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Sir Donald HAWLEY

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SIR DONALD (FREDERICK) HAWLEY, KCMG, MBE

interviewed by Malcolm McBain on Tuesday 7 August, 2007

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Education and Army service in World War II

MM: Could you start by telling us where you were educated and when and how you joined the Army?

DH: I went to a prep school called Elstree which was, I think, fairly formative in my life. My children often say, "Oh Dad! How do you know that?" and reply, "Prep school!" My years at Elstree were happy as well as formative and I did what was fairly common in those days; Latin from a very early age and Greek from the age of ten. Sadly I have retained only a little of this. I managed to get a scholarship to Radley where I stayed for four happy years until 1939.

When the war broke out I was still at school and went in October 1939 to the depot of the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry to join up. They said they didn't want me then and asked me what was I going to do. When I said I was planning to go to Oxford, they said I should do that to fill the time before I was required. It was possible then because, in the war, universities were taking students in the bi-term and I went to New College in January 1940. I obtained a War Degree in what was then called the Honours School of Jurisprudence and never went back after the war to complete my studies. So I had a rather brief Oxford career, but am an 'MA Oxon' nonetheless.

MM: So at what stage did you join the Army?

DH: I actually joined the Army in October 1939 and was attested and all that, even though not actually called up at that stage. At Oxford I joined the OTC, the Officers' Training Corps, and after a while they asked my group if anybody remembered much about mathematics. When I admitted that I was not too bad

on that, I was shifted to the gunnery section and, after a while, became a student instructor in gunnery in the OTC. I passed the necessary exams to obtain what was called a Certificate B, which was a qualification entitling the cadet to enter an OCTU without going through the ranks. Whether that was desirable or not, I don't know, but that's how the system worked in those days.

MM: So you got a commission?

DH: Yes. In April 1941, having taken the necessary exams for my Law degree, I was called up – still only nineteen – and sent to the OCTU at Ilkley which was commanded by Colonel Sebag Montefiore whose nephew Hugh Montefiore happened to be a contemporary of mine there. He later became Bishop of Birmingham and was quite a well-known writer. I stayed at Ilkley for three months and was then transferred to the OCTU at Larkhill, where I was commissioned in September 1941 as a Gunner officer; 2nd Lieutenant RA.

MM: How long did you serve in the Army?

DH: Well, there things become a bit complicated because I understand you're going to ask me about how I joined the Sudan Service. The two are intertwined and so I will have to tell you exactly how it happened.

Before going off to Ilkley, I asked the Oxford Appointments Bureau to put my name down for some sort of job after the war. The man who interviewed me asked me what I wanted to do and, as I had only a rather vague idea, I opted for something administrative. Whereupon he suggested that I should consider the Colonial Service or 'that splendid service, the Sudan Political Service'. When I said, "Oh! That sounds interesting. Please put me down for those", he said, "Yes, but it's not as simple as that. It is important for them to recruit young men at the moment ." I said that, as there was a war going on I didn't particularly want to go in that direction for the present. "Ah!" he said. "But the deal is that – both in Sudan Service and the Colonial Service – throughout the war you would serve with the local troops of the particular territory who are engaged in active war sectors. Of course, in the process, you would both

learn the language and something about the people which would prepare you for the future job in civilian life.” In due course I had preliminary interviews both for the Sudan and the Colonial Service, and was called to final interviews for both. I was asked the difficult question about which would I choose if I were offered a job by both and, when I said the Sudan Political Service, I was asked the inevitable question why. Nonplussed, I merely said that I had heard of its high reputation and cachet.

I was duly selected and, after receiving my commission, went out to the Sudan, round the Cape, to Suez and Egypt. On arrival in Khartoum, I was kitted out and became an officer in the Sudan Defence Force, holding the rank of Bimbashi. This really means a Major or even a Colonel commanding a thousand men if you go back to the Turkish meaning of the word. No British officer in those days held a rank lower than Bimbashi. So Bimbashi Hawley I became, even though I was really only a 2nd Lieutenant. I was just too late to take part in the War in East Africa and, missing out on that, served mainly in Libya and North Africa.

When I was recalled to the Sudan before the end of the war, I protested violently but was told it was my duty to obey.

MM: With the Army?

DH: No, I was called to a civilian job, one of the reasons being that a lot of the senior officers from Political and Technical Departments in the Sudan had been taken away to administer Eritrea and Libya after those territories had been captured from the Italians and the Germans and there was a real manpower shortage in the Administration of the Sudan itself. I was told that it was my duty to go and assume this civilian work. My furious letters were all to no avail. I suppose I could have said I would resign and go somewhere else with the Army, but it wouldn't have been easy to achieve.

Appointment to the Sudan Political Service 1941

MM: You joined the Sudan Political Service formally in 1944?

DH: Strangely enough I actually joined it on arrival in Khartoum in 1941, because I had been placed on the reserve of officers in the British Army. In the Sudan I was seconded by the civilian Government to the Sudan Defence Force. That's actually what happened, although the technicalities of it are not really germane to the main thrust of my career.

MM: After you'd had this introduction to the administration of the Sudan, you did become a member of the Political Service in 1944.

DH: Yes, that's essentially right. I had been a member of the Political Service all along but began my actual civilian service with them then.

MM: And you remained there ..?

DH: I remained in the Sudan until 1955 but in fact I had three Sudan incarnations: soldier, as I have explained and then administrator, after which I moved to the legal side. As my degree was in Law, the Legal Secretary told me I should join the Legal Department and I did so, after several years in Districts. I took my Bar exams in London on 'Study Leave' and then went back out to the Sudan.

MM: And did you make use of those legal qualifications?

DH: Very much so in several ways. First of all when I was in Defence Force – and I'll begin there. During much of 1942, I was in the oasis of Kufra in Southern Libya which the Sudan Defence Force was garrisoning. We were working closely with the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) and David Stirling's SAS when they arrived and started mounting long distance raids on Tripoli and Benghazi.. It was a quite an interesting period and we had a very happy Sudanese unit there.

After Kufra I went on leave and my battery was sent to the Red Sea Hills for regrouping to form part of a larger unit and retraining for service in North Africa. Unfortunately, our Battery Commander had been captured by the Italians during a joint raid on the oasis of Gialo. Leaving a chap called Dick Guest as the senior British officer remaining with me next in line in our own unit. During this reforming in the Red Sea Hills, our Battery's troops did not take to the new Commander who'd been put in overall charge of the expanded formation and started deserting. When I got back from leave, I found this situation though the deserters were inevitably caught and brought back. I then had the unpleasant duty of being appointed prosecuting officer at the Court Martial with the added embarrassment of hearing the troops concerned giving evidence that they did not like serving with Bimbashi X, the Commander, though they were very happy to continue serving with Bimbashi Guest and Bimbashi Hawley! I was, of course, successful in the prosecution of the accused and, as a result, the next batch who had been caught asked me to be their defending officer when they came up for trial!

MM: Not slow to learn! Was this because you spoke Arabic?

DH: Yes. But I did not have a university degree in the language and had had to pick it up as I went along with a number of lessons as well. When people say, "How did you learn Arabic?" I usually point to my nose and eye and say, "I started by saying 'what's this?' and 'what's that?'" A great deal of my Arabic had initially to be learnt like that because, of course, I had many other things to do as well. One had to learn pretty quickly as, in the Political Service, we were required to pass a very stiff exam including written, modern classical, Sudanese spoken Arabic and translation in both directions. If you did not pass it within two years of arrival, you got no rise of pay. In the event I got a Distinction!

The fact that I'd had a legal background probably made it easier for me to deal with courts martial. Now, let's go back to the theme of my using my law in the Sudan in the civil sphere which I first did as a magistrate in a Kosti District. A District Commissioner or Assistant District Commissioner was a

magistrate and had what were called either 2nd class or 1st class powers. You didn't get 1st class powers until you had passed a stiff law exam. Though not nearly as stiff as a degree, it was pretty comprehensive – not just any old exam. Once you'd passed that and also had some experience under tutelage, you could be promoted from 2nd class magistrate to 1st class magistrate. You might then use limited summary powers or you could try a full length case with greater powers, though always subject to the supervision of the Province Judge. Your work was closely supervised until they were sure you were sound. Of course, those convicted had the option of appeal to a higher court. A First Class Magistrate could preside over a Major Court with two other magistrates even if the case were one of murder.

After serving in two Districts – Kosti and Gedaref – I joined the Legal Department after the Legal Secretary had invited me. My first job in that Department was as Police Magistrate in Khartoum, which was very interesting. It was also quite tricky because it was a highly political time and there were criminal cases with political overtones, during some of which there would be huge crowds outside the court shouting slogans like “Long live the unity of the Nile Valley” and “Down with colonialism!”

MM: They were saying it in Arabic, which you understood?

DH: Yes.

MM: Were they shouting these slogans because you were a magistrate?

DH: No, but because of some sort of sympathy with the accused in the case, who was perhaps a political figure. Many of the cases were just normal criminal ones but, where there were political overtones, the court would be very full and the atmosphere sometimes quite tense. I found at such time that the best thing to do, without knowing exactly how to play it, was to crack some judicial joke from the Bench. This would release the tension and usually, somehow or other, inspiration came to me. When the tension lessened it was much easier to proceed.

- MM: What was a typical sort of case? My experience of Arabs and Moslems generally is that they are very honest and don't steal and things like that.
- DH: True but there were a number of common or garden thefts and cases of burglary, though not a vast number. There was one form of theft which the Government had to take cognisance of but which many locals regarded merely as a gentlemanly pursuit – camel theft.
- MM: That, I imagine, would arouse great passion.
- DH: Not really because it was regarded as a gentlemanly game and, if you were caught, well fair cop.
- MM: I can imagine there would be problems with water.
- DH: Not only that, but there is a deep Arab tradition, described well by Glubb and others, of raids by one tribe on another. When camels were taken away, the injured tribe had to ransom them back or fight them over the matter. Although serious and not infrequently leading to bloodshed, such thefts or raids were essentially regarded, I suppose, as football might have been in mediæval England; a very dangerous but exciting game!
- You asked about the Islamic aspect of it. That is quite interesting because sometimes litigants would say, "I can't accept his evidence merely because he has sworn an oath on the Koran in court". They would feel that the other party might not take that too seriously and, therefore, insist on an oath being taken on the tomb of a local Sufi saint, such as one called Wad Hassuna. You couldn't normally allow that, although such a procedure could be sanctioned in a Sheikh's Court – a traditional body constituted under a different law. A Sheikh's Court would be quite happy to agree to such a procedure but for formal courts it was usually too difficult to stomach.

I can remember one case, however – and I can't exactly remember the details of why – where I thought it justifiable for such an oath to be admitted. It was an interesting case sociologically and anthropologically as well as legally.

MM: It was a very good introduction to adult life, wasn't it.

DH: It was indeed, and very often I reckon I learned as much about diplomacy, in terms of dealing with people, from my Sudan experiences as from my subsequent experiences. When you're in the position of a ruler, if you like, you actually live with the consequences on the spot of your own decisions or behaviour and you therefore do learn quite a lot from that.

Resignation from the Sudan 1955

MM: What brought you to resign from the Sudan Service?

DH: You're quite right to use the word 'resign'. As the early 1950s proceeded, the taste for independence grew quicker and quicker. Everything was complicated by Britain's relationship with Egypt and the importance of the Suez Canal was always in the forefront of peoples' minds in formulating British policy. The Sudan, of course, was part of the whole Egyptian equation but – if one generalises – an official in the Foreign Office in Whitehall would tend to think that the Suez Canal was of more importance than the interests of the Sudan. In the years, from say 1948 onwards or really slightly earlier – just after the War – there were two contenders for power in the Sudan: the pro-Egyptian Party and the Umma Party which essentially insisted on Sudan's ultimate independence as distinct from being absorbed by or linked too closely to Egypt. Matters were complicated by the presence of two religious figures of high importance, both connected with the main political parties. The pro-Egyptian Party [Ashigga or National Unity Party] fell within the religious aegis of the Khatmia sect, of which Sayyid Ali El Mirghani was the head. He had in fact returned to the Sudan with the Anglo-Egyptian reoccupation of Sudan in 1898 and thus he had ties with both Egyptians and British. On the other hand Sayyid Abdul Rahman El Mahdi, the posthumous son of the

famous Mahdi, Mohamed Ahmed presided over the Ansar sect and was associated with the Umma Party [pro independence]. Both religious leaders were knights – Sir Ali and Sir Abdul Rahman and I knew them both. In fact I knew Sayyid Abdul Rahman (known as SAR) considerably better as he was very influential in my first District, Kosti on the White Nile. I was summoned from my magistrate’s court in Khartoum on two separate occasions to translate for the Governor General when the two Sayyids had interviews with him. It was an interesting experience for a young man.

MM: Very tricky, I would have thought.

DH: Goodness knows how I would have rated my performance subsequently, but the Governor General didn’t know any Arabic. I think it was probably all right; at any rate, no-one ever told me it wasn’t.

MM: Well done! You did resign.

DH: Yes, you were asking about resigning. Under the 1953 Self Government Statute, there was constitutional provision for a truly independent Judiciary and, when I had become Chief Registrar of the Judiciary, I had to make all the administrative arrangements for setting it up as a separate Department of State. In doing so I had to tease things out from what had been within the purview of the Civil Service and one instance of this was establishing an independent Judicial Appointments Board. The 1953 Self Government Statute was tied to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty which had been signed just beforehand and which provided inter alia for self-determination for the Sudan and a rather complex road to independence. There was agreement that British Administrative, Military and Police staff should be withdrawn and so in the Sudan what happened in Nigeria with British officers, District Commissioners and Provincial Governors staying on after independence did not occur. The whole Political Service was withdrawn between 1954 and 1955 as were all the British officers in the Sudan Defence Force and the Police.

A Sudanisation Committee was, however, also set up to pronounce on the sensitivity of other posts held by British officials which might be considered to affect the freedom of choice of the Sudanese at self-determination. The Committee appointed by the Government of Ismail El Azhari, which was elected on a pro-Egyptian ticket in 1953, appointed very radical Sudanese to that Committee, although there were also British and Egyptian members. But of course the Sudanese had a big say and they took decisions ensuring the departure of more British officials than people had contemplated. One day the Sudanisation Committee purported to Sudanise the whole of the British element in the Judiciary but that raised a constitutional question as to whether they had any power or mandate to Sudanise the Judiciary. As Judges we felt that their decision was incorrect but at the same time did not want to prejudice the future independence of the Sudan Judiciary, in which we and the Sudanese Judges strongly believed. We did not want to embarrass the interests of our Sudanese colleagues who were going to take over and felt that it was not right that we should be dismissed. We, therefore, decided to resign en bloc after painful heartsearching. We all put in our resignations to the Governor General and so you used the word 'resign' absolutely correctly. All the Sudanese Judges wanted nonetheless, even after this, to retain a number of British Judges, of whom I was one, under a Sudanese Chief Justice. They requested this and the Bar Association also voted unanimously to keep some British Judges and put in petitions to that effect. But Ismail El Azhari, the Prime Minister, refused to grant their requests on the grounds that the Egyptians would not like it.

So we all left and, when I had to find another job, I was one of those who applied to join the then Foreign Service. This I was duly able to do after some interviews.

MM: Did you get any credit for your services in Sudan in terms of pension or anything?

DH: Not as such; not with the Diplomatic Service, no. I was in fact a pensionable official in the Sudan because I had been appointed well before pensionable

service for British officials had been stopped as it was for the last seven or eight years before independence. The Government of Sudan, seeing the writing on the wall, negotiated specific contracts with the last batches of British officials. I have always drawn my Sudan pension separately from my Diplomatic Service one and it was quite a nice little cushion, I have to say, when I joined the Foreign Service. Though not very much, it helped a little bit. Later the British Government took over payment of Sudan pensions just as they had for those in Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service and the Colonial Service. We were treated as quasi Crown Servants although we were not technically such – so that pension now comes from DFID [the Department for International Development].

MM: So that's the end of that little episode. You joined the Foreign Service in 1955.

Appointment to the British Foreign Service, 1956

DH: Well actually 1 January 1956 to be precise. It was a snowy morning; I remember it well!

MM: It was a momentous year.

Levant Department of the Foreign Office

DH: It certainly was. My first job was on the Jordan desk in what was called the Levant Department. Dealing with Jordan I sat precisely opposite Peter Laurence, an old school friend who'd been in my House at Radley and was dealing with Israel. He had been in the Office for some time. I personally found my first months in the Foreign Office extremely difficult. For instance in Khartoum, as Chief Registrar, I'd had a huge office of my own. In the FO I was in the third room – as they used to be called and perhaps still are – in a very busy Department with five of us in it: one dealing with Syria, one with Israel, one with something else. Telephones were going; dictating was going on and, what's more, I was very much thrown into it, although I had

somebody kindly sitting at my shoulder for just a day or two. I was a bit confused on procedure as I really didn't know which knobs to pull to make things work on that particular organ. Should I write a white minute? Should I write a blue minute? All that sort of thing.

Anyway, it was anyway a turbulent year. When I'd been in the department about a couple of months, the young – as he then was – King Hussein sacked Glubb Pasha and officers of the Arab Legion, and so I was faced with that situation. The Secretary of State, or a Minister, was due to make a statement in Parliament in the afternoon, at a time when the situation was unfolding and very difficult to follow. One did not know how many people had been affected and I remember trying to find out how many British officers had been sacked. When my Head of Department asked how many it was and I said, "About ...", he replied somewhat tartly that he must have the actual number! So I produced the best estimate and gave him that. He was quite satisfied and that figure was given in Parliament! But it was a bit alarming having to deal with that because, as I said, I still didn't know the system all that well.

The officers were sacked including Glubb came home. Alec Kirkbride, who'd been the grand old man of Jordan, came in to give advice and I took him across to the House of Commons to see the Prime Minister ...

MM: Was he PUS at that time?

DH: Alec Kirkbride? No, you're thinking of Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick. Sir Alec Kirkbride had been British Resident and then Ambassador in Jordan. He was the father of Diana, a well known archaeologist, and a son, Ian, who was in the Iraq Petroleum Company. Anyway, he was a grand old figure. On the way to Parliament he asked me how I was finding my early days in the Office. I replied, "Well, fairly tough going in these early days but fine." He then said, "Well, I worked under the Colonial Office and also under the Foreign Office, and I found that the Colonial Office always said 'no' but, if they eventually agreed, they stuck to it. The Foreign Office always said 'yes' but things didn't necessarily happen." It was a rather shattering insight!

Transfer to Permanent Under Secretary's Department in the FCO

Anyway, after a few months, I transferred to the Permanent Under Secretary's Department, PUSD, and my job was to liaise between the Foreign Office and the Joint Planning Staff. I dealt with the Directors of Plans at three levels. I went to desk level meetings where they were actually drafting papers but also found myself attending the meetings of the Deputy Directors of Plans and of the Directors themselves.

MM: Was this Joint Planning Staff really a fore-runner of the FCO's Planning Department?

DH: No, this was the Joint Planning Staff in the incipient Ministry of Defence, and I was the Foreign Office liaison man. Derek Ashe was liaising with the MOD on the intelligence side and I on the planning side. Although they wrote plans about all sorts of things they did not actually draw up the detailed plan for the Suez operation. That was done by a separate unit altogether.

MM: Was it done by the Military?

DH: Yes. Such Foreign Office input as there might have been was at a level so astronomical as to be out of sight. It was a very strange period because I was cleared, and probably knew more than the Under Secretary in charge of the Middle East. Even so, when the actual operation started, the first I knew of its launch was when I bought an *Evening Standard* when I went out for lunch that day. It was very bizarre.

MM: We've even now only just heard about the extraordinary approaches to Anthony Eden by Pierre Mendès of France suggesting that there should be unification between Britain and France. I mean, something as fundamental as that going on without anyone much below the Prime Minister knowing anything about it!

DH: That's right. It was a most extraordinary period. I have to say that, having served in the Sudan and knowing Egypt reasonably well, I was apprehensive. I wrote a prophetic note which is with my papers at Durham, a personal one not an official one – although as a matter of fact Derek Ashe and I were both worried and concocted a joint minute from our comparatively low level which we submitted. We did not, however, have a good hearing, shall I say!

MM: Before we leave that, could I just ask you what prompted young King Hussein to sack Glubb Pasha?

DH: Yes. In 1956, before Suez, the Young Officers' movement in Egypt under Gemal Abdel Nasser was very strong. By 1956, I think I'm right in saying that he'd already taken over from the first President, General Mohamed Neguib, whose brother, the amiable Ali Bey Neguib, incidentally was Egyptian ADC to the Governor General in the Sudan. I used to play tennis once a week with at the Palace. Both Mohamed Neguib and Ali Neguib had been educated at Gordon College in Khartoum.

That's by the by. When Nasser was President, Young Officers' movements springing up in various parts of the Arab world including Jordan, where an officer called Ali Abu Nawar the leader. I think that King Hussein reached the conclusion that he would have to make some sort of compromise of his own to hold the situation stable because there was quite a lot of anti-British political sentiment building up in the Middle East at the time. Fortunately it was not animus against individuals for the most part – certainly not in the Sudan – but King Hussein must have concluded that it was no longer tenable to have a British Commander and many British officers in his national Force. Nonetheless it all happened very suddenly and came out of the blue.

MM: And of course we had vacated the Canal Zone in 1954; perhaps that was a trigger?

DH: Well, I suppose you could argue that. The question is again how long we could have stayed there because, as you know, we did keep troop numbers on

the Canal over and above what was strictly agreed by treaty, for longer than the treaty provided for. That's why the 1954 Treaty had to be negotiated. Certainly, if you withdraw a strong military presence, it does affect the equation somewhat.

Posting to the Trucial States in Dubai as Political Agent, 1958

MM: After your period in the Foreign Office, your next move was as Political Agent ...

DH: In the Trucial States, as they were then called. That's right. I was not particularly pleased, I have to say, when told of my next appointment as, when I had joined the Foreign Office, I thought I had made it clear to all concerned that I did not wish to go to the Gulf for my first overseas posting. Perhaps, in retrospect, I had only told the Boards this rather than the Office itself. Anyway I was not against the idea in general, but for the first time round didn't particularly want that posting. So in accepting it I was bordering on the grumpy. I have to say, however, that it was one of the greatest experiences of my life and I enjoyed every moment of it in the event.

MM: What did you actually do?

DH: Well, the Political Agent was a very curious sort of hybrid really. The idea of Political Agencies came from India where, as you know, British officers were advisers to Maharajahs in the Princely States. There was a separate cadre of "Indian Politicals" and it was they who had staffed the Gulf posts for a very long period – in fact until the end of the British period in India. Of course they spoke Arabic, Persian and so on. Their style would probably have differed a little from that of those of us who had been in the Sudan, of whom there were quite a number forming a pool of readily available Arabic speakers. The job was a curious one. Representing Britain we were responsible for the external affairs and defence of the Gulf, which were 'Protected States' at that stage and not formal 'Protectorates'. The diplomatic/political part of the job was conveying HMG's views and policy to the seven Rulers and their views to

HMG. Strictly that was about it and as a Political Agent, you didn't interfere in the affairs of local States unless there was something which was a bit too barbarous to be tolerated. In such cases something would have to be said.

In practice, however, our influence was much stronger than that implies. The Political Resident, based in Bahrein, was the chief British diplomatic representative in the Gulf. He was known in Arabic as 'Fakhamat Ar Rais', which means 'His Big Excellency', 'His Puffed Up Excellency' if you like! The Head of the Gulf. The local sheikhs and Arabs talked about him as 'Rais Al Khalij' constantly without any nuance at all - just as a fact. The local people also habitually talked of the Britain as Ad Daula – 'the power'.

As for my job, Sheikh Rashid bin Said, the Ruler of Dubai, was a very progressive man in mind and spirit, although he had had only a very simple education with a Bedu Sheikh at some Koranic school. I think, however, that he was probably one of the most naturally clever and incisive men that I've ever come across in my life. He wanted development to take place in his state and my predecessor who had also served in the Sudan, Peter Tripp, had initiated a number of things in Dubai which the Ruler had been happy to go along with, such as setting up a baladiya – municipality - essentially to clean the place up. We were able to develop that later into something slightly different and more substantial, but Peter Tripp set the ball rolling. Sheikh Rashid was very keen on these things and was eager to have advice about internal and development affairs as well as about defence matters, naval visits and those sorts of things. So the job was a hybrid one; on the one hand doing the official technical job and on the other becoming de facto adviser to the Ruler. To some extent one could differentiate between the roles because we had a development scheme there, which was British Government money for Dubai and all the States. But Sheikh Rashid had money of his own and he would consult me about how he was going to spend it. In fact, at one stage when he went on leave, he said, "You have discretion to commit my money on my projects as you judge best!" – which I never presumed to do.

MM: That displays remarkable trust.

DH: Extraordinary! I can't explain it, but it's recorded in my diaries.

MM: And friendliness.

DH: Yes, we did get on extremely well.

MM: Can you explain the difference between a Protected State and a Protectorate?

DH: I think I probably can but in rather general terms. A Protected State was one where the touch was really very light and you didn't presume to do anything internally. If it was a Protectorate, you took full protectorate powers, as it were, to do all the good - as we saw it in those days - you could for the State. I think that would define it as best one could in simple terms.

MM: You said that, if something barbaric were about to occur, you would have a word. How would you do that?

DH: I'll give you an example. Within a very few days of taking over, a rumour reached us in Dubai that, in Sharjah that Friday morning, a hand was going to be cut off a thief. If I recall correctly - I have written about it somewhere - I think I asked Hooky Walker, my Assistant (Sir Harold Walker now), if he would go and make enquiries of the Sheikh saying that there was 'a rumour which of course we knew couldn't be true'. However, we found that the Arab Assistant in the Agency, Ali Bustani, had in fact already forestalled us and done exactly that without being asked. That would have been one example.

The only other example I can think of is when, in Dubai, it reached my ears that somebody had been beaten on a canon, and I knew the younger elements in Dubai didn't like that. I told Sheikh Rashid that I hoped that he would avoid such acts in the future; it might cause him problems.

MM: And a hint!

DH: I didn't mention that!

MM: So it was an interesting and worthwhile experience.

DH: It was a wonderful experience. In fact I have written a book about it which has just come out, called 'The Emirates: Witness to a Metamorphosis', which compares the Emirates of those days with what's happening now, although everything that is happening now is changing things so quickly. The bulk of the book is taken from my personal letters and diaries filleted to make them accessible.

MM: Anyone who wants to delve further into that could obtain a copy of the book.

DH: Yes, that is it! Personally I find it quite nostalgic to re-read those letters. Sheikh Rashid came to our house in England, although I was in fact in Dubai at the time. It was his first visit to Britain and he had met my parents when they'd come out to Dubai earlier. There's a picture of him and his son, who later became Ruler, on the lawn of our house in Hertfordshire in the book. You can also see my mother and my sister; my father seems to be lurking behind somewhere and you can just see a tiny bit of his head.

So in fact the place I was grumpy about to begin with turned out to be extremely rewarding.

Appointment as Head of Chancery, British Embassy, Cairo, 1962

MM: Your next move then was to Cairo as Head of Chancery at the British Embassy, in 1962.

DH: Very early in 1962. In those days we used to cross the Med on one of the ships of the Adriatica Line to Alexandria and I remember we were held up outside Alexandria – to the Italian Captain's fury – because President Tito was coming in at more or less the same time. Anyway, we got in to harbour at last and, seen through the Customs and other formalities by a local member of

staff, I went to see the Consul General. Well-heeled 'old school' Egyptians actually hated Tito's visits and told me that 'whenever that chap comes here, Nasser does some new nasty thing to us.' Whether true or not, that was their perception.

MM: It must have been a coincidence.

DH: I don't think so! Not entirely! You know Nasser and Tito were both very much leaders in the Non-Aligned Movement along with Nehru and Soekarno.

MM: So we had a Consul General in Alexandria!

DH: We did indeed.

MM: Did he cover Port Said?

DH: Before the Suez operation, we also had a Consul in Port Said and one in Port Tewfik, Suez. In fact the Suez Consulate building had only been built a short time before the Suez business, and we still held it as one of our properties in my time. We were, therefore, able to go down there for weekends and enjoy ourselves in a pleasant building overlooking the Canal. While there, walking in front of the Consulate on one occasion, I fell into conversation with an Egyptian who proved to be a Suez Canal pilot. He had been working as a pilot during the Suez operations – and indeed before – when the British and French pilots were withdrawn. I asked what it was like at that time and he said they had had to work extremely hard simply because they hadn't adequate numbers of pilots, but the job was perfectly easy. The propaganda that we put out before the Suez operation was that the Canal would come to a grinding halt for lack of British and French pilots. This myth was destroyed by a retired Lieutenant Commander who said he didn't know what all the fuss was about. He had arrived at the canal entrance during the 1939-1945 War and, as there weren't any pilots available, he had just driven his frigate down the centre.

MM: So that was your arrival in Alexandria and you then went on to Cairo. Were things back on a normal footing by then?

DH: At that stage, we were trying to repair the damage done by Suez to political, economic and cultural relations and working on all those fronts. One major problem, not at the forefront of normal diplomacy, was the question of British property. An enormous amount of British property had been affected and sequestered during the Suez war period. Things could be extremely complicated because a single piece of property – say a factory – might have gone through several processes: first Egyptianised; secondly nationalised; then sequestered; and then sequestered again under another provision, ‘Proclamation 138’, because the person concerned was a very rich man. You may remember that the United Arab Republic involved a union between Egypt and Syria, but Syria had pulled out of it. Nasser suspected, perhaps not without foundation, that the defection had been caused by rich Syrians financing the opposition and was afraid that something similar might happen in Egypt. To avert this, he neutralised the most wealthy in Egypt who still had riches left in their hands by sequestering their property. The second sequestration under Proclamation 138 did not immediately affect British property already sequestered as enemy property, although it complicated its ultimate release. This Proclamation 138 did, however, affect a lot of Egyptians directly. I had to deal with two Sequestrator Generals at one stage: one for enemy property (British and French) and the other for Proclamation 138, although it became easier when one man combined both roles.

Although I had all the usual Head of Chancery duties, I also had these property matters on my plate and was directly responsible for that. What’s more, there had been a Legal Adviser, Arthur Watts, in the Embassy until I came. He was then withdrawn and I was told that, as I had a legal qualification, I could do what was required.

MM: They’re not slow on the uptake!

DH: I'm not sure that I actually had to do too much purely legal work, but at least I understood the legal issues.

MM: That also was an interesting job.

DH: It was a fascinating job, and there was a lot of humour in serving in Egypt too. The Egyptians, of course, have a wonderful sense of humour which is very infectious.

I can't think quite how it happened, but I got tied up with the Egyptian military; I think the Defence Attaché must have been away. Anyway I had to see the Egyptian Director of Military Intelligence on two occasions. In the first case a group of British men and women in the Army in Aden had strayed over the frontier into North Yemen where the Egyptians had sent troops to support the new revolutionary regime. The question arose of how to get them back. I found the Egyptian DMI, with whom I got on quite well personally, was helpful and the problem was solved. Amusingly enough, about a month or six weeks later, he got in touch with me again and asked if I could help him because some Egyptians had strayed over into British territory in the Aden Protectorate! Again we sorted it out between us.

I thoroughly enjoyed the three years in Cairo and of course that's where Ruth, my wife, turned up. We weren't actually married in Cairo but we did go back there immediately after our marriage.

MM: It was a happy post from that point of view. Were you aware of any subversive activities by the Egyptians in South Yemen?

DH: I'm not sure about in South Arabia. They definitely did support one of the parties there, the name of which I'm afraid escapes me without looking it up. It was not the party which won out in the end and formed the independent government. Actually I think the party the Egyptians supported was the more reasonable party and, as some of their representatives were in Cairo, I did meet them. I'm not saying the Egyptians were not capable of carrying out

actual subversion but I'm not aware of it and, of course, their main concentration of effort was in North Yemen, as it then was. Their action there was more than controversial as they used gas and other things. At any rate they were accused of it.

MM: That doesn't sound very humourous.

DH: That was not indeed. But if you're dealing with ordinary Egyptians in Egypt, there's a lot of humour in day-to-day life.

MM: Highly civilised people actually.

DH: Yes, delightful.

MM: So, from Cairo, you went in 1965 to Lagos.

Counsellor and Head of Chancery, British High Commission, Lagos, 1965

DH: That's right; on the Elder Dempster Line, on the SS Apapa.

MM: And how did you find Lagos?

DH: Well, Lagos was really rather agreeable when we first arrived. It was before things fell apart, and we had a nice house on Queen's Drive overlooking a creek. Our High Commission was huge with over a hundred people and we had subordinate posts – Deputy High Commissions – in Kaduna, Ibadan, Enugu and Benin. So the country was pretty well covered even though we had no representation in Kano, the biggest place in the North. We were thus involved in numerous aspects of what was going on then and had very close and friendly relations with the Nigerians in every sphere.

In our first year, 1965, all was relatively well and our personal and social relations with the Nigerians were good. A democratic government working not only at federal level but also at regional level, with all the panoply of

Parliament, executive councils, elections and so on. Fresh elections, however, were due in the Western Region and there was a good deal of turbulence as the end of 1965 approached. The then Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was probably about to turn his attention to that because the violence was growing notorious and getting out of hand. In the meantime, the broader African issue of Rhodesia and UDI was brewing. Abubakar was particularly helpful to the British Government at the time and, in January 1966, arranged a Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Lagos; it was in fact the first CHOGM ever held outside London. We had to contribute quite a lot to that, and so I had to use the very close relations I had with the Head of Protocol and other senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over it. We were all pretty dog tired after we'd seen Harold Wilson off from Ikeja airport at Lagos at the end of the Conference. At the airport Sir Abubakar stood the middle with Francis Cumming-Bruce, the High Commissioner on his right and I on his left. I was the Acting Deputy High Commissioner at the time because Nick Larmour was away. Within forty-eight hours of the closure of that rather successful Conference, Sir Abubakar had been murdered in the first coup which took place causing considerable loss of life.

Things then changed enormously and General Ironsi, who was the first Nigerian head of the Nigerian Army, took control and all the political Ministers disappeared from their offices. Ironsi was an Ibo and, although most of the main leaders of this coup were in fact Ibo officers it was thought at the time that Ironsi was not actually involved. Those who participated in it were mainly majors. Lt Col. Ojukwu, who later of course led the secession of Biafra, was commanding the battalion based in Kano and, although an Ibo, stood aloof from what was happening, although there was a lot of speculation about his position. The majors implicated came to be known as the Bloody Majors and there was a lot of pressure for them to be put on trial, because not only had they either killed or been responsible for killing the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, but also one of the most senior officers in the Nigerian Army, Brigadier Maimalari. He was number two or three or four down the line after Ironsi and it so happened that he had been a fellow passenger on the boat on which we went out to Lagos. We, therefore, knew

him quite well. So that was a very sad period. It looked for a while as if the Military might hold the situation, but frankly Ironsi wasn't a man full of political ideas and it became impossible. Massacres followed and then the second coup place and Nigeria very nearly split up in 1966 and 1967. The first year, however, before all this had been really quite agreeable.

One thing I mentioned in my book "*Desert Wind and Tropic Storm*" was my suspicion when people said 'X is anti-British.' I always liked to find out first whether it was true; secondly, if it was, whether there was a reason for it; and thirdly if the condition might be curable. I had been told that the Permanent Under Secretary at the Ministry of Finance was anti-British. So I cultivated him, and he and his very nice wife used to come to the house quite a lot. He was one of those with some sparkle and became a very good friend. Then, when things fell apart, he used to drop in to tell me what was happening and on our very last day as we were leaving he and his wife actually came to the house on to see us off personally. But that's by-the-by and perhaps not very germane to our main thread.

MM: Did other people such as Nick Larmour and Francis Cumming-Bruce have good relations as well?

DH: I would say so, yes.

MM: So you were really closely linked into the establishment.

DH: I think we all had our separate contacts. I just mentioned my theory about allegedly anti-British people because, once or twice in my life, I liked to put it to the test and this was an example!

MM: Have we covered Nigeria?

DH: I think probably. It was very sad to see the writing on the wall getting larger and larger, and the almost inevitability of the Biafran secession. I feel that it

need not and should not have happened. I think to some extent that history is in danger of being rewritten a little bit in some areas.

Malcolm MacDonald came out on a number of occasions and was doing tremendous work, in my view, as an intermediary between Gowon – who of course became the controller and ruler of the great bulk of Nigeria at the time of the second coup - and Ojukwu. It was Gowon who saved the northerners from pulling out of the Federation and becoming independent. Malcolm MacDonald really did do sterling work and I always felt that had time been granted to him (I'm not sure exactly why time ran out), he might have achieved something. In the event, however, he didn't and then the tragedy of the war took place with enormous casualties. One thing that's very often forgotten is that, at the time of the second coup which was when things really started to change, there were 2,000 Ibo police in Lagos and it was certainly believed, as well as there being intelligence to this effect, that Ojukwu had given instructions urging people in Ibo land to send messages to their sons brothers and cousins in Lagos to come back to the East because it was unsafe in Lagos. In fact those 2,000 police were, with their colleagues, keeping order there and things to me seemed fairly normal. In fact an Ibo policeman one afternoon tried at that juncture to give me a parking ticket at that stage, for parking outside the High Commission!

First of all 250 Ibo police went, then 500, and so on until all 2,000 went left. They were, of course, all trained to arms and I had the impression that that the defection was more inspired than natural.

For the whole of that period, right up until we left finally in early 1967, Malcolm MacDonald was trying hard. What happened after that, I really don't know.

MM: He was Special Representative of the British Government for Africa, wasn't he.

DH: Yes, and he'd also been Commissioner General in South East Asia. A remarkable man with a remarkable style.

MM: Enormous ability to establish good personal relations.

DH: Yes, but curiously he seemed quite unprepossessing as a personality in many ways. But he was a tremendous letter writer, and I had letters from him up to within a week or two of his death when I was High Commissioner in Malaysia.

MM: Was there any sign of the tremendous corruption and congestion in Lagos at the time you were there?

DH: Yes. In fact ridding the country of corruption was one of the reasons given by the majors for their coup. The Finance Minister, Chief Festus whom I mentioned earlier as having been murdered, was fairly notorious for taking huge back-handers. It was said that, if anyone were seeking a lucrative contract, he would have an open drawer open on his desk. As the bidder conversed with him, he was expected to drop money into his drawer until, when the Minister judged that the sum deposited was enough, he closed it, signifying that the deal was done. Whether that's true or not, I don't know but he certainly had a reputation as being corrupt.

MM: And what about congestion in the harbour?

DH: It was not so severe at that stage, no. I don't remember a problem when we docked.

MM: Let's move on to Baghdad.

Sabbatical year at Durham University, 1967

DH: I had a brief interval of a year at Durham University on sabbatical, to which the Foreign Office sent me. This is where I first established the close relations

I've had ever since with Durham. I would like to have gone to the IDC (Imperial Defence College) as it was still called in those days for my sabbatical, but was told I could not do that because, when I was liaising with the Military earlier, I had, as it were, done the same sort of thing 'for real'. I also had had experience with the Trucial Oman Scouts and so it was appropriate for someone else should do the IDC course. I must say we were enchanted by Durham and enjoyed it hugely.

MM: Did you know Durham had very strong links with Malcolm MacDonald?

DH: Yes indeed; his marvellous collection of porcelain is there. And there are very strong Sudan links; you know about that, do you?

MM: No.

DH: There's a Sudan archive in the library at Durham University. I think it's unique for overseas territories to have an archive of this sort, because it contains not only official papers that have found their way there, but also private papers of a very large number of people who served in the Sudan in almost every capacity. It is an important resource now for those who are going to work in the Sudan in NGOs or in development. Such people, as well as many Sudanese, use it frequently. My papers, incidentally, are deposited at Durham but not in the Sudan Archive because they cover other places as well. They are in 'Special Collections' but cross-referenced to the Sudan Archive.

Counsellor Commercial, British Embassy, Baghdad, 1968

Anyway, we pass on to Iraq. I was clutched away from Durham slightly prematurely. We'd been rather looking forward to the long vacation spending time in Northumberland, but it wasn't to be because diplomatic relations had been broken by the Iraqis with us in 1967, essentially over what they deemed to be our attitude towards the 1967 War in the Middle East. However, they came to view things differently when we inaugurated Resolution 242 at the UN about the Israel/Palestinian situation, and relations with us were restored

rather more quickly than had been anticipated. Since I was, as it were, in a 'parking slot', I was hastily pulled out of it and told to go to Iraq as the Commercial Counsellor. In fact I was Number two in the Embassy and consequently Chargé d'Affaires from time to time. On arrival in Baghdad incidentally, I found that, wearing my commercial hat, I had better political access than the Political Counsellor.

MM: And of course you spoke Arabic.

DH: Yes, but he did too. It wasn't a matter of personalities; it was simply my wearing the commercial hat that worked. It wasn't a device. I really was the Commercial Counsellor and at that stage you more or less had to go through a commercial course, as I had, before you could go through the hoops to higher office. The political spin-off I was able to gain from my commercial work proved considerable.

MM: That is a bit surprising really. How do you account for the fact that the commercial hat worked in Baghdad?

DH: Well, I think that the Iraqis seriously wanted to restore economic and commercial relations with Britain, or at any rate a very substantial number of them did; certainly that applied to people in the private sector, as well as quite a proportion of those in the Ba'ath Party, not a few of whom were really rather pro-British. We spent a lot of time puzzling out where the Ba'ath Party was coming from and going to. It's an Arab Nationalist Party divided into two parts – the Syrian one and the Iraqi one – and the only person who could really speak at the topmost co-ordinating level was Michel Aflaq, the Christian Syrian who had founded the international Ba'ath Party. He came to Baghdad from time to time. Apart from the pro-British element – which you could not distinguish very clearly – there was a faction more inclined towards the Soviet Union. Some sort of tussle was going on.

What's quite interesting in view of what happened subsequently, and the way that Saddam Hussein embraced building mosques and so on, is that, if you

read the Ba'ath Party manifesto in 1967 – which in fact I can show you – there is no word in it about God, Allah or the Koran. The Ba'ath was a totally secular party. During the time that we were in Baghdad, never once did either Ruth or I hear people talking of Sunni or Shia difficulties and divisions; it simply didn't occur. Of course you knew which were the Sunni areas and which were Shia, and you probably knew who among your friends might come from one sect and who from the other. But there was considerable inter-marriage and the division simply wasn't an issue. At that stage, many Iraqis could and would come to the Ambassador's house, to mine and those of other senior officials but they had to be cleared by Iraqi Intelligence unless they were sufficiently elevated. For the most senior it was not a problem. Later, I believe, it became very much more difficult and people like Alec Stirling, who was later Ambassador there, told me that contact with Iraqis was very difficult in his time. In our day it still wasn't.

On the other hand extraordinary things happened. We were encouraged by one part of the Iraqi establishment to put a Commercial Office in town and thought it a very good idea to take this function away from the old Embassy itself. We had an official opening of the town office and many private sector business men were invited. Next day another branch of the Iraqi government machine, the Intelligence, sent officials to arrest all those Iraqi businessmen who had attended! What was really happening internally was indeed a puzzle.

I don't know if you remember when a number of aircraft were hi-jacked in September 1970. As a matter of fact Ruth and the children came out to Baghdad on the very same BOAC aircraft that went on to Kuwait, and on its way back from the Gulf was hi-jacked and taken to Dawson's Field in Jordan.

MM: That was a VC10, I think.

DH: I think it probably was. The situation was very tense and to begin with the Iraqi press tended to favour such drastic actions in support of the Palestinians, but the Government clearly thought after a while that that would be a mistake. I was Chargé at the time and remember being summoned to the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs to see the Under Secretary, quite honestly thinking I was going to be declared PNG or something. However, the Under Secretary said, “Good news! You’ll be glad to hear that the Government is going to condemn attacks and hi-jackings of this sort.”

MM: What led to the emphasis being based on differences between the Shias and the Sunnis in Iraq?

DH: What, you mean latterly, since the invasion in 2003?

MM: Is it that recent?

DH: Yes. In modern time it has accentuated enormously since then. I can’t speak for what was happening immediately before 2003. I do know, however, that Terry Clarke, who was Ambassador in the 1990s, told me that he never heard of distinctions between Sunni or Shia being spoken about as an issue. I think Alec Stirling, who was there earlier, says the same. Of course there were Sunni and Shia but they certainly weren’t fighting, and it was not an issue that impinged on daily life; they had lived together without fighting for a long time. In fact the very worst fighting between them had been in the early days of Islam, though there were many later historical instances.

MM: What about relations with Iran?

DH: Relations with Iran were quite ambivalent. When I was in Baghdad the two most influential Embassies, without doubt, were the Iranians and ourselves. The Iraqi President, Vice Presidents and senior Ministers would, for instance, come to receptions at both the Iranian and our Embassy when they were prepared to go to only a few Embassies. I always reckoned that the Iraqis seemed to get on well personally with the Iranians. On the other hand one of the things the Iraqis said to us when we re-established relations was – and this was said to me several times – ‘we want you to help us over three matters in particular. First of all, to stop the Iranians meddling with Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan; secondly, to continue with the good work you have done at the UN

with Resolution 242 over a solution to the Palestinian problem; thirdly, to help us reach a better deal with the oil companies.’ Those propositions were formally put to us.

Despite the ambivalence between Iraq and Iran, diplomats and ministers seemed to understand each other very well whether they were speaking Persian or Arabic. The Iranian Embassy, representing a very large neighbouring country was very influential.

But then they suddenly expelled the Iranian Ambassador just like that. I can’t remember exactly what the cause was except that he was accused of complicity in a plot against the regime. At a later stage, of course, Saddam and the Shah reached an agreement over the Shatt-al-Arab waterway which entirely changed the maritime regime there. Under the Persian/Ottoman Turkish border settlement of 1913/14, the Shatt-al-Arab all lay in Iraqi waters and thus, unusually for international waterways, the water all belonged to one side. Saddam Hussein actually agreed with the Shah that the boundary should go down the median line, which is the normal rule in international waters. So the Iraq/Iran relationship was complex. Later, of course, came the Iran/Iraq War but that was after my time and after the Iranian Revolution.

MM: So really, during your time, access was good, relations were ...

DH: It was not really improving. We thought we were making ground here and there, but I can’t say that access was definitely improving because the Intelligence element in the government was perhaps growing stronger. This is confirmed by something the present Iraqi Ambassador in London told me recently. He was Under Secretary in the Ministry of Planning when we were in Baghdad and I knew him and his Minister quite well. He came to the house for at least one of the big parties we gave – perhaps for our in-coming Ambassador or the out-going one – and was as a result gently warned off. So you couldn’t say that things were just opening up in any easy sense; no they weren’t. At the same time, we felt that we were making ground and ground

was also being made in terms of relationships between the oil companies. We genuinely thought that some settlement might eventuate.

Going back to your theme about Iran/Iraq: the Iraqis broke relations with us over the Tunbs Islands when we withdrew from the Gulf in late 1971, because, accusing Britain of complicity with the Iranians, they claimed that we just allowed them, knowing them to be Arab territory, to fall into Iranian hands. There's an irony about that because Glen Balfour Paul, who was Ambassador for the latter part of my period there, gave a copy of my book 'The Trucial States' to the Director of the Political Section of the Iraqi Foreign Office. When Dr Daud informed Glen Balfour Paul that Iraq was breaking relations he also thanked him for having previously given him that copy of my book, because, until he had read it he didn't know anything about the Tunbs! So there's an irony! (Perhaps I shouldn't have written it!) Glen Balfour Paul relates this in his book.

MM: Was there any oppression of the Iraqi population by the Government in your time?

DH: It was a very tough regime but the Iraqis are used to toughness and, if they are imprisoned as many were, not finding good conditions there. Whether they like strength or not, they will admit to admiring it. Many expressed great admiration for Nuri al Said for instance and they often talked about Al Hujjaj, the ruler of Iraq sent by the Caliph in Damascus in the early days of Islam to restore order there. Al Hujjaj did this very effectively but with great cruelty and roughness. Nevertheless I heard Iraqis say more than once 'there was a man!'

Oppression, yes. The police and the Mukhabarat (Intelligence Service) were very strong and feared. For instance just before we left, our next door neighbour sent us a note inviting us come in for a drink, but requesting us to come very discreetly. We naturally were and on arrival they said 'we've lived next to you for three years and simply can't allow you to leave the country without entertaining you. Sadly it's really been impossible until now.' So the

heavy hand was undoubtedly there, and was used in certain circumstances. In fact on one occasion they arrested a whole lot of people and, after trial, hanged a number of Jews with others whom they called 'collaborators'. They then displayed the bodies hanging in Liberation Square and the officials in all the Ministries were invited to go and observe the scene.

On an unrelated matter, at one stage, as a result of Saddam's influence, a deal was done with the Kurds. The whole of Kurdistan was opened up, and all the Arab Governors of the Kurdistan Provinces were replaced by Kurds. Actually I was the first senior diplomat to be allowed to go into that northern area and Ruth and I went together. We found the Kurds cock-a-hoop because of the appointment of Kurds as the new provincial Governors, replacing Arab predecessors. So Iraq was a very mixed bag.

Appointment as Consul-General and Ambassador, Sultanate of Oman, 1971

MM: In 1971 you were appointed as HM Consul General, Muscat.

DH: It was April I think, when we were transferred from Baghdad to Muscat. After a brief period of briefing in London, we went en famille flying by Iraqi Airways to Bahrain where Geoffrey Arthur was still the last Political Resident. He was a very old friend from Cairo days where we'd worked very closely together. On we went to Muscat. Considerably earlier, in May 1970, I had been asked if I would like to be Ambassador to the former Sultan, Sultan Said Qaboos's father. The idea apparently at that stage was that, if someone of ambassadorial rank were appointed to him, Sultan Said might listen to advice more readily about getting development going in the country.

At any rate, things happened - 'events' as they say - on 23 July 1970 and Sultan Qaboos took over from his father who left the country, came to England and stayed for the rest of his life in the Dorchester Hotel where he died the following year.

They wanted me in Muscat in April 1971 pretty quickly and, at the time, Sultan Qaboos, who though not exactly under house arrest in his father's time had been restricted in his movements, was taking a prolonged holiday. As speed was apparently of the essence, I went to Oman as Consul General as the predecessors had been. As soon as the Sultan himself came back in August, however, the Omanis asked me to leave the country and return so that they could receive me properly as the first Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. So I went to Bahrain and Dubai for a day or two and, when I came back I was received in Muscat with the due ceremonial of those times as the new Ambassador. I was in the very first Ambassador Oman had had since the Great Moghul sent an Embassy in the 1780s. Thus I also became at the same moment the first Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.

MM: Did it make any difference to your official residence?

DH: Yes it did, in a very big way. As soon as it became an Embassy, letters started pouring in, "Now you're an Ambassador, you're entitled to this and that"; all sorts of things which, as Consul General, I was not entitled to. Fortunately, however, despite going to Muscat as Consul General, I had had ambassadorial pay, which I had already enjoyed for three months. Immediately after those three months, the letters came announcing my entitlement to crockery of a certain type, and to various pots and pans and all sorts of things one didn't know about. Very exciting!

MM: You were in the same house?

DH: In the same house and the same office. We lived 'over the shop' in the lovely old Consulate building built in 1890, with magnificent views over the harbour. It was really sensational. Unfortunately it's now gone and forms part of the Palace of Sultan Qaboos as a guest wing. In its day it was marvellous. Another thing that happened was that money was available for refurbishment of the premises. So people came from the equivalent of the Ministry of Works, (the Department of the Environment - I think it had already become that), and they asked what we would like in the way of furniture, furnishings,

and all sorts of things. We wanted to make some changes to the Embassy to put two small rooms together to make a bigger drawing room, and also to extend the dining room; all this happened with the utmost ease. I think we must have been in a period when the Treasury weren't cost cutting unduly. Everything we wanted came.

MM: Why was Oman important to Britain?

DH: If you look at a map of that part of the world, you will find that Oman is the largest country in that corner of Arabia. It has one geographical feature which is extremely important - the tip of the Musandam Peninsula, the narrowest point at the mouth of the Persian Gulf; where you have Iran on the north side and the Musandam Peninsula on the south. As that is part of the Sultanate of Oman the two countries that actually control the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Gulf – whatever anybody likes to call it – are Oman and the much bigger country, Iran. A large proportion of the world's oil flows through those straits; and that is of crucial strategic importance. There is a curiosity because this tip of the Musandam Peninsula is separated from the great bulk of Oman by a corridor belonging to the United Arab Emirates, so it's rather a jigsaw part of Arabia. But there's no doubt about the sovereignty of the Musandam Peninsula being Omani; hence the country's overall strategic importance.

Oman's significance at that time was the greater because oil had been discovered in commercial quantities and was just beginning to flow from about 1967 onwards. Another factor was that there was a war going on in Dhofar between rebels who had started as a group of Dhofari rebels – the Dhofar Liberation Front – but had been infiltrated and more or less taken over by communists from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which was aided and abetted by the Chinese, the East Germans, and the Iraqis to some extent. The Russians weren't involved quite so directly but at that stage, of course, they controlled East Germany and so had a surrogate in that part of Arabia. It was certainly thought that, if Dhofar were to be taken over, there would have been one of those domino effects which have been talked about in theory and sometimes occurred in practice. Oman, the Emirates and parts of

the Arabian Gulf would go out of their former orbit. What did the rebels call themselves? The People's Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), thus announcing their intentions very clearly in their title. Interestingly enough an academic of great standing, Fred Halliday, at that stage wrote a book called '*Arabia without the Sultans*'. As a matter of fact, it's a very good source for what was happening on the other side from ours because he detailed exactly what those revolutionary movements were up to.

However, the collapse did not take place because the combination of a military campaign in Dhofar with 'hearts and minds' and actual development on the ground won the Dhofaris over gradually; and more and more deserted the rebels. The more communist and atheistic the rebels became, the more offensive it became to some of the Dhofari leaders who changed sides reckoning that the new Sultan was really going to do something positive for their country. I think that the Sultan was very successful because he pardoned a very large number of these rebels, and indeed absorbed many into his Government. Now Salalah is the southern capital of Oman and has more or less replica Ministries of those in the north. Dhofaris also hold extremely important positions including that of Minister of Foreign Affairs and that's one case in point of a former rebel actually becoming a leading modern Omani leader.

MM: How did you get on with Sultan Qaboos?

DH: He was at that stage of course quite a young man. He had been educated at Sandhurst and, before that, by a man called Romans, an Anglican priest. Romans had served in India, and ran an establishment in East Anglia for the scions of overseas potentates teaching them British/English ways and preparing them for Sandhurst and the like. Sultan Qaboos at that stage was a delightful person to be with. One was just very comfortable with him and we would converse extremely easily and naturally. He had a combination of natural Omani good manners, which are notable – everybody comments on them – and his own upbringing as senior member of the royal family after his father, as well as English good manners. Amongst other things when he was

with the Romans he developed a love of military bands and also classical music, not least organ music. In fact he had an organ built in his house in Oman, but that was later.

MM: Were there many other missions in Muscat?

DH: When I arrived, there was one other Consul General, so we were two Consuls General; the Indian, Mr Suri, and me. When I presented credentials as first Ambassador, the Indians were not the first to follow, although I think Mr Suri had become a Chargé d'Affaires. In fact the Americans were next after me. They had a non-resident Ambassador, resident in Kuwait, Bill Stolfuss with Pat Quinlan as Chargé d'Affaires in Muscat. Very shortly after that, the Indians, Pakistanis and then the Iranians sent Ambassadors.

MM: So a diplomatic community began to form.

DH: By the time I left, I think we were twelve or fifteen, I can't quite remember. Anyway, a relatively small number signed the presentation plate which they gave me on departure compared with those who sign plates in larger capitals.

MM: There has been mention at various times of the Sultan's being fairly backward and opposed to development. Did you come across that?

DH: If you're talking about the former Sultan, there is no doubt that he was not meeting the anticipation and hopes of his people, particularly after the discovery of oil. He did nonetheless set in hand a little bit more than he was given credit for, and it is not always remembered that he took over a bankrupt country from his father. As the result of prudence – which our present Prime Minister Gordon Brown boasts of – he put his country's finances into the black.

In the case of Sultan Qaboos, it would be impossible to argue that he hadn't developed the country. In fact developments there are quite extraordinary. Most people who see what has happened there comment very favourably

indeed on the high standard achieved in their schemes and the harmony of all the buildings. The engineering work was largely done, certainly in the early stages, by European – and largely British – consultants and contractors. All very well done, with a road system all over the country, good telecommunications, schools and world class standard hospitals.

In the time of the former Sultan there were only three schools, all boys' schools up to secondary level: one in Muscat, one in Mutrah and one in Salalah. By the time we arrived, which was only seven months after Sultan Qaboos took over, there were schools all over the country, mainly in tents and camps. The Omanis had just started up education on as a big a scale as they could manage. The standard of teaching was not as high as it was later to become, but my goodness they started to do it with a will. Certainly Sultan Qaboos has always been credited by his people with doing everything in their interest and giving them development.

If you're talking about the democratic process, or something like that, then I think you would have to say that it is not even now, nor necessarily should it be, a full western-type democracy. On the other hand, the extent to which Sultan Qaboos has liberalised things is highly to be commended. Oman was the first Arab country to have women police apart from a rather bizarre guard of Amazons which I believe President Gaddafi had.

MM: What about education for women?

DH: Education for women started with him and also the great improvement in health. According to WHO ratings, Oman ranks high and it is a very creditable state of affairs. The Sultan has always wanted to give due place to women. Half the university, for instance, the Sultan Qaboos University, are women. They have women Under Secretaries, women Ministers, women Ambassadors and women Colonels in Army and Police. They do have popular representation with forms of election. The Sultan feels he's moving at a pace which can be coped with, rather than taking on a lot of ideas imposed from outside. He is very conscious, I think of people's expectations and very

liberal in his approach. If you say, however, that it is more of a benevolent autocracy than a democracy, it's true; ultimately that remains true. On the other hand Sultan Qaboos himself wrote what is called 'The Basic Law', the constitution, which I think is so liberal in parts that some of his policemen and security chiefs wondered whether things might be going too far. I think one has to give him a great deal of credit.

MM: What was the position of their defence forces?

DH: Well, the defence forces now have been built up into extremely effective, well-equipped modern forces. If you go back to 1971, I remember the first National Day parade in July, exactly one year after he'd taken over – and it was very hot. The troops used to wear brown plimsols; something as basic as that. Gradually they became better equipped in every way and the sophistication of the Sultan's Armed Forces, as they were called, grew greater and greater under successive British commanders as resources became available. The biggest change, I suppose, came when Tim Creasey, with the rank of Major-General rather than Brigadier, succeeded John Graham as the Commander. At this point the troops in Dhofar were formed into an expanded Brigade under the command of a Brigadier. The first two of these themselves later became Generals. Tim Creasey and they – first Jack Fletcher and then John Akehurst – provided leadership and training which enabled the Sultan, with British assistance, to win the war in Dhofar. There were also some excellent people, I may say, on secondment from the RAF and also from the Royal Navy.

MM: How many people do you think we had there, approximately? On loan service, presumably.

DH: Well, there were two categories of British officer: Loan Service personnel made available under the Loan Service Agreement between the two countries and Contract Officers engaged under a direct contract with the Sultanate. Sometimes they were called mercenaries, which offended them deeply because they really believed themselves to be devoted loyal soldiers of the

Sultan. In practice they and the Loan Service Officers worked as one and were largely interchangeable.

MM: How many were there?

DH: I can't tell you exactly; I ought to be able to do that. It was at that stage well over a hundred Loan Service personnel.

MM: So you enjoyed your time there.

DH: Very much and it was an incredible time to be there. I was very privileged twice, actually: first of all to witness the time of Oman's opening up like a bud into a flower, and of course I'd seen something of the same sort earlier in the Trucial States – in the same corner of Arabia. Oman still has a very special place for Ruth and me in our hearts and His Majesty has been very kind in inviting us back to nearly all his National Days since 1980.

MM: As a personal guest?

DH: Yes. So perhaps my judgement is not objective, but at least I've been there and seen things for myself!

MM: It's given you a glimpse of what's going on subsequently. It puts it all in perspective, doesn't it?

DH: That's right. I follow things there quite closely. I also try to follow what happens in the Sudan, which is quite difficult, Malaysia and the Emirates; less so in the other places where I served, although I find Iraq has been very much on my mind.

MM: Yes, I can imagine that!

DH: What with Caroline having been the BBC correspondent there as well.

Appointment as an Assistant Under Secretary of State in the FCO 1975-77

MM: After Oman, you came back to the Foreign Office as an Under Secretary. What were you responsible for there?

DH: I was the Under Secretary supervising a rather strange mixture of Departments – not political ones. They were: Finance; Migration and Visa; Treaty and Nationality; Accommodation and Services; Consular; Claims Department; and the Passport Office, which in those days used to be run by the Foreign Office. It was the largest Department in the Foreign Office by far, with several hundred people including those in the regional offices, all of which during my time as Under Secretary. It was a sort of – I hate to call it ‘ragbag’, but all those things were brought together in my portfolio.

MM: And no doubt they were capable of throwing up problems.

DH: Yes. Consular problems, as you can imagine, were always liable to come up and immigration control was very much on our plate. In the sub-continent, our High Commissions and subordinate posts were staffed by a combination of Diplomatic Service staff and people seconded from the Home Office. They had to handle huge numbers of applications for entry clearance certificates, which had been introduced some years earlier, which were similar to visas for foreign nationals. The smooth working of that, therefore, came within my purview and I went out to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to take stock. The resulting report which I wrote about my findings was unfortunately leaked. One afternoon at lunchtime, I was chairing a lecture at the Anglo-Omani Society of which I was the founding Chairman. When I got back to the office, the Private Secretary was on the telephone saying, “Donald, you ought to know that Enoch Powell is on his feet in the House at this very moment quoting great chunks of your report.” Of course there was then a tremendous hoo-hah, quite rightly, about how this had got into the public domain. I guessed initially that conceivably one of the immigration offices in the sub-continent, who didn’t entirely like what was going on there, had sent a copy of

the report to the post to his MP. But this was not so, but as quite a lot of additional copies of the report had been made at the request of various ministers in different departments of the Government it took some time to establish where it had come from. It was definitely a London source, and it certainly wasn't leaked from my office because that would have been totally abhorrent to me. I do not agree with those officials who later tried to justify their action in leaking other sensitive documents by claiming it was truly a matter of conscience. It was, however, of such interest to Ministers that I think the probability is, without pointing a particular finger, that it was passed by one politician to another. The matter was never to the best of my belief ever really solved.

MM: What were the bits of it that were of major interest?

DH: Essentially the report portrayed the very strong pressure from sub-continental people to come to Britain at all our posts. There were huge queues, for instance, outside the Embassy in Islamabad and in Dhaka, and it was rather sad to see them because people – usually with members of their family – were standing for hours in the sun waiting for their turn for interview, which they of course eventually got because appointments had been made. We turned our attention to those long queues as one of the problems with which we had to deal and shelters were put up to improve things. The pressure to immigrate to Britain was really very significant. There was disagreement between the Foreign Office and the Home Office at the time. The Foreign Office considered, as a result of advice from all the High Commissioners, that the 'problem' was 'infinite' as current regulations stood, owing to the sheer numbers of families coming, multiplication, and the ability to bring in brides and bridegrooms to swell families. The Foreign Office wished the question to be viewed in that light. The Home Office on the other took the line that the 'problem' was 'finite' and that, if only the backlog were cleared up, the whole problem would disappear. There was a feeling both in the country at large and in Whitehall that the rate of immigration – as has been felt recently – was perhaps such that the people coming in could not be dealt with and absorbed quickly and easily. That, however, was not the concern of the Foreign Office,

nor did we go into that aspect. Our concern was how the system was working rather than what the result was going to be and there were problems because undoubtedly – though this certainly did not apply to all – there was a considerable amount of cheating.

MM: You mean people were getting in under false pretences.

DH: Yes. Sometimes, for instance, members of families would be included in the list of families which they didn't truly belong to. Such cases were proven to have occurred on many occasions. There was also falsification of papers, and forged documents. In general it was said in the bazaars of all the sub-continental countries that a payment of 20,000 rupees would enable you to enter the UK by one means or another. Middlemen were taking money to arrange some means, including smuggling, of getting people in – and they didn't always deliver either!

MM: I think that had been rife for decades.

DH: Probably, but it was on quite a big scale at that time and was of concern to the Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, and indeed to the country. Enoch Powell, great brain as he was, rather over-egged it in what he said but it was a question that needed to be dealt with and many people were trying to do so dispassionately. Things changed with Enoch Powell's speech and next day the press descended on me at home. At about 7.00 in the morning, the bell rang and I went down to answer it, face covered in shaving soap. It proved to be a photographer who said he would like to take my photograph. I said 'go ahead.' He said, "Can I come back in an hour or so?"

When I left the house to go to the office in my car, pressmen leapt out of the bushes and thrust a microphone at me. One of them said, "They say you're a racist." I replied "Look, if I were a racist, why did I willingly spend all the time I've spent abroad amongst the Sudanese, the Nigerians, the Egyptians, the Iraqis and so on? I simply wouldn't have done it." "All right!" they said. "They say you don't know the law." So I told them I was actually a member of

the Bar and it was not usual to say that to one's face in those circumstances. "Ah! Then they say you don't know about immigration law." "Well, I studied it as much as most other people involved in the law", was my riposte. They seemed quite satisfied with those answers, and all disappeared.

All bar one that is, for he came back sneakily afterwards and rang the bell when I'd gone to the office. Ruth answered the door, and looking round, the journalist said, "Nice place you've got here. What sort of value would your house have?" Naturally enough, Ruth was fairly cagey. Then he said, "What would you be doing now if it weren't for our arriving here because of your husband? I expect you would be enjoying your leisurely life". She said, "Do you want to know the truth? I would be studying for my A level sociology exam which is coming up next week!" That silenced him.

The whole thing nonetheless was a deep embarrassment and I just had to live with it and parry press enquiries. The Secretary of State, Tony Crosland, was kind enough to see me and also write me a little note later saying I'd dealt with a difficult situation well.

MM: Did you have any other problems at that time?

DH: Not on that scale! We had the question of whether to sell the Villa Wolkonsky, the Residence of the British Ambassador in Rome, when the Department of the Environment said that they could make £14m out of it. We in the Foreign Office doubted if that could be so for various reasons but eventually agreed to put it on the open market. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Joel Barnett, was alleged to have been the man who had originally said we would have to sell it and the instigator of the whole thing. Then he happened to have to go to Rome and, when he came back, he said, "What's all this about closing the Residence in Rome?" whereupon the whole problem disappeared in a puff of smoke.

MM: Good for Joel Barnett! You were involved with Cyprus? Was that at this time?

DH: Yes. The Turkish invasion took place in 1974 but, in 1975 and 1976, I led missions to both sides of the Green Line in Cyprus, largely to try to clear up the problems of British residents. I saw Ministers on the Greek side, including the Foreign Minister and also had meetings with Denktash on the Turkish side. I managed to negotiate some improvements for the British community.

Appointment as British High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur 1977-81

MM: So that was quite a worthwhile sort of step in the direction of going to Kuala Lumpur. How did that come about?

DH: Well, interestingly enough I don't exactly know. At that time I had access to lists which showed all the senior posts liable to be vacant in the near future and I couldn't see anything at all to attract me very much. The Chief Clerk, Curtis Keeble, asked me if I had any ideas and, thinking of something quite close to home which would be quite convenient with children at boarding school and so on, I suggested Malta. "Malta", he said, "you deserve something better than that!" I was rather surprised. After that I was approached about becoming Governor of Bermuda and things had gone quite a long way along that line when Curtis Keeble came into my office and said, "You have been trumped, Donald. Bermuda's off." Ruth was very pleased because she thought that being wife of the Governor would have meant putting on stockings and wearing gloves rather a lot! For my part I was not totally unkeen because it would have enabled me to stay on until I was sixty-five, and that would have helped with the childrens' education. Anyway Peter Ramsbotham, our Ambassador in Washington, had been displaced by David Owen in favour of Peter Jay, and a respectable slot was needed for him as retirement approached. He, therefore, assumed the Governorship of Bermuda after leaving Washington. After a silence for a week or two Curtis Keeble came in to my office again after one of the Senior Appointments Boards, and announced "Donald, you've been selected for Kuala Lumpur." "Goodo!" I said.

I suppose, you could say that Kuala Lumpur seemed a bit off my beat. On the other hand, if you consider it, my earlier experience was not totally irrelevant. Malaysia was a former Dependency, a combination of Colony and Protected States (Straits settlements, the Federated Malay States and all that), and it was a Commonwealth country. I'd already served in Nigeria and the Sudan, which, though not a Commonwealth country, was regarded by many Sudanese, particularly in the early days after Independence, as honorary Commonwealth. In fact in terms of aid, the Sudan was often treated just as well as a Commonwealth country in those early days. So the general ambience was not going to feel all that strange. The Malays were, of course, Muslim and I was used to that from the Arab world. I had already come across Indians in the Gulf, as there were quite a lot of them working there and elsewhere in the Middle East. The new element, of course, was the Chinese population, a new and very intriguing one. In the Sudan and Nigeria I had had experience of countries formed by the British with independent Judiciaries and constitutional government. So Kuala Lumpur was a marvellous last appointment to have had.

MM: It would undoubtedly have been a bit different but, on the other hand, it was a country in which we had extremely far-reaching commercial interests.

DH: We did indeed. We still had very large plantation interests with great trading companies like Guthries, Harrisons and Crosfield, and a whole number of others. There had been many smaller ones amalgamated into the bigger ones, and the whole British plantation sector was very large. But there were other very important sectors as well. What's been interesting about investment in Malaysia after independence is that all the well established and successful British companies – quite apart from the plantation companies, because they were bought out by the Malaysians; in the case of Guthries by a dawn raid on the London Stock Exchange – nearly always reinforced success by making further investment. It was much more difficult, however, to get new British companies to come in afresh – to bring in new blood in other words. This was rather tantalising because the Americans, Germans and Japanese were investing heavily in places like Penang. The Malaysians had a tendency to

look towards Britain for almost everything and counted themselves as honorary Britons, if one can put it that way. They also had so many educational ties with us and came here on their holidays as well as for their education and would have liked to see more British investment. They were, therefore, somewhat disappointed and one of the problems that we had with them at the time of Dr Mahathir's 'Buy British Last' policy – which was after my time and so I like to say that I was 'pre-ice age' – was their feeling that we were 'taking them for granted.' In my time there were at least 18,000 Malaysians students in this country.

MM: Some of them Chinese?

DH: A lot of them were Chinese; some were sent by their families, and one of the complicating factors was that, when the special grant for Commonwealth students was abolished in 1980, it was done very suddenly without warning. Strangely it was something which had been more or less slipped in by the Treasury and had escaped notice, even in the Foreign Office. So I had had no previous warning and was in no way prepared for the storm which broke out as soon as the implications of the withdrawal of this subvention became known. The Malaysian Government was extremely embarrassed because there were so many Chinese middle-class families who had sent their children to British universities. They could afford to do that with the subsidy in place. Without it they faced financial difficulties because there was little chance of them finding a place in a Malaysian university at that stage. Priority was given to Malays under the Bumiputra (or sons of the soil) policy – an educational policy for Malays matching the New Economic Policy in the economic sphere.

MM: I thought it was more or less impossible for Chinese to get into Malay universities.

DH: I don't think it was quite as bad as that, not judging by what I saw when I went round. In the Science University, for instance, in Penang there were certainly quite a lot of Chinese, but there were certainly not enough university places

for Chinese boys and girls. So the Government found themselves embarrassed unexpectedly. I was equally so because of the lack of any prior briefing but that was one of the things one was faced with sometimes in diplomacy - having to play a hand with no cards and no instructions. It was difficult.

Interestingly that withdrawal of the Commonwealth student subvention was not, as the papers said for a long time afterwards, the main cause of Mahathir's 'Buy British Last' policy, which was caused by very hostile press comment in England on the dawn raid on Guthries. The educational problem arose a year before Mahathir became Prime Minister when Hussein Onn was still holding that office. Despite their embarrassment, the Malaysian Government did not take an official stand on it with us. In fact the then Minister of Education, Musa Hitam, sent for me and said, "High Commissioner, your Government of course is a sovereign government and entirely free to take any governmental decision it chooses. We view ourselves in the same light and, if we take a decision, you would respect that; we respect your decision. But Donald, why are you, as a friend, doing this to us? I have Frenchmen banging on my door; I have Germans banging on the door. Why are you slamming your door on us?"

MM: Difficult to answer that!

DH: Very difficult to answer.

MM: "It's the damned fools in the Treasury, don't know what they're doing!"

DH: You can't say that, can you! Sometimes the French used to say, "Mon Ambassadeur est fou" but you never heard that in our service!

MM: Were there any other notable things?

DH: Well, we had a marvellous time in Kuala Lumpur.

Yes! But on arrival there, the Malaysians – particularly I think instigated by Dr Mahathir who was Deputy Prime Minister and also the Minister of Transport, Manickavasagam who both felt put out that when they had visited London they weren't able to see a Minister at their own level – had a feeling of 'being taken for granted'. They were also very aware that the British Government hadn't sent any Cabinet Minister to visit Malaysia for a long time. At the same time BOAC was wanting to get Concorde through to the Far East – as far as Australia originally. This was proving difficult because various countries on the route were insisting on Concorde flying over them subsonically instead of supersonically, unless the direct route was modified. In consequence, a number of 'doglegs' were of necessity being put into the flight path, which reduced passenger capacity. All seemed to be going well in Malaysia, however, and the inaugural flight was due to take place in, I think, about a week or ten days' time. Then a problem suddenly arose. The manager of BOAC came to see me one morning saying there was a crisis because the Malaysians had said Concorde could not overfly Malaysia. When I went into it, I found that BOAC, and I suppose the British Government, was relying on the routine clearance having been given in response to a Third Person Note from the High Commission put into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about nine months earlier. The Malaysians didn't appear to have been consulted too much at higher level about this Concorde overflight. When the Malaysians suddenly woke up to what was happening, they had another reason for thinking that they were being taken for granted.

MM: Mighty casual really, isn't it.

DH: When it was put to the Malaysians that agreement had in fact been given and relied upon in planning the Concorde flight, they countered by saying that the poor girl in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who'd given the permission must have been mad on the day! Anyway, the Malaysians, who at that stage were also wanting to negotiate more flights for MAS into London, wanted some sort of quid pro quo for permitting Concorde flights which BOAC were not willing to give. A Senior BOAC manager came out from London in a last minute effort to save the day and complicated things by going

to the Prime Minister's house in the evening demanding an interview. This caused offence. So the flight over Malaysia did not take place.

Then Malaysian environmentalists claimed that, if Concorde flew, it would destroy all the fish in the Straits of Malacca. Meantime the Malaysian Ministry of Communications continued to press their claims for further MAS flights into Heathrow. So my first year was quite an uneasy one. About every six weeks or two months, I got a telegram from the Foreign Office saying, "Please solve the Concorde problem." I would reply "Look, do you want this solved quickly, or are you prepared to wait?" "Of course we want it solved quickly!" "Well, please give me some straw to make the bricks." "No straw". The two questions of Concorde and MAS flights, London claimed were unrelated but the Malaysians thought otherwise. Almost every aspect of bilateral relations became related to the one increasingly fat file I had in the High Commission called 'Concorde'.

After a year I did manage to persuade the Prime Minister, Hussein Onn, that Concorde should be given a try without conceding anything. I succeeded perhaps because I got on with him very well particularly because he, like me, was a member of the English Bar. With the difficulty out of the way, the inaugural flight could take place and I was invited to go on it. I left Carcosa, our house in Malaysia, after morning tea, went down to Singapore, having breakfast on the plane. Then I went to see John Hennings, my opposite number there; and then mid morning boarded the Concorde, one side of which was marked BOAC and the other Singapore Airlines. I had a delicious lunch between Singapore and Bahrain, after which I was up on the flight deck with the chief pilot of BOAC landing in Bahrain. I had another good lunch between Bahrain and London, where I was met by my sister who said, "Shall we go to lunch?" The flight was so quick that time had thus been contracted. Anyway, my sister and I went to her home to tea. On the Concorde flight back to Singapore, I was asleep but suddenly became aware of an air hostess saying, "Fasten your seat belts, Ladies and Gentlemen. We are going to land shortly in Kuala Lumpur." Because this was totally unscheduled, I knew it must be a dream; of course it was a dream! But then the message was

repeated and I woke up completely to find that it really was true because the runway in Singapore had been blocked by a Royal Brunei aircraft. Concorde, therefore, couldn't land there and had had to be diverted to Kuala Lumpur, which under the agreement was to be used only as an ultimate back-up airport for emergencies. A very unexpected emergency had arisen.

The irony is I think that, if in the very early stages of negotiation we had said to the Malaysians, "You'll have one flight a week in and out of Kuala Lumpur in addition to their flights to and from Singapore," a deal could have been done. But nobody thought of that or, if they did, they rejected it.

MM: Probably thought there was going to be insufficient passenger load.

DH: Possibly and they were also perhaps fearful of too much pressure over MAS rights to fly into London.

Anyway, that was the first year. I thoroughly enjoyed the company of the Prime Minister but my very first meeting with him was very unusual. I went to his office to pay my pre-arranged call to find half the Cabinet there with him – the Deputy Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed; the Home Secretary, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafi; the Minister of Communications Manickavasagam; and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tunku Rithaudeen. They were clearly lined up to give me a sort of 'roasting' as the local representative of HMG. However, it so happened that I'd twisted my ankle playing tennis with the children by incautiously stepping on a tennis ball. As a result my leg that day was not only in plaster, but a new plaster had been put on that very morning and I arrived at the Prime Minister's office on crutches. Being kindly people, they could not in the event be as beastly to me as they might otherwise have been!

MM: So it was a good last post.

DH: It was a very happy last post. Kuala Lumpur was also a marvellous place to be and Carcosa was a splendid house to live in. A further bonus was that we

were able to visit all the Malaysian States as well as, as you know, visit Brunei, and neighbouring Thailand and Indonesia.

MM: They've given that up, haven't they?

DH: Yes Carcosa is now a grand hotel. But I have to say that, when the Malaysians intimated that they would like it – several years after my time – and the British Government decided that it should be given to them, they were very reasonable. Dr Mahathir himself was extremely helpful and a very good deal for us involving land swaps eventuated. The Malaysians didn't do the sort of things that had happened in other places, like the Nigerians who came one day and started bashing down the walls of the High Commissioner's residence. In KL it was done in a very civilised way.

MM: As one would expect.

DH: And by gentle negotiation. They're delightful people and we've still got a lot of Malaysian friends. We're going there for the Merdeka Celebrations in two and a half weeks' time, the 50th anniversary of Merdeka (Independence), because I'm Vice-President of the British-Malaysian Society of which I was founder Chairman, and still much associated with it.

MM: Well that was a splendid end to an extremely interesting career.

DH: Well, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

MM: I think it's only right to mention that your book, '*Desert Wind and Tropic Storm*', contains much of what we've gone through to-day but in more detail.

DH: I think that's true. There may be a different emphasis here and there, but essentially it's the same story. I don't think I've changed my tune much.

MM: Thank you very much indeed, Sir Donald.

Transcribed by Joanna Buckley