evacuated more quickly and making other "unreasonable" demands. Of course, this is exactly what the Embassy should have been doing, and it's a blot on the whole operation that the Ambassador, Graham Martin, delayed evacuation operations because he didn't want to cause a panic. As a result, many people didn't get out who should have and even many Americans had to exit in panic from the Embassy roof. Not the most glorious moment in U.S. history!

So, Lionel went on his own hook, and at his own expense. And in the final days before the final fall of Saigon, he was able to get several hundred people out just by being tireless and getting them on planes and in whatever way he could get them out and so personally saved probably a couple of hundred people. And when he came back, Kissinger called him into his office to dress him down for being disobedient and then shook his hand and said, in essence, great job, we're very proud of you. That is how I heard the story, I think not from Lionel. But anyway, that's one of the many legends about Lionel that I think are accurate.

Q: Prior to that, people were fleeing Vietnam before the mob that came across from Cambodia after the Vietnamese invasion. What about the boat people? I mean, their leaving Vietnam and ending up on the shores of Thailand and getting pushed off or being attacked and women raped; there were horrible stories. This was early on; how did we deal with this from your perspective?

LENDERKING: I was not directly involved in any rescue and assistance operations for refugees, so I can recall some details only in outline. But my recollection is that we were not instantly forthcoming. We were fearful that too many refugees would be coming to our shores and we were not set up to handle them. So it took a lot of effort, a lot of working with Congress and the churches and other humanitarian organizations to try and achieve a general recognition that we had an obligation well beyond our general humanitarian concern to support and do something special for the refugees. And eventually we took well over a million refugees from Vietnam alone, plus more from Cambodia and Laos. The Hmong were a special case. But for some years there were camps around Southeast Asia, including in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, with refugees and later on I did visit some of those camps and we can talk about those later. But it was always a struggle to get any kind of bureaucracy, the UN bureaucracy or our bureaucracy or the bureaucracies of other countries to deal with the refugees in a humane way. Because no one wanted them and that has always been the problem.

Q: What was your impression of the international press corps that was in Thailand?

LENDERKING: I got to know many of them very well as friends and we had a lot of interactions, work and socially as well, and most of the established correspondents were superb. There were also some standouts among the independents, and even some of the young ones who came out to make a name for themselves. There were of course a few oddballwar and disaster always attract their share of them - but the mainline people who were resident in Bangkok and the veterans who visited often, such as Henry Kamm of the New York Times, were great journalists. I was always impressed by how quickly they could settle in, make their contacts, chase down their stories, and make clear sense of complicated situations. It's a great loss that the major media, which still have resources, have cut way back on international news coverage, reducing the evening news programs to sound bites on human interest stories and ending coverage of many major overseas stories totally. That's because large corporations whose highest priority is the bottom line now control the major media.

But in Thailand, most of the journalists were savvy pros, knowledgeable and serious. There were guys like Neil Davis of NBC, a one-man TV crew with driver, cameraman, and reporter rolled into one fearless journalist, and he was later eventually killed, I think when he got caught in a firefight. He was from New Zealand or Australia, a superb guy, and one of the most universally admired journalists there.

Q: How did you find places like Chiang Mai and the places where we had those big air bases, and then after the fall of Saigon they were being shut down. Did that impact on you at all?

LENDERKING: Yes, it did, but you know, my memory is hazy on that. It seems to me there was always some issue connected with the bases. The Thais wanted them there but were sensitive about too much publicity for them and so we had to keep a low profile. I think by the time I got to Thailand most of the big operations from those bases were over.

Q: What about the Thai provincial press?

LENDERKING: Thailand is so dominated politically, culturally and economically by Bangkok that sometimes it was difficult to keep in mind that important things could happen "up country" too. Maybe we were too fixated on Bangkok because it was really the horse that pulled the carriage or the country. And I think even when there was so much going on up on the border the local papers on the border were not that influential. You had maybe 2 million refugees inside the Thai border and you would think the regional newspapers would be very important but I don't think they were.

Q: Were you involved with Burma in any way?

LENDERKING: Very little. In fact, I never got a chance to visit Burma while I was in Thailand and Burma was mostly important because of all the drug trafficking that passed through the famous Golden Triangle on the Thai-Burma border. We had a big DEA, Drug Enforcement Agency, contingent in Bangkok and they were active and a lot of activities went on in secret channels, outside of the public domain, so most of what we did was publicizing initiatives such a major drug busts, and providing background briefings to trusted journalists who were always coming to Thailand chasing the drug story. I knew some of the DEA guys reasonably well, and I knew they were going out on raids with their Thai counterparts and that sort of thing, particularly up in Chiang Mai and the border areas that were close to the drug trafficking routes. But it was not something that the public part of the embassy, USIA and the press attachï¿½ office, were involved in much.

One humorous stora leading ABC television reporter came out with his own camera crew to do a drug story, and we set him up to film the drug-sniffing dogs that sniffed the luggage on the conveyor belts underneath the baggage pickup room at Bangkok airport. On one bag that came through the dogs went wild, barking and biting the suitcase, so they opened it up and the dogs went at it. Well, there were no drugs inside, just clothes, and no one could figure out what set the dogs off. So there was nothing to do but stuff the clothes back in the suitcase and send the bag on up the conveyor belt. We all wondered what the look on the passenger's face was when he picked his luggage off the conveyor belt - clothes strewn about, dog teeth marks in the nice new suitcase. You can imagine.

Q: Were we in a duel with communist China vis-ï¿½-vis influencing the press or not? Did we see that as something or was China not very active yet?

LENDERKING: China certainly had much greater influence with the Chinese language press, which we monitored for information. There is a huge Sino-Thai population in Bangkok and some papers were closely oriented towards China. So we didn't have much contact there, but we did with the Thai press, for reasons that John Gunther Dean explained, and also with the important English language press.

Q: With this large press corps there and a significant number of them being involved with America, were we concerned about their reporting about the dictatorship?

LENDERKING: Yes, to some extent but as it turns out they were not focused much on domestic Thai politics, it was the refugee story they were after. Also on what else was going on in Southeast Asia; for example, when Vietnam and China went to war briefly, that was a huge story. I happened to be on a scuba diving trip with the AP bureau chief, Denis Gray, when that happened and we were incommunicado on this trip for about four or five days. And we get back to Phuket and he finds out a war has broken out and his UPI (United Press International) rival has been up on the border for four or five days writing exclusive stories. He almost had a heart attack. So those were the concerns.

Q: How could a UPI guy get up there? Which side was he on? I mean, for reporting; on the Vietnamese side?

LENDERKING: I don't know exactly where he was, but he was able to get pretty close to the hostilities and write first-person stories. The UPI and AP correspondents were of course keen rivals and not especially good friends.

Q: Well, being a Vietnam hand yourself, did you get any feel for what was going on in Vietnam, I mean from contacts or anything of that nature?

LENDERKING: Not a lot was coming out of there. We didn't have a lot of good sources of information. Occasionally journalists could get in there and sometimes diplomats from a friendly country were able to go in but it took many years before we reestablished relations. I used to monitor Vietnamese government newspapers and official broadcasts through FBIS, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which was an unclassified service for government clients run by the CIA. Most of the stuff was pretty dry government propaganda, all about "running dogs" and such things, but occasionally we'd pick up a real nuggean indication something was happening that we hadn't known about.

Q: Was there any effort that you can recall about trying to work on what later became known as an orderly departure program? In other words, rather than people going out to sea in those sinkable boats, process them in an orderly manner for resettlement to a third country.

LENDERKING: Yes, there was an ODP program and a lot of people were able to leave via that route. Mort, Lionel and others who were directly involved would be the best ones for details.

Q: How did you find dealing with Thai government officials who dealt with the press during the dictatorship?

LENDERKING: I didn't have a lot of dealings with Thai officials; although there was a regular contact who I dealt with to facilitate credentials for journalists. Like all dictatorships, the Thai government then was very sensitive about what journalists were writing and what they were up to. As a dictatorship, this one was relatively benign, but they were still sensitive and expected the American Embassy to take responsibility for stories American journalists wrote. Of course, we refused to do this. And sometimes an American would show up with the flimsiest kind of journalistic record, no media sponsor back home, and demand to be accredited. If I questioned their bona fides, they would say to me, are you telling me, is the U.S. Government telling me that I am not a journalist? Who are you to judge who is a journalist and who isn't? So it was a recurring problem and when someone would write something the Thais didn't like, my contact in the foreign office would call and complain. And I would say we're not responsible for what they write but they are legitimate journalists and under our system they can write what they want. The Thai official I was dealing with was a reasonable guy; he understood my dilemma and was just doing his job. I understood his dilemma and we would try to work our way around the problem, and that was very Thai.

There were far more strictures imposed on the Thai journalists, and they sometimes told me how they had to walk a tightrope to avoid punishment of some sort.

Q: Did this last the whole time you were there?

LENDERKING: Yes. It was General Kriangsak who was president and he was an improvement over his predecessor. We actually had pretty good relations with his government, and things began to lighten up a little but he left no doubt who was in charge.

Q: How did you see the role of the royal family and the press treatment and all that?

LENDERKING: The Royal Family was always a subject of intense scrutiny and speculation but such was the respect that was demanded towards the King and Queen and the children that you had to be very careful about how you broached the subject with any Thai person because if you showed any disrespect or anything that could be conceived as disrespect or asked improper questions the reaction could be quite harsh; it could be personal, perhaps even violent, although I had no personal knowledge of any such encounters. And then every year a number of people were picked up and put in prison or roughed up or something for some act, sometimes seemingly remote, of disrespect towards the King or the Royal Family. But the King was and still is revered and his influence has been enormous and a powerful unifying figure and force for good in modern Thai history. Much more so, than, say, the Emperor of Japan, who is respected and widely revered, but has much less real influence.

Q: You mentioned Rosalynn Carter earlier. How did her visit go?

LENDERKING: That was a major event because of the refugee crisis, and she was an excellent person to call attention to it in a compassionate and humanitarian fashion. Mort and Lionel engineered that trip and it was strictly for refugees. She must have met some senior Thai officials but I don't recall who they were. We had to be careful because the Thais were beginning to think that all we cared about was refugees and they didn't like thawe are, after all, major partners and allies. But the refugee issue was a huge everyday concern, and Mort had to be deft and show that we cared very deeply about Thailand and not just about the refugee issue.

I mentioned how peoples' views on refugees, including mine, changed if they visited Aranyaprathet or any of the other huge camps. After a visit, most people came away deeply moved and seemed to feel that we and others had to find some way to take care of these hundreds of thousands of peoplthey did not deserve to be consigned to wasting away for years in a soulless refugee camp. The refugee kids played a big part in thithey would approach you, friendly and totally without guile, most of them cute as buttons but some with some kind of physical problem, and your heart would melt.

Q: Well then, in 1980 you left.

LENDERKING: That's right.

Q: By the way, when you went out to Thailand, did your USIA senior people sort of look at you a little bit sideways saying, oh my God, are we going to have problems with this guy or not? From your Rome experience?

LENDERKING: Most of my colleagues, if they reacted at all, seemed to agree with what I'd done. The East Asia & Pacific Area Director, Bill Payeff, a great guy, authorized official travel to Washington when the American Foreign Service Association gave me the Rivkin Award that year for "creative dissent." The only one who voiced disapproval was my new boss in Bangkok, the PAO, Jim McGinley, who looked askance at Foreign Service employees who criticized policy. In his view, they shouldn't do this and certainly should never be rewarded for it. Bill Payeff told him to shut up about it and he was authorizing TDY (temporary duty) travel to Washington so I could attend the ceremony. Some State colleagues said, in essence, I would have done it differently but I agree with much of your position, and so on, but in general the reaction pro or con was like a pebble thrown into a lake.

And then one last vignette on that, at the ceremony itself, AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) had arranged for Henry Kissinger, who was Secretary of State at the time, to attend the ceremony. So, in typical fashion he comes in a little bit late and sits down and asks the head of AFSA, "why am I here?" And she says, "Oh, we're giving awards to all the people who disagreed with your policies." And he makes a sound as though he's just been thumped in the stomach, and left at the earliest possible moment. So that was amusing, but it was a long way around to answer your question.

Q: Okay, 1980; whither?

LENDERKING: I thought having a big press attachï¿½ position was the best job in the world, and I was happy to have another one of those jobs rather than be PAO, because the latter was more of a bureaucratic manager kind of job. Trouble was, I'd never get promoted with another press attachï¿½ job, because it was considered essential to acquire management experience in order to make it to the top levels of the Foreign Service. So, since I still had plenty of ambition, I recognized the conflict. Being a PAO involved having to be a naysayer to a lot of people and my experiences with my PAOs in Italy and Bangkok were not the happiest. But people who thought I had some talent kept saying, you know, you should be a PAO, you are senior enough and you have been around long enough. So anyway, I get a phone call in the middle of the night from Bob Chatten, the East Asia and Pacific Area Director who had succeeded Bill Payeff and an old friend, who says, "Congratulations! You're going to Peru as PAO!" I had not applied for that and I said okay, Peru. And my wife, who is Australian, is just awake enough to say, "Peru! Where's that!" She'd barely heard of it and couldn't visualize how it could be any fun or at all interesting. So, Peru is a long way from Bangkok and that was my next assignment, as PAO to Lima, Peru.

Q: Well, you were sort of a Pacific Ocean specialist.

LENDERKING: I guess, yes. And I had Spanish and I had had Cuba and Bolivia way back when so there it was. And Peru turned out to be just a super, very pleasant assignment with one exception and that is that we had three ambassadors, two of them great and one of them was one of the worst people I have ever met in the Foreign Service.

Q: Alright, so you were in Peru from 1980 until when?

LENDERKING: 1980 to 1983.

Q: How would you describe the situation when you arrived in Peru in 1980?

LENDERKING: There was a new freely elected democratic government under Fernando Belaunde, a reformer, after a long period under a leftist military dictatorship that was hostile to and suspicious of the U.S., although it wasn't nearly as autocratic and hostile as Castro's Cuba. Anyway, there was a feeling among both Peruvians and Americans that a new dawn was breaking.

Q: How were conditions from your perspective, such as freedom of the press and expression and all that? Was it a pretty open situation?

LENDERKING: Under the military dictatorship basic rights were circumscribed, and many journalists and politicians were in exile, but the new government restored press freedom and a lot of the exiles returned. There was a feeling that Peru was launched into a new era.

Q: How about the economy and the ethnic situation in Peru? What was going on?

LENDERKING: The economy has seldom been robust in many Latin American countries and that was certainly true in Peru. There was a lot of poverty and unemployment; there were huge areas in the big cities, Lima especially, of poor people living in shacks and barrios. As in most Latin American countries, the gap between rich and poor was huge and seemingly unbridgeable. The prevailing political and economic discussions centered around the basic issue of what economic model was besdemocratic capitalism, viewed as exploitative and benefiting only the rich, or government-dominated socialism, which had never delivered what it promised and still left people poor and exploited. Downtown Lima was actually dangerous to move around in because of street theft and similar hazards and it was also dirty. You had those marvelous old colonial buildings and squares, and the place was so rundown you had to be very careful going there. So the huge disparities between rich and poor that exist in most Latin American countries were very much in evidence in Peru.

Q: Was there a significant Indian population?

LENDERKING: Oh, yes. Peru and Bolivia were at one time all one country and basically they are overwhelmingly Indianot descendants of the Incas but descendants of those who were ruled by the Incas, who also ran an authoritarian system with themselves at the top, but which also managed to produce some glorious structures and a dynamic culture, both of which were not among the achievements of modern Peruvian governments. So in countries like Peru and Bolivia, once ruled by the Incas, and Mexico, once ruled by the Aztecs and other Indian cultures, Indians or Mestizomixed - were the vast majority of the people.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you arrived?

LENDERKING: The ambassador when we arrived was Harry Shlaudeman, a very savvy and experienced senior career diplomat. Unfortunately, he was there only for a few weeks after we arrived and he was a very competent ambassador. He was not the easiest person to talk the was said to have only two serious interests in life, diplomacy and golf, but he was universally respected. You would get in the elevator with him and he would maybe nod at you and you would think well, what can I say until the elevator gets to my floor so I am not just standing there. He didn't welcome small talk, but there was nothing unpleasant about him, he just had no interest in the kind of small talk people indulge in when meeting by chance in the course of business. But he was a very decent man and a successful ambassador. When he left to take up his next ambassadorship, in Argentina, I had been there only about three weeks - we all went out in the Embassy courtyard for a farewell and when it was time for him to say a few words, he was characteristically laconic, thanking the staff briefly for their good work, and then, concluding, "as far as my time here as your ambassador, you could have done worse."

Q: Who took his place?

LENDERKING: His successor was Ed Corr, who had been a special assistant to the ambassador in Thailand years ago, years before I was there. Remember, we had a Democratic administration in Washington and promoting democratic governance around the world was very high on the agenda. Ed Corr was a very dynamic guy and an energetic ambassador who was very amenable to a policy of promoting democratic reforms in Peru. He was tireless, very outgoing, spoke good Spanish. Overnight he became very popular with the Peruvians.

Q: How did you see your job? What was going on with the USIA agenda?

LENDERKING: We had a number of challenges based on the old left-right divide. On the press side there were friendlies, people suspicious of us, and outright enemies. In the latter category were people who were aligned with those who opposed to everything we said or did, who were strongly anti-imperialist, anti-Yankee critics, and they existed in the press, as columnists, editors and working journalists, and they were especially strong in most of the universities, which were havens for the radical or revolutionary Marxist left. The main university, San Marcos, the oldest university in the Americas, was really controlled by militant Marxists, who saw their natural allies as Fidel Castro, the revolutionary government in Algeria, China under Mao, and similar regimes. It was physically dangerous to go on the campus, even just to make a courtesy call on the Rector. In fact, I don't think any American officer of the embassy had been on that campus in many years because it was real risk. We had a fearless cultural attachï¿½, Carol Meirs, who broke the ice and inch by inch made it possible to establish at least our ability to visit radical universities for intellectual dialogue on some of the ideological conflicts of our time, as well as to discuss the practicalities of such time-honored programs as the Fulbright Program and other cultural exchanges. Carol was an excellent CAO, and I felt USIA in Washington didn't show proper appreciation for her achievements and the way she established decent contacts with our severest critics, plus those who were moderate but were cowed by the militants. This wasn't an easy task around the world in those days, but it was central to USIA's work: not just to circle the wagons with our conservative, establishment friends, but to reach out to our critics and even our enemies to see if we could establish an ongoing intellectual dialogue. Now there were also a number of private universities that were quite good, academically superior to the national universities which were a disgrace in academic terms, and various think tanks and institutions that were important and with which we could develop good working relationships and contacts. I felt it was my responsibility to take the lead in this work, and indeed it was, and I was pleased to establish fruitful contacts with a few people in the academic, journalistic, and political spheres with whom the Embassy should have been in touch years ago, but, as in Italy, some of the people who came before us didn't have the wit or the gumption to do it. Anyway, Carol Meirs opened up a lot of new contacts for us in academic circles, and improved the quality of people we were selecting for International Visitor grants and other exchange programs.

Q: Well, I'm not sure when the Shining Path got established but this group actually came out of the universities, right?

LENDERKING: That's right, the Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path. At least the head of it was a university person and all of that started while we were there. The first inkling that something strange was happening was one night dogs were hung from lampposts in the city, and we wondered well, is this a prank or is this some sort of political symbolism? And that was the first of it, and then it got worse, escalating into bombs being planted and then power outages in Lima. They had the act of blowing up and toppling electrical power towers down to a science. I guess it's easy enough to do, given a rudimentary understanding of explosives and electricity (which I, incidentally, do not have) and that became a real threat in fairly short order. We were having frequent power outages that would sometimes last for several days; crews would repair them and Sendero would blow them up again. There was a machine gun attack on the embassy. They threw grenades over the wall at the ambassador's residence. Parts of the countryside became no longer safe, so it wasn't just a group of university radicals. As soon became clear, they were revolutionary extremists of the Maoist or Khmer Rouge variety, executing poor farmers in the countryside who took their produce to market because in Sendero's view they were abetting the evil capitalist system. There were some gruesome massacres, one of which Mario Vargas Llosa, the great Peruvian novelist, wrote about in dramatic detail. The one that got the most attention was a massacre of twelve journalists who went into the countryside to cover the rise of Sendero, and were captured and executed. I knew one of them slightly, a nice guy, a young aspiring journalist from a poor family, as most of the journalists tended to be, and it was a shock to see that the Senderistas would kill a guy like that, with not a moment's hesitation or compassion.

Q: While we are talking about the universities, I am thinking about someone who was in Venezuela, earlier on, and he said you couldn't go to the national university, and in his opinion, there was not a lot of education taking place there. However, there were the Catholic universities and others where you went if you were wealthy enough to pay the tuition, still cheap by U.S. standards but a lot more than the really poor could pay, and wanted to get an education. Was this the situation in Peru?

LENDERKING: Yes, and the same situation prevails throughout Latin America. It is a shortcoming of historic proportions and immense consequences, and it is a reflection of the failure of the political class of most Latin American countries to come to grips with their own history and culture, and the imperatives of building modern societies not driven by outmoded ideologies but by practical necessities. I'm not saying it's easy; I'm saying almost all Latin American countries have failed to do it, with tragic consequences for themselves and others, including us. And of course, our hands are far from clean on the subject of relations with Latin America, but that is a long and complicated subject beyond the scope of our discussion.

But, back to Peru. It was easy to say okay, we will deal with the Catholic and the private universities because a lot of the faculty are American educated or they are sympathetic to developmental capitalism and so forth and you can have good programs and the students are good, and many of them will become the business and political elite and so they are very important. But it was essential not to forget that there were also intelligent and important people at San Marcos, the national university, and some of them were amenable to contacts and exchanging ideas with us. We should have been trying to reach out to these people and that is what we started to do. It's ironic, but some of the more prominent academics of course most of them were leftists of varying stripes - had excellent contacts with academics and intellectuals in the U.S., but the American Embassy in Lima didn't know who they were, what they believed, and whether they might be amenable to contacts and dialogue.

I should explain a bit here, since this theme surfaced again and again in my career, from my earliest days in Havana. I soon came to realize that most of our critics were on the left, ranging from committed, doctrinaire Communists to critics who basically yearned for a democratic, just society and were willing to work for it if they only had a chance. Among the former group were America haters who had closed minds, emotionally wedded to doctrinaire ideologies and simplistic notions of what was wrong with the world. I learned to write those people ofthey were immune to constructive dialogue, they would never change their minds, and it was a waste of time to try to reach out to them. But among the latter there were people who criticized us vehemently but down deep admired the U.S., liked Americans on a personal level, and hoped for a day when we would do more to encourage democracy in Latin America, rather than merely support our dictatorial friends, who were generally anti-communist, dictatorial, and ironically enough, anti-capitalist, in that they favored strong central governments, protected markets, and anti-entrepreneurial controls.

Q: How about the press - the whole media business, TV, press, radio?

LENDERKING: There was a weekly magazine of news and political commentary and culture called "Caretas" and the editor and owner of that magazinit was family controlled and it was excellent by any standard - had been in exile during the years of leftist military dictatorship. He himself was a liberal in favor of democratic reforms, and the magazine's political point of view was probably close to what you might find in today's New Yorker, or New Republic, or the New York Times. In other words, basically centrist, slightly center-left, pro-democrat with a small "d." When Belaunde was elected, he (Enrique Zileri was his name) returned to Peru and got his magazine going again. One of the first things I did when I arrived was to go around and call on the editors and the owners of all of the major media and opinion leaders, and this was standard procedure, anywhere. And they were substantial figures, important people in Peruvian society, movers and shakers. So in terms of their station they were quite a bit above me; I did not have the same kind of stature that they did but they were respectful toward a senior representative of a friendly country. Occasionally we had disputes with them and I would go to them and they would at least hear me out before ignoring whatever I was requesting.

Q. The Reagan Administration had come in and Reagan was quite a change from Carter.

LENDERKING: Quite so.

Q: And Reagan early on I think made a trip to Latin America and came back and was quoted as saying, these countries are really quite different. How was the early Reagan Administration viewed from Peru?

LENDERKING: I think there was apprehension that the Republicans were back in power, that they were allied to corporate interests that historically are suspect in Latin America, and I think some of the early signals coming out of Washington were not well received in Peru. Our ambassador, Ed Corr, was very popular and in fact had personally negotiated a stand-down when it looked like Peru and Ecuador were going to go to war. I was close enough to him so I could watch what he was doing over a period of several days when he was tireless in working both sides to try and get them to back off so this flare-up, a perennial occurrence in a long-standing dispute, would not escalate into a full war. So how effective he was had a direct bearing on how much the Peruvians appreciated him; he was an effective representative of the U.S. and of our interests, and at the same time a very popular ambassador with the Peruvians. And as soon as Reagan came in another career diplomat who was close to the Republicans started undermining him with the White House and eventually succeeded in having Ed Corr replaced, although he had not been there as ambassador all that long and this other man, Frank Ortiz, came as ambassador and things totally changed under him.

Q: Describe what you know about the role of Frank Ortiz, both in Washington and then when he came to be ambassador.

LENDERKING: I am going to say some things that are critical of Ambassador Ortiz, for the sake of the historical record. He died a few years ago and never had a chance to rebut what I am about to say. But he was the kind of person who would not have thought twice about going behind someone's back to slime him or her, if it was in his interest to do so. Anyway, I'll try to keep personal remarks to a minimum, but the kind of person he was also affected his performance as ambassador, so that's relevant too. He wanted this job very badly. He had been ambassador to several other countries, I think most recently Guatemala, but before that in Barbados, maybe some other small country. He was critical of the Carter initiatives in human rights and the diplomats who had been active in Central America and had tried to do something in countries where there were severe human rights problems, caused by the way dictatorships that were friendly to the U.S. treated their own people.

Frank Ortiz worked very hard to ingratiate himself with the White House, saying for example that pushing for human rights in countries where they were blatantly violated was a wrong policy and that if he were an ambassador he would faithfully carry out the Reagan policies and back away from some of these policies that he thought were mistaken. So he was successful in currying favor with the White House and persuading them that he was a Latin American expert and a conservative loyalist. But what he was really successful at was pushing his own ambitions.

Some of us were outraged when he came. Ed Corr was a very successful and popular ambassador, and although he was no troglodyte, as a career ambassador he could be counted on to faithfully support the policies of the administration in power. So, replacing him well before he might have been expected to move on was, in effect, a blatant example of politicizing our Foreign Service. It's nothing new, mind you, but generally it's not a good or healthy thing for our country. I'm well aware, of course, that an ambassador is the President's personal representative and that all ambassadors serve at the pleasure of the President, but politicizing the process by filling posts with political loyalists is, in the long run, against our own interests.

As for Frank Ortiz, I don't like speaking ill of him, but he was such a prime example of a bad ambassador that I think his case in instructive. I will quote a friend who was also an ambassador and a career foreign service officer, and who knew Ortiz quite well. He said Frank Ortiz was the only Foreign Service officer he had ever met about whom it could be said that after 35 years of service he had not a single friend. Ortiz was not a pleasant person, but he was wily. He had his own personal agenda, which was the furthering of Frank Ortiz. I think he was intellectually dishonest and a coward and still I tried to do what I could as a Foreign Service person to give him support and do the best job I could.

Here are some examples: he was not friendly, to say the least, to the Fulbright program. He once said publicly, "I don't know why we have a Fulbright program; all it does is give grants to Marxists." That was nonsense. He was also a masterful backbiter. He was tough on me, cordial on the surface but saying nasty and untrue things behind my back, but he was much tougher on some other embassy officers, most of whom were working hard and doing really good jobs. If there was a pattern, he was toughest on fellow Hispanics whom he regarded as social inferiors. He himself claimed direct descent from Spanish grandees who settled New Mexico. He played that card whenever it suited him, and he was able to bamboozle a lot of people with that kind of approach, whether his claims of ancestral distinction were true or not.

Now here is a huge irony: early on the White House chief of personnel, Helene Von Damm - I think that was her title, but in any case she had been Reagan's secretary early on and she was now a high ranking assistant and a real power in the White House - came to Peru on a visit and Frank Ortiz had gone out of his way to welcome her and her assistant because she was so influential and had Reagan's ear. At that point I had been involved rather peripherally with AFSA (the American Foreign Service Association, the professional association of the Foreign Service, which also functions somewhat as a labor union) in campaigning against the proliferation of political appointees as ambassadors instead of career officers. I believed with AFSA that the basic criteria should be professional experience, expertise, and competence, and not political loyalty. And I had been outspoken in a few situations where I said we should not have so many political appointees. So Helene Von Damm comes down and she turns out to be just a very savvy lady and of course totally political. Frank Ortiz duly called the Country Team (office directors) together to meet with her and we sat around the table and talked about issues and problems, and the issue of political appointees came up. At this point it was so clear to all of us Helene von Damm was so much more a savvy and congenial person than our career ambassador that I really couldn't say anything and didn't want to. She was very impressive. All the other office directors said after the meeting that it would be great to have Helene Von Damm as ambassador rather than Frank Ortiz. So the issue wasn't strictly political appointeeit was competence. Later on my wife and I got to know her and her assistant a little bit personally, and they were both real professionals, smart, quick studies, friendly and good company and certainly not fooled by the likes of Frank Ortiz. Later on, Helene went to Austria as Reagan's ambassador and I was quite pleased. I lost track of her after that, but she seemed to me at the time as the kind of political appointee no one could take justified exception to.

Q: I think we've always had this schizophrenia over career Foreign Service officers, knowing some really top rank political ambassadors who can often call upon their political knowledge and their political connections to get things done where a career person could not. We have all had examples of the good and the bad. You know, somebody who was a good political supporter of an obscure senator doesn't bring anything to the table but somebody who is both savvy and with damn good political connections going up to the White House can really accomplish something.

How did you find working with Ortiz? This must have been difficult because in a way you were the, among other things, the public relations person for the ambassador.

LENDERKING: It was painful because his tactic was to needle people and belittle them, sometimes publicly, and he was always needling USIA and anyone that was in his line of fire at the time for not doing enough to support our initiatives, to deal with our enemies and that sort of thing. If someone wrote a critical editorial in a leading newspaper, which of course happens all the time all over the world, Ortiz would imply that it was our fault and we weren't doing our job. When we had a good case, or someone's facts were wrong, I had no problem calling on the managing editor to try and correct the record. I didn't do it often, because you can quickly wear out your welcome, but I always got a respectful hearing. Admittedly, I can't recall formal retractions, although a newspaper would sometimes print our comment as a "clarification," because editorials and articles by political columnists were opinion pieces and we were entitled to disagree without impugning the integrity of the writer.

Q: He came from an old New Mexican family who were here before the founding of the United States, isn't that correct?

LENDERKING: So I believe. If this information is correct, of course he had every right to be proud of his forebears, but in my opinion he overdid it in order to puff himself up. I mentioned that the people he seemed to be hardest on in the Embassy were Hispanic. We had a Naval attachï¿½ whose name was Martinez; he was a great guy and a very effective Naval attachï¿½, and Ortiz was always on his back about some imagined problem. We all thought that the basis for it was Ortiz's tendency to look down on those he thought were his inferiors.

Q: He probably came from peasant stock, you know.

LENDERKING: He may well have. Anyway, I'll give you an example of how Ortiz operated. It's typical. On this one occasion, I'd worked very hard to cultivate a TV executive who was a producer of the most popular interview program on TV, a half-hour program something like "Meet the Press." It was a real coup to get him to invite Ambassador Ortiz on the program. The producer also promised me that he would give me an advance look at the questions the panelists were going to ask. So, I could go to Ortiz and say look, this is what you are going to be asked on this program; you can prepare your answers and practice them, we can whip up a draft for you. It's a golden opportunity, and we don't get these very often. Well, Ortiz turned him down, even though his Spanish was fluent. Why? Because he was afraid he'd say something wrong and people would criticize him or make fun of him. He had a great fear of ridicule. A leading cartoonist did a cartoon lampooning Ortiz when he first arriveit wasn't cruel but it wasn't flattering, eitheand Ortiz was deeply wounded. He kept referring to it for months afterwards, and would often respond when I suggested some new initiative, "Well, we don't want to get anyone mad at us." In fact, Peruvian opinion leadergovernment, media, academic, intellectualwere mad as hell at us as a matter of course, which was generally the case throughout Latin America at the time. And that is why I say he was a coward, because he was always demeaning us for not combating anti-American feelings effectively, but when I offered him a chance to do something really effective for the cause as the American Ambassador, he punted.

LENDERKING: On another occasion, I went with the ambassador to call on the Maryknollers, an American Catholic order. This was a time of liberation theology in Latin America and one of the founders of liberation theology was Peruvian. The Maryknollers were a convivial group but their politics were definitely left of center and they were very critical of U.S. policy and Ortiz just passed up one opportunity after another to talk to them. These were Americans, you could let your hair down, roll up your sleeves and have a real discussion, off the record. I liked them personally, but disagreed with their politics, and thought that, despite many historical mistakes in our Latin American policies we also had a record we could defend and achievements we could be proud of. So I was hoping there would be a substantive discussion, but we just sat around the table and Ortiz avoided one substantive thing after another. He refused to engage with them, so all we had was platitudes. There were also problems in his personal life but I don't want to get into that. He simply was not a pleasant man, and more important, he was not an effective representative of the United States.

Here's another example. Remember William French Smith, the attorney general?

Q: Yes.

LENDERKING: Well he was a very elegant and gracious gentleman and he came down for a visit of four days or so and stayed at the residence. But after about a day he moved out and went to a hotel. What we heard was that he couldn't stand Ortiz, who had a habit of leaving notes in the refrigerator saying please don't touch thithings like that. Early in his career, I learned from several FSOs who were there at the time, Ortiz was a young staff assistant to Ambassador Robert Hill in Mexico. He used to snoop around and inspect the garbage of his colleagues, count the number of liquor bottles and report to the Ambassador. He also reported any "improprieties" he could uncover, whether for example an embassy employee was sleeping with someone not his wife, or whatever. In other words, he was a snitch.

Q: Okay. Let's look at Pinochet in Chile; here you had a democracy reviving in Peru and Pinochet was in high power in Chile. How did that set?

LENDERKING: This was a time when there were things coming out about our role in the overthrow of Allende and our ambassador in Chill think it was Nat Davis - was very active in trying to refute some of the charges coming out. And basically I was trying to refute charges that could not be substantiated. We spent a fair bit of time trying to rebut factual errors about our involvement. Of course, as you know, our behavior in the matter of the overthrow of Allende, the freely elected president of a sovereign and friendly country, was considered by many to be reprehensible, and that belief is widespread to this day. That doesn't mean that we were guilty of all the wild charges that were being thrown at us. My personal view is that our acquiescence in the overthrow of Allende, whether or not our role was as actor, or supporter or as encourager was deplorable. I think we could have worked with him. He was no Castro.

Q: Did our involvement in Central America, the Sandinistas and things in El Salvador, cause much of a stir in Peru?

LENDERKING: Central America tended to be regarded as a little distant from Peru's problems. There were so many local problems, domestic problems. Maybe I'm unsure of the timelines but I don't recall the Sandinista issue as being terribly overwhelming at that time. Argentina and its authoritarian government were a big issue. Many influential Peruvians have close ties to Argentina, and it's always been a favorite place of exile for Peruvians out of favor with their own government. And then we had the Falkland Islands, the Malvinas; that took place on Ortiz's watch, when the Brits mounted an expeditionary force and took back the Islands.

Q: How did that go? I assume that Peru strongly supported Argentina?

LENDERKING: Absolutely. I could hardly find anyone who supported the Brit case or the Brit position, which of course we did. I happened to be on a trek up in the mountains with my wife when that broke and I had a little short wave radio and we would listen to it and all the Peruvian porters would gather round, and they would cheer loudly when there was news of the Brits having a problem of some sort. They were all 100 percent for Argentina. But they took our support for the Brits with good grace and we got along well.

Q: When you got back to Lima, how did that go? We tried to play the honest broker and we ended up coming down rather firmly on the British side.

LENDERKING: Once the battle was over and the Brits had won so decisively, the controversy died down quickly and there was not a lot of residual resentment against us. Shortly before this, Jeane Kirkpatrick had visiteshe made two trips, actually. For the first one she came as a visiting scholar invited by USIA and we had just arrived in Lima a day or two before. We invited her and her husband, a delightful man, to dinner and they had just come from Argentina, about which Ms. Kirkpatrick claimed some expertise. We spent the whole evening arguing about her famous article that had just appeared, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," which brought her smartly to the attention of the incoming Reagan administration and was instrumental in landing her the job as US Ambassador to the UN. In the article she claimed that right wing dictatorship that we supported could always change over time, but Communist regimes were totalitarian and immutable. Please remember, disputing that false notion was part of why I got kicked out of Italy, and here we were, seven years later, arguing some of the same points. I criticized her article on several pointI had read it very carefully - and we had a very lively discussion over dinner. As you recall, Ms Kirkpatrick was no shrinking violet and she didn't give an inch. At the end, we parted amicably but I think she made a mental note that Ed Corr and I, and perhaps others in the Embassy, with our talk about promoting democracy and supporting those in Latin America who were true democrats, were not as hard-line anti-Communist as she would have liked.

Now, she had just come from Argentina and I said well, what do you think of the Argentine government? And she said "Oh, I think the admirals are just a little bit misunderstood." Now mind you, this is a government that had taken over the Falklands and had perpetrated some of the worst human rights abuseremember the 'desaparecidos'? the 'disappeared ones'? in the history of Latin America. So in my view Ms. Kirkpatrick, much as I admired her for her gutsy understanding during the Cold War that Communism presented a real threat and wasn't an invention, and those who thought as she did, had a real blind spot about oppressive, dictatorial regimes. And they failed to understand that acquiescing in their brutality, or even supporting it, went against our long term interests.

Q: Disappearances.

LENDERKING: The disappearances. And for someone like Jeane Kirkpatrick, who I always regarded as a sensible anti-communist and not some rabid polemicist, to say something like that - well, I thought she was way off base, to put it mildly.

A few months later, she had been made ambassador to the UN, and she returned to Peru with all the trappings of her high office, with her own government airplane. She didn't have to depend on USIA and some arranged speaking arrangements, she was now a personage. She was treated as an honored embassy guest and a VIP by the Peruvian Government. She seemed a bit suspicious of Ed Corr and of me as well, because she remembered our conversation and referred to it. So anyway, this little vignette maybe sheds some light on the dispute over human rights policy that began with the Carter Administration and roiled the body politic for a time. And the Falkland Islands battle later on soured our relations with Argentina for a while, because there was no doubt whose side we were on.

Q: How did we view the military in Peru?

LENDERKING: The military was still dominated by leftists and they favored keeping us at a distance. Of course, we had to continue the work of building close relations with the military forces, but they were very standoffish, and it was not easy to deal with them. Our military attachï¿½s had a tough row. And we wanted to get the military-to-military cooperation restored and I just don't recall the specifics of that time but there was always an issue.

Q: Did President Fujimori cross your radar at all at this time?

LENDERKING: Yes. I don't remember when he came in but certainly-

Q: I mean, was he a figure and I was wondering whether you, you know, because of your Japanese experience, got involved with the Japanese community in Peru?

LENDERKING: I got involved with some of the artists who were Japanese, Peruvian-Japanese. Otherwise not. They were not very prominent in leadership circles in Lima. The embassy put on a huge and very impressive show of Peruvian contemporary art every year to raise money for charity, and it was always a showcase event. Susan, my wife, put it together one year - working with all the artists, arranging for their works to be exhibited, setting up handling the money, and all the rest of it, and we got all the top artists to exhibit and raised a lot of money for charity that way. But I never met Fujimori. Certainly in the beginning he was quite impressive, and he organized the fight against Sendero Luminoso and began to get results. Some Peruvian journalist friends who knew him told me some stories later on that he seemed very level-headed at first but went off the tracks with megalomania.

Q: Now, you left there in '83, was it?

LENDERKING: Yes.

Q: Where did you go in '83?

LENDERKING: I came back to Washington. It was my second tour in Washington. By now I had been in the Foreign Service for 23 years and this was only my second tour in Washington.

Q: Good God.

LENDERKING: It was quite unusual, especially since I never fancied myself as a field person, but that's what I became and it was good for me, because I learned something about having a worm's eye view and usually sided with field operatives when they had disputes with headquarters, as they inevitably did. After all, the folks in the field were on the spot; the good ones always knew what was going on better than policy wonks in Washington.

Q: What job did you go to?

LENDERKING: At first I didn't have an assignment, but there was a Central American coordinating committee or something like that, run by Otto Reich out of the State Department. He was a smart, conservative political appointee who later became Ambassador to Venezuela and remained prominent in Republican conservative circles for many years after that. They wanted a senior guy from cooperating agencies to make sure that the agencies supported the committee's initiatives. Its role was both public and privatpublic diplomacy to oppose the leftists, mostly in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and some highly classified stuff that I wasn't privy to and later became quite controversial. I was supposed to be the coordinator for USIA, to make sure VOA and others running programs and projects on Central America were aggressive in supporting the mission.

Q: It sounds like...

LENDERKING: Another ball of wax.

Q: Yes. Did you, I was just wondering, did you leave Peru as scheduled, or did Ortiz get you out or did you get yourself out or what?

LENDERKING: No, I left on time. But another little vignette: when I left Ortiz wanted to do my efficiency report. But technically he wasn't my supervisor; that was Gerry Lamberty, the DCM, a career FSO who was a fine officer and a good friend. He willingly provided the buffer between Ortiz and his staff every day, and never complained, except to say once that being DCM was the worst job in the Foreign Service. Despite his frustrations in dealing with Ortiz, he never kicked down on the rest of the staff. So, Ortiz wanted to write my OER; he was cross with me and he wanted to do a job on me. But I insisted that my supervisor was the DCM and he had to write the overall report, with the Ambassador adding a shorter review. He didn't like that but I showed him the regulations. And the DCM gave me a glowing OER. And Ortiz wrote a very critical review with many misrepresentations and snide comments. It was the worst report or review I'd ever received.

When I saw what Ortiz had written, I said to myself, here's trouble. Anyone who wants to take on higher authority in most hierarchies, and certainly the Foreign Service, almost always loses, regardless of right or wrong. But I wrote a rebuttal to it, citing instances where Ortiz had made false statements in the review and where he had failed to act on opportunities that we had presented to him. And I tried to make it short and not whiny or anything like that and much to my astonishment a few months later I was promoted, to MC (minister counselor). Some time later I ran into one of the guys who was on the panel and I said I'm astonished after what Ortiz wrote about me, that I would get promoted because all of this is very competitive. (I was competing against officers who had marvelous, unblemished records and here was the ambassador taking me apart). And he said well, the panel liked the way you handled that situation. So I guess sometimes you can win by rebutting and setting the record straight; I think generally you do not.

Q: This is interesting because I think in 1981 I was on an MC promotion panel with Frank Oritz.

LENDERKING: Oh really?

Q: Yes. So he knew how the promotion system worked and you have to be a little careful how you write these things because sometimes you set it up for a good rebuttal.

LENDERKING: That's true. In my case, he made factual errors that made my rebuttals credible, and it was clear he bore animus toward me. It wasn't a professional review. If you're going to do someone in, you have to be a little bit clever, at least.

Q: Okay, next time we'll move to 1983, when you were making our Central American policy make sense. Next interview: The 3rd of April, 2007.

Q: And your assignment was to Central American coordinating?

LENDERKING: That was a time when Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador were deeply embroiled in domestic insurgencies in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and the Reagan administration saw it as an attempt by radical communist revolutionaries to take over in Central America. I mentioned that the overall head of the coordination committee was Otto Reich in the State Department. I was the sole USIA representative. I didn't see much of him except at weekly general purpose meetings, but as it turned out he was involved in much more than that. Otto had kind of a sinister reputation but I always found him personally very pleasant and very intelligent. He knew Latin America and of course he was part of the hard line group of politicos. I think he grew up or spent at least some of his boyhood in Cuba, so you would naturally expect him to be fervently anti-Castro. Now, I have no admiration for Fidel Castro, except that he has been able to outlast many American administrations and our clumsy attempts to overthrow him. If his regime has some accomplishments, such as improving literacy and medical care, there is a long list of minuses, including destroying the Cuban economy, destroying free enterprise, throwing dissidents in jail and stifling political expression and dissent, meddling in other countries (of course, Castro wasn't the only one!), and hanging an albatross around the necks of the long-suffering Cuban people. So if you want to talk about a policy that has been consistently wrong and ineffective through one administration after another since 1960, you can talk about U.S. Cuba policy. Now, I'm sure Otto Reich and I would have disagreed on elements of U.S. Latin American policy, but personally I liked him and I didn't have any problems with him at all, or he with me. I was no threat to anything he was up to anyway, and he looked on USIA as something that probably could be marginally useful to his purposes. I didn't see all that much of him and I guess my memory is hazy on this but later on some secret stuff came out that we were hip deep in murky incidents in Latin America.

Q: How long were you with this group?

LENDERKING: Oh, only three months and then I got a regular assignment.

Q: But did you get any feel for a violent changing of gears vis-ï¿½-vis our policy towards Central America? Was there something momentous underway at that time?

LENDERKING: We actually began to sense early on, when I was still in Peru, that the Reagan administration was mounting a much more aggressive foreign policy, with significant support for the Contras and the anti-Communists in El Salvador, and reduced attention to human rights abuses by anyone who was anti-Communist. This also included support, including funding, for any effort to undermine people we didn't like and discredit them. I was personally uncomfortable with this radical change in policy and intervention, although there were a lot of things going on that I wasn't aware of. Much of this was done behind the scenes, bypassing the traditional Foreign Service, although some State senior diplomats were deeply involved in the overall effort.

Q: Well this group, were there other foreign policy professionals, or were these a bunch of ideologues fresh from the political campaign who were tossed into this particular group?

LENDERKING: The people I dealt with were mostly foreign policy professionals, career people who were mid or reasonably senior guys. And then there were people like Otto Reich who were at the top and I guess the most notorious was Elliot Abrams, who now is still a very high ranking guy in the Bush Administration but he does not have a position in which he would have to testify to Congress, or a job that would require congressional confirmation because he is over at the National Security Council in an influential position. But I think he was Assistant Secretary, for a time for the Western Hemisphere and he was hip deep in a lot of this stuff. I'm sorry I don't have a good recall of the details. A lot of it's now on the record, in various declassified archives.

Q: Did you get any feel from your fellow professionals about what was happening, particularly in El Salvador and in Nicaragua?

LENDERKING: I did but not mostly through that particular group; it was just by reading the paper, talking to people. The Republicans were very hard line and certainly in the beginning, they had meetings about once a week with various people and if you had a legitimate reason to be there you could just go. People would get up and say what they were doing to further the cause in their various agencies on Central America. And these were, as I recall, informal, these were different from the Central American group.

Q: Well, how did you view the situation in Central America and did you think maybe we should have handled it differently?

LENDERKING: I have always felt that pure unalloyed anti-Communism was not a sufficient basis for our entire foreign policy. As a huge country with worldwide interests, we couldn't afford to subordinate every single issue to the war against Communism. We had to be in favor of something and support it with money and other resources. Of course, we did that with many programs, such as support for democratic labor unions in Europe and many other beneficial things we did, but we shouldn't have aligned ourselves with some of the despicable tyrants we did without realizing that it would hurt us down the road. There is a thread that runs through our foreign policy to the effect that we align ourselves with some really pretty awful people and if they are friendly to us and are aggressive in confronting people who we regard as enemies, and in those days it was always the far left and people we thought were pro-communist or tolerant of communism, that was OK. Well, in some cases it was and in many cases it wasn't. And when we are myopic and ignore realities on the ground, eventually we pay a price.

Q: After about three months of being in this cockpit, where did you go?

LENDERKING: I heard that there was a job in East Asia as the head of the office of public affairs in East Asia and Pacific, and I would also be the spokesman for the bureau, and they wanted someone who was familiar with Japan, and who could speak Japanese to deal with the Japanese press because there was a very large and influential press corps covering Washington and American politics. So that's how I got the job. Paul Wolfowitz, who went on to even greater fame, was the Assistant Secretary and he had a group of very able guys as deputies and the office directors were all very good, but the original purpose for which I was hired actually did not come to pass, as is so often the case. The most aggressive people that I had to deal with were Australians and New Zealanders, our closest friends, and I almost never had a really tough issue with the Japanese press corps.

Q: How long did you do this?

LENDERKING: Two years. I really liked working at the State Department, its different pace and policy orientation, and, of course, the daily interaction on compelling issues of national interest. This was from early 1984 to 1986. I would have liked to stay longer, but the way things were in those days it was not in one's interest, promotion-wise, to spend too much time away in an out of agency assignment. I was still with USIA, "on loan" to the State Department.

Q: Okay, in the first place let's talk about Wolfowitz and whoever else was working in the area. How did you find them?

LENDERKING: Well, I had heard that Paul was a very smart fellow and was widely respected as a real comer. He was also reputed to be something of a hardliner and I suppose he was, compared to some of us, but I didn't find him doctrinaire or overly ideological. He was pragmatic, well-informed, personable, very hard working, and made sure he had command of some very complicated issues. He was also a dedicated public servant, and one of the most naturally bright people I'd met in government service. I didn't necessarily agree with everything he said, but I can't remember any demurrals from any of us on any of his views. He was not a hard line ideologue and he would listen to people who disagreed with him. I was not part of his inner circle anyway. But I found him an extremely impressive person and he worked so hard, any issue that I or anyone else would bring up he seemed to know more about it and had thought through all the policy implications so he was familiar with your argument even before you had stated it. I saw very little to take issue with, and I wasn't looking for disagreements anyway. Paul had a very positive impact on a number of policies. For example, he played a key role in how we handled the end of the Marcos regime in the Philippines, edging him to leave without causing bloodshed, and that was handled very smoothly. One of his key contributions, as I understand it, was persuading President Reagan that Marcos had to go. Reagan was very reluctant to jettison a good friend of the U.S. and a strong anti-Communist. It's ironic, in lieu of what happened years later in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, that one of the things that Paul always used to say to us was, if you overthrow a regime you are responsible for what comes afterwards.

Q: These things can come back to haunt us...

LENDERKING: And this was the era when the Philippines wanted us out of two huge military bases that were cornerstones of our military presence in East Asia; one was Clark Air Force Base and the other was the Subic Naval Base, where most of the Seventh Fleet came for repairs and maintenance. I'd been there years earlier when I was in the Navy, and it was very impressive, because the base had a highly skilled work force, they were safe and reliable, and doing repairs there saved us gobs of money. Subic had the best naval ship repair facilities and docking in East Asia, but now the Filipinos wanted us out. I expected Paul to be adamant about this and he said you know, if people don't want you in a country, the strongest military power in the world can't make your presence tolerable.

Q: I was just talking to somebody yesterday dealing with the Panama Canal, and you know, the reversion of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians was the same thing; if we stayed too long with the Panamanians it could make the canal unusable. Anyway, what were the major issues in East Asia during this period that you had to deal with?

LENDERKING: There was one perennial, and that was the adamant refusal of New Zealand to have anything to do with, or permit any contact with, nuclear vessels or weaponry or anything like that. That means that U.S. nuclear ships couldn't call at New Zealand ports. We couldn't conduct naval exercises with New Zealand ships if any of our ships were nuclear powered, and so on. It meant, in effect, that New Zealand had opted out of the very close mutual security relationship we'd had with them. It was a serious problem, for them and for us, not just a disagreement among friends.

Well, they stuck to their guns, and we still have a problem with them, but they sky didn't fall. New Zealanders are marvelous people and they have a lovely country, but they also tend to be a little self-righteous and they saw themselves as leading a crusade to keep nuclear weapons away from the South Pacific, and beyond. One might say, "well, good on them," but our immediate concern was our security relationships and we had good reason to feel the New Zealand position jeopardized our security. The Australians agreed with us. Our policy, to this day, is that we neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons anywhere. We also feared that the New Zealand attitude would undermine our fragile working arrangement with Japan, which still had a strong nuclear allergy. Now, we and the Japanese eventually figured out a way to finesse this issue, and with New Zealand, we felt we had no choice but to exclude them from military cooperation operations and there was considerable cost to New Zealand.

Q: Well you know, we talk about it but New Zealand is a small country in a relatively remote part of the world, and we no longer fear Japanese militarism there as we did during World War II, and that issue was settled in 1945. So what was the fuss?

LENDERKING: The great fear was that okay, here is this little country and it defies us and then before you know it our ships and especially the nuclear submarines, the carriers that were nuclear powered and the ships that might or might not have been carrying nuclear weapons could not go anywhere because other countries would take up the cudgels and then we would have our navy crippled. So it was a key issue and the New Zealand and Australian press particularly were very aggressive about hammering on that issue and I spent probably more time on that than anything else. But in any bureau I think you usually have at least one issue a day, at least, and I thought it was a great job. I got to know all the correspondents who covered the State Department. Some of them had been covering the State Department for years and had better contacts in the building initially certainly than I did and were also extremely well versed in American foreign policy. A few of them, like the senior guys for the Washington Post and New York Times, could usually get an interview or a comment directly from the Secretary of State or his senior deputies, so they performed at a level above my pay grade, to use the old saying. I'm thinking of people like Don Oberdorfer of the Washington Post who has written authoritative books on Korea and other subjects, and now retired, is the head of the Asia Society in Washington. The State Department press corps was quite aggressive as a whole, and the regulars were highly professional and very knowledgeable on the issues. They differed in interesting ways from the White House press corps, in that they tended to have greater subject expertise and were much less interested in being flamboyant and becoming on-camera celebrities. The White House press corps was very closely attuned to US domestic politics. It was the different natures of their jobs that made them that wathey weren't like that to start.

Q: Well, let's talk about New Zealand and Australia. You know, Murdoch came out of Australian and representI hate to use this worthe "gutter press," but my meaning is something close to that.

LENDERKING: Yes, Id not dispute that. But we have to admit he's been extraordinarily successful, one of the most powerful media moguls of all time. Like him or not, and I'm very wary of his power drive and ambition, he's an extremely shrewd businessman.

Q: You know, he trades in the sensational, sex, the lower depths or whatever, and his tabloid style and substance are basically irresponsible. Was he a model for Australian and New Zealand newspaper and media journalists?

LENDERKING: I think not so much but I think the Australian press, those papers like "The Sydney Morning Herald" and "The Melbourne Age" and respectable mainline papers certainly had a critical approach to the United States and American foreign policy, which I think they continue to this day. If Americans read the Australian mainstream press regularly, they'd start to wonder whether Australia is really a friendly country and whether Australians actually like us at all. Now, of course Australia is a very friendly country, and key ally, and there is still a lot of respect and admiration for the United States, but it's not unalloyed admiration and we often make the mistake of taking it for granted. Right now, there is a lot of popular opposition in Australia to our Iraq policy, but the Government is foursquare with us.

Q: Well, what about this? You have this kind of ambivalence - I have talked to people who have dealt with New Zealand who say you know, this anti-nuclear stand is not a foregone conclusion. It may be the policy of a particular government and that could change; or the papers might be opposed to certain things but this really does not represent Australian political opinion in general.

LENDERKING: That's true, and I suppose it applies to any democratic government. Policies can change. I have made a number of trips to Australia on business and pleasure, and my wife is Australian and comes from a moderate conservative family and most of her friends are professional people who probably are more conservative than not, and still I think there is certainly a basic friendliness towards the United States but also there is an underlying feeling that you sense very quickly, even among people who are extremely cordial and polite and friendly, that there is something wrong with the United States. We are too big, too brash, too vulgar, too bullying; our policies often go wrong and we drag other people in like the Australians and that sort of thing. Obviously, there are also a lot of people who are enthusiastic and gung ho about being a very close ally of the United States. After all, we have really provided very generously and confidentially for their defense. They have tied their whole national defense to the United States and we give them access to information and weapons technology that we share with no country except the UK.

Q: Did you feel at this point that Australia had pretty well broken, psychologically or otherwise, with Great Britain as far as it being the mother country, and looking beyond that maybe to the American protective layer, or not?

LENDERKING: Australia, like any modern country, is a nuanced society, and there are many strains of thought and opinion, including all those you mentioned. But in general I would say that even today the ties with Mother England, although they have loosened and Australia is very much its own country, are much stronger in many ways than they are with the U.S. I'm talking about the cultural and historical ties and a sense of where Australia belongs when they think about themselves. I think the strong ties with the U.S. are based on national defense, rather than cultural affinity. Despite this, American popular culture permeates Australia, and is generally to their liking, and Americans and Australians like to think of themselves as natural mates because we are both big, continental democracies with many historical similarities. Our self images are also similar but not identicahale, hearty, generous, a bit rough and rugged but well-meaning, and so oso we think we understand each other well, although the truth is not quite that way - there are big misperceptions on both sides. So Australians come here and visit, of course, but they are much more likely to go to England and Europe than the U.S. because they aren't very aware of the depth of American culturl'm talking about serious literature and the arts, for example. Australians are surprisingly unaware of some of our achievements. My wife and other Australians point out that Australia is one of the most geographically isolated countries in the world, and that partially explains the lack of awareness. The rest of the world is a long way away, and many Australians dream about having one good overseas trip to see the world before they come back and settle down. Perth, a lovely city on the Indian Ocean quite similar to our San Diego but without smog and traffic jams, is where my wife is from, and the American Consulate General there is the farthest in the world from Washington, DC. Consequently it's a much-prized assignment for American diplomats.

Susan's uncle used to love to tell the story of how he and the American Consul General used to play in a regular weekly poker game and the CG literally broke down and cried the day he received his orders to return to Washington. Anyway, that's how I heard the story, many times. Now, the other side of the coin is that Australians are generally charmed by New England and surprised by the more reserved behavior and respect for tradition they find there. Many Australian visitors flock to the West Coast and if they don't have time or money don't get to the East Coast or South at all. That's probably because they feel the West Coast might be more familiar and congeniacertainly in terms of climate, Southern California is most similar to Australia. Also, I should say that knowledgeable people in the arts, government, whatever, of course are quite familiar with the U.S. I was talking about the general populace as a whole.

Q: Turning to Japan, you say they have a large press corps here. Can you talk about your view of the operations of the press corps, because this is a subject about which we aren't very familiar. How did they operate and was there much investigative reporting, that kind of thing?

LENDERKING: The Japanese press is large and very sophisticated, and in some ways outstrips our own. Their journalists are generally well educated, serious, and professional. Of course there are scandal sheets, just as there are in any country where there is a free press. They break down along conservative to progressive lines just the way our papers do but the numbers are vast, the readership and circulation figures. The Japanese have a big three, they are all national newspapers; the "Asahi," - I don't know how it is now but probably basically the same, is considered the paper more for intellectuals and it was the most left of center, but it was a mainstream paper. And then the "Mainichi," centrist and mainstream, and then the "Yomiuri," which has the largest circulation and is slightly conservative, or at least it was then. I think in those days the daily circulation was around 12, 13, 14 million a day. They all put out English language editions, which were excellent, well written and full of information, necessary for the large expat colony, most of whom couldn't read or speak Japanese. And there were a lot of other newspapers too; one was the equivalent of the "The Wall Street Journal," another perhaps similar in editorial content to "The Washington Times." Now these are huge and very powerful organizations. Japan is probably the most literate country in the world, so you can imagine how important the media are in a democratic country like that. In addition, they have weekly intellectual, political, and cultural magazines, similar in content to our own except that there are probably more of them.

The correspondents for the established newspapers stationed in our big cities are all well educated; most of them really enjoy their assignments here because this is a place where events of world consequence are either happening or being hatched, and having good, reliable information about the U.S. flowing to Japan is essential to Japan and to us as well. I am ashamed to say it, even though there are many excellent American correspondents covering Japan, there are more Japanese covering the U.S. and the quality of their coverage in an overall sense is more thorough and more informative. Most of the Japanese correspondents here speak good English and they are often 'A team players,' so to speak. They developed good contacts and they were approachable; they weren't just off on their own, writing stories in a vacuum.

Q: Were there Japanese newsmen or newswomen burrowing down in the various parts of society and then all of a sudden stories would pop up that you had no idea were coming at all, and you had to deal with them?

LENDERKING: I can't recall a specific instance, but I think there must have been. I was constantly worried that the Japanese didn't call me much about stories they were working on. Yes, they had good sources, but with American correspondents and some of the others I got to know well, they called on me often as an official source and occasionally depended on me to warn them away from misleading paths or sources, and to the best of my ability and the limits of classification, I tried to do thait was an essential part of my job. Sometimes I couldn't talk about a sensitive subject directly, say, for example, most aspects of the nuclear issue, but I often could say, "there's nothing to that idea," or "you're on the right track," and so forth. Determining how far I could go was what made the job so interestinit was far more than just sticking to the press guidances. I'd say that any press officer who insisted on doing only that would be useless to his superiors and to the media as well.

Anyway, the Japanese didn't often call me, even though they knew I spoke Japanese and would help them if I could. Maybe it was their ingrained distrust of government officials. If they were working on a story and no one denied it, then they might feel a bit freer about what they wrote, just quoting sources. But of course not every seemingly credible source is reliable. With the Japanese, I knew most of them, and a few of them were friends and I saw them socially. But I found that a lot of times when they were working on a story, they would go out and develop their own contacts. We knew what they were writing. Our embassy in Tokyo did a press digest every day, so they knew we knew what they were writing.

I might explain that my phone usually started ringing non-stop around 1 pm, after the daily press briefing and when reporters were starting to work on their stories and meet deadlines, and it didn't let up until around 5 pm. Of course, I had other things to do besides brief reporters, so it always seemed I was doing a lot of things at once. But the callers were almost all Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, plus visiting non-resident journalists in town to do a story or two and set up some interviews.

Q: What about the Korean press?

LENDERKING: The Korean press in those days had a much lower profile. They had a few big mainstream papers like the Big Three in Japan, but media sophistication was not on the same level as Japavery few countries have the sophistication of Japan. So they had a much lower profile in Washington and fewer correspondents, although there some very serious issues, such as the return to Korea of Kim Dae-Jung, who later became president. It was a serious issue because he was in exile here and we were really afraid that if he went back the authoritarian Park Chung-Hee regime would kill him, the same thing that happened to Aquino in the Philippines. Was it Park?

Q: Well, Park Chung-Hee was gone by that time - Wait a minute, Park Chung-Hee was killed I think around '79.

LENDERKING: And I remember we were adamant that if Kim Dae-Jung went back to Korea that nothing happen to him. We put a lot of pressure on the Korean government not to let anything happen to him.

Q: What about the Chinese? I mean, the two Chinas, Taiwan and Mainland China?

LENDERKING: I knew the Xinhua correspondent, and one or two of the others, but not well...

Q: Which newspaper was that?

LENDERKING: That was the official New China News Agency of China, the PRC. Despite being a government entity, they did a pretty professional job.

Q: Alright. Let's go to the Philippines. You were there when Marcos left?

LENDERKING: Yes, in Washington. I think you should get Paul Wolfowitz to give some interviews; he could tell you all the things that he did, which were substantial and extremely adroit, insofar as I was familiar with them. I believe he was instrumental in getting Marcos to leave without bloodshed and bringing about a smooth transition. As I said earlier, he was also instrumental in persuading President Reagan that Marcos had to go and that we had to give him a push because otherwise it wouldn't happen.

Q: How about the Filipino press and the growing discomfort of the Filipino public with our presence in the Philippines?

LENDERKING: I think the Filipino press is much more hotheaded than some of the other countries we have been talking about, and they were, for the most, very strongly nationalistic and so on the base issue, for example, they wanted us out of there. This was an infringement on Filipino sovereignty and it was a symbol of their being a grown up nation that they didn't want an extensive American military presence on their soil.

The base issue is interesting, because we agonized over it for months and thought losing the bases would do huge and irreparable harm to our interests in East Asia, even though cool heads like Paul Wolfowitz recognized holding onto the bases was really untenable in those circumstances because Filipino nationalism was on the rise and they wanted us out of there. In the end, we worked it out, and with the bases removed as an issue, our relationship actually improved. Yet we still have issues of bruised nationalism cropping up with the Filipinos, who really feel they have a close relationship with us and want it to continue.

Now, I'm mentioning Paul Wolfowitz a lot because as we speak he is a very controversial person because of his role advocating the Iraq war and some of the huge mistakes attributed to him and Rumsfeld, such as drastically underestimating the insurgency in Iraq and the number of American soldiers required to have a successful occupation and the restoration of responsible government. And then he left DOD for a whole new set of problems at the World Bank, and had to resign under a cloud, and with a damaged reputation. All I'm saying was that when I worked for him, he handled problems like the bases in the Philippines very adeptly. People liked and respected him enormously because he was so smart and, although he could be tough, he was a very decent person and he was fun to work for because he was so talented.

Q: Well you know, it's an interesting thing. I have been doing this now for over 20 years and people I have talked with like yourself have the highest respect for Wolfowitz before he got involved over in the Pentagon as number two to Rumsfeld and prior to that he was right on everything. Over at the Pentagon he was basically wrong on everything and tragically wrong. I mean, this is my opinion but it's certainly shared by most professionals.

LENDERKING: For sure. And it's going to make a great book or a series of books someday. There have been some good things already written on that particular subject but I certainly agree with that and I was very disappointed because Paul was so well grounded, so dedicated and so common sensical and later he just seemed to have gone off the tracks. Of course, he would violently disagree with that, and so would his supporters. In their eyes, he was right all along and the only problem in their eyes, I would guess, is that there were some big glitches in the execution of the concepts.

Q: As a press officer for a bureau, how were you used? Did you sit in on conferences and meetings? Did you know what was going on?

LENDERKING: Yes. This was my first assignment inside the State Department and I was an office director and a lot of big issue things were going on. I attended the morning staff meeting that Paul had with his deputies and all the office directors. There were some 20-odd countries in EAP so it was a large staff meeting but that was the main source for finding out what was going on each day and there would always be a part of it devoted to what was in the press and whether we should take some action, such as correcting an error, setting up a background briefing for invited reporters, whatever. Paul encouraged his staff to use their own initiativhe didn't want people just waiting around for the phone to rinthe bureaus don't work that way, it's frantic most of the time. I worked on the floor below him so I didn't see a lot of him after that morning staff meeting unless I was bringing in a journalist or film crew for an interview or he was doing something outside the building for which there would be press contact, and I would go with him on those occasions. But he was accessible to the press and we got many requests for interviews and I always sat in on those. It was a great way to keep current on his thinking and policy developments without talking to him face to face. Occasionally I would initiate a meeting with a journalist or group if I thought an issue needed clarification at his level. We had TV interviews in his office for TV shows like "60 Minutes" and things like that. He was on all the major talk shows and some of those I orchestrated and also went with him when he was on them. There were usually several of those kinds of contacts with journalists every week. So, with this and reading cables from embassies plus the newspapers and watching the news shows I felt I was plugged in. In addition, if a new problem surfaced I could go to the office directors or the action officer on that particular issue and get an instant briefing or clarification of a complex issue. The office directors were always terribly busy but they always made time for me because they understood I was dealing with reporters under deadline pressure and what we told them would be reflected in the next morning's headlines. Having that kind of instant access was absolutely crucial to my ability to do a good job, because going in I wasn't an expert on anything, and at the State Department one's expertise has to be updated constantly, even on a daily basis if it's a current issue.

Q: Who were some of other senior officials of the Bureau?

LENDERKING: The principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Paul's #2, for most of my tenure was Jim Lilley, an ex-CIA officer who went on to become ambassador to Korea and China. He was a real China expert, an impressive and incisive man. All the deputies were outstanding in my opinion, as were the office directors. There has always been a lot of talent in that Bureau, and it was a great experience and very stimulating to be in that company.

Q: What about the MIA, the Missing in Action issue? My impression is that the issue was picked up by the far right, with the idea that somehow or other there were camps deep in the jungle with American prisoners of war. It made no sense but it was an issue that we treated very seriously and nothing every came of it. What was your feeling on this?

LENDERKING: This was a big issue, because there was a lot of political noise on it, and of course, several administrations had vowed they would press for a full accounting of all our MIAs. Those groups knew how to work the media and they knew how to work the Congress and they would raise issues for us that we would have to spend a lot of time on. I don't think anyone in the East Asia bureau took those allegations seriously. Now, there was a guy, I cannot remember his name, who did come ouRobert Garwood, maybe? - I can't remember if he had been a deserter, or if he'd been captured and then was allowed to stay on in Vietnam. Anyway, he finally surfaced and I remember that happened during my tenure in the bureau and there was a big fuss about him for awhile and then he just faded away. He didn't have all that much to say, as I recall.

Q: So we're up to about 1986.

LENDERKING: Yes, I was there until maybe '87, I guess.

Q: By the way, had Charlie Wick created Worldnet or not at that point?

LENDERKING: Yes, it was about that time.

Q: Were you getting involved with that and trotting people out from your bureau to be interviewed?

LENDERKING: A little bit, yes. I'm sure Paul was on Worldnet from time to time. I did have some problems with the Voice of America because it was being politicized to some extent by the conservative ideologues. By this time I had left State and gone over to USIA as Deputy Director for East Asia and Pacific, which was also a good job. I went to a weekly large staff meeting at the Bureau , and at one of these things someone brought up something that a Voice of America broadcast had said. They'd started having editorials and many of them reflected the hard right ideas of the writers, who were political appointees, and not necessarily the considered policy view of the State Department. Sometimes they deviated from American foreign policy and people at the State Department were upset about this. And I was upset about it. One issul forget the particulars - after hearing about five guys, one after the other at the State Department meeting blister the Voice of America for wandering off the reservation on this policy issue, I went back to USIA and talked to Richard Carlson, who was the head of the VOA and actually a terrific guy, and said that my ears were red because I got blistered so much for what was perceived as an errant VOA broadcast. Dick heard me out, but just shrugged it off. He knew that Charlie Wick would back him, and the State Department wouldn't push it because Charlie Wick had the ear of the President if need be and the issue, although important, didn't rise to that level.

So I took it to Ken Tomlinson, who was, I think, the head policy guy at the VOA at the time, and he certainly was a conservative political appointee, and his answer was classic: "American foreign policy is whatever we say it is." He actually believed that, that if you said something it would then become policy. Tomlinson went on to other jobs, and most recently was head of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees all American government broadcasting entities, and just recently resigned after a series of allegations centering on management deficiencies and ideologically-driven decision-making. Of course, Tomlinson denied it all and probably moved on to a cushy job in the Republican shadow government, or private industry, I just don't know.

Q: Well, you went over to USIA and worked from '86 to '88, was it?

LENDERKING: It was '86 to '88. We had big programs in all the countries of East Asia and the Pacific except for Vietnam. And the area office is what backstopped those programs, supervised them and got involved in everything; what the programs were, what the personnel issues were; if there was a problem the area office was responsible for supervising and resolving it. We had a couple of personnel issues where guys had to be transferred and that sort of thing, those things come up. But the area office was the overseer for the area, and also represented the area to the director, who was Charlie Wick.

Q: From your perspective, talk about Charlie Wick.

LENDERKING: He could be very charming but he was also very demanding. I always hoped to be an area director, but there were many days I was glad I wasn't one because whenever Charlie Wick traveled, and he traveled a good deal, he would always take along the area director with him, who was basically the minder and chief baggage handler and responsible for seeing that Charlie Wick was treated in the manner to which he thought he deserved. And this required an enormous amount of handholding and making arrangements and using up all kinds of goodwill chips to make sure that he got access to the most important people and all the other things that people with huge but fragile egos and elevated senses of entitlement require. In other words, he was extremely high maintenance, in modern parlance. A good friend of mine, who was area director, once said it was "unseemly" for adult human beings to be forced to behave in this way.

Now, the bright side of the coin, and Wick's detractors have to recognize this, he did have rapport with the President Reagan, mainly because his wife May Jane and Nancy Reagan were close friends. Through this association, Mr. Wick got us more resources than we otherwise would have had, in good measure. Sometimes you could reason with him; he had a lot of good ideas, and Worldnet was one of them. That came out of his brain not fully formed but he just carried it forward and developed it and refined it until it was a success and the naysayers were proved wrong. There were a lot of people who were scoffers, initially, and I was one of them. I came to realize that this was really something pretty good and he was on to something worthwhile. He had a temper; he would get red in the face if he didn't like something or when he was tired. So it was important to keep him happy on a trip, and I am glad I never had to go on one with him. I also have to say that he could be very charming, full of wise cracks, some of which were so funny you couldn't help but break out laughing. He could play the piano very well, and probably could have done OK as a barroom piano player. I was at one meeting in Sao Paulo where he had all the area directors and a lot of high level Brazilians in, and we'd taken a large meeting room in the hotel for a reception after the day's meetings, and someone had arranged for a piano to be wheeled in and he sits down and starts reeling off cocktail music. He was really good, playing and adding witty commentarit was genuinely entertaining.

Q: Were there any either personnel or other issues that you were particularly concerned with?

LENDERKING: Oh yes. They were constant. Let me touch on two of them that perhaps illustrate the kind of regime that we had under Charlie Wick. A perennial issue for USIA was what guidelines we had for our speakers who went overseas for us, often from academic and policy related fields. Given that the Reagan administration was a strongly ideological one, what people said about the U.S. and the administration while they were overseas on a USIA-sponsored trip mattered a lot. Some of the people we chose, who almost always were respected mainstream leaders in their fields - we didn't recruit people with extreme views of either right or left - on a number of occasions criticized current foreign policies. Sometimes they made headlines and the cry would go up, "Why are we sending these folks overseas on taxpayers' money to criticize the administration?" In a couple of cases Charlie Wick would get heated enough to either demand that the speaker stop his criticisms or we would abort his trip. Of course, that would have been counterproductive and some of the senior guys would have to try to calm him down. So this issue often arose, but I also can't remember a single instance when Mr. Wick actually carried out his threat to abort someone's trip, but there were a couple of close ones. Our guidance to PAOs overseas was that if someone really got up on a soapbox and delivered a strong policy attack on the U.S., it was up to the PAO on the spot to work out a corrective, either by getting up and saying something like "Mr. Smith has just expressed his views, which he is entirely welcome to do, but American policy is that..." I had to do that a number of times, overseas, and I think it was the right tone to take.

Now, that example was on the problem side. On the good side, one of the most interesting projects I was involved in - and it was due to Charlie Wick's contacts, was getting Gregory Peck to go to China-

Q: The movie star.

LENDERKING: - yes, and take some of his best films and talk about them. And we showed the movies and we had him there with all the trappings, with very high level, influential people, and it was an enormous success. We got Ford Motor Companit was probably Charlie Wick who made the contacthe knew a lot of people - and a couple of others to pick up some of the expenses because a person of that level of prestige demanded, and rightfully so, to travel at a certain level of comfort. His wifVeronique - went with him; he had to have a really nice car and first class accommodations and comfortable treatment all along the way. So Ford contributed a brand new luxury cal can't remember the modeand Peck and his wife also believed that separate bathrooms for husband and wife held the key to a happy marriage, so those accommodations had to be guaranteed at every stop, and that added to the cost. Now, I have to point out; he did this pro bono - he didn't get a cent for this. It was his time and considerable effort that he was donating because he believed in the project of opening doors to China and he was proud of most of his films. He was also an extremely gracious person to deal with. I talked to him a few times on the telephone, but it was a terribly difficult project to put together because people who were in Hollywood, that he trusted, were always whispering in his ear, you know, you cannot trust USIA because it is the U.S. Government and that sort of thing. Some of them were seeking personal advantages for themselves, in the time-honored way of Hollywood. So we would be moving ahead, thinking things were on track and we had all the players in Hollywood, Washington, and Beijing working together, and someone would get to Peck or something else would happen and we'd be confronted with a potential train wreck. Here's just one small example: Peck himself chose the films he wanted to showcasI think there were about six of them. But locating them proved very difficult. Obtaining rights to show them was even more difficult. Arranging for their safe transportation and storage, deciding how to present them was another. I think we decided against a simultaneous interpreter, and arranging subtitles would have been very costly and there wasn't enough time, so we just went with the films and relied on Peck and others to explain what was going on to those who couldn't handle English. At least that's my recollection.

Gregory Peck himself I think had liberal leanings and was sympathetic to the goals of USIA, and he didn't have any big distrust of government but he wanted the thing to go right and he didn't want any Washington bureaucrats to be messing up his program. He was very proud of those films and rightly so. Well, with all the headaches we had, the program, which involved about a week of public appearances in China, with Peck introducing his films and answering questions, going to official receptions, and all the rest, the entire project was marveloureally precedent setting. It was a real breakthrough, sort of symbolic of the highly visible emergence of a major world power from decades of being a tyrannical closed society, and it was very exciting. High level Chinese of all kinds clamored to see the films and meet Peck, and the Embassy feasted on the new contacts and introductions made for years. Something like that could not have happened without Charlie Wick's contacts and input, and the months of hard work we put in to make it work were totally worth it.

Q: Well, of course too, ,at that time, our relations with China and China's relations with the outside world were not that great, and to get these films, which were major films, into China and somebody of the stature of Gregory Peck, who was well known among the Chinese cultural literati, to talk about them was quite an attraction.

LENDERKING: It sure was. I was not in China but I had a lot to do with it on the Washington end, and the people that we were able to contact and establish ongoing relations with just opened the doors throughout the Chinese world of intellectuals, ideas, and culture. The payoff was enormous and I'm sure we benefit to this day from what that program started.

Q: Did you get any feel in your office about our exchange program and visitors program? Let's talk about China first. If I recall correctly, this was a period of tremendous exodus from China for those who had the wherewithal to get their kids to go to American schools and pursue university studies.

LENDERKING: True. It was a time of ferment in China and some of the barriers were coming down, not without struggle, so it was a stimulating time of opportunity for us. We had a gifted American staff in China, people who could speak Chinese and were willing to commit significant portions of their working lives to getting to know this extraordinary country, and who could take advantage of this sudden blossoming.

One example of that occurred on my first trip to China. I was calling on the president of a major university in Beijing and I was very flattered and pleased when not only did he say he would be pleased to receive me on what I thought was just a courtesy call, but he would like to invite me for lunch. And for him I was just a faceless bureaucrat from an agency he probably didn't know much about and not at all equal to him in the social hierarchy, and he turned out a rather large lunch with a lot of his senior faculty present, and I was the guest of honor. At the appropriate time he gave some remarks in Chinese, which were translated. He started talking about the Cultural Revolution and he said, basically, this must never be allowed to happen in China again, and we are depending on you, America, to help us on this. And wow, I was floored. I mean, this was the president of one of the most powerful universities in China saying this, right out there in front of his faculty. So that was the kind of era that we had and it was pretty exciting, considering all the years when China was a closed and hostile society.

Q: You know, to my mind probably the strong right arm of our diplomacy has been our exchange and visitor program and the great number of students that we attract here. And any tampering with that process would be an enormous blunder...

LENDERKING: During this period Johns Hopkins University opened a branch in Nanjing and a lot of good things flowed from that, and continue to do so, although I'm not up on current developments. The State Department was behind it, USIA was behind it and the White House was behind it and a lot of really positive things happened.

Q: You were doing this until about 1988, right?

LENDERKING: Yes.

Q: Well, in '88 whither?

LENDERKING: By 1988, it was time for me to leave that job and go overseas again. I'd been in Washington for six years and that was longer than usual, at least for USIA officers, even though this was only my second tour in the U.S. after 30 years in the Foreign Service. So I was named to be Paul Wolfowitz's public affairs officer in Indonesia. He was by now Ambassador there, an apparent concession to his wife who had a PhD in Indonesian studies and was enraptured by the country and its culture. What's interesting here is a little side story: when I was in Thailand, Ambassador Mort Abramowitz was named as ambassador to Indonesia for his next assignment. However, there was some mischief making by the disgruntled CIA station chief in Bangkok and some political allies who apparently disliked Mort's liberal views, even though he was a really tough-minded person. I say apparently, because I do not remember all the aspects of this, and wasn't privy to them at the time. Anyway, a few scurrilous articles appeared, and some senior Indonesians who might have believed that as good Muslims they should oppose Jews on every possible occasion, put a stop to Mort's nomination, that is, they did not issue agrï¿½ment. But a few years later, when Paul Wolfowitz was nominated, I believe he sailed through without a breath of opposition.

Anyway, I was assigned to be the head of the large and important USIS effort there, and it was a great assignment. But for personal reasons involving probable family separation for about six monthmy wife was working in a demanding job in the White House and needed some help with our young children, and she also had some health issues to resolve - I didn't feel I should leave the family for that long. So I used up whatever goodwill chips I had and broke the assignment although I was disappointed not to go to Indonesia and work for Paul because I had so much respect for him. I wrote him a letter and said I was disappointed, and that was true, but also I felt I'd spent so much of my career in East Asia, which I loved, I also wanted to have some experience in another part of the world because I could see I was getting to the final years of my career. So that was another motivating factor.

Anyway, I broke the Indonesia assignment and there were very few openings available. But I learned of a staffing shortage up in New York at the U.S. mission to the UN, to which they always send extra guys for the General Assembly session that lasts for four months every fall. That's when all the heads of state and other dignitaries come and make speeches, and it's an extremely busy time because all kinds of political business is transacted on the sidelines of all that ostensible speechmaking. So I went up there as the political advisor for East Asia and Afghanistan for the USUN during the 1988 General Assembly. I reported to the minister counselor for political affairs and I was part of the political section.

Q: You did that from when to when?

LENDERKING: It was September to December of 1988.

Q: How did you find that situation, the UN?

LENDERKING: I thought it was fascinating and it was something totally new for me. I had never worked in a political section, although I'd worked at the State Department before. But during the UNGA session I thought it was the hardest working mission of any embassy I'd been in and I have been in some pretty big and busy ones. People stayed late, worked late, worked hard. The difference I think lies in the difference between multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. It is more like, say, dealing with the House of Representatives or something like that than dealing with just your bilateral counterparts. So you had a much more layered, complex, and nuanced political situation to deal with, with political alliances being formed and dissolved every day depending on the issue and circumstances. Lots of horse trading, trying to build winning votes, and all that goes with that. There were some guys in the Mission, Civil Service guys who had been there for years who were really godfathers to people like myself who didn't know all that much about the workings of the UN. And my boss was an old comrade from Japan days, Bob Immerman, who was a Japan hand and also had had many years at the US Mission. So he was an expert on the UN, how it worked or didn't work, who was important, and how to get things done. In fact, during his entire career he served only in Japan and at the UN, with the exception of one early tour in Guatemala. How he managed to have a career like that I don't know, but he did it and he was one of the reigning experts on both Japan and the UN. Bob knew what had to be done and how to do it and I was very pleased to have him as a supervisor. I learned a lot from him and it was an intense, albeit short, experience.

Q: Were there any particular issues that engaged you at that time?

LENDERKING: There was one that I still smart about to this day. That was the seating of the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate government of Cambodia. And it was U.S. policy that the Khmer Rouge was the legitimate government because they had been overthrown by Vietnam, which we still considered to be an enemy, and they had committed an act of aggression. Every year the Cambodian resolution came up for a vote and we lobbied very hard to make sure the Khmer Rouge continued to be seated regardless of who was ruling in Phnom Penh. And Chuck Schmitz, a Foreign Service colleague also seconded to the political section for UNGA, and I worked very hard on this issue. After several weeks of lobbying other delegations, when the vote was taken, it was the highest it had ever been in our favor. It amounted to an overwhelming vote in favor of the U.S. position of keeping the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate representatives of Cambodia and secretly I thought this was shameful. I had no particular love for the communist government of Vietnam, which was still keeping hundreds of thousands of its own citizens in re-education camps, but as awful as that was, it did not compare to the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. Further, in geopolitical terms, I believed it was time to start working with the Vietnamese to encourage them to loosen up, time to start trying to wean them away from the brutalities of their system. At this time, I believed they no longer represented a threat to our friends in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and they were also a potential bulwark against China.

Q: Yes, I realize this is awful.

LENDERKING: Yes. So, at the end of the vote we got a congratulatory telegram from Gaston Sigur, Assistant Secretary for EAP at the time, effusively praising us for the superb lobbying job we had done on behalf of a policy I thought was wrongheaded.

Q: Well, what was the reaction from your Asian colleagues at the UN when you came around?

LENDERKING: Well, I think they understood that American policy was evolving; it was an election year and the most vocal domestic group on Vietnam were the MIA folks who would have been very unhappy at anything that let the pressure off Vietnam for even a minute.

Q: Yes. Now, we're moving into 1989 and where did you go next? Oh - I have a question to ask and I don't know if we're covered it. You mentioned your wife was from Australia. How did you meet her?

LENDERKING: I met her at EXPO '70. As someone who had been an exchange student with Japan, she was selected as a guidthey were called 'hostesses' at the Australian Pavilion, which was right next door to ours. The Commissioners General of our pavilions became good friends and we helped each other out on many occasions. So our Commissioner General, Howard Chernoff, wanted to throw a party just for the Australian staff by way of thanking them for their cooperation. As chief of protocol I was in the receiving line and I introduced the entire staff to Mr. and Mrs. Chernoff. When Susan came through I said hello, nothing more, but I ran into her from time to time just being there at EXPO. We had coffee a couple of times, gossiped about doings at EXPO, and when the exposition was over in September I returned to Washington and she used her EXPO savings to go on an extended trip to East Asia, Latin America and the U.S. with a friend from the UK pavilion.

By the time she arrived in Washington about six months had passed and I wasn't sure I'd remember what she looked like. My marriage had not survived the problems of two years' separation in Vietnam, and I was now a bachelor again. Susan and I hit it off well, and eventually married, in the fall of 1971.

Q: Okay. Back to '89, where did you end up going?

LENDERKING: The job I got was PAO in Pakistan. I took Urdu for four months or sit's an interesting and fun language, but everyone I met and had to deal with in Pakistan spoke excellent English, in many cases with much more flourish than I did.

Q: I've heard this again and again, from people who have taken Urdu. It appears to be handy in the marketplace and that's about it.

LENDERKING: Yes. So once I got out there I hardly used Urdu at all and it probably would have been more helpful to have studied Dhari or Pashtu or something like that, you know, what the Afghans spoke. Anyway, that turned out to be a very interesting and challenging assignment; not an easy one.

Q: You were there from when?

LENDERKING: Eighty-nine to '92.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

LENDERKING: Bob Oakley had just taken over. His predecessor, Arnie Raphel, was killed in that mysterious plane crash that also took the life of President Zia-ul-Haq, who overthrew Benazir Bhutto's father and had him hanged. A tough country. So Pakistan was in its usual state of upheaval and it was the height of the war in Afghanistan.

Well, here Zia is dead; what was the situation politically in Pakistan, both internally and vis-ï¿½-vis the United States?

LENDERKING: Well, first of all the war- the Russians had withdrawn from Afghanistan and the war to overthrow the Russian, I guess you could call him a puppet, Najibullah, was well underway. We were supporting a group of seven different factions with an incredible amount of clandestine assistance. So that was one issue. And the other issue was who was going to rule Pakistan, and while I was there, there were two non-military rulers. One was Benazir Bhutto, who was prime minister twice and Nawaz Sharif, who was her political opponent but both of them were heads of democratically elected governments. Both of them were regarded generally as corrupt and ineffective.

Q: Well, how did Bob Oakley use you?

LENDERKING: Bob Oakley was seized with the two issues that I just mentioned and he was a very forceful person. He was given, I believe, an unusual amount of latitude and policy formulation authority over those two issues. Those were the two issues that he cared about. He was always supportive of the USIA program, which was quite large. If you count all the gardeners and the different people in the various posts that we had, there were about 430 Pakistani employees, and 16 American officers in five cities. I also had authority over a small low key but substantial information program in Afghanistan. We printed up a newspaper, more of a newsletter really, and paid truck drivers to carry it into Afghanistan with them. Americans could not go into Afghanistan at the time; we had no relations with Najibullah's government and there was a civil war going on as well.

Anyway, Oakley was supportive of USIS but he pretty much left us alone, unless he wanted us to do something in support of his main concerns, which we did, or if he didn't like something we were doing. He rarely raised objections, but we had some sharp differences of opinion when Desert Storm got underway and immediately what seemed like the entire Pakistani population turned vocally and actively against the U.S. and for Saddam Hussein.

In addition, Bob Oakley was always willing to talk to visiting journalists who we recommended, mostly American and UK. In those days, we had some large very popular multi-purpose, multi-use libraries, called American Centers. When the Cold War ended, we closed these very effective centers all over the world and replaced them with gimmickry. Budgets were slashed, exchange programs were cut bacit was disgraceful. It seemed that even intelligent experienced people had concluded that because the cold war was over, America didn't have to compete in a changeable and sometimes savage world.

I'll mention a couple of things; when I first got there, Oakley said you and your staff give some thought to programs you might do to lessen the decades-long hostility between India and Pakistan, because that is one of the big issues of our time. So we did and what resulted turned out to be one of the most interesting programs I was ever involved in. And I can go into that if you want.

Q: Absolutely.

LENDERKING: Well, what my counterpart in New Delhi, Len Baldyga, and I decided, along with people in Washington, was that we would bring together a group of people in both countries who were non-official but influential opinion leaders, either retired government officials or leading journalists and intellectuals. No one currently in office was eligible, to lessen the probability that they would merely take rigid official positions. And then, through a series of conferences and dialogue we would try to get some momentum going in favor of creating an atmosphere congenial to genuine rapprochement. We wanted it to be high level but we didn't want it to have a lot of publicity because there were too many people on both sides who were strongly opposed to any activity like this. Oakley thought this was great and he had some good ideas and our ambassador in India also liked it.

Q: Who was that?

LENDERKING: I cannot remember who. It may have been Bill Clark but it probably started prior to his tenure. This was the same Bill Clark with whom I shared the frustration of studying Japanese for two years. Anyway, one day Oakley and I called on the President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, a very imposing gentleman, and we told him what we were up to and we asked his blessing. He said this is a good idea, but keep it quiet and keep me informed and go ahead. And Len Baldyga in India did the same thing.

And so we worked on this pretty constantly for about a year. It started off with what we called electronic dialogues, where we would get people into our center and the center in New Delhi and maybe there would be a TV screen or maybe it would just be a telephone hookup with a moderator and they would start talking. Well, just getting them to that stage took us months. There was bickering over whom the participants would be, how much time each would be allowed to speak, and other ground rules. In the beginning the participants didn't want to have any contact with each other at all, so the only way we could get the project started was through a glorified telephone conversation. What was interesting was that all the participants knew each other, at least by reputation, and knew each other's families, and so on. We wondered at the beginning whether they just wanted to throw mud at each other. Eventually we put on a series of these dialogues and we had some excellent American mediators who knew the issues and how to avoid unnecessary confrontations. Each program grew a little bit more complex, and more intimate, and some we did with a large TV screen with participants in the US as well. It was quite complex, but most importantly, the participants were superb, often brilliant in expressing their viewpoints and framing the issues, so what we had was a lucid and insightful framing of the issues and what might be done to resolve them. The technology, by the way, was an outgrowth of what USIA learned from developing Charlie Wick's Worldnet. The private sector had this, of course, but it was expensive and we lagged behind the private sector in technology. But we were way ahead of them, it seemed to me, when it came to something like reaching out to adversaries when they was called for.

Q: Who were the mediators? Any Pakistanis or Indians?

LENDERKING: No, for all their criticisms of the US, they wanted only Americans, because they didn't trust anyone from India or Pakistan to be moderator. The whole project was frustrating and exhausting, but in the end it was worth it.

Q: In other words there was no great thirst on either side?

LENDERKING: Yes, there was a huge thirst, but the enmity was so deeply embedded that it was extremely difficult to get beyond that to a real discussion of the current problems and what the two sides might do. And this kind of thing was a new experience for them. They'd been sniping at each other for years, and now they were sitting down and talking to each other, although they were thousands of miles apart. A suggestion that one of the sides would think was inappropriate could set back the whole tenuous negotiation for a couple of weeks and then we would go at it again. But each time we did this there was more momentum built up. The first one was especially fascinating because we didn't know what to expect, but the participants, about three on a side, were so good and so articulate that the dialogue was one of the best I have ever heard. The people were leaders in their fields, their ideas were good, the points were good, there was emotion, there was a lot of intellectual conviction and content, the people were really expert in what they were talking about and they did not waste a lot of time in ranting. It was really a serious dialogue. So we were all thrilled by this.

Q: On this initial dialogue, was the theme how do we get together or what can we do about it or...?

LENDERKING: The approach was confidence building. What are the problems, and how can you, Pakistanis and Indians, work towards a rapprochement? What are the areas where we can go forward and where we cannot? Where are the red lines and the sensitive points, and so on.

Anyway, this project went on for perhaps a year or so and despite the progress we had made, unfortunately the whole effort fizzled shortly after Len and I left. This was not because we abandoned the scene but because of extraneous events, that is, hostility on the ground between militants on both sides.

Q: There were attacks on the government and all.

LENDERKING: Yes. It became not feasible to carry on with the dialogue. It was too risky for the participants.

But one program before the finish was truly groundbreaking. After preparing the groundwork with both sides, we rented a very nice villa outside of Lahore, which is right on the border, for a conference. And we were so nervous that something would go wrong and there would be an incident of some kind. But when the Indians and Pakistanis came into this houswe'd invited about 20 from each side - which was a lovely house and we'd spent a lot of money to have good food and attractive surroundings - it was like a family reunion. They all knew each other, they all knew each other's families. Of course, they'd not seen each other for years, they'd had little or no contact, and it was very emotional for all of us to witness the warmth and friendliness and the tears and hugs. I just sort of faded away from that scene and watched it from afar because the participants took it from there and had a wonderful time talking and catching up with one another. Of course, the next day serious issues were discussed, but this icebreaker was one of the most successful events of its kind that I've experienced. It proved to us that things can often be done to bring adversaries together and start them thinking about resolving issues instead of fighting. So, we thought we were on to something special, but the militants soon created a different atmosphere and it was impossible to pursue these kinds of confidence building initiatives for a while. But now, in 2007, confidence building has been progressing for a couple of years and concrete achievements have resulted. I'd like to think that what we did helped to set a favorable precedent.

Q: Well, did you feel that the situation was always going to be screwed up by somebody - by militants who would launch an attack or raise something in Kashmir or tear down a temple or, you know, attack the parliament house or something? In other words, did you feel that the militants on both sides really had the upper hand?

LENDERKING: Well, they certainly had the potential at any time to derail these efforts. And ours was not the only initiative of this kind. A couple of other organizations on both sides were also trying to do these things so we were not exclusive in this. But it always seemed that, just as you said, something would happen and they would go off the rails. But you keep trying - it was a worthy goal, a lot of serious Pakistanis and Indians were willing to put their prestige and even their personal safety on the line to try to bring something positive to the consuming issue of their lifetimes. So it was very exciting even though it didn't come to fruition.

Q: Yes. In our lifetime we have seen France and German really do something. But there you did not have the awful poison of religion, which can really foul things up.

LENDERKING: Very true.

Q: Speaking of religion, in Pakistan did you have anything to do with the madrassas (religious education schools) and the schools in the tribal areas? Was this something we were looking at?

LENDERKING: Yes, USAID had a huge educational assistance and reform program, and some of it was aimed at improving rural education, in areas where the militant madrassas were strong. Those were halted because of the Pressler Amendment, which was aimed at deterring Pakistan from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, and which failed to prevent that. So all the effort went down the drain.

As for USIA, we weren't into assistance, but more into intellectual and political dialogudifferent but complementary aspects of the same problem, and we didn't have anywhere near the resources that USAID had. But in Peshawar, we started a series of discussions, bringing together Afghan people, many of whom were mullahs, religious people who we thought were at least moderate enough so they would talk to us. A lot of them would have nothing to do with us, regarded us as non-believers and therefore inferior. But we persevered and managed to put on a few programs. We recruited a moderator from Yale who was familiar with the Middle East and Islam and had experience as a moderator. His name was Charles Norchi and he was excellent. We selected people very carefully and we had a few people from Christian groups, and the initial idea was to just establish a dialogue. But again, long story short, the sessions were very contentious and we decided to give it up. Here was the probleit differed in substance from the Indo-Pak dialogue - the Muslims were very articulate and interesting and they presented their views forcefully, but basically they had no interest in dialogue. They were only interested in telling anyone who was a non-Muslim what was wrong with their thinking, and they wanted to proselytize and show the correctness of their ways. Anything else they regarded as a waste of their time. Of course, you cannot have a dialogue with people of that mindset. Now mind you, these were moderates; these were not the most militant people. So that was a lesson for me, which I carry to this day and I am very skeptical of a lot of what is going on in the Islamic world and rather pessimistic.

Q: Yes. I think about back in the 19th Century when we were sending a lot of missionaries all over the place, the missionary movement was strong in the United States, and I happened to start doing some studying about missionaries in the Middle East, and they got absolutely nowhere with Islam so they spent most of their time working on Jews, trying to convert Jews to Christianity. I mean, it's almost futile.

LENDERKING: For sure. I think it's much worse in Muslim countries to be a Muslim who leaves his faith than to be a total non-believer. Militant Muslims believe apostates must be killed.

Now, there is one other thing I would like to mention, more on the political side than the USIS/cultural side. When I got to Pakistan our policy was already controversial, especially towards Afghanistan, and there was a guy in the political section, Ed McWilliams, who became a dissenter and Oakley and the other people in the embassy had his tour terminated. That is, they didn't want him there because he thought the policy was wrong and said so within the Embassy. I only met him once and I saw a departing cable that he had written disagreeing with the policy of trying to form an alliance with these seven Afghan parties, most of which were radically conservative, and I thought it made a lot of sense. I thought, uh oh, here is Vietnam all over again, but I also thought I didn't know enough about it although I had been reading frantically to catch up and get more expertise on this issue and this area of the world where I'd never served before and had no background. So I didn't want to just say well, this reminds me of Vietnam and then go off on that tangent. But the more I saw the more I felt the policy was mistaken and that McWilliams was right. I concluded early on that our policy was bound to faithat is, standing up a coalition government that would be anti-communist and friendly to the US. The people we were arming and supporting with a lot of money were anti-communist all right, and they were fiercely fighting the Russians and their Afghan supporters, but most of them were militant Islamists who hated us too. In other words, we were temporary allies of convenience.

Of course, Ambassador Oakley and the Embassy staff - we had separate staffers for Pakistan and Afghanistawere trying to make the policy successful and it just wouldn't fit. So, I was convinced that a key US policy was doomed to failure, and although I didn't know as much factually as many others in the Embassy, I was right. I didn't want the policy to fail, but I just felt it could not succeed, and the tribal forces we had cobbled together would never be allies of ours.

I didn't want to write any more dissenting cables or anything like that but we had people like Fulbrighters out in the hinterlands who had their programs on university campuses and I kept in touch with them and encouraged them. It was part of their position as Fulbrighters to write reports and they would often put in notes about what was going on at these rural universities, about the growth of Islamic militancy and anti-American feeling, and I found them very alarming. This bad news did not fit with the tenor of the way people were looking at things in the embassy. I mean, the ambassador and the political section were trying very hard to make the policy work with Afghanistan and they didn't want to hear from naysayers. Besides, I could see the flaws in the operation, but I had no magic solutions. There weren't any. Oakley told me one day that there were many enemies of Pakistan in Washington, and to report back to Washington all the negative aspects of the conservative alliance we were trying to build would only give the critics ammunition to gut the assistance programs, which was what gave us leverage to try to influence Pakistan and the Afghan leadership.

Q: How would you describe the policy from the embassy, what was the policy they were trying to uphold?

LENDERKING: The policy was to forge an alliance with seven different parties, one of whom is Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, still one of our fiercest enemies right now. He's still alive and has been allied with the Taliban all these years. But to form an alliance and try to hold it together required a lot of money. So we essentially created a shadow government in Peshawar, which would then be able to lead an uprising against Najibullah, the Soviet puppet. Even though the Soviet troops were out he was still in control. And then they would take over the reigns of government. Well, there was an alliance all righwe called them the Seven Dwarfand they had ministries replete with ghost employees and other bits of blatant corruption, and we were bankrolling it all. It was like something out of Gogol's "Dead Souls." And I thought, these guys are not friends of ours. In fact, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is an Islamic radical who would never be a friend of ours. And that was my conclusion.

Hekmatyar in fact got a lot of assistance from the CIA, he seemed to be a favorite. All this is documented with painful detail in two marvelous books, Charlie Wilson's War, by George Crile, and Ghost Wars, by Steve Coll, who was Washington Post correspondent for India and Pakistan when I was there, and later became managing editor, and still later went with the New Yorker.

Q: Did Osama bin Laden come across your radar at all at that point?

LENDERKING: Maybe a tiny bit. At that time he might have been in the Sudan, I don't remember, but I heard his name and that he was an Islamic militant, but I don't recall learning anything beyond that about him.

Q: How about the Saudi influence? Talking about the Saudi Government; what I gather is that the Saudis around the Islamic world and elsewhere have made their pact with the devil in order for the Saudi family to stay in power, were financing Islamic schools which were teaching a rather virulent form of Wahhabism, or militant Islam. Were you picking up any of this at the time?

LENDERKING: I knew the Saudis were financing many projects around the world like schools, but I had no specific knowledge. You should call Bob Oakley back in and ask him about that because he forged a very close relationship with the Saudi ambassador, and the Saudi ambassador and the Saudis were very discreetly putting big money into the fight against Najibullah. I can't give you a figure but Bob Oakley could. For one thing, he has a prodigious memory and if he'd be willing to discuss this whole period it would be fascinating, because he was the man in charge of US policy. Mushahid Hussain, a good friend and leading journalist (even though he regularly scorched us with newspaper editorials) who later became head of the Pak Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a leading political leader, once dubbed Oakley "The Viceroy." The nickname stuck and all the Paks referred to him as "the Viceroy." Mushahid and I concluded that Oakley secretly liked the nickname, but he professed to ignore it. In any case, I was not privy to much of the information that later came out during the period when Bob Oakley was at the center of US policy and which was discussed in the books I mentioned.

Q: What was your impression of democracy and its prospects in Pakistan? This is part of our mantra; we try to promote democracy. What was happening?

LENDERKING: There were certainly some impressive people on the side of the committed democrats, and the political parties, including Benazir's, which was the largest and most popular, certainly had some able people in them. And certainly Bob Oakley was strongly supportive of the democratic process and we had some very good programs in USIA to get parliamentarians to the U.S., to train parliamentary staff, to provide a parliamentary library and things like that; all these things that would help provide the infrastructure for democratic governments. And so that was rather encouraging despite the fact that Benazir's regime, according to Mushahid Hussain and other Pakistani friends, who said ruefully that her regime was corrupt even by Pakistani standards. Another civilian PM, Nawaz Sharif, who came to power when Benazir was kicked out, also did not head a distinguished regime. So in Pakistan you have a perennial dilemmdemocratically elected civilian governments are corrupt and ineffective; the military governments that periodically overthrow them are also corrupt and ineffective and also lean hard on civil liberties. For example, they throw journalists who displease them in jail; Mushahid Hussain was one of them, and there were many more. Najam Sethi, a brilliant man, committed democrat, and who, with his wife, edits and publishes one of the best political and cultural weekly newspapers Pakistan, "The Friday Times," has frequently been persecuted by military regimes. This see-saw represents a basic failing in Pakistan because there is a tremendous amount of talent there but they have terrible problems. And if you compare Pakistan with India, where the people have so many similarities, you have to conclude that over the years India has fared much better. The reasons for this are complex, but certainly one factor is the pervasive influence of a conservative and restrictive brand of Islam in Pakistan.

Q: You mentioned you had a small information program for Afghanistan. How did that work?

LENDERKING: Well, I didn't start it, but I inherited it and I kept it going, providing the funds and a little input from time to time. This was all contracted out to Afghan exiles that we kept in contact with. I mentioned the newsletter and how we tried to circulate it. It was almost impossible to get any real, substantive evaluations on whether people read this product, but we had anecdotal evidence that people tended to pass those things around because they had some information and they were starved for information, at least those who could read. So we had to take a lot of that on faith, that it was worthwhile doing and that what we were doing was reaching some of the right people.

Much more impressive was the Afghan Media Resources Center, which we'd set up in a building in Peshawar and basically it was a marvelous repository of informatioarticles, photographs, documents, interviews, personal histories and morabout the Soviet occupation and the resistance. A priceless archive, really, and meticulously kept by the Afghans in exile in Peshawar who were on our payroll. Now, that is one project that was totally worthwhile and will assist historians forever. It was a trove of information to visiting journalists, many of whom came to Peshawar to write about the war. Of course the Afghans regarded the Center with great pride and reverence because it documented their struggles and provided a beacon of hope for the Afghan diaspora. I should say that outside of the funding, our touch on this Center was very light. It had an Afghan Director, Haji Doud, who I kept in touch with regularly, but he and his colleagues ran the Center. So I don't take any credit for the Center, but my predecessors who got the project going and made sure it was a research and documentation center of high quality deserve a lot of credit. Eventually the archive was given to the Afghan Center at the University of Nebraska and that's where it is today. So the records have been preserved; they have not been lost.

Q: When did you leave Pakistan?

LENDERKING: June of 1992. My next assignment, and final one in the career foreign service, was as a diplomat in residence and a senior research associate at the North-South Center at the University of Miami in Florida. Before we start there could I do just one little reflection on Pakistan?

Q: Oh absolutely.

LENDERKING: I will make it quick and then get back to your question.

My wife just got back from two weeks in Pakistan; she had not been there since we left in 1992. She was there on a project for her company, and they are bidding on a big educational contract. And she had occasion to call on Mushahid Hussain, who I just mentioned. He's a big deal now; he was a pretty big deal then. But today, in addition to his political importance in Pakistan, he regularly comes to the US and lectures at Johns Hopkins and other universities; he's invited to talk about Pakistan to CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific Command) senior officers in Honolulu, and so on. When we were there he was the most important newspaper columnist and also a vehement critic of US foreign policy. And for some reason he and I got along well although we did not agree on many of the issues. He was also a very devoted Shia and had close ties to Iran. The embassy regarded him with deep suspicion and did not look kindly on any of my contacts with him, despite his prominence. Yet he was certainly within the Pakistani mainstream, had a graduate degree from Georgetown and many friends of all stripes in the U.S. His wife has a post-doctoral degree from Columbia University and has authored academic articles and books. And without going into all the history, he has gone through a lot; he's been a minister of information; he was imprisoned by President Musharraf and other things. It's ironic that in 2007 he is one of Musharraf's most trusted advisers and part of his inner circle. Pakistanis are extremely hospitable, as are the people in all Muslim countries if you are their guest, and they also value good friendships. For these reasons, Susan was welcomed at a lunch there with him and his wife because I and a number of other American friends had participated in efforts to have him released from prison when Musharraf threw him in on no real charges. We wrote letters and did whatever we could to bring some pressure to get him released. And whenever he sees any of us he always thanks us for standing up for him.

And the point I want to make is that Ambassador Oakley pulled me aside after a staff meeting one day and said you are not to have any more contact with this man, ever. And I did not obey that although I kept it discreet. The reason for this edict is that the embassy distrusted Mushahid because he had close contacts with Iran and he criticized US policies. Some of the embassy folks also thought I was indiscreet with Mushahid when discussing various people in the Pakistani political firmament, but I never went beyond what was appropriate for an American official to say. In 2007 and many ambassadors and events later, Mushahid Hussain is regarded as a key friend and contact of the embassy, and has kept the ambassador apprised of crucial events as Pakistan struggles to shift from military to civilian rule yet again and increase the pressure on Islamic extremists.

Shortly after I was ordered not to have any contact with Mushahid he invited me to a dinner at his house. Among the guests were the former foreign minister, several high ranking government officials at the highest levemuch higher than mine, by the way, a mere counselor of embassy; several of the top columnists and opinion makers in Pakistan and the British ambassador. And Susan and I were the only people from the American embassy. The conversation was stimulating and well-informed, obviously. Other people from the embassy would have benefited from being there too, but they were not invited because they regarded Mushahid as an enemy. We behave in this way time and again with foreign elites and it does us no good at all. Once again, we have an example of an embassy deliberately cutting itself off from very people we should have been in closest contact with. We'll never have a really successful foreign policy if we only talk to people who agree with us. Of course, we shouldn't be chasing after people who are avowed enemies, and we should recognize when critics are too rigid to ever shift their thinking. But we have to know the difference between fierce critics and outright enemies, and know where each is coming from. Anyway, I was a forceful advocate of U.S. policies and I didn't argue with Oaklehe was the boss, but I thought his edict was humiliating and wrongheaded. As later events proved, I was right.

But anyway, the point I want to make is that deep down this man, Mushahid Hussain, is a good friend of the United States even though he was critical and we should not ignore such people.

Q: No, absolutely not. Frankly it is always horrifying when we try to make points by saying we will not talk to somebody. But for God's sake, that's what we do.

(Later). Today is the 25th of April, 2007. Bill, you were at the University of Miami from '92 to when?

LENDERKING: August Ninety-two to '94. We arrived just before Hurricane Andrew, at that time the second most damaging natural disaster in U.S. history, after the Northwood earthquake in California. I should have known something was amiss at the North-South Center, to which I was assigned, in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane. When the storm had passed, I called Ambler Moss, director of the Center, and a former ambassador to Panama, who had really impressed me on an earlier stocktaking visit. I asked him if the Center would be open that day, and if there was any damage, what I could do to help. He said, "No, everything's fine; come in when you're ready and the Center will be open." So, I retrieved my car from the safe place where I'd stashed it, and picked my way through deserted and debris laden-streets, through intersections with all the traffic control lights and signs down and strewn about, and finally got to the Center. It was deserted; there was broken glass everywhere; all the doors were locked, it was tight as a drum. I was thinking, "who's giving Ambler this kind of nonsense info, and why isn't it he on top of things?" After a couple of days of trying to function in a dysfunctional city that was extremely slow in reviving even basic services, I gathered my family and took them up the coast north of Ft. Lauderdale, to a hotel on the beach where we could hang out a bit and have access to food and so forth until Miami had recovered enough so we at least could participate in volunteer recovery efforts. That took about a week.

Q: Some start. Okay, now talk a little about your impression of the university. I like to get snapshots of various organizations and what did you think of it? And before we get into that, were you there out of choice or were you being put into a parking place or warehoused?

LENDERKING: By this time I could read the handwriting on the wall. There were several overseas assignments that I bid on that I didn't get and I was probably the most qualified candidate as a senior guy with a lot of relevant experience. At a time of growing retrenchment it looked like I was not going to be allowed to extend. I was 60 when I retired, and I had 35 years of very interesting and satisfying service under my belt, so I can't complain. But what this was was an ushering out the door kind of assignment and it was a nice one and I lobbied hard for it; I used up all my goodwill chips with the personnel people and others and I got the assignment. The irony of it was, when I came home with the good news to my family, all of whom had urged me to apply for the job, they had changed their minds. I took them out to dinner and they all sat there with glum faces because they didn't want to go to Miami. So you know, your good intentions sometimes backfire.

Q: You were there from '92 to '94; tell us about the university and the student body...

LENDERKING: I was pleasantly surprised by the University of Miami. It is a large, wealthy, well endowed private university, with an extremely diverse student body with many academic, athletic, and creative standouts. It's an exciting university, and all kinds of nationalities are represented there far beyond any recollection I ever had of any of the Ivy League schools I was familiar with or even the schools around Washington where diversity is pretty evident. So that was impressive. The student body ran from top students who would be competitive with the best students at any university to people who just wanted to go and party and have a good time, so the range was pretty broad. The faculty people I came in contact with were excellent and I had a very stimulating two years there although I was not as productive as I thought I would be.

Q: Was there a particular thrust toward Latin America there or not?

LENDERKING: Absolutely. The North-South Center, to which I was assigned as a Diplomat in Residence and Senior Research Associate, was established to be a Center of both academic and practical (meaning commercial) information and ideas on Latin America. It was hoped that the Center would become a major source for the study of Latin America and its relations with the U.S. It was the southern equivalent of the East-West Center in Honolulu and was generously funded by Congress with a grant of $10,000,000 a year. By now, that has been cut way back, maybe eliminated entirely, because the Center failed to meet expectations. The problem was not misbehavior but ineffective management on the part of the Center and the University of Miami. There was every reason to expect that the Center would be one of the places you would look to first if you wanted to do business in Latin America or learn something about it. Certainly the focus in Miami on Latin America is extremely very strong. There are other places too; the University of Texas comes immediately to mind.

Q: What was the problem?

LENDERKING: My opinion is that the University of Miami did not supply sufficient oversight to the Center. They left it in the hands of a very impressive retired career diplomat, Ambler Moss, who had been our ambassador to Panama and had done a great job handling the politically tricky job of handling the turnover of the Panama Canal to Panama. It was difficult to figure out what the Center's agenda and focus were. It was all over the placa little here, a little there, often producing good and informative small studies and monographs, but nothing essential. Ambler seemed to want to avoid dealing with controversial subjects and deal with rather mundane subjects like trade and business. In defense of Ambler, although he never articulated his priorities very clearly, his concept seemed to be that the Center would be pragmatic and leave the polemical issues, especially Cuba, to others. That may have been a wise decisioCuba was still an incendiary issue in Miamand Ambler thought there were other useful studies we could conduct that would avoid the endless polemics on Cuba. Good idea, but the quality of the Center's output never reached a high level of distinction. I personally didn't want to get involved in the Cuban situation, I wanted to look beyond that, but you could not get away from it because it is so interesting and it is ever present in Miami. A lot of the most able people in Miami are Cuban-Americans. There are a lot of Cuban-American students and the generational differences were very interesting.

Q: Well, let's talk about this. What was your impression of what was happening? You know, the Cuban-Americans have dominated our policy towards Cuba, and for somebody like myself who does not know beans about it, it just seems like it has been a mistaken policy, it is the old way of not talking to somebody and cutting off dialogue. My God, we have been talking to dictatorships forever - how did you see it at the time and what was happening?

LENDERKING: I think your impression is correct. Cuban policy has always been driven by the Cuban-American community in Miami and the community has always been perceived in Washington and especially now as far more powerful than it actually was. The Cuban community in Miami is not one-dimensional; especially now, there are generational differences, hardliners, moderates, different strands of opinion. But we were always swayed by the hardliners, who made the most noise, and were influenced by the Cuban-American National Foundation, run by a very able guy named Jorge Mas Canosa. He modeled his organization on AIPAC, the American-Israeli Political Action Committee, and was very skillful in getting congressional support by tactics that were quite legal and quite ingenious. And he was very effective - Cuban policy for many years was dominated by him and the Foundation.

But by 1992 the Cuban-American National Foundation was losing influence. Jorge Mas Canosa died somewhere around that time, I don't remember the exact year, and after he died the subsequent leadership didn't have the same power and effectiveness, and the diversity among the Cuban community itself began to assert itself. You had the old-timers, people who had come across when they had to escape, sometimes at the risk of their lives, from Castro and if they stayed they might have been thrown into prison or killed. Those people were the hardliners and you could understand why. But their children, some of them University of Miami students or graduates, had graduated from the University and were established businessmen or professionals and they tended to be more flexible. Among the students I met, some of the graduate students worked at the North-South Center as interns and they were much more reasonable. They identified themselves as Cuban-American, sort of half Cuban, half American but neither one nor the other. Some of them had never been to Cuba and some didn't want to go until Castro was gone; some of them wanted to go very much and had actually gone and come back. So you had this varied makeup and Washington was oblivious and still is, in my view.

Q: What were you doing there?

LENDERKING: I asked one of the senior academics there, Cole Blasier, an old Latin American hand, what diplomats in residence normally did and he said, "diplomats in residence do exactly what they want to do." And Ambler Moss was very cooperative, and said, "we're not paying any money for you, so get yourself involved in anything that interests you and get it approved by me or my deputy and we'll probably let you run with it." The subject that interested me most was immigratiol was looking for something that was important and which I didn't know much about. So I did a fair bit of research, talked to some experts, and then I spent three weeks traveling along the U.S.-Mexican border and I talked to just about everyone I could in those three weeks. I talked to guys wading across the river into the U.S., my Spanish was quite good so I could do that, and I talked to people in the maquiladoras, the factories along the border, and visited a lot of them. I visited some of the slums, I saw the electrical fences as well as the places where illegal immigrants - they were called "undocumented aliens" theclimbed over the walls, punched holes through them or under them, or whatever the circumstances demanded. I talked to officials, university scholars who specialized in immigration issues, I talked to the cops, I talked to people who provided municipal services to the immigrants, businessmen, NGOs, and so on...

Q: Explain what maquiladoras are.

LENDERKING: They are factories set up with Mexican labor on the border under American management to manufacture goods for international markets but also for American domestic consumption. The idea is that they could be good for all concerned. To tell you the truth I don't know what the situation is now, but they were not just American, the Japanese had a lot of them. And at the ones I visited, the management allowed me to go on the floor, talk to the workers and of course they all said they loved their jobs and that kind of thing. Some of the factories were spotlessly clean, and the workers - I don't want to sound trite - but they looked like happy workers, bustling around, laughing, that sort of thing. It didn't look like they were being exploited in any way. I talked to some of the young management people as well. One young woman I remember had graduated from Vanderbilt; she was from northern Mexico, where there are many examples of places with a basically modern, capitalist economy, and she seemed to represent the best of both countries. She had a very good understanding of the United States, no visceral dislike of the gringos, but she was clearly proud to be a Mexican. She struck me as bright and forward looking and none of the usual clichï¿½s that have marred our relations for decades applied to her. And I came away from that huge factory thinking there are a lot of people like that and that's where the future lies.

But there were also some maquiladoras where things weren't so rosy. In one I went to, the smell was so bad from the chemicals I had to close the car window as I drove up because I thought I was going to pass out. The air was truly foul, and it was that way all the timthis was not just a passing cloud of noxious chemicals. There was a small stream running by the factory and it was obviously badly polluted and little kids were playing in it. Little kids were playing, with no parental supervision and no input from the factory managers warning kids away, correcting the pollution, and fencing off the area. It was sickening to realize the kids were shortening their lives in very serious ways. It was a horrific scene, like something out of "Dante's Inferno." So the maquiladoras ran the gamut. If you could establish standards and ensure factories abided by them, they obviously have an important role to play. But you would have to establish oversight and enforce high standards for pay, health, benefits, environment, and the rest.

I also talked to a lot of law enforcement people on both sides, talked to the people who would protect illegals as they came over the border and obviously we had a huge problem that has not been solved to this day. One Texan employer told me quite openly, "We like making money more than we hate Messicans." Many Texans called them "Messicans" in a derogatory way, and their attitudes were firmly set.

I also talked to people who were just wading across the river and I would say where are you guys going? And they would say we're going to go buy some chickens and then we'll come bacimagine millions of these very different kinds of crossings, legal and illegal every day. Now, of course some of the crossers would go on into the communities or up north and some would get into trouble and commit crimes and in a lot of the communities along the border people were stressed, the hospitals could not handle the intake, the schools were overcrowded, the public facilities were degraded and people were justifiably out of patience. That situation has been exacerbated. So the problem has not been solved. I am totally against erecting border fences because they are not effectivpeople determined to come will always find a way - and it doesn't do anything for our image in the world. I mean, we made a big deal out of the Berlin Wall coming down and we build another one on our own border. So that is not the answer. But the idea behind the maquiladoras was that if the economy in northern Mexico grows, that will absorb the workers and there will not be so many coming over the border. Good idea, but that's not what happened.

Q: In Miami, what was your observation about the Haitian element in the population?

LENDERKING: There was a large Haitian population and there was concern that more and more people were coming. There were several cases of Haitians fleeing their country in small boats and washing up on the beaches around Miami and, given the dreadful situation in Haiti, there was concern that there could be a massive influx. It never happened while I was there and the known presence of our Coast Guard was probably a deterrent.

I remember going to some court cases where people were there for one reason or another, not necessarily crimes but child custody cases, domestic disputes, and that sort of thing. The Haitian people I saw there who were appearing before the magistrate were quite impressive. They were well dressed, they were respectful, they were not down and outers at all. I came to realize that most of the Haitians in Miami, if given half a chance, were doing well in Miami. Many of them had skillthey were not Caribbean flotsam, as many Americans seem to regard them. Miami is basically a service economy, and you have big corporations but then you have hundreds of thousands, millions, of jobs for people who have skills and provide services.

We had a little house in Coral Gables - a ticky-tacky 1950s ranch style that had been modernized at least twice into something quite attractive and comfortable, and it had a swimming pool and I think we had six or seven people who came once a week to service that little house, clean the swimming pool, maintain the garden and perform other maintenance. And that was an important part of the economy. Those people needed to work and we needed the help. So it is that kind of a distorted economy and I don't think that has changed very much.

Q: Well, moving on to a really foreign culture, how did you find the academic world at the University of Miami, and were you involved at all?

LENDERKING: The other research associates at the North-South Center, the people I had the most contact with, were academics or people from think tanks, and some of them were from other countries. Most of them had very comfortable arrangements. For example, they would come to the North-South Center for a semester or a year, have office space and shared secretarial support, and some of them taught and did research on their projects, but most of them were not on the faculty. There was a terrific investigative journalist from Peru, Gustavo Gorriti, a marvelous fellow and a truly great journalishe and I became good friends. There were research associates working on aspects of the Latin American economy, corruption in Argentina, developments in Trinidad Tobago and the Caribbean, and several others. I also met quite a few people in the political science/international relations faculty, which was separate from the North-South Center, but at the time also directed by Ambler Moss. When severe management problems developed, he was obliged to shuck both of these positions, but that was after I had departed. Anyway, I met quite a few of the international relations faculty and was impressed with them. I also took some courses that I was able to do free of charge, and that was another benefit that we had. And those people were excellent. I took a creative writing course from a well established novelist and she was terrific. It was a seminar with about 16 students, and the best of them were clearly more talented as writers of fiction than I, although I'd had many more "life experiences."

Q: On the political science side, had the quantitative virus hit them hard, or not? In other words, at some political science departments at some universities everything has to be reduced to something measurable...

LENDERKING: I really can't say because I didn't take any of those courses and in my contacts with the faculty there was more talking about issues and the content of their courses, but a couple of people I got to know well believed UM should place more emphasis on a tutorial system, which is a little bit different than what your question was. What they wanted was something along the lines of a graduate school, or the situation in the UK, in which a student does the reading, meets with the professor perhaps once a week and has to demonstrate mastery of the subject. Some very forcefully advocated changes along those lines.

Also, Miami is strongly business oriented. It's the gateway to Latin America, and the university reflects that reality. The business faculty is very strong; many of the faculty moonlight in making all kinds of deals with Latin America, and they make a very good living if they are willing to hustle and have two or three jobs. Miami is relatively inexpensive compared to Washington and New York, but if you want to live comfortably with a nice house, a small boat, amenities for your kids, and whatever, you can't do all that on a university professor's salary, with a few exceptions. The Latin American presence in Miami is always very higwealthy people from Latin America maintain luxury apartments as second homes, using them for vacations and also as places to escape to if the political situation in their home country becomes untenable. There are always huge numbers of tourists coming from Latin America as well. So that reality had an impact on the nature of UM. It was more oriented to the economy and business than to pure academic subjects, although of course that was present too. It was very different from Dartmouth, much bigger and more diverse of course, but a successful and serious university in the heart of a booming economic environment that also had a lot of problems.

Q: Of course, Miami back in earlier years had a very large Jewish community but mainly mostly elderly Jews. Was there much of a discernable Jewish community still there?

LENDERKING: Oh sure. I spoke to some of the retiree Jewish groups and they were a lively bunch, a great audience, great fun and still very much involved in the arts, the theatre, ballet, what have you. The serious performing arts are not terribly strong in Miami, not nearly as strong as Washington, for example, and some of the other cities in the U.S. like Chicago and San Francisco, but each genre has its own following. Without the Jewish community they wouldn't have existed.

Q: Well then, after '94 what happened?

LENDERKING: After '94 I came back to Washington and retired.

Q: While you were at the University did you see any particular intellectual or political ferment? Was there any connection to what was going on in the State Department or USIA at the time or not?

LENDERKING: Certainly Cuba is always a potential political bomb and there is always something going on with the Cuban community. Also, as a large university in a major American city, the usual run of causes, almost always connected to Latin America, roiled the campus at regular intervals. But there was nothing major, as I recall.

UM is a big time university, probably about 10,000 undergraduates, plus graduate schools. Not just a football and party school. Towards the end of my stay there, I was looking at post-retirement employment because I didn't just want to go somewhere and watch the grass grow. So, among other things, I applied for the job of chief fundraiser at Dartmouth College, which was my alma mater, and probably because I was an alumnus with a certain amount of relevant experience, I was invited for an interview. To prepare for that, I went to talk to the chief fundraiser at the University of Miami and he told me how they did their major fundraising and wow, what an eye opener. It is a major operation, and UM is in the big leagues of university fundraising, probably in the top five nationwide. They have a slick and well-organized operation that brings in millions of dollars every year. I learned a lot in a few hours about how they organized their donors, how they made different pitches to different people, and all of that. So I was well prepared when I went for my interview but I must say I didn't get the job. It went to the deputy who was already therthe job was wired from the start and he was not only the best candidate but he was ideally positioned to succeed to the job. I mention this because it brought home an important lesson to me. By this time, I was 60 years old, and although age discrimination is prohibited by law, in practice it rules hiring and firing decisions every day. The second point is that although I'd had a successful career in which I'd risen to senior levels, and had a lot of experience directly relevant to the positions I was seeking, diplomatic service is much less useful in obtaining post-retirement employment than one might think. What is important is personal contactthe old business of networking. If you know the right people in the areas you're interested in, you'll probably do OK, but without those contacts it's a tough road.

Q: What did you do after retirement?

LENDERKING: I took the State Department retirement course and the thing I wanted to do most besides writI had a number of ideas for both fiction and non fiction - was to get an administrative job at a university, for which I was well qualified. Certainly my experiences at UM would be relevant, especially for university public relations. I came close, but didn't land any of those positions. What I was discovering was that switching to an entirely different field was difficult.

I studied to become a stockbroker, and after several months took the exam, failed it once, and passed it the second time. The exam is several hours and is tough and comprehensive. So now I was qualified to buy and sell stocks, mutual funds, and do other things. I went with a small firm in Washington and all I needed was to develop a client base. I hated cold-calling and also saw that the guys I was up against were both younger and more knowledgeable than I. They also had a real fire in the belly for this work, whereas I found it fascinating, with reservations. The small firm that I thought would be perfect for a new venture of this kind turned out to be less solidly grounded than one would have thought from its comfortable offices in downtown Washington and the life styles of its two chief executives. So after a few months, I realized this wasn't for me and I was out of there with little harm done, except for time spent in learning a lot about a complex and fascinating businesstock tradinthat I would never use again except in hopefully bringing a bit more enlightenment to my own small investments.

Not to belabor the issue, I think retirement is a difficult transition, perhaps second only to the transition after university graduation, when you are choosing your life's work and wondering whether you can actually support yourself and raise a family in decent circumstances. I worked for FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) for awhile as a disaster assistance employee, very similar to a WAE and that was-

Q: WAE is When Actually Employed. Somebody working part-time for the State Department, usually a retired person.

LENDERKING: - really exciting, and in the days before FEMA was destroyed by the Bush administration, who saw it as a holding area for political loyalists without commitment or expertise. When I worked on disasters for FEMA, during the latter years of the Clinton administration, it was one of the most effective government operations I have ever seen and much more impressive than I expected. In many ways it was more impressive than anything I had seen in State Department public affairs. I worked in perhaps 14 or 15 major disasters, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, ice storms. The last one I worked at was the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon in Washington. On my various assignments, I went to all kinds of places in the United States that I never would have seen otherwise and the best part of those jobs was being out in the field and talking to people and getting interviews and explaining to them what kinds of assistance were available to them. You really saw what people were like and how they would pull together and what happens in a disaster. And after all my years of working and living overseas it was gratifying to have this experience and see close up what a marvelous country this is, and how at our best the way people solve problems and work together is unrivalled anywhere else. FEMA at that time was the best example of federalism at work I have ever seen. It really works, and can be made to work.

Q: It really had an excellent reputation - Who was the head of it at the time?

LENDERKING: James Lee Witt, who was a Clinton appointee. He had come from Alabama as an emergency disaster manager and he was an expert when he arrived in Washington. He knew what he wanted to do and he was an extraordinarily effective executive; in fact he now has a lucrative consulting business and even the Bush Administration has consulted him. That seems to be the way in the Ucome to Washington, work for the government, acquire a good reputation and make high level contacts, then go out a make a bundle. I guess we careerists missed the boat in that regard, but I wouldn't trade my experiences for anyone else's.

Q: Well, the Bush Administration appointed a man who was known as a horse trainer or something like that, a horse breeder.

LENDERKING: Yes.

Q: You know, it was a throwaway.

Well, can you name a disaster or two, you know, one's favorite disaster? That is a horrible thing to say but one's most memorable disaster that you worked in?

LENDERKING: They were all memorable but I think the one that was the most stimulating was Hurricane Floyd, which devastated North Carolina and Virginia in the late '90s. It was a major hurricane and there was tremendous devastation, especially in the Shenandoah area. And I got to Richmond perhaps on the first day after the wind stopped blowing and they said go out to the Shenandoah, that will be your territory, go to all the major towns and cities there, get yourself on TV, get yourself on the radio, give newspaper interviews, and make sure all the people affected in that area have access to information about how FEMA can help them and how to get assistance. Call in once a day and tell us what you've been doing, and you're on your own. I did that for almost three months. People don't understand that in a major disaster the first and most dramatic phase is rescusaving people in extremis, restoring power and water, and so on. That phase usually ends fairly quickly. The next phase, recovery and rebuilding, can take months and even years and can get very complicated as people argue over how much money there is, what gets rebuilt, and in what way. So out I went, and initially everyone wanted to talk to ml was on TV news broadcasts, talk shows, and so on. It may be hard to understand, but there was major flooding and people lost their homes and all their mementoes, and it was often very sad. FEMA was well organized and we had every modern thing you can think of to get information to the people. The idea was to reach everyone in an area affected by a disaster and give them the information they needed to get help to get on with their lives, and that's what we did. At the end of every day you could see the results of your day's work and it was gratifying. That's not always true in every profession.

Q: Well, I would think that your training in public diplomacy would have been invaluable.

LENDERKING: Sure, because I was on the public affairs side, and in a disaster you have experts in disaster recovery and you have technical experts and so forth and one of the big components was always a public affairs side. We had guys who were putting out radio spots and we could commission local polls to find out what people were thinking, and many other things. We could innovate, and our colleagues were experienced professionals. In every disaster I worked, the first three weeks we worked about 12 hours or more a day, seven days a week until you got over that first huge workload, and then you went to maybe ten hours six days a week, and so on. I think the longest I ever worked on a disaster was three months.

The other one that was a long one was a Maine ice storm in 1995 or '96, the worst natural disaster they had ever had and I think it is still the worst, bigger than any hurricane. It looked like every tree in the state had been sheered off at the same level. And because there was no electricity farmers could not milk their cows and the cows' udders were exploding. They had public meetings and these rugged farmers would come in with tears running down their faces. It was very moving. For a short time I was a real expert on ice storms, how they happened and how to deal with them. Same with tornadoes, floods and hurricanes. As with most quickly acquired expertise, you have to renew it regularly or you lose it.

Q: In one of my last tours, in Italy, they had a major earthquake in my consular district near Naples. And you know, you had people complaining to the media that the government was doing nothing. Actually the government was doing quite a bit; they moved a whole army division down there but people were just complaining. Did you find that you were out there talking and things were getting done, but people were complaining? Did people appreciate what was being done?

LENDERKING: The attitudes were very interesting. I would say this: usually in urban areas people were much more inclined to whine. And I don't mean this critically because they were suffering and they wanted help but they were much more inclined to demand it and demand some things that maybe they were not entitled to - we were governed by law, and we had to explain what we could do and what we couldn't. In rural areas, particularly in the Midwest, a lot of people said we don't accept government handouts here; we will do our best to pull together and get the job done. If you're here, maybe you can do some things like getting the roads repaired or remove the garbage or something like that but we don't really want your help. And you would run into those kinds of attitudes but usually most people were in-between. If you could explain to them what you could do, what you could not do and why they were entitled to it because they paid taxes and it wasn't a handout, their attitudes changed. And then we deliverenot always, but we usually came through as quickly as we could, with explanations along the way so people could see what the status of their situation was. There were always problems but that is what made it so interesting and fascinating. In my experience, federal, state, country, city and local officials, plus relief organizations like the Red Cross and the church-affiliated organizations, pitched in and learned quickly how to work together in a common cause.

Q: How did you find the political process during this time?

LENDERKING: Oh wow. For any disaster all the politicos are deeply involved and they want the publicity, they want the coverage, they want to be seen doing well, they want to be seen getting aid to their areas and they are very quick to criticize if it's not coming. So I would say this, both in praise and criticism of FEMA: FEMA was intensely politically attuned. And that is, we had a special unit, part of public affairs, which was congressional affairs, one or two guys, and they were there to massage the politicos, keep them happy, tell them what we were doing, respond to their needs. If they said my district is not getting sufficient aid, well, that was a way of getting attention to areas where maybe it wasn't being received. Or sometimes there were huge disagreements. A congressman or someone would want something done and we would have to make a decision, our bosses, sometimes it would go right back to Washington, and they would decide, usually in favor of what the congressman wanted. Never underestimate that where big issues and big money are involved, decision makers are aware of that or else they lose their jobs quickly.

Each disaster has its own dynamic, so what works in one disaster does not necessarily hold true in another, because you run into a complex of laws and customs. And you have local county, state and federal people plus all the outside organizations like charities and the churches involved, all with their different interests.

In Oklahoma, I worked in the aftermath of the biggest tornado ever recordeit cut a huge swath through a large part of Oklahoma. The first meeting we had with all the representatives, some of the Indian tribes there didn't have a lot of damage but they said well, you know, before you can even come on our property you have to consult with leaders of our nation. Well, this was a new experience for me. I thought, this is the United States, we can go wherever we want - No, no, you cannot; you cannot even come on our reservation until we talk to the leaders of our nation. They discussed it as if they were a foreign government.

Q: Well, this is sort of moving away - Were you involved- I mean, we are still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Katrina, which inundated the city of New Orleans. Were you involved at all?

LENDERKING: No. After 9/11 I worked for about three or four weeks with the office here in Washington on the Pentagon part of 9/11, not the New York part. And that was my last gig for FEMA. There were things I didn't like about FEMA and I was uncomfortable with the over the top careerism of the headquarters personnel in Washington and the way I sensed things were going.

Q: This is a new administration; the Bush Administration.

LENDERKING: A new administration. And it seemed to me more highly politicized and less competent and more ego-centric and self-serving on the part of the people in Washington. And at that time I was also getting good temporary jobs from the OIG, the Office of the Inspector General in the State Department and so I did more of that and then after a couple of years of that I got my present job in the pol-mil (political-military) bureau, which has been very interesting. And at the OIG I think the most interesting inspection I worked on was an inspection of Radio Marti, the U.S. government radio station that broadcasts to Cuba.

Q: Well, what can you say about that?

LENDERKING: The report we did is in the public domain. It got in all the Miami newspapers and caused a stir for awhile. Radio Marti has been mismanaged almost from the get go, and we pinpointed some things that indicated that it was ineffective and badly managed. Everyone knew that, but sometimes it's hard getting particulars. Now, for a program audit you do not have subpoena powers and the purpose is limited to answering the question of whether this taxpayer-funded entity is carrying out its mandate, whether it is doing what its charter or whatever says it should be doing. So what I and one other colleague did was interview people who were at liberty to tell us whatever they wanted, and didn't have to tell us what they didn't want. And a veritable gusher issued forth, of mismanagement, political back-biting, favoritism, ineffective programming, and on and on. The staffers, mostly Cuban Americans, were a broadly disgruntled and very able group of professional broadcast journalists. The Director tried to cover up problems and lied to us about substantive matters, and we were able to find documents that proved that. But what disgusted me is that a lot of the stuff I found out I could not use because it was beyond the scope of the program audit. In other words, major things were amiss at Radio Marti, we found out about it and were able to document some of the problems, and we had to ignore our findings, narrowing them down to the scope of the audit, which was limited to broadcast content alone. A program audit is merely to see if the station is saying what it should say, is doing what it should do according to its charter. I wanted to use the additional information and expand the audit, but I was overruled.

Q: Anything connected with Cuba had a high politicization barometer, so I'm sure that was always a consideration.

LENDERKING: There were a number of congressmen every year who introduced bills to try and reduce funding for Radio Marti and TV MartTV Marti has cost us millions and very few people have ever seen it because Castro jams ibecause of deficiencies of one kind or another.

Q: Well, TV Marti is an absolute no, is it not?

LENDERKING: I agree. There are those who defend it.

Q: How?

LENDERKING: Well, they say it is there and Castro has to jam it, therefore it must be important. But the Cuban people can't see it.

Q: Did you look at the people involved in that at all?

LENDERKING: I did not. I was only looking at Radio Marti for which there is a raison d'etre, but it was important that it reflect broader U.S. policy interests and not just be an anti-Castro mouthpiece for the Miami Cubans, and that was always the crux of the problem. And I think this is the way to go to get it in line; there is a reason to have a Radio Marti because the Cuban people are not allowed to have free access to information by the Castro Government. So on that basis I think a number of congressmen every year try to have some changes made and they are always overruled. Jorge Mas Canosa had tremendous political power.

One of his favorite tactics was very successful and perfectly legal; he would give substantial amounts of money to someone like say, Ernest Hollings, a very influential senator from South Carolina. There was no Cuban colony at all in South Carolina so Hollings would vote the way Mas Canosa wanted him to without any political cost to himself. And he had influence.

Q: There's a lot of corruption in our political system.

LENDERKING: Here's a little vignette. Years ago I was on the AFSA board and we went up to the Hill to talk to Congressman Peter Frelinghuysen from New Jersey about something, and I made the point that he should support this because it was in the American interest. And he looked at me with kind of an amused look and he said young man, if you think anyone up here decides an issue on its merits you've got to change your perspective...

Q: Oh boy. Well, I guess this is a good place to stop, don't you think?

LENDERKING: I think it is, yes. There's no way I can briefly summarize a career of 35 years, now extended by part-time work. The career Foreign Service is not for everyone, but it was a great career for me. If you are really interested in how the world works politically, and taking the trouble to learn the languages and meet the people and try to understand where they are coming from, there is nothing better anywhere, although a few other vocations offer comparable experiences. It is tremendously important to have a foreign service that can advance the interests of the United States effectively, and it is just as important to have an informed group of people in close contact with decision makers and opinion leaders around the world who report what's going on and what the impact of our policies is and is likely to be. We are in danger of losing that capability, despite the talent of the young people still applying to the Foreign Service in impressive numbers. Many of our foreign policy errors and setbacks in recent years have come because we have failed to understand the nature of the problems and peoples we are dealing with, and policy is too often driven by domestic concerns and political ambitions. We need a course correction, not an overthrow of the system. We need to reflect on our mistakes and rechart our direction. Diplomacy is our first point of contact and our last line of defense. It needs the backing of military capability to be fully effective, but the actual use of military force should be our last resort, not our first. When we have to use it, it usually means our diplomacy has failed.

Q: I want to thank you very much.

LENDERKING: It's been a great pleasure for me.

End of interview