

ROBERT S. STEVEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[This interview was not edited by Mr. Steven.]

Q: Today is the 3rd of August 2001. This is an interview with Robert S. Steven. This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Bob?

STEVEN: Bob.

Q: Okay, Bob, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born? And let's hear a little something about your family.

STEVEN: New England, way back. Born in the town of Clinton, Massachusetts in 1932 on September 15, and I am told that the church bells were rung on the occasion of my birth, my father being the minister. I was his first son after two daughters, and the church wardens or deacons or whatever they were called knew how he felt, so without asking him they went and rang the church bells. My father was a Unitarian minister in central Massachusetts. My mother was from an old New Hampshire family. I was brought up first in the little town of Westborough, Massachusetts, which was a rural community at the time - now it's a bedroom community to Boston. I spent the first 10 to 14 years of my life in a farming atmosphere, which I was very, very happy about.

Q: I want to go to that, but let me go back. Could you tell me about your father and his antecedents.

STEVEN: His father was a Scottish immigrant. The family came from the Glasgow area originally. His father, my grandfather, Robert Steven - same name - came over as a 14-year-old orphan. He had been orphaned and put into an institution in the city of Glasgow. The authorities in Glasgow found out that he had a relative, an aunt, here in the United States, so they shipped him off to her. He arrived a penniless 14-year-old orphan in 1879 in central Massachusetts. He became eventually a foreman in a steel mill and did quite well by the standards of his time. He married a girl named Mary Stewart who came, again, from an old Scottish family, but their ancestry was more in northern Ireland. My father was brought up in the town of Clinton, Massachusetts, and the surrounding areas there. He went in the Army in the First World War, did not see combat but had health problems. I think he was influenced partly by the great flu epidemic in 1918 and was not able to do heavy physical work after that, so he was the first one in his family to ever go beyond basic education, got to the university, got to college, got a bachelor's degree.

Q: What college did he go to?

STEVEN: He went first to Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and then he went to Tufts down near Boston, where he completed his bachelor's and then went for a degree in sacred theology, the ministry. He was of a Unitarian family and met my mother there at Tufts. They were both in school together. They married while he was still a student. She had graduated and went off to teach school while he completed his school. He had lost time in the Army. They became a Unitarian minister first in the town of Hudson, Massachusetts, which is right next to Clinton, which is why I was born in the hospital in Clinton. But after a few years he took a church in Westborough, Massachusetts, nearby. I grew up in that rural, farm-town atmosphere, which I always remember with great happiness. It was a great way to grow up.

Q: Were you considered a PK, a preacher's kid?

STEVEN: No, not really. Unitarians hardly qualified.

Q: What is it I've always heard? Unitarians believe in one God at most.

STEVEN: It's a very liberal concept. There is no creed other than that there is no creed. You pretty much can join and hold whatever beliefs you want and carry on your religious ideas on your own. I have not stayed with it. I went off into the Army and sort of broke contact with home. I've never gone back. I'm an agnostic, if anything, now.

Q: For your generation, which is my generation, to have two parents who were both college graduates was somewhat unusual.

STEVEN: Well, it was the first time in either family. They were the first college graduates of either of their families.

Q: What was it like growing up? You were saying it was equivalent to rural Massachusetts.

STEVEN: Well, it was. It was basically a farming town. There were both regular farms and orchards, and I grew up there with most of my friends being farmers' kids. My father, of course, was not actually farming, but I was in that atmosphere. I worked on farms in the summer, pitched hay, milked cows, and so on, and had a pretty fortunate occasion. There was a good school system. The public schools there were...

Q: Where was this?

STEVEN: Westborough is central Massachusetts between Boston in the east and Worcester out to the west. Worcester is the second biggest city in Massachusetts. It was on what was called the Worcester Turnpike, the main road. Now, the Worcester Turnpike is a back road. The Massachusetts Turnpike slices through the area. It was a very different atmosphere. One of the interesting things about it in my experience was there was not much encouragement for intellectual development - a euphemistic way of saying that it wasn't highly prized among the kids I grew up with. I was a reader. So my father even got to the point where he chased me out of the house on a beautiful summer day and say, "Go play baseball or something," because I was always reading. I found my father's diaries recently and was going through them. He didn't keep much of a diary but occasional comments. I was very, very amused to find, when I was probably about 12, an entry in his diary: "That lazy so-and-so bookworm son of mine, I had to chase him out of the house again today." I credit that really with anything that I did in my career - reading.

Q: I think reading is so important. What sort of books were you reading?

STEVEN: Anything and everything, completely eclectic. I read books my father had, of course. I remember reading Plato's, *The Republic*. It's a family joke now that Dad was reading Plato when he was 10 or something. I read every book he had in his fairly extensive library from novels to military history. That had always been sort of a favorite; it's one of my hobbies, the Civil War - books on travel, exploration, some on foreign affairs but there weren't that many foreign affairs books in a little town in Massachusetts in those days. My father's interests were more in philosophy and things of that nature.

Q: Did you have sort of a Carnegie Library or the equivalent?

STEVEN: Yes, exactly. There was one of those little Carnegie Public Libraries in the town, and I was a bookworm. I remember in the sixth grade getting the award for having read the most books in one school year.

Q: What was the school system like?

STEVEN: It was a good one. By the standards of the time, I would rate it very good. It had good teachers. They worked very carefully. They had enough staff and enough professional knowledge to recognize when kids needed special attention or something. They found out that I couldn't add or subtract, which I attribute to a very bad first grade teacher who turned me off from math. Again, it's a family joke; my wife keeps the checkbook. So I would fail math - or arithmetic, we called it - year and year regularly, but I was the leading student in English and history and other stuff, like geography, so they had to promote me. I spent so many evenings and weekends and summer schools being drilled in math.

Q: Any teachers when you were in elementary school that particularly stick in your mind?

STEVEN: Oh, yes, the first love of my life. My fourth grade teacher was Miss Knight. Miss Knight, looking back, was probably 20 years old, a starting, first-year teacher.

Q: Oh, an old lady, yes.

STEVEN: An old lady, but I was in fourth grade. I was so in love, it was painful. I realize now, of course, in retrospect that this is a frequent occurrence with young boys in school. I was hardly unique. But I often tried to picture in my mind if Miss Knight would wait for me when I finally graduated from school. Then she broke my heart by going off and getting married.

Q: Women are just perfidious creatures.

STEVEN: And I think to this day, unless Miss Knight ever hears this, she'll never know that she was the subject of adoration. But the teachers were good teachers. There was one I do remember who encouraged my reading, the only one who ever really asked me what I was reading, and would raise an idea and then would steer me occasionally to something that I hadn't thought about or she thought I might be interested in. That was a helpful thing too.

Q: You know, I think of some of the books that were coming out at that time which seemed to capture the minds of particularly people who ended up in the Foreign Service, like the Richard Halliburton books and Nordhoff and Hall about the...

STEVEN: The Bounty Trilogy...

Q: The Bounty Trilogy and those things, sort of getting out beyond. How about geography?

STEVEN: Yes, geography to a certain extent. It was poorly taught in those days; sort of memorize the map and what country was where. But yes, it was enough to get me interested. But I have to confess, the Foreign Service had not entered my mind, and the diplomatic service I hardly knew about, so that wasn't where I was going. I was thinking probably I'd be a teacher.

Q: You got out of elementary school...

STEVEN: Elementary school, and then Junior High, as we called it, and then in 1948 I was entering my sophomore year in the local high school. My father then moved to Providence, Rhode Island, to take a church there, and so I left and went to the big city and entered the high school at that point.

Q: You were still pretty young but young enough to start picking up your reading. How about World War II?

STEVEN: I read vast amounts of stuff. I read the newspapers regularly, which for a boy at that time was probably very unusual.

Q: Certainly it was, awful to say, really addictive when you have the war, and for geography it's pretty good.

STEVEN: We got Life Magazine, which was fascinating with geography. The war was good. They, in the fifth grade, gave us a social studies test. It was the first one I ever took where there was multiple entry - we colored in little things - and I remember when the results came back, there was some buzzing around the school and then the day they brought the test back they asked me to come up to the front of the room, the principal and the teacher for my class, and they announced that I had scored in the 99th percentile in this country-wide test and how wonderful I was for the school. It was basically a proof that they had a good school. At the same time I was flunking math.

Q: In Providence did you graduate from high school there?

STEVEN: I graduated from high school there in Providence in 1950.

Q: In high school did you have an equivalent to a major? Was there a track system?

STEVEN: Well, college preparatory as versus vocational, yes, but I also remember the most useful course that I ever took in high school was typing. I insisted. I got the idea in my head that my handwriting was bad. I hated to handwrite because it was slow and I wanted to speed it up, so I signed up for the typing class, which was 95 percent girls in those days, and got laughed at, of course, by all the macho boys, but it was the most useful thing I ever did because I learned how to type really well. You know, in this career of ours you're writing all the time, and there's been a tremendous benefit there. But no, just general college preparatory studies but not specialized.

Q: Did you find a different type of sort of after-school life in Providence?

STEVEN: Yes, quite different. I had gone from a small, basically farming town to a fairly sophisticated big city by my standards, and, yes, things were quite different, mainly the opportunities that opened up. For example, in high school they had a debating society, which they'd never heard of in such a small town, and became a debater and eventually ended up running the debating society. They also had more in the way of organized athletics that I was interested in. I couldn't play football - I would have gotten killed the first time I went on the field; I was much too thin and so on - but they had a track team, so I started to run and was a distance runner on the school track team, this sort of thing, so it gave me a whole new series of activities: track practice every night after school, debates going to different high schools and debating. It opened up a whole new area of possibilities.

Q: Well, graduating in 1950, what were you pointed towards?

STEVEN: I didn't know. That was just it. I got out and didn't know what, other than that I would go to college. That was assumed. I was very fortunate, and against everyone's advice I applied to only one school, and that was Brown University, which was three blocks down the street from our high school. I don't know if it was hubris or stupidity, but I thought I'll get into Brown, it's okay, I don't have to apply everywhere else, and money was a factor. I didn't have any money; my family didn't have any. But I was very pleased to be accepted to Brown, so with that and some scholarship help and a little bit my family could do, and I worked.

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

STEVEN: I worked in what they called the Educational Measurement Office of the University, where I compiled punch cards and transferred data back and forth, this sort of thing, and odd jobs in the summer. I worked lawn care, whatever I could manage to earn a few more dollars. And I was living at home; I wasn't living at the University and, of course, I didn't have food and lodging expenses.

Q: You went there till '54?

STEVEN: No. I had had the great good fortune at the high school I was in, the very first year, to meet a girl. We always said we were very methodical, because at the age of 15 we were sort of interested in each other, at the age of 17 we were going steady, at the age of 19 we were engaged, and at the age of 21 we were married, so I had a fairly logical progression there. We went to Brown together, and that really sealed it, because if we had separated at that point, who knows, but we were in Brown together. I spent my first two year at Brown in what was then a general studies, liberal studies, before you specialized, and ended up those first two thinking we couldn't get married. You didn't do it in those days, that early. We didn't have any money, and you didn't live together the way they would today, so that was frustrating for a normal red-blooded American boy. I was working, I finally calculated, more hours to earn money to stay in school than I was studying to school, and my course work was average, I suppose B- type of thing. I knew I could do better, but there simply wasn't time. All of these factors combined together, and then the Korean War, of course, was on. So I took my own decision and took leave from the University and joined the Army. I went down to the Draft Board and I said, "I want you to draft me," and they said, "After we examine your sanity, we'll consider that," because I was automatically exempt with a student exemption if I wanted it. I said, "No, no, I want to go in," so they drafted me and I spent two years in the Army.

Q: Were you married while you were...?

STEVEN: No, we were engaged. I was 19 years old, and in those day that was simply impossible.

Q: So this would be '52 to...

STEVEN: '52 t '54 I was in the Army.

Q: What were you doing in the Army?

STEVEN: Well, because I only wanted to do the two years with the draft, it was very limited. At that point they wanted nothing but infantry replacements for Korea. They kept pressure on to do other things. They required that I and others take the officer candidate test, and I took it and passed without any particular difficulty. It was not, let's face it, a very complicated test. And then I had several interviews with pressures to go to OCS, but I didn't want to do that because that was a minimum commitment, I think, of something like four or five years at that time, and I wasn't prepared for that. So I ended up on the list as an infantry replacement for Korea and got to San Francisco just before Christmas in 1952, and they decided that the garrison at Okinawa was too weak. They had taken troops out of Okinawa for Korea and they wanted to start rebuilding it. So we had 500 of us from our battalion, and they went down the list from A to M and everybody from A to M went to Korea and from N to Z went to Okinawa, so I spent a year and half in Okinawa.

Q: Did you ship out of Camp Stoneman?

STEVEN: Yes.

Q: Beautiful place.

STEVEN: Christmas 1952 at Camp Stoneman.

Q: I spent some time there before going to Japan, eventually to Korea, as an enlisted man. What did you do in Okinawa?

STEVEN: Infantry training basically. I became a sergeant finally, I oftentimes think mainly because I was one of the few in the company who could read and write well. But I became a sergeant serving with the 60-millimeter mortars. I was the mortar section sergeant. Then towards the last several months, the company commander realized that he was losing his company clerk. He looked around and the only person he could see who could type and might be able to keep records was me, so I was not ordered but it was suggested that I become clerk. So I became the company clerk, but they still made me a sergeant - or let me keep my stripes, rather - so I spent the last part of it as the company clerk there.

Q: How did you find the military experience, looking back on it?

STEVEN: For me it was wonderful, maturing experience. It's a cliché; they always talk about this. But I came from a small, rural town, I was 19 years old, I had been in a minister's family, so I wasn't exposed to too much of the rougher side of life, and suddenly here I am in the infantry exposed to people. In that point, of course, at the height of a war like that, they draft illiterates, and I was writing letters for some of these illiterate boys to send home to their families and then reading their letters written by somebody else when they came. It was a very maturing, interesting experience. I puffed up physically, of course, and mentally matured very, very rapidly. It was probably the single best experience for a young man at that point in my background, to learn what the outside world is like, to learn about people. I learned I could get along well with a boy from the slums or a kid from the rural South who couldn't read or write, or I could get along with officers who were reasonably well educated - a useful experience. And, of course, it exposed me to a little bit of the foreign scene.

Q: How were relations? Today we still have troops in Okinawa and they're rocky, because again you're throwing 19-year-old kids full of piss and vinegar, and then we almost invariably have a rape or something like that going on.

STEVEN: Then it was nowhere near the problem. It was still relatively new. We had gotten there in '45; I was there 10 years later, less than 10 years later; it was '53, so it was only eight years later. Things were much different. For one thing, the Okinawans were far more repressed. They didn't dare stick their heads up in protest. We were, after all, the occupying winners. I have a feeling - and this may be completely just the wrong impression - we were probably more disciplined. There wasn't much nonsense about it. You knew perfectly well that if you got into trouble in the village and so on, you were going to pay for it, you were going to the stockade type of thing. I suspect now they worry more about the soldiers' individual rights than they did back in those days, and it was just fully understood that if you embarrass the company and you get into trouble down there, you were going to pay for it very immediately. So we didn't - I didn't certainly. The few who did get into trouble in one way or another were very quickly disciplined and shipped out. It was a different atmosphere. Of course, there was fewer public notices, shall we say.

Q: Did you get a chance to get up to Japan or anything like that?

STEVEN: No, not during that time, no.

Q: Well, you missed something. During this period I was both in Korea and then in Japan. It was a delightful time to be an enlisted man. Money went further. You could really sightsee.

STEVEN: I wanted to try to do that, but by the time I was eligible for that type of leave, my tour was near an end, and then, of course, transportation was problem, the space available to get a flight, which was very difficult to do. By the time I became the company clerk, the company commander sort of said, "Well, if you can find somebody who can handle you work for you." I never did get to Japan. I didn't get there then; I got there later.

Q: Then you got out of the service in '54?

STEVEN: Got out of the service in '54, came home in the summer of '54 and was married two weeks later.

Q: You had the GI Bill by this time?

STEVEN: Had the GI Bill by that time, and went back to Brown. My wife graduated in '54 on the original schedule, then she became a school teacher.

Q: She was taking a course in...?

STEVEN: She majored in sociology. Graduated magna cum laude from Brown University, which was a good score. She's very smart, much smarter than I am.

Q: This is what I find in the Foreign Service. My experience has been that the wives are usually smarter than the guys are.

STEVEN: I am certainly willing to assert that the type of women that we married in those days today would be very successful in their own rights, in their own careers, but then they accepted, as we did, that they were going to be wives. My wife raised three children, has four grandchildren now, but could easily have had a career. In fact, at Brown they worked very hard on her to continue at Brown and go on for a master's and a doctorate, she was brilliant at sociology.

Q: What was her family background?

STEVEN: They were German Jewish refugees. She was the only child of a Jewish family. Her father was a World War I German veteran, had been wounded in combat on the Russian and Western fronts and survived it, and in the '30s when the persecution started he was determined to stay in Germany. He was a good German, veteran, patriot, and soldier. In 1938, November, during the infamous Pogrom, he was picked up and taken to Buchenwald, where he spent about a month. He didn't talk about it much, but it was a very grim experience. I've read enough about it now to realize what happened to him. Then at the end of that period - and we've only reconstructed it in recent years; I've read enough history on it - Herman Goering, of all people, protested to the Nazi hierarchy that they had veterans who had fought along with him in the war in these camps and that they at least ought to be let out. So they called them in one morning and said, "All of you who were front fighters, combat veterans of the First War, step forward." My father-in-law said what did he have to lose at this point. He thought it might be a trick, that they wanted to get any men who had any military experience and kill them first. Anyway, he stepped out, as did others, and was sent home. So he went home quickly, grabbed his daughter, and got visas to transit through England to the States, and left in January of '39. Her mother stayed on to try to sell some of their household effects and get their things packed up and get out. She had a similar lucky experience. She was on the train going out to Holland at the border on the day in March 1939 when the Nazis decided to let no more Jews out. She was on the train sitting in a compartment alone when she heard a commotion, looked out, and the police and soldiers were going down the train picking out the Jews and pulling them off at the border. So she said she just froze and waited. The door slammed open and there was a young German soldier. Apparently they didn't have enough police, so they just recruited the local soldiers to come in. This young German, classic German, blue eyed, blond young man with a rifle over his shoulder said, "Passport," looked at the passport, which I still have - it has the J printed on it for Jew - looked at it and looked at her. Then she said he stepped back through the door of the compartment, the European compartment, into the corridor and looked both ways, reached back, handed her the passport, slammed the door and went on. So she left Germany like that. These are the sort of stories that you'd use in a movie or a novel, and yet they happened. She says how very much she could hate the Nazis but she remembers that young soldier who exposed himself terribly. He would have been in very serious trouble if he'd been caught. Anyway, they went to England, spent a year in England, came to the States and eventually were able to settle in Providence. Her father got a modest-level civil service job with the state government. She was brought up there, and that's when I met her in high school there.

Q: That's really something.

STEVEN: These are curious things.

Q: Then you came back. I guess it was basically the GI Bill that allowed you to get married..

STEVEN: The GI Bill allowed me to get married, and my wife working. The GI Bill essentially paid my tuition at Brown; that was all that was covered, just that. My wife supported us with her earnings, and I continued to work some part-time, so with all of those things we managed to get along, with a little help, of course, from the parents and so forth.

Q: This would be '54 to '56 about?

STEVEN: '54 to '56. Majored in sociology.

Q: You majored also in sociology?

STEVEN: Yes, mainly because I didn't know what else to do. I was interested in the subject.

Q: What does sociology mean?

STEVEN: The definition was changing even as I was doing it - essentially how human societies function, how do human societies organize to function at every level from primitive tribe to the superstate.

Q: But as somebody said, what's in it for you; in other words, what does this mean you'll do when you get out?

STEVEN: It's a very general preparation, liberal arts. You understand a lot of things. You obviously can be a social worker, they say, but it's a great basis for further studies in other areas and, it turned out, for the Foreign Service.

Q: I would think so.

STEVEN: Understanding foreign societies, interactions among people, and so on.

Q: When you were in the military or in this '54-to-'56 period at Brown, did international affairs intrude other than, you know, the Korean War?

STEVEN: I think it's fair to say that I had never heard of the Foreign Service. I was aware there was a diplomatic service that the government maintained, but beyond that, that was all. I never imagined I be interested in it. I thought probably that I would take my sociology degree and then probably become a teacher. How much of that was influenced by the fact that my wife was a teacher, and it sounded interesting. Fortunately for the children of America, I did not become a teacher. I discovered that I hate children, except my own. When they're young, they're just terrible things. And then I don't have the skill with young children that would be needed. I could have taught at the university level if I wanted to, but not young children. So I finished my two years, graduated with a degree from Brown, doing much better scholastically than I had before due to the good influences of my wife, I think, and a little more maturity, and then, not knowing what else to do, signed up for a graduate year. I still had the GI Bill, so I signed up for another year at Brown taking a master's in education. Got halfway through that year and realized that, number one, the teaching of education in those days was ridiculous, absurd jargon, and also discovering that I really didn't like being around lots of young children unless, as I say, they're my own. So I had to do something different, and I walked into the student lounge, as they called it at Brown, in late November, I think it was, of '56, and there was a notice on the student bulletin board that a representative from the United States Foreign Service would be speaking in the auditorium there that afternoon or the next day about careers in the United States Foreign Service, and it was Frank Underwood. Did you ever run into him?

Q: He's been interviewed by our program, and he lives up in that area.

STEVEN: Frank was maybe doing it for them because he was in the area, but he was an active officer at that time. I think he was associated with something in Indonesian affairs.

Q: He was an ambassador somewhere.

STEVEN: He might very well have been there. So I went and just sat and listened, and it was kind of intriguing. He handed out brochures, which talked about taking the test. It was an option; why not? And so I went up to Boston on a cold, wet, wintry day in December and took the Foreign Service entrance examination, the written exam - no, I did the written exam at Brown; the written exam was given there at Brown - and literally didn't think much about it. I wasn't waiting anxiously because I wanted to know if I was going to have a career in the Foreign Service. It was just something that might be interesting. To my astonishment, I found I passed the written exam, and only then did I start thinking, hey, this might be worth pursuing a little more.

Q: You took it when?

STEVEN: I'm trying to remember the sequence now. I know that it was in the fall of '56 when I heard the pitch for it, and then I took the written exam after that obviously, and then it was in December of '56 when I went to take the oral.

Q: Was it a day's exam?

STEVEN: One day, it was a one-day written.

Q: Do you recall the oral exam, any of the questions? I'd like to get a feel for what was there.

STEVEN: The oral exam was fascinating. I went to Boston, to the courthouse, and it was cold and wet and rainy, sleet and ice outside. I came in, and there was a secretary sitting in the outer office, and the interview was inside with somebody else. As I sat there, this young woman secretary made a terrible faux pas that she should never have done and told me something about the fellow who was in there now. Her attitude was: "Wow, this fellow who's in there now, he's from Harvard, and he scored 99 on the written examination, 99 percentile." I thought this was not going to work, going in after a star like that. I hadn't scored 99. But I braced myself, and the door to the interview room finally opened and out came this pink-faced, pale-blond, young man with his raincoat draped over his shoulder, carrying galoshes, the old-fashioned galoshes with the buckles on them, in his hand, which he had not left outside in the waiting area, the obviously place, but had carried into the interview room.

Q: Obviously anybody taking the Foreign Service exam waiting in the waiting room was next to being a criminal.

STEVEN: Well, as soon as I saw that, I said, "Ah." By then I was sophisticated enough after the Army to know this was not going to have made a great impression on the examiners. So I went confidently in, and then they proceeded to destroy my confidence, of course. It was a nice, long, oral interview. There were three of them naturally. I'm trying to remember their names and to this day I can't. I can picture their faces. They went to work on me, and the technique, I very quickly realized, as perhaps you did when you did it, they would get into an area - first "Talk about yourself a bit," then they get into the area - and then as soon as they got onto a subject area where you were confident and knew what you were talking about, they dropped it. I realized I was all set to really find out what I knew about something, and they dropped the subject. They'd go to something else entirely. They probably had a list of things. Well, they got onto economics, and that was a disaster. The less I showed I knew about economics, the more they pressed. One of the questions I do remember, "What were the chief exports from the southeastern United States?" - gestured by hitting his head. "Cotton? Tobacco?" Anyway, I did the best I could, and then finally they drove me into a corner, as they were hoping to do, and I sat there and thought and I finally did what apparently turned out to be the right thing to do and said, "I haven't the foggiest what the answer is. I do know how to find out, where to go, but I know nothing about that subject." And they sort of relaxed and went on. Then, in one of those sort of moments in one's life that always sticks there, they said, "Okay, Mr. Steven, please step outside and wait outside." So I went back out, and I was a little bit confused because I thought that they would say, "Goodbye. Don't call us; we'll call you," and then they'd think about it and I'd get a notice in the mail later. So I sat out in the waiting room, a little surprised, and then after about five minutes they buzzed and I was sent back in. So I went back in, and they said, "Mr. Steven, there are three things we try to tell the candidates after these oral interviews." Two of them had disappeared; only the chairman was left. "One was that 'we do not think you should consider your candidacy; you're gone.' Secondly, 'we think you have done well enough so that we would like you to continue your education for another year or so, and perhaps you would come back and try this again.' And thirdly, 'we feel you have done well enough, and we'd like you to continue your candidacy.'" So I sort of sat there waiting, he sort of sat there looking at me, and finally after this long, pregnant pause, he said, "We think you're in the third category. Yes, we believe that you could have a career in the Foreign Service." I tried not to leap onto my feet or something. This was all still something that I didn't expect, you know. "That's nice; I'm glad I'm still available." And then he said, "Please go out to the young lady outside, and she'll give you some papers for you to sign to commit to come into the Foreign Service, and we'll proceed with your medicals and your security and that sort of thing." I suddenly realized that I wasn't going to have a chance to go home and talk to my wife about this and think it over some more, that they wanted me to sign there. I looked at these papers and thought if I don't sign, they'll say this kid's not seriously interested and that will be that; but if I do sign, my wife and I haven't even really thoroughly discussed this idea of the Foreign Service yet, didn't know that much about it. I took a deep breath and signed and went home and told my wife, "I think we're in the Foreign Service," and, sure enough, we were.

Q: A question I forgot to ask: What would you say was sort of the atmospherics and the thrust of Brown in those days? Today Brown has a reputation of being a very good school but very politically correct.

STEVEN: They're very far out on the left.

Q: Very far out in the left. What was it like?

STEVEN: Much less so, much less conservative. The president at the time I was there was Wriston...

Q: Henry Wriston.

STEVEN: ...Henry Wriston, who was a model conservative Republican upright of the old school. It was a more conservative atmosphere and, I thought, a very high-quality education, more liberal than some but not anything like the reputation they have today. I've watched the change over the years of the University. I think it's still a very, very good school, but it had gone all the way over to some of the more politically correct ideas, which I think a drawback in many ways. When we there, it was a little bit more structured. The first two years you had certain requirements, science and math and language studies and so on, and then you majored in something. I gather they've pretty much thrown that whole structured program out, and you pick what you want to do. I'm conservative enough, I guess, even though I come from a liberal background, to doubt that that's wise.

Q: Well, I'm dubious too. I went to Williams. I graduated from there in '50 and, you know, we had five required courses we took. Now I think there are four and 70 percent of the class graduates with honors. I get very dubious. And some of the stands they take, it seems to be run more to make the students feel good.

STEVEN: I now in retrospect have to look at it, having raised two boys myself, boys particularly, adolescents, they aren't capable of really deciding what they need in the way of education. They need guidance and structure, and they need to be exposed to these other areas, and then, fine, after that let them spread out. I still think Brown's a fine school.

Q: No, the schools are excellent but...

STEVEN: It was traditional then.

Q: What happened.? I assume you took the security test?

STEVEN: Then they proceeded with the security test and the physical, and I passed them. I was sitting in May of that year, working again at this Educational Measurement Office and still working on my degree in education, and my wife was sitting home very, very pregnant with our first child. This again is the sort of thing I guess we did as young people in those days: we assumed somehow that I'd have a job, make some money, and we'd be able to support a child. We wanted one and we started one, and there she was eight and 9/10ths months pregnant, and we still not even really getting a paycheck. But she had to stop teaching too. So the phone rang and there was a young man - I later met him - at the Board of Examiners at the State Department saying, "We are forming a class, Mr. Steven. We'd like you to come down and report, and want you to report on May 21st." Well, this was like May 10th. I said, "Uh, uh, I've not finished my school year yet, and my wife's about to have a baby." This cool voice said, "Well, Mr. Steven, we feel that, if you are serious about wanting a Foreign Service career, you should make every effort to report." So, all right, I said, "Yes, I'll be there." I arranged to get my exams out of the way and so on, but I wasn't going to be there long enough to write a thesis for my master's and so on, and I wasn't going to be there probably when my wife had the baby." Bless her heart, being one of those Foreign Service wives of the school that you and I have cherished, she said, "Go. The family will take care of me." My brother was there, and my father, her family; they could all take care of her. So off I went to Washington, and discovered that this young man was a junior Foreign Service Officer on his first tour. I remember his name, which I will not use. I often debated assassinating him. As it turned out, he apparently had been told to assemble this class, but the class wasn't going to be actually starting until some time in June. My name was one of the first ones he got to, and he just wanted to start getting them in, so he told me I was supposed to be there on the 21st, because they weren't quite sure when they'd start, and so on. Anyway, there I went with one other Foreign Service Officer who was called in the same way, Dick Flanigan, Richard Flanigan, a Boston Irishman. Dick and I arrived down there on the 21st and reported in, and we found out then that they had determined since they had called us that the class wouldn't start until some time in June and that they didn't have anything for us to do. So they put us to work in the Board of Examiners filing cards. The security clearances weren't finished yet, so they had to put us in there. That's where I was working when I got a phone call from my father saying, "You have a son." So I rushed home to see my newborn son. Anyway, it was an interesting start for the Foreign Service.

Q: You did take the A100 course?

STEVEN: Oh, yes.

Q: What was sort of the constitution, and how did you find the course?

STEVEN: Of course, that's many, many years ago.

Q: You came in in what year?

STEVEN: Well, I would have entered actually in '57. My entering class, I think, started, the A100 class, started in June of '57. I don't remember the A100 course all that well. I seem to recall it was just basically an introduction. I remember they told us about something called airgrams that were going to be new at that time. The trouble, of course, with those situations is that you're in the middle of that course and at the same time you're still trying to find housing in Washington, you're getting settled in, learning your way around, and half the time your mind is on other things, at least mine was. I was still somewhat in shell shock, because this was not something that I had spent years working toward, as I have found many of my colleagues say. They decided they wanted to be Foreign Service Officers when they were 10, and here I was, not still completely sure what I was doing or why I was there, but, as I say, with the support of one of those wives who said, "Hey, sounds good. You can do it. Let's just go along with it." So we did. And then, one little anecdote which I still think is a classic: We graduated from the A100 course and we're told to our great thrill that we would be presented our commissions - they actually handed a commission out at that point - by no less than John Foster Dulles, who was the Secretary. Wow! So we sat in the little auditorium over there at the FSI, and Mr. Dulles came in. The first and only impression I ever carry of the man: he looked like a walking corpse. He was pale, haggard, tired. I'm not completely certain that he was fully focused on what was going on. He was sort of mechanical, going through the motions that they were giving him. But he was handing out these diplomas, I guess, and I seem to recall that the commission came at the same time, and with each of them was a beautiful black leather folder, a big leather folder in which you could place your commissions, and they had the big, gold stamp of the State Department on the front and your name down there on the bottom. Wow! So I was called up and shook hands with Mr. Dulles and got my folder and commissions, and went back and sat down and was there looking at it with great fondness. My name was spelled wrong, stamped in gold with 's' on the end. Later I sort of inquired around, "Is there any way I could get another one of these?" No, they were all one-time orders: "Sorry about that." So I never used it, and it disappeared. I'd better complete the anecdote, because if we don't, we'll forget it. Thirty-five years later I went to a little ceremony in the auditorium over here with the IG's, the Inspector General's, office for retirees, and I had 35 years, which was, I think, as long as almost anybody else did there. They called up first the people who were retiring with 20 years, and the finally, "Bob Steven," and they handed me that nice plaque you get, with the bronze seal on it and your name and number of years, etcetera, and they handed it to me and shook hands. They asked me to say a few words, and I turned before I got to the microphone and glanced down at this thing: my name was spelled wrong. Thirty-five years and they hadn't gotten it right. So I told that to the people and I was saying, "Put some things in perspective. You've spent 35 years at your career, and still they can't spell your name right." The people in the IG were so horrified and so remorseful: "Oh, what an insult!" and they insisted they were going to fix it, give it back and they'd fix it. I said, "No way, no way. This is mine." Well, they actually got another one made and insisted I take that too, and that's in the storage trunk. The one with my name spelled is right there on the wall. I just thought it was a perfect commentary on the bureaucracy.

Q: There's always that thing about whether and where are you going to go. By the time you were through, you and your wife, did you have any place, or were you just lying back and saying "Wherever"?

STEVEN: We at that point really didn't have too many 'druthers'. I think, if anything, we would have preferred to stay here for the first tour, we did prefer to stay here, mainly because we had a brand new baby and we'd just been uprooted from home. Neither one of us was an experienced world traveler, let's face it. My wife had a little more exposure than I did. I was still a fairly green young man and, as some of my friends used to say, the hayseed was still there in the hair. So we were happy enough with the idea that maybe we'd just stay in Washington for a while, and that was perfectly agreeable to the Service, because apparently they needed to fill some slots here too. So the A100 course finished, we had this little graduation ceremony, and then I realized that I was the only one in this class of 46 who did not have an assignment. So I sort of thought maybe I'd better do something, so I went to the administrative office there and I said, "Look, we've just completed this. It's Friday afternoon. Where am I supposed to go Monday?" "Don't you have your assignment?" "No, no one ever called me." So they said, "Oh, my god!" So they got on the phone, did some calling to Personnel, and finally they came back and said, "You're supposed to see Mr. Laveck" - Gary Laveck, do you remember him? - "who's the administrative officer in FE." I did some fast thinking and figured out that FE was Far East. "Go see him on Monday morning." "Okay." So I wandered over and wandered down the corridor hunting for Mr. Laveck's office, and I walked past an Office of South Asian and Australian and New Zealand Affairs - this was in the Executive Directorate staff over there - and there was my name as one of the officers in that section, "Robert S. Steven," right there. So I walked into Mr. Laveck's office and he said, "Where have you been? We thought you'd call us a week or two ago and figure out where to come. You disappeared." I said, "No one ever told me." Literally nobody ever thought, after assigning me and putting my name on the door, nobody ever thought to tell me. Anyway, it was a good start for the Foreign Service.

Q: So you were in Far Eastern Affairs?

STEVEN: Far East, FE/EX as it was then, and I was the Post Management Officer for Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. I had New Caledonia, where we then had a consulate, and I forget what else I had, a couple of other islands.

Q: You did that from '57 to when?

STEVEN: '59, a regular two-year tour there, and then in '59 I got my overseas assignment, which I by then had sought, tried to influence, to Tokyo.

Q: Well then, let's talk about the post management business. This often is a very good introduction, isn't it, to the Foreign Service to how things really work?

STEVEN: It is, and for so many of my colleagues, I know, at the time who came in with my class, they went immediately, they thought with great anticipation, to their first assignments, which in those days were usually a visa officer, issuing visas, and some went on to other jobs and never got exposed to the administrative side of it, the management side. I had a good exposure to the management side of it. Budgets actually meant something to me when I finished this, as well as the Department's organization, the personnel system. It was a very good grounding in the Service.

Q: You covered what? New Caledonia, of course, but...

STEVEN: Australia and New Zealand.

Q: ...Australia and New Zealand.

STEVEN: And New Caledonia and I had Tahiti. It's interesting, most people don't know that we had a post in Tahiti, a consulate out there, until the 1920s and it was closed in the 1920s. The US government apparently sort of forgot, that it had property out there we actually owned a nice little waterfront piece of property - and they also forgot that we had a local employee out there, who they had paid off and everything, but he still considered that, until somebody told him differently, he should take care of this property. So the property sat there, and he went in every day and raised an American flag on the flagpole in front of it and dusted the place and kept it from deteriorating too badly, although it began to show great signs of age, until somebody finally figured out, about the time that I started on the desk, that we owned a piece of property out there. They actually sent somebody up, I think, from Australia to look at it, and said, "My god, we've got a building," which was almost ready to tumble down at that point, "with a faithful, tottering, old Tahitian who every day was raising a battered old American flag." So we had to organize the sale of the property, transfer it out. We all had great thoughts about what we could do for this faithful employee, try to get him a pension of some sort or whatever - he'd supported himself, had a little family farm or something - but by the time we could do that, he died, so it didn't become an issue. But it was interesting. I never did get to go out there. Some post management officers are able to finagle a trip to their countries, but in those days Australia and New Zealand were far, far away and they just didn't give you the opportunity. I interviewed everybody going out and briefed them on the post, and people coming back I debriefed about what the situation was at the post.

Q: These must have been considered quite desirable assignments, weren't they?

STEVEN: Those were very good, desirable assignments, not to New Caledonia particularly but even there there were some people who thought that was a great place to go.

Q: Then in '59...?

STEVEN: In '59 we went out to Tokyo; I think it was midsummer.

Q: Obviously being in the management business you had a chance to pretty well work your own, so why Tokyo?

STEVEN: Well, I'd been in Okinawa and I was interested in the culture, and I hadn't gotten to Japan during the time I was there. There was an assignment that looked interesting, a consular assignment. Having been a major in sociology and with my family background, I was more interested in people than I was in policy. In consular work you're going to meet lots of people and work directly with human beings. So there was an opening there a consular office, a vice consul slot in the consular section in Tokyo, and my wife was thinking Tokyo would be an interesting place to go. So off we went. Those in our generation remember that in those days we traveled first class. By golly, we flew out to San Francisco on United Airlines, but then in San Francisco they put us on one of the old Boeing Stratocruisers of Pan American Airways, the double-decker.

Q: Double-decker, yes, with bunks.

STEVEN: And we were first-class passengers. Before they started the engines, the captain came back and greeted me by name, "Mr. Steven, we're so glad to have you aboard going to your assignment in Japan." Wow! That was the one and only time I was ever personally greeted on a flight. But off we flew to Japan with one young child and got settled in there as a vice consul in the consular section.

Q: You were there from '59 to when?

STEVEN: '61, two years.

Q: How would you describe the situation in Japan at that time?

STEVEN: It was fascinating because the security treaty was coming up for renegotiation, renewal, in Japan and there were many Japanese opposed to the presence of American troops, etcetera, so there were riots going on, the famous riots. There was an organization called the Zen Nakurin, they were students.

Q: There were students - I remember seeing pictures - with headbands and they did snake dances.

STEVEN: And one technique was a fascinating one. They would line up 30 or 40 across and take a pole about this thick and they would wrap their arms around the pole and then march forward and it made a battering ram just like this with that pole, lengthwise so they just held on to the pole, and it made it extremely difficult to stop them because they were being pushed from behind by more students. We watched them go down the width of the street, the pole having been scientifically measured to the width of the street, and then the police in front with their shields were in a solid line, their shields locked together, and then they would be pushed back. They would retreat back a few yards, and then the whistles would blow and the police would surge forward and push the students back. The discipline was astonishing. There was no bloodshed, there was no fighting as we now see it. Nobody threw anything at the police. It was all chanting and shouting and bullhorns and push and then push. I never saw a missile in the air. I never saw any teargas. It was beautifully disciplined, choreographed shall we say. Nobody ever came near us. I remember once when the building where the consulate was - it was not at the embassy; it was a block away - going out the door there to walk up to the embassy were these enormous crowds of chanting, yelling people out there. And as soon as I stepped out on the steps they opened a path for me, and I walked through, the Japanese, and greeted people and said, "Good morning." They said, "Good morning," and they bowed, and I continued on up to the embassy, and they closed behind me and kept yelling. It was a wonderful exposure; for a sociologist. What a different type of a mentality it was. Q: Who was our ambassador at that time?

STEVEN: When I got there it was Douglas MacArthur II. Douglas was the nephew of the general, had taken his name. His wife was the daughter of Alben Barkley, the vice president, Wahwee. We had the interesting experience of working with them for about the first 18 months of our tour over there. I met the ambassador himself probably three times in the entire tour. I was with all the vice consuls in a different building, so logically I didn't see him. It was an interesting to be there to watch the style, the imperious style, of a man who I think consciously probably tried to pattern himself after his uncle. It was fascinating. And, of course, Wahwee has a reputation, you know as well as I do...

Q: But did your wife run across Mrs. MacArthur?

STEVEN: Oh, yes, yes, yes, my wife was then active, as wives were expected to be, in things like the women's association and so, yes, she'd be at the residence and working on something. She wanted, as I think most of the young wives did, just to step very carefully and try to behave.

Q: Were you there when the president came out? Eisenhower was supposed to make a visit.

STEVEN: Oh, yes, yes, he was there.

Q: How did that go, from your perspective?

STEVEN: I remember distinctly the honor in the position that I was given. I and another junior vice consul were assigned to be at the airport when the party arrived and the two of us were to take personal charge of the President's personal bags and his family's bags, and we were to make sure that those bags were taken straight to the residence - I guess he was staying in the diplomatic residence - and our job was to ensure that those bags reached the residence and were properly installed in their rooms. I thought, wow, this is an honor, the Presidential baggage. Plans were going on, and a good friend of mine, Bob German - do you remember Robert German? He left the Service many years ago, but he was known then. He was the ambassador's aide, staff assistant. He was the coordinator for the Eisenhower visit. I do remember all of us assembled in the cafeteria of the consulate building. It was the final briefing. Everybody had their folders, their assignments. Everybody was coordinating everything. Bob was sitting there working on it, and somebody came in and handed him a piece of paper, looked like a telegram, and he looked at it and just sort of sat there in silence looking at this thing, and then he reached down - he had this folder thick with a lot of paper in it - pulled it up and looked at it. Then he took a deep breath and he threw it into the air, throwing paper all over the room, just a tremendous heave. He said, "He ain't comin'!" - I'll always remember that scene - "He ain't comin'" and threw the papers up in the air, and that was the end of it.

Q: This was a terrible shock to the Japanese.

STEVEN: Well, to probably the government, but there probably were just as many in the Japanese population who had no problem at all with the American President not being able to come.

Q: You mentioned how polite the Japanese were even when they were demonstrating. Did you find that being an American was giving you any problem in your daily...?

STEVEN: No, no, not at all. If anything, probably it was an advantage socially. You had money, which they didn't have in many cases, and you had access to military facilities, PX's, things of that nature. The Japanese invariably were polite. I think probably as late as the time we were there, they still had the image, and we, after all, were the conquerors. We had been the occupying power. The respect that the Japanese gave to us carried over to diplomats. I recall no single incident in two years in Japan of any rudeness or anti-American personal reaction. It was always polite and open and receptive. We made a few Japanese friends, which was difficult to do. We were not fluent in Japanese, but we made some personal friends, were invited to a few homes, which again was unusual. The Japanese don't normally entertain at home; they take you to a restaurant or something. It was a good two years, and I enjoyed it. I rotated through the consular section.

Q: What sort of work were you doing in the consular service?

STEVEN: Well, I did all of them. I started off in the protection and welfare of American citizens, taking care of lost tourists and death case and all these things. Had many good experiences which would make fine anecdotes some day.

Q: Can you tell me, just to give a feel, in dealing with Americans in trouble, do you recall any cases?

STEVEN: Oh, the most famous one - oh dear, should I use his name? Well, I'll use it and you can edit it if you think I need to; Mr. Wolfson is all I remember; his name was Wolfson - an American, as I recall, a retired US military type who had been living in Japan. There were quite a few of them; they took their discharges there and stayed in Japan, had a wife or a girlfriend or something; they stayed there. Mr. Wolfson died, inconsiderately on a Friday night in his little apartment. I was notified by the Japanese police, and I had to go. He had died apparently accidentally by inhaling gas; the gas burner had been disconnected or something. The Japanese police investigated, and they were pretty efficient and very good, and they said, "Yes, we're satisfied it was an accident, not a deliberate attempt." He was asleep and it sort of overwhelmed him. The man was probably in his 60s. But Mr. Wolfson had to be disposed of on a Friday. What do you do? Well, Japan doesn't have the facilities that we have. They cremate everybody, so they don't have much in the way of morgues or holding facilities. We had an arrangement with the US military down in Yokohama, who did maintain a morgue, left over from the Korean War, where I could dispose of his body. So there he was, and how do I get him to Yokohama? We had to get his body out of the sliding refrigeration case in the medical examiner's office. He had to get rid of it - it was Friday night - because there was no other room. He'd done a quick autopsy. So he handed me this body. I got an embassy station wagon and had it loaded with the body to Yokohama. It was an interesting experience. Then it turned out Mr. Wolfson didn't have a family that could pay to have the body shipped home or anything, so we arranged to have him cremated. Then his ashes were given to me as the custodial officer, and I had the ashes sitting on my desk in an urn at the consulate waiting for instructions. What do I do with these ashes? Finally I thought I'd better put them in the vault at least. It would be embarrassing if the ashes disappeared or got broken. So I put it in the vault on a shelf and sort of waited until I got instructions from the remaining family back home. Finally the young American woman who controlled the vault, the secretary - classified, so it was an American - came and said, "What's that vase up there, that piece of ceramic on the shelf that you put in there?" Without thinking I said, "Oh, that's Mr. Wolfson - the ashes, you know. Remember that case we had. We had him cremated, and those are the ashes, and I put them there." She said, "Not in my vault. I don't go in there with ashes. Get him out of there." So I did and stashed him in the bottom drawer of my desk. It was a typical day in protection and welfare work.

Q: How about Americans getting into trouble?

STEVEN: We had a few of those, people who got into trouble. We had at least a couple at any one time in Japanese prisons serving time. That was always interesting because the Japanese were very, very correct. The prisoners were very carefully tended to, regular medical attention. I went, I think, every month at a minimum and sometimes more often, took them magazines and little things. The Japanese were very good at this. They had one prisoner - a Scottish name; it'll come - who had again been US military there, had left the military, stayed in Japan, and was probably not the most intelligent of men. He went to the famous Imperial Hotel and checked in and then from his room called the jeweler from the hotel to bring a tray of jewelry up that he wanted to look at. He wanted to buy some diamonds, he said, so the fellow went upstairs with this tray. Our American then hit the jeweler and knocked him out, left him on the floor, and dumped all this jewelry into his bag and then walked out of the hotel, having registered under his own name and his own passport and everything. The Japanese police were not amused, and they found him within about two hours. He was a fairly big man; he stood out, shall we say. And they had him in jail by the time I heard about the thing. I remember asking him, "What on earth were you thinking?" He said, "Well, I don't know. I didn't think they'd know it was me." He ended up serving, I think, five years or something there. When I was seeing him in the prison, he had told the Japanese authorities that he would be treated like any Japanese prisoner and he'd eat the same thing they ate. They said, "All right," and they started to feed him the standard diet of the Japanese prisoners but in much larger amounts. He was a big man; he was at least 250 pounds but all muscle, a big fellow. They gave him all that he could eat, but it was the Japanese diet, and his health started deteriorating. The Japanese doctors examined him and they told me, they said, "We can't do this. He's not getting what he needs out of our diet to keep him in good shape. He's got to have more" of whatever it was.

Q: Meat probably.

STEVEN: Meat probably, so they insisted on putting him onto at least a mixed diet, and he finally agreed that he'd do that. But I was impressed at the care. It was very correct, very strict, and very careful, always correct but not abused, and he was given a certain time for recreation and he could receive magazines and correspondence and so on. They did a good job.

Q: On the visa side, I imagine that on the immigrant visa side you had an awful lot of Japanese wives. Did you?

STEVEN: A great many, yes.

Q: Did you have the problem that I had and frankly that it usually the girls a GI would meet, a significant number of them, were professional ladies, and according to our laws they weren't allowed to get visas? This must have been quite a problem for you, wasn't it?

STEVEN: As I recall, it was not as much of a problem as you might think, because the Japanese have very sensitive ways of dealing with these things. We would get the young lady's police record, which was required by law. It didn't identify her as a prostitute or having had any arrests. It just wasn't in there. Shop girl or something, and then the question was: do we go behind the Japanese police record and challenge it? Do we say, "You're liars. We know this girl's a prostitute. Just look at her." Unless we had somebody who was willing to come in and testify that he had indeed paid this girl for sex, how do we know? So I could sit there and look and know with complete moral certainty that this young lady somebody had picked up in the red-light district, but the police certificate was clean and I had no testimony that she was a prostitute. What else can you do? I acted like all the other regional officers and I was told to sign her off. What are you going to do? The Japanese police didn't want trouble like that, so they didn't usually record that sort of thing. Now, if they'd been involved in drugs, that was different, and you'd get a certificate saying there'd been a drug conviction.

Q: My experience was that an awful lot of these young men were ending up with ladies who had been around for a long time. They were almost marrying their mothers.

STEVEN: We had one. I remember a young man came in and he had his wife's Japanese birth certificate and her other papers, which he couldn't read, of course, but the clerks that I had, my Japanese Foreign Service locals, we called them then, brought it to me and said, "Mr. Steven, she has erased her age date even in Japanese and tried to rewrite it in, and we can still see what was originally written under, and she'd subtracted almost 20 years." Her husband thought she was maybe in her mid-20s and she was actually well over 40. So we called her in separately from him, and through the interpreter I said, "Have you altered this?" Yes, and she was afraid if he found out that he wouldn't want to marry her and she thought maybe that she could do this. I said, "You've got to tell him about this. We've got to send you back to get another certificate, and eventually he's going to find out. You really ought to tell him now," and tried to be nice about it. So I loaned them a little side office that we had, and the two of them went in privately while she was explaining to this young man that she was old enough to be his mother. In a few minutes they both came out with big smiles, and he said, "That's okay. I love her." So we got the new papers. Sociologically - it's interesting - I was interested enough to follow up. There was a study done - and I was able to get the study later to look at - of a large number of these, I think 1000 cases, Japanese brides who'd been taken back over the years to the States and followed up how these marriages worked out, what were the rates and so on. Fascinatingly, the rates of stability in the marriage were roughly the same as the American population of the same people. American soldiers marrying American girls in America had about the same rate of divorce and so on as they did. The conclusion of the sociologist was that the soldiers were marrying the same type of women they would have married back home. In other words, if the boy himself were from a low socioeconomic group with not an awful lot of education, etc., that's what he was marrying in America and that's what he was marrying in Japan. Therefore, they tended to be in so many ways the same type of people with the same expectations, and the divorce rates and breakups and so on were no different really than the ones prevalent at the time in America. We found this quite a revelation. It went against the conventional wisdom. The conventional wisdom is they must all be breaking up, and they weren't.

Q: You were doing consular work the whole time you were there. Any problems with passport work, American citizenship problems?

STEVEN: Yes, we had at that time the larger problem of what to do about Japanese Americans. At the beginning of World War II there were many Japanese, both people who had American permanent residence and American-citizen Japanese who were in Japan.

Q: A lot of families had sent their children to get an education in Japan to make sure the cultural ties were closer.

STEVEN: Exactly, they were there, and I'm sure it's the same thing that you found. When the war broke out, the Japanese government didn't want to hear anything about "I'm an American citizen and you can't draft me." They took one look and said, "You're Japanese. Get your ass over there to the draft board," and they were conscripted and fought through the war. They said, well, they were full-fledged Japanese soldiers. After the war, of course, we said, "You're no longer an American citizen, or you've lost your residence, because of service in an enemy army." The Japanese challenged it, and I forget the exact timing of it but I think it was while I was there that the US Supreme Court finally said, "No, if they were coerced into the Japanese military, they didn't voluntarily renounce their citizenship or anything," so they had to be reinstated. I had the marvelous experience of having a Japanese businessman come in shortly after all this took place to apply for a visa and go to the States on business. We looked at his documents and found out that he had been born in the United States, originally had been an American citizen, had lost it at the end of the war because of his Japanese military service, precisely the case that we talked about. So I called the man in and said, "I have good news and bad news. The bad news is I can't give you a visa to the United States." His eyes got wide. I said, "The good news is you're an American citizen. You don't need a visa." He was stunned. He had no idea. His English had pretty well disappeared. He was a young man when he left and this was many years later. He finally said, "What is this? Yes, I was made an American, but they said no." I explained the situation to him. He was just wide eyed. He said, "How does this affect my Japanese citizenship?" I said, "It doesn't at all. You're allowed to keep them both under these circumstances." He said, "What do I do?" I said, "Here's a passport application." He filled it out, we handed him an American passport, and off he went happily to the States. This type of situation was prevalent then.

Q: Did you get any feel, or were you somewhat removed, from, you might say, the embassy Japanese-speaking officer group at the embassy?

STEVEN: There weren't that many, number one. You'd be surprised how few we had. There was one case, a very interesting one there. The officer's name was Sakaue, Muneo Sakaue. He's long retired, I'm sure, but there would be people who would remember him. Muneo and his wife were Japanese Americans but of something like the third generation, and they didn't speak Japanese. They were studying it, like we were, the basic how to get around the street, but he wasn't a Japanese native speaker by any means. Both he and his wife had constant difficulty, because the Japanese, of course, looked at them - and they were racially entirely Japanese - and assumed that they had to speak Japanese and would not believe, literally, that they couldn't speak the language other than the basic few words that I had. It became apparently quite difficult for them in certain circumstances because people thought that they were refusing to speak Japanese just because they were American citizens. Muneo had a great deal of difficulty with that. I remember him talking about it. He sometimes wondered, I think, even if it had been a good idea to assign him there, because the Japanese all expected him to speak Japanese, and when he didn't speak Japanese, it was very difficult for him to establish a relationship that I could, for example, because they kept looking at the man and saying, "How can you not speak Japanese?" So that was a problem for him. There's another officer, whose name I long ago forgot, who had been with the US Marines during the war, another Japanese American, as a translator and had been in combat and so on against the Japanese. He spoke so fluently that, of course, unless he told people that he was an American, they would never have known it. He said he used it very selectively. Oftentimes he would just pose himself as a Japanese until the question came up of what he was going, etcetera. But it varied.

Q: Did you have any feel towards what you wanted to do? You had now gotten yourself into four years' time in the Foreign Service, and particularly in those days you had to sort of figure out what field and area you wanted.

STEVEN: We hadn't coned ourselves yet.

Q: Yes, but there was...

STEVEN: You realized you were going to go...

Q: You had to figure out what you wanted to do.

STEVEN: Well consular. I liked people, I enjoyed the contact, the case work I was doing, and I thought that consular work is an excellent choice for someone of my background and inclinations. I sort of looked at my April's Fool Report - do you remember that one?

Q: Oh, yes, this was a report that came out. You were supposed to turn in the first of April where you wanted to go and, of course, it invariably got named the April's Fool's Report because often you didn't get what you wanted.

STEVEN: But it was interesting at least they asked you. But then you waited. It wasn't a question of negotiation, at least at my level. Older and more experienced senior people probably can go to the Personnel people and negotiate, but in our case we waited, and it was like waiting for the lottery, what are you going to get. And when my next assignment came up, I said I genuinely would be happy with another consular assignment, probably to a small post, which would be an advantage because I'd been in a big embassy, and perhaps out of the Far East. So they assigned me as an economic officer to Rangoon, which I had never asked for and had no training for. Go figure.

Q: You were in Rangoon from when to when?

STEVEN: March of '62 to, I guess, the summer of '64.

Q: I know because I came in the Foreign Service in 1955 and my first assignment was Frankfurt, as a consular officer, and then I went to Dhahran, again as a consular officer and, gee, I liked the work, and eventually I ended up in Belgrade as chief of the consular section. But everybody kept telling me, including inspectors, "Well, this is fine, but if you really want to have a real career, this isn't the place to go." I just kind of liked the work and I had more responsibility than your number-three person in an economic or a political section.

STEVEN: No, I couldn't agree more. At later points in my career I've been exposed to that whole question of the senior service and how you get ahead to it. No, being a consular officer, particularly in those days, was no way to get yourself ahead. You were going to become, if you were real lucky, a consul general in some mill somewhere, but you could forget about ever being an ambassador.

Q: As a matter of fact, I kept an eye very closely on it until about 1965 or so. No person who was identified as a consular officer rose above FSO 3, which was equivalent to colonel in those days. It just wasn't done.

STEVEN: It was understood that you chose that career and you were going to top out at the dignified level of a colonel and that was it. Yes, that was very much a factor and I was aware of it when I was looking at careers, but, as I say, I thought I liked the idea, so I made the general indication in my letter that I'd be happy on the consular side. So when the assignment came to go to Rangoon as an economic officer, I was just completely blank. I had no economic training. I'd never taken a basic course in economics.

Q: You hadn't read Samuelson?

STEVEN: No, I literally had not read Samuelson. What on earth! You just stepped off and you went. On our way out to post - we came back home for home leave and started out to go to Rangoon in March of '62 - we stopped in Tokyo on the way and took a couple of days to call on friends and see people there and have a rest before we continued on into Rangoon. We had by that time a second child, who was born in Tokyo. While we were in Tokyo, we were informed that the Burmese military had staged a coup and had thrown out the elected president, U Nu, of great fame in our period, and had taken over the country. So I was told to stay where I was in Tokyo until the embassy said it was safe to continue onward. I think I spent an extra day or two only, and then we started off again and went into Rangoon. It occurs to me that it might be of interest to people interested in the Foreign Service life, particularly back in Japan. We had our second child there, and as soon as my wife was pregnant we looked for a doctor and ended up with a German, an old German who was then in his 70s, who had been a missionary doctor in China for many, whose English was almost nonexistent. He spoke fluent Chinese, of course, and German, but his English he'd never used. He'd been run out of China by the Communists, and so he was in Japan. My wife liked him and spoke German, of course, so he was her doctor. He was practicing in a local hospital, not one of the military hospitals but a local Japanese hospital, but it was run by an order of French nuns, and the nuns, who were the chief nurses and others, all spoke French. Well, my wife and I both had adequate French, so we talked French to them. The regular staff under them were Japanese, and we used some of our little Japanese with them. My wife said it was fascinating going and talking with her doctor in German and then turning and using French with one of the nurses and then what little Japanese we had with the rest of the staff. Our child was born there in the Japanese hospital as the only non-Japanese child at that time. I remember standing in front of the window at the cribs where they are with newborn babies that looked Japanese, little babies here and here and here and right in the middle one pink blob. I said, "That's mine." Japanese birth certificate, of course, which is a big document with all sorts of stamps and lovely things on it, which, of course, we can't read, but then, of course, we have a consular certificate of birth, which has been our official birth certificate ever since.

Q: You went to Rangoon. When you arrived there, what was the situation?

STEVEN: It was not so tense. The revolution, the coup, was almost bloodless. There was no organized resistance to it. I think they shot one politician who was foolish enough to resist, but basically nothing else. But the military had taken over and the military had an idea which they were beginning to develop while I was there called 'the Burmese way to socialism.' They believed in the socialists' concept but it had to be correct for Burma. This meant, for example, nationalizing everything, and overnight you went from these thousands of little shops you see on the streets in the Asian countries - you know them, a little hole in the wall where a guy sells cigarettes and so on - every single one of those became a government shop, and they all had identical green signs with white lettering. The lettering, thank heaven, half was in Burmese and the other half was in English, which was the standard language for the government, and it would said 'People's Shop Number 243' and didn't tell you what was sold at People's Shop Number 243. You had to look in the window and figure it out. It was a stunning display of the arrogance of not well educated people who had a very isolated view of the world - they weren't people who traveled - but their idea of how this country was going to be run and they established it, and nothing you could say or do turned them from that course. Of course, Burma's still paying the price today for that. The economic work was all right. I wasn't given analysis of foreign exchange trends, things like that. They quickly gave me the things that I could do, which were labor reporting, which was a fairly interesting thing. I ran around the back alleys and the bars talking to labor leaders who were sort of semi on the run from the government, and I did the mining industry and several other types of things that left the economists in the section to concentrate on the economy. But the thing that Foreign Service Officers will appreciate: while I was doing all this labor work, I was very quickly identified by the Burmese intelligence as very suspicious because obviously, if I was sitting in bars late at night talking to Burmese labor leaders, I was probably a spy. We found out very quickly, and I noticed it first myself, that I was being followed. There was actually a car back there when I went somewhere. So I reported this to the appropriate people in the embassy, who were delighted. They said, "They haven't got that many people. If they've got a team following you around all the time, they aren't following the people that we're concerned about." They said there was no danger to me or anything like that, and they said, "Use common sense. Don't be seen publicly with people that you're concerned about, or the Burmese government might misunderstand." After a while, the surveillance sort of disappeared; they decided I was harmless, I guess, and it disappeared. It was an amusing thing to sort of look back and there they were.

Q: Who was the ambassador? How was the embassy? It must have been quite a small embassy, wasn't it?

STEVEN: Yes, it was a small embassy. The ambassador was John Everton. He was a non-career man, a political appointee. He was there until, I guess, '63 and was replaced by Henry Byroade, who had been a general in the Army. He had been an ambassador, I believe, in Nepal before that, or maybe it was Afghanistan even, one of the central Asian up there, and then came to Burma from there, and he was there for the rest of my tour.

Q: The DCM, do you recall?

STEVEN: What was his first name? Albert I want to say. S C H N E E, Schnee. He was a career officer at the time, later was here in the Department. Some of the older Foreign Service people might remember him. Apparently he later became blind, or virtually blind, but still was in the Department for several years working at one of the jobs here that he was able to do with help. The Burmese experience was fascinating.

Q: Had the Burmese been sort of a commercial race? I think of the Chinese and the Vietnamese who really take to commerce like a duck to water, but I think of Burma as a place where the Indians were more or less...

STEVEN: The Indians ran the economy until the military took over. The British had brought the Indians in, as the British did in other places like Fiji, with the same results. After the British left, the economy was controlled very much by the Indians, and all the professional people, the doctors and lawyers and so on, were Indians. When the military came in, they literally cleaned them out. They just forced them out of the country, and the country lost its entire entrepreneurial class.

Q: Our embassy - and you were a part of this - must have been watching at the beginning the disintegration of a country.

STEVEN: Oh, yes, we did, precisely, and there was very little we could do about it. Part of the question, of course, is how much did the US government want to do about it and how much do you invest in a country that's of no strategic importance, that had no role in the Cold War. The US had little in the way of trade interests or commercial interests there. It was traditionally a British sphere of influence if anything. The British embassy had more staff than anyone else there. We were fairly much bystanders. We had an AID program, which ran into interesting problems. One I remember so well: We had been helping to finance literally a new road to Mandalay. The highway between Rangoon and Mandalay obviously was a major commercial artery, such as it was, but it was a two-lane, paved road full of box carts and so on, and the idea was to build parallel to it a modern highway that could be used by trucks and other things and get the commerce of the country in good shape. AID committed to financing it, and they started actually, I think, building the lower section of it and then very quickly ran into a problem, because as it went out of Rangoon there was a hill they wanted to traverse and on the hill was a religious monument of some time, a cemetery or a temple, whatever, but there was something on that little hill. The engineers said the only real recourse is to go through that hill, so they would bulldoze it pretty much down, go over it, and continue on. Going around, I remember, was difficult because there was a gully with water over here and there was marshland over here. It just wasn't feasible. You had to go through this thing. And the Burmese were saying, "But, but, but there are spirits on that hill." The net result was that the Burmese held firm and said, "We can't do that. We've got to go around it. We're going to have to build bridges or whatever to go around that hill." The embassy continued, to press very, very hard, "Listen to our engineers. We've got to do this." I remember very distinctly being in the embassy when the message came from the foreign ministry that the Burmese had thought this through thoroughly and had come to the conclusion that it was becoming damaging to their relations with a friendly country like the United States, which they so much respected and loved, and because of this agreement it was becoming very unpleasant and, therefore, they thought the best thing to do was to forget about the road. I remember the AID director sitting in the country team meeting almost literally with his mouth hanging down saying, "But, but, but, they can't do this." His whole operation was geared up to this project, and now he was suddenly being told, "Forget it. You're going home." And we forgot it. It never went any further. It was typical of the way the Burmese did things.

Q: Did you have any contact with Burmese officials?

STEVEN: Yes, quite a fair amount, in the beginning particularly. They all spoke English. English was the operational language of government in Burma. The Burmese have half a dozen different languages, and the common language is English, left from the colonial period. So it was easy to get to know them and, yes, they came to my home. I had parties at my house, invited officials and so on, and went on a few occasions to their homes, not too often. They tended also to take us to restaurants, because their homes were really modest and I guess they were a little ashamed to have us see how they lived. Yes, we had quite a bit of contact, but then the government, increasing its control over things, began to tell their officials not to associate with us, and other embassy people too. I talked to my colleagues in other embassies, and it was the same thing. They were simply told to stay away from us. They had to get permission finally to accept an invitation to an embassy party or something. That made it much more difficult. By the time I left there we were pretty much reduced to talking to each other in the diplomatic corps.

Q: The military, the junta or whatever you want to call it, these were not very approachable, were they?

STEVEN: No, they were not. General Nay Win was the leader at that time. He's still alive and, many think, still the power behind the throne in Burma. But no, our military, I think, had contact with them, just because they were soldiers, but they were not people that I think we could influence particularly or were interested in the US. I do remember reading a big, thick book on the development of Burma, and one of the things that sticks in my mind, and it's the impression I left Burma with, is that Burma is cursed by being a country just overwhelming rich in resources. Until apparently through the British colonial period at least, a young man growing up could marry and take his machete and walk down the road a mile or two and carve out a farm. There was plenty of land. It's enormously rich. They used to say if you stuck a broom handle in the ground it would flower. It was an enormous rice exporter in the old days. The climate's benign, few natural disasters. It doesn't suffer like, say, Bangladesh from floods and hurricanes. It's just blessed country for easy living. You can almost literally pick bananas off the trees. So the pressure was not on, as it has been in places like Vietnam and China, where you either learn to be an entrepreneur or you starve. That's why the Chinese, of course, have been so good, because you learn to be smart or you starve. In Burma you didn't starve. You just reached up and pulled a banana off the tree. I think that's been part of the problem, that they've been isolated but they haven't had the strong economic pressure. One of the economic analyses that I was involved in: we looked at the Burmese foreign exchange picture, and some people were just horrified saying, "My god, they can only finance about two weeks' imports," and so on. And then we began to ask ourselves what do they need. Medicines, certain medicines were good; flashlight batteries, which they were having difficulty producing, were useful; there wasn't an awful lot else. They had oil, their own. They had other resources. They had plenty of food. The lifestyle was very simple; people's expectations were low. Of course, the black market flourished. It wasn't the type of pressure that would happen in many countries where literally the population, like in North Korea, would starve. That is one reason, I think, why the military regime has lasted so long in Burma, that there isn't this movement from below in reaction to major deprivation. There isn't deprivation.

Q: Was there a feeling that the military, particularly at this time, was pretty amateur in the rules it was setting out?

STEVEN: Arbitrary. They had a few advisors, and they read books on Marxism and socialism. They had good ties with the Soviet Union at the time but were by no means subservient at all. Among my other functions was the protocol officer for the embassy, and I had contacts with the dean of the diplomatic corps, who happened at that time to be the Russian ambassador, the Soviet ambassador. In talking with his protocol officer, who actually was allowed to come to my home as long as he had another officer with him, at one point I do remember the fellow sort of shaking his head after some local thing the Burmese had done and saying, "You know, these people just don't listen to us. We tell them how to do this and how to do that, and they won't listen to us." I laughed and said, "You sound exactly like our economic assistance people." It was true. The Russians were as frustrated as we were with it, and they put in very strict rules which, of course, were also sometimes just ignored by everybody. Things loosened up from their initial tight reign, but they were still very tight. The attitude of the military there was particularly dangerous, because I believe that they regarded opposition to them as not just opposition but as evil. "It was bad that you did this. Didn't you understand that we're doing this for the sake of the country and, therefore, your opposition is not just a political viewpoint, it's an evil thing that you're going." And when the students at the university while I was there - I lived about half a mile from the university but across a lake so you could see the university from where I was - the students struck and had a big demonstration on the campus, the military brought in a few truckloads of soldiers, who got out and lined up at the edge of this big, open common area. An officer with a bullhorn told the students to disperse, go home, stop this, and they didn't do it, of course. They continued to yell, and I think some stones may have been thrown, so the officer in charge simply gestured and machine gunners, who had set up their tripod-mounted machine guns, opened fire. Nobody knows, but somewhere between several hundred to a thousand people were killed and many more wounded. They just mowed them down till they dispersed. Then, to make their point even more firm, the military went to the student union building, which was an old building that had been built way back in the British colonial period and had become a symbol because Burmese politicians like U Nu and others had been educated there.

This was sort of a national monument almost, the student union at the university, and so the military packed it with explosives and blew it up, and cracked windows in the compound where I lived half a mile away. I remember that tremendous explosion and the window rattling and the door shaking. We looked out and there was this cloud of dust coming up over at the university, and they had blown up the student union literally, and the university was then closed for a year or two. Since that time my understanding is that they close it for long periods. I think in the last 30 or 40 years since the military have been there, the university has been closed at least half the time. They just don't allow opposition,. You won an election, so what? They're in charge. It's not so much that they're politicians. I think in the beginning they had some political ideas and theories about socialism that seemed good to them. Since that time I have not been associated with Burmese affairs, so an expert probably would laugh at me for trying to comment, but my impression has been that we're dealing now more just with a gang of thugs. They're in power and intend to stay there.

Q: This is my understanding too. There are a lot of perks to be in the military.

STEVEN: And nepotism; their families run the country.

Q: What about insurgencies in Burma at that time?

STEVEN: They were going. They weren't too active at the time, not as they have been even since, but the Shan and the Kachin and others had armed forces and occasionally there were raids going back and forth. That was a problem. We were not allowed to travel more than about 10 miles out of the city of Rangoon without permission from the foreign ministry, the excuse being that they didn't want diplomats exposed to danger from the insurgencies, the real reason being to keep track of us. If you asked for permission and you were going to see one of the tourist sights or, as I did on a couple of occasions, going to look at some plantation or something like that, you could get the permission, but they just wanted to know where you were going. The fighting wasn't as bad as it became later.

Q: They didn't have the red flag/white flag group or whatever it is?

STEVEN: I believe they used terms like that at times. I can't remember that now. There were different groups, and there were always the questions what the Chinese were doing. The Red Chinese had influence in the north and the Thai had influence over here.

Q: Did you feel a bit like you were under siege there, isolated, or not?

STEVEN: To a certain extent. It wasn't bad. We lived comfortably. One of the things I suspect you found in the Foreign Service as I did, we talk about the public image of things that are hardships, we got a hardship allowance, etcetera. Most of us, at least in those day, in personal terms lived very well. I lived in a house as big as this building we're in today with five servants altogether. I could have easily imagined myself to be a British colonial with all this stuff going on. At one point my wife and I actually sat down and figured out that I was supporting on my salary 22 human beings and two litters of cats, with the families of the servants, etcetera. I paid a servant perhaps 50 dollars a month, and that supported the servant plus the family, and I think I continued, as my predecessor had done, to pay for the education of a couple of the servants' children. This was sort of one of the perks that you gave a servant. But that cost me for a year's tuition 20 dollars, this sort of thing. So even on the salary of a third secretary, I had five servants in the house, and we belonged to the local sailing club on the lake where we could go and sail on the sailboats, and I had a car. Life was not unpleasant. There was round of, mostly as time went on, inter-embassy entertaining and activity. It was a pleasant assignment, not really hardship in the sense of being outside and you look at it. Yes, there were health problems. We had bad health problems a couple of times. Every once in a while you wanted to get away. We were allowed trips out to go to Bangkok and take a couple of days just to refresh yourself.

Q: Did the outside world intrude much there on the Burmese?

STEVEN: I don't think the outside world was that much interested. Burma is interesting in that it's isolated and it doesn't have much influence. It's not a military threat to anybody, it's not a major political player. It just sits there. Yes, I think there've always been certain people who have been interested in the human rights issue, shall we say, and were from '62 on, but it's never really brought any major attention from the outside world. People don't worry too much about it. It hits the newspapers once in a great while.

Q: Did the Sino-Indo War up in the mountains raise anything, since these were two kind of neighbors.

STEVEN: Not that I was aware of. I suppose there were people in our embassy who were concerned about such things. As I recall, it was never anything that seemed to be a threat to us or to Burma.

Q: How about the assassination of President Kennedy?

STEVEN: Yes, that has very personal memories. I was the protocol officer. I was at home - I'm trying to remember what time; I think it was the middle of the night in Rangoon when our telephone rang. The telephone was in the front hall, and I was way up in the bedroom, and I heard the phone and stumbled down, and my wife beat me to it. I'm never at my best in the middle of the night. She got to the phone first and she picked it up, and it was the embassy administrative officer, and he, the fool, in an ominous tone said, "Margaret, is Bob there? I need to speak to him." And all my wife could think was her mother had died or something like that and they didn't want to tell her, they wanted to tell me, so she sort of stood there petrified and handed me the phone. And, well, he was telling me that they'd just gotten a flash telegram come in that President Kennedy had been assassinated and the ambassador wanted to assemble the key staff at the residence to see what had to be done, and I was protocol officer, so he woke me. I remember being simultaneously furious at him for not realizing the effect a call like this would have on my wife in the way he presented it and relief that it wasn't a family member, and at the same time, my god, my President's been killed. I'm trying to talk to this fellow on the phone and I'm looking at my wife and saying like this, "It's okay," so she sort of wondered. It was one of those interesting moment when you're trying to communicate. But then I went to the ambassador's residence; we assembled there. I know it was around seven in the morning when we assembled, so I must have gotten the call early in the morning hours. One of the very first things the ambassador did - it was then Byroade - he sat down and wrote a handwritten note to Ne Win saying, "You should know that this has happened. It will be on the news this morning." I never read the note; I guess that's what he wrote. He put it in an envelope and gave it to me and said, "Bob I want you to take this to the presidential residence, Ne Win's residence." So I climbed in the ambassador's limousine which was right outside, and I was amused because nobody had thought to take the flags off because the ambassador wasn't in it. So off we went down the road with me in the back seat of the thing with the ambassadorial flags out there, the only time I ever had that happen. Went down to Ne Win's residence, where, of course, you stopped at the gate - there were soldiers there - so I got out and asked for the office of the guard there. The young lieutenant came running right up - spoke very good English - and I said, "This is from the United States ambassador, who would like you to take this personally to the general. Make sure that he has it right away. It's urgent." Eyes wide, he took it, saluted smartly, turned around and ran full-tilt to the residence. So I get back in the limousine. I told the ambassador, "I think it's probably been delivered." Then we had open house that afternoon, I think, or started the next day with a book to be signed at the residence, and the foreign ambassadors all came. The Russian ambassador came, and at that point we had just begun to get the information about who had done this. There was a connection with Russia; this guy had been in Russia. And with the Russian ambassador, of course, was his protocol officer, who was a fellow that I knew - he and I had talked on occasion - so while the ambassador went to sign the book and talk with our ambassador in the hallway, I was in a side room and this fellow was standing with me and he looked at me and said, "Bob, I hear, I read, that the man who did the assassinating, he was in Russia?" and I said, "That's what we are hearing, yes, that he came from Moscow and was married to a Russian." He sort of looked sideways and said, "Oh, my god!" and I always remember "Oh, my god!" from an atheistic Communist Russian. He recognized the possible implications at that time, and I just tried to keep it very straightforward, you know. "This is what I'm hearing. I have no idea if it's true or if it's significant," but in any event, off they went. I think it shook them very badly. The impression I had from other embassies is that the Soviets particularly were badly shaken at this, wondering if some rogue operation had gone wrong or what it was. As it became clear, I think, that it was a madman and not a political assassination by the Soviets, they relaxed a bit more. It was an interesting one.

Q: Did you get a feel for Henry Byroade, how he operated? He was later ambassador to Egypt, South Africa, God knows where.

STEVEN: I found him very comfortable to work with. He seemed to know what he was doing and had a good relationship with the staff, relaxed. He put me at ease. I spent perhaps more time with him than some of the people did because of the protocol connection. Whenever he had a party, I was there. I found him pleasant to work with, comfortable. He had a personal life, which you may know is a little bit controversial. He had apparently stolen his general service officer's wife from his last post, divorced his own original wife and married this woman who was a Czechoslovak, I believe. So when he arrived in Burma, it preceded him, this sort of scandal or problem, and we didn't know quite how to handle it. He and she handled it beautifully, fit right in, very comfortable, and we all forgot about it.

Q: Later I heard stories that he had quite an active life with young ladies.

STEVEN: He liked the ladies very much. There would be stories here and there. All I can say is that I neither ever saw nor heard anything improper right in the embassy. He wasn't chasing people's wives at the embassy, but he did seem to have an appreciation for the ladies. My wife said he was very charming, all the younger wives all considered him very charming. He was gallant and attentive but never improper.

Q: Was there any manufacturing or anything like that that you looked at it?

STEVEN: Some but nothing major. They exported rice; that was the major crop. There was timber of various types. Oil, to a certain extent, was still going out then; British Petroleum was still there. Some minerals were going out. Manufacture: the local things that you would want. The motor vehicles all came from outside, but they manufactured, you know, flashlights and small things, stoves and other items.

Q: In so many of these countries that went socialist who were great exporters of, say, rice ended up having to import rice. Did they go through sort of a collectivization thing?

STEVEN: No, my impression was that they did not go to the communal farm type of thing. They "nationalized" every cigar stand. Literally the entire street was just all these little green signs. I do not recall that they actually tried collectivized agriculture. I think they tried to collectivize in a sense the distribution mechanisms and things like that. The farmers had to sell to the government, but I don't think they ever got down to the point where they actually tried to nationalize the farms.

Q: But you're saying that the rice crop went down?

STEVEN: It went down.

Q: Why would that happen?

STEVEN: Generally inefficiency, I guess.

Q: Maybe there wasn't that much in it for the...

STEVEN: There wasn't that much in it. They had to sell to the government, and the government made any profit there was to be made, and the prices they gave the farmers weren't incentives enough for the farmers to work all that hard. And again - and, as I say, my sociologist background always comes through - my impression was that the average Burmese farmer entrepreneur did not have the incentive to really push himself hard. Why should the farmer go out there and work day and night in the hot sun to do this and really produce when he knew that anything he really made was not going to result in an improved life for him and his family. It was going to go to the government, another factor, of course, being the Burmese religious outlook on life. Burmese Buddhism is fatalistic. Your fate is already predetermined. Whatever you do isn't really going to have much effect anyway. The saddest thing I can remember, an incident in my mind, going out to the street one day after hearing some screeching of brakes, I went out and looked and wondered what happened, and there was a burro or donkey lying beside the road that had been hit by a vehicle. The vehicle had hit the brakes, I guess, but it hit the animal and then had driven off. So I walked up to look, and the poor animal was still alive but in terrible condition, but it was still alive. So I went back to the house, with my servant helping, and they called the police and said, "There's a donkey out here. You've got to come out and take care of this." I remember that the police car finally came, and the policeman sort of looked at the donkey. I turned to my servant, who was interpreting for me - I spoke, again, only a few polite phrases in Burmese - and I said, "Tell the man to shoot the poor animal. It obviously can't be saved." The man talked to the soldier, and the soldier looked at him rather sharply and said something to him, and the two policemen got in their car and drove away. I thought, well, maybe at least they're going to send the animal people. I asked my servant, "What did he say?" He said, "Oh, it's the fate. The animal will die." He couldn't shoot. That would be taking a life. Policemen didn't do that. They may take human life for political reasons but not for an animal. I was standing there. What on earth can we do here? I didn't have a gun or would have shot the animal myself. From the other direction comes one of our British neighbors who was a oil company employee who was still there advising the Burmese, and he had his shotgun. He came down the street and he looked and said, "I've seen this before," and he put a round in, shot the animal in the head, walked back to his house and said, "They'll eventually come and pick up the body." That was all right, because if you, a foreigner, wish to take upon yourself the responsibility for ending this life, that was between you and God, but they certainly weren't going to do it. To me it sort of symbolized an attitude that is very difficult for us to understand. Economic progress was not a priority.

Q: Well, Bob, I think I ought to put at the end of the tape - it's a good place to stop here - you left Rangoon in 1964. Where'd you go?

STEVEN: Home leave, of course, and then to Yucatan, to Merida in Yucatan, Mexico.

Q: All right. Well, we'll pick it up then.

STEVEN: They finally caught up with my April Fool's report. I had said a consular assignment to a smaller post in a different area of the world.

Q: Today is the 15th of August, the ides of August, 2001. Bob, you're off to - how do you pronounce it? - Merida?

STEVEN: Merida.

Q: Could you tell me about the post and the area in which it was at that time?

STEVEN: Merida is a marginal post. It was considered so then, I think. The main reason it was open at that time was the proximity to Cuba, and we obviously had people there who were more interested in Cuba than they were in Mexico. Technically it was a two-man consulate routine. The primary function, as many of those are, was visas - there was heavy traffic going back and forth - plus economic interests. Yucatán was at that time still the leading source of binding twines for agriculture machinery. I never knew there was a big market for that - it's enormous - and they have henequen, the natural fiber. It's been largely replaced, I understand, over the years by plastic fibers. I did a mix of consular work, protection and welfare for American tourists, visa issuances, and some economic reporting and pretty much ran the consulate. The consul had other things on his mind, so it was an opportunity to excel. I spent a year and a half there.

Q: You were there from '66 about?

STEVEN: I got to Merida in November of 1964 and left in April of '66, ahead of time. My tour was interrupted and I was called up to Mexico City to become the staff aide to the ambassador to Mexico. I've never quite understood why.

Q: Let's stick to the Yucatán for a time. It doesn't look like a very prosperous area down there. Visas, who was going where and why?

STEVEN: I would say the Yucatán is a fairly prosperous place; at least it was at that time. It had, I would say, a very large industry. The prime industry was the henequen manufacture, but there were other industries there. There were cattle. Tourism was already a major development. Since then, of course, there is far more. The political situation was interesting in that Yucatán has always considered itself somewhat separate from the rest of Mexico. At one point in their history the Yucatecans petitioned to become an American state and be taken over by the USA, which we declined. The focus of travel often was from Merida directly to Miami. We tend to forget that the distance was much shorter from Miami to Yucatán than it was from Yucatán to Mexico City. So there was a very much closer tie to the States than other parts of Mexico. It was worthwhile to have a consulate there. Every time the Department has a budget crisis, they contemplate closing Merida down, and they always somehow manage to keep it going. It serves a useful purpose.

Q: Did you have any particularly difficult protection and welfare cases?

STEVEN: Oh, yes. One of the more interesting ones, I guess, was an American fishing boat off the coast had a fire onboard, and the captain of the fishing boat was rather badly burned. They got him ashore at the port down there - it'll come to me - got him ashore and then just called us, "What do we do with this man?" Through the course of the night working on the telephone, I was able to get in touch with the Coast Guard in Miami, and the Coast Guard flew an airplane down in the dark, getting to Yucatán just before morning light, circling over the airport, and then landing right at dawn. We had been able to arrange all this by telephone with the help of the Mexican authorities to have this fellow ready to go, and they put him on the airplane and took him back to Miami and, I gather, saved his life and he eventually recovered. Other cases were the normal ones that you handle in small posts, Americans getting into trouble with the law. We had to work with the local police. If you were lucky and had good contacts, they were usually happy enough to send them home, just expel them to get rid of the problem. One American, a young man on a motorcycle, thought that driving at 60 or 70 miles an hour at night on a Yucatecan country road was a smart idea. Well, the cows consider the roads theirs at those hours, so he ran right onto a cow, and the cow was demolished and he was fairly badly broken up. That took a good deal of effort to get him hospitalized and eventually get him moved. Another typical case that happens more and more, out at Cozumel, which was then the leading tourist attraction - now it's Cancun, which has opened up since then - at Cozumel a young American went scuba diving under the supervision supposedly of a Mexican diver, a professional diver. Unfortunately they'd stretched things, and the diver took down too many people and couldn't keep track of them. They stayed down for the allotment of time at 100 to 150 feet, and the diver came up and discovered that one of the people in the group wasn't there. So the young Mexican diver, who had already exceeded his allotment of time and knew that if he went back down again he was very probably going to get deathly ill with the bends and the nitrogen, without questioning me he went back down and spent another 20 minutes or 30 minutes searching. Never found the body; they never found it; it just vanished, wiped out to sea somewhere. Then when the young Mexican boy came up, he was in terrible condition himself. He had the convulsions. That was an extremely difficult case. Again, the US Coast Guard came to our rescue and had nearby on a ship apparently a decompression chamber which they were willing to make available, so they came in and they put the boy into the decompression chamber. He ended up, I think, a paraplegic but at least survived. I think he never regained the use of his legs. These are the sort of routines that go on in consular work and which in my case interested me. I enjoyed that type of work and thought that this would be a useful thing to do. That was back in the days before we were into our coning system and you could contemplate being an economic officer at one post and a consular officer at the next. That changed. But Yucatán, as I say, was a fascinating place. I would still recommend it as a tour for your officers.

Q: Who was the consul while you were there?

STEVEN: Paul Dwyer. He's long retired.

Q: Was there much political activity at that time?

STEVEN: At that time I was there the political activity was again, as I say, focused on Cuba. We were more concerned about Cuba's relationships and the movement between Cuba and South and Central America.

Q: Were there, from what you were gathering, many Cubans in the area?

STEVEN: Yes, there were Cubans there, not ostensibly openly and politically acting. They weren't allowed to. The Mexicans just simply didn't permit that sort of thing. But there were Cubans there; there was a Cuban consul. There were relationships. There was a fair amount of traffic back and forth. When I say 'we', I mean the US government had a good deal of interest in what was going over there, so that was part of the US activity in the area.

Q: Then in '66 you went up to Mexico City.

STEVEN: I was called up to Mexico City as a staff aide to the ambassador, which came as a bolt from the blue. The ambassador was Fulton Freeman. It always used to be amusing, because if anybody called on the phone or wrote to Fulton, we knew that they didn't know him; he was universally known as Tony Freeman. A marvelous man, he grew up in China with missionary parents. He spoke Chinese and read Chinese. He ended up as ambassador to Mexico. We were extremely fortunate, both my wife and I, in the personal relationship and the official relationship. Normally that's considered a one-year or at the most a two-year tour. As the end of my second year came along, he and I both were sort of tentative, and it turned out that we were both thinking very much the same thing. He very much wanted me to stay, if I would, for the rest of his career, and I very much wanted to. Naturally the career guides back here warned me that this was not the way your career was to progress, this was too long at one job. Not for the first time or certainly the last in my career, after discussing it thoroughly with my other half, we decided that we still wanted to do that. So we stayed almost three years in that job.

Q: Until about '69.

STEVEN: We left there in the summer of '69.

Q: Okay. How did you see, from your position but people talking and sitting at the side of the ambassador, how did you see our relations with Mexico at the time, and what were the kind of issues that concerned us?

STEVEN: I think the relationship was as it has been in the overall sense for the last several decades, completely open, good, with points of irritation. One was the famous dispute over a few acres of land along the Rio Grande River - I forget the name of it now. The Rio Grande had shifted and it had cut off what was considered Mexican territory, and we built on it and took it over, and the Mexicans said, "Hey, you can't do that; it's ours, so give it back," so we finally did - that type of thing, border issues. Politically there was not a great deal of difficulty. That was unfortunately though the period of the famous riots that they had in the city.

Q: Was this because of the Olympics?

STEVEN: No. The Olympics took place during that period, but the riots were more politically oriented, students protesting, and the difficulty was it got out of hand and the military did some shooting.

Q: Quite a bit.

STEVEN: Quite a bit, yes.

Q: Who was the Minister of Interior at the time? He later became President.

STEVEN: I forget.

Q: I want to say Echeverria - I can't pronounce it. Anyway, I don't know.

STEVEN: It was very sad that it happened. To me, it always reminded me of the Kent State incident that we had. I think it was not a question of anybody in the government ordering the police to fire to break this thing up violently. I think it was more a question of scared young conscript, soldiers and police who fired, just as exactly what happened at Kent State. The relationship was generally good. Tony Freeman had excellent relations with the local government. He could go to them very quietly and resolve a great many problems that never rose to the level of major political difficulties. One interesting historical note while I was there that I always remember: At the time the Vietnam War was on, and, if you recall, President Johnson was at the point where he decided that he would not run again and withdrew from consideration, but he hadn't yet announced that when Vice President Humphrey came to Mexico City on an official visit. I was very much involved in that, of course. The Mexican President then, Gustavo Diáz Ordaz, honored us most exceptionally by accepting an invitation to the ambassador's home. Most presidents don't do that. Our President, for example, has always made it a practice you don't go to foreign embassies, because if you go to one, then the others are offended, and the Mexicans had about the same thing, but Diáz Ordaz accepted an invitation to come to our ambassador's residence for a dinner for Vice President Humphrey, and I was right there with them. That was the same evening, by coincidence, when the radio broadcast, special broadcast, of President Johnson was to be made, and we expected something was going to happen. I had the great good fortune - and Foreign Service Officers sometimes are able to do this - of being in the library at the ambassador's residence with the ambassador and his wife, Vice President Humphrey and Muriel, President Gustavo Diáz Ordaz and his interpreter, and me. The ambassador had one of those big Zenith radios, you remember those shortwave radios we had, and was listening to the broadcast. I shall always remember the interpreter whispering in Diáz Ordaz' ear while the thing was going on, and Johnson announced that he would not accept or run again. As soon as the broadcast ended, Muriel Humphrey turned to Hubert - and I'll never forget it - in tears and said, "Hubert, what are we going to do?" I'll always remember and wondered, had they not thought this through, had they really not known it was coming. He made it clear, as I recall the conversations that came out - the ambassador obviously was interested too - that Humphrey knew pretty much that Johnson was not going to run again, but he didn't know it was going to be announced that night, so it came as a surprise to him too. I'll always remember the interpreter turning to Diáz Ordaz and whispering this in his ear about the announcement and Diáz Ordaz turning his head sideways and staring at him like that, and then blank, turned back, no expression, no emotion. Once again an example of how Foreign Service and trained diplomats think of these things: There was press attention, a great deal of press there, not only Mexican but a lot of American press were at the residence too. They were kept in the front lobby in the hall. But as we came out of the library they were all lined up and they were demanding a response.

Humphrey's aide was obviously thinking only of the politics of this thing and that Humphrey needed to speak to the American press and the other press that were there responding to the event that had just happened. As they were moving across the big living room - I suppose you could call it - or reception room toward the dining room where the dinner was waiting - it had already been delayed for about 20 minutes because of the broadcast - Humphrey looked a little incisive and he sort of looked at that aide and at the press and at the ambassador, and Tony Freeman just very quietly said, "Mr. Vice President, we do have as our guest the President of Mexico, and I wonder if it would be possible to continue on with the evening. In fact, I think maybe we should continue on with the evening." Humphrey picked up just like that and said, "You're absolutely right," and they walked past the press without a word and into the dining room for dinner. Then after, he came out and said a few words. It's the sort of diplomatic touch that a real professional has.

Q: How did Tony Freeman operate? He was one of the big names. In a way, he moved over with his Chinese expertise sort of to get out from under the fire of McCarthyism and all.

STEVEN: I think that was probably part of it, yes. He had a manner which was probably the perfect blend of authority and good human relationships. It was clear who was in charge at the embassy, and when necessary he made firm decisions, even unpleasant decisions, but always in a manner that left people feeling very comfortable and friendly and open with him. People felt quite able to come and argue with him or protest things he was doing or make suggestions - to me, he was the ideal ambassador in his relationships, both with his host government and with the people in his embassy. But he had a heart attack while he was there and spent quite some time - I forget how long; it was measured in weeks, I think - at the residence, part of it in bed recovering. I think - I don't know this, but I believe - that he sort of sounded out the Department if they thought he ought to resign or give it up, but he was able to continue to work, so everybody agreed he'd stay on and I would take work to his residence and he would do it there. He also later was offered the job, or pretty much anything he wanted to do. I know they talked to him about becoming Assistant Secretary for then ARA. He turned it down and said no, he didn't want to get back into that high-pressure political atmosphere of Washington. I believe, and I wouldn't want to be quoted on that one publicly, but I believe that he was offered Brazil, and, again, he said to me and to others who were with him in the office that after Mexico what does it offer? Is it a bigger, better job? No. Mexico was one of the best ambassadorial jobs. So he went ahead and decided to retire and accepted a job as president of the Monterey Institute for Foreign Studies up in Monterey, California, which was right in his home area. He came from that area and had lots of good ties there, and so he went out there for a few more years and ran the Institute. He died very much as I think Tony Freeman would have wanted to, walking off the 18th hole of the golf course. He finished a nice 18-hole round of golf, started back toward the locker room, and... If you've got to go, that's probably as good as anything.

Q: Did you get any feel for how we viewed the politics of Mexico? At that time the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] was the power... It had just been there since the '20s, I guess. Was this an accepted thing?

STEVEN: It was accepted. It was de jure and de facto the dominant force. It kept the country reasonably stable. We weren't worried about Communist takeovers as we had been in Cuba. The relationships with the US were completely acceptable. There were minor irritations but nothing major. There were no alternatives, I think, that the United States saw that were better. We didn't see a strong opposition party that was capable of replacing it and insuring stability as we now see. It's a different situation. So I think it was generally accepted by everyone. It's all right. We aren't necessarily endorsing publicly the idea of a one-party government that runs the way it does, but it worked.

Q: I've been told - I've never served in Mexico but I've been told - that the Mexican Foreign Ministry is sort of the place where it's sort of the designated place where you can be somewhat anti-American and all. While everybody else goes about their business dealing quite amicably with the Americans, the Foreign Ministry sort of is the place where the somewhat anti-American sentiment resides. Did you get any of that feel?

STEVEN: When I was there, no. I would think more, if there are people who feel that way or even if it is true, it's tactical as much as anything. Mexico does have problems with this domineering power to the north, and the Foreign Ministry would be expected to uphold Mexican honor and interests, and if that required talking tough to the Americans, it could be done. I think it's more just a tactical thing. You'd be expected to be protective of poor little Mexico.

Q: Did you, or the ambassador and you with him, get drawn into any of these major controversies over border problems or...?

STEVEN: Well, drawn in very much in the sense of dealing with them, but I recall no instance in which the ambassador or the embassy were ever identified either by the Mexicans or our side as part of the problem. The problem existed, and we did our best, the ambassador did his best, to deal with that problem in an amicable way with the Mexicans, and it generally worked. I don't recall instances of the embassy itself becoming controversial or the ambassador becoming controversial. Most of the problems we had with the Mexicans were worked out, and it was more practical questions like that piece of land that had to be handed back to Mexico and other decisions of that type that were made. In trade relationships I don't recall there were major initiatives like NAFTA and so on at that time. Things went along pretty well.

Q: Did Cuba come into the equation at all?

STEVEN: Some. Of course, you were concerned about Cuban influence in Mexico, but it wasn't regarded as either likely or dangerous. Of course, the Cubans were active. They had their embassy there and so on. The Mexicans insisted in keeping relationships open with Cuba. I have no official knowledge of it, but my impression might have been that it didn't bother us that much because it gave us opportunities to work on Cuba too if we had somebody there in Mexico to see what they were doing, etcetera. Mexico had the very comfortable position of not fearing Cuba. The Mexican armed forces have always been a fascinating subject since the revolutionary days of the '20s. They have not been an overt factor but were very much in the background. They support the PRI, of course, and the government, but they have never been an independent factor and have never been big enough or powerful enough to be too dangerous in Mexico. A famous story - it's probably apocryphal but it might very well have happened - was the Mexican government bringing its budget to President Díaz Ordaz at the time I was there for their military expenditures for the upcoming budget year, and they wanted to buy some tanks. It turned out Mexico had, I think, a half dozen light tanks from the World War II period mainly for parade purposes, but they actually wanted to buy a few modern tanks. They came to the President and put this in the budget. He is said to have looked at this and said, "Tanks, hmmm. Well, who are we going to fight? Why do we need these?" The southern border with Guatemala was of some concern at times. There were differences down there and so on. He said, "The Guatemalans are going to invade?" "Oh, no, no, Señor President." "I see. If the Americans decide to invade, there's not much we're going to do with a few tanks. If the Cubans decide to attack us, the Americans aren't going to permit that. They'll immediately step in and stop that, so why do we need tanks? Scratch them out of the budget." Well, that's almost exactly what Mexico has always done. Their air force was a pitiful collection of a few T33 jet fighters; I don't think they even have those now. For what purpose? They've been blessed and cursed at the same time by having us right here. We're not going to permit anybody to attack Mexico. It wouldn't be in our interest, so they have complete protection under our umbrella. Aside from their own internal security needs, which are basically police and light infantry requirements, there's no purpose in having a military, so they've been fortunate to be able to keep the military very much out of it.

Q: Did our involvement in Vietnam bring protests, demonstrations, that sort of thing?

STEVEN: Some. We had protests and demonstrations, and Vietnam was an element of it. I remember the students, again, marching up the avenue in front of the embassy one day and lot of shouting and crowding, but the student leaders themselves designated marshals, and as they came by the US embassy, the marshals lined the sidewalk arm to arm holding like this and formed a human rail across the front so that nobody would go near the embassy, and they marched yelling and shouting but nothing was thrown, no incidents of that nature. I suspect that it was almost like the types of demonstrations you had in this country at the same time. They didn't generally get violent at all.

Q: How about your and your wife's social contacts with Mexican society?

STEVEN: We were very fortunate because of the ambassador, of course, and I was exposed to a lot that I never would have been able to see. It was also so very busy. We had Mexican friends and spent what time we could meeting them and seeing them. We were very much involved in the ambassador's social activity. It was common enough that I be at the table when he had the Foreign Minister there for dinner. I was fortunate in that he was an ambassador who included me in most of what he did, for example, meeting in the library when the Vice President and the Mexican President were there. At many of the activities he went to, I was there with my wife. My wife was pregnant in the middle of all this, and that slowed her activity down a little bit. But it was a very good period.

Q: In '69 whither?

STEVEN: In '69 the question came of whither, and by that time the people on the Personnel side were not terribly happy with me because I had disregarded their advice. I hadn't taken the path that I should have taken. It also became a problem because that's when we went into the cone idea. During my time in Mexico City, you had to select the cone where you wanted to go, and that was a real problem, as I suspect it was for many FSOs at the time. I like the consular side of it, but I also had been exposed to the political and the more general economic diplomatic side, particularly from the position I had in it, and decided that in the final analysis I'd become a political officer, so I chose that cone. The assignment came up, and suddenly the process began and I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but suddenly and to my surprise a telegram came assigning me to Vietnam. I was going to be in the embassy in Saigon in charge of the program for bringing in third-country nationals, Filipinos, Koreans and other who worked there.

Q: Known as TCNs.

STEVEN: TCNs, third-country nationals, and I was going to be the person in the embassy who handled that program, coordinating with the Vietnamese and such. My wife, of course, could not go, and she and the family were going to go to the Philippines. They would be allowed to go to Manila and I would visit her in Manila. So we, being faithful FSOs and families at the time, saluted and got ready to go. I sold all the warm clothing we had, and we ordered a car which was to be sent out and got everything ready, and then suddenly got another telegram from the Department saying, "Your assignment's cancelled. Stand by." So I frantically got on the telephone and found, of course, that my new car had just left San Francisco that same day on a ship heading for the Far East. They got it off in Hawaii and kept it until we were assigned. I only found out later - and this is something that has always been rather a sore sport - the job that I was to go into was taken by another agency. They asked that they be allowed to fill that job because of the positions and the contacts it gave them, and this was not supposed to happen. Foreign Service Officers were never supposed to be displaced from assignments because of that idea, but that's what happened. I only found that out some years later by running into an old friend from the other agency who told me that's what had happened; he'd been involved in it. So I was left hanging, and there wasn't anything else open in Vietnam, so we were told to sit and wait. So we sat and waited. Finally two or three weeks later a telegram came. I think I was going to head the consular section in La Paz, Bolivia. My wife's first reaction was very much the reaction of a Foreign Service wife: "But we just sold all our warm clothes." So we started getting ready, literally buying more sweaters and things to go to Bolivia. We got the car sent back to San Francisco and started getting all our plans ready to go to Bolivia. Another telegram came saying "Whoops! Assignment cancelled." At this point I began to get those doubts that I'm sure all Foreign Service Officers get: Wait a minute. Is this just coincidence or am I so unwanted that they're canceling all the assignments. I found out what happened in that one: The fellow who was in the job had been vacillating. The ambassador wanted him to stay out there in that job, but he hadn't made up his mind, so they'd gone ahead and assigned me, and then the fellow changed his mind and said he really would like to stay, so they canceled my assignment. It had nothing to do with me; they didn't know me at all. So we sat and waited. The next assignment came out of the blue - I must say my mouth was simply hanging open - a year at the Fletcher School in Boston.

Q: You could use your warm clothing too.

STEVEN: We could use our warm clothing. I grew up right outside of Boston. My parents met and married at Tufts, so to me it was very much a home assignment. It was incredible. My wife and I both came from Providence, Rhode Island, so all our families were right up there, so this was like going home.

Q: Just as an aside, that third-country national job ended up under me. I was consul general, and they gave it to a CIA officer. I used to sit on the third-country national committee as consul general. You probably didn't miss a thing. It was a bad time there.

STEVEN: I had to correct a very senior officer. Later I went to work for Under Secretary for Management, and he said in a staff meeting that he intended then to say at the time that the Foreign Service protected its people and that no Foreign Service Officer had ever been displaced in an assignment by another agency. I sort of put my finger up and said, "Whoops. In one case he certainly was." He was very upset by that. He said he'd been assured by our Personnel people that that had never happened, so there was a little bit of grumbling and unhappiness about that. Anyway, the assignment came to go to Fletcher School. I think part of it was that they had me available and nothing else to do with me. But AID at that time was facing something new called Title IX in the Foreign Assistance Act which said that they had not only to provide economic assistance but they were supposed to provide economic assistance that promoted democracy and human rights, and nobody knew how to do that, so they set up a course at Fletcher with eight AID program officers, basically all at my level, career FSO, to go to the school and take a special course in how to use foreign economic assistance to promote democracy. The Department of State was dubious about this too but thought it was an interesting idea, so they had me available and they sent along as the sole State Department officer to take the course with them, observe and report. So I arrived up there in September of '69, taking courses in a building right across the street from my mother's sorority house. It was a very, very interesting and different experience.

Q: In the '69 to '70 period, how did they constitute the course? This was sort of cut out of...

STEVEN: Well, it was feeling their way. Nobody really knew how to do this. So they designed a course which combined political studies with economic studies, and then someone got the idea that it was important for the officers to know something about statistics and how to use them, so they assigned us a course in statistics, which didn't work very well because most of us were people like me whose mathematical competence ended with keeping a checkbook, if we could even manage that. It was sort of a humbling effort. One of the professors had a theory himself that these things interrelated and how they interrelated, and we were taught this or given the chance to understand this very complex series of interrelationships. I don't think it ever really gelled. Nobody ever really knew quite what they were really getting at. We took the course. It was interesting. We wrote a paper about our experiences; I picked Burma, my experience in Burma. But the Burmese situation, I realize and later would have agreed, should not be used, because Burma was such an exceptionally different country. The ordinary rules of economics don't apply in a place like Burma. So nothing too much came out of it, and they only did it that one year and then they dropped the idea. It was an interesting experience to spend the time up there.

Q: Coming out of that, what were they...?

STEVEN: Well, then they had an assignment for me, and that was to be the OIC of El Salvador and Honduras Affairs here in the Department. I'll give you this when we finish; it may be useful.

Q: I'll just make little notes.

STEVEN: It may be helpful if you want.

Q: You did that from '70 to...?

STEVEN: I went down there in '70 and had only an 18-month tour there, until '71, July of '71, and I had the desk, the combined El Salvador/Honduras desk at the time, which was an older arrangement which had become extremely difficult because that was just after they had their war.

Q: The Soccer War.

STEVEN: The so-called Soccer War. The relationships between the two countries were so bad that when I went for my familiarization visit, I went to El Salvador, then had to go over to Guatemala and from Guatemala over to Honduras because I couldn't go directly. Dealing with the two embassies, it became a fascinating experience. It's sad it's gotten the title and the image of the Soccer War. It was much more serious. There were longstanding questions there. One of the major problems was a demographic one: Salvadorans flooding over into Honduras and taking up land in Honduras and the Hondurans trying to stop that. That was one of the basic causes of war right there. It was a difficult job trying to get anybody in Washington in the Department to take it at all seriously. Everyone had the same reaction: oh, it's crazy in Central America, banana republics having a war over a soccer game or something. It was like saying as soon as they assassinated the Archduke in Sarajevo in 1914 that that was just a minor thing. It set it off and was a catalyst for a lot of trouble. The interesting experiment there was with AID. The Latin American Bureau has always been used for experiments. Planning and programming and budgeting exercises, other things generally seemed to be tried there, partly, I think, because they feel that if it doesn't work it won't be quite as disastrous as it would in Europe or something, and the Bureau has generally had a reputation as being more willing to experiment with things. It experimented with the idea of making the State and AID desk officers sit together and share the jobs. In theory and in my case with the fellow I worked with in practice, we substituted for each other. I did AID work and he did State work, and we signed off on each other's telegrams. When I was on leave, he ran the desk, and vice versa. It was a very, very interesting experiment, and I found it a very, very good one, because we very closely integrated the work, but mainly for bureaucratic reasons it didn't continue and eventually it was discontinued a couple of years after I left. It was an idea the Department tried and an interesting one.

Q: Later, particularly when all hell heated up in Nicaragua and you had a full-scale war in El Salvador, this became a huge concentration of American resources, but at the time, I take it...STEVEN: At the time it was on a sidebar and not particularly important to us.

Q: Had the war stopped by the time you got there?

STEVEN: Yes, there was no fighting. There was no cross-border traffic.

Q: Were we trying to do anything, or was this just their problem?

STEVEN: Ultimately we tried to encourage them to settle things in practical terms.

Q: Hadn't OAS stepped in or done something?

STEVEN: They had made lots of loud noises to try to stop it. I think myself and what I know of the war, the main reason it stopped when it did is that the Salvadorans, who had by far the larger population, basically felt that they were able to damage Honduras enough to force the Hondurans to back off - not that they were going to invade Honduras or something but basically that they would dominate them. The Hondurans did something very interesting, or had done something very interesting, which is similar to what the Israelis did. The Hondurans recognized that, in those conditions with the bad terrain, air power was going to be an issue, and the Salvadorans had done what most of those countries had, they bought a collection of half a dozen different types of airplanes to shuttle their generals around and a few things like this. The Hondurans concentrated very much upon one fighter they happened to buy, the navy, Corsair, which was a very able aircraft, and there were plenty of them around after World War II, and even at that late period they were buying them. So they had a substantial number of them in their squadron of these Corsair fighters, and their pilots to get the training did what the Israelis did. They were airline pilots largely, who trained as reservists, and when they mobilized and put them into the cockpit, you had very experienced airline pilots flying these planes who knew what they were doing. They spent a lot of money on maintenance and upkeep and armament, so they had a really effective, modern air force. When the Salvadorans tried to fight them, they were massacred literally. The Hondurans went through them like a hot knife through butter. One of the better pictures is of two Salvadoran aircraft finishing a mission and having just barely escaped with their lives and possibly having some damage, landing at that same airfield at the same time from opposite ends of the same runway. Once the Hondurans effectively had complete control of the air, had a few missions over and, I guess, shot up a few airport towers and things, the Salvadorans were quite willing to back off. Interesting.

Q: What were your major concerns or efforts while you were on this desk?

STEVEN: Economic assistance probably was a lot of it. That's why I worked so closely with the AID man. We had economic assistance programs there at the time trying to be helpful. Minor problems I forget. There's always a few, protection and welfare of an American citizen perhaps who'd been arrested or things of that nature. One of the nastier incidents we had was the Salvadoran Vice Consul in San Francisco, as I recall, who was found standing on a sidewalk one evening late firing his revolver at the windows of an apartment building above where his girlfriend lived. The police took a dim view of this and were able to safely disarm him - he was thoroughly drunk - and hauled him off, where he got sober enough to announce his diplomatic status, and I remember having to deal with all that. The sad thing is we had at the moment the Salvadoran Foreign Minister in town on an official visit, and he had intervened because the Salvadoran Vice Consul was the son of a very prominent politician in Salvador. Getting him out of jail, because they had been able to hold him - you can hold somebody if he presents a threat to the public - getting him out and getting him back to Salvador, and the main problem was he demanded his revolver be returned before he left, which they didn't do. It was this type of problem, not big, serious things at that time. It was only later when the Nicaraguans and so on got much more involved when these things happened...

Q: I take it at this point there was no guerilla movement or rebel movement up on the hills?

STEVEN: In Honduras and Salvador there always are, but they weren't significant. There were always elements of banditos that I recall in El Salvador. They had some trouble in the countryside, but the feeling was probably, even though it was under a political banner, it was more just the usual banditos taking advantage of a situation. There was nothing that serious. There was no threat to the stability of either government at that time, except each other.

Q: At that time I take it there was not a very sizable immigrant community of either country in the United States.

STEVEN: No, the big floods of immigration hadn't started yet. There was some coming in, it was always a concern, but it hadn't reached the horizon of public awareness or become a serious problem at the time.

Q: Then in '71 where did you go?

STEVEN: In '71 again a surprise - my life seems to be filled with those in the Foreign Service - I suddenly got a call on the telephone from Personnel people - I'm only 18 months through my tour - saying, "Would you go upstairs please to the Deputy Under Secretary for Management's office, Mr. Macomber." So I said, "To do what, to be prepared for what, discuss Salvador and Honduras?" "No, there's a job up there that they want to interview you for." That stunned me, and to this day I don't know what happened, who suggested my name, how I came to the attention of the Under Secretary for Management's office, etcetera. But I went up and, sure enough, they had a job as a special assistant up there that they wanted to fill, and I had been identified and did I want this job. I was interviewed by Macomber, and he seemed to be happy enough with me. I was still quite stunned. How did my name come up there? I'd never talked to anybody on his staff, had no connection with them at all. How did they notice me way down in the depths of the Department? Never did find out but accepted the job. So I moved upstairs for a year or two as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Management, now the Under Secretary, and one of my portfolios, probably the dominant one, was the reform efforts that were going on, diplomacy for the '70s, you will recall, the big blue book of hundreds of recommendations. They wanted someone to track what was happening to those recommendations - Were we actually making any progress? What was being done? - plus other responsibilities, but that was sort of the dominant one. That I found to be absolutely fascinating exposure to the highest-level politics of the Department and how things really worked, etcetera. The Under Secretary for Management, of course, was involved in all these things like selection of ambassadors, promotion lists, the budget, the whole routine, which I was exposed to and learned a great deal. I had some exposure in Mexico with the ambassador, but this was an eye-opening experience to watch people at work. Macomber had a fair amount of influence at the time. He was controversial. Many people didn't regard what he was doing as right, they didn't like the reform effort, and they didn't like Macomber's manner. He was brusque.

Q: I'm told when he lost his temper it was really something.

STEVEN: I was on the end of his temper a few times, as was everybody else. It's one of those classic stories. He had a very high, bad temper, and his method with people wasn't terribly good, but underneath he was very much an honorable man. I saw him do things that were risky personally and professionally for him that were the right things to do and demanding that the Department make these moves. One that I don't know if it's very publicly know - at this point there's no reason why it's not: You may remember that there was a group of young officer who signed a dissent against our policy in Vietnam.

Q: Yes, after the Cambodian incursion.

STEVEN: The question came up as to whether those people would have retaliation from the system, whether they would lose promotion opportunities or something because of what they had done. I think there was a consensus practically on the seventh floor that, yes, they should be retaliated against and they should suffer for what they had done, because it had embarrassed the government. Macomber said absolutely no, that they had done the proper thing, they expressed it in the proper channels, they had every right to do that, and he set up a mechanism to track their progress to see whether they made the normal progress. You could sort of average it out. Of that group, how did they sit with their peers? Was there any evidence of prejudice against them. That was actually done for a bit, and he made sure it didn't happen, which I admired him very much for, and a number of things of that nature. You finally get to deal with him. I learned very quickly from his senior assistant, who let Bill rant on and almost literally looked at his watch to time how long he wanted to let him go - I once thought of doing that - and then he would start talking firmly to him, just explaining here was the situation and what needed to be done, and just keep talking while Macomber was talking. Eventually Macomber would start to falter, realizing he was being talked to directly and wasn't paying attention to what he was saying, and eventually he'd start to listen and then suddenly he was a reasonable man you could talk to. I learned the technique very quickly. You had to give him a certain amount of time to rant, and then you began talking. I have not seen him much in recent years but I saw him a few times. In fact, a couple of years ago we had a nice talk on the phone and he wrote back. A question had come up and he was asked about something during his time, and I was asked. But he now has Parkinson's or some other degenerative disease.

Q: He's up in Martha's Vineyard or someplace?

STEVEN: Yes, he's up in Martha's Vineyard.

Q: He's teaching, I believe. He's teaching in high school, I think.

STEVEN: On balance, a difficult but quite admirable man.

Q: He left an impression in a positive way. What about these reforms that were going on? Which ones did you note? Did you find that the sort of State Department bureaucracy dug its heels in on certain things?

STEVEN: On everything; there was very little change. I got deeply into it and tracked these things. I'll give you a typical one. The committees that had done their review looked at the system for designating principal officers, ambassadors and principal officers, at our posts, and in theory you looked at what the prime purpose of the post was, the main interest in Post X's economic relationship with the country in commerce and trade. So in this you should consider an ambassador with economic and commercial credentials. For a consul general in a consulate whose main function was issuing visas, like the Dominican Republic, probably you might consider a consular officer. They studied and found that a small percentage of the posts were run by anybody but political officers. Political officers dominated two-thirds of all the posts, and even in places where the country's own country plans and stuff identified the primary interest as something other, economic or consular or whatever, those posts generally were filled by political officers. Relatively very few were filled by consular or straight economic or commercial officers. Consular was the worst, and I think we found one post that had something who could be identified as an administrative cone officer. So the effort was made to review all of these post designations with their country plans and so on and try to bring it more into line with reality. It was always recognized that the majority would be political officers probably but that there should be a much better distribution for the others. So we worked on this for a year or two, and then I did a survey of all the posts. It was like prying teeth out with pliers to get it from PER; they did not want to give me the figures, and they stalled and stalled and stalled until they were finally ordered by Macomber personally to produce the figures. I looked at them and found that the reform effort had not done terribly well. In fact, it continued to deteriorate. There were still more posts than ever under political officers and fewer than every under consular or anything else. So the direction from the Department and the guidelines had been ignored. They just flatly paid no attention to it. So Macomber called in the Director General of the Service - at that time it was Bill Hall; remember him? - and others who sat around in his office and looked at every single post and read the country statements about what the responsibilities of the post were and then looked at the qualifications of the officers who were assigned or proposed to be assigned, and did switch some but a small percentage. My own basic feeling about the whole effort was it was largely unsuccessful. It was another dusty study to put on the wall.

Q: What was your impression of the bureaus, particularly the geographic bureaus? Did they sort of go their own way?

STEVEN: I'm looking back an awful long way. My feeling is that it depended to a fair extent on what was happening in the bureaus. If there were a major crisis going on somewhere, then naturally it drew high-level attention. If things were quiet and nothing much was happening, as it usually was in Latin America at that time, nobody much paid attention and the bureau ran its own affairs. It depended also on the Assistant Secretary. If he had influence or power and so on, he played a bigger role. It was sort of to me more a reflection of what was happening in those area and how much high-level attention was being brought to it. There were the usual questions of the budget, where you never have enough money, so where do you make the changes. Trying to close a post is very similar to what the military has found now trying to close a military base. You'd be surprised who comes out of the woodwork. You propose to close a post, and suddenly people you never imagined have gotten interested in keeping it open. Terrorism and incidents were something of a problem. We had two or three of them. An example that might be interesting historically: The ambassador in Haiti, Clinton Knox, a political ambassador, political appointee, was kidnapped in his own front driveway and taken into his own residence and held in his own residence under guard by a terrorist group. He got put on the telephone and called the embassy and was told to tell them that he was being held and that they had to negotiate. They wanted release of some political prisoners in Haiti. He called the embassy and spoke to the senior officer who was there in the embassy at the time, who was a consular officer, and unfortunately instead of really sort of telling him what was happening, he said, "There's an emergency. You've got to come out to the embassy right away." He went to the embassy and became a prisoner along with the ambassador. That was an interesting development, but then finally they figured out what was happening, and the deputy chief of mission, whose name I genuinely do not remember, was a USIA - no, no, there was no deputy chief of mission. He had left; the position was vacant. A new one was in training back here at the FSI, but he hadn't reported yet. The next senior officer who should have taken charge was the USIS counselor. He was told what was happening and said, "Well, I don't know. I don't have much to do with that sort of thing," and he left and went home, leaving the next man in the embassy, a very junior political officer. The junior political officer got on the telephone to the operations center and said, "Hey, I've got a problem down here." That's when Macomber heard about what was going on. So, Macomber being the direct type, said, "I've got to go down there and straighten this out," so they called the Air Force. The Air Force whipped up a Jetstar transport. Then he got the DCM out of training, the DCM designate out of training, here at the FSI to go down, and he got then the Assistant Secretary for the security side to come and told him to bring some weapons, so the guy showed up with a pistol. We roared on down to Port au Prince in the middle of the night and got there and got run over to the presidential palace where Baby Doc Duvalier was in charge, and we spent most of the day in his outer office with Macomber going in occasionally to see him. I never saw but was in the outer office with Tonton Macoute, literally dark glasses, white shirts, dark blue pants sitting on the window sills all around the room with carbines and Tommy guns staring at us. Every time you moved, their eyes followed you like this. So for most of the day they negotiated by telephone with these people.

They finally negotiated that these people would be allowed to be a plane that would be flown in, and I think the Mexicans finally agreed to fly a plane in and they would board the plane and at that point they would release the hostages. The papal envoy, the nuncio, was to be the guarantee, and he would go with these prisoners to the airport to make sure that they were on. They didn't release the political prisoners, but the idea was that the hostage takers themselves - I think there were three of them - would be allowed to leave. They flew out, and then we spent the evening. It was already late evening again, so we decided to stay overnight and then fly back the next day, and I am in the proud position of being able to say with a perfectly straight face all through my career that I slept with the Assistant Secretary of State for Management. We shared a room. Yes, I slept with him. Eyebrows [raise] until I explain. An interesting experience.

Q: Did they do something to the USIS officer? That this was not a good performance.

STEVEN: I think discussions were had with him later, yes, about this. The more interesting part though was the poor consular officer who had suffered through this, because he was a pro. He had every right to loudly and vociferously protest what this idiot ambassador had done to endanger him, but he didn't seem to want to. He was a consular officer, and by sheer coincidence they were reopening the consulate at Salzburg. Salzburg opens and closes quite regularly over the years. We were reopening it, and the question was coming up as to who would be the principal officer, and there was quite a competition for it. It was quite a popular idea. Everyone wants to be principal officer in Salzburg. And I brought up the question and said, "Look, we have so-and-so here and he's just done a very gusty professional job of not embarrassing the Department. He could easily have but he played the role like a real pro. Don't you think he deserves some consideration for that?" Macomber immediately picked it up and said, "You're right, absolutely." We found out he had all the necessary qualifications, the rank, experience and every other thing. Really it turned out he was functional. So he was given Salzburg as a reward essentially for handling the situation in Haiti. That was typical of the things, anything that came up in the Department, but the saddest thing was the reform effort, as usual.

Q: They go through this. Sometime a little earlier there was the Young Turk Movement, I think, and they'd come...

STEVEN: Yes, Talin...

Q: Byroade.

STEVEN: ...and Bill Harrop and some of the others, yes. Macomber was involved in that. I think the relationships, I guess, were typical of Macomber. There were some pretty heated exchanges, and yet I believe deep in his heart he was always trying to do what seemed right and recognized things that needed change and did. One of the biggest changes we made during that period, of course, was the famous or infamous, if you're were against it, policy on spouses in the Foreign Service. Do you remember 1973 the airgram that was put defining the role of the spouse in the Foreign Service. I had a very big hand in that. My wife and I sat around at our kitchen table several evenings helping to write that thing. The open forum panel originated the idea, and there would be a statement from the Department that the wives were not employees and couldn't be treated as slave workers and so on. This came after some unfortunate incidents with some of the ranking ladies from big embassies who mistreated the wives, and, of course, the movement was on. Allison Palmer's case was very famous at the time and her claims of discrimination. So when the open forum came with this proposal and a rough draft, Macomber was receptive and I was assigned to work with them, and I did. I had a very big hand, and my wife, in helping to write this thing, and we actually got it finally published and put out, to a great deal of dissent among those who thought it was wrong and those who thought it was right. What I've always emphasized, and Macomber did too, is that he and everyone else knew full well what was going to be sacrificed by this. It would definitely have an effect on the morale and the community spirit in the Service, etcetera, but it was necessary and inevitable and we all felt very privately that if it wasn't done voluntarily it was going to be done to us by a court, so it was moved ahead and done, and recognized the changing nature of the Service. Wives were no longer chattels.

Q: Well, the wives used to be mentioned in efficiency reports.

STEVEN: But that was stopped. I think on balance it was necessary.

Q: It had to be done. I don't think anybody really thought about this, but a very large baby went out with the bath water, unfortunately.

STEVEN: But they knew that was going to happen. Some people with great outrage would talk about, "Didn't you realize? Didn't you think ahead?" Yes, we did. It was very carefully thought ahead and balanced, and the inevitable feeling was, yes, it has its drawbacks but, if we don't do it, it's going to be done to us, and let's get ahead of it.

Q: The way things were going, it was a different world.

STEVEN: And the anecdotes of the cases, many of them unfortunately verified, of bad treatment of wives at posts. It just had to stop.

Q: I met some principal officers' wives, and this is often done by the wives of professional Foreign Services Officers. It was not limited to the wives of political appointees.

STEVEN: Oh, no, the worst cases were the professionals - the infamous Mrs. MacArthur you probably heard about in your career, Wahwee. She was one of the worst cases. But it was a fascinating assignment and I learned a great deal about the management of the Department and had some small influence perhaps in certain areas like that wives issue. I can never to this day figure out how I was identified for it.

Q: Well, anyway, then we're coming back to what, about...?

STEVEN: Summer of '73, the assignment cycle, I was due to go out, and being where I was, let us say I had some opportunity to influence my assignment more than others might have had. I knew the people in Personnel, shall we say. And an interesting opportunity opened in, of all places, Chile. There was a vacancy as a political officer in the embassy in Santiago, and this is, of course, during the height of the Allende government with the major stresses of US government over Allende policies. At that time I didn't know, nor did the world know, how deeply involved we had been in this, but it was coming out. There was a great deal of controversy. There was a vacancy available, and I spoke Spanish having served in Mexico, and I just indicated in my equivalent of the April Fool's sheet in those days that would be a good one and, sure enough, I was given it. So I started out in late July traveling. Those were the good old days when we used to travel by ship. I found out that I could get on a freighter in New Orleans and go on a freighter down through the Panama Canal down the coast to Chile, and it was all legal and above board. So we took the family and went to New Orleans, put our car on the freighter, and started off. We had interesting experiences on the ship going through the Canal, arriving in Chile in chaos. There was a big truckers' strike going on, for example, and trucks weren't moving and nothing else in the commerce in the country was moving. There were big demonstrations and strikes and all sorts of big problems going on. The inflation rate was outrageous.

Q: Allende was in control

STEVEN: Still in government, yes, he was still there. But a few weeks or so after I arrived - was still in temporary quarters in an apartment building downtown - the military coup took place. The morning of the coup I was on the shuttle bus from the apartment building and was just getting near the embassy when the police literally walked out in front and started putting up barricades. We had to stop them, what was going on. A few gunshots appear, so we piled out of the vehicle, and I at least said, "Whatever, I want to be in the embassy," so I sort of slipped past when a policeman stopped me and went down the block and into the embassy. Within a very few minutes they literally cut off access; nobody could get in or get out. The ambassador was still in his residence and hadn't come to work, and he was not allowed to come downtown. For three days he couldn't get to his embassy. We got in, and a few other officers, and we spent the next three days, most of it on the floor because bullets were coming through the windows, and crawling out and peeking around the corner of the window occasionally, but that was about it. We opened up a phone line to the Op Center near the Department and reported what was going on. There was a great deal of interest, of course, in Washington at the time. It got worldwide notice. The embassy was right by the square where the national palace was. The tanks were down in the square shooting at the national palace. We heard the gun blasts. They brought in fighter planes which flew down over the square and shot rockets into the palace. An interesting experience, shall we say, more interesting for my poor wife and kids. They were still back in this apartment, and my oldest son, who would then have been an early teenager, hearing shots, ran up onto the roof of the building and stood there and watched the fighters going and saying, "Wow! Wow!" He had a wonderful time, my wife desperately trying to get him off the roof so he wouldn't get shot and at the same time worrying about her poor husband downtown watching literally big explosions and the smoke from burning buildings coming up from downtown and knowing I was right there. It was an interesting time. I knew little about the place; I had only been there three weeks. I hardly knew what was going on myself, but I had to get involved very quickly in writing situation reports and getting people back to the embassy.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

STEVEN: Nathaniel Davis.

Q: And the DCM? Well, we can fill this in. You were in the political section; who was the head of the political section?

STEVEN: Dan Arzac, Daniel Arzac, A R Z A C. I want to think that there wasn't a DCM, that they had a vacancy. I can't remember a name.

Q: It may well be. But anyway, were other members of the embassy saying what was going on? Had they expected this?

STEVEN: You asked the key question: were they expecting this. It depends on who you were talking about. Probably only about half of the embassy staff actually got into the building that morning. The others were still home and hadn't come in yet. I and the people in the political section that I talked to did not expect it. We can't say it was a surprise. Things were getting so bad and there had been rumors. When it happened, it wasn't a surprise. We said, "Ah, it has happened," but it didn't surprise me. On the other hand, we didn't predict it. The question has been discussed ever since and there have been books written on it, government hearings in Congress about it. Did we "the United States government" know it was coming? That has also never been satisfactorily answered. We had suspicions the CIA was involved to some extent. My personal view, which has no official backing at all and whatever any historian might regard it, I believe that the CIA and the military, our military, were warned in advance or had knowledge in advance that the military in Chile were going to war. I doubt that they were given the exact time, but it was made clear that the military was going to war. The morning that I went into the embassy dressed as usual - tie and coat and briefcase - the defense attaché^{1/2} arrived with me, and he was dressed in blue jeans and a flannel shirt and carrying a sleeping bag. I've always remembered that. I sort of asked him about this after the thing started. We had a break for a moment and I said, "You must have known this was coming," and he sort of grinned at me. That was all. So, yes, I believe the station and the defense people knew that it was going to happen, not exactly when, although there has been publicly released documentation that shows that our military, our defense attaché^{1/2}, by about one o'clock in the morning was told by the Chilean military that there would be military movement later that morning. He did not apparently call immediately the ambassador or report it to anybody in the embassy. Apparently he did call or send a cable back here to the military, but it was not shared with the State Department nor the ambassador. He knew perhaps four or five hours in advance. Does it make any real difference? No, but it indicates that the attaché^{1/2} was not briefing the embassy.

Q: Well, actually this is not unique. In a situation like this, from what I gather, everybody knew the shoe was going to drop. It couldn't go on this way, and you had the military, which had been essentially apolitical but...

STEVEN: But was clearly ...

Q: ...I mean how it would avoid it. That's a whole different thing. But in a lot of countries where there have been coups, we kind of know, gee, there's going to be something. Usually people say, "I wouldn't go to the office this morning if I were you, George."

STEVEN: That's pretty much what our military were told. We had ships down there at the time, a training exercise, so our ships were down there. Basically what our guy was told was "Tell your ships to keep off. Just don't get involved."

Q: And this was often used to turn this into 'well, they knew, therefore they had to be involved'.

STEVEN: The more serious question would be: What did our people pass to the Chilean military as our position? It's never done quite that way. The Chilean military didn't come to our people and say, "We're going to have a coup. Do you object?" I'm very much convinced from all the evidence I've ever seen that it was made clear to the Chilenos that we had no difficulty in the decision they had made about doing it, that if they decided to move it would not offend the United States government, that we would not object to it.

Q: And also, if I recall - I'm not trying to put a whitewash on this - there was intonation this thing was going to turn deceptive, is it?

STEVEN: No. The terrible part of it was that on the day of the coup and the first week or two after, the Chilean military could easily have cemented their reputations as the great patriots and saviors of their country and set an example for the rest of the world. I later was identified very much with the opposition to the Chilean military government, and I think most other people who know the situation feel that the coup was inevitable. It was beneficial essentially. If it had not taken place, the country would have really got into a mess.

Q: Allende was really running the place.

STEVEN: The trouble is Allende didn't control things either. Most people think it was Allende. It was more that he couldn't control his own elements. There were elements of the left under him who were terrorist groups who had armed militias who were running things and doing things that he himself and his government had sort of tried to discourage, but he was either not able or willing to make the necessary steps to stop these takeovers of farms and things like that.

Q: And was creating particularly a nonmilitia, directly spitting in the face of the military.

STEVEN: The military resented that, and the trouble was, of course, that the opposition in the military could point to Cuba and say, "He's going to turn this into another Cuba. We're going to have a Communist government which will destroy all of our institutions." So I think the majority of Chilenos themselves, even if they didn't like the coup, accepted that it was probably necessary. Somebody had to step in and stop the deterioration and bring some order, get the guns off the street, except the military guns, and resolve things. If the military had been able to do that, restrain themselves, they could have kept political prisoners in jail but without killing them, without torturing them, without those abuses, with a little intelligence and then bringing in civilians of neutral known professional capacity to help them run things...

Q: This was done hundreds of times.

STEVEN: ...yes, Pinochet could have been the George Washington of Chile. It would have been marvelous. The saddest thing I can recall was our maid in our house was a card-carrying Communist - and I found this out and talked to security people at the embassy, and they said not to worry, "We know about it, too" - she, the day of the coup, shaking her head and saying, "Enough's enough." It's terrible but even she knew it was necessary. She said, "It has gone too far. We can't continue this way." It was out of control. Something had to be done, and the military stepped in. Up to that point, they had general agreement. But then when the abuses started, the killings, the reaction from the right when they brought in right-wing ideologues to form what was essentially a fascist government. That's when they lost all their support.

Q: Here you are, brand new to the situation. You don't know the characters you have or your contacts and all that. What's sort of the rabble? What were you doing?

STEVEN: Tentatively trying to reestablish contacts. Nat Davis is somewhat controversial himself, and people have criticized his behavior, for example, for supposedly not protecting American citizens who were killed there, but one thing he did do very shortly after the streets were opened up again, of course, for the first few days nobody could move; everything was completely clamped down. But then they opened up and in the daylight hours you could go out. A key concern was that they immediately began to arrest former ministers of the government. The foreign minister, and others who were ministers had been arrested and taken away, and there was a great deal of concern over their well-being. Davis did something quite interesting. He had teams of us - in my case, linked with Jeff Davidow, who is now the ambassador in Mexico - in the big embassy car with a US flag on it, go out and visit the families and wives of these former government officials. And I remember very much going with Jeff to two or three of them, where we parked the big black car right in front of their house, went in, and very publicly were seen talking to them and assuring them that the US was interested in the welfare of their husbands and would do everything they could to assure that they were not harmed. We never agreed with them politically, but "we're not your enemies and we sympathize." I think it was a marvelous gesture. It has never been given public recognition, that we did that, and it worked, I think, fairly well. We did put the Chilean military on notice very quickly that we didn't want to see these people summarily executed. So it may have had some effect on their behavior. That to me was a fascinating experience to go out and be doing that. But then we slowly began to reestablish contacts. Of course, the entire political structure had been wiped out. All the people that you normally knew, the ministers and congressmen and the political figures, had literally disappeared. But within about a month I found it a little bit curious, because it didn't seem to me that we had any contacts at all out in the countryside beyond Santiago. We didn't have consulates or anything, so I suggested that one of us should get out and make a tour, go visit the provincial capitals and get a feel for what was happening out there. The embassy's first reaction was, "Well, it's your idea. Why don't you do it." So, all right, I went ahead and planned it, and the embassy sent an embassy car to the northernmost region with a driver, and my wife and I flew up. She came with me, and we flew up, got the car, and then started a series of visits, and I'd go all the way back down to Santiago visiting the state capitals, the provincial capitals, to visit with the "governors." Well, the governors were the local military commanders. The people in charge of the military zone had been given the titles of governors. I sent letters ahead, of course, to notify them I was coming and wished to call upon them, but it was in their capacity as governors, not as the military heads. I went and had nice, interesting talks with these people in about four or five of the provincial capitals and found them to be fascinating people. One of my favorite anecdotes was the man in Concepción, I believe, General Forstier, who became infamous as one of the abusers of the period, and General Forstier was of Swiss ancestry and extraction and had brushed shock of white hair, crystal blue eyes, tan, very stern face, very handsome man, very, very dramatic - you could see him in a German uniform. I went to call on him, and looking for a neutral subject, not politics, I asked him about the situation with the drug trade, because it had been an area previously which had been known for taking drugs from Bolivia, processing them in laboratories there locally, and shipping them on out to other places, and I asked him how had that changed or what had happened. He said, "_____," and explained to me that everybody knew. He said it was like your Al Capone in Chicago. Everybody knows he's a criminal, but you follow the law and you can't touch them. He said they were corrupt, they made bribes and so on, and they got away with this. He said, "As soon as we took over, it stopped." This is a euphemism that's often used in Latin American countries if you. If you don't speak Spanish, it's literally a pronouncement, it's a political act by the military, and it sounds better than a coup. "We went out and rounded up the drug traffickers. We rounded them all up," he said, "and then we shot them. We haven't had any drug problems ever since." I remember sitting there thinking to myself, now, here's a test of my diplomacy. Do I commend him for ending the drug traffic? Do I suggest that this violation of human rights is really not the way to go about it? I must say that I finally felt the only appropriate thing to do was to say, "Hmmm, yes, well," and then go on to other subjects, and that was the end of that. I'll always remember him saying, "And we shot them. We haven't had any drug problems since." But then we got back to Santiago, and I wrote voluminous reports on this, and reestablished at least a little bit of contact, and at the same time called on a few of our other contacts who were keeping a very low profile. What I tried to do was to very gently find out, "Is it going to be a problem for you if you see me or if I see you?" And two or three of the ones who had former prominent politicians said, "No, no, no, it would probably help me if it were seen that I had contacts with you, because they'd be more likely to not molest me." So I talked to a few of these people who had been in the former government. Back in Santiago I expected that somebody would volunteer to make a similar trip to the south. I went back to the people and said, "Hey, somebody really ought to go and visit." "Great, Bob, go to it." So they gave me a car, and my wife and I took off, visiting all the governors as we went along, and had a great time of it and had the same experiences and learned and visited people, and then came back and wrote it all up.

Q: From what you gather on this, after the fall of the Allende government, were there revolts upcountry, down country, because these militias had been formed and all? How was it dealing with it?

STEVEN: There wasn't much organized resistance of that type. There were individual acts, more of the military and the police going after people who had tried to shoot back to defend themselves, not much in the way of efforts by organized left to attack them. The only real organized fighting that I know about was in the city of Santiago during the first few days when Allende's bodyguard and others actually fought the military. There were machine guns and things. But once they were eliminated, it got down to more people trying to escape who were caught, who fought back rather than surrender.

Q: What about the thing that had so much controversy: in the early days of Americans caught up, and the one case - you'll know the name - the missing...

STEVEN: Charlie Horman and Frank Teruggi were the two famous ones who were killed. Yes, I was very much involved in those cases. At the time I knew about them, and then in later years - we'll get to it - I was more deeply involved in it. They were both down there, as were many other foreigners, Americans and others, mostly young people who wanted to experience and participate in the socialist revolution. Here was the dream of the young radical, to finally act.

Q: Later this happened in Nicaragua, the same sort of group.

STEVEN: Young, radical, dedicated types who think that finally capitalism and the conservatives have been overthrown, democratically, because, after all, Allende was elected, and they wanted to see this and participate and write about it and so on. Both Horman and Teruggi were in that category, and they both went down, and apparently both involved themselves to some degree in political activity. I've not ever suggested it was clandestine. They weren't supporting clandestine activity, but they were in the company of the young activists and they made clear their views, wrote articles which got published in the hometown newspaper about the wonderful things happening in the democratic revolution in Chile, etcetera, etcetera, and their names were in the files of the Chilean intelligence agencies and police. When the coup took place, they, along with a great many others, foreigners and locals, were rounded up routinely. Those who were in real danger, the Cubans particularly, they simply tried to escape, because they were afraid if they were picked up they'd end up dead, and many were. Other foreigners, the Europeans, Americans and so on, probably felt that, if they were picked, they might be roughed up a bit but they weren't really in fear for their lives, that the embassy would protect them and that the Chilean military would not want to offend the outside world and at worst they would be arrested and held or expelled from the country or something. In the Horman and Teruggi case, they were both killed, and it's very controversial, and I've seen as much, I guess, as anybody has been allowed to see. Later I worked on declassifying papers and saw everything in the files. My own view is, at least in one of these cases, that they were in the national stadium, which they used as a concentration point and probably or quite possibly, being young, feisty radicals, being Americans - and, after all, nobody's going to touch an American - gave the military some lip, gave them a hard time: "You bastards, you've overthrown the government, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." And it may be that some relatively low-ranking person, a junior officer or senior sergeant, something like that, may have reacted, "You bastard. You think you're going to run this place. You came down here to see our country destroyed and participate in all this. We'll show you." I have no proof, but I think myself that's the most likely explanation as to what happened. It only happened in those two cases for Americans.

Q: Were we getting other Americans out?

STEVEN: We weren't much getting anybody out in the first few days. They were all held up. But then we started getting them out. There was an American priest who was held for some time, and we got him out. Others who had been arrested we got out. There were other cases of some who had taken refuge in other places, including some in homes with embassy officers. I still didn't have a home, so I couldn't do it, but there were a couple of cases where young Americans had friends among American embassy staff and they went to their homes and were taken in there. They were afraid to go back out on the street because they'd be picked up. We were able to negotiate with the Chileans: "So-and-so, we know where she is. She would like to leave. Is it okay?" And the Chileans would finally say, "Okay, go ahead," and they'd take her to the airport and get her out. These were the only two who were killed, and I have to think myself that it was not a formal policy decision by any high level of the Chilean military. There was nothing to gain. They weren't that dangerous. It was just that, I think, probably they angered or irritated some young hothead of an officer and his reaction was, "Fine, I'll shoot him."

Q: This, of course, is one of the things that I know, from my time when I was in countries with curfews and all, that we kept telling Americans, "Don't get wise with the guys who are out there with the guns, because they're the guys who are stuck with the duty. If you're on curfew duty at three in the morning, these aren't the best and the brightest. This is some poor slob."

STEVEN: Of course, a lot of soldiers were nervous because they were getting shot at. There were instances going on where police and soldiers were shot at and sometimes killed or injured by snipers during the night, and so they were justifiably nervous and the finger was on the trigger. So, as I say, I think those instances were like the famous motion picture "Missing." I think it was a very sad thing and certainly not excusable by any means, but it was something that was almost inevitably going to happen in a few cases in a situation like that.

Q: While you were there, were we sort of expecting "Okay, when's the military going to move out and do its thing?" because the Chilean military had a sterling reputation about...

STEVEN: Reputation by Latin American standards.

Q: ...by Latin American standards of just staying out of politic. Wasn't it expected that they would do their thing?

STEVEN: There was a hope and, I think, an expectation that, once things settled down a bit and it became clear that there was no more military threat to them or subversive threat, they would then slowly lift the restraints and allow reestablishment of a civilian government, probably selective - they weren't going to let the left back in again - but, yes, that they would eventually turn it back to civilian control, keeping a very close eye and hand on things but letting it get back to normal. I think that was not only what we hoped and expected but it was what many Chileans hoped and expected. I remember talking later to a very prominent Nationalist Party, which was the very conservative party at the time, politician who had supported the coup - we knew that very much. He said, "Oh, yes, we were very happy that the military did this," but then he shook his head, "but what has happened since" - this was a year or two - "but what has happened since, we didn't want this, we didn't expect this, the atrocities and the hard clamp-down." And the military then got politicized in the sense that they brought in people, not even politicians so much but academics and others, who outlined philosophical, political policies of the military government which read like something out of 1930s fascist writings. Somebody identified a section in one of their writings that was given a great deal of prominence as practically a translation from a Portuguese fascist party document.

It was very long and difficult to comprehend that the military really didn't contemplate a return to anything like the normal previous situation. What they contemplated was a change in Chilean society which would sterilize it, purify it, and bring a new age of right-thinking government. That, I think, no one in the first year or two would have predicted that they would have stayed in for 10 years, or whatever they did, or longer, 20 years. Of course, Pinochet didn't really leave power when, until '79? So, yes, it was a shock and a surprise and slowly disillusioning to many people who originally supported the military.

Q: What were you all getting on Pinochet? Had he been a major figure before?

STEVEN: No, the interesting thing is Pinochet was a very little known figure before. He had not been a prominent person. The predecessor as commander of the army, who is by de facto then the commander of the military - the army is by far the larger, dominant force there - General Schneider, had been effectively run out of the country and moved to Argentina, where he was later assassinated by the Chileans. Pinochet had been somewhat lower down and not a known political figure. He emerged really the day of the coup. There were people who hardly knew him when he suddenly was announced as chairman of the junta. It was a considerable surprise to everybody to see him, and nobody really had much of an idea what sort of a person he was or his governing philosophies or how he would do things. I think the impression has been confirmed that we had fairly early on of a man who was not himself a great thinker - not that he was not intelligent but he was certainly not a brilliant leader himself; most of the ideas came from others - but he was clever enough and politically adept enough to keep control of the army and of the other services, and therefore of the whole movement. I shouldn't be quoted as saying this - by Latin American standards he was relatively honest. He and his family had done all right out of the thing, but it was nothing resembling what African dictators or Somozas or others do with massive corruption. He kept a reasonably honest government, by his standards doing reasonable things. I've actually had one Chilean officer point out to me years ago that, after all, they only killed a few thousand people, and we get very excited about that, whereas look at what Castro did or what other dictators have done. They've killed hundreds of thousands, and we hardly noticed. It's still a very complex situation.

Q: Did you get any feel from Washington? This came at a time when Nixon and Kissinger were riding high in the United States, but at the same time they also had a pack of enemies in the United States, the press and others, who were to the left of them. I'm not talking about extreme leftist, but it was just the political situation, Vietnam War and all that. We were beginning to feel some of the heat of this focus from the United States on Chile?

STEVEN: The heat from the American opposition to the coup started very promptly, and very vigorously and became a cause celebre. I have often used the analogy - I still think it's a valid one - that Chile became in the '60s and '70s the equivalent of Spain in the '30s. It crystallized and focused trends, international trends, and views far more than were deserved there. Chile symbolized the rising conflicts of conservative, fascist, Nazi, whatever you want to call it, versus democratic and, unfortunately, communist societies. It was a focus for world attention because of what it symbolized. Chile became a focus at least for American attention, and Europeans and others. They said no to those who fought communism. We know the terrible things that happened in Russia and Cuba under a communist government. The message was that we must sometimes use methods that are harsh but necessary. The other element said, "No, you have destroyed this marvelous effort at a democratic socialist revolution down there and it shows how the US supports only killer type capitalists, etcetera." It became a symbol as much as anything. It became a litmus test. Your view on Chile indicated to some people, therefore, that you were either good or bad, or evil or benevolent, or left or right, much more than it should have.

Q: Did you get any either newspaper correspondents or requests to get further information about human rights things? In other words, was there a focus on what you were getting from the United States on what happened?

STEVEN: Oh, yes, very much. We had reporters all over the place down there, and others were coming down to write books and get interested. There were considerable efforts, of course, to try to help people who were there and great deal of pressure on us to put pressure on the Chilean military to let the officials of the previous government out of the prison camps where they were held and to investigate reports of people being tortured and killed in the camps, things of this nature. There was a great deal of pressure for that, and great deal of pressure for sanctions on the Chilean military. The problem, of course, always being nobody could really point out what the alternative was to have been. You couldn't just turn it back over to politicians, and they couldn't have kept the country together. There was an element in Chile on the conservative side that thought the military had gone nowhere near far enough; they wanted to see a lot more cleansing and clamping down. So a lot of our time was spent on individual cases, trying to influence the government to let people leave, if we could get them out. A great many people in Chile were, in fact, allowed to get out, into exile. I went, for example, to trials, military trials where military personnel who had been considered to have been traitors or collaborators were tried, and again the Chilean military showed that rather interesting mix of humanity and authority in that these young officers and some people in the air force, which was particularly harsh on this, were tried in a semipublic way - they allowed embassy representatives to come, and outside observers; Ramsey Clark went down, and I escorted him to one of the sessions - because they had been accused of giving information about the military dispositions to the leftist government. Of course, as some of the officers pointed out, yes, they were working for the leftist government. And many of them were found guilty and in many cases sentenced to long terms in prison, but nobody was killed. They didn't execute them, which they could have. Their law, they could have taken it to mean, "Okay, we can execute people." And the long prison sentences, we became more and more aware, tended to fairly soon resolve themselves into commuted sentences or permission to leave the country or something. I don't think, in most of those cases where people who were given very long prison sentences, that they stayed in prison for more than a year or two. It was a symbol of their authority, to punish for doing these things. The military honor was upheld, but then quietly they were let go. They were relatively humane, they did what was necessary to save their country for disaster. Yes, there were mistakes made, atrocities were committed, but no way near what has been done in many other countries. Certainly they would always cite Cuba as an example. The world really was harsher on them in many cases because of the disappointment, they would say, of the world's leftists at seeing what they regarded as a democratic socialist revolution overthrown. Is that a fair evaluation? I don't know. I will say that objectively the Chilean military regime killed and tortured and imprisoned far fewer people than many other dictatorships.

Q: How about in comparison to Argentina where they had this rather long period of taking particularly young people and killing them?

STEVEN: I was in Argentina just after, so I saw that too. Nobody has figures, but the estimates are that the Chilean regime was far less abusive than the Argentines.

Q: This might be a good place to stop, because I want to spend some more time on Chile. You were there until when?

STEVEN: I was in Santiago until March of '76, and then I did a direct transfer to Buenos Aires, and in Buenos Aires they had just not long before had their coup. So I was a coup expert by then and went over and saw what they did in Argentina.

Q: I'm putting this at the end here. We've covered up to the point where we're talking about what happened during the coup, in the embassy during the coup, and we talked about how the military did not go back to the barracks and stayed in, but now I'd like to come to the point of asking you the next time around about dealing with the military. Militaries are, after a coup, often very difficult for political officers to get in to see, and all that. How did you deal with them, and how did you find yourself as this thing developed? What were we doing? Were we coming in and making protests or demarches or what have you? What were we doing, and how did we see things developing, and also the role of the economy and your contacts with Chileans, both left and right and regular people, what were we reading? We'll pick those up next time.

Today is the 22nd of August 2001. Bob, you heard my questions. The one thing we have covered is after the coup how you made trips to north and south early on, but let's go to just sort of day-to-day dealings.

STEVEN: Well, in the political section, as in every embassy, we divided responsibilities. I had some interesting ones in that I dealt with the right-wing party, the more conservative party. Again, the Chilean government officially, the new military government, had outlawed political parties. They just flatly dissolved all political parties. But they still existed, their structures were still there, the people were still there. And I had in my portfolio, interestingly, the most conservative of the parties, the National Party, and met fairly regularly with former officials of that party. They, of course, were greatly relieved and happy that the Allende government had been disposed of and that the country was not going to become a Communist nightmare like Cuba, the one they constantly cited. At the same time, I found it interesting that numbers of those people increasingly expressed their concern over the direction that the military was going, and it culminated after a year or so of it with one very senior member of that party, a former senator, who shook his head when we were talking about what was going on, and he said, "This is not what we meant. This is not what we wanted." They had hoped, I think, as many Chileans had hoped, that the military would come in, would establish order - that was the basic thing - and then there would gradually revive true democracy, would bring in the appropriate centrist and even righter politicians, i.e., the National Party, to run things, and the military would then gradually go back to the barracks and leave things in good shape. They became increasingly concerned, I think, as they realized that the military had no intention of going back to their barracks and it became more and more evident that the military had their own agenda, political agenda, not just restore order in the economy but a political agenda to permanently send the country off in a much more conservative direction. They published at various times proclamations and proposals that sounded to us as we researched them as if they came straight out of Spanish and Portuguese fascism of the 1920s and '30s, the corporate state, the structures that they were talking about, the echoes we saw of writings from back in that period. They were being advised by extremely conservative right-wing politicians and academics. One in particular, who was later assassinated, became so controversial.

Q: Who was that? Do you remember his name?

STEVEN: Jaime...

Q: You can fill in later.

STEVEN: Jaime, I'll remember his name. He was a young man at the time. He was a typically interesting person but very young - he was probably at that time barely in his 30s - was a professor at one of the local universities, noted for his writings, and reminded me always in a sense of George Will, the writer, in that he was an avid fan of sports and he wrote sports columns for the local papers, something of an expert in futbol, or soccer as we call it. But he wrote, and others like him, proposals for an organization of government that we were quite frankly stunned to see that somebody was still trying to sell this corporate-state idea that had been so discredited in Europe. We still maintained contact as much as we could with all elements in the society. I happened to have that element, the right-wing former conservatives, but I also had contact that had developed, some accidentally, with people on the far left.

One of the contacts that I got was a young lawyer who worked with the Catholic Church's groups there trying to help people who needed support, and whenever I saw him I would have to reestablish in his mind that I was not hurting him to be seen with him. He was under surveillance; we knew that. I assumed always that I was under surveillance, because I was known to move around and talk to politicians and stuff, as other US government agency people were. And he assured me that he thought it was a protection to him, because they were less likely perhaps to abuse him or hurt him or assassinate him if he were known to have contacts with the Americans, and we would be more likely to complain or get upset if anything happened to him. I also, for example, had developed a contact, entirely through the family, with the family of the former foreign minister, Orlando Letelier, who was at that point imprisoned with the other former party leaders. My sons, two sons, went to the local American International School there, and at the school were sons of Orlando Letelier, and my oldest son became a very close friend of the oldest Letelier boy, who is now a senator in Chile. Through them I met the family, and with the embassy's approval. The ambassador, quite firmly in favor of it, went to their home and saw Mrs. Letelier and their family, again reinforcing our interest in not seeing these people abused. The husband was in prison camp, but at least the family was not directly attacked. At one point I saw a film which had played here in the United States. One of the television networks had gone to the camp in southern Chile where they were keeping these people, with the permission of the government because they wanted to show that they were alive and they weren't being badly treated. They were living in rather harsh but at least satisfactory conditions. They didn't die and they weren't permanently damaged by it. I saw this film which was played in the States. It was sent down to us at the embassy. We saw it, but, of course, it wasn't played in Chile. And in it was Orlando Letelier and others, and they had quite an interview with him on the TV. He looked reasonably good and talked about his family and so on. So again, with the ambassador's express approval, I invited the Letelier family to my home and ran the film for them. It was the first time that they had seen him and seen that he was in acceptable condition, since he'd been taken months before. This type of thing was done, and I was proud of it, more of the embassy's attitude that we were not going to abandon people who had been our contacts and those whom we respected, and let the local government know that. At the same time, I think, the local government also understood that the United States official policy was essentially to support the military. We felt, as did many Chilenos that the country had been saved by the military - and it's an argument that is respectable - from becoming a Communist country - more not from becoming a Communist country but from descending into civil strife, that would have been terribly bloody. And at the same time we tried to keep our contacts open to the people on the other side.

On the trip I took to the south not long after the coup, I stopped in Concepción, I believe it was, and looked up a former officer of the senatorial foreign relations committee, someone whom we had dealt with not I personally; but I got his name from the embassy - again having assured ourselves in advance that this would not be detrimental to him. But it was amusing in that when I drove to his house, a police car right by me and parked right outside when I went in. I was watched every time. But I talked to this man. He was delighted to see us and to talk about politics and the whole situation. He said he personally had not been directly disturbed and he was left to live. He had not been too leftist or too antimilitary, so they left him alone, but it was clear he had to behave himself. He gave me a souvenir as I was getting ready to leave. He went and got a beautiful leather-bound copy of the regulations of the senate of Chile, how they operated and so on, and inscribed it to me. I thought that was rather a pathetic idea, this man trying to convey that, "We still believe in democracy; here's what we had; here's how we can hope to return to it." I still have that book and treasure it.

Q: Were we watching a gradual development of Pinochet and his group into moving towards this corporate state? How were we viewing this, sort of from the beginning, and particularly you as the new boy on the block and, I imagine, rather wide-eyed at this thing that was happening around there? How did you see this?

STEVEN: It still is one of the most controversial political situations in our diplomatic history, and you can get varying views on it. I can only know what I think was happening in my view, and others can challenge it. I think at the beginning US government policy was simply one of relief. The Allende danger had been put aside; a "friendly" government had taken over that was not a threat to US interests of any kind. They had the proper economic ideas for development of trade; it was a conservative capitalistic trade system, which in a sense has worked. Chile has become a fairly comfortable economic situation. We were increasingly, I think - we, the US government - concerned and disturbed as we watched the movement into more formal right-wing activity. The first few months they didn't know what they were doing. Here was a military government trying to run things and keep everything quiet, but as the statements began to be issued about the outline of what they expected to build and the new constitution, laws that were being passed... One of the laws came out and the embassy took a quick look at it - I guess it must have been the ambassador himself, and said, "We're impressed by this because it appears to loosen up some of the controls and allow more freedom and so on." I had my doubts, but I was assigned to look at the law in more detail. Well, reading it in Spanish, and I'm not a lawyer, but I finally was able to determine to my satisfaction and convince the people in the embassy that actually the law was a further tightening, was a regression, and some public affairs spinmeister in the government had managed to present it as a liberalization. It was actually a tightening, the way the laws were written, referring to other laws and so on. If you traced the whole thing through and put it together, you realized that they were actually making things worse. The military trials began for those who had been considered to have committed treason by supporting the Allende government. Again, by coincidence, I was assigned to cover some of those trials. I went to the air force trials of some of their people. It was a travesty, of course. The defense had practically no authority at all. One lawyer went too far and began to say that his client's confessions had been extracted from him by extreme physical pressures - it was a euphemism, I think - and he was immediately cut off by the court and threatened with legal action himself because he was maligning and defaming the Chilean military, who would never do such a thing, and he was forced to simply abandon that whole line, which of course was his only defense, that the kid that he had up there had been tortured into a confession. But we reported these things regularly, and my impression always was, the attitude was, these are unfortunate developments, it's not really what we like to see happen, but the country's not Communist, it's improving economically and American business will benefit from this, the country's now "stable," it's not going to go into civil war. Bit by bit we hoped that the military would loosen up and things will gradually change. And that was essentially it. We never got a great deal of concern in Washington, or, for that matter, in certain levels of the embassy, about the abuses. Human rights problems were not on the top of the agenda.

Q: I spent somewhat earlier, from '70 to '74, as consul general in Athens, the last four years with the colonels there, and something that I picked up at that time and also picked up from my oral histories is that you often have in an embassy, particularly when there's a coup and military or right-wing takes over, you end up with a split in an embassy between the more senior officers, who are stuck. They have to deal with the government there, it's our policy to have relations with it, and they can't go around in a pout the whole time. It doesn't get you anywhere and, you know, you have economic things to deal with; in other words, you have to deal with it. Then you have the more junior officers who, one, are more idealistic; two, have far less responsibility and can have a wonderful time opposing everything and saying, "I was against it the whole time," but in a way they're not really doing their job but seeing a lot of satisfaction. This is being unfair on both sides. But did you find something of this nature?

STEVEN: Something sort of in between. I'm very familiar with that argument. It was the argument that we heard in the embassy at the time. It's now public knowledge and can be researched by documents that they released in recent years - do you remember something called the country analysis and strategy papers that were done? They were on programming, how was our money being spent?

Q: And it was concentrated on Latin America.

STEVEN: It started in Latin America. That was always the test ground for these things. Through a couple of those cycles in the first couple of years after the coup, the embassy developed the typical split, yes, but it was not anywhere near as clear-cut, I think, as you suggested it might have been when you were involved in it. It was more an agency thing. The military, of course, were very unhappy about any criticism at all or any indication that the local government, the military government, was not doing just exactly what was needed, and they were very reluctant to hear any critique at all. The agency there was split. Their official policy was a very strongly conservative one, to support the government to the hilt to keep the Communists out, but even within that agency there were differences of opinion and it was always much quieter. Those people were much more disciplined and never came out officially in these ways, but from the things that were said in meetings in the embassy, it was clear that there were several officers in that agency also who were very much opposed to the unqualified support that we appeared to be giving. Then, as you might almost expect, in the State Department, the political section was split. A couple of the officers were quite conservative in approach; a couple other were of fairly liberal and critical. In USIA, not surprisingly, there were some good liberal thinkers. And it ended up with something, I think, that's fairly unusual in diplomatic experience with the country analysis and strategy papers, a dissenting opinion annexed to two documents that went out. I helped write both of them. John Tipton, another political officer there, was the first one, and John and I sort of shared the effort, and we were supported by several other officers in the embassy, some of whom signed the dissenting message, or the alternative cast, and some who personally approved it but, for whatever reasons of their own, felt that they couldn't sign it. It wasn't a tiny little group in the embassy; it was a fairly substantial group of people, and not all junior people, who were very much concerned about this and wanted to at least present the alternative ideas. Those of us who actually signed, I think there were five of us who signed the first of these dissents. But it was not an uncritical one. I think earlier in our discussions we looked at this. In the paper, which is now available on the Internet in the State Department Reading Room site, we said very clearly that we thought there had been no real alternative to the military takeover of the government and we thought the greatly majority of Chilenos recognized that the country needed to be brought to a halt, that they needed to have this firm control put in place to stop chaos.

Q: Well, actually there had been a people's revolt against the government and the pounding of...

STEVEN: Exactly, and the truckers' strike.

Q: ...and the truckers' strike, this type of thing.

STEVEN: There was a recognition that the coup was necessary, a recognition that the country needed a transition period to reestablish democratic government in a more reasonable way, but that the military were damaging their own cause and the cause of eventual democratization again or reestablishment of a democratic government in Chile by their methods. They were hard-handed and brutal. The various atrocities they committed, the sort of fascist type of planning that they appeared to be putting in place - which, by the way, never got implemented - challenged our policy. We clearly did not want to overthrow the military government, or try to bring back the left. But we did try to influence the military government in every way we could to lift its hand and be more intelligent in the way it governed. We would hope eventually that the hard-line people at the top of the military like Pinochet and others who were then even more influential could be replaced by more moderate officers who would begin to work increasingly with acceptable civilian politicians and bring the country back to eventual civilian control. It was a moderate approach, not a radical one at all, and it became very difficult, I think, to sell that because it was opposed by the more conservative people in the US government, here and in Chile, who didn't want any criticism. The more extreme radicals who were opposed to the Chilean military, and it was an extremely emotional group, thought that this was a wishy-washy, halfway attitude and that the only real solution was for the US government to land paratroopers and reestablish civilian government in Chile. Anybody listening who does research ought to read very carefully the two country analysis and strategy papers done during that period. The official position of the embassy, which was more 'don't criticize; let this thing sort of work its way out; make the necessary demarches and approaches reminding the Chilean military that it was in their own interest not to be seen conducting atrocities' versus our dissenting opinion, or alternative position as it should have been called, saying that we must continue relationships here as the only viable way that Chile can move forward thought that we should and could influence it in many ways, to move into a more moderate path. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. Chile had to spend another decade at least in the conservative hard grip of the military. We might have been able to shorten that period if nothing else.

Q: What were the roles of particularly the British, the German, and the French embassies, and the Spanish too?

STEVEN: My recollection of the European embassies in general was a more critical one than ours. Their governments tended to be more openly critical of the military, and they certainly took a more active role in trying to protect their own nationals. They were much harder in dealing with the military when their own nationals were affected. Our record is not a good one, it's not a handsome one. We had instances; we've already discussed earlier, the infamous one of Horman and Teruggi, but also others where Americans were mistreated. We tended to dally around a great deal and to not be quite as firm as I think we should have been in trying to protect those people. One of the very best examples, being in the coup itself, the day of the coup, when Americans came - this is, I know, a very controversial question, but I was there, I saw it - some Americans came to the embassy and asked to be allowed to come in for refuge because there was shooting in the streets and were refused entry. They were told, "No, just go home. They're not going to bother any Americans. As soon as things quiet down, you'll be all right. It's not necessary for you to come in here," and they left. In some cases they went to other embassies. We had Americans taking refuge in other embassies, and we had cases of Americans who had friends on the embassy staff, going to their houses.

Q: Where was the decision of that made?

STEVEN: It had to have been made by the ambassador, who unfortunately wasn't in the embassy himself. He was at home doing this by telephone. He couldn't get downtown for two or three days. But I think at the time there was a genuine belief, sincere belief, that Americans would not be harmed. We felt, they felt - I think probably all of us did at the time - that the Chilean military respected our power and our influence and our political importance to them for the future and were not going to bother Americans, and, therefore, you didn't have to have Americans cluttering up your embassy sleeping on the couches. You could send them home or tell them just to wait it out and things would be quiet. As it turned out, at least a couple of them were killed and many others were arrested and held for various periods of time, incidents that have always been played up in propaganda. It was a mistake. I believe that the ambassador should have allowed people who felt they needed refuge to come in and remain until it became clear that there really wasn't going to be a danger to them, and I think myself that would have taken place within 24 to 48 hours. They were not allowed to come in.

Q: How about Pinochet himself? Did we seem to have much contact? Often in the military they don't really talk to anybody.

STEVEN: No, we had contact with him. Our military had very good access, our ambassador did, and at appropriate levels others of us did. I don't think there was ever a question that we didn't have access to these people. We were too important to them, and they basically regarded us as friends because we had let it be understood, either openly or by inference, that we would not oppose a coup and, when it did take place, that we did not object, and that we hoped to continue productive, friendly relationships with the military government. There was no reason for them to avoid us. There's plenty of evidence of that, and I think much of it's already been released in these various declassification projects, about interviews of our senior people with their senior people and discussions and so on. In those discussions I don't believe you will find much evidence that we put pressure on them to do things. We made a few broad, general statements, 'we do encourage any move toward democracy as rapidly as possible' type of thing, but not much more than that. The result, I believe, for several years was that the Chilean military went happily on their way abusing and planning what amounts to a fascist political system, thinking that the United States either supported them or at least didn't care.

Q: Well now, you in the embassy, were you feeling the heat that was being generated back in the United States, you know, the media heat and all this? This was not popular in a lot of places. It fit into the Cold War, and there was a certain amount of sense logically, but it didn't play well in the United States.

STEVEN: No, I am very much aware of that, but I'm also aware that they produced - how do I phrase this and not be misunderstood ten years from now by somebody reading this? - a lot of noise but not truly a great deal of influence on the government in terms of Chile. When you had the noise you did in this country and the protest and the revulsion over Vietnam, our government had to be affected, and it did affect what we did. In Chile it was a fairly specialized interest. There were not that many people who were knowledgeable of what was happening in Chile, not that many people who truly cared specifically about the Chilean situation. There were many who regarded it as, again, as I've said earlier, like Spain in the 1930s. If you were of the proper political view, you condemned the military government in Chile. You didn't necessarily know who they were, what they were doing, and why they were there, but by definition they'd overthrown an elected socialist regime and, therefore, had to be condemned. That didn't translate, I felt, into pressures that were enough to move the US government to change its policies.

Q: How about Congressional interest, staffers and all that?

STEVEN: I don't recall very much. There must have been some. I couldn't even begin to remember one. The most prominent visit I recall was Ramsey Clark coming down to go to the trials of the air force academy when they tried the air force officers, and I was assigned to go with him there.

Q: Ramsey Clark is still...

STEVEN: Still out there. In fact, I think he's now - I've seen in the papers - supporting Milosevic in Brussels, one of his advisors. But at least he came and went and observed and said things. The embassy's reporting about those trials was scandalous. I believe that I tried to write reports that made it clear that this was a sham. There was no trial; it was simply a notification that here are charges, the prisoners confessed to them, and therefore here's what we're going to do about it. There was no defense. They didn't call witnesses or anything else. At least someone like Ramsey Clark came down and tried to call attention to this. I didn't see a great deal of interest in the rest of US.

Q: Now, with the trials and the one you went to where the lawyer tried to raise the torture defense, did you report that?

STEVEN: Oh, I tried to.

Q: Why do you say you tried to?

STEVEN: What I wrote was carefully edited so as to make it much less stark. It became a gray piece of paper that disappeared into Washington, whereas in its original form it might have drawn more attention. I don't know.

Q: Was there a feeling of unease on your part?

STEVEN: On my part certainly, but the unease was that we - as official US policy - were delaying what needed to be done in Chile. We were not using the influence that we certainly had to try to move the Chilean military in the direction of the establishment of civilian government and democracy. Our official attitude was reassuring the Chilean military, the hardliners, in their hand line, so that they felt, even if the United States didn't necessarily approve it, it certainly didn't object to it.

Q: Now, a military needs its toys; it needs its tanks, its airplanes and spare parts and boots and all that. There are essentially three suppliers of military toys: the United States, maybe France, Britain, and then the Soviet Union. Were we supplying a lot of military toys?

STEVEN: No. To the point, the Chileans couldn't afford that much. It's a small country and they didn't have advanced arms. Basically what they needed was light infantry, and they had plenty of that. They were cut off completely from the Communist world. They couldn't buy weapons from anybody under Soviet influence, people like Czechoslovakia and so on. The Europeans wouldn't sell to them, so we were the only supplier, and we were hampered in supplying them by precisely the uproar back here. If they had come to us and said, "We want this type of military equipment," it would cause a tremendous uproar in the press and certain elements back here. It wasn't that we couldn't necessarily have overcome that with Congressional support, but it wasn't worth it. Why spend a lot of your political capital to get more for Chile when it wasn't really that necessary and important. We forget that the Chileans didn't need weaponry for internal affairs; they had plenty of that, they'd made their own weapons. What they were concerned about was a situation most American were not even aware of, the possibility of war with the neighbors. They've always had tension with Peru; they've had wars with Peru.

Q: The War of the Pacific.

STEVEN: And they still had very hot issues with Peru over this, and then also of course with Argentina, focusing in something that's ridiculously called the Beagle Channel Dispute, which was far more than that. But the Chilean military had some genuine concerns that they might be attacked by Peru, which had been receiving large numbers of Soviet weapons, for example, tanks. The only tanks that Chile had were these little World War II American light tanks; they were called the 'stewards'. They were tin cans. They were fine for police action, but they wouldn't stand up to warfare. And they were genuinely concerned that they had to have at least enough weaponry for defense. All they really wanted was a relatively small number of tanks that could block the roads in northern Chile. And they needed aircraft, and they were after something that would serve to give them some air defense, which probably was the F5 fighter, as we called it here, which was ideal for them.

Q: It was designed for non-NATO countries.

STEVEN: It wasn't a ground-attack aircraft; it was essentially 'we can go up and fight to protect ourselves from the enemy bombers'. Those issues were discussed back and forth, and there were some naval questions, because the Chileans traditionally had gotten their naval equipment from the Brits. They had ships that were made in England and bought them thereafter. Then after World War II we donated a ship or two, including a couple of cruisers, and so that tied into our Navy for support there, and it, of course, was difficult for us to give them the support they wanted. So it was a question of tension going back and forth. Eventually, after things quieted down, they did get a small number of F5 fighters, 10 or 12, from us and a few other small things. I don't think they ever got a tank from us. But the military tie was rather difficult because it just irritated the Chilean military they couldn't get the spare parts they needed to keep their American equipment operating. But it never became a major issue in the relationship.

Q: One of the things I observed in my four years in Greece around this time under a military dictatorship was how bloody inefficient the thing was. This may be just Greece, but the colonels would issue a decree which sounded fine, new taxes here or something, issued a decree enforcing a 1923 court tax - "we'll get some money from these wealthy people" - so all the foreigners picked up, took their investments and went over to god awful places - in Greek terms, they went to Turkish ports. And they didn't do things; they didn't stop the pollution and all that. Was this a more efficient military?

STEVEN: Yes. To most Americans, Latin America is the banana republics. The image is the inefficiency, the corruption, the manana attitude, nothing really works very well. This, of course, is not true. Any Foreign Service Officer knows that the countries are different. Chile is very different. It's been described, and I think it's a fair description, as a European country plunked down in Latin America. Chile was settled largely by Basques and western Spanish, the more vigorous Atlantic side, supplemented as time went on by large numbers of Germans and then large numbers of English and Scots. The population by bloodline is overwhelmingly Norman and Western European. There weren't very many Indians. It wasn't like Central America, which had enormous indigenous populations. Chile is described as like the United States when we first came here, a few scattered nomadic tribes who had Stone Age culture, and they were either killed or pushed onto reservations. There wasn't a great deal of intermarriage. When the Spanish went to Central America, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia, they intermarried, because they didn't bring their women with them, they intermarried. Those populations now are largely Indian mixes. With Chile it's still very much almost a European country. The blond, blue-eyed person on the street was always commented on. It's a very common sight to see down there. And northern and western European efficiency carried over. It's an efficient government. Their military is admirable as an efficient military. I suppose you could say the same thing about Hitler's Wehrmacht; it was a very efficient army, at least that. And the Chilean military, whatever else one wants to say, had a reputation for efficiency and relative honesty. The corruption level in Chilean society is very much less than in other Latin American countries. You can argue the cultures and everything else, but essentially that's the fact. So the Carabineros, the Chilean national police, for example, are practically a model organization. When I was there, and it may still be true, to become a Carabinero private, basic rank entering, you had to be at least a high school graduate. For Latin America this was astonishing. And they were very careful. The Carabineros were highly disciplined, rigidly trained. There used to be a joke: The average American makes a terrible mistake when he goes to a Latin American country, because the first thing he does he puts a 10-dollar bill into his wallet next to his license so when he's stopped on the street and the cop takes his license, he's got a 10-dollar bill and he hands it back and you can drive on. If you did that in Santiago, you went to jail, if you tried to bribe an officer. There was just no nonsense about it. You always warned people. The police were very efficient, which, of course, made it all the harder for the opposition, because when the police were told to go out and arrest the opposition, they did if they found them. It worked. But they're, of course, also efficient in extracting confessions when they felt they had. It's a mixed picture when you do that. You can admire them in one sense. Their ability to fight off a Peruvian or Argentine invader or a battle, to me, was fairly clear-cut. They would probably have suffered, of course, because they didn't have the size or the weapons that the enemy did, but I think they would have prevailed very quickly. Contrasted later going over to Argentina, where you find a population, again, of very low Indian mix because the Indians over there were the same as the ones in Chile - they were either wiped out or put on reservations; there weren't many of them - but the people there are very much southern and eastern Spanish and Italian supplemented by Greeks and Lebanese and others of a more Mediterranean culture, which contrasts remarkably when you see them next to each other, between the Germanic/Anglo-Saxon culture of Chile and the Latin/Italian/southern Spanish culture of Argentina. They're very different people. The Chileans are admirable people in that they're hard working and efficient, you might say that they had almost a Germanic trait.

Q: Did you get much in the way of people that you knew socially coming at you for the United States to do something about the situation, or not?

STEVEN: Oh, both sides. We were fortunate, my wife and I were fortunate, we were able to join the Prince of Wales Country Club, which desperately wanted foreign members, because they figured, if they had foreign members, they might not get nationalized. After the coup, it became fairly clear as the years went by that they really didn't want these lower middle-class Americans coming. I think not too many of our people are members anymore; they can't afford it. But I do recall at least one instance, for example. We knew many of the people who are upper-class Chileans, very much in favor of what the military had done, but of a ceremony where Pinochet himself came, not to the club - I forget where it was, some activity - and one of the women that I knew, a matronly woman, probably 50 or 60, rushed up to Pinochet and threw her arms around his neck and kissed him very emphatically on the cheek and hugged him. They were obviously used to this. The Secret Service probably would have killed her, but in that case they just sort of smiled. There were people like that. Chilean society is not highly differential. People weren't afraid to walk up to Pinochet and talk to him and so on. He returned this hug, I remember, with a big smile, and she, with tears in her eyes, looked at him and said, "You've saved us. We're grateful to you." That was one side of it, and those same people were generally sophisticated enough and polite enough not to berate us when we didn't meet their expectations of support. But if given the opportunity or if provoked, they would really be quite harsh in condemning us for not understanding that this was a necessary thing and giving all the support we possibly could to Pinochet. I remember one woman, particularly, who asked why were we allowing the American press to criticize him like that, and, of course, I had to sort of point that we don't really control the American press. On the other hand, those who were on the opposite side, like the lawyer I mentioned earlier and so on, we saw them too, and the attitude as I understood it, and the situation I think was fairly clear, was that, if they kept their heads down and didn't become actively opposed, they were left alone. You could make it clear that you were unhappy and opposed to this but as long as you did it on your own time, and were generally quiet. If you went around waving banners and marching in demonstrations or joining an active opposition group to the government, you would draw attention, and perhaps sanctions of some sort. But if you just went about your business and behaved yourself, even though your attitude was negative, you weren't generally bothered. I heard things said about the government in mixed groups that, in the Soviet Union would have had people immediately imprisoned. But it was all right, they weren't publishing it in the newspaper and they weren't joining an active opposition party, so they could say what they wanted to. It was a more relaxed type of control. Everybody understood that, if you didn't draw attention and do something active, you would probably be left alone. And we maintained our contacts with former opposition people, including people working actively in the human rights movement, like this young lawyer that I knew, who had no trouble. They weren't bothered. He was eventually arrested at one point and accused of being a Communist. All of this is in the material that was released; it's on the embassy website. That was a sad one, because I think we had something to do with it. He was accused of being a Communist, and the intelligence people in our embassy, I think, knew better but didn't say anything and sort of let it be understood by their contacts in the Chilean intelligence that the guy was a Commie. It was touch and go for a bit. He was held, I think for two or three weeks or a month, and eventually released because they really couldn't find any evidence about it. But I was never very happy with our embassy's attitude. I talked to him when he got out, and he said himself it was very, very interesting, because he had understood that there were these terrible people like the Gestapo busting in on you. They came to his home, he said, very quietly and said, "You've got to come along with us," and he apparently was dressed lightly and it was getting cold outside and he said, "Well, can I put some more clothes on?" because he figured he was probably going to be in a concentration camp, "Can I put some more clothes on?" "Of course," and they let him go unescorted back to his bedroom and get out warm sweaters and things and dress, took him off, and the entire time they held him they interrogated him at length but he was never physically molested. He was always fed. Conditions were sort of harsh but not what we would call abusive. He himself told me he was impressed because he had expected much worse. Their activities generally met the defined standards of the Geneva Convention in such matters.

Q: Which is really quite unlike what was happening in Argentina...

STEVEN: Exactly, yes.

Q: ...during the Dirty War. The military kind of ran amuck and got very nasty.

STEVEN: But where the military felt they had to get information, for example, they were capable of doing it. There were tortures. There were very, very sad examples. A woman I talked to came to the embassy and I got to know her, was married to an air force officer, and the air force officer was identified after the coup as having had too many contacts with the Chilean left, and he was arrested. Then she was arrested and she was tortured, with electricity, tied on a table, and she was unable to say it openly, but I was convinced that she was also saying that she was raped. The terribly sad thing about it was that she recognized the voice of one of the torturers, the man who seemed to be directing it, and he was another air force officer who had been a guest in their home. She recognized his voice. They were capable of this also, so it was a mix, but compared to Argentina, no, the Argentines were much worse. In Argentina it was the sort of thing that you'd take them up in a helicopter or throw them out of a plane, this type of activity. Among the Chilenos it was correct. If you had to torture to get information, you did it; if you didn't have to, then you treated them properly. It was far more Germanic.

Q: Had there been a more or less flourishing intellectual, artistic community in Chile, and did the coup do something to that? You hadn't been there very long.

STEVEN: I hadn't been there very long. I do know, because particularly I had friends who were USIA, who said, "Yes, Chile has always had a flourishing intellectual life and artistic life." Pablo Neruda, the great poet, of course, is probably the best known name outside of Chile. That continued as long as it wasn't political, if the person was politically identified and active, as was Neruda, who, I think, I recall left Chile at the time, and some of the singing groups. There were groups of singers who had to leave Chile, and one of the groups was very lucky they were out of the country when the coup took place and didn't go back for 10 years. But those who could stay and kept out of politics and who weren't identified with the political situation continued on and flourished.

Q: What about during the time you were there - you left in '76 - were you seeing the results of the thing that many people think about after the coup, the economic revival and all that? Did you have any contact with that group, or was that sort of your bailiwick?

STEVEN: Well, I wasn't, that was the economic section more, but I was fully aware of it, of course. Yes, the changes were tough, because the country had been far more of a state-run economy earlier. Of course, under the Allende government it was very quickly becoming a communist-type economy, everything being nationalized and concentrated, but the steps that the military government took were classic, the Chicago school of economists. They brought in young economists who had been educated in the States, who brought classic free-market, capitalist theories, which do work over time to increase the country's economy, its gross national product, but you pay a price, and this was always the issue. Even today, if you read what's going on in Chile, the separation between those who are successful under their system - and many Chileans were, had very good jobs, probably the majority of the population - but it left behind, of course, the poor and those without special skills, who became relatively poorer. I forget whether in our earlier discussions we covered a vivid impression that I had. I think it's one that symbolized to me what happened in Chile. If this sounds familiar, stop me. On the second or third anniversary or whatever it was, they had a big celebration downtown of the military takeover, and there were thousands of people there and there were bands and lights and speechmaking and parades, a big deal. John Tipton and I went out and covered this, going into the crowd, talking to people and getting opinions and watching, but when the ceremonies ended, the crowd began to march out of the main square and it was a big flow of 10 or 20 across, a big column, and they had signs and so on. So John and I got his car, which was parked at the embassy, a small one, and started on a parallel street riding along just to see what the city looked like. The people marched out of the main square and then to the west and across a big bridge over the river - the river runs through, and they crossed the bridge - and they have what amounts to a T and then there's a big avenue running up and down, and to the north of that is a neighborhood where the rich people in the better, upper-class sections of the town, middle class, etcetera, where all the embassy people lived. To the south of that you ran off into the barrios, into the poorer areas, working-class areas, not slums but working-class areas clearly, which ran off down to the south. The crowd got that intersection, to the T, and then - it was incredible - it turned north and everybody went north, and the noise and the lights and the celebration, the people on the sidewalks waving you could see all going off to the north. Nobody turned south. It was absolutely quiet, so John and I decided we'd go south, and we started down that boulevard, deserted, empty. Every house you saw was shuttered. You could see lights under the doors, through the blinds, but everything was shuttered and quiet, nobody on the street, not a sound. The only human life we saw in almost a half hour of riding down through the southern area were police, who sort of glanced at us curiously and saw the diplomatic plate and paid no attention. To me that always symbolized what it was. I remember talking later to a couple of working-class Chilenos who, when I commented about this big celebration and activity going on, said, "It was their thing, not ours; it's theirs." The society was divided decisively, and I think that that's one of the tragedies of what happened in Chile. It wasn't necessary. I think that a wiser military, and perhaps a US government that tried to help them understand this better, would have at least been able to bridge that gap to a certain extent so that it didn't open up the way it was. You were either for the military coup or you were against it. You weren't allowed to be for some aspects of it but against other aspects. It split the society right down. I think the elements, as I understand it - I don't follow Chilean affairs that closely - much of it is still there.

Q: You left there in 1976. Who was the ambassador by the time you left?

STEVEN: Nat Davis was replaced by Popper.

Q: David Popper.

STEVEN: Yes, David Popper.

Q: Did you see any sort of change in the embassy? One, it was getting used to it, or getting more active? Were we changing toward this government?

STEVEN: Remember, it was only three years after the coup that I was gone, or less, two and a half years. No, I would say that probably the embassy fairly faithfully reflected the US government's policy, basically supportive of the military government but cautious because we didn't want to get tarred too much with the human rights brush, and basically content if the country was stable, it wasn't anti-American, and the economy was improving so we could do business. That was about it. Nobody was terribly excited about the atrocities.

Q: Were you all looking at something like leader grants or trying to get people up to the United States?

STEVEN: We did some of that. It was already becoming a little difficult, because the opposition was growing already for sanctions on Chile for the human rights abuses. I do remember an interesting one. Another portfolio I had in the embassy was drug enforcement, the narcotics program; I was the narcotics coordinator, worked with DEA and others. And because the US narcotics people had to work with the Chilean military, the Carabineros, I got to know them through them. The effort we made to get a leader grant for a Carabineros officer to go for narcotics training and a tour in the States for a leader grant was very, very difficult. It became a question, how hard did the embassy want to push it. We'd have to spend a lot of capital and make a lot of noise and draw attention in the newspapers to push this grant, whereas if you just let it die quietly, you save yourself some grief. As I recall in that particular case, they didn't send this fellow off on that particular grant but then later found another way to get him up for a tour.

You asked if things changed over time. No, essentially I think our policy, the years I was there at least, didn't essentially change, friendly towards the government, supportive, increasingly discreet because of the uproar back here about it.

Q: You left there in March of '76, I think, and then you were off to Buenos Aires.

STEVEN: A direct transfer.

Q: A direct transfer. Did you go right to Buenos Aires?

STEVEN: Yes, they had a vacancy there and things were hot in Buenos Aires. They needed somebody and I said, "Fine, I'll go," and arrived in Buenos Aires after their coup to find a rather similar situation, a military government being quite repressive, but still a very different circumstance: less efficiency, more corruption, more brutality. The total numbers of cases, the total volume of human rights abuse in Chile never approached that in Argentina. I think over time it would become clear that the Argentine military were more motivated by the pure idea of power than they were by saving their country. The Chilean military, for whatever one thinks of them, I believe, genuinely were reluctant to move as they did. They were provoked for a long period of time. They were urged by many people in their society to move. They were very reluctant to do it. They didn't take power because they wanted power. They were not particularly corrupt. Of course, there were instances, yes, but as a whole it was not a corrupted class of people. I remember talking once to an officer, a Carabinero officer I got to know very well, who told me that they were becoming increasingly concerned because the chaplains, the Carabinero chaplains, were reporting to the senior leadership that the officers and men coming to confession were very troubled. Many of them were talking to the priests and saying, "I have difficulty reconciling what I'm being required to do, because I know that this is not God's will, killing people and so on." And many of them were genuinely and seriously disturbed. I think that Carabineros particularly, being police rather than soldiers, were very concerned about how their troops were reacting to it. I rather doubt that became as much of an issue with the Argentine military. Corruption over there was a far more prevalent thing.

Q: Could you explain the origins and what the coup was about? You arrived after it happened, but could you explain...?

STEVEN: It was basically, again, a breakdown in the political situation. Argentina had had the same sort of turnovers of government and economic disasters that were typical for so long of places like Italy. The very well known comment is such a cliché^{1/2} but it's true, that Argentina has resources. It's one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and up until about the 1920s Argentina was thought of as one of the richest and most promising countries in the world. And because it's inhabited by Argentines, it's been a disasters. Again, even today they are having problems with the IMF.

Q: Today we're talking about sort of a financial breakdown.

STEVEN: Yes. Nothing ever changes in Argentina, and the Peron experience, of course, had exposed them to dictatorial government there. I think at the time the Argentine military decided to move, they felt that the country was again in this disastrous situation and something had to be done. I have a private view, which I've never seen expressed by any scholar or anybody better qualified, that perhaps the Argentine military were inspired by what they'd seen happen in Chile, that they saw their colleagues across the hills take over and were making a success of the economy, at least in classic terms of product and foreign exchange reserves, and that perhaps they could do the same for Argentina. Well, they weren't the same people and it didn't work in Argentina. To me, the culture is a large part of it. You're talking about Mediterranean culture, which has a different outlook on life and efficiency in government than, say, the Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon culture, just a very different thing. Whereas Chile today is stable and economically in pretty good shape, Argentina is not. I think the Argentina military may have deluded themselves into the idea that they could do the same thing the Chilean military had done. Of course, there was also the terrorist factor, the fact that people were being assassinated in Argentina. We had an American USIA officer, one of the branch public affairs officers killed at the time. And there was much more danger for the rest of us. We had considerable security precautions as Americans moving around in Argentina than we had ever had in Chile. The Argentine military were much more brutal, openly so. One of the worst examples we saw of that was - I forget the exact circumstances - they found a number of bodies of people who had been apparently killed by the Argentina military police piled in a field with a large charge under them and literally blown up. There were body parts all over the field. And everyone said, "What on earth! What are they trying to signal to their people and to the world?" and the basic signal, we all agreed, was very clear "We're in charge. We can do any damn thing we want, and if you don't behave yourself, this is what's going to happen to you." The business of tossing people out of aircraft: we all like to think at least that they were heavily drugged or dead before they were thrown out, but who knows. But bodies started washing up in the River Plate estuary in Uruguay, and the Uruguayans complained, "What in the hell is going on here? We don't want these bodies washing up on our shores." This was a government that didn't even care enough to fly coroners out to the bodies to bring them back in. That resulted, of course, later - a different subject entirely - in the Falklands War when the Argentine military, losing popularity, seeing that the opposition was increasingly gathered its strength, desperately reached for the old classic idea: find an external enemy, and thought if we invade the Falklands, we will get our people united behind us. It was the disaster that brought them down and ended them all in jail with trials and so on.

Q: You were there from 1976 to 1977, approximately a year, a little over a year. Talk about the embassy. Who was the ambassador, DCM, and your impression of the embassy, coming from one to another?

STEVEN: The ambassador was the political appointee...

Q: His name was Robert C. Hill.

STEVEN: Ambassador Hill. He was a political appointee who had been ambassador, I think, in Mexico at least before that and perhaps some other country. It was an interesting situation for me that Ambassador Hill did not speak Spanish. He had had at least two assignments, perhaps three, as ambassador to Latin American countries, and he didn't speak Spanish. So everywhere he went, he took one of the officers with him to act as an interpreter. I went with him on visits to fairly high-ranking people where I acted as the interpreter, untrained as I was, and also took the notes to write up the conversations. And then for his next interview in the afternoon, he'd take another officer, so we sort of rotated the duty. I think, at least in his own mind, he may have also thought that he was doing us a favor by exposing us more to what was going on in the embassy, which was perfectly true. It was interesting to have that access, but also trying to learn to act as an interpreter, which was very difficult. Fortunately, the majority of people that we talked to spoke English. But Ambassador Hill was there.

Q: Was this a different type of embassy from the one you'd come from? How did you find it?

STEVEN: It was a bigger embassy and, therefore, I knew less what was going and didn't know the people as well. I think my own impression of it was that we were less involved. We had been deeply involved in what was happening in Chile because of the Allende government and so on. In Argentina it was more sort of a normal distance. We were interested, but I don't think we were as much involved. My impression has always been, both from what I've read since and what I knew then, that we were not really involved in the coup. I have no idea whether we even knew it was coming. But it was just sort of a little bit more laid back, watching what they were doing and scratching our heads trying to figure it out at times. Yes, protesting the human rights abuses when we could. Americans were not as directly affected. I don't think that any Americans were killed over there. Very few Americans gave a damn what went on in Argentina. The government didn't focus on it, the press didn't focus much on it.

Q: Well, there had been so many coups, and you hadn't had this sort of PR delight of Allende.

STEVEN: Chile was ideological, like Spain, but Argentina was just another banana republic. Who's in, who's out, so what? They'd had the military in before. The governments changed. It just didn't excite people as much as what happened over in Chile. Chile in a sense to me - I probably would get thrown out if I talked about this among certain circles - Chile was a serious country, and what happened in Chile made a difference to people. It was important, I think, that Chile be restored to democracy. In Argentina, what happened, so what? In a year or two it would change anyway, and they never had been able to govern themselves very well, so what did we really expect? In Chile we had seen the loss of a long democratic tradition of good self government. In Argentina we didn't see that at all; we just saw another example of a takeover or misuse of power and the country stumbling from crisis to crisis. It was a different atmosphere.

Q: What job did you have?

STEVEN: I was political officer there.

Q: What part of the action did you have?

STEVEN: It was more general. In Chile I had had three sort of assigned portfolios and I knew them specifically. In Argentina, as I recall, we reacted more ad hoc, whoever happened to have the time to write the latest report or follow something. We all tried to keep in touch with everything. The political counselor was Wayne Smith, whom I hope you will have interviewed or you should put him on your list. Oh, yes, Wayne Smith is better known for having been head of the US interests section in Cuba.

Q: Yes, I've tried to get a hold of him. He was at George Washington University.

STEVEN: He's here. I saw him on television just a couple of days ago. He was quoted on TV just a couple of days ago, a short stretch with him. Wayne was political counselor there and certainly somebody that really should be pressed very hard to participate in this because he's got lots of experience, the Cuban experience particularly. But in Argentina it was more the politics. Even when the military were in, the political parties were still important. They were never formally dissolved. I remember going to receptions where the politicians all talked who was up and who was down and who was involved with the military and who was not, again quite different from the situation in Chile where the politicians were literally for the first year or two out of sight. They kept very carefully out of sight. In Argentina, no, life continued on much more normally. The people who had changes in their lives were largely on the left, those the military had identified as dissident or problem makers. The embassy was not as polarized, as I recall. The embassy in Chile was quite polarized, the military and some of the Agency people and some of the others. That didn't happen in Argentina, partly because the passions were so much less.

Q: So what were you doing? How did you operate?

STEVEN: Quite openly. We had no problems. We went out as standard political practice and tried to interview and meet and get to know and cultivate politicians. I had much less contact with the military. In Chile I had a great deal of contact with the military, particularly in the police, the Carabineros. I'm still in touch with a Carabinero officer; we exchange letters and so on regularly. But in Argentina our military pretty much conducted those relationships. Again, I did narcotics work, which brought me into some contact with the Argentine police, but again not as much. Human rights questions were a problem - and do make a note to press Tex Harris on this.

Q: I've had a long interview with him.

STEVEN: Oh, you've already had him here, but I would make a point then. Among the jobs I did was to receive people who wanted to come in to tell us about human rights abuses and to listen, and I found that was becoming sort of a routine stop for people. When you had human rights complaints, you went to the Red Cross or to the human rights organizations or to the Catholic Church, of course, but then you also went to the US embassy and told them your story. The stories were depressingly similar, and we made notes and so on. But then what? What were we to do with this? When they weren't American citizens, we weren't going to go to the local government and complain, except in the most general terms, you know: "We've been hearing all these complaints. You really shouldn't be doing this." But you can't take up individual cases with them. You can write the thing up, but you can't publish it, you don't send it to the newspapers. So I began to think to myself what really are we doing this for, and I became convinced that we were doing it more as a sop to our consciences and to let these people feel better. They felt that they could come and talk to us and get it out of their systems and record what was being done and that the US government was hearing them, and so on. This all had a certain validity. Yes, it's admirable, but it was not, I thought, a good idea for us to develop a reputation and a practice of routinely interviewing everybody who was abused. Some of them were genuine horror stories, torture and so on, or mothers coming in about their sons and so on. Others were people who clearly just had political axes to grind and wanted to talk to us. So when I was packing up to leave the place, I recommended, I think even in writing, that we try to discourage the practice of our becoming a stop on the parade of people who had complaints, and I heard later that Tex, picking up after me, had taken quite a different approach and was widely available and known in the human rights community as a person you went and talked to. In fact, I think he even got some sort of an award for doing that. And I'm not sure that it was the appropriate thing.

Q: You've got to remember you have to look at the political change in the United States. We had gone from the Ford/Kissinger, particularly with Kissinger, to the Jimmy Carter Administration with human rights on the thing in Argentina. So Tex Harris was...

STEVEN: Tex was doing what he was told to do.

Q: I'm sure it's his proclivity too, but the point was that the time, at least politically in the United States, was ripe for this.

STEVEN: Whether it was the best use of our time and whether in the end it was a good idea. Among other things it may have raised expectations among the human rights people that we seemed to be so interested in collecting this information and listening to these people, and then look at what we did about it. There was a disconnect there. It was nice to have the archives, but unless we were out there really working hard to change things... And, of course, we did change after the Carter Administration came in, but I will show you how that worked. The two best examples I can recall were Father Drinan. Do you remember the Catholic priest who was a Congressman?

Q: Yes.

STEVEN: He was very interested in human rights matters, and he came to Argentina. Well, when a Congressman comes to your embassy, what do you normally do? The ambassador would normally have a reception for him, right, or at least include him in some big reception, or you would have the DCM or the political counselor at least pay a lot of attention. But instead of that, I was assigned as his control. You know, I'm a careerist but I'm second down in the political section. I sat down to plan out his schedule and waited expectantly to be told when he would go to the ambassador's or when something else would be done, which didn't happen. There was a silence there, and so I finally asked, "Look, is somebody going to have a reception for him or something?" "Well, that would probably be a good idea, Bob. Could you handle that?" So I gave a reception for a visiting Congressman, not any of the three senior levels above me but I did it. And I invited primarily people from other embassies who were interested in these matters too and reporting on them, the Brits and the Australians and the French, who were important in that area, and a few contacts from the Argentine government. I knew a couple of Foreign Office people, Ministry of Foreign Relations people and so on. And we had a cookout in my backyard, which was a nice arrangement. In any event, there I am with an interesting man. My mother-in-law was living with us then, and he charmed her. She said she hadn't met such a fascinating gentleman for a long time, he was interesting. We had a good talk with him, but I was just very concerned and embarrassed that the senior people in the embassy in effect were keeping their distance. This was reaffirmed in another instance - I can never remember which was first, but another instance - where Pat Darien, who was then the Assistant Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, HA, came down. She was an Assistant Secretary, and the same thing happened. I was assigned to be her escort, and the schedule was simply left for me to work up. She was not invited to the ambassador's or the DCM's or the political counselor's, and it was suggested that perhaps I could arrange something for her. They made sure I had some representation money for it. So, again, I ran a party at my house for Pat Darien and her escorts. To me it was fairly clear. They didn't want to be associated with that element, with Drinan and Darien, who were human rights advocates. They wanted to keep their distance, even although the President's policy was fairly clear. It should have been done. But these were people who were unhappy with that policy and were distancing themselves from it as much as they possibly could. I was fortunate in not having to try to explain in detail to either Drinan or Darien why they weren't being treated in a somewhat more elegant fashion. I suspect in retrospect they were wise enough to realize themselves and didn't embarrass me. They were very delighted that I was honoring them with a reception. So the policy of the President and the Administration at the time was exactly not disobeyed or foiled by the people running the embassy, but they certainly didn't encourage it or do anything that they could to advance it. It was, again, left to the lower levels to handle.

Q: Did you get any feel for the CIA representative and the military representatives? Did they seem rather close to the government? Or did you have any feel for that?

STEVEN: Only much further away than I did in Chile. In Chile I was very much involved. I knew what was happening in Chile. In this situation my impressions were that they had good contacts, but to what degree they represented normal contacts that you would have with your counterparts or involvement in any further sense, I don't know. I suspect it was less, but again in Argentina there was not a political element. This was another coup of a military who essentially didn't like the civilian politicians no matter who they were as they were making a mess of the country, and they could try to straighten in out and also make some money for themselves. The corruption level was much higher. And I think our military and our CIA didn't see it as a political challenge or political issues as we did in Chile. It was just more a question of the normal relationship with still another Latin American junta, until, of course, the Falklands came along.

Q: The Falklands didn't come while you were there?

STEVEN: No, no, no, but I saw it later.

Q: Were other embassies - I'm talking about the major European embassies and all - were they sort of treating the government in Argentina as just 'this is the way things are done here' and not getting very involved in it.

STEVEN: I think that was a fair summary of it. It varied, of course, with different ones. The British always had a somewhat different relationship. Britain was the European power, after all, which landed troops in Argentina at one point. There's a large British colony of Scots and English in Argentina too and had quite an influence there, and the Brits always had the Falklands thing in the background, which had been a longstanding problem. So their relationship was a little tougher. Countries tended to me to react on two bases: one, did they have citizens in trouble - if they happen to pick up one of our citizens, then we're going to be more involveor attitudes of the individual officers or ambassadors in those embassies. The Finnish embassy in Santiago became a hotbed of resistance. The young Finnish chargi½, who lived two doors down the street from me - I was always worried I was going to get blown up when they blew him up - was very active in human rights cases. Why Finland, you say? Was there a Finnish colony? Not a big one. Was it trade or something? But this individual established himself and worked on these questions. In Argentina, as I recall, an embassy would have an officer who was particularly active, there would be a little more focus on that. If he transferred and went away, the focus may have died off. It was a more casual relationship. I don't think it drew the world attention anything to the degree that the Chilean experience had.

Q: Did the Argentineans look to Europe more than to the United States?

STEVEN: I think so, yes. The connections were very much there. There were very few Americans other than some businesspeople there. They looked back to Spain, to Italy, to other countries. Tex may have covered some of this ground, but it was interesting to me to see in Argentina, also in Chile and other countries but emphasized in Argentina, the communities that were there, the country club which is the one for the British community, and there's another one that was specialized for the Italians and there was another for the Spanish, and there was a Jewish club. They were not exclusive but clearly it was a community's center, and Argentina was very much a collection of communities rather than integrated nation, which I think is one of their problems. There were the turcos, the people from Syria in Lamont who had their club, and there have been certain elements of business.

Q: Mennan was from that group.

STEVEN: Mennan, I think, was, yes. But they tended to be focused around their community lives and not a feeling of being an Argentine. If you asked in Buenos Aires the question "Where are you from?" they wouldn't say, "I'm an Argentine"; they'd say, "I'm a Portena," "I come from Buenos Aires," or "I'm something else, whatever." It was interesting to find how many carried two passports. The average ex-Britisher down there, who may have been two generations in Argentina, still maintained his British nationality and Argentine.

Q: I understand that there were long lines at embassies just recently in Argentina.

STEVEN: Well, because of the economic situation, to be able to get out. It's a much less integrated country than some of the others that we know, which is part of the reason, I think, for its economic problems.

Q: Were we doing much in the way of sending people off on leader grants and that sort of thing?

STEVEN: There was some of that. I wasn't directly involved in it, but it was a routine thing as they tended to try to get people, young people particularly. I always had a little bit of doubt about those programs. They sound wonderful, but I'm not sure how effective they've ever been, and I've talked to numbers of young leaders who've come back from those countries. In many cases, they were young leaders who had already traveled to the United States on their own privately or had been to college up here. It seemed rather silly to spend money on a young Argentine leader who was educated in this country. And we had another famous one, not here but in Mexico, I always recall, when I was involved up there. This young politician was reluctant to go to the States, because he thought they were going to show him only the showplaces that we wanted him to see. And we said, "No, no, no. You plan it out and tell us what you want to see." So he laid out a pretty good schedule, and he wanted to go to Harlem, for example, and things that he knew about that we would probably try to hide. But they worked out a pretty good schedule for him, at universities and all sort of activities, and even to a factory somewhere. Then he came back, and I wasn't responsible, I was the ambassador's aide, but I was with some others who talked with him at the breakfast, which was a big thing down there. They sort of held their breath and said, "Well now, how was your trip? What did you think?" and waited for him to say how wonderful it had been and how it had really affected his thinking. He sort of looked at us all and said, "It confirmed every bad thing I ever thought about your country." We all had to laugh. He even laughed himself because it was so not what we wanted to hear. But I think it had. He had already convinced himself, of course, that our workers were oppressed and we had racial discrimination, and he was able to confirm all that in his own mind and what he saw. That one didn't work too well. Argentina was a fascinating country. It's so rich, and it's just devastating to see it so poor in every way. To go out in the pampa out there, I took my family and drove over to Chile and down through Chile and back over on a vacation trip, stopping literally beside the road out on the pampa in southern Argentina and walking out to a field and just putting my hand in and digging in the rich, black soil. Most places out there have thick topsoil. That rich, black soil is 10 feet deep. It's the breadbasket for the world out there, and they have to bail out of their economic difficulties and respond.

Q: Was there any labor movement going while you were there?

STEVEN: Yes. My impression - I wasn't directly involved with it - my impression has been though that labor was extremely politicized in that country. It is in many Latin American countries, but there particularly labor tends to be an arm of a political party, the labor union will be an arm of a political party rather than a real, what we call, independent labor union. There are some in this country would say the AFL-CIO is an arm of the Democratic Party, but down there it really is. The labor union would be integrated pretty much...

Q: Well, Peron had taken over the labor.

STEVEN: Labor was very much politicized. My impression was that you didn't really look at it as much as labor and the classic indications of its progress or lack thereof; you looked at it more as an element of the political life of the country down there.

Q: Did you get any feel or repercussions about the Dirty War that was going on with, you know, young students particularly, young people, who were getting involved? Was this affecting everyone?

STEVEN: No, I don't think it's fair to say it did. It affected those who were affected, in the sense that if your son was taken or your family was involved in the political activity and they were targeted, yes, you were affected. But I don't think that it was something that affected the majority of Argentines. The man in the street wasn't being beaten up by the police, and these were the students or the young people who were in trouble and there weren't that many of them. Many of them had lost, I think, a great deal of sympathy because of assassinations and kidnappings and things. There was some attitude I remember hearing once from someone I thought was a very liberal-minded Argentine when somebody had just been found assassinated and disappeared, "Well, he had it coming. They were trouble makers." It wasn't that it affected such wide numbers of people. They were more worried about their economic, I think, than their political situation. They didn't like the publicity, of course. Let's face it. Many of them were humane people after all, and they didn't like to see people being killed or tortured. I don't think the majority of Argentines would have overthrown their arms because of that type of thing. The thing which the Argentine military did which forced them out of power was the stupid war in the Falklands. The dumbest thing they ever did.

Q: Maybe this is a good place to stop, I think, Bob. So we'll pick this up the next time when you leave Argentina in July of '77 and you're going back to Washington, where you're in charge of Chilean affairs, which was very interesting. We'll pick it up then.

Today is September 13, 2001. Okay, 1977, you went to the Chilean desk from 1977 to when?

STEVEN: '79.

Q: What was the status of things in Chile as you saw them when you came in '77?

STEVEN: It hadn't changed that much from when I left there to go over to Argentina. The military were increasingly clamped down and repressive. It had not changed, as I think many people thought it would, after the initial flurries, after the initial rage and anger had been overcome and things settled. But the military would have lifted their hand somewhat, brought in what effectively would have been people they controlled but at least a civilian government and tried to reestablish some sort of a normal situation in what had been a democratic country. I think, to the surprise of even many of the so-called Chile experts, the Chilean military remained very, very hard line and even went so far as to have papers written up by their civilian advisors on how Chile's government should be reformed with a new constitution, all that sort of thing, which, as I believe I said earlier in these interviews, was language very reminiscent from the 1930s in places like Portugal, Spain and so on. Fascism, the corporate state, etcetera, was very much being pushed, and the human rights violations, shall we say, the lack of due process, had continued. It wasn't getting better. It continued to be very hard line. So when I got to the desk in Washington, it was two very different strands of thought, two very different policies, mingling but also opposing each other within the Department as well as within the government and even the country. Many people were outraged, of course, by what was going, and their basic reaction was to do everything possible to revenge what the military had done, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. The other attitude is extreme on the other side: "No, no, these are our boys. We wanted this coup. Chile is now safe from socialism. We have to chastise the government and tell them not to be too rough but at the same time indicate our support so that they will eventually be able to establish a stable Chile." I was, as the desk officer, of course, aware of all this. As an example of what happens - this would be of interest to people who have been in the Department...

Q: The Carter Administration had just taken over.

STEVEN: Yes, but as an administrative note, it should be of interest to some people. I was in Argentina, Buenos Aires, in the summer of '77, and I received orders then to report directly to the desk without any home leave. Well, I had already agreed to transfer from Chile to Argentina without home leave, so I had gone almost four years with no home leave. Things were piling and I needed to have a break, and I talked to the Department about this. Well, the fellow who had been on the desk had to get on to his next assignment, so the desk was actually vacant and they had to have me right there. I said, "Why didn't you keep him?" Well, he had to get on to his next assignment. So I did something which is probably not good for the discipline of the Foreign Service, and I said, "No, I have to have a month for my family and to do other things, and if that can't be worked out, then I need to be reassigned to something else." They bought that and said, "Okay, we'll just manage." So when I arrived, the desk was literally a foot high with paper. Among them, I think, was something like 50 Congressional referral letters, most of which were simply, "My constituent, so-and-so, wants to know why things are going on this way in Chile. Please answer." And at least 50 were piled up on the desk that nobody had tried to take care of. So the very first thing I faced was an enormous pressure to move all this Congressional correspondence, and at the same time all these other things were happening in Chile. To make it even more difficult, as you may remember, in 1976 there had been the assassination of the former Chilean ambassador, Letelier, Orlando Letelier, here at Dupont Circle, and nothing much had happened for about a year. The investigation was certainly being carried on with full faith and effort by the FBI but they hadn't gotten very far. The suspicion was, that it was Chilean secret intelligence agency, the acronym being DINE. The DINE had done this. But how do you prove it? So nothing much had happened, and as I settled onto the desk, working nights and everything else trying to get up to speed, I found things in the files that made me wonder, because if this information was available, why hadn't certain types of investigations been made, why hadn't this been followed up. Well, I discovered that essentially the Department of State had told its people, including its desk officer, my predecessor, and the Bureau, to cooperate in every way with the Justice Department. That had been interpreted to mean that anything that Justice asks for, by all means give them, but it did not mean that you had to go out of your way to find something to tell Justice if they didn't already know it. That's not in writing, and I think if this interview were looked at, there would be those who would challenge in frankly. All I can say is that is the situation I found and understood when I took over.

Q: Was this attitude more one of 'gee, I'm working hard and I don't have time to do this' or 'let's hope this will go away and the less we...'"

STEVEN: Exactly, the latter, 'let's hope it will go away'. The basic attitude was that we had approved the coup, that our interests were best served by Chile at that time run by a military regime, hopefully a more moderate military regime than we had, but we might hope for, and that it was not to US interest to see the situation become inflamed or to otherwise rattle the cage. The Letelier assassination in retrospect was one of the more stupid things done by any government. It did rattle the cage very much, just as, for example, what has happened today. Up till now we had talked about Islamic fundamentalist terrorism; now we've seen precisely what it can do.

Q: We'd better explain what happened two days ago.

STEVEN: Tuesday, September 11, 2001, was the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the attack on the Pentagon here in Washington where, as we speak now, that's very much in our minds and, of course, dominates all of our thinking at the moment. But it has also made me think back to the period. Chile was not much in people's minds by then. There were elements, of course, that remembered the coup and the Allende government, elements, if you want to be simplistic about it, say, toward the left, the more liberal side, which thought that this was a tragedy for democracy, and elements on the other end which thought, no, this was a triumph for democracy because we had saved Chile from becoming another Cuba, and an element in the middle, with which I think I identify myself today properly, more moderate, recognizing that the coup was inevitable and probably beneficial but that the military in Chile had to be helped, forced, convinced somehow to moderate what they were doing so that they didn't lose the benefits of what they had done. And the assassination of the former ambassador here was very much a provocation, a challenge, a slap in the face to us. Terrorism by a state agency can be carried out in Washington DC a mile from the White House, and "what do you folks think you can do about it?" Many of the people that I talked to in those days in the government who were even sympathetic to the effort that the military government had undertaken in Chile were equally outraged by this. This was too much, that they had challenged us to ignore this, and, for example, the FBI agents working on it were as outraged as I was. Yes, the tragedy is they have killed an innocent man, and an innocent American citizen - with him - but also outraged that they thought they could get away with this sort of thing in Washington DC. Of course, even more so today, we see what they can get away with now - they can blow up the Pentagon. But the result was to put a great deal of pressure on me and on the desk and on the Bureau and on the Department to help solve this terrorist act. I suspect that more than half of my hours in those two years that I was on the desk were devoted to the Letelier case.

Q: Before we move to the Letelier case, did you see any indication, even when you were in Chile, about the killing of the air force general?

STEVEN: He is the one who is currently in the papers, General Schneider. General Schneider was the army commander who was also chief of the armed forces. He was the equivalent of our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and key man. General Schneider was very much a democrat, apparently a very competent military officer, whose attitude was, I think, understood clearly. He certainly did not approve of the Allende movement, certainly did not approve of what was likely to happen in his country if Allende won, which at that moment he hadn't. Schneider let it be known he did not approve of the idea of the military taking over. I think it must have been in his mind - and this is not just my speculation but based on all my experience and people I know and have talked to - I think he and certain other people in the military felt "We will support our civilian government. If Allende wins, so be it. We will, of course, watch, and if the country goes into chaos and dissent, then we may have to do something, but at this point we should let the process work." There were other elements who said, "No, we have to move the military first before Allende could do any more damage," and the harebrained people, including many here in Washington, decided that a kidnap attempt should be made to take General Schneider, make it look as if it were a leftist action and, therefore, provoke the military and so on to support a coup. It was in retrospect one of the more amateurish actions. The documents show - and it's coming out increasingly and I had known this for years - we provided money, we provided counsel, we provided weapons to the people who eventually did kill General Schneider. I don't believe the actual weapons we provided were the ones used or necessarily that anybody in the US government ever said, "Kill the guy," but certainly the United States government knew about and approved, let it be known they would not object if there were a kidnap attempt made. It failed because of something, I guess, they had not foreseen and perhaps should have foreseen. When they stopped General Schneider's car, he pulled out his service pistol to defend himself, and in panic and presumably in defense of what they thought was their own lives, they shot him and killed him, which had not apparently ever been intended. That set off the government and the military outrage. They eventually identified Chilean military, General Viaux and another, who were behind this. I believe they were actually disciplined, given very short sentences, something, a 'slap on the wrist' type of thing. It is coming out now more and more, and it will continue to be clear, that we probably did not actually say, "Kill Schneider" - nobody wanted that - but we certainly knew about it, helped, and supported the idea of kidnapping him.

Q: Were you aware of this?

STEVEN: No, at the time, no.

Q: I mean on the desk and all.

STEVEN: Oh, yes, by that time I had seen the documents and knew what was happening. But the more immediate concern was what was actually happening to them. The Department had instructions from the highest level to cooperate. I think it was Secretary Rogers at the time. He turned over the sort of management and oversight of that to Warren Christopher, who was the Deputy Secretary.

Q: Vance.

STEVEN: Vance, it would have been Vance, I guess. Did they not change during that period? I forget.

Q: Vance left really in '80, I guess. Muskie came in. It might have been Rogers. Well, it would have been Kissinger.

STEVEN: The fact being, however, that the most senior level turned over the management of this aspect. Chile relations in general was Warren Christopher's headache. The actual effect of what I found was that most of the career officers did not want to be associated with this. Most of the career officers from the Assistant Secretary level, the country director down, wanted, if possible, to separate themselves and their reputations from this. They didn't want to become controversial. I believe that the attitude that I sensed and heard was this is all very unfortunate, we should not disturb our relationships with Chile, we should keep out of the funny papers, but at the same time we should not harm the current Chilean military government. The way to do this was to respond when directly required to but not to volunteer. The word that I very quickly got on the desk was that I should be quiet and do what was necessary but don't raise any problems.

Q: What sort of things would you be getting...?

STEVEN: Well, the decisions: for example, what documents would we give to the Department of Justice. Justice was anxious to have, for example, people go to Chile, interviews, all this sort of thing. Were we going to help support that in diplomatic efforts, and so on? I inherited from my predecessor a mess of paper, literally cabinets stuffed full of documents, with no order, and I really didn't know what I had, so I spent a lot of time, many evenings, in the Department sorting through just so I could put into some sense what was happening, so I'd know where I was. And as I did that, as I started to say earlier, I found documents and information which puzzled me in a sense. If we know this, why hasn't something been done, why hasn't it been checked out? So I introduced myself to the prosecutors. This was Eugene Proper and Larry Barcella, who were then Assistant US Attorneys who were charged with this case. I talked with them, got to know them, and realized as I went along that they were sort of stopped. They didn't really have much further to go. We had all sorts of suspicions but no real evidence. I, having organized the file and begun to find various pieces of paper, on my initiative invited the prosecutor, Gene Proper, to come over to the Department, and he did, and I hand him the file and just said, "Read." He found very quickly the information that was there, recognized its importance, was outraged. There were threats of taking people in the State Department to court for obstruction of justice, that sort of thing. I think I had some benefit in telling him I didn't think that was really going to advance the cause; "let's see what we can do." We then got this information out and started. I had been told by Proper and by others that it did indeed mark, if not the turning point, at least an important turning point in handling the case, because this gave them leads then into the assassins who had come here.

Q: These would be what? I'm trying to figure out.

STEVEN: Chilean DINE intelligence officers who had come to America under cover, who had checked in with cover stories, really that they were supposed to be Chilean government officials, but they were using false documents and different names and they were not here for the purpose, they were here for consultation with their embassy. They were here to scout and set up the assassination plot. They hired, or took the assistance of, exiled Cuban American community people to do the actual execution of it, and they found a volunteer in Chile, an American citizen named Michael Townley who was living in Chile, was married to a Chilena, to actually build their bomb for them and placed it. I won't go through the whole story. It's far too long and complicated, and the details of it are very, very well summarized in at least two books on the subject, one written by Gene Proper, the Assistant US Attorney. Anybody who's really interested in that degree of detail can go there; they're quite accurate. The overall thing, perhaps of interest to historians and to Foreign Service Officers, is what do you do when you find yourself in this situation, when the signal is clear to you that the Department doesn't want you to press something, to do something, when publicly it is saying, "Oh, goodness, we certainly want this thing done." For better or worse, I decided that I could not accept that and would not accept that, and I did everything I possibly could to assist the Justice Department in breaking into the case. I also argued the case that it was vital for us to press it against the Chileans, not in the sense of a general attack on the Chilean military government of Chile but on their actions, what they had specifically done in this case. They had gone beyond the pale, and it was important not only for us to punish terrorism but it was equally important to help Chile, that the DINE had grown to the point where it was out of control. There are those who have compared it to our FBI under Hoover, an agency that had become so powerful that it was politically impossible to control it. In hindsight, I don't think that Hoover was like the man in Chile, - no, of course not - but in the sense that an intelligence agency, police, security agency with enormous power, essentially uncontrolled by any political restraints, and it was to the benefit of Chile and the Chilean people for us to help get this organization punished and out of power. To this day, I know - I say I know because I know Chileans who have told me this - there were many in the Chilean military themselves, and in their civilian life of course, who were horrified and outraged and afraid of what they were seeing with the intelligence agency, with DINE, and were just as anxious as we were to see it controlled and reduced in power. So there was a considerable difference of opinion. There were those like myself who felt we needed to use this as an instrument to moderate what the government was doing in Chile, those who wanted to drop a nuclear bomb on Santiago - we see that today - and then, of course, those on the far end saying, "Well, it's too bad about Letelier and this sort of thing, but let's not get carried away. Our real interests are 100 percent behind this government," the usual spread, if I could say that, of feelings. In retrospect, I have always been satisfied that we helped reach that moderate position. We did help identify and explain not just to the American people but to the Chilenos what had happened, who was responsible, and what its effect was, without overthrowing the government of Chile, the military government. What it did was to get the DINE under control. The head of it, Manuel Contreras, was removed from his position. I strongly suspect, and I have some basis for that, that other members of the Chilean junta and the military forced Pinochet to set Contreras aside. Whether Pinochet would have done it voluntarily I doubt. He was very close to Manuel Contreras. But I think that it was made clear to him by his fellow officers that this had to be done if nothing else for cosmetic purposes, so the man was pushed out of power. This was probably the single greatest benefit to come out of the whole exercise, that the most radical and vicious element in the Chilean military was controlled then and pushed aside, reduced in its influence, leaving more moderate elements in the government, in the military government, to come to the fore, and they did. There were officers elected, particularly an air force general, or selected for power in the air force, one of them, who were moderate, moderate in the sense that they certainly supported their coup and they were certainly anti-socialist, anti-Allende, but at the same time recognized that there had to be an eventual return to a normal democratic situation in Chile. And if we had anything to be proud of, I think, it's the effort made to push that. It was internally in the State Department a very difficult time. As I say, the Assistant Secretaries in that time clearly did not want this thing...

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary?

STEVEN: Bill Bowdler was there, and then there was a black officer you may remember. I don't remember his name. He became ambassador later, I think, to Spain.

Q: Terry Todman.

STEVEN: Todman, and then Byron P. Vaky. I remember particularly Vaky, because he was there during the crucial period when we were really pushing this thing to find out what was going on and so on. They clearly did not want this thing pushed.

Q: Was anybody calling you in and saying, "Bob, cool it"?

STEVEN: Yes, I was called in by the Deputy Assistant Secretary, who was an Hispanic gentleman, a professor from California - if we research it, we'll find it - who called me in, and he told me it was at the direction of the Assistant Secretary he called me in, and it was the usual euphemistic approach that we were used to as diplomats. "Bob, we really think that we should let Justice take the lead in this," etcetera, etcetera. The signal was very, very clear: lay off. I acknowledged that I had been told that but I didn't say necessarily that I would do it. I figured that, if they really were dissatisfied and wanted to, they could very quickly remove me from the job.

Q: In a way, once you turn the file over, allowed the Justice people to play with the file, there wasn't much more you could do, was there?

STEVEN: Oh, yes, we could do a great deal more. Well, the question was, of course, once we had - and again this is very well outlined in these books that have been written about it - the essential thing was this: the leads all led back to Chile. Now, how does the FBI function in Chile? How do you get permission for an FBI agent to be allowed to go to Chile and interview people? This requires the State Department to be involved. So we very quickly became involved in efforts to get information in Chile. An example of the extremes to which this went is identifying this American citizen. The people who came here...

Q: This was Townley?

STEVEN: Townley, Michael Townley. The people who came, Townley and another Chilean officer who came up here under false pretenses, false documents, had been identified. At least, we had pictures of these people from their passport pictures, and an effort was made to identify this man, who, we had heard rumors, was "an American." How to do this? It was very, very interesting. A newspaper reporter who used to work for the old Washington paper...

Q: The Washington Times.

STEVEN: The Times, not the current one - no, it was the Star, the Washington Star. What was his name? Anyway, he was very close to us. We trusted him. He was a superb professional in the sense that he was given something on background, it stayed on background. If he was given something, we made it clear that we would not mind seeing this published and it was a legitimate thing he could do, and he did it, which was very, very helpful, very professional reporting. He was given - not by me, by the FBI - a copy of the pictures that had been identified, which he ran in the Star, saying, "These are the suspects that we'd like to identify." And within hours literally of those pictures appearing, the embassy was getting phone calls saying "My God, we know this guy, Michael Townley." Townley was eventually picked up. After heavy pressure from us, the Chilean police picked him up. And then the question came how do we get to him to interview him, and it was a constant battle with the Chilean officials, who did not want him identified, then didn't want him interviewed or, if interviewed, didn't want him extradited. And the pressure had to be put on, and there within the Department was this sort of a struggle. Should we be pressing this, or should we not? I was very much on the side that, yes, we should be pressing this. A situation which I suspect has happened in the Department many times and is fully appreciated perhaps only by Foreign Service professionals: a desk officer would write a draft to become the Department's position with the Chilean government, a basic diplomatic note telling them "you've got to let us talk to this guy," and the country director didn't really want to look at it. As I recall, he did not sign off on most of the documents that I prepared in this case on those years.

Q: He was just ducking.

STEVEN: He was ducking. He didn't want to be involved.

Q: So he let you...

STEVEN: He let me do it. He didn't want to be involved.

Q: That's very unusual.

STEVEN: Well, I don't know if it was unusual. I had a long career in the Service, and I'm not sure it's that unusual. He didn't want his name associated with something, because I think he hoped to become an ambassador one day, and controversy is never helpful when you're coming up to be an ambassador, and this was certainly an emotional and controversial issue in the time. I would write the document. He might or might not read it, but he never initialed it, never had his name appear on it. He didn't attend the briefings on things that were going on. It was just as if he'd never been there. Well, this had mixed feelings for me. I would certainly have liked to have had not only the support but also the counsel as to how to do this sort of thing. I was a relatively junior desk officer. "You stay out of the way." The Assistant Secretary couldn't completely stay out of the way, but he certainly wasn't helpful and encouraging. I say the Assistant Secretary because it was the same pattern all the way through. The change came when Frank McNeal became Deputy Assistant Secretary, and Frank - and I think it was purely just by the luck of the draw - he drew the southern cone and therefore Chile and therefore supervised what I was doing. Frank had much the same attitude toward the thing as I did, that, as I try to say the position, we were not against the Chilean government, we were not against what the military had done. We were against the abuse of it and the terrorism that had been performed in its name, and so I would draft documents that went directly to the Deputy Assistant Secretary, and Frank dissected, changed, added. We worked the thing very much together. And then the document would have to go to the Assistant Secretary, of course, and he would hem and haw and make a few change perhaps, but generally he would just sort of sign it and let it go, and then it would go upstairs to Mr. Christopher. I didn't know anything about Christopher other than his reputation. We don't, at the desk officer level, meet the Deputy Secretary very frequently, but there would be meetings to discuss strategy, how we were going to do these things, and I became more and more impressed by Christopher. He was as dry and unemotional acting and looking a man as you ever see, but he asked the right questions, penetrating questions. His views on strategy and timing were superb, and again and again he took what I considered to be the most responsible attitude toward it - wave to press this, we cannot allow this, we cannot have terrorism in this country. I usually went to any meeting he had. We called the Chilean ambassadors in repeatedly - they changed in the middle, as I recall - and we would present the Chilean ambassador our latest note, and Christopher would tell him what our concerns were. And I was always there; I was the notetaker, so I was very much involved, the country director nowhere to be seen. Frank McNeal and I pretty much did it. All the time, no one ever came right out and ordered us to stop. I'm disciplined enough and I was disciplined enough as a Foreign Service Officer that, if I had been told "stop this" or "present documents and positions which are opposite than those I felt were necessary," I would have stopped. I would have resigned but I would have stopped. I probably would have asked for transfer out but, if necessary, would have resigned, because I did believe then and now that we were doing the best thing not only for US interests but ultimately for Chile, and I had come to know and love Chile. They're marvelous people, and it's a marvelous country. This was the way to help everybody. Eventually it did, it worked. Christopher was superb. He repeatedly guided the thing with a very, very great sense of timing and emphasis. He impressed the FBI and prosecutors in the Justice Department enormously. Their attitude, when this whole thing started about State Department, if you can imagine, was very, very negative. We were a bunch of wasted pussyfooters who didn't help. And eventually they came to a different viewpoint, and I think it was sealed when they saw that Christopher was a true professional in that he had the right instincts, and that was important in that sense but also as professional how to go about doing it and how to make it a reasonable course of action. Eventually it worked. We got convictions in the courts and exposed the whole thing. As I have just said, the most important result in my mind, in all these years of reflection on it, was that we removed from the Chilean military government its most radical element and gave an opportunity for moderates to eventually work their way in, which gave an opportunity then more and more for the civilians to work in and eventually get back to the democratic situation we see today in Chile. If I did anything in my career, it's that single effort that I think was the most important and the greatest contribution. The willingness of too many people in government in my experience to overlook that act of terrorism in Washington, to try to say, "Well, it really isn't important," was one of the most discouraging things that I ran into. And you see the result even today when I have been working as a retiree declassifying documents. I worked for a year, my last year, two years ago, in the declassification of many of the documents of that period, many of which I wrote, so I certainly knew what was in them. I remember when I was introduced to the office staff meeting and people were reminded of my background. Ernesto Pinochet, of course, was in London under arrest, and immediately one of these officers said, "Boy, you must be happy today," and I said, "No, no, I'm not. You've simply assumed something that you should know better as a professional. You don't identify someone as categorized that I would be happy that Pinochet was arrested. It's far too complicated. There are too many elements in it." I saw a similar thing, for example, if you know Wayne Smith, Wayne Smith, the Foreign Service Officer who was head of the US interest section in Cuba in his last assignment. Wayne became controversial, and the feeling that I saw at the time among people was, well, here's another dissident who didn't get on board where he should have been who was pro-Castro, who was trying to tell us that we should be cozying up to Castro. Nonsense! Wayne had a far more sophisticated view of these things and, I believe today even, the correct one, but he was identified, fingered as controversial, and once you're figured as controversial, that's it. So Wayne, who I believe would have been a superb ambassador, you know, is out there in a foundation somewhere. I was never fingered in that sense. I was never important enough, I guess. I never worked again in the Bureau. The rest of my career was elsewhere. One of the amusing vignettes in my memory: Frank McNeal at the end of all this wrote a recommendation for me, a nomination for the Superior Honor Award for my two years of service on the desk, and to my enormous surprise, they approved it. There was a ceremony, and I was called up, and Mr. Vaky read the citation and then turned and, with grinning teeth and the most forced smile that I can ever conceive of, shook my hand for my good work and sort of handed me the award. As I say, I never worked in the Bureau again. The other aspect of that - and this is something you'll get in other histories, I'm sure - is Frank McNeal was literally fired. At one point Frank had done something, said something, wrote something that challenged what they wanted so much - I don't have first-hand knowledge of this but I've heard the story - that Frank was literally called in to Mr. Vaky's office and told to clear his desk and be out of there this afternoon, just go. He was sent off into the wilderness for a while. He did recover in later years. He was ambassador to Costa Rica, but he paid a price. I wasn't important enough; they just wanted me out of the...

Q: In a way it's interesting because we are talking about the Carter Administration. I can't imagine it being that happy with the Pinochet regime. So it almost doesn't sound political; it sounds more on a professional...

STEVEN: I've tried to summarize it in my own mind, and I've had years to think about this. The Carter Administration obviously was unhappy with the situation in Chile. Liberals in general were appalled by what had happened and, as I said earlier in these interviews, Chile became symbolic in the sense that Spain became symbolic in the '30s. I do not believe myself that there was that much interest in the highest levels of the US government over Chile. The interest was driven only by the pressures that were put on. Otherwise, if it made the newspapers and there were Congressional reservations or something like that, then the government expressed its regret, but the Administration was busy with much more important things in other parts of the world and didn't put that much effort into Chile. It was left to drift, and one of the best examples of that - and this can be verified by your scholars - the most recent documents in the last couple of years that have been released from that period include at least a couple of memos done at the National Security Council by Robert Pastor who was the Latin America representative on the National Security staff, very much tried to interest himself in this whole business of Chile, particularly when the Letelier case came along, and he would call me from the White House or the staff over there to ask questions what was going on about messages that had come in that he'd seen and very much tried to get involved in the processing of it. I took this fact that Pastor was increasingly interested and demanding not only up to my superiorities, who just sort of didn't really give me much guidance, and then I also mentioned it to the Justice Department people, to Proper and Barcella, and the FBI people. Proper, who is sort of on a brassy type if there ever was one and proud of it, said, "Tell them to go to hell. We don't want people involved who are going to be leaking stuff out of this investigation," and that was a concern. It was a very, very hot item for newspaper people who were very much involved. They were very much afraid that, if it got out and people who were identified politically by their own statements as being leftist activists on this whole question, would leak vital information from the prosecution and the investigation of the case. So the Justice Department's view was don't share things with the National Security Council people; if they need briefings, they can come to Justice for it; this is not a State Department matter, it's a Department of Justice matter. So it got to the point that when Bob Pastor called me one day and simply told me that from now on all messages going out from the Department on or about Chile had to be cleared with him. As diplomatically as I could I said that I wasn't really the person he should be talking to, I didn't have the authority to send stuff to him or to deny him stuff. I said, "You really need to take that to a higher level." Then I immediately let Gene Proper know, and he did the proper things. I guess Pastor went to a higher level and he was told, "No, you're not on the list." We developed what amounted to a Letelier case group, certain people who saw the traffic only, that included, for example, a couple of the lawyers in the legal division, people in the Bureau and few others on the senior staff at the State Department, but not much else. It didn't get the wide distribution that it might otherwise have gotten. Another person who was very upset...

Q: With Pastor, what do you think was motivating him?

STEVEN: Bob Pastor is clearly on the active end of things. He's very outspoken always. You find him quoted recently in the papers anytime something comes up. It was clear to us that he was a politically motivated anti-Chilean military person. I don't think Bob was one that we should have distrusted who would leak something, but I do think that he would have brought into the discussions and the influences a politicized...

Q: Yes. In other words, instead of being a case, it would become a cause.

STEVEN: A cause, exactly. It was already a cause but...

Q: But Pastor wasn't on the case, and he was working...

STEVEN: I thought that someone, again, at his level with his access, being directly involved in this and clearing cables and such, would complicate it and shift it to much more of a political cause and away from the narrower arrow we were trying to use. I started to say, in the documents that have been released in the last couple of years - it's quite interesting - there's at least a couple of memoranda that Pastor wrote to his superiors in the NSC and in one of them he talks very distractedly and very unhappily about the apparent two-path policy which was coming out of State. Someone in State on one hand is saying one thing and then on the other hand is saying something else. It was perceptive of him, because that was exactly what was happening. There were statements coming out of elements of State which were very supportive of the Chilean military and how we must not damage our relationships with them, etcetera, etcetera, US business was going to be affected; and then another element of State which was obviously pushing the case, basically the element I identified with. He warned the senior people at NSC as to what was happening and that something should really be done about it, and I'm very amused that the answer that came back - and it was written on the memorandum; you could see it on the Internet on the documents - in effect, well, yes, we hear you but leave it alone, State will take care of it. They didn't want to get involved. It must have been frustrating. The other case was another figure - if anybody ever researches this and uses my words as any references - another figure at the time was Richard Feinberg, and Richard Feinberg was in our policy SP, as we now call it up there, the policy staff, and he was a Latin American figure for that. He's written books on Chile and other things, and his name pops up occasionally. Again, he's with some foundation. Poor Mr. Feinberg showed up in my office, when this thing was getting well underway, very unhappy. He was seeing more of the traffic and the documents, because they went through the front offices up there on the seventh floor, and he wanted to be involved and he wanted to clear those documents. Anything going out should be passed up there for clearance. Again, it was somebody out of the operational line who wanted to move in at a policy level. Now, the case could clearly be made, and he made it articulately, that that's after all what the policy staff was for, to bring a policy orientation to operational things going on. There was the same reaction, that we don't want to bring in people at that level who will make this a political issue. We can be handling it better if it's handled this way and let the chips fall where they may, rather than pressure from above. So poor Dick Feinberg was cut out of the action as well. He didn't get the traffic. It was a fascinating experience professionally to see the Department at work and how these things...

Q: Who was our ambassador in Chile at the time?

STEVEN: George Landau was during that period.

Q: And what was the role of the embassy as you saw it?

STEVEN: I think George Landau was caught in an almost impossible position. Our ambassadors suffer that traditional problem, and you know as well as I do - good relations with your host country, the key thing, promotion of US interests with your host country. If there are problems with your host country, no matter who started it or who's really responsible, the ambassador's going to suffer. It's going to be associated. "Oh, yes, we had a terrible time with Chile and George Landau was there." On the other hand, Landau was a very principled man who I believe, and I know from talks with him, was at least as outraged as I was at what had been done in this country. He very much wanted to follow the course of action, I believe, that we were pressing, but at the same time he was the guy who actually had to go to the foreign ministry or sit down with those generals, so he was in a very, very hard place, and he did it superbly. We were blessed at that time. We had a first-class ambassador and we had a first-class deputy secretary who guided the thing very, very well. And Landau did a marvelous job of balancing us. We were able with his guidance many times to adjust the tactics, adjust how we did things to make it more effective and reduce the unintended negative consequences by his guidance and counsel on it. He is much to be admired for being the ambassador at that extremely difficult time and did a good job.

Q: Did you get any feel - sort of outside your bailiwick but you were in a position maybe to get something from this - about the role of the CIA in Chile at the time? I'm going back to my time in Athens when colonels were in, and my feeling was the CIA got a little too snuggled up to the colonels. They all talked the same language, they came out of the intelligence side of things. So I'd be looking for that same disease to affect the CIA down there. Did you get any feel for it?

STEVEN: Oh, of course, exactly. The Agency in this period - and this has been in the Church hearings; there's nothing I can add to it, it's all been laid out there for historians - were very much involved, even to the point where - and I find this hard still to believe - that they brought down weapons, submachine guns, to give to right-wing elements.

Q: There wasn't enough guns around.

STEVEN: But they in turn were being driven by - oh boy, now I'm going to be undiplomatic - by a maniac in the White House, Nixon, and Kissinger, men who had no respect, I think, for law, who simply felt they were so powerful they could do whatever they damn well pleased, and they ordered the CIA to do things. And I don't think really that the CIA was comfortable doing it, but when they get orders to do these things, they salute in most cases and do it. They were deeply involved in the whole business. The one question I have been asked so many times, because presumably I have more association with Chile than many: did we order the coup, or did we take part in it? No, obviously not. I remember once being told by a CIA officer, "We didn't have to order the coup. We didn't have to participate in it. The Chilean military were perfectly competent to pull off a coup. What we did, we being the US government through its various elements, was made it clear to the Chilean military that we would not object, that it would not be a question of a confrontation with the United States in any sense, that if you feel you must do this, well, it's your judgment, go ahead. As years went by, my impression was that the Agency tried to disassociate itself, pull back a bit more, for obvious reasons. It was politically damaging to them because of the associations they had, and as more moderate administrations came in.

Q: When the coup came, you had Allende, who was really making a mess out of...

STEVEN: Oh, the country was...

Q: It wasn't just the Communist thing, he was really...

STEVEN: The country was in disaster and crumbling.

Q: The Pinochet takeover was sort of unforeseen as far as its thrust, of turning into...

STEVEN: The takeover was not unforeseen, that was expected momentarily. We had these wonderful vignettes that have been repeated in every history book - I didn't see it but I talked to eye witnesses - of women, middle-class women, going to the military headquarters barracks and bases and standing there and throwing corn kernels and stuff through the gates for the chickens who wouldn't come out and defend their country - this provocative type of thing. And then you've heard, of course, of the famous pot-banging when the city reverberated with banging of pots. That I did hear. They did not foresee the military then hardening into a hard right-wing, oppressive government the way it did. I believe that everyone - the Department, the CIA and military - expected, because of Chile's history and the types of people that they were, that the military would take over, would do the necessary hard things at the beginning to make sure that peace and stability were established, but then keeping a firm hand - it would be firm but fair because there wouldn't be the torturing and the killing and things like that - and then eventually as soon as they could, get the country back on civilian terms. What surprised everybody was the narrowing down and the control by a narrow - for want of a better description, the right-wing element - near fascist, which tried to direct the government over to a permanent corporate-state concept, which many of the Chilean military themselves did not want. I talked to Chilean officers myself who shook their head and said, "This isn't what we should be doing. This isn't the way we want to go." But if they raised their head too far, they were silenced.

Q: As you were trying to help the FBI carry on its investigation, was our Intelligence Agency down in Chile helping?

STEVEN: They were bystanders. I don't remember much if any input from them. The input from them would be sort of the observer standing by, that this general in the government is heard to say such-and-such, or something like that. But, no, my own impression at the time - let's face it, it was 20 years ago - my own impression is that they stepped back and didn't, again, want to be involved. They were so badly tarred by the brush at what had happened under Allende that now they wanted to just back off it. My impression was that if the prosecutors of the investigators asked for help, they got precisely what they asked for but no more. This is the thrust really, that after they had gotten the coup into place, they pulled back. I do remember - and I think we've mentioned this before in the talks we had about the time I was actually in Chile - that they certainly didn't want to see in the embassy's official reporting the types of critiques that we were sending. They would constantly question. We would write in and say We have heard that this is happening, killings, concentration camps, torture, this sort of thing. "What proof have you got of that" - pulling back, pulling back - "Don't report this." We've been through that earlier, but I emphasize it again. That was the attitude, clearly anxious that the successful effort of establishing a safe government in Chile not be damaged by our criticism. This is controversial, and I'll defend it: They had what I believe amounted to a veto over our political reporting in Chile, at least, in the time that I was there. Our messages had to be submitted to them for clearance, consultation, and again and again they were stalled, delayed, suggestions made, until, in several cases that I can recall, the message was simply overtaken by events; there was no point in sending it, because it was so late by then. I remember the deputy chief of mission coming to me because I had written one of the messages, "Boy, Bob, you know, you've got this reporting here and your sources, and they're pretty good. It's well written and everything, but, Bob, the Agency says they're really questioning whether this is accurate stuff. If we report this, we're going to be asked about it." By the time they finished doing all that, two weeks had gone by and there was no point in sending the message. But I think that that reflected in the embassy at the time, the same division that was reflected back here.

Q: Were there any other issues that you got involved in on Chile besides the Letelier case?

STEVEN: Well, the overall human rights issues. There was an effort, driven considerably by Pat Darien in Human Rights, Human Affairs, HA, at the time and her cohorts, who were pressing, as they properly should have, the importance of the human rights. But it went to the point where - I do remember specifically one case - there had been a Carabinero officer, police officer in Chile that I knew well, a good source, a friend even, very, very proper in the sense that he was 100 percent for his own government, but he was able to put things in perspective for me at times. He was a good friend who was personally involved. He proposed to go to the States for a tour on narcotics issues. Narcotics was one of the few issues that we were still able to engage the government with at that point. The military government had drastically reduced the narcotics traffic coming out of Chile very simply. As I mentioned earlier, in one incident they simply shot the traffickers, and that was that. But there were still concerns, and we were working with them. This officer, the Carabinero was in a senior position able to help influence this, and we thought it would be useful to have him come here and do a tour in cooperation. And you could set it aside from the political side. He was not personally in any way considered hated. He'd never been associated with the repressions and the things that were done wrong. He spoke better English than I do, one of the few cases I've ever seen of a foreign military officer, a cop, in his house standing there proudly declaiming Shakespeare verse after verse in English. "Send him up. He's not tainted, he's not controversial. We need their help in the narcotics work. Let's do a tour, a two-week tour or something like that." And the HA Bureau fought to assist him. "No, this is Chile." I said, "It's not Chile. This is a specific noncontroversial officer who should be allowed to come." And they killed it, simply on these mindless sanctions against Chile. I think if they had their way, they would have broken off diplomatic relations - not a sensible attitude at all.

There were commercial aspects, but they didn't involve us a great deal. Chile's economy was recovering very, very beautifully under the military. They had the Chicago boys, young economists educated here, who were turning it into a good free-market economy. The critique would be, of course, if it had the prices that these things always have in developing countries, and a lot of people got rich and a lot of people got poor. Certainly the impact on the lower classes in Chile, on the working people, was horrendous, but there were those who claim, and I have a hard time challenging them, that that's one of the necessary steps that has to be taken to build a new economy. In Chile today, yes, there are people who are very poor and the rich get richer, but that might describe our own country. That was not a major part of my activity, frankly. The economic situation sort of took care of itself. We didn't have any difficulty there. I did have a considerable issue on negotiating an extradition treaty. That was while I was still in Chile and then it came up again when I was back on the desk. The Department was trying to redo outdated and obsolete extradition treaties universally all over the world, and they had a team running around down in Latin America from country to country negotiating this new extradition treaty. And we brought our text and said in effect, "This is what we want you to sign to match all the other countries in the area." And they were rather dumbfounded when the Chileans weren't quite prepared. There was a civilian I worked with in the Foreign Ministry, who was very professional, who looked at this thing and said, "Bob, this problem, this problem, this problem," and they were legitimate questions. In the treaty that they presented the text was essentially pro our side. It just made it much easier for us to get what we wanted, but at the same time it really didn't commit us to a great deal. He pointed out there were legitimate objections to it. So the team left unhappily, not having concluded a text. They left the text with me; I was the political officer who had to handle it. And I sat for hours with this fellow at the Foreign Ministry going over this thing, working out compromises, and sending telegrams back to Washington. And the delegation, these people in the ministry would come back frustrated. "Why isn't it signed. We want a standing treaty with everybody." I said, "Well, conditions vary in each country, and you are not going to get a standing treaty there." As I recall, I was still working on that when I got back on the desk two years later. Much of my effort also of course was dealing with American groups who were pro or anti Chile who wanted to talk to somebody at the Department, and who do you always talk to? You end up at the lowest level possible, which was the desk. So there were delegations of people coming in that I had to talk with. It was a very, very busy time. I'd never worked that hard in any other job in the Foreign Service.

Q: With these groups coming in, I would imagine that the great majority of the groups would be really from the left. I can't imagine too many people coming in and talking about wonderful Pinochet. They were just happy in letting the...

STEVEN: We got a little of that, some letters, but, yes, 90 percent of everything that I dealt with there...

Q: What would you say?

STEVEN: I was trying to say what I'm trying to say here in many ways, that this is far more complex a situation that you folks seem to understand. It's not simply 'nuke Chile and we'll solve something'. We have legitimate concerns in Chile. The Chilean people need our understanding and support in their own efforts to reestablish a democratic society. I would say the coup was probably necessary and beneficial for Chile and for US interests, and they'd give me horrified objections to that. "How can you say that?" We'd end up not usually agreeing. They wanted me, of course, to come down very firmly on that side. And then, of course, at the same time I was facing within the Department the general atmosphere they wanted me to come down very much on the opposite side. The middle is a great place, because you get shot at from both sides. As I've often said, and I tried to - I suppose, you get to a midlife crisis, I'm 69 almost, I'm going to be 69, so it's not a midlife crisis - but you get to the point that, you know, 'did I do something useful?' and I think that what I did then in association with that whole era was about the properly balanced professional way to do it. I don't know what could have been done differently and done better.

Q: Of course, for somebody looking at this, it's easy for what we would call a civilian or a student or something to go charging off left or right and you have a lot of fun, but when you're up against a real problem, how do you work it. You get your jollies by running off and spouting out and all that, but you're actually ineffective.

STEVEN: I think what we ended up getting was about the best that we could have. You also asked what we were involved with at the time, and of course I have to come back to war in the southern cone. There were two crises, as you remember. One was the Beagle Channel dispute with Argentina.

Q: What the hell's the Beagle Channel?

STEVEN: Well, the Beagle Channel is a line down in the gulf.

Q: This is Magellan's Straits..

STEVEN: The Magellan Straits, it's that area, and it's the dividing line between the two countries. It's important only in the sense that the line drawn down that channel then goes out to sea into these 200-mile economic preference zones, and who knows what the resources are down there, fishing, oil, everything else. So the key thing was how did you draw that survey line, not because of what it did in the channel - who could care about the channel - it's what the extension would mean to sea, and it made a big, big difference. And the stresses and strains and concerns on that got strong enough so that there was some genuine fear of some military action, not that there would be a major war but that the Argentines might land troops on soil down there that Chile claimed, or vice versa, and it could escalate into something worse. I've often thought back in my own mind that, if that had ever happened, the Argentines would have gotten the same terrible surprise they got in the Falklands. The Chilean military, whatever they are, are very professional, they're very good. They were small; it was a considerably smaller force than the Argentines had, but I think myself that they would have badly hurt the Argentines. That had to be resolved. But then even earlier when I was in Chile as a desk officer, there were concerns about Peru and Bolivia. Historians remember the War of the Pacific, this sort of thing. And it's never really been resolved. The Bolivians still had their gripes and grievances, as do the Peruvians, and there was concern because at that time Peru, under a fairly leftist government, was getting surprisingly modern and ridiculously advanced equipment from the Soviet Union. They were getting tanks and aircraft and things. Well, the Chileans were looking at this and saying - I remember talking to the Foreign Ministry people - "The idea of our being attacked by Peru is silly, but at the same time, as our military pointed out, if we are attacked by Peru, there's not much we can do about it up there." This was way up in the desert up there. "We don't have equipment to handle modern battle tanks. We don't have the fighters to fight off the Russian jets." And they were desperately looking for military hardware. We weren't about to sell it to them; we couldn't. They went to the European countries, of course, and they didn't get any help there. They were really scratching at how they were going to defend themselves if the Peruvians decided to come down, for example, and take the city of Arica, which they could have easily done. It's a bargaining point. It didn't in the end amount to anything, but there was some genuine and legitimate concern. So we dealt with that type of thing, talked to the Peruvians and the others. As I recall, in the Beagle Channel the best resolution finally came when the Pope involved himself, the former Pope. He spoke up, and, of course, their being both good Catholic countries, they could ignore the US Secretary of State but they couldn't ignore the Pope. Things quieted down again, but these were issues that were peripheral to US interests only in the sense we didn't want to see fighting in the Western Hemisphere. The Argentines were the worst case, because their inability to see reality was shown so clearly in the Falklands. I don't think we mentioned. This is going back a little bit but it may be a useful perspective for somebody someday reviewing the Falklands War, the Malvinas War. I have always maintained that the Argentine government made several mistakes, and their foreign minister should have been shot. Their first mistake was the British won't fight, obviously; they were very wrong. Secondly, if the British want to fight, the US won't let them, the Monroe Doctrine and so on; they were wrong. Thirdly, if the worst happens and the British do come down here, the other Latin American countries will rally around and send troops and airplanes and so on; wrong. Last, they would have massive sympathetic outpouring of public opinion in the Western Hemisphere against the foreign invaders; wrong. They should have shot the guy. This didn't take an ambassador, or diplomat, to figure out in advance; anybody could have told you that. And they desperately were trying to save their government, and the only way to do it was to go out and start a little war.

Q: I got the feeling watching this whole thing that the main military effort on the Argentine part was into the uniforms of its senior officers.

STEVEN: But that's very typical Latin America...

Q: Because apparently with their troops, there was no connect...

STEVEN: Conscripts, they used conscripts. What the Argentines - and most people aren't fully aware of the detail, and it's an interesting detail - they had marines, and the marines were the ones who actually took the islands to begin with. They were under very careful orders: minimum bloodshed. What they wanted to accomplish a *fait accompli*, take the islands, and then immediately say to the British, "Now, look, let's negotiate over this." But if there was a lot of blood, then the British were going to be less likely to negotiate. So the marines went in with orders essentially "Do your level best not to kill anybody." As I recall, there were a few casualties. A few of the British troops there were shot, but very little. And they apparently were very well treated by the Argentine marines. They were treated as honored prisoners. The whole effort was 'this is an unfortunate thing, we really don't want to hurt anybody, let's talk'. When it became clear that the British weren't about to accept that - it's quite interesting; most people don't know this - the marines were pulled out, and their troops that went on were basically conscripts, 17-, 18-year-old conscripts, who had to fight the gorkhas and the...

Q: _____ just as sad.

STEVEN: Ridiculous. But from a military point of view, what the Argentines did was very sensible. They must have recognized, and I'm sure they did, once the British came down there in force and started, they were going to win. Why sacrifice the one very well trained professional force you have. So they pulled the marines out immediately, back home, so they didn't suffer casualties or didn't even become prisoners. You preserve that professional element, and then the conscripts were sacrificed.

Q: Well then, in '79 you left the desk.

STEVEN: In '79 I left the desk. As we all know in the Foreign Service, you start looking for jobs and what do you want to do. The picture was clear to me that the usual course of action was not open, that as a desk officer - and I thought for a desk officer who had done a job that was at least good enough to get a Superior Honor Award handed to him, there ought to be something useful out there, political counselor or even a DCM in a small place, you know, a step. And it was very clear there was nothing there. Nobody ever said, "No, I don't want you." It was just that every job that I was interested in was already spoken for. "You've done a wonderful job, Bob. We wish you luck in your future." It didn't take a great deal of intelligence to see that at that time at least in the Bureau it was understood that I was persona non grata. So I looked around, and the only interesting thing I could find at the moment, that looked interesting to me, was in the watch office as a watch officer. So I went from the Bureau to Senior Watch Officer in the Operations Center, which was fun and different and a break away from what I'd been doing.

Q: You did that from when to when?

STEVEN: Well, I left in the summer of '79. I guess in the fall of '79 I went to the Operations Center. Again, it's on that paper, if we can find it.

Q: I have it somewhere.

STEVEN: I went up as a senior watch officer, and that was an 18-month tour.

Q: What sort of things did you find you handled?

STEVEN: A little of everything. You run a watch, which is roughly five people. You have an assistant watch officer; you have an editor who reads the telegrams and does the morning brief; you have an Intelligence representative there from INR; and there's a military representative. The Pentagon staffs the place; it used to in my day. There was always a military officer in their little area. A side note, a sad one: At that time - and it may still be; I don't know - we had a desk over at the National Military Command Center to exchange. I've seen the desk at the National Military Command Center. There's a sign on it: Department of State. It was empty; we didn't staff it. The military offered it, they had the desk there, they wanted it to be filled, and we just couldn't find enough manpower to put somebody at the National Military Command Center to represent the State Department. To me this always symbolized the narrow view of things that we have. Of course, we have problems filling personnel, but can you think of anything more important than to have somebody from the State Department in the Command Center when these things happen? Oh well, if something happens, we'll send somebody over. Ridiculous. He wouldn't know who he was talking to, he wouldn't know the procedure, nothing. Anyway, the job at the watch office is a good one. It certainly exposes you to everything. The senior watch officer sees and reads any significant traffic coming in, all of the limited-distribution things, the NODIS and so on, and NODIS Cherokee. NODIS Cherokee was a more restricted system within no-distribution, then Cherokee because Secretary Dean Rusk came apparently from Cherokee, North Carolina or South Carolina, wherever Cherokee is down there.

Q: In Georgia.

STEVEN: And during his period, they introduced even more restricted channels and called it Cherokee, so it was NODIS Cherokee. A NODIS Cherokee message came in once a month: "This is virtually a war." They came off the wires and were immediately sealed and sent to the senior watch officer, day or night. The senior watch officer read them and made the determination who to call, what to do with it, so on and so on. There were some, NODIS's and others and restricted messages, which obviously should not have been. Half of them were overclassified, and you marked who should get them and send them on. Initially they weren't shown to any people on the watch. I learned to read very, very quickly, and after just a few lines you'd see what it was, and I'd hand it to my associate watch officer and he'd take care of it, and I'd read on. Well, in a few cases things were sensitive enough so that you read this and you said, "Wow!" Seal them up in the envelope and hand carry it yourself down to the executive secretary in the front office. I didn't worry about distributing it. It was this type of judgment call. In the middle of the night if something happened, you'd say who to wake up, what to do with it. The one thing, and it might be of interest to any historians or researchers looking for things, would be the fact that I was the senior watch officer on the night shift when our embassy in Tehran was invaded. I made Time Magazine on that one. But I think the picture is worth the vignette for people thinking how does government work. It was three o'clock in the morning. The watch was dead. It was absolutely silent, nothing was happening, and I was sitting at a counter, a control board and everything up there, which is used 24 hours a day and it has the coffee and Coke and it's a mess. It's covered with stains and dust, you know, coffee stains. So I sat there and said, "Oh, my god, we've got to clean this up." So I looked at my associate watch officer and said, "Come on, let's clean up." So we picked everything up and got it off and went and got the spray and sprayed the desks and got paper towels and were wiping away, and right in the middle of this the phone rings. I think I picked the phone up. Yes, I picked up the phone up, not the associate, but I picked the phone up myself. "This is..." - the young woman who was the political officer in Tehran when this happened.

Q: I've interviewed her.

STEVEN: You know the one. Maybe we can put her name in. Elizabeth?

Q: Swift.

STEVEN: Swift. They called her Swifty; her friends called her Swifty. Elizabeth Swift was on the phone and said, "I'm back in the embassy in Tehran. We're being invaded by a mob." And I could hear the sounds in the background. I said, "You are?" She said, "Yes, we're in the refuge" - I forget the exact terminology. "We had pulled back into the inner area with the vault doors and shut things off, and they were trying to break in." So at the same time that I was listening to her talking about this, I'm frantically motioning to the associate watch officer to pick up number one, to get on with me, and then secondly to start pushing the necessary line buttons. I will always remember, and I hope it tracks with her memory, a short conversation. There were Marines there; the Marine guards were there, and they had their weapons. I heard her yelling at the marines, "Put the guns down. Put them under the desk." They apparently were ready to go down and die shooting, but she had the good common sense, even in those circumstances, to recognize, number one, that was suicide and, number two, she said, "They don't seem to be hurting people." It wasn't one of those situations where they were breaking in and obviously killing people. They were taking hostages and prisoners, but it wasn't, if I can use the term, violent in that sense. They were just trying to get control. She was telling these Marines, "Put the weapons down. Put them away." And then I do remember something to the effect that "somebody's coming over here now" - they had broken in - "somebody's coming over here now." That was the end of the connection. She told me later that they ripped the phone out. So by that time I went over to the system which, for anybody who's ever worked in this, is called the NOISWAN, National Operational Intelligence Officers Warning And Working, a green telephone at that time. This may all be changed now; this was years ago. You punched this button, and it automatically connects you to all the other operational centers, CIA, National Military Command Center, the NSC, the White House Situation Room, the NSA, the whole works, automatically. You're all on. And they check in, and as soon as the last one checks in, you say, "This is State. Here's our problem." I remember saying something fairly idiotic in retrospect: "Gentlemen, we have a problem." I explained it to them, and then I think I had asked the associate watch officer to get the Assistant Secretary. At first, we called the Executive Director at the Bureau. I said, "Get the Executive Director," because I had seen him that day and knew he was in town at least, so he called him. And then the very next call he made was to Assistant Secretary Saunders.

Q: Hal Saunders.

STEVEN: Hal Saunders was, I think, the man at the time. And I woke him up. It's now three-30, four o'clock in the morning, and I woke him and told him what was happening. He said he was coming right in and asked me to wake up his country director and some other people. But while that was being done by the staff, I was getting other people notified and doing my own chain of command, as they would want to come in, supervisors. But then I thought it was about time probably to let the Secretary know, because he was going to get hit by the press and everything else as soon as he wakes up in the morning and he'd better be briefed. He's going to want to be here. But waking up the Secretary of State in the middle of the night, you don't really want to do this unless it's something special. So I did then call Saunders back - he was still at the house; he hadn't left yet - and I said, "Mr. Saunders, I'm beginning to think it's time to get the Secretary." He said, "Yes, you're right. Go ahead." So we reached over and pushed the red button. It was a red button on the keyboard at that time. They've replaced all these consoles. At that time there was a red button you pushed, and it rang the classified scramble phone beside the Secretary's bed. This sort of sleepy voice said, "Yes?" I explained the situation to him. He was very calm and he said, "All right. I'm coming in." It went on from there. People began to arrive one after another. Everybody starting coming in, and pretty soon the place was overflowing and we then pushed them off into an operational room.

Q: Ann Swift, by the way, Elizabeth Ann Swift, known as Ann Swift.

STEVEN: I'll always remember somebody called in once. A couple of her colleagues who knew her well called her Swifty. But we got the task force behind me and we started over in another room. And, again, I'm trying to think of things that might be of more historical interest. We didn't really know what was happening out there. The embassy was no longer talking to us, and CNN wasn't as ubiquitous as it is today, and we were sort of wondering what was going on. One of the people who had already gotten in there, I think the desk officer or somebody, had just served in Tehran, and he said, "You know, there are a couple of the other embassies nearby. Maybe they'd be willing to tell us what's happening. The Swedish embassy was overlooking ours. I pictured it always on some sort of a ridge line, but the term he used, "It overlooks ours," so whatever that was. I don't know Tehran. So I called the AT&T long lines office in New York City, which was an emergency center they had. We had a direct line to them, essentially a way for us to override any other traffic, if necessary, for State emergencies, US government emergencies. I called them and said, "This is State Operations Center. We have an overriding emergency. I need to talk to the Swedish embassy in Tehran, and, bless their hearts, they didn't say, "Huh?" They said, "Okay" and hung up. Within about 60 second there was a voice on the other end, and I said, "Is this the Swedish embassy in Tehran?" "Yes, it is. Who is this?" I explained, and they got their ambassador on the phone, so I explained to their ambassador, "Mr. Ambassador, we understand that our embassy is being overrun by a mob." He said, "Yes, I am standing here looking at it." His English was excellent, of course, with accent. He said, "I am standing here looking at it." I said, "Mr. Ambassador, can you tell us what's going on?" So he was describing what he could see, about having gotten in and so on. He said, "I see people being brought out." He said, "I don't think they are hurting anybody." He didn't see blood or things like that. So our source of information for quite a while was the Swedish ambassador to Tehran looking over our shoulders for us. By then it was getting to six or seven in the morning and things were really hot. My poor editor on the watch, who was supposed to be compiling the morning report. I just made a snap decision and I said, "Forget the summary this morning. We'll be doing a special summary on this situation obviously, unless there's a world war somewhere else in the world. Forget it. I'll be responsible for it." I kept waiting for somebody to come down and say, "Wait a minute. Where's the morning summary?" This fellow was more usefully involved doing something else. It turned out, just as an after note, that the Department's leadership was very, very good. I don't think they ever noticed, frankly, that the summary hadn't been done. The one or two comments I did get was, "Obviously you did the right thing." That made me happy.

The other point of interest, and for future reference for many people, because of the number of hostages in the embassy, the wives back here, they had been in a tense situation and many wives were here, families were here, and the officers were in Tehran without their families. So they were not only at home in the States, but some of them had already come into the Department. Someone, not me certainly, a senior watch officer, but somebody above, brought them into the operations area, two or three of these wives to represent the group, and they were installed in the task force area right next to the people who were trying to carry on classified conversations and make decisions about the life and safety of their husbands out in the embassy. I saw this and I immediately took it up with the director of the Operations Center, who by that time was in, and said, "We've got to get them out of there. For whatever reason, you can't have these uncleared family members sitting there inhibiting the talk and the decision making going on." And the reaction was, "Well, we couldn't do that, because that would look bad. It would be bad press relations if we chased the family representatives out of the operations area when we are going this. It wouldn't be good." So they then moved over and took a conference room which was right next to them. It was a classified conference room we could have used for conferences on this. We turned that over to the operations group. It had a door, a single door, leading then into the operations area. But it still was no good, because the door was never closed. They wandered in and out, and they set up this 24-hour arrangement, which was very beautifully run by these wives, but there would be three or four at least in there every time, and other family members just came in, listening to everything going on. Two or three times I and other members, the senior watch officers, raised this and said, "We can't function this way," and were told, "No, no, no, it's politically impossible to run them out now. Therefore, we just have to live with it." Quite quickly, within a very few days, the desk officers, the people in the Bureau, had decided that they couldn't work this way and they were going to move the key elements out of the Operations Center. So they did. The political officers in effect were back and working in their own bureau, and they set up their own mini-task force there, leaving in the official task force area all of its resources and communications and so on, leaving there only the consulate element and other sort of noncontroversial things. A lot of the consular element, of course, and all that and citizens having trouble, they were all there, but the key decision-making not being done where it was supposed to be done. It was being done in a makeshift way down below because of this decision to put the wives in there. It was the sort of thing that, of course, we wrote up. We, the senior watch officers, wrote a joint memo to our director saying this should never be allowed to happen again, that an arrangement should be made for an alternative area for these people away from the classified area. For the entire months that that thing went on, the whole operation was badly handicapped by the fact that you had non-operational people there. Not only that, even if you trusted them, they were people who were emotionally involved. No officer wanted to say, "Look, we may have to take a chance if they're going to kill these people. We're going to do this." You can't do that sitting there in front of their wives. It was a bad decision made at the time.

Other incidents in the Operations Center just covered the entire range. A Coast Guard cutter was calling in wanting to stop a foreign vessel in the Caribbean checking for narcotics. We had to get people in the appropriate desks, then we had to contact the embassy of the country, Peru or Venezuela or Mexico, and they had to find local authorities. The poor Coast Guard guys were sitting out there bouncing up and down for three to four hours following some boat trying to get authority to get on board, and of course if they didn't get the authority, the boat might very well by that time have gone to shore or something like that. It was busy and messy. The messages were coming in, and one I remember even where it came from, and who was involved, but I think all it's appropriate to say is that it was a NODIS Cherokee message from an outraged ambassador who vented his anger over something that had been done, and his action wasn't questioned. I remember sealing that one up immediately and taking down to the front office. I think the operation is probably more professional now. They have better communications now.

Q: I think all the time that's the question.

STEVEN: At the time, the communications boards that we had were very limited. They were the boards that had been used at the National Military Command Center. When the National Military Command Center modernized, the old stuff was sent to State. We got stuff with 1950s technology, and it was really limited. I think we had something like 12 conference lines. Well, 12 conference lines sounds like a lot, but in any sort of a crisis they immediately disappear. And every time you'd do that, you've tied up more of your communications, and we didn't have the modern equipment to switch people in and out. One night - I happened to be involved in this - we had one of these Coast Guard things going on, and somebody said, "You know, I understand that the Coast Guard" - they knew somebody over there "has a beautiful, new, modern switch arrangement over there and has the ability to help us put in somebody that's on the other lines." So we called the Coast Guard Operations Center, and they had somebody on duty over there who was just right there. He said, "How can we help?" I said, "Could you handle this conference call that we're running. It's mostly your people and your cutter and everything else. Could we get it picked up on your switchboard?" He says, "Sure." Buttons were pushed and things were done, and eventually, you know... We were still there. We still had access to the continents, but it was being monitored and run out of their switchboard and not holding up our communications. The next time we had a crisis, it didn't involve the Coast Guard at all. One of our other senior watch officers called them again and said, "Look, guys, we're in trouble. Can you help us?" Well, it got to the point for awhile when they were carrying the load for State by handling a lot of our communication traffic that we couldn't manage with our antiquated equipment and they were putting it onto their switchboard for us, until eventually we got modern equipment. Today, I understand, we can handle it. But there's nothing more embarrassing than having the Secretary of the Navy, or lots of other senior people on a conference call and have it break down because of obsolete equipment. The Coast Guard became our saviors. I remember reporting this to the Executive Director of the Department. "The Coast Guard is listening to all our stuff?" I said, "Well, obviously we're not putting out the most classified stuff. They are, after all, officers cleared," and so on and so forth. So they were handling all sorts of State stuff over there for months on their switchboard for us. Anyway, it was a fascinating time.

Q: Well, you left there when?

STEVEN: It would have been, I guess, 18 months later.

Q: '81 or '80?

STEVEN: '80, over in '80, again coming up for assignment.

Q: Well, why don't we pick this up in 1980. You were just coming off the watch thing, and we'll pick it up then.

Today is the 19th of September 2001. Bob, in 1980 you come off the watch thing. Where'd you go?

STEVEN: I went to the Inspector General's office as an inspector. As a side observation for those who might be interested in this more as a career pattern than any historical interest, how these things happen, about that time I was aware of two things. First, I probably wasn't going to become an ambassador. I was not in the right track for that. And secondly, that really wasn't much of an ambition that I had or had ever had. I was far more interested in the jobs I was doing and the life I was living and not worrying so much about where I might be 10 years from now. Fortunately for me, I had a wonderful wife who agreed with that. I think she also put it that she wasn't terribly anxious to be an ambassador's wife with all the responsibilities and so on that that took. So we began to look very carefully at the career and think what could I do that would be very interesting and rewarding, would keep me from getting selected out but at the same time have a pattern. And the IG looked like a good possibility. I went over there, and it happened that I knew Bob Brewster, who was then Director General. I had met him in the past. And he expressed delight that I was interested, and the next thing I knew I was an inspector. In the usual fashion in the Department, a couple of weeks after that I was put on a team with a new team leader, who had never been an inspector before, and we were sent out to do some inspecting. As a matter of fact, we were going to go to inspect Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Pacific Islands. We had the manual, the Foreign Affairs Manual for Inspectors, the inspection manual, handed to us and they said, "Go ahead and inspect," and it was a fascinating way of learning by doing, which we're so good at. I think we had something, theoretically a week of training, but it was pretty useless, pretty much 'how you fill out the forms' type of thing. And off we went to be inspectors.

Q: In the first place I'd like to get the date. From 1980 to when were you an inspector?

STEVEN: Two years, to '82.

Q: It was changing then.

STEVEN: It was changing indeed, yes. At the time that I was there, it was still the State Department's Inspector General in traditional form, headed by a Foreign Service Officer, with active-duty ambassadors as team leaders, who bid for these jobs like anybody else, and the staff mostly Foreign Service Officers. They were at the same time, however, bringing in what became known as AQIs, or audit-qualified inspectors. We had been criticized for not having professional, particularly administrative, inspectors who could handle finances. So they went out and got people like this, mostly from the General Accounting Office, who came over as inspectors, and they were a new, different animal to us. I think they were appalled - sometimes they told me so - at what they considered our lack of professionalism, 'our' being Foreign Service Officers. We made our notes and did our things but operated very much on instinct and occasionally looking at the manual when we had a question. They operated very much to the professional standards of the GAO where every conclusion, every fact had to be footnoted and documented. They were used to inspections, or work, that might take six months and went really into depth in a fairly narrow subject. We were used to work which took two weeks in an embassy and went an inch deep. It took a great deal of adjustment, cultural adjustment, on both sides for that. It was a very interesting time. I went to various parts of the world. I did the political/economic work at the embassies. If it was a large embassy, we would have a political inspector and an economic expert and we would inspect those sections. If it were a smaller embassy, oftentimes I'd do both at the same time. I also learned that most inspections were heavily focused, then as now, on things where you can quantify, where you can actually see what you're doing, the finances, the general services, the contracting, the security, things where you could actually put your hands on it. We had a very, very poor system for looking at the political reporting, for example. It was instinct. The political officer inspector would talk to the people there, read some of their product, and make a judgment, based supposedly on his superior background and knowledge, of what value he had there. I think it worked reasonably well because the political inspectors - and I modestly put myself in that category - were aware of what was needed and what good inspection entailed. We, of course, had found out from the desk what they supposedly wanted and what were the important things going on, but it was very much an amateur, ad hoc, operation, familiar probably to any Foreign Service Officer of my generation. The work for the two years I was there was fascinating. I was glad I did it. I was on the road a great deal, saw a good part of the world I'd never seen before, and worked with some very good people.

At the end of that assignment, an interesting possibility came up that I'd never heard of before. There was in the Middle East then a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, under which Israel had agreed to evacuate the Sinai, which they had taken in the '67 war, and they would pull all the way back to the Israeli border. Egyptians could move back into Sinai but, under the treaty arrangements, into a series of zones, which became increasingly demilitarized the closer you got to Israel. The border zone was about a third of the Sinai, roughly a third. It's the third nearest to Israel where there were police only. They were to have no heavy weapons, no regular infantry. The middle zone had a very limited and controlled number of military forces. The zone nearest to Egypt obviously were allowed even more.

Q: I want to go back to the inspection job. One always zeroes in on the problems rather than 'everything's fine' and all. What was your feeling about the reporting system at that time? Particularly political reporters, were they getting in too much depth things that had been picked up, over-reading in newspapers and all?

STEVEN: It varied very much between the embassies and between the individual officers. There were some embassies - I remember one which is applicable to your question although it came in one of my later incarnations with the IG, but I will cite it because it's so obvious. A small embassy which had four political and economic officers in a combined section, so there were four substantive reporting officers in a small embassy of moderate interest to us. The US national interests there were not threatened. It was basically consular and trade questions. I noticed the reporting very quickly. It was heavily focused on what the newspapers were saying, or other published sources. The local union movement, which was very powerful, would publish a manifesto, and they would report on that in depth. They were very limited in interviews with people, very limited analysis of what all this meant. It was as if they were just a newspaper staff out there just picking up everything that was there and sending it back to Washington, where, I had already determined, nobody was reading much of it. It wasn't very interesting. And I kept saying to myself, "Why have I got four reporting officers out here when four reporting officers would make a wonderful addition to many other places around the world that were desperately short?" So I convinced the people in the section plus the ambassador at the post and, of course, my own team leader that indeed they were overstaffed and at a minimum one position should be released. I thought two would be perfectly appropriate, but that met so much opposition and one would have been a small victory, so we took what we got. Later, within a month after I had made my recommendation, they had accepted it, they had moved the officer to an Eastern European post which was desperately shorthanded and desperately needed help and where this particular officer had a chance to shine, to show ability and respond to the challenge and improve a career, whereas in the embassy I was inspecting that officer would have continued to do a lackluster job through no fault of the officer and ended up getting a moderately good performance review. This was the type of thing I felt was useful. It was, however, clear to me at that time that the Department depended very much on individual officers to try to guess what might be useful. The amount of guidance given by desk officers and country directors to the people reporting it wanted was minuscule. There was very little feedback. Again and again I heard the description, "It's the black hole back there. I wrote a 15-page dispatch or airgram and thought I'd really done a wonderful job on something, and I got a mild pat on the back, 'gee, that was a great airgram' and no analysis of it or how it responded or what they really wanted more, what questions it answered or raised. It just vanished."

Q: Is this endemic to the system?

STEVEN: I think it was systemic, yes. There were exceptions, of course, but the exceptions tended to prove the rule. In most cases you were looking at people floundering in many cases with no real guidance system what was wanted. Now, in a crisis country, of course, they were focused because then they had to be, but where there was not intense focus of interest back here, the people were pretty much left to report anything they thought was important. So what might be important to me as a reporting officer that I wanted to focus on might satisfy my interest, but frankly it was of no particular interest to anybody back here. It was one of the things that I noticed as an inspector, and it's not changed all that much, I'm terribly sorry to say. My last active inspection was in the field just a very few years ago, and it hadn't changed that much. The inspection system identified these weaknesses. I thought we did a pretty good job of that. You would comment on things you saw that were wrong. The response of the Department was "Do no more." Oh dear, I'll probably get hung by my fellow inspectors for this. I don't really think myself that the Inspector General's office, in the many, many years since 1980 that I've been associated, has made that much of a contribution. The Department has resisted. We were pretty good at finding the fraud, you know. If somebody's embezzling the money, you'll find that, or something really wrong or if the ambassador is pinching the behinds of the secretaries, that will get reported, but the overall ability of our Inspector General system to influence the Department positively, I think, has been minimal. It's pretty sad.

Q: One of the complaints has been that so many requirements are loaded onto reporting officers that they do end up sort of office bound, and to really be any good you kind of have to get out and mix and mingle...

STEVEN: You should be out on the street.

Q: ...making your contacts, going out and around, and not sitting back. That's a CIA amorous type thing.

STEVEN: No, that's very, very clear indeed. It's never changed, the inevitable progression, if something interests the Department. I believe it was in the Carter years they got interested in the youth movement and, therefore, every embassy had big youth reports to fill out and you had to show that you were meeting with youth leaders and you identified youth leaders and then found people that you could send to the States and so on. I do remember an incident that I found amusing and an illustration of what you're saying exactly. An ambassador, a politically appointed ambassador with some influence in the White House, was given the requirements for this youth report, which probably was going to occupy one of his officers for a month putting together all this and then distracting him; going around and talking to the supposed youth leaders and so on. And so he came back to the Department with a message that was certainly passed around in the IG staff, saying, "I don't have the people to do this. I can't do it without giving up some other function." He put it in more elegant terms but it was basically, "Tell me what you don't want anymore, that I should stop doing, so that I can do this." There was a lot of hemming and hawing, and, as I recall, it was sort of left hanging. The instruction was still out there but it was clear that they didn't expect to enforce it, and he continued to ignore it. So the program didn't get done at that post. It depends on your ambassador. If the ambassador's got the influence, he can get away with that sort of thing. If he's a career officer with no political influence as such in a small place, he does it at his peril. He's expected to have youth reports and he'll do it somehow.

Q: With people who've done inspection, I always have to ask a little bit about life and love in the Foreign Service. Do you have any stories to tell about problems you found?

STEVEN: Oh, yes, of course, the cocktail party stories. The factor that to me is more interesting and might be of general interest to a researcher is the role of the inspector. When I did this I was still in mid-career. I'd been told that my manner was enough like a clergyman, my father having been a clergyman, that people sort of instinctively talked to me. Maybe they were the institution skills that we're supposed to have developed. But I found that people, if you approach them properly in an embassy in private interviews, began to unburden themselves in a way they would perhaps to a priest or something, or to a dear, close friend. There was an assumption on their parts that it would be discreet, that we could be trusted, we weren't going to get them into trouble, and, therefore, they could pour out their hearts to us. I was told things that were truly to me astonishing about their relationships with their fellow workers and their superiors, the life at the post, the difficulties they were facing. I had one fairly senior officer break down in his interview with me and cry over the problems he was having dealing with his ambassador, because he saw his career going down the drain. He was dealing with a non-career ambassador who didn't like him obviously and was determined to send this fellow home, which might have helped him in a sense, because sometimes when a career man gets run out by a politician, you shrug and go on. But he was living in a very, very stressful situation, watching his record getting blotted and thinking 'but for that SOB, I would be on my way to the career I wanted, and now it's probably going to vanish'. And having him weeping there, it was one of the more difficult moments trying to be empathetic but at the same time professional, give him some guidance if I could, and I was able to, as a matter of fact.

Q: What did you advise?

STEVEN: Well, in a case like that it was clear to me that the man had been too passive. He was accepting this treatment from his ambassador and had not at any point in effect turned around to the ambassador and said, "This is not working. You've got to tell me more clearly what it is you dislike about what I am doing," or whatever, or stating flatly, "I think it would be better for you and for me if I got out of here." But he was just sort of letting this thing go without taking a step to either resolve it or to get out of it. He had to do one or the other; he couldn't keep going. Of course, I had to follow up later to find out what happened. Once you leave the post, oftentimes you never know what happens, but in this particular case, I gathered that he went to his ambassador and laid out the situation, and the ambassador professed to be shocked at the idea that he had pushed this man to this point and that things were really that bad. By all means, he respected the officer and really felt that he wanted him to stay on and they'd try to work this out. I guess they eventually did satisfactorily. But this is where an inspector can be helpful, as an outsider that they can pour out their feelings to or an outsider who can raise questions.

Q: This is what I always considered the role of the inspector sort of during my time, and I left about '81 or so, but I've been told that it's changed, at least early on when the new inspection thing came out. These are people not to help you but to find out... They were after waste, fraud and inefficiency, so don't treat these guys as a confessor, treat these guys as someone you've got to have an attorney sit with you when you go in, which was a whole different category. Did you see that?

STEVEN: Oh, of course. The inspection corps traditionally in State was a group of management inspectors. I've seen that term used. A management inspector is someone sent around by management to inspect and report back. It's a reality check for management, and as much of their job is not just to report back but to see what they can do to assist in the situations that they find out in the branch office. And that works very well if it's understood that is what they're there for. What the problem became is the fear that you were not getting independent judgment, because the people who were sent out to do this work were themselves members of the system. First, they might not even see something wrong because they'd always had it that way themselves and they assumed it was fine; or, secondly, if they did see something that was truly wrong, there was a great deal of concern because, if they reported it and caused a furor, and particularly if they got a reputation for doing this in more than one or two places, very quickly the word went out and that officer pretty well had finished himself in at least the geographic bureau where he was working. "Oh, yes, Steven's a troublemaker, you know. If he applies for a job in this bureau, we don't want him." I did see during my career in the IG one instance of that, where we found a situation at a post that truly needed very critical reporting, and not fraud but just complete incompetence. The inspector who would have to write that up - what we finally did, we had to write it up and push it through an administrative officer who refused to do so. He just flatly said, "No, I will not do that, because my future is tied up with this bureau and I have to go from here in the inspection corps, back to one of these jobs, and if I'm involved in this, pushing that person in that situation in this embassy, I'll never be able to work here again. I refuse to do it. If you want to send me home off the inspection team, Mr. Ambassador leading the team, you can do so." That is a breakdown, a complete breakdown, in the concept of inspections, and it was this sort of thing that basically caused the change. There was concern not just in State - and really in IG there were many of us who felt this way - but the General Accounting Office, the Congress, that the only way that you were going to get an independent view is by sending people who are not part of that system. In the professional standards, so-called Yellow Book of the General Accounting Office which gives professional standards, the basic point is that the inspector must be independent and objective. You cannot depend for your paycheck on the people that you're inspecting. The change that came, I think, was inevitable as we entered the modern world. Was there a cost? Of course. We knew that at the time, that increasingly as you brought in auditors and others from outside the Department who hadn't been Foreign Service Officers, who hadn't lived at embassies abroad and faced their problems, we would lose that empathetic knowledge of the post and how they operate and the inspectors would become to be seen more and more as looking to nail somebody for something: a sort of gotcha! It also raised the question, which I don't believe has ever been resolved, whether you can do that with almost all your administrative and consular functions or not. Either you were issuing honest contracts or you were not. If your visa rejection rate and visas were so bad, INS picking people up back here, you can measure that, but how do you measure success in foreign policy. Even in economic sections you could quantify it sometimes - was the economic reporting, forecasting logical or not? - because you could see what happened; and with the business assistance, did they get business? The political side of it particularly was extremely difficult to measure. We still have never really found a good way to do that. I think that the changes that then came over the IG - and that's what we'll mention later, because I went back to the IG a couple of times - increasingly shifted away from the management inspector 'we're here to help you' function to the much more objective, harsher system of going out and looking at people and being able to say what you want about it because there isn't much of a backlash against you personally. We did see something that hadn't been expected at the beginning and which is today even questioned. I know many people in the inspection business. We brought in, I mentioned earlier, the so-called audit qualified inspectors, people from the GAO who came in. These are civil service people, low middle rank, who came over, permanently transferred, from their old jobs to the State Department. They very quickly discovered that life in the Foreign Service can be more interesting. "I wouldn't mind an assignment out there to one of those embassies somewhere. It's a good idea." If you stayed with the IG as an inspector, you were going to be on the road up to half the year, living out of a suitcase, and there wasn't all that much chance for improving your position. Yes, you might work your way up a bit, but you probably weren't going to become any team leader, because those were Foreign Service Officers. So after a while, some after a couple of years, some after several years, began looking for some way to change the situation, and several of them managed to get so-called "excursion" tours to Foreign Service postings. Wouldn't it be useful if this inspector had a tour in an embassy somewhere to see how it actually was done and then go back to the IG. Well, increasingly they didn't go back to the IG. One of them has gotten to the level of a deputy assistant secretary since that time - very human, very understanding, but again compromising IG independence, because you're looking ahead already and saying, "Hey, I want to be part of this system some day," and even if you don't admit it to yourself, you may be afraid that you're compromising your reputation as being a troublemaker and you won't later get into the system that you want. So they're still struggling with this.

Q: Another thing: with obvious exceptions, it seems like you're using a very large hammer to hit a very small tack as far as looking for fraud. One, the State Department doesn't handle a lot of the money; it's more a management job. So, again with exceptions, you get people running around looking at expense vouchers and all, which are kind of minor: 'Well, maybe you could have taken the bus instead of the train' or something like that, a lot of high-powered talent looking at some pretty mediocre stuff. Correct me if I'm wrong.

STEVEN: Part of the difficulty, of course, is we would, I, for example used to, look at representation vouchers for more than one reason: one, of course, were they legitimate or were they obviously charging off their birthday party to the representation fund; but, more importantly, to see what the pattern was, who were they entertaining. In more modern times now, of course, we have mission program plans, things of this type, and they're supposed to be focusing on this aspect of the situation particularly. And you find out the majority of all the representation funds are going to people in other areas who are of no interest to us: "Why are you entertaining these people, using your scarce funds there, when, according to your own mission program plan, those are among the least of your concerns, that area?" "Well, because, you know, they're nice people." That's not the idea. So reviewing things is looking for patterns as much as anything else. If you look at, as I did, at a half a year's representation vouchers for a section, obviously you're going to find a few where you scratch your head and say, "Gee, he really didn't have very many foreigners there. That was probably paying off his debt to his fellow members of the diplomatic corps." But the overall pattern was all right. He was getting the people he should be getting. Fine, we didn't go into that. But the administrative inspectors, who knew much more about these things than I, were looking for patterns of massive fraud where somebody was raking out large amounts of money in fraudulent or a fraudulent contract where they had been kickbacks, this type of thing. And you have to do that, if nothing else, to keep people sort of honest, like the IRS, you know. You may get audited, so it helps keep people honest.

Q: Well, then in between...

STEVEN: In '82 I went around and found that they were looking in HA, Humanitarian Affairs, at that time for an office director for policy and plans, which sounded vague enough to be interesting, the sort of job where you could perhaps write your own position description. So I went and interviewed for it and was given the job. It has a portfolio of things that basically didn't fit somewhere else, and you could very much make it a path of what you wanted to do in that office. The Assistant Secretary at the time was Elliott Abrams, who has later become more controversial. I found the job quite fascinating, but very soon after I got involved, got stuck with something which changed it enormously. The Department was required to write annual human rights reports on every country, and those human rights reports were submitted by the embassies based on a set of criteria. The Bureau or HA would send out an airgram which listed pretty much, "These are the areas we want you to cover," but within that format you could go almost anywhere. It was fascinating to watch the reports when they came in, because they were very, very different. People interpreted the instructions very differently. And the pattern I saw, which really didn't surprise me - it disappointed me but it didn't surprise me - was making excuses for your host country. "They're not very nice to people with the opposition parties, but you have to understand that in this culture..." There was always "yes but." Some of them were almost caricatures of reporting, euphemisms, ways to somehow try to avoid saying anything terribly bad, and emphasizing always, "This isn't America. Our ideas can't be translated here. This is a different culture. They don't do things the way we do," but in the final analysis not coming right out and saying, "They regularly torture anybody they arrest here, just on general principles," or "The place doesn't have any freedom of the press at all, and if you dared to write anything contrary to the government, you would very quickly end up in jail." It's a cultural thing, I think, with us. An ambassador, a post, is expected to "maintain good relations" with the host government. Now, whether that host government is Nazi Germany in the '30s or whatever, if there's a lot of trouble, if the host government is complaining about the American embassy, the ambassador doesn't have good access to senior people in that government who don't want to talk to him, all too often he's not doing his job. So the human rights reports really forced people to do some very creative writing, some of them. Most of them were perfectly fine, good, honest, objective reporting, but so many were ones that we would pass around the office to look at this paragraph, an unbelievable sort of thing.

Q: Of course, part of the problem was that human rights reports just didn't come in, but they were handed to Congress, which then published them. I ran into this. I did a history of the counselor service, and back in the 1890s prior to the Spanish American War, they had the foreign relations series that had been going since the Civil War, but they published selective documents the year after they were sent in, and we had a couple of consulates in Cuba stormed by Spanish settlers who didn't like what we were saying. So that format causes you to pull your punches somewhat.

STEVEN: But, if I may say it, the obvious problem with requiring these human rights reports is the overall philosophical question: Is it in our interests as a diplomatic organization or function of the government to be forced into reporting things that are going to make it difficult for us to carry on diplomatic relations. On the other hand, you know, this is America, the American people want to hear what's going on, and these things should be done. What I found so disturbing to me personally was not just the willingness in so many cases to sort of put aside atrocities of human rights, to turn a blind eye to it - that's human, that's not the Foreign Service, that's human - but the officer who wrote in from an African post who pointed out how the local 'big man' was doing all these authoritarian things, controlling the parties, this, that and the other, and the press, his opposition was arrested, and so on, and they made a fair presentation of all this, which frankly you could read in the newspapers, and then went on record as saying, "But this 'big man' properly regards the economic development of his country so that his people can be fed and so on, as to require setting aside for the time being the niceties of political rights." I looked at that and I said, "The man can think this, but only a fool in the atmosphere in which we were working would write that in a report to Congress." It's a situation I similarly ran into as an inspector: a senior officer today who continuously harasses the women in the embassy in truly outrageous ways. That was back in the early '80s when I first started this. You can't force the man to stop lusting in his heart after the women. You can't force him to have a better mental attitude. You can force him not to display it. You can say, "You're too stupid to be an ambassador if you don't realize that you can't pinch the secretary's behind." You can go to a political officer and an ambassador who approved his report and say, "You're too stupid to be allowed out loose when you write something like that in a report that's going to Congress, when you know very, very well it is the policy of this administration and government that we don't approve of repression and human rights violations."

Many of our officers always surprise me at their lack of plain common sense. The officer today who perhaps was raised in a situation where he found black people offensive or found that they were incompetent or believed that they shouldn't be in the Foreign Service. I can't change that in him probably if that's in his mind, but I can sure complain if he's stupid enough to put it in writing or to actually exercise prejudice against a black officer in his embassy. And yet you find that. You find people who are arrogant, ignorant - I don't know what the explanation would be - who would leave an inspector just shaking your head in wonder at how did this person ever get to be a political officer or a DCM or even an ambassador when they are so stupid that they don't know what can be said publicly.

Q: What role did you have on these reports?

STEVEN: Well, I wrote most of them. The political officer traditionally on the team is almost always the editor.

Q: No, I'm talking about the human rights reports when you...?

STEVEN: Well, they were submitted to the Department, and they had ad hoc ways of handling them, and then finally in my office. I think we did the first ones under that arrangement. All of the reports were brought in by the embassies and sent to their desks. The desks then edited, supposedly, and made sure they were appropriate, then submitted them to me. And in my office I was given a team of temporary officers - I think I had three at one time - who were assigned there, usually somebody between assignments or whatever or somebody on a medical restriction, to help edit them and get them into shape to be published in that big, thick government book. It became obvious very, very quickly that we had a big problem. The level of writing was surprisingly disappointing for people who are supposed to be able to write. That's so supposed to be our stock in trade. We are word smiths. We are supposed to be able to write. Some of these things came in with poor grammar, misspellings, badly written reports, reflecting sometimes, I think what happened, they gave them to the most junior officer in the section. In fact, I know this happened. They gave them to the most junior officer in the section, who dashed them off, and they were given a quick review by his superiors to make sure they weren't glaringly offensive to somebody, then shipped. So we spent far too much time literally rewriting the grammar and misuse of words and so on, and correcting or catching things like the comment of the officer in Africa that I mentioned that had to be redone. That meant not going back out to the post - there wasn't time - but going to the desk officer and country director and saying, "We can't use this. We can't have this done this way." And in one case, similar to the one I described to you, the country director was horrified, because he hadn't read the report when he came in himself, and he said, "My , this is terrible," and we changed it on the spot. Eventually we put these big books together, but I found that was taking almost half of my working year.

Q: Did you get involved in the annual battle of Israel?

STEVEN: Yes, that very much was a problem.

Q: Could you explain what we're referring to.

STEVEN: Well, the reports coming in had to satisfy both the Israeli lobby and the Palestinian lobby. How did you write a report that was objective about what Israel did and why it did it and then a report also which was objective about what the Palestinians were doing or had done to them. There were all sorts of interest groups on all sides pressing about this. Yes, I became involved only as a referee. I wasn't expected to or wanted to make a substantive judgment about it. What I had to do was to say, "Look, this is the instruction put out by the Secretary of State as to what you ought to cover. Here's your report which doesn't do it. Now, how do we resolve that?" But whether the emphasis should be one way or another eventually had to be determined by the Bureau, and we had at least some of the reports that were eventually discussed by the assistant secretary of the regional bureau and the assistant secretary for HA, at that level, to resolve tone more than substance. Another one that I recall specifically as being particularly difficult was, of all things, Ireland. The report on Great Britain included Northern Ireland, and I remember, as this was being done, having people make an appointment with me who were Americans but basically were Irish radicals. They sat in my office, three of them, berating the Department of State for not understanding the terrible human rights atrocities being perpetuated against the poor Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, the bloody oppression by the British and the fanatical terrorists on the Protestant side. These people's eyes were flashing and their faces were flushed, and there was a young woman there who was just leaning forward bitterly condemning what we were not recognizing in our report. I thought that if we can't make peace between Christians in Northern Ireland, we're going to have a hell of a job making peace between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East. It was fascinating. And there were other things we got involved in, oftentimes just the story of the day and how it was going to be handled, and so on.

Q: How did you find Elliott Abrams as a person to work for?

STEVEN: Elliott was fine to work for on the personal side, very much a gentleman, a kind, pleasant person to work with. I often wondered then and I still wonder today. His politics appear to be somewhat to the right. This has been the subject of Elliott Abrams. Your researchers will know his history from other places, getting into trouble with Congressman not telling them what was going on, and he's now in the present administration in the White House. Occupying the position he was in was very, very difficult, because I believe he was very much of a conservative, not giving human rights perhaps the same emphasis that might come under a different assistant secretary from a more liberal background, and yet at the same time a man sincerely trying to carry out the mandates of the administration in which he was working. There was one instance that disturbed me very much and has always been in my memory, and I've been debating with myself whether this should go into the record here for you, but I'm going to do it because someone someday may want to see these things. The discussion was going on at the time about Chile and our policy toward Chile, what we should be doing there. It was known in the office, discussed, and I contributed, my background having been involved in Chilean affairs both there and later, and this was long enough after that - this is a few years after...

Q: Pinochet was in full power.

STEVEN: Pinochet was in full power, yes, but it was long enough after the Letelier bombing so that it wasn't on the front pages anymore; it was three or four years back. And I was standing in Elliott's office talking with him, just the two of us - there was nobody else there, and I had gone in to ask him a question or something unrelated - and we got talking about the Chile situation again. I just mentioned Orlando Letelier and the case and how it had affected and complicated the relationships we were having with Chile. Elliott seemed to be aware of the Letelier name, and then he looked at me and said, "Wasn't he some kind of a Communist?" In the context of the conversation we were having, I interpreted it, and I think correctly, as almost saying, "So, what difference did it make if he got assassinated? He probably had it coming." He didn't say that, I emphasize here. He did not say that, but that was the interpretation I placed from the tone of voice, from the way it was raised, "Wasn't he some kind of a Communist." Well, I was stunned, because the implication was, well, it's okay, it really isn't important to us because this is the kind of person who should be assassinated. I never forgot that, and it always colored my attitudes about Elliott Abrams. I'm not sure that he intended it that way, but it was sort of a callous statement that left a terrible impression on one of his officers, and I'm not sure that he to this day has any idea that it was interpreted that way. The situation, of course, in HA changed very much when Pat Darien.

Q: That was before your time. She had initiated it. She had come in and set a...

STEVEN: Pat had done it before. I had run into her in Argentina. We talked about that, I believe, earlier when I talked about Argentina. But the change in the Bureau between her regime and Elliott's regime, the political change there, was very, very clear. I don't think HA was anywhere near as active in pressing on things as it had been under Pat Darien.

Q: What about something Abrams was to get very much involved in a little later when he moved over to Latin American Affairs? When you were there, do you recall the situation in Central America? The human rights reports there, how were they?

STEVEN: Very difficult, very difficult indeed. These were things that were constantly negotiated out. They originated in the embassies, then the desks got involved, and they eventually came to us, and then we had to go back to the desks. They were constantly working them out.

Q: Technically you were there sort of as the editor. You're not supposed to be, let's say, the Nicaraguan specialist.

STEVEN: No, we were editors, trying, however - one other aspect - to make sure that the report reflected the outline that had been sent out. We had the outline that made it clear how they wanted this presented and also the philosophy of it, what human rights means. The report could not at a minimum say things that contradicted the Administration's public statements on human rights.

Q: But I mean would you find yourself in the position of going back to the desk and saying, "Come on, fellas."

STEVEN: Oh, yes.

Q: "I may not know much about Honduras, but I can at least in read the newspapers that they're going out and hanging people up by their feet," or something of that nature.

STEVEN: Exactly, and the fact that the report didn't address that subject couldn't be accepted, because people are going to read this and they're going to say, "Come on, these guys are covering up or something. They're refusing to even address it." I would try to convince them, "Look, you must address this. If you wish to say it is the judgment of you and your embassy that these reports are greatly exaggerated and not to be believed, fine, but you've got to address it and say something about it. You can't just pretend it didn't exist. Everybody's reading that these things are going on, and the embassy report doesn't even mention it." Otherwise, going back again, you have to use common sense. You cannot be foolish in what you're doing. If the report doesn't reflect reality even to the casual reader, much less to the informed reader who might be a Senate staffer or something, we will look as if we're covering up.

Q: This probably didn't endear HA and you to many of the desks. Here are these guys coming around. Even though you had a Reagan administration, which was no longer the Carter/Pat Darien group, it still was active, because the whole human rights thing was actually under the dictates of Congress, not an administration.

STEVEN: I like to believe, and I think it's honest to believe, that the Reagan administration believed in what it was saying. There was a respect for human rights. The differences come between the degree of human rights as a priority against other things. Do you emphasize more security arrangements which may require a lessening of the human rights concerns? That's a political judgment call. But the lip service, at least, was being given to human rights as an important factor, and I have to believe that people meant what they said. When you got down to the concrete question: Do we want to report that the government of Guatemala was sending death squads around, versus our needs to keep them strong against Nicaraguan subversion? How do we balance these things? What was our legitimate diplomatic concern?

Q: Did the UN representative, Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was a strong supporter of authoritarian rule - she made a point of this - did she get involved?

STEVEN: I don't recall that she or the UN delegation got involved at all in any of these things, no. I don't recall in the two years I was there that they were ever...

Q: How about the Congressional staff or Congressmen? Did you find they were coming to you and saying, "What is this?"

STEVEN: Not a great deal, but there were instances, yes, staffers normally or letters from Congressmen asking about something, as much, however, though as passing on things. You remember from your career, I'm sure, the numbers of times you got a letter from a Congressman saying, "My constituent Joe Jones has sent me a letter expressing his concern about something. Could you give me an explanation?" Then what he wants, of course, is a letter back that he can then use in reply. Yes, we had a lot of that.

Q: Sometimes you run across particularly staffers, a female staffer who has a boyfriend who lives in Honduras, or something like that, or somebody of Bosnian descent or what have you, who take these things and really sort of run with the ball. Did you find yourself...?

STEVEN: I did not in my office. We were general policy and plans. There was another section of HA which had what amounted to be desk officers with regions of the world. An individual, a person, coming in and saying something about Guatemala, they dealt with what amounted to be a human rights desk officer for Central America. The line was there on individual cases. Mine was the broader one, the overall report on the country. If a Congressman and constituent wanted to complain bitterly about what was being done in a specific country, that didn't come to me, it went to the desk officer. I got the human right report and some would try to influencing that, the delegation of Irish for example who came in to see me, and there were other similar types of things, who wanted to influence what that report was going to say and they might cite an individual case as evidence of what their position was, but basically I didn't get involved in that type of thing. That was done by a different section of the office.

Q: Well, you said that absorbed a good solid half of your work. What else were you doing?

STEVEN: The other half of the time was trying to answer specific questions that were given to us, planning conferences, writing speeches that had to be given by an assistant secretary or someone, a range of factors coming in but the more general sort dealing with human rights organizations, nongovernmental organizations, for example, the NGOs. We spent a good deal of time reading their stuff and responding to them, Amnesty International and the other organization which puts out its own annual human rights report - I forget the name of it now; they had a big thick book - you know, talking with them and reading their stuff to see if we were missing something or if they were in such conflict that it was going to become an obvious problem. But I was disappointed myself that too much of my working time in those years was taken up just for those human rights reports. I made a recommendation in the second year that they relieve my office of doing that. It wasn't going to help me, but it might help my successor. Because it was about a six months' crash project, it could be very easily set off and identified that it ought to be done by a special team of consultants or, as it has been, by retirees, by WAE [when actually employed] retired Foreign Services Officers, a home team could come in, handle the reports, get them issued, and go home. They started doing that they year after I left, and they apparently have done it ever since, and I think it's worked very well. Then the office is able to go back to doing things like reviewing policy and plans instead of spending all this time on that project.

Q: Being part of the Reagan administration - this is early years of the Reagan administration - did you feel, particularly in dealing with human rights groups and all, that human rights was sort of the on the defensive because the change from the Carter to the Reagan thing?

STEVEN: The change was very clear. I could give you an example that might help on the policy level. The new administration coming in wanted very much to demonstrate that the concept of human rights was limited, or should be limited, to certain basics, the right to life, the freedom from torture, the freedom from illegal executions, the freedom from policy brutality. These basics were what human rights are. To those basics, however, had been added in many people's minds and in the UN and in other places the rights to many other things: the right to a democratic government, the right to vote, the right to an education, the right to medical care, the right to this and right to that. The concern was twofold: one, that expanding the idea to rights beyond those basic ones that were originally realized or recognized at the UN and so on or in our legislation to include much more controversial areas diluted our efforts. We were trying to keep people from being tortured. It would be nice if we could also educate them, but that was not a basic human right. Education was to be settled in another area of rights, by the welfare state, whatever you want to call it, but the US government shouldn't be going out and in effect putting its weight into a small foreign country which was trying to feed its people and saying, "Your people have a sanctified right to education." It would be nice if we could do it. This was quite a change, because the previous emphasis had been on a far broader interpretation of rights. The Reagan Administration effort at the time that I was in that office was to try to focus and concentrate on true human rights violations as they saw it and move the discussion on other additional civil rights - the term they tried to use, civil rights versus human right. Civil rights were not to be considered in that category; they were a different area. This is a point that can be argued very well. I had mixed feelings. My own background probably tends to be more liberal than that position would take. I would have given a somewhat broader interpretation. But at the same time you have to recognize where do you stop. When you start saying these things are all rights, how do you provide for them and then how do you prevent what happened in again that infamous human rights report coming out of Africa: The big man is trying to feed and take care of his people, and if he has to cull their rights of voting and that sort of thing out, so be it. How do you balance these things off? It was an interesting time, and we had many discussions in the office, instances where the question would come up: Is this really human rights we're talking about now, or are these political and civil rights, that really are not something that we should be concentrating on? We approve of them, we think it's a good idea, but should our efforts be made to try to take care of the basics first? It was a very interesting point. I gave a lecture down at a college down in Georgia in Valdosta - I forget the name of the school - presenting this point essentially. This was the Administration's position, and I presented this in my talk, and I, as you can imagine, being in a university, got hit pretty heavily by particularly the students: How can you say that? People have a right to medical care. It became an interesting period. The shift was quite dramatic from the broader view of human rights of the previous administration. I'm sure it will go back and forth with each administration. I would suspect in this administration it's probably back more to the more narrow interpretation.

Q: Well, in '84 you went where?

STEVEN: In '84 I heard about the details of a strange organization that I had known about vaguely. The '67 war between Israel and Egypt resulted in the Israelis holding the Sinai right up to the Canal. The Israelis agree effectively to withdraw from the Sinai in return for its demilitarization, largely. They didn't want military forces right up against the Israeli border, because they need the warning time. If you start a military attack on Israel from the western Sinai, the Israelis have time to react and they can mobilize. If you start it from the border at Gaza, they don't have time, so they had to have that demilitarized. And the treaty, largely with US insistence and refereeing and working on it, put together the demilitarized Sinai. It's certainly not worth going into here; anybody's who's interested can find plenty of written material on it. But the Sinai was divided in three areas, degrees of militarization, going down towards Israel, and as a token they threw in a three-kilometer-wide strip along the Israeli border which was also supposed to be demilitarized, just so the Egyptians can claim that the Israelis have taken some of the burden too. And a force was needed to enforce these things, to be present on the ground. At the beginning the Israelis had made it clear that the United Nations was not acceptable. The United Nations had been in the area for a long time, had been in the Sinai. They had not been able, or in the Israeli view, willing to stop the Egyptians from attacking them, so the idea of a UN presence in the Sinai was not acceptable to Israel.

Q: Well, of course, I guess the '67 war was precipitated by Nasser expelling the United Nations Emergency Force from the Sinai Peninsula.

STEVEN: But also allowing, you might say, Egypt to blockade the Gulf of Eilat going up at the Straits of Tiran. Israel, as I have always understood it and I've seen some of the inside stuff on this, essentially went to the UN and said, "Put up or shut up. He's closed the Strait at Eilat, he's running your people off. You said this wouldn't happen." And my understanding was they went to our government and said the same thing: "Are you going to allow this? Are you going to permit these people to break all these understandings we've had?" And the answer they got in both cases apparently was fairly unsatisfactory. The UN pulled its people out, and we did not go in openly and publicly and tell the Egyptians to move out. So the Israelis decided to take things into their own hands, which they did. The UN not being acceptable, how were you going to establish a peace force? So we proposed the idea of a multinational force and observers, and this was in the original document in small capital letters. It was a multinational force and observers would be put into Sinai. When the time finally came to form an organization, nobody apparently could think of a good title for it, so they said, "All right, let's call it the Multinational Force of Observers," so that's what it became. They already had within a couple of years after things quieted down after the peace treaty. By the late '70s/early '80s they had a group called the Sinai Field Mission, SFM, Sinai Field Mission, established by the State Department, and we sent out a group of observers to Sinai - they were originally in western Sinai, whose job was to go around and observe and make sure nobody was exceeding the limits of their military obligations, make sure the Israelis were pulling back and the Egyptians were not advancing forces, etcetera. By '82 when the peace treaty was put into effect, they needed a permanent organization to do this, and there was the question "How do we do this?" Well, we finally said, all right, the United States would undertake to organize such a force, and the expense of that force would be shared and the governing of that force would be the United States, Egypt and Israel together, a tripartite controlling group who would finance it theoretically. In actuality, of course, we gave the money to them and they put it back in the pot. The force was finally constituted originally, I believe, with 13 countries, an interesting group. The United States was the predominant one. We provided two battalions, a battalion of infantry and another battalion of logistic support troops, and we provided a squadron of helicopters, 10 helicopters. We got another helicopter squadron from Australia. They sent up 10, which was quite astonishing, because something like a third of their helicopter force was committed to the Sinai. The American helicopter force was in southern Sinai, and the Australian in northern Sinai. The force itself of 13 countries with their troops was split into two main camps, the main camp in the north up towards Gaza, towards the Israeli border, and the other camp in the south at Sharm el Sheikh at the entrance to the Gulf of Eilat. Where do you find a place in the Sinai where you can put a military force of Western nations which require comfort for their troops? And it has an air field and has other resources. Conveniently, the Israelis had built airbases in the Sinai when they were there, so the main force headquarters was in what had been an Israeli airbase in the north, and then another Israeli-function area in the south at Sharm el Sheikh. There were about 3,000 people altogether, three battalions of infantry, one American, one Fijian, and one Colombian battalion of infantry, spread through the Sinai in lookout posts. Then they had to have an observer force, and there was the question of what sort of observers. Somebody made the suggestion, "Well, we've already got an observer force on the ground that's working and doing things. Let's get that one." So they brought the State Department group down to the base in northeast Sinai, and it became the observers in the Multinational Force of Observers. In '84 when I got involved, they were looking for a new chief of the observer unit. The turnover was supposed to be yearly; it was a one-year term for each observer; you had a one-year contract, including the chief. So I became interested in this and thought it would be a useful thing to do, that it would be a good possibility to learn something about a different area of the world, so I put my name in the hopper and, somewhat to my surprise, seeing that I had no Middle Eastern background of any sort, I was selected as the chief of the observer unit and only then really found what I was getting into. I had 31 people: 30 observers, a secretary, and me, 32. The observer unit had been translated down from the old Sinai field mission. I always say "translated down" because they used to be on a mountaintop out in western Sinai. Fifteen of them were retired or at least former US military personnel. The idea was to have professional advisors who knew things. By a coincidence of where they had done their initial recruiting and how they organized it, most of them were special forces people, Army Special Forces veterans. The majority were 20-year retirees; about a third of them at least were people who hadn't done a full 20 years but had years of experience, probably somewhat between half of them former senior noncommissioned officers, the other half majors and even lieutenant colonels in the Army. The State Department element was very, very interesting. The original proposal had been for Foreign Service Officers, probably not at the entry level, probably people who'd already been in the Foreign Service at least five years, had a tour or two tours behind them, lower middle-grade officers, to come in. And the chief of the unit would be a Foreign Service Officer of roughly O1 rank.

Q: About that time, equivalent to colonel.

STEVEN: Yes, colonel, 06. I learned the military numeral system; I was an 06. The initial people going out there, as I understand it, up in the Sinai field mission and then the first year or two in the MFO, were indeed Foreign Service Officers, but very quickly it became a plum to be dispensed to others, and very quickly the State Department element was heavily infiltrated with civil service people and not just people at the civil service officer level doing an excursion tour but clerks and secretaries. The secretary to some influential person who was in the Rome headquarters had been a secretary in the State Department and thought this would be a great idea, so she was appointed as an observer and came out to the Sinai with absolutely no Foreign Service experience of any sort and also no experience at all in any of the skills that even a Boy or Girl Scout might have, basic map reading and things like this, nothing. When I got there, I would say at least half of the people in the State Department element were not Foreign Service Officers and in several cases were not even officers, they were clerks and secretaries, people with backgrounds that seemed entirely inappropriate except for the fact that they knew people in the hierarchy of the MFO who got them out here. Of course, there is an office in the State Department which supports the MFO contingent, and they had friends and people who would be recommended for this. The personnel situation, as I say, when arrived was very interesting in its makeup. The other factor I noticed was that, out of the 15 State Department observers, two were female, and the only other female in the unit was my secretary, so I thought why are there only two females here? It was made clear to me in the beginning here in Washington - in the MFO headquarters in Rome, the Director General of the MFO and the headquarters staff were in Rome, because they couldn't be in either one of the two treaty countries, so they were in Rome - and it was made clear to me by the senior staff at the MFO headquarters in the Sinai that this really wasn't a job for women or a place for women on the observer unit. It was not stated in those words obviously - people are far too subtle for that - but it was crystal clear that they didn't need any women out there and, if I could figure out some way not to have even the two token ones who were there, I should try to do that. They had two women in the group, I think tokens. We had to be able to point and say, "Hey, we aren't prejudiced." I realized, having been there for a while and seen the actual work that was being done, that there was nothing there that couldn't be done perfectly well by females. The whole concept that we were bouncing around in the desert in four-wheel-drive vehicles or we were flying in helicopters leaning out open doors and so on and it was unladylike, I guess, was nonsense. Women were flying helicopters. In fact, one of the American helicopters that I flew in had a female captain, a pilot. So I began to question increasingly why we were limiting ourselves to essentially males in most cases and got the usual evasive sort of answer, one of the standard ones: "Well, women, you know, wouldn't be able to change one of those big tires on a vehicle if they got a flat tire." Number one, there would almost always be a male and a female; the observers worked in teams of two, so we could easily enough insure you weren't going to have two females on the same team if that was a concern. Then we discovered that some of the men couldn't change the tires either because they were so difficult, so that became quickly discredited. You always had a liaison officer with you - if you were in Israel, you had an Israeli officer with you; if you were in Egypt, you had Egyptian army officer with you - so there was always a male in the group at a minimum, and you were never that far away from help. Even if you were out in the middle of the Sinai Desert, just down the road somewhere there's an Egyptian military camp, and they looked after us. A couple of times they pulled our vehicles out of the sand when we got bogged down. So this was sort of nonsense. Then, of course, "Well, they have to live in a military base." Well, we had quite a few women living on the military base. The American logistics battalion had any number of female officers and enlisted. So I worked at one of my goals the entire time I was associated with this, which was much more than a year, as you will hear, to reduce that prejudice, and I think I did, the best example of that being when I finally left.

Q: You were there from 1984 to...

STEVEN: '84 to '86, then I left, finishing two tours. I had already broken the record, because I had not had one year, I had two years, so I then left, and, as I will get to later, I went back again in 1987 and stayed for another two years.

Q: We'll do the '84 to '86.

STEVEN: On that point I'd like to make about women, not belabor it but I think it's worth recording, when I finally left in the second tour, the State Department observer group was very neatly divided into half female and half male, and I consider that an accomplishment of a fairly important goal. I always found, an interesting fact, that the female observers, if they were carefully selected, if they were the right kind of people, basically experienced Foreign Service Officers, made even better observers than sometimes the men did, because the Egyptian officers were fascinated by the idea of women doing this job. When a woman shows up at your little bungalow out in the middle of Sinai Desert wearing a bright orange suit, because the observers all wore bright orange - my motto was "We'll never be shot by mistake" and you could see us a mile away - so a woman shows up wearing one of these bright orange suits to get the count of his tanks and guns and his men and this sort of thing, and stops for tea, of course - you always had to have tea; I drank more tea in the Sinai - they were getting information given to them freely. They'd just talk and talk and talk. A male went in, you and I would go in, and using all my supposed skills, I would get, "Yeh, yup, here's my count. Nice to see you again," but the women they didn't want to let go, so they would talk and talk and talk. And they were extremely successful at the job. The best of the State Department observers that I ever saw out there in my four years was a woman, and I'll put her name in the record because it's highly complimentary: Carol van Voorst. Carol is today in the Department. I've seen her name somewhere. She's an office director, I believe. Carol van Voorst came out for a one-year tour and was probably the very best observer we had, certainly of the entire State Department contingent and as good as any of the military. She learned what needed to be learned: how do you recognize a T54 tank versus a T62 tank, and how do you look at fortifications, and how do you get ideas of counts of troops and so on; dealing with the liaison officers, dealing with the entire situation. The job could not have been done better. She was superb. I made the point to everybody I could, with her as an example, again to overcome this natural, built-in sort of military resistance that was still evident in those days against women.

Q: Were you able to weed out the people who were getting these jobs as rewards with no particular qualifications?

STEVEN: Not at the initial point; I was not able to weed it out in Washington, the recruiting. Interestingly, for most of my time there, the recruiting was done with absolutely no reference to me. The recruiting was done in Washington and by the headquarters staff. They simply sent us the list, saying, "Here's the people who will be coming this year to replace vacancies." I was never consulted or asked, "Do you think this would be a good person?" I just was told, "Here's your staff." I began to influence it the best I could, because I'd go over to headquarters at least a couple times a year and I would talk to the people there and work on trying to influence the recruiting that was being done. I was also able to influence it because I wrote an evaluation of each observer towards the end of their one-year contract. It was, from the point of view of the manager, an ideal situation. They had absolutely no rights. I wrote a report on them which they did not see, which went just to the MFO headquarters. They really didn't have an appeal, because once I got the confidence of the headquarters staff, which I was able to do, they never questioned my recommendations. I could say, "This person has done a one-year tour. Thank them and send them home." Or I could say, "This person we really ought to try to hold onto, because they're so good. I'd like to extend them for a second contract." In that sense I was able to quickly do some weeding, because there were people who had there, in some cases for some time, both on the military and on the State side, who should not have been there that long and it was time to begin to move them. I was able to do that and, again, get enough confidence of the Director General and his staff so that they didn't question my decisions, they accepted them, and that made it easy to begin to turn the unit over at least. But on the people coming in from the State Department, I never had any input; I simply was given a list and here they came. I did in one case, I think, later in my tour when the deputy was being nominated, and again they came up with list of possibility for deputy. I happened to be in Washington - I was back in Washington on a consultation - so they had me interview these people. I think I interviewed about four, three of whom were civil service officers; only one was a Foreign Service Officer, and this was even at the deputy level. Two or three of those civil service they had picked were people who to me seemed completely inappropriate, did not have area experience, brought nothing to the job that would say this is a good reason to have this person here. They hadn't have overseas tour, they hadn't been in embassies, they hadn't had negotiation experience - we had a lot of delicate relationships with the liaison systems and so on - and it very quickly became clear to me that probably their primary qualification was that they knew the people who were doing the recruiting. I think we finally settled on the Foreign Service Officer, who turned out to be a fine choice, but I'll tell you frankly I recommended him primarily at the beginning because he just was Foreign Service and they were not. In that sense, we did it. But the work was fascinating, and the fact that it is not a United Nations operation was very, very rare. I believe it's the only peace-keeping force, except for the NATO forces now, but basically it was the only peace-keeping force of that nature that was not United Nations sponsored; it was a privately sponsored...

Q: You talk about your impression of the Israeli and then of the Egyptian sides and what they were doing. Had people pretty well settled in? Was either side testing the bounds?

STEVEN: No. Both sides wanted us there. The Israelis regarded us as their warning alarm system. The Egyptians, of course, had gotten Sinai back, so obviously no country wants to have foreign troops on its soil, but they recognized that we in effect had regained Sinai for them, and so they put up with us. Neither side was looking to provoke problems. The problems tended to be what I call unintentional or accidental or misinterpreting the terms of the peace treaty. Israel is a tiny little country, and when they have the supersonic jet fighters flying around, it's very easy for one of those supersonic jet fighters to swing in over Egyptian territory. The Egyptians very quickly complained every time it happened, and our people reported it. We had observation posts. We would look up and we'd see this thing going to the west then back, and we'd report "Violation by Israeli aircraft." There was a poor pilot up there who's got 20 square miles of space to maneuver in and a jet that takes 20 square miles to turn, so it happened. Egyptians on a few occasions did things, brought in, shall we say, a system or something that was questionable, and we would go look at the treaty and we'd go talk to them, and usually they'd say, "Well, yes, I suppose we could look at it that way. All right, we'll move it out." Or if they didn't, we'd issue a violation notice. We discussed in meetings between the liaison systems which they held regularly, and they'd hammer out a solution to it. I don't recall when I was there a single instance in the entire four years I was associated with the MFO where either side deliberately provoked a violation. It was accidents, misunderstanding of the terms. I think I can give you one example without violating any confidences. One of the sides once brought in for training purposes hulks of tanks and artillery pieces - and these were artillery pieces without breech blocks, meaning, of course, they were just useless, they were no more useful than the one sitting in front of the American Legion post - or a tank which had been burned out but the hulk was dragged in, to a training area so that the troops could train on them or their aircraft could see them on the ground and they could say, "That's what a tank looks like on the ground." We found this and realized what they were, that they weren't active elements, but that in our view they were provocative in that they could be misinterpreted and, therefore, shouldn't be there. They were in an area where they weren't allowed to have tanks, and it arguably could be said they looked like a tank.

Q: There's always the possibility that somebody could substitute it.

STEVEN: Substitute it; or, you know, the breech block might be kept somewhere and, when you're ready, you could put the breech block back on the artillery piece and we're back in business. It was this type of question raised. So we issued a violation to the country involved, and they were quite indignant and insisted we come out and look at these things, which we did. I looked at them and said, "Yes, I fully agree with you. That's not an operable tank. But..." I found out that they actually then called a meeting of their senior people and thrashed the whole thing out and finally came to agree that we were right, because if they did it and the other side did it, before you know, nobody would be quite sure what people had, and it wasn't a good idea. So they towed the stuff out again. This was the type of activity and atmosphere.

Q: I was wondering. You had a young Egyptian or Israeli captain who's stuck out in the middle of the desert and gets a little antsy, and I would think every once in a while they'd try something just to show that they had some vigor, or something like that.

STEVEN: I honestly don't think I saw that as much. Each side was anxious not to provoke the other. Things were done, which I wouldn't talk about even today, which were misunderstandings. Shall we say, a system brought into a zone which might be interpreted as something of value to a combat force being brought in, laying out something in advance so when you did bring in your troops in a war you'd have the system on the ground; and we shook our heads at this and said, "Look, the treaty doesn't specifically treat this, but here's how it can be interpreted by an objective observer," and we would go over to the government in question - it happened on both sides - and say, "Look, people, this isn't something you can clearly say beyond a reasonable doubt violates the treaty, but we believe it could be provocative, it could be disruptive, it's a bad idea." And I'm happy to say that they accepted our judgment in each case. I think we, the force, came to be trusted enough so that if we said, "This will be seen by your treaty partner as provocative and dangerous, they would pull it out and stop doing what they were doing," which I thought was an excellent idea. In the entire time I was there, I never saw or heard arguments where one of our people was attacked or injured in any way by either side. I had a couple of stones thrown at my vehicle out in the desert at times by boys, but they do that in this country. You know, a big, moving, white vehicle, a great big white vehicle, is just a great thing to throw a rock at.

Q: Were there sort of bedouin wandering around?

STEVEN: Yes, there were bedouin out there. The Egyptian government was trying very hard to get them to settle down, and had been trying very hard to get them to settle down for years. I found an interesting cultural factor, and this I saw in Sinai and I've also seen it as an inspector. I was up by northwest Pakistan and out in Baluchistan doing inspections at one point on the refugee camps, and the same thing happened to the nomadic populations there too. In each case, the governments were trying to settle these populations by providing basic services, and the Egyptians were doing it in exactly the same way as the Pakistanis were doing it. If you provide these people with a water source, electricity, and a way to make a living, they pretty much give up the old ways quite willingly. I had one Pakistani officer explain to me when I was there that it's a myth that these people are bedouin and it's a way of life that they never want to give up. The bedouin way of life is terrible. It's on the edge. They starve, they die, they're endangered, and particularly in places like the Sinai where the place is loaded with minefields. He said, "If you provide the basic elements of life, they're pretty willing and happy to settle down. I saw it in Pakistan. They were trying to do it up there with the people, and it was working in the Sinai. The bedouin were increasingly settled. They still had their flocks and so on, but they'd settled down, and it was because they provided basic services to them. The Israelis, of course, had long before done that. There are bedouin in Israel and they wandered to a certain extent but nothing like they do elsewhere. One of the more fascinating recollections of my time there was overhead photography. It's published photography in color of the Middle East. If you look at the area of what is essentially the Israeli-Egyptian border in Sinai, all the way down the border, you can see the border, because the Israeli side is quite green and gray and the Egyptian side, like a knife cutting it, is gray and white. The goats on the Egyptian side are out there; they eat everything, leaving sand. On the Israeli side they're not permitted. The Israeli side has got ground cover and looks like access to water, and then on this side it's white. It was a fascinating cultural experience just to see these things.

Q: Did you see any interchange between the Israelis and the Egyptian troops?

STEVEN: Not the troops, no. The troops never saw each other; they were kept back. But liaison systems did. There were parties regularly at the border station. The one I dealt with mostly was at Rafah. There were other border places, but Rafah was the main headquarters. The two liaison systems had their field headquarters in that area, the Egyptian side on the Gaza side and the Rafah side which the Israelis were controlling. It was a 50-yard walk across between the fences and you were there, and they would have parties and invite each other, and they would go. You would go to a party and you'd find a dozen Egyptian liaison officers and a couple of dozen Israelis and everybody enjoying life, and some big Muslim was stretching the limits on alcoholic intake at times. And they would invite us. I was usually invited as chief of the observer unit, so I would go, and these were friendly discussions. They all spoke English, which was a requirement dealing with the force, so therefore you had no language problem of any sort. And everyone got along fine. It was fascinating. Incidents which would show, I think, how well this worked. There was one sort of sad incident where, after an international negotiation between them, they were making some adjustments on the border, and these adjustments would be 100 yards. It's the principle of it: "That 100 yards is ours." Well, the Israelis had established border markers and in an effort to keep anyone from moving it, these border markers were big, they weighed a ton. I think they were about 2000 pounds. They were concrete pyramids with a metal post on the top and a number on the top. This is Marker #53 and it was set down right on the border, and it could not be moved except by heavy equipment, so there wasn't the question of somebody sneaking out at night and shifting the border. You couldn't move these things. But after the agreements were made about arranging the border, some of these stones had to be moved. Most had to be moved further into Israeli, because the Israelis had sort of taken a little bit more than they should have. But to move these things - they're way out in the sand out there - you needed to get a truck out to do it, so the Israelis volunteered a helicopter. I think they had one of those big American Chinook helicopters, big double-rotor affairs, heavy lift; they'd use this. And both sides agreed and both sides sent out their liaison teams. I wasn't physically present, but other people from the force were at this time. And these stones were lifted by the helicopter, these pyramids. The helicopter would get the big straps on it and lift it up and move it over to where you wanted in and set it down again, both teams cooperating. As they picked up one of these stones, something went wrong - I read technical descriptions of it; I don't know - something went wrong and the helicopter crashed right on top of the pyramid and burst into flames. An Egyptian liaison officer who was nearest, a young major that I knew, instantly dashed into the flames to the cockpit, ripped open the cockpit doors, got both pilots out somehow, who were strapped in their seats, got them out and dragged them out into safety, burning his hands rather severely and burning his face somewhat in doing it, but rescuing these two people. There were only those two in the helicopter. Instinct, I suppose. He didn't stop and think to himself, now, this will be good for Israeli relations, or something; he just went in and rescued them, saved their lives very clearly. Well, the Israelis couldn't do enough. They gave him a presentation plaque from the squadron in appreciation of their comrade, Major So-and-So. It was a big moment. He was still wearing bandages, I think, for a month or two after. I remember going to one of these parties, and the Israelis were holding drinks for him because of how popular he was. Another fascinating picture which I think is worth recording: Further down on the border in my very earliest year there, when things were still a little tense, we were going to two posts on opposite side of the fence but where a road used to go through, and the Israelis and the Egyptians, had their little outpost, six or eight men in each, but they weren't connected anymore. The fence was there, and they just sort of watched each other. I went down to the Israeli side one day talking to the Israeli commander, a young lieutenant. I looked over at the fence, and I realized at the fence there was a card table - it was actually a wooden table but like a card table - set up straddling the lower rank of the barbed wire, and on it was a chess set and a chair on each side. I looked at this and looked at the lieutenant. He laughed and said, "Oh, that's Morsch. Morsch is a chess champion at the university in Tel Aviv, or something; of course, he is an active-duty soldier, he's a corporal; but he loves to play chess and there's nobody good enough for him here in the little detachment we have, but they've got a very, very good chess player on the Egyptian side, so they get together every day to play chess, sitting on opposite sides of the barbed-wire fence. If I had only had a camera, that would have been the shot of the century, but, of course, we didn't carry cameras. But they met every day and sat opposite each other. Apparently one day the Israeli would bring tea and coffee or something, and the next day the Egyptian would bring it, and they'd push cups back and forth to each other, and they'd play chess. Fabulous possibilities.

Q: Did you have anything to do with other troop contingents, like the Fijians and others, Samoans?

STEVEN: Yes. The three big contingents were the American battalion in the south. I should mention their situation briefly. They were responsible for the southern sector. They were drawn from army units, the 81st Airborne and 101st, and they took a battalion at the time. The Army was very unhappy with this, because when you take a battalion out of a brigade, you cripple that brigade; it's only two-thirds strength. The battalion itself is not going to get proper training. They can do small arms and individual unit training, but they can't do the big stuff that they need. They don't have any tanks to work with, no artillery, nothing. So six months in the Sinai depreciates their training, and the Army was unhappy with it, because, of course, these people were supposed to be the firemen who rushed off to war if needed, and here they were sitting in the Sinai losing their edge. So the Army very quickly tried to start substituting other kinds of units, and then they brought in others of the so-called elite, the 10th Mountain Division, for example, and some of the others. Eventually, I understand, after I left they even tried provisional units of Reservists, called up Reservists, National Guard people, for volunteers to do a six-month tour out there. I gather, and this is strictly rumor, it didn't work so well using those people. I believe now they're back to sending regular Army units out there, but the present administration has already said publicly, Rumsfeld's already said publicly, he wants to get the Americans out of there because it's tying up a battalion that they really could be using somewhere else. The Fijian army has always maintained itself in modern times by peace keeping. There are three battalions, were three battalions in my time, in the Fijian army. One was in Lebanon under the UN auspices, the second was in Sinai under our force, the third is back in Fiji where they train and recruit and so on, and then they keep moving these units around, and that supports the Fijian army. Without those contracts or in effect being paid to do these peace-keeping duties, they couldn't afford more than maybe one ragtag battalion. The Colombians, for some reason, wanted to get involved in this national peace keeping, so they put a battalion out there. One cynical way of looking at it, I've been told and I sort of got some feeling that the Colombians themselves recognize this, is conscription in Colombia. When a young man is conscripted, he may very well end up in combat, because they have these wars going on down there. Things can get dangerous and a guy can get hurt. So the better class of young men from the wealthier and well-to-do, influential families would be sent off to do a peace-keeping tour in the Sinai, which was reasonably comfortable and quite safe. The worst thing that might happen to you is you might get stung by a scorpion. So it was a very high-quality battalion. They provided ample interpreters. I remember working with a couple of very young interpreters who'd been educated in this country. Their English was at least as good as mine if not better. The officers tended to be tough. They were good, they had seen combat, they'd been fighting for years in Colombia, and this, I think, was seen sometimes for them as a sabbatical, to go off to Sinai and make money, because while they were in Sinai they were paid at American rates, so it was a very popular way to go. So those were the three major combat units. We had Australian helicopters in the north, American in the south, 20 altogether. I used the helicopters a great deal in my work, because my observers were carried around on the missions by helicopter, and we'd have three or four, even five, teams out on rotation doing their missions going here and there. We did half our missions in aerial reconnaissance and the other half went on on the ground, reconnaissance versus verification of going out and actually visiting the people on the ground. You'd use your reconnaissance missions to identify things you wanted to see; then you'd get your vehicle and go out and look at them on the ground, the logistics battalion for the US. We had Norwegians. The force commander during my entire time except for the last six months was a Norwegian lieutenant general, and it was quite interesting in that my understanding was when I was there that the relationship with the observer unit and the command of the force in the field had not been ideal for any number of reasons. I'm not saying anybody was to blame. It just had not been a terribly harmonious relationship, I gather. I set out to try to improve that and was successful because - and I discovered this within the first year - towards the end, apparently, of my first year - I've only had this third-hand - the State Department began to press to have a political advisor from the State Department appointed to the force headquarters in the Sinai to advise the commander. They had a lawyer, the force lawyer, out there; the counsel was a State Department lawyer. He was in the headquarters there, but there was no sort of designated political advisor. When they started to press this, the commanding general - I only found this out sometime later - went back to them and said, "I already have a State Department advisor, my chief advisor, which I took to be evidence that we had overcome the concern, so I ended up as time went on spending at least as much of my time and effort as what amounts to a political advisor and counselor to the force commander as I did running my own unit. The unit, of course, was able to run nicely without me most of the time, because we had a deputy and good people running it. So I would end up going to the meetings with the force commander, liaison meetings.

Q: What type of issues would come up?

STEVEN: Frequently issues such as the introduction of a system into the Sinai. I don't want to be coy about this, but there are so many things that the military had these days which are not actually weapons but things that they might bring in, mapping systems, markings, that in themselves do not appear to be offensive except when combined with other elements. If you set everything all up and then you bring in the weapon to use it, you've violated things. There was a great deal of discussion of this. Small issues, the Egyptians regularly would get very, very unhappy about the Israeli overflights, violations of Egyptian air space. Well, the violation may have been 100 yards, then the poor pilot found out what he was doing and got out again. The Egyptians were very offended by this. There were problems occasionally with our soldiers. We had one incident I remember very well: a Colombian officer, young officer, going between two of his outposts. Essentially the Americans had southern Sinai, the Colombians had middle Sinai, and the Fijians covered the north with the outposts. In the center section, which was the most barren section, there were more bedouin moving around in villages there - called villages or encampments. We had been told by our cultural advisor, who was a British officer there who had had a lot of experience with the Arabs and the bedouin, "Stay away from their women. Just don't even talk to them. Stay away from them." Well, apparently this young Colombia captain had made the mistake of thinking he was doing something humanitarian. He found a bedouin woman, I think with her young child, what he thought was out in the middle of the desert in distress. So he stopped his jeep - I guess he had a soldier within him - and invited her into the jeep to give her a ride on to wherever she needed to go, get her safely home. Well, it was sort of a misunderstanding. She was waiting for her husband who was eventually going to arrive on his camel and pick her up. But they couldn't communicate, and here was this foreign military officer telling her to get in the jeep, so she was terrified and got in the jeep. It was just a misunderstanding from start to finish. But in the end word got out very quickly that it would be a good idea to move that Colombian officer out of there fast before her husband caught up with him. So we did. He was transferred off to some other duty. But this takes time and discussion. One incident I got involved in: I was on a mission out near the Suez Canal, as a matter of fact, when I got a radio call - all our vehicles, of course, were equipped with radios - that I was needed back at the main camp and they were sending a helicopter for me, which I thought was quite an honor. So I started back, and soon enough a helicopter landed on the road and picked me up and took me back, and I was taken up to the Rafah border where the Israelis had discovered a tunnel under the border. It was a very clever thing. I saw the tunnel. They had dug it out with an excavator, right across the border there. It was a concrete framed square tunnel about this big, big enough for a man to crawl through, with an electric light cord running through it so it could be illuminated. They showed me the Israeli end of it. It ran into a house about 75 yards back from the border, where they had dug through the floor and had dug down, then dug the tunnel that way. They said, "That house over there on the Egyptian side is where we believe the other entrance is," although they hadn't been over there. The Egyptians then took us over to their side and, yes indeed. The tunnel altogether must have been, I'm going to guess, 200 yards right under the border, and it was down between six and eight feet. It was really quite an excavation, not something somebody dug out with his bare hands. It had concrete lining for the walls, so that was a construction project. The Israelis were dumbfounded and embarrassed. They said, "How on earth did we ever go past that place? Where did they put the dirt? How did they get the concrete in there?" It was a good job. So that had been discovered and they wanted the MFO to come and see it and so on. Essentially there was nothing we could do about it. It wasn't in the treaty. That was something between the two countries. The treaty didn't cover building tunnels under the border. Again, I spent two or three days probably involved and working on that situation.

Q: What was the tunnel for?

STEVEN: Smuggling.

Q: Oh, smuggling.

STEVEN: People or goods or weapons or cigarettes or whatever. The Israelis told me they privately thought that it probably was a very well financed smuggling operation to smuggle stuff from Gaza into Egypt, cigarettes and other things that were taxed highly in Egypt.

Q: It wasn't only for criminals. I served in South Korea, and we had tunnels which were getting discovered, but this was for troop movements.

STEVEN: No, but these concerned the Israelis. They didn't really care that much if the Palestinians were gouging the Egyptian tax collectors, but the thing could also be used for smuggling in weapons and for espionage purposes, so they wanted it stopped. A lot of my time was spent with individual issues and problems of people in the unit. It's an unusual situation to take a State Department civilian and put them in a military camp in the desert. There was not an awful lot to do when they weren't actually on duty. The actual duties that we had were not onerous and didn't take that much of our time. I would say that people had ample free time to do other things. We gave courses. When the new observers came out, we had courses arranged to teach them how to read maps and use compasses and handle the vehicles and how to live in the desert, emergency survival training, all this sort of thing. That took time, and the treaty, of course, itself, and then each one had to make up his or her own maps, because this is the only way you learn how to use it, when you have to get the map out and do your own markings on it and draw in everything you need to have. It helps you to focus on using a map. And we tried to get them to the point where they knew the treaty backwards and forwards, so if they saw something, they knew whether it was a question. But then there'd be individual difficulties. Drinking is always a problem when you're out there with not much to do. For a force of 3000 there probably were 300 women altogether, and that included everything from the American women in the logistics battalion to the few I had to some civilian secretaries who served the force. The liquor was far too easily available. Not only was there an officers' club and enlisted clubs, as you would find at any military base, but the contingents also had formed their own clubs, so the Australians had a club and the French had a club. The French was particularly popular. My observers didn't have a club, because there weren't enough of us. We used the regular officers' club or went to one of the contingent clubs, which had an open house. I had one interesting advantage there because I was the only senior officer in the force who spoke Spanish, so I became unofficially a liaison with the Colombians and the Uruguayans. There was an Uruguayan engineer unit there, about 50 men, who did heavy engineering, and I could talk with them in Spanish. The problem the Colombians had was that their young interpreters, boys 18 and 19 who had been educated in the States in many cases, would also then, after having some juicy stuff going on, go back and talk to their friends about it in the battalion. If an officer who didn't speak English or spoke very little really wanted to have a private conversation with the force commander about problems, he had to use his own interpreter, who then probably, despite being warned that he would be tortured to death, was going to go back and talk about it. So they discovered that I spoke Spanish, and a couple of times I ended up in some very sensitive sessions with the commander of the Colombian battalion and our force commander and me with me as the interpreter, the go-between, which meant that I also, of course, got to know them very well and became accepted by them in their club, so whenever they had a ceremony or party, I'd get invited to it because I spoke Spanish. It was handy. When I went out there, my wife, of course, stayed back. It was an unaccompanied tour for me. She was here. My daughter was in her last year of high school, the last child at home, and my wife wanted to be here for that period. But then when it became evident that I would be welcomed for a second year and, after discussing with my wife, decided there were enough advantages to this that it was worth it, and also finding that she could come out and join me. It was one of those situations that the Europeans probably insisted upon, that American commander might have a little more difficulty with. The 06's and the commanding general were allowed to have a spouse on the base, no children but the spouse, and only those, so that meant six colonels at my time, three battalion commanders, the six battalion commanders, a couple staff officers, me and the general, six, seven, something like that - it varied - could have a spouse, and I had a bungalow. There had been an Israeli air force base, so I had what had been an officer's family's bungalow, and my wife could come and join me. So when I was offered and took the chance at a second year tour, the question came for my wife. Well, my daughter was going off to college; I had two sons who then were grown, older than she was; and there was absolutely no reason why she shouldn't come, so she moved out to the Sinai with me for the second year. She spoke fluent Spanish and became sort of a substitute mother for the Colombian battalion, who had, say, 17-/18-year-old boys, many of them for the first time away from home, who didn't speak English at all and who just were delighted to find somebody whom they could substitute for their mothers and who spoke fluent Spanish. So my wife would go to the swimming pool on the weekend and there'd be a number of these young Colombian troops, and I would actually walk over and find my wife sitting on a lawn chair surrounded by a circle of as many as a dozen of these young Colombian soldiers all sitting on the cement around her and chatting away. She said, "Oh, this is wonderful." She loved it. But life was difficult in that people who didn't have resources of their own to fall back on, they didn't read a great deal or something, didn't have hobbies, didn't have anything really to occupy them, particularly some of my retired US military, the temptation was to get drunk, to drink and abuse alcohol. I had two or three cases where we had these extremely difficult heart-to-heart talks that we Foreign Service Officers usually aren't prepared for. Military officers are, but to have to call in some retired lieutenant colonel, close your door, and really go at it, you know, "You're drinking too much. It's becoming embarrassing or something. It may be affecting your duty," etcetera, etcetera. This was tough stuff, and some of these guys, as I say, were Special Forces veterans, real killers. In a couple of cases, I found out they were killers. They were guys who had fought hand to hand with knives in Vietnam, that type of thing. All I could think of as I'm lecturing this guy, what if he gets made at me? But, of course, it never happened. But this is the type of thing that was exaggerated and exacerbated in the desert environment that I had to deal with occasionally. As I said, I spent two years out there with the force, having a wonderful time, doing what I think was useful work, and learning a great deal about them. At the end of that two years, I went back to the Department. The system was a strange one. I had to resign from the Foreign Service to do this. It was like our foreign service people at the Institute in Taiwan. I resigned from the Foreign Service, although I kept all my rights. I was getting credit for promotion and all that sort of thing, and I paid my retirement benefits in, but technically I was a private citizen off the roles. They had a difficult time because I had to see certain classified information that involved our mission, and that meant that we had to keep my security clearance, of course, current back here, so I was sort of 'of' but not in the Department. And then when I went back at the end of my two years, I was back on duty and released back into the Foreign Service. I was amused because when I went out I found out only later than I should have turned in my building pass because I was a private citizen now, but no one ever bothered to ask me for it. So when I went back at the end of my two years to go back into the Department, just for the heck of it I took my building pass and ran it through the thing which they had just put in, and it worked fine. They'd never disconnected it.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop. So in '84...

STEVEN: In '86 I was back bidding for jobs and heading back to Washington.

Q: So what happened?

STEVEN: I went back to the IG again. Anybody who follows this who has experience in the Foreign Service knows that if you take yourself out of the mainstream as I had done - first I had done a tour as an inspector, then I'd gone to HA of all places, and then I had gone off for two years in the Sinai - I was no longer competitive along traditional lines. My career counselor in Personnel had thrown up his hands in dismay. He tried, very, very hard. I give him credit for that. "Bob, you can't do this. You've got to get back in the mainstream." I acknowledged his advice and said, "Yes, I understand that; however, with clear knowledge of what I am doing in my career and so on, and with my wife and family's support, I want to do these other paths." I think he felt relieved, because once that was in the record that I accepted all responsibility for it, it wasn't up to him then to try to find me choice jobs or something. But I left the IG apparently in good favor, and they were happy to have me back. This was when Bill Harrop was the Inspector General.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up at that point.

This is the 28th of October 2001. Bob, we're in 1988, is that it?

STEVEN: '87.

Q: '87, and you're back from the Middle East.

STEVEN: From the MFO, Multinational Force and Observers

Q: So, you came back to the inspection thing. In the first place, you were there from when to when?

STEVEN: The inspection corps again?

Q: Yes.

STEVEN: I came back in August, I believe, of '86 fully expecting to have at least a two-year tour. As it turned out, I only had a one-year tour, and I left...

Q: '86 to '87. How did you find the Inspection Service? Had it changed when you came back?

STEVEN: It was in the process of change. There was a great upheaval going on. A little earlier than that the Congress and the General Accounting Office and others had been very critical of the State Department's concept of an Inspector General. By their definition it was not an independent Inspector General. We were management inspectors under the control of the State Department, staffed by the State Department, beholdng to the Department and, therefore, by definition could not be an independent review organization. We had difficulty arguing with that. That was correct and that had been accepted, and I think that over the years we had at least worked on the concept that we are here to help. When you arrived at a post, you had flexibility to try to be helpful and be very flexible in how you looked at things. The GAO concept of an Inspector General and, I think, Congress' basic idea is that the Inspector General should be an enforcement organization. You do look to see if people are being honest, you do look to see if they are being efficient, you are not beholdng to them, and it is not your job basically to help them. It's your job to look at what they are doing and render, hopefully, an objective report on their progress or lack of progress. When I arrived back for that second tour with the IG in '86, it was in the midst of a turnover. The Congress has insisted in having the State Department create a true Inspector General, and the best symbol of that was that they ruled that no Foreign Service Officer might be the Director General; it had to be an outsider. So we ended up for a period of time having two Inspectors General in the Department. There was the Department's Inspector General as authorized by Congress, which basically wasn't even staffed; it was a theoretical organization. Sherman Funk, who had been in the Department of Commerce, I believe it was, was named the Inspector General and began to assemble a staff, basically bringing people with him from Commerce. At the same time, the Department wanted to have its own management inspectors and, of course, they had to bridge the gap because it was clear that the new IG would not be functioning well for some time. So they created something that I recall was S/P or something or other, not the policy staff but it was then under the Secretary in the Secretariat, the S, section, headed by Bill Harrop, a Foreign Service Officer, containing a core of the old inspection system. We went out still trying to do inspections but in this atmosphere of "You guys aren't really the inspectors anymore; you're management's inspectors." And it was an awkward period for a year or so. Essentially we carried on as we always had carried on, tried to do things that way. There were some advantages to the old system. The best example I can ever remember is arriving in a very tiny outpost in Africa and finding, as was far too common, that the administrative officer, who had to keep the place running, was a first-tour junior officer. He'd been given a month of training at the Foreign Service Institute, sent to this most difficult climate to try to support a small consulate, and it was a mess. He didn't even know what he didn't know, and his consul was legitimately occupied with more important things and tried to be helpful but just sort of never got to resolving things. This young man struggled mightily trying to do things, so when I arrived there with my fellow inspector, we looked at this, and after the first day the two of us sat privately and quietly and said, "This is impossible. We could spend our entire time here simply cataloging all the deficiencies and writing a devastating report." That serves no one's interest. So we spend most of our time, actually only a week there, helping this young administrative officer set up procedures, clean up his nastiest problems, try to be supportive and bring what expertise we had and experience to helping him get better settled, and I think we did some useful work in that. The other problem that disturbed us very much was the fact that his efficiency report, officer evaluation report that had been written, was not helpful. It criticized him for not running a better administrative section, and I found this completely unfair because he didn't know what an administration section was. So I talked with his consul, who was somewhat, I think, surprised that he had allowed himself to write such an unfavorable-sounding report. It would have killed the young man's career. He wouldn't even have gotten tenure. He hadn't been a tenured officer yet. So I wrote what we call an inspector's evaluation report. This is something on the part of inspectors - it was at that time. We had to write them at that time on the principal officer at the post and in an embassy on a DCM, but we never were required to write them for anybody else unless we saw a reason. So I wrote a fairly stiff evaluation in which I said there was every evidence that this was a very promising young officer, the fact that he kept his head above water in this bad situation was promising, but that he had been given no support really by his own immediate chief, he had been given no support by the embassy, which was supposed to help him, and the Department of State had placed him in a position to fail by sending him out there with no experience and very little training. I strongly recommended that he be tenured and kept going with his class on the basis of the performance he'd already demonstrated in this impossibly difficult situation. Later I found that it had indeed apparently saved him, and he went on to a reasonable career, I guess. But it was a difficult time in IG, and towards the end of that year that I was there, I think the spring of '87, I had kept in touch, of course, with friends in the MFO and people who were involved in it, and I heard that the situation with the civilian observer unit of the MFO had deteriorated very badly. It was always difficult to run a civilian unit in the middle of a military camp, but my successor unfortunately - I'm not going to use his name - turned out to be an alcoholic. This was apparently known to many people in the Service, but it was not known to the Personnel people who assigned him to the job or to the MFO who accepted him, or at least apparently did not know. If you put someone like that in the Sinai 100 yards literally from an officers' club with lots of cheap alcohol, constant parties going on, and he was not accompanied by his wife, at least much of that time, I gather, so it showed and the unit's performance began to deteriorate. I gather the force commander complained, and they were looking to release him at the end of his one-year contract and replace him. I gathered that they weren't terribly happy with what they were getting in the way of applications, so again, consulting with my chief counselor, my wife, she said, "Well, I've never known you to be happier than when you were out there playing boy general running around the Sinai. Why don't you see?" So I called Peter Constable, who was the Director General in Rome at the time, with whom I had served earlier, and said, "Peter, would you consider another tour, somebody else coming back?" He said, "Yes, yes, yes." We talked for a bit, and I indicated, yes, that I'd be happy to go back out again, and he said, "Let me call you back," because obviously he had to clear it with the powers that be in the Department, and very quickly I was notified that, yes indeed, I would be welcome back. So I told Bill Harrop at the time, and Bill was in a quandary because he had had a position in his office for someone to be sort of a staff manager, to reform the inspectors' manual, to guide the whole operation and keep it together - it was like a chief of staff position - and the fellow who had been in it who'd done a wonderful job - his name was Mack Adams. Mack had been in my entering FSO class, and Bill Harrop wanted me to take that position. I had to explain to him that I knew I'd signed up for a tour and I was only there one year, but this opportunity to go to Sinai was being offered to me, and would he mind terribly. And Bill, being the wonderful professional that he was, said, "Of course not, Bob. You must go out there if that's where you want to go." I think he realized, as probably any of us would, that if I were kept back doing a job that I wasn't happy with, I wouldn't be terribly effective. So I went back on out to Sinai, where I was welcomed by the force commander, who didn't need the headaches of the civilian observer unit. I brought my wife with me, and the two of us were right back to doing what we had been doing, but my role had been reinforced, I think, even more as a political advisor to the force commander. I had established that at the beginning. It had not been the role of the chief of the observer unit earlier, but the Norwegian lieutenant general in charge, who was there through my entire time, and I got along very well. I was able to counsel him and to help him do things that he needed done. I think he was very pleased to have a civilian who was not in this military chain of command. The European military are quite formal, and it would have been more difficult for him to unbend and talk freely with a colonel, particularly one from another nation, British or Italian or something, whereas in my case I was a civilian set to one side and hopefully diplomatic and trustworthy and not talking about his secrets. So I ended up having more of a role as counselor than I perhaps would have had earlier. And it went on for another year.

Q: That would be '87 to '88.

STEVEN: '87 to '88, and I was able to, I think, clear up some of the problems that had developed. It required letting some people go and doing some work on recruiting the proper people for the unit. I had to tighten it up a bit. There were some complaints that this was not supposed to be a military unit, it was a State Department with some military advisors attached to it, the retired military section of CLU. But I had to institute a few things because of the criticisms and the concerns of others in the force. It had to be slightly more professional, and I did what I think was the minimum required, but there were some who didn't like that. They expected to be completely on their own except when they were actually required for a mission, and that just wasn't going to work. In any event, at the end of that third year...

Q: I'd like to talk just a bit about that. Working as sort of unofficial advisor to the general in charge, what did you see were the political pressures that came on from Tel Aviv or Cairo or State Department or Oslo or what have you?

STEVEN: I can give you an example first of pressures from the State Department. At one point, and I believe it was in that third year although it might have been the fourth - it makes no difference - we had an officer, a State Department officer, actually a civil service man, who had been in the security part, DS, the diplomatic security element of the Department, and suddenly we received a telegram ordering him back to the States for debriefing on some case that he had worked on. I said, "No, wait, we can't have this. He no longer works for the State Department. He was required to resign from the Department formally, which I also had done." And I said, "At least technically he is a private American citizen working for a foreign organization, an international organization. He cannot be ordered back to Washington." I also needed him because I think we had somebody sick, a couple were on leave, and we had missions to do and I really needed all my bodies there. And the force commander backed me fully on this. I told him what my situation was. I said I intended to resist the situation. So I prepared a message and sent it back to the Department through the Director General, through Peter Constable, who forwarded it on to the State Department unchanged, and pointed out to them that Mr. So-and-So was not their employee, he was mine, and that he was needed at his job and, while we were prepared to make him available at our convenience or perhaps have him go to Tel Aviv or Cairo to be interviewed there, that would be a possibility, but at this time I was not going to permit him to be ordered out of the country. Well, I gather that diplomatic security back here was stunned by this. This was defiance. I never actually got anything in writing, but I got the sense that they were prepared to come out and arrest me or something for obstruction of justice. But better, cooler heads intervened apparently back here and indeed he was told, "Oh, okay, we'll work something out," and eventually he went to Tel Aviv and was interviewed there by DS, and that was perfectly satisfactory. But it was this type of pressure from the government. There were also the requirement to keep the force independent. The US paid a third of the costs. We were by far the biggest contributor, the Director General was an American officer, etcetera, etcetera. There was always the feeling that we had to be shown to be independent of Washington, of the State Department's or the Defense Department's orders. We were an independent international organization, and it was a little touchy keeping that proper distance, at the same time acknowledging that we wouldn't exist 24 hours without that support. There were occasional problems with other countries. Colombia provided a battalion of infantry, Fiji provided a battalion of infantry, there were other units out there. Individual countries had problems about how their forces were treated or used, or we wanted them to take on something and their country might not be prepared, and so on and so on. The primary difficulties, of course, were with the two parties, Egypt and Israel. We had a peace treaty, an arrangement, to keep the force in the Sinai, but it was never possible to foresee everything that might develop, and irritations would develop. I'm not sure if this is repetitive from the previous time we talked about my service there, but either one of the countries would want to introduce some new system...

Q: Yes, you were mentioning that.

STEVEN: We have to make a decision really and talk with them. Is this really going to affect things?

Q: It's not prepositioning.

STEVEN: It's not prepositioning, or is this system you want to bring in something that would normally be used by the division that you were allowed to have? The Egyptians were allowed essentially to have a division in the Sinai, but if they wanted to bring in artillery, which was not normally assigned to a division - it was at the corps level - was this possible? How much ammunition could they stock in these zones? The treaty had to be constantly interpreted, and I contributed to those discussions and tried to help when I could. We had to deal with the liaison systems. And it was a fair amount of politics involved in it. The blessing was that they both wanted the thing to work.

Q: One of the things that has been sort of a constant throughout our relationship with Israel is, in a way, the people are kind of feisty and they're challenging all the time. They do it to each other, so it's part of the thing. Also, if the Israelis feel that they're not getting their way, they have no compunction about immediately going to Congress, the American Congress, and launching a complaint, and the government usually jumps to their will. This is being oversimplified, but it's a fact. I was wondering whether you ever ran across that sort of thing.

STEVEN: Of course, also at times from the Egyptians. The Egyptians could put a good deal of pressure on as well for their own ways of doing things. But, yes, the Israelis are the tough guys of the neighborhood. I might suggest that's how they have survived. Without that attitude they would have been overwhelmed and pushed into the ocean, and that would have been the end of that. So, yes, they constantly pushed at the limits, but it was always in a manner, I found, that was open. There was no effort to sneak something past us. When they did something, it was right there. And then if we went in and said, "No, this is wrong. You can't bring that equipment. You can't do that. We won't accept this position," they would argue with you vociferously. You'd have hot discussions. But in the end when a decision had been made, if we prevailed in our opinion on it, they would immediately comply. There was never a question of saying, "Yes, we will stop doing something," and then continue to do it. It was always straightforward in the way they handled it. During the time I was there, I was never aware of a situation with the MFO or the Egyptian treaty with Israel that they went in effect behind our backs to Congress. I don't think the average Congressman knew we were there. It was a low-profile force. Most Americans even today that I talk to assume that it was a United Nations force, and then I have to explain that it was not, and they're completely baffled at something that was not a United Nations peace-keeping force. The force was unusual. One of the questions we often had asked of us was would this be a model for other peace-keeping operations. It appeared to be so successful. We had a couple of injuries, but they were accidents, stupid people doing things. Why couldn't we use this somewhere else, in Lebanon for example. We talked about this and I argued strongly that this should not be a substitute for UN forces. UN forces can bring in political support from all around the world. Ours was clearly a US effort, and the countries that had contributed were US allies. Today I understand that there are some strange ones out there. Hungary is out there now. I believe they're providing military police for the force, because, let's face it, they're now NATO members, they're allies, and so there they are. This is a little strange, but it was the type of a force that would not have stood up very, very long politically if other Arab nations, for example, had begun to condemn it. It was clearly an American tool, and it would not have worked. We're also fortunate in being able to stay out of the Israeli-Palestinian argument. For example, I was required to verify in the zone of Gaza, in Rafah right along the Egyptian-Israeli border, which was very dangerous. We would have to go in and meet the Israeli liaison officers and travel through this zone. I went through the places today, sites of gunfights and so on. And we had to be flexible about that. I credit the Israelis. At one point when they were having a great deal of difficulty in Rafah, I talked to the Israeli liaison and said, "Look, we're supposed to do a verification mission in there a couple of days, which means getting into a vehicle and driving through the streets and up and down the roads and so on," and he said, "Well, if you do it, I, of course, will accompany you myself and I will have lots of armed guards, but," he said, "I wish you wouldn't because it could be very dangerous." Not that they would shoot at us - nobody was unhappy with the MFO. We wore those bright orange uniforms. I always said that, if somebody shot us, it would never be by mistake. But he said, "I wish you wouldn't do this but, of course, if you insist, we will do our best to protect you." So we compromised and we got a helicopter, one of our helicopters, and with the colonel and I and one of my observers as a team we flew the thing at very low altitude, and every time I wanted to see something, they would actually hover and I could look right down under roofs and things like that. Hopefully, nobody would shoot at our helicopter. It had our big symbol on it. This type of thing you could work, and with the Egyptians the same. There were some instances where the Egyptians wanted to do something that they interpreted as being permitted under the treaty that we felt would cause difficulties, and it was our job to try to work with them. We had to be extremely careful because the Egyptians were very sensitive about our getting approval from the Israelis for them to do something. Otherwise, if the Egyptians wanted to do something, they didn't want us to go to the Israelis and say, "Would it be okay if we do this?" They said they had the right to do this and they would argue with us, but they weren't about to have the Israelis veto it. So we had to be extremely careful about the relationship between the two sides, that we couldn't go to one and say, "Look, the other folks want to do this. Is that okay with you?" That wouldn't work. So it required some diplomacy and some initiative.

Q: What were the Egyptians doing with that big hunk of desert there? All I can think of, it's a good place to maneuver, have military maneuvers.

STEVEN: Oh, they did. They had military maneuvers there and I observed some of them. They were fascinating to watch. They were firing rockets and tanks were maneuvering, and they had a bombing range with their fighters. But more interesting is that the Egyptians began to develop Sinai during the years I was there. The place has resources. There are minerals, theoretically some oil under there. Nobody found any yet, but there's a good possibility. And they ran, for example, water lines out from the Nile all the way out across the desert along the northern coast to support settlements out there. They had the tourism industry, for example, down on the Red Sea. The Gulf of Eilat and Sharm el Sheikh was very heavily developed while I was there. I had always to keep an eye on my observers because they always wanted to go down and observe the beach to make sure that nobody was building fortifications when all the lovely young Scandinavian girls were down there in their topless suits. So I had to make sure that we didn't overdo the inspection of the beaches. It was being developed, and the military aspect of it was very, very interesting. The zone closest to the Israeli border was allowed only police, but the Egyptian police out there wore the same uniforms as the army, and sometimes frankly it was difficult to say is this particular patrol an army patrol that's violating the border or is it police. Sometimes I wonder if they didn't just change places. The central zone was light weapons. They couldn't bring in tanks or guns. Then there was a big zone closest to Egypt where they could have roughly a division. Does an Egyptian division have three tank battalions or four tank battalions? And when suddenly a fourth battalion showed up, there was a great deal of soul searching and looking at records and Egyptian military history to see what was a legitimate division. It was an interesting experience for a Foreign Service Officer. Many people said that it probably should have been a military officer heading this unit, and I objected to that, not just on personal grounds but I thought basically what you needed was somebody with diplomatic experience and a diplomatic train of mind. If there were military questions, there were plenty of military to talk to, but basically it should be run as a diplomatic operation rather than a military operation. Anyway, towards the end of my third year in the Sinai, the question came up further what do we do about a fourth year, and, I'm happy to say, they asked me to stay for another year. By this time the Department's career management people didn't even answer my messages. They just said, "Oh, Steven, forget him, do what he wants." So I talked to my wife. The commanding general was extremely anxious that I stay on. We were having a wonderful time out there, and I thought it was useful work, so we signed up for a fourth year. Now, this was unheard of, two two-year tours. Now, by the way, I have found that they are now advertising the chief of the civilian observer unit as a two-year assignment. I had strongly recommended this, because it made sense. You needed that time. I also strongly recommended something to take place after I left, of course. No one heading the civilian observer unit was a Middle Eastern specialist. The Middle Eastern Bureau, NEA, inexplicably was uninterested in this unit and the job, and my predecessors - I guess there were only a couple of them - they had both been people from other areas and other experience, and I came in with background, if anything, in the Far East and Latin America. I spoke good Spanish but didn't speak a word of Arabic or Hebrew, and suddenly I'm in the Middle East. So I began fairly soon to say, always with the caveat 'after I leave', that the NEA Bureau had to pay some attention and use this. It's a marvelous opportunity for one of their officers to get experience.

Q: To know the military side.

STEVEN: Well, even less the military side, because it's almost impossible now to find a Foreign Service Officer with military background at that level. They just don't exist. There aren't any anymore in the lower levels. So I said, "Get somebody out here who speaks Hebrew or Arabic, who has experience in the area and who's going to stay in the area and use this as a basis for training and experience," which they did. When I finally left at the end of my fourth year, they appointed Frank Ricciardone, who had been the political officer in Cairo, and Frank's replacement - I forget now who these people were in later years, I've lost touch, but they tended to be people with NEA Bureau experience. I also fought very hard - and we've been over this in my earlier talk - to get the Foreign Service element or the State Department element of the civilian observer unit back to being Foreign Service Officers who could profit from experience like this.

Q: Yes, rather than...

STEVEN: ...rather than a place to send somebody who had influence back in Washington who wanted to make some money and have a good tour. We don't like to talk about it that it was a lucrative assignment financially. The arrangements were very good, so it attracted people who sometimes were perfectly fine observers, but it undermined the purpose of having diplomatic personnel out there. So I finished up my fourth year out there.

Q: This is '89.

STEVEN: '89, and in '89 I realized I only had a couple more years in my career before I'd be at the time-in-class requirement. I was Class 1 at the time, and realistically I didn't expect to go further. I had voluntarily abandoned the mainstream of the Department.

Q: You know, you make these choices.

STEVEN: You make the choices. I made them consciously with full understanding, and I was quite happy with it. So as the time came, I looked at the Department and said, "What would I be eligible to go back to?" I didn't want to go back to some routine little thing. I was in touch again with the IG, although by this time, I guess, I had sort of squatter's rights in the IG, and the answer then from a new operation under Sherman Funk was, "Yes, come home." So I went back to the IG still again in '89 and went back to inspecting but in a newer and in a fairly interesting capacity.

Q: You did this from '89 to when?

STEVEN: Well, we targeted October of '92.

Q: So '89 to '92. I just like to get the dates.

STEVEN: I came back and found that they were setting up something - they had already set it up and it was beginning to work - called at that time Compliance Follow-up Review of Inspections. The idea was to select a certain number of inspections that had been done and anywhere from six months to a year later send a small team, two or three at the most even for a big post, to review the results of the inspection, take the recommendations - the post had come back and said, "Yes, we have done what you asked us to do" - did they actually do it; or go out and look at a recommendation that the post had in effect rejected, didn't want to follow up and was still unresolved between the IG and the post and say, "Okay, now what is the situation here?" And we had the authority to close recommendations, remove them, or even issue new ones. Basically the concept was we would not do a new inspection, we would not open up a new area, we would simply review the old inspection, but with the caveat that, if we saw something going on that couldn't be ignored, we could also treat that. It was an eye opener for me. I was made chief of this operation, because I had had a great deal of experience in inspection. To find that when people came in and said, "Yes, we have done what you told us to do in the recommendation, all too often that was not true. In a very few rare instances they lied; it was a plain, outright lie; and this astounded me that even ambassadors signed off on this. Of course, when you challenged them on it, the ambassador's claim was always, "Oh, my goodness, I just sign what my people put in front of me." More frequently they had said they had done something or were doing it, but effectively it was not happening. They'd made maybe a change in nomenclature but not the change in substance. Also, areas where we had made recommendations that were not sensible to begin with, could not have been complied with, and should never have been issued, to have to retract and say, "Okay, you're right. We close that," and withdraw. It was a fascinating operation, and you arrived sometimes at embassies with people who were very unhappy with the IG, they were sore over what had been done to them, and they were combative when you arrived out there. We had to soothe hurt feelings, always supporting what the IG was trying to do but at the same time recognize that we had not always been perfect. Sometimes it made recommendations that weren't very sensible or handled ourselves badly during the inspection. We would try to set it up with the logical thing. I would take a team out and we would go to, say, three countries in west Africa or four countries, so we'd take a team out and do two or three countries in Europe, a pattern of things. It wasn't just random. We would pick an inspection that had been controversial, where there was a great deal of difficulty in closing the recommendations, for example, or an inspection when the team had come back and said, "You know, we didn't comment too much on certain things here because we didn't really have the evidence to put it into a report, but we really think you ought to take a look at this and see what's happened in the last year." We'd pick that post. I did this for three years in this period of '89 to '92 and enjoyed it tremendously. It was a great responsibility and extremely controversial within the IG. Teams didn't like to be second guessed. An ambassador had taken an inspection team to a post, he'd made his recommendations, his findings, and he came back. He did not like the idea that somebody else was going out a year later and making decisions about whether his recommendations had been good ones or how they'd been done. Some of them were very testy about this. Let me stop for a second, if I may.

Q: Did you see a change in attitude towards the inspectors and all because things had changed in the two years you'd been there and the new Inspector General had gotten his feet firmly on the ground?

STEVEN: Things had changed. Everybody tends to forget - even I do at times - that the OIG has more than the traditional inspection function. Actually the inspection function is only a third of what they do. There are also the investigators, the investigations, which is a very, very busy shop. They're the ones who go out when there are reports of embezzlement or something like this. They have a very, very active role. There's a third shop for audits, which do more intensive reviews. Inspections, we used to joke, were a mile wide and inch deep. Audits were an inch wide and mile deep. Then, of course, we also added at the last moment in my time Security and Intelligence Oversight, SIO, in the office, which was assembled when we began to have more and more concerns about terrorism, and their job was to review security inspections, to conduct specialized security work. So now the IG actually has these four different operations. The Inspections section, in which I was involved, had changed very, very much. It was beginning already when I had been there in '86 to '87 with Bill Harrop. Sherman Funk came in and was probably as good as we could have hoped for in making the transition. He understood very much the concerns of the Foreign Service and the Department over having this new concept imposed on them from the outside. He did his best to make it easy. He continued to try to use Foreign Service people on his teams, active-duty ambassadors as team leaders as a regular assignment. He had to bring in increasingly accountants and auditors from places like General Accounting Office and other department to provide the type of expertise that the Foreign Service was too thin at doing. Those people had great difficulty adjusting. They were used to taking a long period of time to carefully examine every piece of evidence. They had a cross-referencing arrangement. Almost any statement made: They made a statement, "We found this"; footnote: the evidence on which that was based. It was enormously complex and complicated and time consuming. And we were saying, well, when you look at a major embassy like London, "There are three of you: four weeks, and do your report," and they would look at you blankly and say, "But that's impossible; it can't be done." Well, they had to learn how to change their standards to what we had to work with, and we in turn - we, the regular Foreign Service staff - learned how to make our work more professional by government-wide standards of the General Accounting Office. It was a tough mix. I remember many times when one of the trained auditor types from outside the Department would bitterly complain about the slipshod, shallow job we were doing, and we would have to try to explain, "I'm sorry, but we don't have time. We have to do this in two weeks and get out of here and go on to the next post. And we have to have a draft to hand to the principal officer at the post when we leave." They said, "This isn't real inspecting." The argument's not resolved. It goes on today. How do you mix these concepts of traditional inspection work with the standards that Congress and the General Accounting Office would like to see put in? It hasn't been resolved.

Q: How much was the auditing showing? Obviously there are always real problems. There are crooks out there, people bending the rules, but there's also a bunch of people heavily at work with a constantly moving work force and all that. I was just wondering whether the auditing system worked, was producing, compared to its efforts.

STEVEN: Again with the caveat that I was not in audits and I have seen only some of their work, what they were doing, I think, was very useful. It is productive. Let me give you an example. Back at that period - I think it was my tour with the IG from '86 to '87, that one-year tour - we decided to try something a little different. Traditionally you go look at an embassy and rate what it was doing, and we decided let's try something a little broader, let's do an inspection of a function. One that was causing a lot of uproar at the time was the housing for the Foreign Service. You may recall infamous airgrams that went out talking about the square footage that you were allowed to have for different ranks. It caused an enormous uproar. We decided to take an inspection team out to look at the housing and compare what we actually found being used to the standards the Department had set up and to see just how the program was being run, particularly focusing on how was the representation money being used in relationship to the housing. You had to have representational housing, as we called it, so you could give the big receptions and parties and dinners it needed so you could invite officials in. How was that working? So we divided up, and it was in mid-winter, January and February and March, I think, when we did this, and the team members were to scatter to begin with. One was to go to the Far East, one to Latin America, one to Asia, and so on. To my astonishment, when my turn came to pick, nobody had picked Europe. I guess the idea Europe in January and February is not as pleasant as some of the southern climes. So I snapped up Europe immediately, and off I went. I spent a month roaming around in Europe. I went to Geneva, I went to Rome, Paris, I forget where else, and looked at the housing. We came back, compared our notes, did our research in the Department, talked, of course, with FBO a great deal, and came up with a report, which I believe had a great impact on how the system worked. Nobody had ever actually gone out and looked at it the way we did. We found first that the majority of posts had paid little, if any, attention to the space limits. It was always, "No, we had to get that house that is 50 percent oversized because it was the only one on the market," and oftentimes this was true. You had to use your local situation. But then we looked at the representation funds, and I was literally astonished. Very little money relatively, even for the higher ranking officers, other than the ambassador and the DCM perhaps, very little money was being spent in the houses. In the majority of places we looked at, the money was being spent in restaurants. You would take people out for business lunches, things like this. There was some home entertaining but relatively little, and when the home entertaining was being done, it was a dinner party for six or eight, which doesn't require banquet rooms for 50 people. I found one house - I think it was in Geneva - being occupied by a single officer in which one party a year was held, and that party each year was for the staff of the office where this officer was the chief. He invited all the Foreign Service local employees - nationals, we now call them - and other people with a very small percentage of Swiss officials to a big annual party there. I checked and found the party was largely a potluck thing; everybody brought stuff and contributed it. And the officer at a consul general had something like 600 dollars a year representation money and yet had this enormous house. The house was so big that it had just all the regular functions but it had a complete separate apartment for somebody else. In this case, I think the officer was using it for her mother-in-law who came to stay with her. We said, "This is absurd." It's wasteful indeed when you don't have that kind of money. I think this was a great surprise. The conventional wisdom had always been you needed representational housing, but when you actually look, it wasn't being used because there was no representation money.

Q: I think also - I noticed this towards the end of my time - that things are changing. One, the wives don't play the game anymore, and it really took a wife to put on these things, or a spouse, to use the correct term. It had been a wife who put these things together, and without that you can't do it really. More and more the Europeans, I think, are not entertaining as much at home. I think this is true all around. It represents a change of lifestyle. You don't have the servants, you don't have the support at home, the wives are working, so you can't reciprocate. So it ends up you do a lot better by going to restaurants and lunches.

STEVEN: But in the meantime we were paying for these enormous houses. One of the classic examples that I found: in Paris the political counselor in Paris had "an apartment," so I went looking for an apartment, and I discovered that it was the entire floor of a building in old Paris just off the Champs Elysees or something. It was incredible. I must have been 15 rooms or more. It had a ballroom, literally a ballroom, a big, big room you could hold dances in. I came in the front door - the officer took me there to lunch, "I'll show you the place and then we'll have lunch" - and as I stepped in the door, his wife was standing there waiting, and she took charge. She said, "You're Bob Steven; you're the inspector, right? Okay, come with me." I sort of looked at him, and he had this stricken look on his face. He was just sort of cringing. She tucked my arm under hers and led me off on a tour of this place. It was fantastic. It was the sort of place that an ambassador in the early 1900s would have had with a staff of thousands and all, a wonderful place. You could get lost in it. She took me back and showed me a small room that she had converted into her study because she was a professional. She was a writer of some sort, and she had her writing area set up, very professional. But then she showed me this enormous apartment, and in the back behind the kitchen there were servants' rooms. There were four complete separate rooms for servants permanent in the back there, none occupied. She said, "We have somebody who comes in two or three times a week to clean, but somehow it has become expected that I am going to clean this enormous place and use it to entertain guests and everything. Not only won't I do it, I couldn't do it if I wanted to." She was completely correct, and I reassured her husband that he hadn't got his career damaged by his wife's outspokenness, because she was completely right. There was no way in the world we could do that. "Well," I said, "why are we keeping this ridiculous apartment?" "Tradition. We can't be shown to be giving this up, you know, the American embassy is giving up its counselor's apartment. That would show we were retrenching." I said, "Yes, it would, because it's useless, it's a burden on the families. The embassy could not and would not provide servants to maintain it." If this poor woman had spent her entire time doing nothing but vacuuming and dusting, the place would still be impossible. What they had essentially done was reduced their living area to the couple of rooms they used, and the rest of it just sat sort of unused. It was a useful type of activity, I think, for the IG to do. Nobody often does this. It's an example only of the type of thing we did.

Q: One of the things that I've been concerned about - and I don't know whether it still performs that function - the IG represents in a way management specialists to help you and sort of psychiatrists to sit down and hear complaints and maybe to ease things, and the idea that they're going out to catch somebody... In a way, management should pick this up in the audit. You can't fault an audit that finds people really going in for malfeasance in a big way. But if you've got some high-powered accountants looking over the accounts of a small consulate somewhere, you may find that there are a few discrepancies, mainly because of no fault of misreading of the rules or bending the rules a little. It's almost unfair.

STEVEN: But, Charles, this quite honestly was not the intent and very seldom the practice. When you found mistakes in accounting, the real question was this: Is this in a sense expected because we don't train our people well enough, or we've got too much work to do and they make mistakes? You look to see is there any bad intent, were they stealing the money. If not, then we didn't go out and crucify somebody. You did as I tried to do in the post I mentioned in Africa. You said this is not anybody's bad intent, it's not malfeasance or anything or embezzling; it's simply that we've overloaded the system and haven't provided the proper support. Then you work on that. But the answer to your basic question: Yes, that was the traditional function of the inspectors. To many in the Department today, including to some in IG, that should be the function. The answer that you get from the Congress and from GAO has been, if you want to do that, provide management support and provide those counselors, by all means do it, but don't try to improve it under the Inspectors General Act. The Inspectors General Act is not designed for that; it's designed to be the watchdog, it's designed to be professionals going out and looking for malfeasance, etcetera, but also looking for inefficient practice. Now, that was what we did with that inspection I've just described to you on the housing and representation money. We were looking to see what is actually being done, and, incredibly enough, I believe it was the first time that anybody had ever actually done this. We actually had some statistics to show relationships between the expenditures of money and the house sizes and things like this, and it had a tremendous impact, I gather. Really people opened their eyes up and said, "My , we never really realized this was happening or looked at it that way." We looked at several other things. I was involved in an inspection of the so-called recruiting function of the State Department, and we sent a team together and we looked at both the civil service recruiting of secretaries and staff to the Board of Examiners. I got the Board of Examiners, and I looked at what they were doing and how they were doing it. We came up with a fairly critical review that the Department simply hadn't thought through what it was doing, and it had some impact on these things. But if you want to have the traditional old-fashioned inspection service, by all means do it under management auspices and call it what it is. It's management inspection. If you want to have the oversight and the use of the Inspectors General Act and its powers, then you should have a true Inspector General operation. We still haven't gotten that far. We'll still in the IG - and I speak because I work in there still now - have never really resolved this. We try to do the old job; at the same time we try to do the new job; and we're still working out how to separate those functions. Management certainly doesn't want to establish another office, as it did under Bill Harrop back in that transition period where you have sort of management's IG team and then the official one. You can't do it that way anymore. So we still haven't resolved the situation.

Q: Back to the Board of Examiners. One of the great problems has been the recruitment of minorities, I know. I was with the Board of Examiners for a year. When you talk about minorities, you're really talking for the most part of the blacks and the African Americans. Did you look at that function?

STEVEN: It was extremely difficult. It's such a sensitive function.

We looked at the recruiting function and particularly of the minorities. They were running an Affirmative Action program by identifying separately black candidates, minority candidates who, as you say, at that time was entirely a question of blacks essentially, and giving special preferences and testing them in a separate way. They didn't even take the examination. That frankly did not work well, because it was an enormously expensive way to recruit a small number of people. Secondly, when they did get in, they were tarred by the brush of not being examinees. They had been brought in under some special dispensation, and no matter how people felt about it - and I had people tell me this, black officers tell me this, later - they were always looked at, subconsciously perhaps even, as not being really qualified, that they had been brought in under special circumstances. I felt that just the expense of doing this, the expense of going out and trying to find these people and making a separate evaluation of their educational history and so on - I forget the figures, but we were spending many, many thousands of dollars to get a single person on board. I tried to think of a better way to do this, and I came up with what I thought was a pretty smart idea. I looked at the Board of Examiners' last exams when they rate everybody - every single person who comes in is rated on a scale, and you have a one to 500 or whatever it is - and we were then accepting people and I think the cut-off line at that time was scoring a 70 out of the 100 on the exam. If you were above 70 percent, you were offered the opportunity to continue and have an oral examination and so on. If you took that as a cut-off line and looked above it, there were not enough Afro-American candidates to fill what we wanted to have. You couldn't use the word 'quota', that's forbidden, but we would have liked to have had a dozen or two dozen, shall we say, viable candidates. They weren't there. So I went to work and identified how far down the list you would have to go. If you went from 70 down to 60, you picked up more than you needed. Above the 60 line you could find lots of well qualified black candidates, and we're only talking about a small deviation, which then you could say, yes, this genuinely could be lack of education opportunity rather than lack of capability. So I proposed that, if they were going to continue this program, and they clearly were, that they shift and, say, reach down starting a 70, 69, 68, 67 until you pick up the numbers that you need. It was estimated for me by people at the Board they wouldn't have to go down more than about five points to 65 to pick up the dozen or two dozen candidates. This sounded interesting to them, and it eliminated all this extra business of having special circumstances, plus when these people came in, they could legitimately say, "I took the exam." They didn't have to say that they got credit for five points; so what.

Q: I always say I was averaged in. It was 70 when I came in - this was the three-and-a-half-day exam - and I got a 69.75, and they averaged me in. It really didn't make a hell of a lot of difference.

STEVEN: It struck me that these people were self selected. They had taken the exam. They really wanted to do it. They had almost passed over that line. These were the people we should be looking for. So they did, they tried it, and I was told later that they estimated that it saved at least a million dollars in extra staff time to process what they had been doing by using that new system. Now, I don't know how long they did that or if they still do it; I lost track of it. But that, I thought, was a thing that inspectors could usefully do, to identify an ongoing general issue and do something about. I also found - and while we're on the subject, it's worth recording for some future reference for somebody - that statements have been made again and again and again by high-ranking people in the government and the Department that we had to have a diverse Foreign Service because we didn't want people to walk into an American embassy overseas and see nothing but a sea of white faces. Well, I walked into the Department and walked into many offices, the outer offices, not the sealed offices for the officers back of the windows that you used to have, but frankly you saw a sea of black faces. We looked at this and found, of course, that the Department had quietly agreed to limit its recruiting for staff, people like secretaries and others, clerical staff, to the District. They took names off the OPM roster, Officer of Personnel Management roster, which meant that they were heavily focused just on the DC population, which is heavily Afro-American. You, I think, would have to admit you see it today. You are very likely to go into any office and find in the outer offices several black faces, and then you talk to the officers, who are primarily white faces. I tried to point this out. I said, "We insist in the Foreign Service on all these measures to get a few more people to bring it up to the diverse level. The black population in this country was what, 12 percent, at that time, whereas in some of our civil service categories that we measured - and these figures do exist - we had 67 percent of one of the categories was black. I said, if you're going to walk in and get a diverse picture of America, this is not it. This was not acceptable. I was not permitted to include this in the report. I wrote a section that I thought was as objective as it could possibly be, not making any judgment, simply saying this is what we found, and then contrasting it with the supposed policy the Department was talking about. The decision was made not to include that in the report. It was simply too controversial. It would bring down the wrath of all sorts of people upon our heads, and I was given "Bob, sorry, this cannot go in the report," and so it didn't.

Q: It shows, you know, political correctness. But you're absolutely right, and it does help create a division, because, quite frankly, one is not overly impressed by the support staff in the Department of State. It may be because it is recruited from one place and it's not very competitive.

STEVEN: I do always want to put into the record though an example that I think points out another problem. We in the Foreign Service - now we're limiting it just to the Foreign Service - we have almost completely failed in our efforts to do anything about this. I was desk officer way back early in my career for El Salvador and Honduras - this was in the early 1970s - and I had a white secretary who was average, completely competent, a fine young woman. She moved on, got promoted, something, and her replacement was a young black woman from the District. I had never worked with a black person like this before. In my background from New England that just was the way it was. I said, "I'm going to be as sensitive and as careful as I can," because I really believed this was a good idea. Well, this young woman came in and just was a delightful person in every way, but after a day or two I called her in and I asked her to take some dictation. I wanted to dictate a short memorandum. I think the memorandum might have been just 10, 15 lines, just a third of a page. So I dictated this, being careful to enunciate properly and slowly and make it a good message, and she took it down and went off, and about an hour later came back and handed me her draft effort, which was incomprehensible. It was incomprehensible, unusable completely. I sighed and thought, oh Lord, what am I going to do, and I made a decision: I'm going to make it work. Well, I worked for a year, and she worked for a year, and, I have kept in touch enough to know what has happened to her since. I think she's now an Assistant Secretary's secretary. She's good. I've heard people say, "This is first-class executive secretary," because somebody took the time to help. Again and again as an inspector, however, I would sit down with Foreign Service Officers, or, for that matter, civil service, and say, "How is your office working?" and so on. "Oh, it's impossible. I can't get staff. That gal out there's just useless. I let her answer the telephones, and I do all my own typing on the computer now. It's just useless." And I'd say, "Well, what do you know about this secretary out there? Have you tried to see what can be done, how she could be developed?" - usually it's a she. "No, I haven't got time. I've got a job to do. I can't be training people." Well, as long as we have that attitude, we're going to have the problem. But I know it can work because I did it with the person, who turned out to be a gem and is of great value to the Department. It did take extra time and work, but it can be done and should be done. On the other hand, should we have a situation where the recruiting is only done here and we end up with a population in the Department which is not representative? No, we shouldn't. The CIA, at the same time, was recruiting all over the country, and I went out to CIA in connection with this to talk to their people, and we went to the cafeteria at midday and it was a diverse crowd. There were plenty of African Americans and others there, but it was a diverse crowd. He said, "Yes, we recruit in the District, but we also recruit in Minneapolis and Omaha." They mixed it. I wrote this up in what I thought was a very good summary. Couldn't use it; would not allow it in the report. What do you do?

Q: Well, you retired in '92.

STEVEN: Retired in October of '92 - I think it was on a Friday - and on Monday came back and sat at the same desk and started working again. This, too, is an interesting policy question. For some time - I don't know how long, years at least - the IG had taken retired Foreign Service people and others on as inspectors and, I suspect, investigators and so on on contract as contractors. This had the effect of meaning there was limit on what they could earn. You could get your full pension and then as a contractor you could be paid full wages there too, and some people were making a lot of money. The General Accounting Office looked at this and said, "Wait just a minute. What are those contractors doing?" Well, there are rules about contracting, what can be done by contractors and what requires regular government employees, and they were breaking every rule in the book. The people who were being hired as contractors were working right alongside regular Department personnel and in many cases supervising them. I remember in one case, I think, somebody was even writing efficiency reports on active-duty officers and this guy was theoretically a contractor. The GAO pointed this out, then it got into Congressional testimony. It was very embarrassing. Here's the IG, supposed to be enforcing the rules, and it's breaking them right and left. You can't do that. And I agreed fully it was wrong. By the time I got there, they had stopped doing that, and they were using this WAE, When Actually Employed, system where retirees may come back and be paid essentially the hourly rate for a civil service job to which they are appointed until they have earned the difference between the job salary and their retirement. In my case, for example, it adds up to somewhere between \$25,000 and \$30,000 a year that I'm allowed to earn, which brings it up to the present rating compared to my pension. In my case that works out to roughly four and a half months of work I can do a year. When I came back on Monday, October 5, I guess, 1992, I sat back at my same desk, opened up my same file, and went right back to the same job, to finish the current thing I was doing. From '92 on I continued to work on inspections. I did more compliance follow-up review work, I did inspections in the field, and I did compliance, as we called it, of work in the Department where you handle the correspondence. The post sends a telegram saying, "Okay, we've done all these things you told us to do," and you evaluate it and then send a cable back saying yes or no. I did this, I think, until '96 approximately, roughly four to four and a half months a year. Found it fascinating. Watched the effort continue, still unresolved today, to balance that traditional concept of inspecting with the requirements of the new laws. Around '96 they ran out of money. There was a big budget crunch at the time. They didn't have money to pay retirees, but I was able, I think, for a couple of those years to do other things in the Department. I was brought into the Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau to work on declassifying documents from Chile, many of which, it turned out, I had written, so my expertise there was of some value. It's always amusing to read something that you wrote 20 or 30 years ago. Did it hold up? You sort of read it and say, "I hope I didn't do something terribly stupid and look bad now." I must say, to pat myself figuratively on the back, it still sounded pretty good. So we did that. One period I didn't work at all for a year or so, which didn't bother me too much, and then I came back this year to start working on Freedom of Information and Privacy Act cases for the IG. I work now in the legal counsel's office in the IG. People write in to say, you know, "Three or four years ago I was investigated for such and such. I want to see the file," or someone will write in from a newspaper and want to see what we did on some controversial publicized case, and all of these have to be processed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act rules, which are enormously complex. It all sounds simple but it's not. It takes lawyers to figure it out, and I work with the lawyers. I've been doing this currently. I'll probably work two or three days a week the rest of the year, and then next year I gather they want me to sort of stay with it. It's no longer full time. When I came in, they had a big backlog. We've pretty well cleaned that up. So now I estimate that I can work as little as one day a week or two days a week and keep the thing sort of moving along.

Q: During the early time when you came back, really during the Clinton Administration, it was in a way a continuation of the downgrading of the amount of money spent on foreign relations. Was that reflected in what you were seeing?

STEVEN: Yes. For example, at the height of our activities in the IG when I came to them in '89, '90 or so, I think we had six inspection teams functioning at one time plus two compliance follow-up review teams in the section that I ran. In recent times they've been down to four teams going out and little, if any, compliance follow-up review, or CFR, work, because the money's not there. A related problem, and an interesting policy one, is the fact that, starting in the late '90s, as I recall, they found it increasingly difficult getting active-duty Foreign Service people to even bid on the jobs, and it's obvious. It used to be that an active-duty young ambassador, particularly, who was rising would take a tour for two years as an IG team leader, and then go on to another embassy. It was good experience for him. With the change and the sort of distancing of the IG from the Department increasingly, it became obvious that people who had taken inspection jobs were not benefiting from them. They weren't getting placed out from there terribly well. So the drop-off was quite dramatic in the numbers of people applying for the jobs. It became increasingly difficult to fill them. It's a good point, whereas in the last couple of years all of the teams, four or five when they've been able to manage it, all of the teams have been led by retirees, ambassadors but retired ambassadors, and the teams might have one Foreign Service Officer. Usually the political economic reporting officer would be the Foreign Service person. The rest of the team would be retired Foreign Service Officers, in many cases ones who had left the Foreign Service and had taken appointments to the civil service to become full-time inspectors. They in effect forfeit the pension because they can work a full-time job. This is very, very noticeable: a team going out with, in a couple of cases, no active-duty Foreign Service personnel on the team and less and less experience living abroad, inspectors going out who had never served at an embassy abroad or lived abroad. This makes their credibility somewhat lessened in the people coming up. And they haven't resolved this yet. I gather that the latest development in IG have had some change. The last Inspector General, Jacqueline Williams Bridgers, was particularly interested in the forms of management, and she reorganized the IG with some of the very latest management concepts. Matrixes were brought in. People are no longer assigned to an office; they're assigned to a job, they bid on them, and they go from team to team and do things like this. My own evaluation of it was that the theories are very interesting and theoretically should work. For that matter, theoretically communism's a wonderful system and should work. In this case the result was sort of a dropping off, at least in the inspection functions, to a very, very sharp decline in production of numbers of inspections, the number of teams going out - it just collapsed virtually - and inability to get any Foreign Service active-duty people to bid even on the jobs. I won't criticize her for her efforts as Director General. She was doing what she thought was necessary and a good idea and would work. For whatever reason, it hasn't worked. A large part of that, of course, is just resistance. No system like ours is willing to make that degree of change. I think if it had been much more incremental, if there had been a slower effort, but a massive effort to change it didn't work. Now we have a new appointee, a gentleman from Texas, a friend of the President's, Mr. Clark Kent Irving, who appears to be convinced that it should be put back more or less as it has been, a more traditional arrangement: increase the numbers of inspection teams, get back out and start producing again. I think all through this it has had less effect on the other parts of OIG. Investigators are investigators, and they still pretty much do the same thing, and the security oversight intelligence people do the same thing. Auditors got changed around too, but now it apparently is being put back more or less as it had been, and then we'll see how it works out. But I think our generation that remembered the old idea of inspections, we are leaving the scene completely, and there's going to be the new concept. The inspectors coming in are going to be seen for what they are by the standards of the General Accounting Office. They're looking for malfeasance, waste, and inefficiency, not just catch you on something, but look at something and say this is inefficient and wasteful of US dollars. If people still want the sort of management support that the inspectors were able to give in the old days, they'll have to petition the Department to set up an office to do that. That's not the function of an IG, according to the rule book. I have enjoyed very much the career. I sometimes sat and looked at my wife and raised an eyebrow and said, "Did you miss being an ambassador's wife?" She says, "Absolutely not." We took assignments that looked like they would be fun and at the same time would be contributing usefully. I think the most useful thing I ever did was the two tours with the MFO, in which I technically was not part of the Foreign Service anymore, I resigned. And now, as I say, looking back on it, I wouldn't have changed it.

Q: Great. Thank you.

End of interview